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Social justice in agroecology: co-creating equitable spaces for asylum seekers' participation in Dutch Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms

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Social justice in agroecology: co-creating equitable spaces for asylum seekers' participation in Dutch Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms

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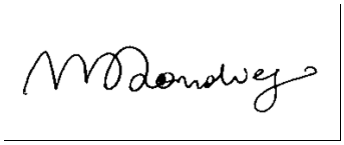

THESIS APPROVAL

I, Alberto Lanzavecchia, as supervisor of the student Martina DONDIEGO, hereby APPROVE the thesis entitled “Social justice in agroecology: co-creating equitable spaces for asylum seekers’ participation in Dutch Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms”

Cavalese (TN, Italy), 26th August 2025.

Signature 

To Ahmed, Lassine, and Zeyn,

may their dreams and ambitions guide them towards the bright future they deserve.

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Abstract

This study examines how grassroots agroecological initiatives foster social inclusion by co-creating spaces of participation for asylum seekers within Dutch Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms. It focuses on the work of *Mycelia van Hoop*, a working group within the Agroecology Network of the Netherlands, which has launched a pilot project to connect asylum seekers with CSAs. These efforts reflect a concrete commitment to place social justice at the core of agroecological practice and challenge the gap between values and implementation.

Using a mixed qualitative approach, this research aims to (1) map and analyze the roles of key stakeholders involved in connecting asylum seekers with CSA farms in the Netherlands; (2) identify the main barriers to participation, including logistical, cultural, and institutional factors; (3) explore the potential benefits of collaboration for both CSA farms and asylum seekers; (4) develop a practical framework and recommendations for fostering more inclusive agroecological spaces.

By exploring the Dutch case, this thesis contributes to broader debates on the future of agroecology in Europe. It stresses the importance of claiming agroecology as a transformative project that not only promotes ecological resilience but also advances equity and solidarity. In doing so, it offers practical insights for policymakers, practitioners, and activists committed to making alternative food systems more accessible.

Resumen

Este estudio examina cómo las iniciativas agroecológicas fomentan la inclusión social mediante la creación conjunta de espacios de participación para personas solicitantes de asilo en las granjas de "agricultura apoyada por la comunidad" (CSA) de los Países Bajos. Se centra en el trabajo de *Mycelia van Hoop*, un grupo de trabajo dentro de la Red de Agroecología de los Países Bajos, que ha puesto en marcha un proyecto piloto para conectar a los solicitantes de asilo con las CSA. Estos esfuerzos reflejan un compromiso concreto de situar la justicia social en el centro de la práctica agroecológica y desafiar la brecha entre principios agroecológicos y su implementación.

Utilizando un enfoque cualitativo mixto, esta investigación tiene como objetivo (1) mapear y analizar las funciones de actores claves que participan en la conexión de los solicitantes de asilo con las granjas CSA en los Países Bajos; (2) identificar las principales barreras a la participación, incluidos los factores logísticos, culturales e institucionales; (3) explorar los posibles beneficios de la colaboración tanto para las granjas como para los solicitantes de asilo; (4) desarrollar un marco práctico y recomendaciones para fomentar espacios agroecológicos más inclusivos.

Al explorar el caso holandés, esta tesis contribuye a debates más amplios sobre el futuro de la agroecología en Europa. Destaca la importancia de reclamar la agroecología como un proyecto transformador que no solo promueve la resiliencia ecológica, sino que también fomenta la equidad y la solidaridad. Al hacerlo, ofrece ideas prácticas para responsables políticos, profesionales y activistas comprometidos con la creación de sistemas alimentarios alternativos más inclusivos y participados.

Keywords

Agroecology; social inclusion; Community-Supported Agriculture; asylum seekers; the Netherlands.

Contents

Preface

This thesis explores whether Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in the Netherlands can be inclusive spaces by fostering the participation of asylum seekers. While these farms often promote environmental sustainability and local food systems, their relationship with the broader political vision of agroecology is not always explicit. Agroecology, rooted in the struggles of peasant movements in the Global South such as La Vía Campesina, represents not only a model of sustainable agriculture but a political project grounded in food sovereignty, land justice, and social inclusion (Altieri, 2018). This research examines how agroecology is interpreted and practiced in the Dutch context, and how its core values of social justice, solidarity, and access to land, can be reclaimed and embedded in practice. I explore how these values can guide efforts to make CSA farms more accessible to groups often marginalized or kept invisible in society, such as asylum seekers. This goes beyond simply creating volunteering opportunities; it involves reimagining the farm as a space of encounter, mutual care, and community building.

My interest in this topic has grown through direct engagement in the field and interactions with both farmers and asylum seekers. What began as an academic inquiry gradually became a personal commitment, shaped by my experience volunteering in a community garden in the asylum seekers' center (AZC) in the city of Wageningen (the Netherlands), where I witnessed the importance of safe, shared spaces for people to feel seen and valued. AZC residents expressed a desire to engage with farms and community gardens in the surrounding area to learn about local farming experiences. Simultaneously, conversations within the Dutch Agroecology Network revealed a growing awareness of the whiteness within CSA farms and a desire to make these spaces more accessible. These two needs of inclusion from below and openness from within, have shaped the direction and purpose of this thesis.

This research aims to lay the groundwork for designing strategies to connect asylum seekers with CSA farms. It is intended as a preliminary step toward deepening contextual understanding, with the goal of informing future funding applications and supporting further development of the initiative.

Ultimately, this thesis is a contribution to the ongoing effort to resist the co-optation of agroecology by dominant narratives and reclaim it as a living practice of social justice, care, and collective transformation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background: agroecology, CSA farms and the Dutch context

Agroecology has emerged as a prominent framework for reimagining food systems worldwide. Although the term "agroecology" was first introduced in academic and agronomic circles in the Global North to describe the application of ecological principles to agriculture (Altieri, 2018), the lived experience and political expression of agroecology has been profoundly shaped by peasant and Indigenous movements in the Global South, who have long practiced agroecological methods rooted in sustainable land management, food sovereignty, and resistance to extractivist and industrial agricultural models (Altieri, 2018). Therefore, agroecology should not be understood merely as a set of technical practices for sustainable farming but as a political and social movement that challenges the structures of power and inequality embedded in global food systems (Altieri, 2018).

However, as agroecology has gained visibility in the Global North, there is increasing concern about its depoliticization and co-optation. Dominant actors, including agribusiness, policymakers, and mainstream institutions, have begun to appropriate agroecological language, often reducing it to technical or market-based solutions that do not address deeper social and political inequities (Giraldo & Rosset, 2018). Such co-optation risks stripping agroecology of its transformative potential and reinforcing existing hierarchies within food systems.

This tension between agroecology's emancipatory aspirations and its implementation is visible in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, which are often celebrated as models of ecological stewardship and participatory food systems (Egli et al., 2023) but also reflect ongoing challenges in achieving social inclusivity and equity. In the Netherlands, their recent expansion has provided consumers with access to locally produced, organic food and opportunities for direct engagement with farmers and the land (Henderson & Van En, 2007). Yet, despite their commitment to food justice, CSA farms frequently remain exclusive spaces, serving primarily white, middle- and upper-class consumers (Parot et al., 2024). Similarly, the Dutch agroecological movement, while rooted in principles of social equity and diversity of knowledge, struggles to fully embody these ideals in practice, particularly when it comes to engaging marginalized communities. This discrepancy leads to a broader tension between the movement´s emancipatory discourse and the limited inclusivity observed in practice (Parot et al., 2024).

Recent efforts by groups such as Mycelia van Hoop, a working group of the Agroecology Network in the Netherlands, represents attempts to address this gap. Mycelia has initiated a project to connect asylum seekers with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, recognizing both the untapped potential of asylum seekers' agricultural skills and the need to diversify and enrich the agroecological

movement. These initiatives are still in their early stages, but they point to reimagine Dutch CSA farms as spaces of encounter, mutual care, and community building.

1.2 Relevance and significance of the research

The relevance of this research is underscored by both theoretical debates and empirical evidence. On a theoretical level, there is a growing recognition that agroecology's transformative potential is at risk of being undermined by processes of co-optation and depoliticization (Giraldo & Rosset, 2018). As dominant actors adopt the language of agroecology without embracing its core values, the movement risks losing its capacity to challenge the structural drivers of inequality in food systems.

Empirical studies indicate that Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms are predominantly comprised of individuals with higher education and income levels. According to Parot et al. (2024), this lack of diversity limits the legitimacy and resilience of the agroecology movement; despite their potential as sites of community-building and ecological stewardship, CSA farms often remain inaccessible to those outside the dominant social group due to barriers such as advance payment requirements, unfamiliarity with CSA operations, and logistical challenges.

The need to address this gap is further highlighted by the lived experiences of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. Although many asylum seekers come from rural backgrounds and bring valuable agricultural expertise, they often face significant barriers, such as restricted access to land, limited social networks, and transportation difficulties, that prevent their full participation in local food systems (Hartwig & Mason, 2016). Conversations within the Agroecology Network revealed that while some asylum seekers expressed a willingness to volunteer on farms, their participation was hindered by logistical barriers, including the costs associated with transportation to farm sites. These farms are frequently situated in remote locations, often at considerable distances from urban centers, thereby limiting accessibility for individuals residing in city environments. This recognition led to an exploration of how to facilitate connections between asylum seekers and CSA farms, both to foster inclusion and to enrich the agroecological movement with new knowledge and skills.

Mycelia's approach involves organizing farming days and inviting volunteers to participate in hands-on agricultural activities. This would not only provide asylum seekers with opportunities for meaningful engagement, skill-sharing, and social connection but it also helps CSA farms embody the values of diversity and solidarity that are central to agroecology (Sempik et al., 2010). Moreover, research shows that participation in community-based agriculture projects can have significant positive effects on the well-being and integration of refugees and asylum seekers, offering spaces for healing, socialization, and a sense of purpose (Hartwig & Mason, 2016).

By focusing on the Dutch context, this thesis contributes to broader debates about the future of agroecology in Europe and the challenges of building inclusive, just, and sustainable food systems. It also offers practical insights for policymakers, practitioners, and activists seeking to make CSA farms more accessible.

1.3 Research focus and objectives

This dissertation addresses the paradox of exclusion within agroecological spaces in the Global North: while these movements advocate for social justice, inclusivity, and the democratization of food systems, they often fail to meaningfully engage marginalized groups. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in the Netherlands, for instance, are grounded in principles of equitable access to land and the valorization of diverse knowledge systems; yet in practice, multiple and intersecting barriers, ranging from legal status and language to mobility and social isolation, limit asylum seekers' participation in community-based food systems. As a result, their voices, knowledge, and contributions remain largely excluded from both agroecological practice and discourse.

Therefore, this research aims to explore how grassroots movements grounded in agroecological principles can foster social inclusion by co-creating spaces of participation for asylum seekers within Dutch CSA farms. In doing so, it contributes to the broader effort of reclaiming agroecology as a transformative and political project, capable of challenging structural inequalities and cultivating solidarity across differences.

The study is grounded in empirical research and aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice through the analysis of concrete experiences, challenges, and possibilities for action. The research approach is informed by context analysis, stakeholder mapping, needs-based assessment, and SWOT analysis.

The objectives of this thesis are:

- To map and analyze the roles of key stakeholders involved in connecting asylum seekers with CSA farms in the Netherlands.
- To identify the main barriers to participation for asylum seekers, such as logistical, cultural, and institutional obstacles.
- To explore the opportunities and mutual benefits that such collaborations can offer to both CSA farmers and asylum seekers.
- To develop a practical framework and actionable recommendations for connecting asylum seekers with CSA farms.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

The Dutch agricultural landscape is deeply shaped by its distinctive geography and climate, with low-lying polders reclaimed from the sea and a temperate maritime environment providing generally favourable conditions for farming (CBS, 2019). Agriculture occupies approximately 44% of the country's land area, with dairy farming and arable crops dominating both land use and export revenues (CBS, 2019). Over recent decades, the Netherlands has developed one of the world's most productive and technologically advanced agricultural sectors, characterized by large-scale, export-oriented production, monocultures, and high input use, including fertilizers and pesticides, which have enabled significant gains in output per hectare (OECD, 2023). However, this intensification has also led to substantial ecological costs, such as biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and nitrogen pollution, positioning the Netherlands as the highest per-hectare emitter of nitrogen compounds in the EU (Jennings et al., 2022).

In response to these environmental and societal challenges, a range of alternative agricultural models has gained prominence in Dutch policy and practice. These include organic, circular, agroecological, and regenerative approaches, which, while conceptually distinct, often share principles such as promoting soil health, biodiversity, and closed nutrient cycles (OECD, 2023). Organic agriculture, for example, prohibits synthetic inputs and emphasizes crop rotation and biological pest control, though it remains a relatively small share of total farmland at just 4.5% in 2024 (CBS, 2024). The expansion of these alternatives is constrained by a complex set of economic, institutional, knowledge-based, and socio-cultural barriers, including financial risks associated with conversion, limited access to context-specific training, and policy frameworks that continue to favor conventional production systems (Lamine & de Wit, 2021).

This section discusses the emergence of alternative approaches in Dutch agriculture that aim to sustain local food systems by promoting food sovereignty, improving access to land, and fostering social inclusion. The following chapters will explore in greater depth the concept of agroecology, the specific context of agroecological transitions in the Netherlands, the rise of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, and the legal and policy framework for asylum seekers. These discussions will form the foundation for analyzing the potential of CSA farms as spaces of social inclusion for asylum seekers, as well as the barriers and opportunities that shape their participation in Dutch agroecological initiatives.

2.1 Agroecology: definitions, dimensions, and relevance in Europe

Within the evolving landscape of agricultural systems, agroecology has emerged as a transformative paradigm that challenges the dominant model of conventional, industrial agriculture. Unlike traditional approaches that often prioritize yield maximization and economic efficiency, agroecology integrates ecological principles, local knowledge, and socio-political dimensions to foster resilient and equitable food systems (Wezel et al., 2018). This perspective views agriculture not merely as a means of food production, but as a complex socio-ecological system that can regenerate environments, empower communities, and strengthen the connections between farmers and consumers (Altieri & Nicholls, 2017).

The term agroecology first appeared in 1928, introduced by the Russian agronomist Basil Bensin to describe the use of ecological methods in agriculture (Wezel et al., 2018). Initially conceived as a scientific discipline, agroecology focused on understanding ecological interactions within crop production systems. This scientific framing prevailed throughout the mid-20th century, particularly in countries such as Germany, where agroecology was rooted in research on plant, animal, and soil dynamics in agricultural landscapes (Wezel et al., 2009).

The environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which criticized the ecological and social impacts of industrial agriculture, played a critical role in expanding the meaning of agroecology (Wezel et al., 2018). By the 1980s, the term began to encompass not only scientific research but also alternative agricultural practices and grassroots activist movements advocating systemic transformation in food and farming (Wezel et al., 2018). Early applications focused on replacing industrial inputs like fossil fuel-based chemicals and fertilizers with organic alternatives at the farm level. Yet this strategy soon revealed its limitations, underscoring the need to reintroduce biodiversity as a fundamental response to the ecological degradation caused by monocultures (Gliessman, 2014).

By the late 1990s, agroecology had evolved into a comprehensive framework that addressed the entire food system. It began to incorporate producer-consumer relationships, just and equitable food distribution, and the restructuring of food systems away from corporate and industrial models (Francis et al., 2003). This shift marked agroeocology's engagement with political economy, recognizing that food system transformation also requires power dynamics. As Gliessman (2018) articulates: "Agroecology is the integration of research, education, action and change that brings sustainability to all parts of the food system: ecological, economic, and social." This definition highlights agroecology as a transdisciplinary, participatory, and action-oriented approach.

Today, agroecology is understood as a science, a practice and a movement (Gliessman, 2018). As a science, it explores ecological interactions among agricultural species, the soil, and natural ecosystems, applying this knowledge to the design of sustainable food systems. As a practice, it values the local, experiential, and traditional knowledge of farmers and promotes its collective sharing

and participation in innovation. As a movement, agroecology seeks fundamental changes in the relationships between people and food, as well as the socio-economic structures that govern food access and distribution, advocating for food sovereignty, inclusion, and justice.

