Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Outline of the Book

Undocumented Migrants and their Everyday Lives: The Case of Finland outlines the situations of undocumented migrants in the late 2010s and the beginning of the 2020s. The main empirical context of the book is Finland and we focused on the everyday lives of people who never had, or had lost, the legal right to reside in the country. The themes connect to a broad geographical scope, ranging from individual and local challenges, opportunities, and practices in communities and municipalities, to national, political, and societal issues regarding undocumented migrants in the EU and globally. We conducted completely new research about undocumented migrants' everyday lives and circumstances, especially with regard to the post-2015 situation and during the COVID-19 pandemic, obtaining results that reached beyond Finland and the EU.

We chose to study asylum-related migrants in particular (for the concept, see Jauhiainen et al. 2019: 19–26). Some had experienced fear, persecution, and danger in their countries of origin, whereas others had economic reasons for leaving their home countries. Due to their inability to use legal labour migration channels to reach the EU, many attempted to seek asylum, albeit unsuccessfully. The majority of these people moved in and out the asylum process, making it hard to distinguish when, exactly, their situations were legal/illegal. Ultimately, they failed to gain admission through the official legal process and were supposed to leave the country (in this case, Finland); however, they did not leave and became undocumented migrants. We specifically focused on rejected asylum seekers, but also studied undocumented migrants who came to Finland without going through the asylum process.

Over the past few years, tightening legislation has made the lives of undocumented migrants increasingly difficult in Finland, as well as in many other EU member states and elsewhere. Nevertheless, many of them find Finland safe and secure—a country in which they can try to rebuild their lives, find jobs, and sustain their families. Ultimately, they have no desire to leave (see Sect. 4.7), despite

politicians and administrators wishing them to do so. Demands such as ‘deport them all’ or ‘please—leave!’ have been unsuccessful, and legislation aiming to make the arrival of migrants more difficult may, in fact, increase the number of undocumented migrants. Migrants will continue to arrive, supported by both legal and illegal networks.

When engaging with public authorities in Finland, we were surprised by how little attention the key stakeholders paid to irregular migration, and how seldom those who dealt with undocumented migrants considered either their everyday lives or the impact they might have on Finnish society. Such perplexities encouraged us to study these topics and delve into the everyday lives of undocumented migrants in Finland, to identify the practices and survival strategies that support their in-between (legal/illegal) lives, and highlight the importance of their agency in actively creating spaces for themselves.

With only a few thousand undocumented migrants in the country, why would their presence in Finland be of interest in understanding irregular migration and undocumented migrants more broadly? On the one hand, we believed it was important to update both the scholarly breadth and depth of recent theories and concepts regarding irregular migration and undocumented migrants; on the other hand, we wished to recognise, examine, and learn from the everyday lives and related practices of undocumented migrants, in their specific contexts, before drawing—and in order to draw more general conclusions. Indeed, comparisons and generalisations can be made for any country, but we maintain that each context is paramount, and we therefore decided to remain true to it. Irregular migration is ontologically ‘in-becoming’, and the studied people lived in-between lives; hence, we wanted to avoid generalising concepts and theories, and deconstruct rigid categorisations and classifications, while describing the specificity of the Finnish context. This does not mean that the results for Finland cannot be extended to other EU countries. Indeed, as discussed in the conclusions of the book, there were similarities between countries, especially with regard to Eastern Europe, which, like Finland, has only a small number of undocumented migrants, who experience more restrictions and hardships than in other Western countries (Dzenovska 2016; Schlueter et al. 2013).

1.1.1 Research Questions

To underpin this book, we asked the following four research questions: who are the undocumented migrants in Finland; what aspirations do they have, especially in relation to their journeys to Finland and within the country, and their migration aspirations, including returns to their countries of origin; what are their everyday lives like; what key concerns do they have (with a particular focus on their agency and the creation of semiregular spaces) regarding housing, employment, health, family, and friends. In investigating migrants’ everyday lives in Finland, we paid particular attention to the internet and social media, leading to the following further

research questions: how do digital divides develop during migrants' journeys from their countries of origin to their destination countries; how do undocumented migrants use the internet and social media, and what impact do these contemporary tools have on them. Our study provided a rare opportunity to conduct research about undocumented migrants and their everyday lives using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

The answer to the first research question (who the undocumented migrants in Finland are) came from two sources: the first official, and the second, the undocumented migrants themselves. National legislation and policies officially define undocumented migrants (see Sect. 3.2); however, the concepts of refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and similar are becoming increasingly blurred, to the extent that it is hard for authorities, scholars, and the migrants themselves to grasp the changing situations (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). In Finland (as well as in Sweden; see Andersson et al. 2018), the majority of undocumented migrants are former asylum seekers who failed to gain admission through the legal process and, therefore, did not receive permission to stay in the country. Those who experienced persecution in their home countries did not leave Finland because, despite everything, they considered Finland to be safe. Those who came to Finland for economic reasons chose to stay in the hope of ultimately finding work and stability.

The second research question concerned undocumented migrants' aspirations (which formed patterns of wishes) in Finland. We elected to study their journeys to Finland, their migration within Finland, and their potential plans to migrate further, including return migration. Traditional migration theories see migration as a straightforward movement from the initial location to the final destination, resulting from push and pull factors, but such perspectives need to be revised (van Hear et al. 2018). The asylum-related migration to the EU in 2015 and the resulting situations, both in the EU and the neighbouring regions, showed that multiple modes of migration existed. Often, the pushing factors in the countries of origin were more influential than the pulling factors of a specific destination country (Wong and Kosnac 2017). In fact, Crawley (2010) suggested that conflicts are a stronger determinant of irregular migration than economic hardships. In addition, challenging demographic and environmental issues in the country of origin were influential (EASO 2016). Scholars have talked about mixed migration from the perspective of a continuum of varied voluntary and involuntary elements that, together, lead to migration (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; van Hear 2014).

Furthermore, the single-origin–single-destination model of international migration, including irregular migration, has proved to be inadequate. Instead, various terms have been proposed, such as multinational migration, to illustrate how international migrants across more than one overseas destination spend significant time in each country (Paul and Yeoh 2020). Undocumented migrants in Finland may therefore be part of broader mobility patterns. For an asylum seeker, Finland could be only one of many possible destinations, or he/she might have ended up in the country by chance (see Sect. 4.7). The travel trajectories and geographical distribution of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants are complex, non-linear, and influenced by various internal and external factors, including migrants' own

aspirations, the migration and asylum policies of countries along their journeys, and the opportunities and constraints of different contexts (Barthel and Neumayer 2015; Brekke and Brochmann 2015; Czaika and Hobolt 2016). Many current undocumented migrants have been in Finland for several years (initially arriving as asylum seekers and later becoming undocumented migrants), so the country is no longer an abstract space for them, but consists of many concrete places that are either 'scary' or can guarantee protection and survival. In general, the word 'migrant' refers to a person who cannot stay permanently in one location; instead, he/she has to move from place to place, constantly seeking solutions for accommodation, work, and concealment (see Chap. 4). We analysed how they met (or did not meet) their aspirations, and how they found roundabout ways to create their own spaces for survival. During the usually long and complicated asylum process (see Sect. 3.3), a person can return voluntarily to the country of origin, and be institutionally and financially assisted to return to that country; however, the majority do not return, even after becoming undocumented migrants. The material to answer this second research question came from the surveys and ethnographic observations involving these migrants (see Sects. 2.3 and 2.4).

The third research question addressed what everyday life is like for undocumented migrants in Finland, and specifically for those undocumented migrants who are rejected asylum