In Europe, agroecology has developed in multiple and uneven ways, shaped by national histories, institutional structures, and societal dynamics. While a unified European approach is still lacking, various countries demonstrate different degrees of integration of agroecology conceived in its three dimensions.

Germany, for instance, maintains a strong scientific tradition in agroecology, rooted in ecological research dating back to scholars like Friederichs (1930) and Tischler (1950, 1965). German institutions continue to define agroecology primarily in ecological and agronomic terms, with limited recognition of its socio-political dimensions. Despite a strong environmental movement, agroecology in Germany remains largely confined to academic and technical domains, disconnected from broader farming practices or grassroots activism (Wezel et al., 2018).

By contrast, France has progressively embraced a more integrated understanding of agroecology. Since the 1980s, French researchers, NGOs, and farmers have developed agroecological approaches that combine ecological science, sustainable farming practices, and food sovereignty activism. Additionally, France is a policy pioneer: in 2012, it became the first EU country to formally recognize agroecology in national legislation through its Agroecological Project for France, which led to the establishment of over 400 Economic and Environmental Interest Groups (GIEEs) that support collaborative agroecological transitions (Wezel et al., 2018).

In Italy, agroecology is closely linked with the organic farming movement, especially within local and regional food systems. Italian agroecology places strong emphasis on biodiversity, ecological sustainability, and peasant knowledge. Although there is no official certification scheme for agroecological farms in Europe, Italy has seen scattered but significant grassroots initiatives that align with agroecological principles (Wezel et al., 2018).

Despite this increasing interest, agroecological farming in Europe remains marginal in terms of scale and institutional support. The absence of a standardized definition or certification hinders data collection and policy design (Verkuil et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the European Green Deal (2019) presents a significant opportunity, explicitly identifying agroecology, alongside other sustainable practices, as a pathway to achieve climate neutrality, sustainable land use, and improved environmental performance in the agricultural sector.

According to Duru et al. (2015), two dominant visions currently shape European agroecological transitions. The first is an efficiency-substitution model that seeks to reduce environmental impact through technological innovation and input-use optimization. This approach, though prevalent, remains embedded in conventional agricultural paradigms. The second model, which aligns more

closely with agroecological principles, is biodiversity-based agriculture. It relies on ecological processes and promotes ecosystem services by enhancing biological diversity in farming systems.
Alongside scientific frameworks and emerging policies agendas, grassroots social movements have become increasingly influential in promoting agroecology as a transformative vision for food and agriculture. Organizations like the European Coordination of La Via Campesina, Friends of the Earth Europe, and Slow Food advocate for agroecology as a form of resistance to industrial food systems and as a path to local empowerment, social justice, and food sovereignty (Wezel et al., 2018). These grassroots movements push for a vision often referred to as 'people's agroecology', which contrasts with more technocratic and institutional approaches (Giraldo & Rosset, 2018).
Nevertheless, agroecology in Europe remains fragmented. Academic research, agricultural practice, civil society, and policymaking often operate in silos, with limited coordination. There are also significant regional disparities in access to agroecological education, research funding, and institutional support (Wezel et al., 2018). To unlock the transformative potential of agroecology, more coherent policies are needed at the European level, along with stronger networks among stakeholders and a commitment to integrating the scientific, practical, and political dimensions into a unified strategy for sustainable food systems.

2.2 Agroecology in the Netherlands: policies, actors and networks

The Netherlands offers a useful case study for understanding the tensions and possibilities within European agroecology. As one of the most industrialized and export-oriented agricultural systems in the EU, it exemplifies both structural barriers and emerging niches of agroecological innovation.
In Dutch policy discourse, agroecology is often conflated with broader concepts like 'nature-inclusive' farming, a term promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture. This approach generally involves minimizing biodiversity loss and promoting landscape restoration (Verkuil et al., 2024). By 2019, approximately 6% of Dutch farmers identified themselves as nature-inclusive, implementing practices such as soil conservation and the integration of landscape elements (Vermunt et al., 2022).
Nature-inclusive agriculture has gained traction within Dutch policy due to its conceptual flexibility. Its status as a 'boundary concept' allows diverse stakeholders, such as farmers, policymakers, and scientists, to co-produce meanings and collaboratively shape practices (Runhaar, 2017). However, this vagueness also limits its transformative potential, as it remains compatible with incremental sustainability rather than systemic change (Runhaar, 2017). While the Ministry has proposed a three-tiered model, the most advanced of which includes a 'fully integrated agro-ecological farming system' (Westerink et al., 2021), implementation remains weak, and it remains unclear how many farms meet these criteria. Furthermore, the current agricultural subsidy structure continues to reward

per-hectare landholding, thereby reinforcing incentives for scale, mechanization, specialization, and intensification (Agroecology Europe, 2020). As such, nature-inclusive farming has yet to significantly disrupt conventional models or substantively support agroecological transition.

Despite these policy limitations, there are emerging niches that embody agroecological principles. One notable example is food forests, referring to multilayered agroforestry systems designed to mimic natural forest ecosystems using perennial edible plants (de Groot & Veen, 2017). These systems, while still limited in scale, reflect a deep commitment to ecosystem regeneration and long-term resilience. The *Green Deal Voedselbossen* (Green Deal Food Forests) supports the development of food forests as a form of sustainable land use (Roodhof, 2024). While not explicitly framed as agroecology, food forests share many agroecological characteristics: biodiversity-based design, ecological knowledge, and local food provisioning (Roodhof, 2024). The Green Deal can be seen as a step toward integrating these practices into the national food policy, though it remains to be seen whether it will lead to substantial structural support for agroecology more broadly (Roodhof, 2024). Until then, the agroecological transition in the Netherlands will continue to depend on the resilience of grassroots networks and their capacity to build broad alliances.

Structural barriers, especially land access, hinder agroecological transition. The Netherlands has some of the highest land prices in Europe, largely driven by intensive dairy farming and land commodification (Eurostat, 2024). This situation creates precarious conditions for new and small-scale farmers, who often rely on short-term leases or informal arrangements with landowners or environmental organizations. Such insecurity discourages investment in long-term ecological improvements, such as agroforestry and soil regeneration, and particularly disadvantages women and other marginalized groups who face additional historical and structural inequalities in land ownership (Goris et al., 2024).

In response to these challenges, new land tenure models such as collective ownership, land trusts, and commons-based arrangements are gaining traction. These models aim to foster community-based stewardship, create durable foundations for agroecology and align land use with ecological and social values (Goris et al., 2024). However, Dutch agricultural policy largely continues to favor sustainable intensification rather than transformative agroecological pathways (OECD, 2023). Official funding and institutional support are often directed toward technological solutions, and land reform remains outside mainstream policy agendas (OECD, 2023).

Agroecological transitions require large-scale and long-term systemic changes. Researchers and policymakers increasingly recognize the critical role of social movements in driving these transformations, acting as catalysts for change by providing the social infrastructure for dialogue, experimentation, and resistance (Elzen et al., 2017).

One key actor is *Toekomstboeren* (“Farmers of the Future”), the Dutch chapter of *La Via Campesina* (Goris et al., 2024). The movement supports young and aspiring farmers committed to agroecology, food sovereignty, and community-based farming systems (Goris et al., 2024). It promotes a wide range of practices, including Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), permaculture, and food forests, and frames agroecology as both a practical and transformative political project (Oppedijk van Veen et al., 2019).

A core concern for *Toekomstboeren* is equitable land access. The group advocates policy reforms enabling new entrants to secure long-term tenure, while also working to democratize agriculture through inclusive practices that welcome youth, urban dwellers, and migrants to co-create new rural livelihoods (Oppedijk van Veen et al., 2019). Knowledge exchange is central to their model, emphasizing horizontal learning and the valorization of traditional and practical knowledge over top-down technocratic agricultural research (Oppedijk van Veen et al., 2019). Through its political engagement, *Toekomstboeren* calls for agroecology to be recognized in Dutch and European agricultural policies not just as a technical solution to environmental problems but as a pathway to food sovereignty, climate justice, and democratic control over the food system (Oppedijk van Veen et al., 2019).

The number of agroecological (AE) farmers in the Netherlands increased rapidly in the last decade. These actors built collective structures to support systemic transition, forming networks such as the Federation of Agroecological Farmers in 2019, an umbrella organization uniting diverse agroecological actors across the country (Agroecology Partnership, n.d.). Agroecological practices promoted by this network emphasize biodiversity, natural pest control, closed nutrient cycles, and healthy soils (Agroecology Partnership, n.d.). They also promote short supply chains, direct relationships with consumers, and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. The Federation also hosts the annual Farmers' Agriculture Conference, a space created for and by farmers, to share experiences, inspire one another, and collectively envision alternatives to industrial agriculture (Agroecology Partnership, n.d.).

Agroecological farmers reject extractive models that prioritize short-term profit (Goris et al., 2024). Instead, they root their practices in solidarity, equity, and ecological interdependence, ensuring access to good food, land, and knowledge for marginalized and small-scale producers (Goris et al., 2024). These principles guide the broader Dutch Agroecology Network (*Agroecologie Netwerk*) launched in 2021. The Network connects farmers, researchers, NGOs, and activists under the Nyéléni Declaration's vision of agroecology as a key element in the construction of food sovereignty and in the struggle against land grabbing (Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, 2015).

Despite limited funding, the Dutch Agroecology Network has enhanced collaboration between stakeholders and increased the visibility of agroecological alternatives in Dutch discourse (Oppedijk

van Veen et al., 2019). Farmers are now more actively involved in research, and the movement is gaining ground in both practice and policy debates. However, challenges remain, including weak connections with conventional farmers, policymakers, and researchers, as well as limited recognition of agroecology within institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture (Goris et al., 2024).

In conclusion, Dutch agriculture continues to face tensions between environmental goals and intensive production. As Runhaar (2017) argues, a fundamental shift is needed: "agriculture must move from being in conflict with nature to working with it, restoring ecological balance and protecting the rural landscape". Agroecology, supported by grassroots movements, offers a transformative pathway forward.

2.3 The rise of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in the Netherlands

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has gained increasing relevance in the Netherlands as both a practical model for sustainable food provisioning and a political expression of food system transformation (Henderson & Van En, 2007). As noted by Wojtkowski (2008), CSA exemplifies a grassroots-driven approach to farming that prioritizes high-quality, low environmental impact, and locally rooted farming practices.

According to Gliessman (2014), while CSA has often been viewed primarily as an alternative distribution model, it also embodies core agroecological principles and offers a concrete pathway for reconfiguring the relationship between producers, consumers, and the environment. In the CSA model, consumers, often referred to as members, commit to purchase a share of a farm's harvest at the start of the season, providing farmers with essential upfront capital and sharing the risk and rewards of the harvest (Henderson & Van En, 2007). In return, members receive regular deliveries of fresh, locally produced goods (Voge et al., 2023). This shared-risk approach establishes a unique form of economic and social solidarity between farmers and consumers, which can support agroecological practices that might not thrive under conventional market logics (Egli et al., 2023). In this regard, CSA is not simply a market innovation; it represents a socio-ecological experiment in food commons, where decisions around land, labor, and food are increasingly shaped through democratic and participatory models (Degens & Lapschieß, 2023).

CSAs are typically characterized by their focus on local food systems and sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic or biodynamic farming, which aim to enhance resource efficiency, reduce environmental impacts, and promote biodiversity (Egli et al., 2023). Research suggests that CSAs can generate positive ecological outcomes compared to conventional systems, while also strengthening social ties and promoting healthier and more sustainable behaviors among participants (Egli et al., 2023).

The conceptual and practical alignments between CSA and agroecology are increasingly recognized in literature. Agroecology, as defined by Altieri (1995), is both a scientific discipline and a social movement that emphasizes biodiversity, ecological interactions, and the minimization of external inputs. Yet beyond its technical dimension, agroecology is also a transformative political project that promotes food sovereignty, local knowledge, horizontal governance, and the reterritorialization of food systems (Gliessman, 2018). CSA operationalizes these principles by fostering trust-based relationships between producers and consumers, reducing dependence on market fluctuations, and enhancing local agroecosystem resilience (Cone & Myhre, 2000). Because financial risks are shared among members, CSA farmers are better positioned to invest in long-term ecological practices rather than focusing only on short-term productivity gains. This autonomy enables them to adopt agroecological practices such as crop diversification, composting, natural pest control, polyculture, and seasonal crop rotations, therefore contributing to soil health, biodiversity, and overall resilience (Galt, 2013).

The origins of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) reflect a broader global movement toward ecological farming practices (Henderson & Van En, 2007). CSA emerged independently in several parts of the world, particularly in Japan and Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, and lately in the United States, reflecting common concerns about industrial agriculture and environmental degradation (Cone & Myhre, 2000). The modern CSA model is widely recognized to have originated in Japan in the early 1970s, where concerns about the health impacts of industrial agriculture led to the creation of the first *teikei* projects (Kondoh, 2015). In 1971, Japanese philosopher Teruo Ichiraku raised awareness about the dangers of chemical use in farming, which inspired groups of consumers, primarily housewives, to collaborate with local farmers and form partnerships that emphasized organic production and mutual support (Kondoh, 2015). These *teikei* initiatives, meaning 'partnership', are considered the earliest examples of CSA, as they involved consumers committing to purchase shares of a farm's harvest in advance, thus sharing both the risks and benefits with the farmers (Henderson & Van En, 2007). Around the same period, similar concepts began to emerge in Central Europe, particularly within the biodynamic farming movement inspired by the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (White, 2015). In Switzerland and Germany during the late 1970s and early 1980s, small-scale farmers and community members developed producer-consumer alliances, which further refined the CSA model by emphasizing local production for local consumption and the ethical treatment of the land. These early developments were not only reactions to the externalities of industrial agriculture but also positive experiments in reclaiming food systems through principles of co-responsibility and ecological stewardship (Henderson & Van En, 2007).

In the Netherlands, the first CSA was founded in 1994 (Volz et al., 2016) and saw rapid growth over the past decade, with more than 100 active initiatives registered by 2020 (CSA Netwerk, n.d.). This

proliferation reflects both the adaptability of the CSA model to local conditions and a broader shift toward sustainable, participatory agriculture within the Dutch food landscape.

The Netherlands is known for its highly intensive and export-oriented agricultural sector, characterized by technological innovation, high-input systems, and specialization (OECD, 2023). This model has generated significant environmental concerns, including soil degradation, nitrogen pollution, and loss of biodiversity (Jennings et al., 2022). In response, CSA initiatives have emerged as localized alternatives that seek to embed farming within community life and ecological limits (Elzen et al., 2017). By connecting urban consumers with peri-urban or rural farms, CSA reduces food miles and fosters greater transparency and trust in the food system. Educational programs, volunteer days, and participatory events organized by CSA farms enhance consumer awareness of food production processes and create opportunities for social learning and civic engagement (Elzen et al., 2017). These aspects resonate strongly with the agroecological emphasis on popular education and the democratization of knowledge (Degens & Lapschieß, 2023).

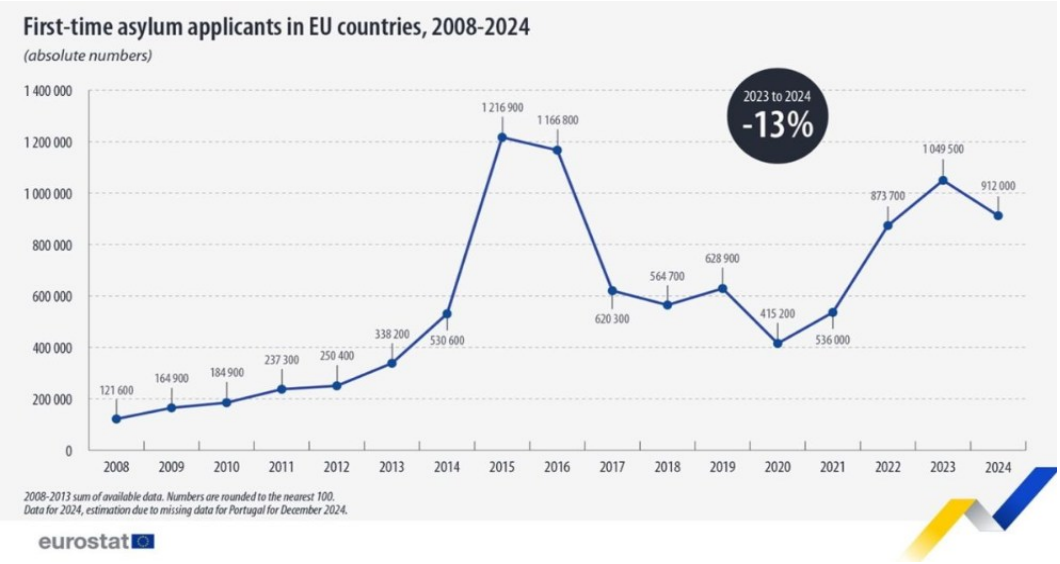
CSA farms in the Netherlands form together the *CSA Netwerk Nederland*, that was established in 2020 with the aim of guiding principles for Dutch CSAs with an agroecological approach to food production, sovereignty, solidarity and economic independence (CSA Netwerk, n.d.). Importantly, many of these national initiatives, including *CSA Netwerk Nederland*, are part of URGENCI, the international CSA network that provides a common framework and advocacy platform for CSA movements globally. URGENCI explicitly embraces agroecology as a core principle of CSA, asserting that CSA is not merely an alternative distribution model, but a practice grounded in solidarity economy, ecological farming methods, biodiversity, and democratic participation (Volz et al., 2016). The network's efforts to link CSA with the agroecology movement, including participation in the Nyéléni Declaration for Agroecology, further reinforce the conceptual and political alignment between CSA and agroecological transitions (Volz et al., 2016). Through this umbrella, CSA is framed as a key vehicle for reterritorializing food systems, empowering producers and eaters, and scaling up agroecological practices across rural and urban settings in Europe.

Several challenges remain for the broader adoption and long-term viability of CSA in the Netherlands. Despite growing recognition, the CSA network still operates as a niche sector with limited institutional support, making it vulnerable to external economic pressures and labor constraints. Policy instruments such as payments for ecosystem services, targeted subsidies, and nitrogen levies could be adapted to support CSA and agroecological practices, yet current frameworks remain insufficient. Second, while CSA holds great promises for advancing social equity, issues of accessibility persist. The cost of a CSA share may be prohibitive for low-income households, and existing models often struggle to reach more marginalized populations.

In conclusion, the convergence of CSA and agroecology offers a compelling framework for transforming food systems in the Netherlands and beyond. While agroecology provides the ecological and political foundation for sustainable agriculture, CSA offers a socio-economic model that translates these principles into practice through community-based solidarity and direct participation. Together, they represent not only an alternative to the dominant agri-food regime but also a viable and desirable pathway toward food sovereignty, ecological regeneration, and social justice. As noted by Elzen and Bos (2023), CSA initiatives exemplify agroecological ideals by enabling collective experimentation, mutual learning, and the co-production of more sustainable and equitable food systems. Institutional support, inclusive governance strategies, and broader cultural recognition will be essential for scaling up these promising alternatives and embedding them within a diverse, multifunctional agricultural landscape.

2.4 Legal and policy framework for asylum seekers in the Netherlands

In recent years, the European Union has witnessed persistently high levels of asylum applications, underscoring the continued relevance of migration as a political and policy issue. In 2024, EU countries received 911,960 first-time asylum applications from non-EU citizens, marking a 13.1% decrease compared to the previous year, as shown in the graphic below (Eurostat, 2025).



Despite this recent decline, the overall volume of applications remains substantial, with more than 1.2 million cases pending at the end of 2024, highlighting ongoing pressures on national asylum systems and the systemic challenge of delayed and overly bureaucratic asylum procedures (Eurostat, 2025).

Within this broader European context, the Netherlands has emerged as a critical case study due to its evolving migration dynamics and contested asylum policies. The country has experienced notable fluctuations in asylum applications, shaped by global events and domestic policy responses. Migration to the Netherlands has occurred in distinct waves since the early twentieth century, initially from former colonies such as Indonesia and Suriname and more recently from conflict-affected regions, mainly Syria and Eritrea (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). By 2024, the Netherlands received approximately 33,760 asylum applications, with Syrians comprising 34% of first-time applicants (Statistics Netherlands, 2024). These migration patterns have been accompanied by significant shifts in Dutch migration policy: while postcolonial migration was largely managed through labor and family reunification frameworks, contemporary debates increasingly focus on issues of national identity, social cohesion, and the perceived burden of asylum. The latter refers to public and political discourse, especially with the right conservative party on power, regarding the potential strain that asylum seekers may place on public resources (such as housing, welfare, and education) as well as concerns about maintaining social cohesion within an increasingly diverse society (Jennissen et al., 2023).

As for early 2025, the Netherlands experienced a marked decrease, approximately 50%, in the number of first-time asylum applications compared to the previous quarter, with only around 4,500 applications submitted in the first quarter of the year (Statistics Netherlands, 2025). This decline was particularly notable among Syrian nationals, who accounted for just 900 applications in the first quarter of 2025, the lowest figure in five years (IND, 2025).

According to the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), this reduction is primarily attributed to stricter controls at the European Union's external borders, as reported by Frontex and corroborated by EU migration statistics. While changes in the situation in countries of origin, such as the evolving situation in Syria, may also play a role, the available evidence indicates that enhanced EU border controls has been the main factor contributing to the recent decline in asylum applications (Frontex, 2025).

The legal architecture governing asylum in the Netherlands reflects both international and national commitments. The Netherlands is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the European Convention on Human Rights, both of which guarantee protection for those with a well-founded fear of persecution (UNHCR, 2010). At national level, the 2021 Civic Integration Act (*Wet inburgering* 2021) requires recognized refugees to complete integration programs within three years, including Dutch language knowledge and civic education (Government of the Netherlands, 2021).

The Dutch asylum procedure is characterized by a multi-phase process. On arrival, applicants must report at the central reception centre in Ter Apel, where the General Asylum Procedure (*Algemene*

Asielprocedure, AA) provides for an initial assessment within eight days. More complex cases enter the Extended Asylum Procedure (*Verlengde Asielprocedure, VA*), which is statutorily limited to six months but frequently exceeds this timeframe (IND, 2024). By 2025, processing backlogs exceeded 50,000 cases, with average waiting times for decisions extending to 21 months (Verkooijen et al., 2024).

Reception and integration policies in the Netherlands reveal further contradictions. Asylum seekers are initially accommodated in centralized reception centers (*asielzoekerscentra*, AZCs), which are managed by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). As of January 2025, there are currently 94 regular AZCs across the country, providing accommodation to less than half of the 72,610 individuals entitled to reception (Verkooijen et al., 2024). Furthermore, recent policy proposals would eliminate state-funded housing for rejected claimants by 2025, effectively shifting humanitarian responsibilities to local authorities and NGOs (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2024). According to Bakker et al. (2016), integration requirements, such as language proficiency and civic participation, are intended to promote inclusion, yet dispersal policies often result in social isolation and limited access to employment opportunities.

The Dutch government's current approach increasingly frames migration governance as a permanent state of crisis (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2024). In 2025, proposals to suspend asylum processing for up to two years under an "asylum crisis" declaration, alongside efforts to opt out of the EU Migration Pact and abolish permanent residency pathways, signal a retreat from multilateral obligations (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2024). These measures, combined with plans to extend the citizenship eligibility period from five to ten years and reduce access to legal aid, institutionalize precarity for asylum seekers.

Despite these restrictive trends, most of asylum applicants in 2024 (75.3%) received protection status, underscoring the ongoing need for robust legal and social support structures (Statistics Netherlands, 2024). Nonetheless, systemic delays and procedural inconsistencies undermine both applicant rights and public confidence in the asylum system (Jennissen et al., 2023). The Netherlands thus exemplifies the broader European tension between humanitarian obligations and restrictive migration management, raising critical questions about the future of asylum governance in an era of humanitarian crisis.

2.5 CSA farms as spaces of social inclusion for asylum seekers

Alternative food initiatives (AFIs) in the Netherlands, such as community-supported agriculture, community gardens and food cooperatives, hold considerable potential to foster not only ecological resilience and community well-being, but also social inclusion. However, despite their promise, these

initiatives are often marked by exclusivity and limited accessibility for marginalized groups, including asylum seekers, immigrants, and low-income communities. Research has consistently shown that AFIs are predominantly accessed and organized by white, highly educated, middle- and upper-class individuals, with various material, cultural, and representational barriers inhibiting broader participation (Goris et al., 2024). Similar patterns have been observed in other European contexts, where community food initiatives are shaped by the cultural identities and resources of their founders, often appealing to audiences with comparable social and economic capital (Véron, 2024).

For instance, participation in CSA farms and community gardens typically requires financial resources, leisure time, and physical or mental energy, which are less available to lower-income and marginalized groups. While some AFIs have introduced solidarity payment schemes or discounts, these measures alone are insufficient to ensure actual participation of vulnerable populations (Véron, 2024). In addition to economic limitations, cultural barriers also hinder accessibility. The dominant culture within AFIs, shaped by environmentalism, agri-leisure, and certain social values, can be perceived as alienating by individuals who do not share these backgrounds or priorities. In many cases, the founding group's cultural and linguistic codes become embedded in the project's ethos and communication, unintentionally excluding those who do not possess similar forms of capital (Véron, 2024). As a result, the narratives and practices within agroecological spaces often reflect privileged realities, sidelining other needs and cultural approaches to food.

Nonetheless, a growing body of research highlights the potential of CSA and community gardening to promote inclusion and enhance the well-being of refugees and immigrants. Malberg et al. (2020) found that community garden participation can positively affect physical health, reducing hypertension, promoting physical activity, and improving food knowledge, while also supporting self-esteem, independence, and a sense of personal control. These benefits are particularly relevant for refugees, for whom gardening can become a restorative and empowering activity. On the relational level, participation fosters social connections and a sense of belonging, enhancing overall well-being among vulnerable populations.

Onyango et al. (2025) also emphasize the relevance of CSA and community gardens for immigrant and refugee communities in the Global North. Their scoping review shows that such spaces not only improve food security by providing fresh and affordable food, but also support the preservation of cultural identities. CSA initiatives, in particular, create opportunities for connection with local food systems and sustainable livelihoods, offering supplementary income and building economic resilience in immigrant neighborhoods. These experiences highlight how food-growing spaces can serve as transformative environments for social inclusion, adaptation, and empowerment.

Yet, despite this potential, AFI promoters often face internal and external limitations that hinder more inclusive practices. Many farms and cooperatives are financially precarious, relying heavily on

volunteer labor and marked by self-exploitation. This restricts their capacity to lower prices, expand outreach, or restructure practices in ways that genuinely accommodate marginalized communities. While some organizations and grassroots agroecology movements are beginning to reflect critically on their lack of diversity, many remain uncertain about how to translate this awareness into action. As Véron (2024) argues, the focus should shift from simply diversifying participation to actively addressing internal power dynamics and the structural roots of exclusion. There is a growing recognition that being merely "open to everyone" is not enough. However, operationalizing inclusive practices often clashes with limited resources, structural constraints, and, in some cases, reluctance to accommodate different needs.

In this respect, the role of community infrastructure is crucial. Research in the Dutch context highlights the importance of everyday social environments, like gardens, parks, and shared spaces, in fostering 'public familiarity', that is, the kind of casual encounters that lay the foundation for trust, solidarity, and mutual recognition in diverse neighborhoods (Jennissen et al., 2023). Such informal interactions are particularly effective when supported by physical infrastructure and social programs that bring people together around shared purposes and practices.

Community gardens and CSA farms represent key examples of this kind of social infrastructure. When structured inclusively, these spaces can become platforms for convivial encounters, where people of different backgrounds can relate not as abstract categories but as neighbors, co-workers, or friends. These relational dynamics are central to shifting away from top-down integration frameworks that focus only on migrant adaptation to the new context, and toward more reciprocal, co-creative processes where inclusion is built with migrants rather than for them (Jennissen et al., 2023)

That said, practical steps can be taken to disrupt exclusionary dynamics. Research suggests that instead of replicating external models, place-based initiatives should be developed by and for local communities, ensuring that practices are locally grounded and culturally sensitive (Véron, 2024). This includes building leadership that reflects community diversity, valuing all forms of skills and experience, not only formal knowledge, and offering flexible participation that does not rely on availability of time and financial capital. Rather than involving marginalized groups merely to fulfill diversity goals, inclusive AFIs must prioritize the needs of these communities, listen actively, and ensure that participation is empowering and structurally meaningful (Véron, 2024).

A compelling example of inclusive practice in the Dutch context is *De Meent*, a farm collectively run by undocumented people. This initiative provides a space for participants to engage in sustainable agriculture, access to land and food, and take part in popular education. De Meent's model is not profit-driven; rather, it seeks to build a sense of belonging and solidarity among its members (Goris et al., 2024). By offering a welcoming environment grounded in dignity, mutual support, and respect

for nature, such initiatives offer a radical alternative to the marginalization asylum seekers often face in Dutch society.

Furthermore, inclusive farming spaces stand in stark contrast to the alienating labor often assigned to asylum seekers in industrial settings. Upon receiving their BSN (*burgerservicenummer*, or citizen service number, used to access public services) and legal work status, many asylum seekers are directed by COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) toward repetitive, isolating jobs in large-scale industrial settings where human interaction is minimal. These jobs reinforce a sense of invisibility and social exclusion, as asylum seekers are positioned as mere laboring bodies, disconnected from society and nature. On the other hand, working in small-scale agroecological farms offers a more human-centered and relational alternative. These settings are often characterized by shared responsibilities, personal interactions, and strong human-nature connections, enabling asylum seekers to experience a renewed sense of dignity, inclusion, and purpose. Indeed, CSA farms often embrace democratic governance structures, where participants and workers share responsibility and engage in collective decision-making. This structure is an essential feature of agroecological transitions, fostering solidarity and community agency over food systems (Degens & Lapschieß, 2023). For migrant communities, this can translate into meaningful pathways to social participation and empowerment through food provisioning. Harris et al. (2014) reinforce these assumptions by noting that participation in community gardens can help refugees overcome the cultural, social, and economic barriers they commonly face, thereby promoting integration and social cohesion.

In this context, Véron (2024) highlights the importance of adopting equity-based models rather than equality-based frameworks. While the latter may assume that treating everyone the same is sufficient, it often fails to account for deeply embedded disparities in access and opportunity. An equity-oriented approach, by contrast, tailors strategies and contributions to meet individuals' differing needs and positions through sliding-scale fees, multilingual communication, or non-monetary forms of participation (Véron, 2024). In practice, this may involve ensuring access for non-native speakers or offering informal work structures that allow flexibility and reduce entry barriers.

In conclusion, inclusive CSA and agroecological spaces require more than good intentions. They must be intentionally structured to challenge power asymmetries and support dignified, meaningful participation for all. This means designing initiatives that are not only locally grounded, but also attentive to the lived realities of asylum seekers and other marginalized groups, offering pathways not just to food, but to community, empowerment, and belonging.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research scope and temporal-spatial framework

This research was conducted during the first semester of 2025, and it is part of a broader, ongoing exploration of how agroecological initiatives can serve as platforms for social inclusion, particularly for asylum seekers. The initial geographic scope covered the national territory of the Netherlands, with a focus on identifying ongoing or potential initiatives that intersect agroecology and migration. The project aimed to map existing efforts, assess their accessibility to marginalized groups (specifically residents of asylum seeker centers), and identify key actors working to connect agroecological practices with broader goals of justice and inclusion.

As part of the preliminary phase, a stakeholder mapping was conducted, involving the identification and outreach to several organizations active in the areas of migrant inclusion, agriculture, and sustainability. Although some of these actors either did not respond or were unavailable for collaboration due to limited capacity or other commitments, their inclusion remains relevant for understanding the broader landscape of ongoing initiatives. These early contacts, while not resulting in formal collaboration, contributed to the contextual understanding of the field and informed the selection of more accessible and responsive case studies. A summary of these organizations, including short descriptions and the status of contact attempts, is presented in tabular form in Appendix A, with the aim of supporting the mapping of current efforts in this area.

A relevant connection was established with *De Meent*, a non-profit foundation managing a collectively cultivated plot of land in the area of Amstelveen, North Holland. Supported by the Diaconie of Amsterdam, the initiative offers a welcoming space for undocumented people, fostering a sense of belonging and social usefulness through engagement in agroecological practices. Although not explored in depth as a formal case study, this collaboration proved to be both stimulating and instructive. A semi-structured interview with one of the coordinators was conducted as part of the research process (see Appendix B), offering valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of working with people in legally and socially precarious conditions. Furthermore, the conversation contributed to a better understanding of the relational and organizational dynamics involved in inclusive farming projects and highlighted the role of community-based initiatives in addressing broader questions of social justice and integration through land-based practices.

To complement the national findings and address the identified gaps, a desk-based investigation was carried out, focusing on related experiences in other European contexts. Among these, the French association A4, which connects undocumented migrants with farms in France, was examined during the early stages of research. Although it was not included as a formal case study due to national legal

and structural differences in relation to asylum seekers' right to work and the regulation of labor contracts, A4 offered valuable conceptual and operational insights. A qualitative interview was carried out with members of the organization (see Appendix C), which contributed to reflections on access to land-based practices as a fundamental right, and underscored the transformative potential of solidarity-based networks between agroecological farms and marginalized groups. These insights provided both normative validation for the research focus and practical knowledge transfer that helped shape the design and orientation of the fieldwork. Following this preliminary research phase and considering the absence of structured efforts in most Dutch regions, the fieldwork focus was progressively narrowed to the municipality of Wageningen. This shift was motivated by a combination of practical and strategic factors. First, the researcher was based in Wageningen at the time of the study, which facilitated sustained field engagement. Second, Wageningen hosts a CSA farm, De Ommuurde Tuin, that demonstrated interest in receiving asylum seekers for volunteering activities and knowledge sharing. Third, the presence of a vegetable garden project within the local asylum seeker centre (AZC), coordinated by both residents and volunteers from the city, provided a unique opportunity to initiate participatory engagement and establish trust with asylum seekers. Indeed, the working group of Mycelia van Hoop had expressed the intention to facilitate the inclusion of asylum seekers within agroecological farms but faced challenges in establishing direct contact with potential participants. This limitation became a key point of entry for the researcher, who began volunteering regularly at the community garden at the AZC to help build relationships of trust and mutual understanding. From this experience, it became possible to identify needs, barriers, and opportunities both from the perspective of asylum seekers and that of local agroecological actors. Consequently, Wageningen became not only the primary site of fieldwork, but also the locus of an experimental and collaborative process aiming to connect existing community structures (particularly the group of volunteers at the AZC) with agroecological spaces.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a representative of COA at the reception center in Wageningen (Appendix D), as well as with a representative of Meedoenbalie, the participation desk located at the AZC that facilitates volunteering opportunities for asylum seekers to engage with society, to share insights about the initiative.

3.2 Selection of the case and subjects

The choice of Mycelia van Hoop as the main actor in this study was informed by its intention to connect residents of the local AZC with CSA farms through hands-on learning, community building, and direct engagement. This case was considered exemplary for its attempt to move beyond the

dominant paradigm of consumer-oriented organic agriculture in the Global North and toward a more relational and justice-oriented agroecology.

The inclusion criteria for selecting cases and informants were based on:

- Active engagement or willingness to engage asylum seekers in agroecological practices.
- Experience in supporting CSA or food sovereignty-related practices, with a declared commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

Subjects included farmers, residents of the AZC, volunteers from the community garden in the AZC, COA representatives, and actors from similar European initiatives (e.g., A4 in France).

3.3 Methodological approach

The methodology employed in this research is both qualitative and participatory, relying on a combination of inductive fieldwork and contextual analysis. The decision to adopt a qualitative case study approach stemmed from the need to understand complex social processes, relationships, and narratives that are often difficult to capture through quantitative tools alone. The qualitative dimension enabled an in-depth exploration of current initiatives and the social processes underpinning them. In parallel, the participatory orientation emphasized co-production of knowledge, reciprocity, and research-as-intervention. Drawing inspiration from participatory action research (PAR), the project sought to not only observe but actively contribute to ongoing practices of social inclusion through engagement in agroecological spaces.

This combined approach was particularly suited to the research aims for several reasons:

- It allowed for the exploration of under-researched and emerging phenomena, such as the role of agroecological spaces for migrant inclusion in the Dutch context.
- It supported an in-depth analysis of actors lived experiences, motivations, and strategies.
- It enabled co-construction of knowledge, especially through participatory activities and interviews that respected and valued local and situated knowledge.

This inductive approach was complemented by a descriptive quantitative framework, which supported the contextualization of field observations. Quantitative data were drawn from public statistics regarding agricultural employment needs, migration flows, and surface area under agroecological or organic cultivation in the Netherlands. This integration helped to ground the field-level observation in the wider socio-political landscape.

3.4 Data collection and research activities

The research involved both primary data collection and secondary data analysis. Data was acquired through direct engagement in the field and through participatory methods that prioritized interaction, reflection, and strategic action. The main techniques used were:

a) Semi-structured interviews conducted with:

- De Meent project coordinator, to learn from their experience of working at the farm with undocumented people.
- Members of A4, a French organization promoting inclusion of undocumented people in agroecological farms through regularized labor contracts.
- A representative of COA, to explore asylum seekers' rights and regulations to engage in voluntary agricultural work and employment opportunities within CSA farms.
- A representative of Meedoenbalie, to gain insights into the volunteering opportunities available to asylum seekers and the mechanisms through which they are supported in engaging with local society.

These interviews allowed for flexibility, enabling the researcher to explore specific themes while also capturing unexpected insights.

b) Participant observation.

The researcher actively organized and participated in:

- “Farming day” at De Meent with asylum seekers from the Wageningen AZC, facilitating group dynamics around values of agroecology, community, and belonging.
- Community gardening activities within the AZC, fostering trust-building and understanding everyday realities.
- Excursions to De Ommuurde Tuin, a nearby farm, for further comparative insight.

c) Participatory group dynamics and needs-based analysis.

A participatory exercise was conducted with members of the civil society of Wageningen, including asylum seekers. This activity focused on identifying barriers and opportunities for engagement with local CSA farms and formed part of a needs-based analysis to guide future project development.

d) Document and textual analysis.

Documents analyzed included policy reports, statistical data (on agricultural labor and migration), and grassroots publications. These provided context and contributed to the understanding of structural constraints and enablers.

3.5 Analytical strategy

The analytical process followed a grounded theory-inspired logic, where codes and themes emerged from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns in interview transcripts, field notes, and participatory activities.

Analysis focused on:

- Barriers to inclusion, identifying what makes it difficult for marginalized groups to participate in agroecological spaces (e.g., legal restrictions, language, cultural distance, logistical challenges).
- Opportunities and enablers, exploring what helps or motivates inclusion (e.g., political support, existing networks, shared values).
- Discourses around agroecology, examining how different actors use and frame the concept in the Dutch and European context.

Triangulation was used to ensure the reliability and credibility of findings by comparing data from multiple sources (interviews, participatory sessions, observations, and documents).

3.6 Ethical considerations and research reflexivity

This research was conducted following ethical principles of informed consent, anonymity, and respect for participants' autonomy. Participants were informed about the nature of the research and the purpose of data collection. When dealing with asylum seekers or undocumented people, particular attention was given to ensuring that participation was voluntary, and no personal data were recorded that could compromise their safety.

Reflexivity played a crucial role throughout the research process. The positionality of the researcher, as a temporary resident, activist-researcher, and non-Dutch speaker, was constantly reflected upon. These positionalities shaped both access to the field and the interpretation of data.

For instance, shared values around agroecology and social justice facilitated access and trust-building with organizations like Mycelia, while linguistic and cultural differences sometimes limited deeper engagement with AZC residents.

The dual role of researcher and intern at Mycelia required careful navigation to avoid conflicts of interest. Rather than claiming neutrality, the research embraced a situated and engaged perspective, in line with participatory action research. The objective was not only to analyze reality but also to contribute to transformative processes through research-in-action.

3.7 Delimitations, limitations, assumptions

This research was conducted within a clearly defined scope, shaped by both methodological decisions and practical feasibility. Several elements of the research process were under the researcher's direct coordination, particularly the communication between stakeholders and the regular reporting of information to the hosting organization. Spaces of participation and engagement with asylum seekers were created, facilitating their involvement in excursions, group dynamics, and informal events. These activities were central to fostering trust, mutual learning, and joint presence beyond formal settings.

The study was intentionally delimited by:

1. Geographical scope: although initial exploration covered the national level, the research was ultimately delimited to the municipality of Wageningen due to logistical feasibility and the presence of relevant initiatives.
2. Thematic focus: the research concentrated on agroecological spaces and did not examine other forms of community inclusion or integration programs for asylum seekers (e.g., sports, education, or language courses).
3. Target population: the project focused on asylum seekers in the AZC, rather than on broader migrant populations such as refugees with legal status or undocumented workers.
4. Timeframe: fieldwork was conducted over a limited period during the first half of 2025, which constrained long-term observation and relationship building.

Despite these delimitations, the research faced some limitations. Language barriers occasionally limited the depth of conversations with AZC residents, requiring reliance on non-verbal communication or informal translation. Establishing trust with participants, particularly those who had experienced trauma or prolonged uncertainty, was a slow and fragile process, which may have constrained the openness and richness of some responses. Moreover, the level of engagement from Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms was limited; several expressed hesitations to participate or did not perceive social inclusion as a core component of their mission. Although the agroecological movement demonstrates a clear commitment to advancing social inclusion within CSA farms, it is predominantly composed of activists rather than farmers. While both the agroecological movement and Mycelia acknowledged the challenges of engaging marginalized communities, particularly asylum seekers, fieldwork research revealed that reaching out to these communities was, in fact, feasible. Conversely, identifying farms genuinely interested in fostering social inclusion proved considerably more difficult. This gap between the movement's discourse and the reality on the ground constituted a significant limitation, both for the research process and for the effective implementation of inclusive practices.

Other limitations included the challenge of making broader comparisons across European contexts due to significant legal and policy differences between European countries. Furthermore, as noted in the reflexivity section, researcher's positionality as a non-Dutch researcher may have influenced the dynamics of interaction and the interpretation of findings. Another risk is that the relationships built, particularly those with asylum seekers, relied heavily on researcher's role as a volunteer and facilitator. Once this presence in the field ends, there may be a lack of a clear reference point, potentially weakening the continuity of the engagement. Finally, there is limited literature and practical guidance on how agroecological initiatives can systematically and sustainably engage vulnerable groups, especially asylum seekers (Malberg et al., 2020), which constrained the availability of comparative models or best practices.

The research also rests on several assumptions that underpin its design and interpretation. It assumes that participation in agroecological activities can foster social inclusion and strengthen a sense of belonging among asylum seekers. It further assumes that the views and experiences shared during interviews and group dynamics were expressed in good faith and reflect participants lived realities. While the cases studied are highly context-specific, the analysis assumes that they offer relevant insights for broader debates on agroecology, migration, and environmental justice in Europe. Finally, although efforts were made to maintain reflexivity throughout the research process, it is assumed that the presence of the researcher did not substantially influence participant behavior or responses in ways that would compromise the reliability of the data.

4. Presentation of the research content

This research was developed within the framework of an internship carried out in the Netherlands in collaboration with Mycelia van Hoop, a working group affiliated with the Dutch Agroecology Network and supported by the grassroots organizations Stichting Boerengroep and ASEED Europe. The case study centers on Mycelia van Hoop as a situated initiative operating at the intersection of agroecology and social justice, with specific attention to the inclusion of asylum seekers in Dutch Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms. The rationale for selecting this case is rooted in the group's explicit engagement with issues of diversity, equity and social inclusion within the agroecological movement. While agroecology, as a transformative framework, promotes values of inclusiveness, reciprocity, and pluralism, its implementation in Western European contexts has often been critiqued for reproducing forms of whiteness and class-based inaccessibility. In this regard, the work of Mycelia van Hoop emerges as a relevant case through which to explore the operationalization of inclusionary strategies in practice. The group's stated commitment to bridging rural-urban divides

and co-creating participatory spaces of regeneration aligns with the objectives of the present research, which sought to identify and activate pathways for asylum seekers to engage meaningfully in CSA farms.

The research was situated primarily in Wageningen and its surrounding region, a territory known for its environmental initiatives and proximity to several agroecological farms. The local context provided access to a multiplicity of actors, including CSA practitioners, grassroots networks, refugee reception institutions, and community gardens, enabling an in-depth engagement with the overlapping fields of food sovereignty, migration, and participatory governance. The research was designed to address the following general objective: to explore how agroecological farms, and in particular CSA models, can serve as potential spaces of inclusion and resilience for asylum seekers in the Netherlands.

The researcher integrated into the activities of the Dutch Agroecology Network, participating in a national gathering held at Tuinen van de Egel, a farm that exemplifies biodiversity-oriented land use. This event served as a point of entry into current debates on the role of migrant labor in agriculture and initiated a series of exchanges with actors involved in both agroecological practice and refugee support. From this point onward, the research evolved along two main axes: first, an investigation into existing approaches to migrant participation in agroecological contexts, both in the Netherlands and abroad; second, the co-design and implementation of activities intended to facilitate interaction between asylum seekers and CSA projects at the local level.

As part of the first axis, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including CSA farm coordinators, representatives of refugee support organizations, and stakeholders who are working on similar initiatives. Among the external cases studied, particular attention was given to the experience of the French initiative A4, a migrant-led organization connecting people in precarious legal situations with employment in agriculture. An online interview with three members of A4 provided insight into the structural constraints faced by migrants in accessing agricultural work and the ways in which self-organization and solidarity networks may challenge these exclusions.

In parallel, the researcher engaged with the team of De Meent, a Dutch farm organized as a space of agroecological practice for undocumented individuals. The site visit and interview with a project coordinator offered a localized example of how such initiatives can be put into practice, offering insights into both their strenghts and challenges.

In the Wageningen area, direct contact was established with a key informant who operates within two interlinked structures: the *Vrijwilligers Centrum Wageningen*, which promotes volunteering activities, and the *Meedoenbalie*, a participation desk located at the AZC that facilitates engagement opportunities for asylum seekers. Several informal conversations were held to present the objectives of the research and to assess the legal conditions under which asylum seekers may participate in

farming activities. Given the complexity of Dutch labor legislation in relation to asylum status, a further meeting was conducted with a representative of the COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), who provided clarity on permissible forms of engagement and the limitations that farms must observe in order to remain in legal compliance. These institutional exchanges were essential for the development of a legally grounded and context-sensitive approach to participation.

Concurrently, the researcher engaged in a process of participant observation through regular volunteering at two locations. The first was Veld en Beek, a large CSA farm situated near Wageningen, characterized by a diversified farming system including vegetables, pasturelands, and dairy production. This experience allowed the researcher to acquire knowledge on the daily operations, labor organization, and spatial arrangements of CSA farms, while observing the extent to which they may act as potential sites for inclusion.

The second site of observation was a community garden located in an asylum center in Wageningen (called *Moestuin* in Dutch). Maintained by a group of asylum seekers and local volunteers, this garden follows agroecological principles and functions as a collective and therapeutic space. AZC residents are welcome to join regular activities at the garden and the produce is accessible to everyone who lives in the AZC. Weekly participation in this initiative enabled the researcher to gain familiarity with the social dynamics within the AZC, as well as with the constraints and potentialities of gardening as a form of socio-ecological engagement for asylum seekers.

Building upon these engagements, the research entered a more operational phase during which participatory activities were designed and implemented. The first such activity was an open farming day organized at De Meent, intended as a moment of shared labor and collective reflection among a diverse group of participants, including undocumented people who regularly volunteer at De Meent, residents of the AZC in Wageningen involved in the community garden, activist from the Dutch Agroecology Network and Mycelia van Hoop, as well as a group of Master's students in citizen science. The researcher took responsibility for all aspects of the event's coordination, including communication, transportation, facilitation, and documentation. A participatory group dynamic was conducted during the coffee break, using guided questions to elicit participants' perspectives on the farm and their relationship to it. The aim of this activity was to explore the significance of such a space for individuals living in precarious conditions, particularly those with undocumented status.

The second participatory activity involved a one-day excursion to the community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm *De Ommuurde Tuin*, co-organized by the researcher in collaboration with the farm's staff. The activity was attended by residents of a local asylum seekers' center (AZC) and included a guided tour of the farm's agroecological practices, hands-on participation in farming tasks, and shared meals. The event was designed to foster informal exchange within a structured setting, creating space for dialogue, inclusion, and mutual learning.

This initiative emerged from a prior conversation between the researcher and the farmers of *De Ommuurde Tuin*, during which the farmers expressed a willingness to explore more inclusive practices and to open their farm to asylum seekers. Together, they discussed possible ways to facilitate this connection and how Mycelia might play a supportive role in enabling it. For the researcher, this was a valuable opportunity to engage directly with farmers on questions of inclusion, thereby broadening the scope of the inquiry.

The excursion served as a practical first step in assessing both the interest of AZC residents and the farm's readiness to host them. Feedback was collected through informal conversations and participant observation, with particular attention paid to identifying structural barriers to participation and potential areas for improvement. The activity also functioned as a strategic exercise in co-designing inclusive pathways between agroecological farms and marginalized communities.

A third activity took place in the form of a participatory workshop organized in collaboration with Boerengroep. Using a role-play format, the session gathered participants in small groups assigned to represent farmers, activists, and asylum seekers, with the aim of mapping perceived opportunities and challenges related to inclusion in CSA settings. Prompts and facilitation were prepared in advance by the researcher, and outputs were later integrated into a SWOT analysis.

In parallel with these core activities, the researcher maintained an active presence in the Dutch agroecology scene, attending a series of public events and thematic gatherings, including the Rooting Deeper Festival, Reclaim the Seeds, several conferences on agroecology-related topics organized by Boeregroep, and the Food Autonomy Festival. These events provided additional opportunities to deepen contextual knowledge, engage with current debates, and consolidate networks relevant to the research. Furthermore, informal conversations and field notes gathered during these events served to complement the more structured data collected through interviews and workshops.

Throughout the entire process, the research was conducted in dialogue with Mycelia van Hoop, whose members provided logistical support, feedback on activity design, and critical engagement with the unfolding of the research agenda. The partnership with Mycelia was instrumental not only in enabling access to field sites and actors, but also in grounding research in a locally embedded and activist-oriented framework.

The activities described in this chapter represent the research content in its entirety and constitute the empirical basis for the subsequent analytical chapters. The combination of stakeholder engagement, participant observation, and participatory facilitation forms a coherent methodological assemblage aimed at investigating the possibilities and constraints of inclusion within agroecological farms. By situating research within a real-world network of initiatives and actors, the internship offered the opportunity to construct knowledge grounded in practice and oriented toward transformation. The

following chapters will analyze the materials generated through this research and assess the implications for advancing social justice within agroecological spaces.

5. Results and findings

5.1 Stakeholder identification

This section provides an overview of the key stakeholders involved in the initiative aimed at promoting asylum seekers'participation in agroecological practices through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in the Netherlands. Stakeholders were identified based on their relevance to the objectives of the project, their potential or actual involvement, and their connection to agroecology, migration, or local food systems. To guide this process, the identified stakeholders were classified according to their nature and role within the research framework. Three board categories emerged from the classification: grassroots organizations and activists' networks; institutional actors; place-based initiatives such as CSA farms and community gardens.

Among the grassroots organizations and activist networks, Mycelia van Hoop plays a central role. This working group operates within the Dutch Agroecology Network and has been instrumental in coordinating efforts to connect CSA farms with asylum seekers. Closely related is the Dutch Agroecology Network itself, a coalition of farmers, activists, and organizations committed to agroecology and social justice. As the broader structure in which Mycelia is embedded, the network contributes collective reflection and strategic orientation. ASEED Europe and Boerengroep are other relevant actors in this category: the former is a grassroot organization based in Amsterdam, active in the climate and food justice movements, known for its direct action and educational campaigns; the latter is based in Wageningen and connects students with farmers to promote agroecology and critical perspectives on agriculture through research, events, and farms visits. Both organizations share members with Mycelia and can be valuable allies for funding applications. Furthermore, after a positive conversation, consideration is given to *Duurzaam Utrecht*, a sustainability-oriented organization based in Utrecht that has previously organized excursions for asylum seekers to urban gardens. Although currently constrained by limited resources, it has shown strong interest in co-developing a project and potentially expanding the initiative to the Utrecht region.

The institutional dimension is represented primarily by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), which is responsible for managing reception centers in the Netherlands. While traditionally more distant from grassroots and community-led initiatives, initial conversations have shown an openness to collaboration, particularly in facilitating the participation of asylum

seekers in farm-based activities. Another stakeholder that plays a strategic intermediary role is *Meedoenbalie* (Participation Desk), located in the reception center to promote volunteering opportunities to asylum seekers.

CSA farms and community-based food initiatives also emerge as key stakeholders. *De Ommuurde Tuin*, a CSA farm located near Wageningen, has expressed strong interest in welcoming asylum seekers as volunteers and is considered one of the most committed partners for implementation. Within the AZC itself, the *Moestuin* project stands out as a relevant initiative. This community garden is managed collaboratively by volunteers and residents of the reception center and represents a direct entry point for engaging asylum seekers already interested in sustainable agriculture.

It is worth noting that the AZC *Keijenbergseweg*, the asylum seekers' center in Wageningen where connections were established, was not included as a separate stakeholder. This decision was based on the consideration that its institutional role is already represented by COA, while its operational involvement is reflected in the Moestuin project.

This identification phase provides the foundation for the subsequent stakeholder analysis, where the roles, interests, and levels of influence of these actors will be explored in more detail.

5.2 Stakeholder analysis

The stakeholder analysis builds on the identification phase by examining the degree of interest, level of influence, needs, and expectations of each actor involved in the initiative. This analysis was informed by direct field engagement, informal conversations, and qualitative assessment of stakeholders positioning within the agroecological and migration support framework.

The analysis aims to support strategic planning and communication efforts, ensuring that stakeholders are engaged in ways that correspond to their capacities and motivations. It also contributes to the design of a governance framework that reflects the power dynamics and potential collaboration among actors.

The table below presents a synthesis of this assessment:

Table 1: Stakeholder analysis

STAKEHOLDER	INTEREST	INFLUENCE	NEEDS	EXPECTATIONS
Mycelia van Hoop	Very high; initiator of the project, strongly committed to connecting asylum seekers with CSA farms.	Very high; core facilitator, manages relationships and project direction.	Coordination support; external partnerships.	Project success and long-term collaboration between asylum seekers and CSA farms.
Agroecologie Netwerk	High; created a working group around the topic.	Medium-low; does not have control over implementation.	Updates on progress.	Promotion of social justice in agroecological farms.
ASEED Europe	High; members involved in Mycelia, aligned goals.	Medium; can act as official applicant for funding.	Project structure; joint application opportunities.	Active involvement in building inclusive, sustainable food systems.
Stichting Boerengroep	High; interest in agroecology and social inclusion; members also in Mycelia.	Medium; linked to university, can offer resources and visibility; can act as official applicant for funding.	Project structure; joint application opportunities.	Promote social justice in local agroecological farms.
De Ommuurde Tuin	High; interested in hosting asylum seekers; active in the design phase.	Medium; as a host farm, has a key role in implementation and success.	Trustful collaboration; regular support.	Reliable engagement with asylum seekers; added value to the farm.
Moestuin AZC	High, participants are residents and volunteers.	Medium; direct connection with asylum seekers; can mobilize interested individuals.	Logistical support.	More structured opportunities for asylum seekers to participate in agroecology.

COA	Medium; not directly involved in agroecology, but open and supportive.	High; controls access and logistics within the asylum seeker centers.	Minimal disruption; clear communication.	That the project supports AZC residents without complicating their current routines.
Duurzaam Utrecht	High; already doing similar activities.	Low; no direct involvement in Wageningen area; limited capacity.	Funding; strategic collaboration.	Joint project proposal; mutual support for implementation in Utrecht and Wageningen.
Meedoenbalies	Medium; shares goal of promoting participation of asylum seekers in the society.	Low; advisory role; can share information but limited decision power.	Regular updates.	Promote volunteering opportunities aligned with asylym seekers´interests.

Source: personal elaboration.

This analysis reveals that actors such as Mycelia van Hoop and De Ommuurde Tuin are both highly committed and influential and should therefore be closely involved in decision-making and implementation processes. Conversely, institutional actors like COA possess high influence but show only moderate interest, suggesting the need for targeted and non-intrusive engagement strategies. Grassroots organizations such as ASEED Europe and Stichting Boerengroep, while not central to implementation, present valuable opportunities for alliance-building, particularly in the context of funding proposals and project visibility. Finally, support stakeholders like Meedoenbalies and Duurzaam Utrecht may play important complementary roles, especially in facilitating local participation and expanding the project to other territories.

By integrating both interest and influence dimensions, the stakeholder analysis provides a roadmap for differentiated engagement strategies that can contribute to the comprehension and success of the initiative.

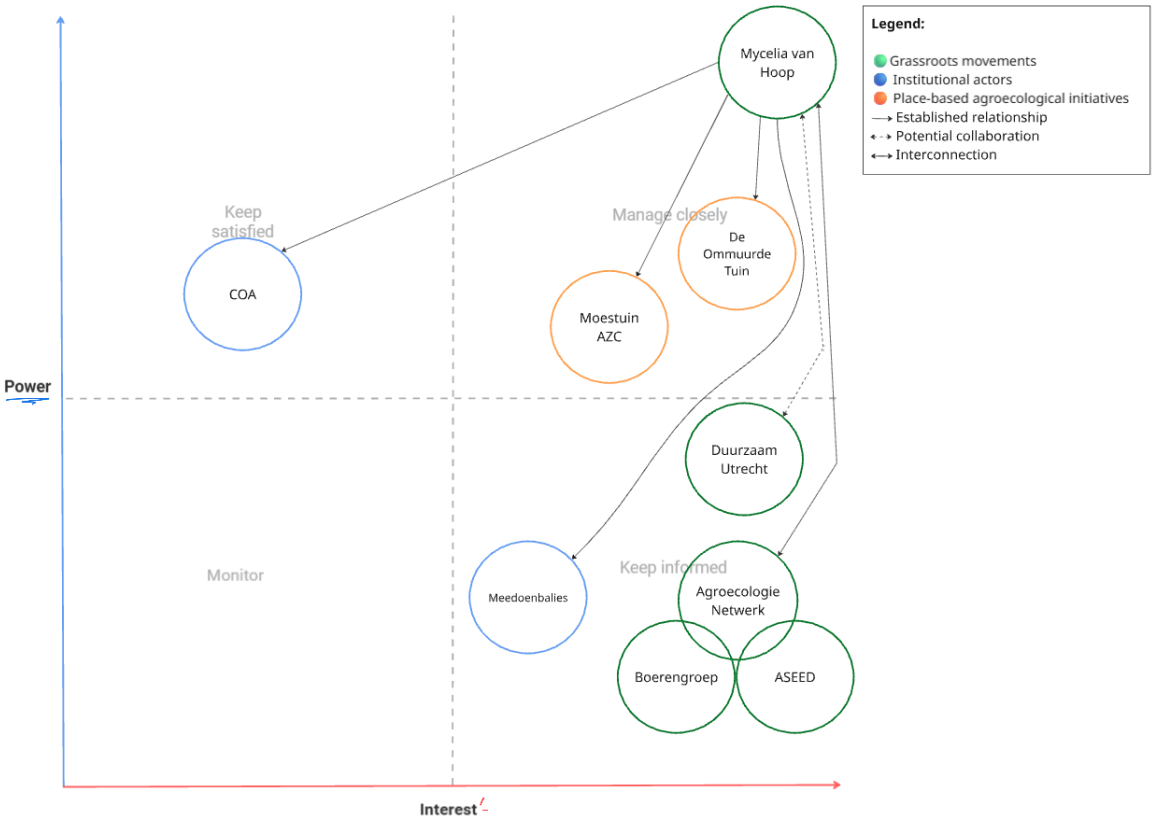
5.3 Stakeholder mapping

To complement the qualitative stakeholder analysis, a stakeholder map was developed using a power–interest grid. This visual tool helps to categorize actors based on their degree of influence over the

project (vertical axis) and their level of interest or engagement with its objectives (horizontal axis). The map not only synthesizes the findings from fieldwork and desk research but also serves as a practical guide for designing differentiated engagement strategies.

The vertical axis, representing power, reflects each stakeholder's capacity to influence the project's direction and outcomes. This may stem from institutional authority, access to resources, organizational legitimacy, or strategic positioning within agroecological and migration-related networks. The horizontal axis, indicating interest, refers to the degree of commitment, alignment, or potential involvement in the proposed initiative, particularly regarding the integration of asylum seekers into community-supported agricultural settings.

Figure 1: Stakeholder mapping



Source: personal elaboration.

Four strategic categories emerge from this typology. In the upper right quadrant, actors with both high power and high interest are classified under the "manage closely" category. These stakeholders should be engaged through participatory processes and regular communication, given their critical role in implementation and coordination. In contrast, the upper left quadrant includes stakeholders like COA, whose institutional power is significant, but whose interest remains relatively low. These

actors should be “kept satisfied,” meaning that while they do not require deep involvement, their support or at least non-opposition is essential to the smooth advancement of the initiative.

The lower right quadrant contains stakeholders with high interest but limited power. These actors fall under the "keep informed" category. They are important allies whose alignment with project goals can strengthen legitimacy, facilitate outreach, and enhance knowledge-sharing, even if they lack direct decision-making power. Lastly, in the lower left quadrant, stakeholders currently hold both low power and low interest. While their role is not central at this stage, they should be periodically monitored, as their positioning could shift in response to project developments or external conditions. In this case, no stakeholders were identified to be monitored.

This mapping exercise provides a visual synthesis of stakeholder dynamics and can inform the design of collaborative mechanisms, governance arrangements, and communication strategies tailored to the diverse roles and capacities of the actors involved.

5.4 Participatory insights

The participatory activities carried out as part of this research revealed a nuanced landscape of motivations, needs, and constraints among different stakeholder groups engaging with agroecological spaces. Through excursions, role-playing exercises, and collective reflection sessions, it became evident that asylum seekers, CSA farmers, and activists each brought distinct yet complementary perspectives to the question of inclusion in community-supported agriculture.

For asylum seekers, the possibility of participating in agroecological initiatives was associated with a deep desire for connection, both to the land and to others. Their reflections highlighted the importance of shared meals, sensory experiences, and spaces of respite from the often isolating environment of asylum centers. Some participants expressed appreciation for “healthy food” and the opportunity to “cook together”, while others emphasized the value of “learning the land”, “community,” and “having a break” from the AZC. These comments underscore how participation in an agroecological farm is not merely an activity, but a potential pathway for social inclusion and emotional well-being. However, participants also identified structural barriers, such as unpredictable appointments with immigration services, that constrain their ability to participate consistently, making flexibility and individualized support essential.

Farmers, on the other hand, articulated both enthusiasm and ambivalence. They expressed a welcoming stance and recognized the potential mutual benefits of involving asylum seekers, citing motivations such as “receiving help,” and “knowledge exchange.” Some viewed inclusion as a means to diversify the skills present on the farm and strengthen the broader food system. Yet, their reflections also pointed to practical and institutional concerns. Time constraints, the legal ambiguity surrounding

volunteer labor, and the need for a coordinating figure were recurrent themes. As one farmer noted, "support would be needed to make this happen," indicating that while the willingness exists, implementation is contingent on external facilitation and systemic flexibility.

Among activists and members of the agroecological movement, discussions around the inclusion of asylum seekers were shaped by both political and pragmatic considerations. Politically, conversations within the Dutch Agroecology Network were driven by an awareness of the group's predominantly composition of white individuals and a desire to broaden participation, recognizing the value of diversity as a source of enrichment. Participants described themselves as mediators and bridge-builders, conscious of their capacity to mobilize resources and find strategies to promote social inclusion in CSA. Importantly, the Agroecology Network sees agroecology as a model for contesting dominant models of industrial agriculture, and for this reason, they put effort in solidarity actions. From a more pragmatic perspective, members of the network began exploring possible strategies to secure funding and navigate the legal constraints that limit the involvement of asylum seekers in profit-oriented agricultural enterprises. While these conversations did not immediately translate into concrete initiatives, they contributed to maintaining awareness of the issue and fostered a sense of collective responsibility and support within the network.

It is worth mentioning some reflections that emerged from the group dynamic facilitated at De Meent, a non-profit farm maintained by undocumented individuals, which served as an inspiration for the tentative initiative in Wageningen. The exercise consisted of small group reflections on the values of farming at De Meent for both sustainable agriculture and community building, guided by a series of exploratory questions, and it succeeded in promoting collective storytelling and facilitating shared understandings among participants. Notably, regular participants with a migrant background spoke of agriculture as a deeply personal and emotionally rooted practice, while students and activists framed agroecology in more overtly political terms. This interplay of lived experience and ideological framing illustrated the richness of inclusive agroecological initiatives.

5.5 Interviews findings

The interviews conducted with actors from different sectors – including activists from the A4 collective in France, coordinators at De Meent in Amstelveen, staff from the COA in Wageningen, and farmers from De Ommuurde Tuin - revealed a variety of approaches in creating inclusive agroecological spaces. A key finding was the shared emphasis on dignity, autonomy, and reciprocity as foundational principles for engaging asylum seekers and undocumented individuals in agricultural work. Particularly relevant to this research is the commitment to move beyond passive involvement, aiming instead to co-develop participatory spaces that promote active engagement within CSA farms.

In this context, several important considerations emerged from semi-structured interviews. A4, which supports migrant workers in accessing farms and navigating employment law, rejects paternalistic approaches in favor of a peer-to-peer model. Their work highlights the importance of legal guidance, self-organization, and maintaining horizontal relations between farmers and migrant workers. At the same time, they pointed to ongoing dependency on individual farmers' goodwill, and the fragility of migrant agency within current systems.

At De Meent, the coordinators described a self-managed, participatory model in which the farm is meant to be a space where to “feel at home”, generating a sense of belonging in participants. The focus is on knowledge exchange, community building, and experimentation with inclusive forms of governance. Their experience emphasized the importance of flexibility, consistent coordination, and transportation support to facilitate the participation of undocumented people. Participants are involved through a shelter house where they are selected based on their motivation and willingness to engage with the community, which has proven essential for building trust and continuity.

The interview with a COA representative clarified the legal parameters concerning employment and volunteering for individuals in the asylum procedure and provided valuable insight into COA’s institutional perspective. Asylum seekers in the Netherlands are permitted to engage in paid employment after six months in the procedure; prior to that, they may participate in voluntary work, including receiving standard volunteer compensation. According to the interviewee, the rules governing volunteering are the same for asylum seekers as for the general population. The COA staff representative expressed strong support for the initiative, indicating a willingness to refer interested individuals and disseminate information about the project. She also acknowledged the challenges posed by the frequent relocation of asylum seekers between centers and expressed her intention to avoid transferring individuals already engaged in such initiatives whenever possible.

At De Ommuurde Tuin, farmers demonstrated genuine interest in offering meaningful and therapeutic workspaces for asylum seekers. However, they raised concerns about regulatory uncertainty, particularly the risk of being fined for hosting asylum seekers as volunteers, as volunteering is not permitted in for-profit settings. Additional concerns included limited time availability and capacity, as the farm operates on a small scale with limited resources. They expressed the need for mediation and support when working with individuals who are facing language and cultural barriers, despite their overall enthusiasm for inclusive collaboration. Following their suggestion to involve a mediator, a first collective visit to the farm was organized, which subsequently developed into a regular collaboration with small groups of asylum seekers from the AZC in Wageningen.

Taken together, these interviews reveal both the obstacles (legal uncertainty, logistical constraints, and precarious stability of the asylum seeker in the same area) and the potential (solidarity networks,

shared values, and opportunities for knowledge exchange) for building inclusive, dignified, and sustainable forms of participation in agroecological initiatives.

6. Discussion

Our findings provide a multi-layered understanding of the conditions necessary to facilitate the inclusion of asylum seekers in CSA farms in the Netherlands. Through stakeholder identification, analysis, and mapping, the study constructs a comprehensive framework that highlights the diversity of actors involved, ranging from grassroots movements and place-based agroecological settings to institutional bodies such as COA. This framework is not merely descriptive, but serves as a strategic tool for action, revealing differentiated levels of power, interest, and commitment that must be taken into account when designing initiatives aimed at social inclusion of asylum seekers. For instance, the positioning of Mycelia van Hoop and De Ommuurde Tuin in the "manage closely" quadrant in Figure 1 underscores their centrality in driving implementation efforts, while actors such as COA, though not directly involved in agroecology and community farming, must be approached carefully due to their regulatory authority and logistical control over asylum seekers' participation.

The participatory dimension of the research further enriches this analysis by shedding light on how different stakeholders construct meaning around engagement in CSA farms. Asylum seekers expressed a strong desire for connection and meaningful activities, viewing participation in farming not only as work but as a space for peacefulness and emotional well-being, highlighting the transformative potential of agroecological spaces when they are designed inclusively. However, their capacity of engagement remains precarious, restricted by last-minute requirements from the COA as well as by the persistent instability of their situation. Farmers, while expressing openness and interest, highlighted critical limitations such as legal ambiguities, time constraints, and the need for external support, making evident that structural conditions, rather than lack of goodwill, often hinder inclusive action. Activists within the agroecology movement contributed to a broader political perspective, advocating for the expansion of diversity within CSA spaces and articulating strategies for overcoming legal barriers through solidarity-based practices. These discourses converged in participatory activities such as the one proposed during the farming day at De Meent, where the interplay between lived experience and political framing produced rich insights into what agroecology can represent for different groups.

The interviews further validated these findings by providing concrete examples of inclusive practices and underscoring the importance of coordination, flexibility, and legal clarity.

Overall, the research reveals that, even though there are still some obstacles, especially legal and logistical once, there is a solid foundation of shared values, emerging collaborations, and political

will that can be leveraged to advance more inclusive and resilient agricultural systems. The stakeholder framework and participatory insights developed through this study thus offer both an analytical lens and a practical roadmap for future initiatives, underscoring the importance of sustained engagement, network-building, and context-sensitive governance mechanisms to ensure meaningful inclusion of asylum seekers in CSA farms. The following sections provide a critical examination of the research findings, situating them within the theoretical framework and existing literature. The discussion focuses on interpreting the results within the Dutch context and concludes with a SWOT analysis that synthesizes the key elements emerging from the study.

6.1 Identified barriers to enable asylum seekers' participation in CSA farms

Our findings reveal that the inclusion of asylum seekers in CSA farms in the Netherlands is embedded in a context of both promising grassroots engagement and persistent barriers. On the one hand, key strengths include the strong social commitment of actors such as Mycelia van Hoop and De Ommuurde Tuin, as well as the presence of grassroots networks and pilot initiatives that demonstrate mutual interest from both farmers and asylum seekers. Moreover, the informal and flexible nature of these initiatives allows for experimentation and adaptation, particularly in contexts where institutional frameworks are lacking. On the other hand, these same informal dynamics often translate into weaknesses, including the absence of formal mechanisms for inclusion, fragmentation among stakeholders, and limited capacity among CSA farmers to sustain long-term collaborations. Logistical barriers further complicate coordination efforts. Transportation emerged as a significant issue, as farms are typically located in rural areas and are not easily accessible via public transportation. For individuals newly arrived in the territory, independently reaching such isolated locations poses an additional challenge. This barrier was highlighted in prior discussions with A4 and De Meent and was likewise encountered during the organized excursions.

Another logistical barrier concerns the project's reliance on volunteer availability. Mycelia van Hoop is supported by Stichting Boerengroep and ASEED Europe, both of which are composed largely of individuals on short-term contracts and unpaid master's students completing internships. Frequent turnover within these organizations undermines the stability of the project, particularly with respect to building and maintaining long-term trust, as new members must familiarize themselves with the project's objectives and stakeholders. This dynamic complicates both the feasibility and the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

One structural barrier identified relates to the limited availability of farmers to actively coordinate and participate in such initiatives. CSA farmers often face demanding workloads and, as a result, have little time or energy to dedicate to developing new collaborations. Field research indicated that farmers were generally difficult to contact and engage in the project. While the initiative originated within the Dutch Agroecology Network, of which some farmers are members, when it came to establish concrete collaborations aimed at fostering social inclusion, farmers were not consistently responsive. Initially, the activist movement perceived the main challenge as reaching out to different communities, particularly asylum seekers, to co-develop the project. However, fieldwork revealed that a more substantial barrier was, in fact, initiating and sustaining dialogue with farmers to secure their active involvement. The experience at De Ommuurde Tuin represented an exception, as collaboration was facilitated by the presence of farmers who were deeply committed to inclusivity and to make their space accessible to asylum seekers.

Cultural and social factors also play a significant role. Language barriers can limit meaningful participation: one farm explicitly declined to engage with asylum seekers due to concerns about communication difficulties. While some asylum seekers have basic proficiency in Dutch or English, many cannot communicate effectively in either language. Even with digital translation tools, interactions require additional time, patience, and attention. Moreover, some asylum seekers may have experienced trauma or are facing other psychosocial vulnerabilities. Supporting people with such experiences requires additional care and sensitivity, which can be challenging for farmers who are already constrained by time and daily responsibilities.

Overall, these barriers represent substantial constraints to the feasibility of the project; addressing them is essential to ensure its successful implementation.

6.2 Challenges and opportunities through theoretical lens

The integration of asylum seekers into Dutch community supported agriculture farms unfolds within a complex landscape of both enabling conditions and challenges. From a theoretical perspective, the process can be understood as situated at the intersection of agroecology, social justice, and food sovereignty. Drawing on Giraldo and Rosset's (2018) notion of "people's agroecology", grounded in relational inclusion and democratic governance, and Gliessman's (2018) conceptualization of agroecology as a transdisciplinary, participatory, and action-oriented process, it becomes possible to examine how emerging bottom-up initiatives navigate structural, legal, and socio-cultural barriers while leveraging emerging opportunities.

Opportunities arise from increasing public and institutional awareness of food justice, agroecology, and inclusive practices, as well as from engagement of allied networks and municipalities in promoting social inclusion through community farming. In nearby cities such as Nijmegen and Utrecht, similar models are being piloted with municipal support, which not only lends legitimacy but also mitigates legal risks for farmers. Ongoing collaborations, such as the dialogue with Duurzam Utrecht, open pathways for joint funding applications and the replication of the model across multiple localities. These developments and cross-collaborations represent strategic opportunities to expand the social dimension of community supported agriculture in line with agroecological principles, and to build what Elzen et al. (2017) describe as the "social infrastructure" necessary for systemic transitions, enabling spaces in which experimentation, civic engagement, and social learning can flourish.

Yet, these opportunities coexist with a range of challenges that limit the feasibility, continuity, and transformative potential of such initiatives. Legal and policy restrictions currently limit asylum seekers' right to volunteer in the Netherlands to non-profit organizations, thereby excluding for-profit CSA farms from hosting them as regular volunteers. According to the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), violations may result in financial penalties, a risk that discourages farmers' involvement. In response, conversations among interested stakeholders, particularly the Agroecology Network and De Ommuurde Tuin CSA, revealed the needing of a recognized non-profit intermediary - potentially Stichting Boerengroep - which can officially receive asylum seekers as volunteers and then connect them with farms as part of its own programming. Additionally, pilot excursions and one-day visits have been organized in collaboration with De Ommuurde Tuin CSA, as these forms of engagement are explicitly allowed under current regulations. Although these alternative solutions are necessarily limited in scope and frequency, they demonstrate a pragmatic commitment to promote social inclusion within the limits of existing policies.

Beyond legal barriers, the broader unpredictability of the asylum process presents further challenges. Asylum seekers may be suddenly relocated to another reception center, interrupting their participation and undermining the continuity required to build trust, mutual learning, and a sense of belonging. This structural precariousness stands in tension with the principles of relational inclusion and co-responsibility that are central to a transformative and horizontal process. Therefore, establishing a constructive dialogue with the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) is essential, as the agency can play a supportive role by facilitating extended stays in the same asylum reception center for individuals actively engaged in local initiatives.

Another concern is the risk of tokenism, whereby inclusion becomes symbolic rather than substantive, with asylum seekers showcased in projects without meaningful opportunities for agency or prospects for long-term integration (Di Santo et al., 2023). Tokenism often manifests in well-intentioned

initiatives that prioritize visibility over substance, in this case involving asylum seekers in ways that appear inclusive but fail to address the deeper structural barriers they face. This threat is particularly pronounced in small-scale or experimental projects that may lack the institutional frameworks, adequate resources, or inclusive governance models to support genuine participation and long-term engagement. To mitigate this risk, it is important to establish clear, open, and trust-based communication (Di Santo et al., 2023). Co-developing strategies with farmers, through active listening and mutual understanding, can help address their concerns and constraints related to host asylum seekers. Rather than imposing externally designed models, this approach supports collaborative planning that respects the farm's existing dynamics and capacity. The aim is not to burden farms with additional demands but to cultivate shared enthusiasm and a sense of ownership over the process. As Véron (2024) emphasizes, initiatives should be rooted in place-based approaches, developed by and for local communities. By fostering participatory, locally grounded models, agroecological farms can move beyond symbolic inclusion and create transformative spaces where social justice and ecological resilience are mutually reinforced.

Finally, the reliance on precarious project funding and unpaid work can further exacerbate these constraints. Projects that depend on short-term financial support or voluntary contributions, including those of asylum seekers, risk creating uneven power relations and reproducing dependency. This underscores the need to complement grassroots efforts towards social inclusion with broader policy advocacy and the active involvement of multiple stakeholders. As Elzen et al. (2017) emphasize, durable agroecological transitions cannot rely only on local initiative but require stable institutional partnerships and supportive policy frameworks to ensure long-term viability and equity.

Addressing these multi-layered challenges requires a combination of legal clarity, policy reform, and sustained multi-level collaboration. It also demands intentional strategies for inclusive governance, models that move beyond charitable frameworks and instead recognize asylum seekers as rights-holders and contributors to the agroecological transition. Despite these considerable challenges, the current momentum, the creativity of local actors, and the alignment of values among farms, civil society organizations, and municipalities offer a solid foundation. If harnessed effectively, these efforts can contribute not only to the inclusion of asylum seekers but also to a broader transformation of food systems and social relations, toward truly equitable, participatory, and resilient agroecological futures.

6.3 Role of key actors in social inclusion

The advancement of inclusive practices in agroecology depends on the coordinated efforts of various stakeholders, each contributing according to their own level of capacity.

The Dutch Agroecology Network plays a crucial role by fostering and supporting initiatives that encourage social inclusion on farms. However, stronger communication and coordination among internal working groups is necessary to avoid overlapping roles, clarify shared goals, and realistically assess their capacity for implementation. Grassroots organizations contribute significantly by providing access to funding sources and by potentially acting as focal points to support asylum seekers. Meanwhile, government institutions need to be actively engaged and informed. Based on this preliminary research and on the identification of similar initiatives in another municipalities – such as Nijmegen and Utrecht – there is strong indication of institutional openness to dialogue, which is especially important when the target group includes individuals involved in legal procedures and under observation from institutional bodies. Institutions can therefore play a key supportive role in enabling and legitimizing these projects. Community-based initiatives, such as the community garden at the AZC, also stand out as vital actors, as they build trustful relationships with asylum seekers and facilitate their engagement in meaningful activities. This highlights the importance of having grassroots organizations on board to facilitate the inclusion process.

Moreover, a significant practical issue raised within stakeholder conversations is whether asylum seekers participating in CSA farms should receive compensation. Given that CSA farms are typically small-scale settings with limited resources, and considering added challenges such as language and cultural barriers, farmers are often unable or reluctant to hire paid workers from this group. Within the Agroecology Network, in dialogue with external stakeholders and with acknowledgment from COA, the possibility of providing symbolic or modest financial compensation to asylum seekers volunteering in CSA farms has been debated as a positive incentive to foster participation. The pathway envisioned involves applying for external funding to support such compensation, balancing recognition of asylum seekers' valuable contributions with the practical limitations faced by the farms. This approach could stimulate engagement and serve as a starting point to understand if there´s effective participation once the project is implemented. Although this solution fits the flexible and grassroots nature of these initiatives, it demands clear strategies for fundraising alongside careful attention to legal compliance. For this reason, it is essential to engage with potential partners organizations interested in the initiative such as ASEED Europe and Stichting Boerengroep, who can play a strategic role in amplifying the initiative´s visibility, facilitating access to funding opportunities, and ensuring that the project is aligned with broader movements for agroecology, food sovereignty, and access to land.

6.4 SWOT analysis integration

To synthesize the findings and their critical interpretation, a SWOT analysis was developed, outlining the strenghts, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints related to the initiative in its territorial context.

Table 2: SWOT analysis.

INTERNAL	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
	1. Strong motivation and social commitment from actors involved (e.g. Mycelia van Hoop, De Ommuurde Tuin).	1. Lack of formal structures or clear frameworks for including asylum seekers in farm activities.
	2. Existing community gardens in asylum centers (e.g Moestuin AZC in Wageningen) as steppingstones for engagement.	2. Limited access to transportation from asylum reception centers to CSA farms.
	3. Existing grassroots organizations (Agroecology Network, ASEED Europe, Stichting Boerengroep) ready to support.	3. Low availability of volunteers who can commit to long-term projects.
	4. Flexibility in the approach due to informal, bottom-up structure allowing experimentation.	4. Limited capacity of CSA farmers, especially in terms of time, energy, and workload, to coordinate new collaborations.
	5. Pilot initiatives show interest from both farmers and asylum seekers.	5. Language and cultural barriers hinder meaningful interaction and inclusion.
	6. Participatory approaches create spaces for intercultural exchange and well-being.	6. Dependence on precarious funding and unpaid labor undermines long-term sustainability.
EXTERNAL	**Opportunities**	**Threats**
	1. Growing social awareness of food sovereignty, agroecology, and inclusive practices.	1. Legal and policy constraints: asylum seekers can only volunteer in non-profits, risk on fines for CSA farms.
	2. Exchange and co-creation of agroecological knowledge between farmers and asylum seekers, enhancing resilience.	2. Asylum seekers can be unexpectedly relocated to another AZC, disrupting participation and trust-building.
	3. Policy trends toward community-based inclusion strategies in various municipalities.	3. Risk of tokenism, i.e. superficial inclusion of asylum seekers without addressing deeper structural inequalities.

Source: personal elaboration.

6.5 Tensions between agroecology discourse and practice

In recent decades, agroecology in Europe has gained increasing recognition as both a scientific field and a practical framework for promoting sustainable farming systems. At the discursive level, it embodies principles of food sovereignty, ecological regeneration, and social justice, positioning itself as a transformative alternative to the dominant agri-food regime (Giraldo & Rosset, 2017). However, when examining its local implementation, particularly through community supported agriculture, contradictions become evident between the values associated with agroecology and the realities of participation and accessibility on the ground. These contradictions raise questions about the extent to which agroecology, as currently practiced in Europe, can advance its socio-political commitments, especially regarding the inclusion of marginalized groups.

CSA models exemplify some of the ecological and community-oriented principles of agroecology. They prioritize small-scale production, organic practices, and direct relationships between producers and consumers, thereby fostering short food supply chains and local sustainability (Cone & Myhre, 2000). Yet, these spaces often remain inaccessible for socio-economic and cultural reasons. Membership fees or the pre-financing of shares represent significant economic barriers, particularly for low-income households and asylum seekers, who face structural restrictions on their labor and mobility. At the same time, the socio-cultural environment of CSA farms, frequented largely by middle-class, white, and highly educated members, can reproduce exclusions that contradict agroecology's commitment to democratization and equity (Véron, 2024). This tension illustrates how CSA, despite aligning with agroecological values in theory, risks reproducing existing patterns of privilege and exclusion in practice.

These contradictions are amplified by the conceptual ambiguity of agroecology in the European context. As noted by Wezel et al. (2009), agroecology has been variously interpreted as a scientific discipline, a set of farming practices, and a social movement. In some contexts, particularly within institutional and policy frameworks, it is equated with organic farming or reduced to a technical approach to environmental management. Such framings risk depoliticizing agroecology by stripping away its emphasis on power relations, equity, and the right of communities to define their food systems (Giraldo & Rosset, 2018). This process of institutionalization, what Giraldo and Rosset (2018) describe as "territory in dispute", creates fertile ground for co-optation, where the discourse of agroecology is embraced rhetorically while its radical and transformative dimensions are sidelined. The growing popularity of the term in academic and policy circles thus risks turning agroecology into a fashionable label rather than a genuine vehicle for social transformation.

Against this backdrop, grassroots organizations and activist networks play a pivotal role in keeping the socio-political dimension of agroecology alive. In the Netherlands, organizations such as ASEED Europe, the Dutch Agroecology Network, Stichting Boerengroep, and Toekomstboeren actively

promote food sovereignty and resist the commodification of agroecological discourse. They create spaces for collective reflection, knowledge exchange, and experimentation, thereby reinforcing agroecology's character as a participatory and action-oriented process. Yet even within these spaces, inclusivity challenges persist. As has been observed at agroecology events and networks across Europe, these spaces are often dominated by privileged demographics, limiting the diversity of voices and perspectives involved. If agroecology is to remain true to its emancipatory ethos, these grassroots arenas must themselves become more welcoming to marginalized groups, including migrants and asylum seekers, who can contribute valuable knowledge and perspectives while also benefiting from participation.

Addressing these tensions requires moving beyond rhetorical commitments to inclusivity and actively restructuring agroecological initiatives to ensure accessibility. This involves rethinking economic models to reduce financial barriers, cultivating intercultural awareness to foster genuinely inclusive environments, and embedding participatory governance mechanisms that allow marginalized groups to exercise agency rather than remain symbolic participants (Véron, 2024). In this sense, the involvement of multiple stakeholders is crucial: farmers, activist movements, municipalities, and local organizations must collaborate to co-create inclusive pathways. Such engagement not only distributes responsibilities and risks but also strengthens the resilience of agroecological initiatives by diversifying their social base.

The contradictions between agroecological discourse and practice are not merely operational challenges but central to the future of agroecology itself. If left unaddressed, they risk undermining its legitimacy as a transformative project capable of uniting ecological sustainability with social justice. Conversely, by openly addressing these tensions, the broader agroecology network can evolve into a truly participatory and democratic space. The challenge, then, is to ensure that agroecology in Europe evolves not only as a discourse of sustainability but as a lived practice of inclusion, solidarity, and collective empowerment.

6.6 Implications of social justice for agroecological transitions and food system transformation

The findings of this research highlight the complex interplay of actors, motivations, and structural conditions shaping the inclusion of asylum seekers in agroecological spaces in the Netherlands. In doing so, they contribute to ongoing debates on how grassroots movements promoting agroecology can simultaneously address ecological sustainability and social justice, while fostering community

empowerment. This discussion situates empirical results within the broader frameworks of food system transformation, with a focus on equity, agency, and ecological regeneration.

Notably, agroecology is understood not only as a set of ecological practices but also as a transformative socio-political project that challenges inequities embedded in the dominant agri-food regime, seeking not only to regenerate ecosystems but also to democratize control over food production and distribution (La Vía Campesina, 2013). This dual ambition implies that CSA farms transitioning from an organic to an agroecological system must also address the persistent inequalities, labor exploitation, and exclusionary structures embedded within the dominant agri-food regime. Without such attention to social justice, there is a substantial risk of reproducing existing inequalities within ostensibly "green" systems, achieving ecological improvements without real social transformation (La Vía Campesina, 2013).

Inclusive agroecological processes contribute to resilience by integrating diverse knowledge systems. People coming from other countries carry experiential and cultural knowledge of farming practices, ranging from low-input soil fertility management to intercropping systems, that can enrich the design and functioning of agroecological practices. The incorporation of such plural knowledge expands the adaptive capacity of local food systems, making them more resilient to ecological and economic disruptions. By contrast, exclusion narrows the pool of strategies and perspectives, leaving systems more vulnerable to crisis and less capable of innovation.

Inclusion also strengthens the collective stewardship of land and natural resources. Agroecology flourishes when agricultural spaces are managed as "commons", where responsibilities for soil health, biodiversity enhancement, and water conservation are shared across various actors. Welcoming other groups of society into these spaces increases the number of people engaged in ecological care, distributes the workload, and deepens the social commitment to long-term regeneration. Without such broad participation, the burden of ecological management often falls on a small group of already overextended practitioners, limiting scalability and sustainability.

From a political perspective, social inclusion amplifies the transformative potential of agroecological movements. Food system transformation requires confronting entrenched power structures, such as subsidy regimes favoring industrial agriculture, limited access to land for small-scale farmers, and restrictive labor regulations, and advocating for equitable access to resources (Wittman & James, 2022). Broad-based alliances that incorporate more voices can increase the legitimacy, representativeness, and political pressure necessary to effect systemic change. Conversely, exclusion undermines the capacity of agroecological movements to mobilize collectively and to challenge the structural drivers of ecological and social degradation. Furthermore, inclusion aligns agroecological practice with the ethical commitments of the food sovereignty movement, as articulated by La Vía Campesina (2013). Food sovereignty frames the right to healthy food and the right to define one's

own food systems as inseparable from the pursuit of social justice. Excluding marginalized groups from agroecological spaces would therefore contradict the very normative foundations upon which these transitions claim legitimacy.

Finally, the relationship between social well-being and ecological regeneration is mutually reinforcing. As evidenced in the participatory findings of this research, asylum seekers' engagement in CSA farms and community gardens fosters emotional well-being, a sense of belonging, and intercultural connection. These affective bonds create conditions for enduring ecological care, as individuals who feel valued and connected to the land are more likely to contribute to its restoration and protection. In this sense, social inclusion is not an adjunct to ecological regeneration but an enabling condition for it.

Taken together, these dimensions underscore that social inclusion is not merely a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for food system transformation. It enhances resilience through knowledge diversity, reinforces collective stewardship, strengthens political leverage, aligns practice with ethical commitments, and sustains ecological regeneration through social well-being.

7. Conclusions

This research has explored the potential of agroecological initiatives, particularly CSAs and community gardens, as sites where social inclusion and ecological transformation can be mutually reinforced. The findings indicate that agroecology is not only a framework for ecological sustainability but also a vehicle for fostering inclusion and empowerment, particularly for asylum seekers who are often rendered invisible within mainstream socio-economic life. Through preliminary encounters, stakeholder mapping, and participatory activities involving asylum seekers, farmers, and activists, this study has highlighted the conditions, barriers, and opportunities for promoting inclusion in agroecological spaces in the Dutch context.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with literature framing agroecology as a multidimensional project that integrates ecological regeneration with social justice (Altieri & Nicholls, 2017). While organic farming and scientific research have traditionally dominated European approaches to agroecology, grassroots organizations and activist networks play a crucial role in supporting its socio-political dimension. By advocating for equity, solidarity, and systemic transformation, these movements ensure that agroecology is not reduced to a set of technical solutions but conceived as a path toward a transformation of food systems that prioritizes food sovereignty.

Inspired by similar initiatives that enable undocumented individuals to participate in agroecological farming, Myclia van Hoop seeks to facilitate the engagement of asylum seekers in CSA farms around

Wageningen. This study assessed the feasibility of such initiative by clarifying legal and logistical challenges through stakeholder mapping and semi-structured interviews, and by fostering horizontal spaces for reflection and collective learning through pilot excursions and participatory group dynamics.

The research explored both employment and volunteer opportunities for asylum seekers in CSA farms, revealing substantial constraints in both areas. For instance, current regulations restrict asylum seekers from volunteering in for-profit settings, limiting the ways CSAs can formally include them. Additional logistical barriers, such as the geographical distance between urban settings and rural farms, as well as the absence of a long-term commitment from the Mycelia working group, further constrain sustained participation. Regarding employment, CSA farms face significant challenges: many lack the financial and organizational capacity to hire, and uncertainty surrounding asylum seekers' legal and residential status - given to the possibility of relocation to another asylum center within the Netherlands – discourages formal employment. Cultural and linguistic barriers also require attention, demanding the cultivation of welcoming environment and reciprocal effort at cross-cultural understanding.

Nevertheless, the analysis suggests that these challenges are not insurmountable. Multi-stakeholder collaboration and targeted funding could play a crucial role in overcoming them. Farmers expressed willingness to welcome asylum seekers if appropriate support structures were in place, particularly through the engagement of external stakeholders who could facilitate connections and help address ongoing barriers.

The research highlights co-development as a cornerstone for social inclusion. By adopting participatory methods, such as role-playing, collective mapping, and facilitated group discussions, the project has ensured that asylum seekers are not treated as passive beneficiaries but recognized as active agents in shaping the initiative. At the same time, this co-development process revealed the necessity of attending to farmers' needs, ensuring that inclusion practices do not add unsustainable burdens to already demanding farm work but instead generate mutual benefits.

The results also underscore the importance of cross-scale alliances in scaling up inclusive practices beyond local pilot projects. Local initiatives can gain traction when connected to national and transnational networks, such as the Dutch Agroecology Network, which provide platforms for policy advocacy, resource mobilization, and knowledge exchange. These alliances enable local initiatives to contribute to broader movements for food sovereignty and justice-based food system transformation. While this reflects the first finding on multi stakeholder engagement, it adds a particular emphasis on the capacity of networks to amplify local practices into systemic change.

The study further illustrates that ecological and social dimensions of agroecology are mutually reinforcing. From an ecological perspective, agroecology regenerates degraded ecosystems, enhances

biodiversity, and builds climate resilience; from a social perspective, participation of different groups enriches these ecological spaces with cultural and experiential diversity. The exchange of knowledge strengthens the adaptive capacity of local farms, weaving together ecological sustainability with social justice.

This research situates itself within the broader academic debate on agroecology in Europe. While much of the existing literature highlights the transformative potential of agroecology with respect to ecological regeneration, comparatively less attention has been devoted to questions of inclusivity and social justice within agroecological spaces. Notably, there is a lack of systematic inquiry into how farms that identify as agroecological engage with issues of accessibility, diversity, and social integration. By examining initiatives in the Netherlands that facilitate asylum seeker participation in CSAs, this study addresses this gap. Although several grassroots projects are emerging across the national territory, they often operate in isolation and without a strong structural or policy framework to sustain them. In this context, networking and coalition-building become essential to unify fragmented efforts, create more inclusive environments, and enable newcomers to contribute meaningfully to agricultural activities while also fostering opportunities for social interaction with Dutch communities in supportive and equitable contexts.

Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of critically assessing whether agroecological movements genuinely prioritize social inclusion. Inclusivity should not be reduced to tokenistic measures, such as diversifying farm spaces to appear “less white,” but should instead be grounded in the recognition of the value of intercultural dialogue, mutual learning, and the co-creation of knowledge. By placing social inclusion as a central rather than peripheral dimension of agroecology, the research underscores the potential for agroecological farms to act as transformative spaces that not only regenerate ecosystems but also contribute to social cohesion and equity.

8. Recommendations for future research

This research remains partial and exploratory, and the findings should be considered as an initial contribution to an ongoing process. A final focus group with stakeholders, scheduled for September, will be essential for validating the results and for identifying further directions for implementation.

At this stage, engagement with the municipality of Wageningen has not yet been undertaken. This reflects the exploratory character of the present phase, which was primarily focused on gathering preliminary information and defining the contextual framework of the project. Once a more consolidated design and clearer evidence base are established, dialogue with municipal authorities will represent an important next step. Such engagement could facilitate policy alignment,

mobilization of local funding, and institutional recognition, thereby reinforcing the sustainability and legitimacy of the initiative. While activist movements provide a strong foundation by being territorially embedded and action-oriented, institutional involvement should not be neglected. The interest expressed by COA and the municipality's previous support for the creation of a community garden at the asylum reception center in Wageningen indicate that municipal authorities may be willing to support this initiative.

Further research is also needed to critically examine the agroecological dimension of CSA farms. It should not be assumed that CSAs are inherently agroecological farms. While their connection to national and international networks such as URGENCI (a grassroots organization that actively promotes agroecology, food sovereignty, and solidarity economy policies at multiple institutional levels) represents a valuable element, it is important to investigate to what extent CSA farms align with agroecological principles. For instance, future studies could explore how participatory processes such as this initiative may contribute to supporting and deepening their agroecological transition.

Finally, attention should be directed to the policy environment that conditions the viability of agroecological farms. Policy advocacy emerges as a key dimension, as stronger institutional support is required to ensure the economic sustainability of small-scale farms and, consequently, to expand their accessibility and reinforce their potential as drivers of social inclusion, ecological resilience, and transformative territorial development.

9. Glossary

Agroecology

A holistic approach that is at the same time a scientific discipline, a set of farming practices, and a social movement. Rooted in peasant, Indigenous, and local knowledge, it promotes food sovereignty, social justice, and ecological sustainability. It aims at transforming food systems, ensuring equitable access to land, and strengthening communities' autonomy and care for the environment.

Asylum Seekers

Individuals who claim the human right to asylum because they have been forced to abandon their country of origin to flee conflict or persecution, but whose refugee status has not yet been determined.

AZC (*Asielzoekerscentrum* / Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers)

In the Dutch context, AZCs are state-mandated facilities where asylum seekers reside while awaiting the outcome of their asylum application. Managed primarily by the *Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers* (COA), they provide accommodation and basic services such as food, healthcare, and education. Beyond their logistical function, AZCs also play a regulatory role in structuring the everyday lives of asylum seekers, often marked by limited autonomy, uncertainty, and spatial segregation from the broader society. In academic and policy debates, AZCs are discussed both as sites of protection and as spaces of control that reflect broader tensions in migration governance and integration policies.

COA (*Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers* / Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers)

The Dutch governmental agency responsible for the reception and accommodation of asylum seekers. COA manages the network of asylum seeker centres (AZCs) and provides basic services such as housing, food, healthcare, and access to education during the asylum procedure. Beyond service provision, COA also implements integration and return programs in line with national migration policies, positioning it as a key institutional actor in the governance of asylum and migration in the Netherlands.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

A model of agriculture where consumers support local farms directly by subscribing or purchasing shares, fostering a direct relationship between farmers and community members to promote sustainable and local food production.

Co-optation

The process by which radical or transformative ideas and movements are absorbed or diluted by dominant institutions in a way that neutralizes their political or social impact.

Food Sovereignty

The right of peoples and communities to define their own food systems, including decisions on production, distribution, and consumption, emphasizing local control and sustainable practices.

Inclusion (Social Inclusion)

Efforts and practices aimed at ensuring marginalized or excluded groups (e.g., asylum seekers) can participate fully in social, economic, and cultural life, in this case through agroecological initiatives.

Intercultural Exchange

Interaction and sharing between people from different cultural backgrounds, promoting mutual understanding and enriching collective knowledge.

Local Food Systems

Food production, processing, distribution, and consumption processes that occur within a particular geographic region, emphasizing local economies and community resilience.

Meedoenbalie

A local information and support desk within Dutch asylum seeker centres (AZCs), designed to facilitate the participation (*meedoen*) of asylum seekers in daily activities and society. Through the *meedoenbalie*, residents can access opportunities such as language courses, volunteer work, training, and cultural or recreational activities. While it aims to promote inclusion and active engagement, scholarly debates highlight its ambivalent role: on one hand fostering integration and social contacts, on the other hand operating within the constraints of the asylum regime, where opportunities are often limited and conditional.

***Moestuin* AZC (Community Garden at Asylum Seeker Centres)**

Small-scale collective gardens established within or around Dutch asylum seeker centres (AZCs). These gardens are often created in collaboration with local residents, NGOs, or municipalities, and serve multiple purposes: food production, recreational activity, skills development, and fostering social interaction between asylum seekers and the host community. In academic debates, *moestuinen*

are discussed as spaces of inclusion and empowerment, but also as symbolic initiatives that may soften the restrictive environment of the AZC without addressing the structural limitations of the asylum system.

Participatory Approach

A method that actively involves stakeholders in decision-making, planning, and implementation processes.

Social Justice

The pursuit of equitable treatment, rights, and opportunities within society, focusing on dismantling structural inequalities.

Stakeholder Mapping

A visual and analytical method used to categorize and understand the influence and interests of different actors involved in a project or context.

Tokenism

Superficial or symbolic inclusion of marginalized individuals or groups that does not result in meaningful participation or power sharing.

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11. Appendix

Appendix A: Summary of contacted organizations in the fields of migrant inclusion, agriculture, and sustainability

Table 3: Contacted organizations in the Netherlands - currently unavailable.

Organization name	Description	Area of work	Status
Stichting Groene Moslims	faith-based organization engaging Muslims in climate and poverty solutions through a religious vision of sustainable development.	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	replied - currently unavailable for new collaborations
Kleurrijk Groen	promotes cultural diversity and sustainability by training migrants as environmental ambassadors and community bridges.	Nijmegen, the Netherlands	replied - invited for participation in Di-vers festival
Tuin Kansrijk	CSA farm working on accessibility and social inclusion - they invite migrant communities to harvest in the garden.	Utrecht, the Netherlands	no reply
Huis van Compassie	promotes activities for refugees and undocumented people, included working/volunteering in CSA farms and community gardens.	Nijmegen, the Netherlands	no reply

Source: personal elaboration.

Appendix B: Exploring De Meent: conversation with a project coordinator

Date: 23/04/2025

1. Who started this project, and what was the main motivation behind it?

De Meent is a joint project of the Diaconate of Amsterdam and World House. The diaconate acquired the land at the beginning of 2020 with the explicit purpose of "welcoming the least wanted", making the undocumented and invisible feel at home.

2. *Who oversees the management of the farm? Is there a specific team or a collective decision-making process?*

A five-person team manages De Meent, including a gardener, a farmer, a carpenter, and two community coordinators. Migrants receive information about the project at the World House, where a pre-selection of participants is conducted. Personal motivation, group work skills, and any special needs are assessed before they are invited to the farm.

3. *What is the general profile of the undocumented people you work with (e.g., country of origin, age, gender distribution)?*

Participants come from a variety of countries, ages, and backgrounds. The farm strives for a balanced gender distribution and welcomes adults of all ages. Selection focuses on individual motivation and group compatibility rather than nationality or age.

4. *What legal or logistical challenges do you face (e.g., transportation, documentation)?*

To address transportation barriers, De Meent provides public transportation cards valid for two one-hour trips per day to reach Amsterdam Zuid station and three vehicles that seats 9 people each to reach the farm (a 25-minute drive).

5. *Is there any compensation for migrants participating in this work?*

Participants receive a voluntary subsidy of 15 euros per day + fresh vegetables and dairy from the farm. This symbolic compensation was introduced by the suggestion of the Diaconate to boost motivation without turning the work into salaried labor. Initially it was 10 euros, then the rate increased to 15 euros at the participant's request but remains capped to preserve the voluntary spirit.

Would people still go without the 15 euro?

It depends, but most people have another job which pays more because they work black, and they get 15 euros per hour, but some are sick or unable to find any other job, and then it's the only possibility to make an income. At the World House, they never talk about the compensation before going to the farm, because the idea is to find people who are really motivated to join the project.

6. *Do you see your work with refugees as an implementation of agroecological practices?*

Absolutely. De Meent organizes regular workshops on biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, and animal care. Additionally, the farm partnered with VluchtelingenWerk to fund a four-day commercial poultry course for 16 participants - a 5000 euros investment - strengthening technical skills.

7. *Who do you lease the land/buildings from? Is there a system of knowledge sharing among participants? How is a sense of community fostered?*

Aham, a Dutch construction company, owns the property and offers it to De Meent at a reduced rent as part of its social investment.

The farm holds monthly community meetings and thematic workshops (e.g., biodiversity, sustainable agriculture) to encourage knowledge sharing and reinforce social and ecological values.

8. *Are the products grown primarily for self-consumption, or are they sold on the market? If so, what kind of market do you target? Can you describe your typical customer base? How do you ensure your products are accessible to migrant communities?*

Most of the products are distributed for free to shelter houses; a few organizations pay a social prize and get a 50% discount. Food is never sold for profit but shared, first with participants and for the lunches, and if there is abundance, it is donated to those in need.

9. *How do you monitor and evaluate the project's impact?*

The team conducts individual check-ins at the beginning of the year, discussing safety, future personal goals, and workshop ideas. At the end of the year, participants complete impact surveys. Initial results showed low awareness of sustainable food production, prompting an increased focus on this matter in the next year.

10. *What are the main challenges this initiative faces, and how do you address them?*

- Transportation costs: mitigated through shared vehicles and transit cards, but remain a major expense.
- Discipline: some participants treat activities as work, while others are less committed. Discrepancies are addressed in community meetings, where concerns are raised and attempted to be solved collectively.

11. *How do you sustain yourselves financially? What are your main costs and sources of income?*

De Meent pays low rent and consistently applies for funds with the Diaconate. Corporate team-building days at the farm generate additional revenue.

Food distribution is not a primary income source; instead, it supports social goals through donations and subsidized sales.

12. *Do you see it possible for others to replicate this model?*

Yes, but on a smaller scale. While De Meent now includes animals and extensive infrastructure with considerable costs, a similar project can start with just a garden.

13. *Do you think connecting undocumented people with organic farms elsewhere is feasible?*

It can work, though it depends on the local context.

There was a guy, Brian, with good expertise and interest in farming; he was moved to another AZC, and De Meent team asked Toekomstboeren if there was any farm that he could join close to the AZC, but they never got an answer. Proactive engagement and partnerships to link undocumented people with CSA farms are needed.

Appendix C: Interview with A4 founders and active members

Date: 07/04/2025

1. *Could you share the story of your project? How did it start, how did it evolve over time, and what stage are you currently at?*

[H]: In A4 from the beginning. The project started in Paris, where a group of migrants used to work in construction, security, and restaurants. Everyone already had experience working at farms, but they were doing other jobs. We asked ourselves: why is agriculture not open for us?

[A]: In A4 since the beginning. The main objective of A4 is regularization. In France, you have to work illegally to prove that you're working and get the papers. We create theoretical guides to help farmers understand how to do that.

Hosting guide: how to host correctly, how to address racism.

The project is built and continues to exist because it is not only welfarist. From equal to equal.

We have local groups: helping groups where there are white people (helping look for farms), and official groups where there are mainly migrants.

2. *What are the main challenges you face? Are there specific obstacles related to reaching migrants, funding, or collaborations with farms?*

At the beginning, people that started the association were looking for jobs and farms; now we have a network of farms, but not so many people are willing to work.

We are looking for a farm to buy where we can develop our activities.

3. *How do you connect with migrants? Do you primarily reach out to shelters/ asylum centers or through informal networks?*

There is a movie of A4, we started making a relationship, and the info was spread about A4. People who are part of A4 are migrants, so they don't have issues with how to reach out to migrant communities.

4. *How do you secure funding for the project?*

Through private foundations, we are trying to build autonomy.

5. *What is the experience of migrants working on farms?*

There is a sense of dependence on the farms — they decide whether to employ people, so workers are entirely subject to the farmers' needs.

6. *Do you offer training for migrants who lack farming experience? What kind of training is provided, and how is it structured?*

Training with farmers is about how to build a relationship, how to accept a person. Knowledge sharing. We are creating an official training to share with different people, now we're still doing it in an informal way.

Training in agriculture: in Brittany, there's a farm where sometimes people can come and learn how to plant seeds. We are not a school, but we'd like to connect migrants with schools.

7. *How can organizations like ours assist in facilitating this process? For example, helping migrants with paperwork, connecting them to farms. (What do they think about us being a group without a farm. Changing farms all the time, does that work?)*

Suggestions from A4:

- To reach out to people who have lived here for longer but came as refugees.
- To provide legal assistance to undocumented people who want to work on a farm.
- To look for farms that are interested in receiving people; to look for associations of people that are interested in getting involved.
- To connect with lawyers to get through documents.

8. *Do you cover travel costs or provide accommodation for migrants working in the farm?*

Yes, we help with travel costs.

9. *What remuneration do migrants receive for their work on farms? Is it fair and transparent, and does it comply with labor laws? How exactly does this work, and do you have ideas on alternative payment structures?*

We encourage legal work for people who don't have the right to work. We ask the employers to do a legal contract and pay the fees, administratively, they can do it even if it's not legal. The only thing is that the employed person doesn't have the right to work. When the farms receive controls, if they find out that the migrant doesn't have the right to work, there is no penalty. Control checks aim to see if there is abuse and exploitation.

In some cases, concerning seasonal jobs, where farmers cannot pay but can provide food and accommodation, people are sometimes willing to volunteer (especially if they are living in the streets), but this is not ideal.

10. *What role do local communities play? Are there initiatives to integrate migrants socially or culturally where they work?*

A hosting guide to receive people in a dignified way.

11. *How do you ensure ethical working conditions? Are there measures to prevent exploitation or ensure safety?*

We started an inquiry to investigate networks of exploitation. It is hard to dismantle because there are powerful lobbies behind it, but the way A4 is doing it is to help people understand their rights and be able to address this by themselves.

12. *Do you collaborate with agricultural organizations/networks or with farm owners directly?* Both.
13. *Are there any success stories from your project that could inspire similar initiatives in the Netherlands?*
14. *How do you measure the impact of your project on both migrants and farms?*
15. *What are some lessons learned from working with migrant communities that could be applied to our context in the Netherlands?*
16. *Do you engage with policymakers of government agencies to advocate for migrant workers in agriculture?*
17. *What kind of cultural or language barriers have you encountered, and how do you address them?*

Appendix D: Guiding questions for semi-structured interview with COA representative

1. Introduction about Mycelia van Hoop and Boerengroep
2. What is the general process for employing people residing in an AZC?
3. Clarification about volunteering in a CSA: is it allowed to organize one-day excursions with people from the AZC to let them experience volunteering at a farm?

a. Does it have to be under the coordination of an organisation?

b. What requirements does the organisation need?

4. Can asylum seekers receive compensation for volunteering? If external funding is secured, is it permissible to use those funds to compensate asylum seekers for their voluntary work?
5. In the case of employment, is it possible to use external funding to compensate individuals residing in the AZC? If funds are secured through a project or grant, can they be used to pay asylum seekers for their work?
6. What are the main aspects that a farm should consider when employing a person who is seeking asylum?
7. How to deal with people's stability in one AZC? How often are they forced to move to a different place?
8. Can they stay in the same AZC if they are employed?
9. Is all information the same in all AZC's in the Netherlands?
10. Is there a specific type of employment contract required or provided by COA for hiring individuals residing in the AZC?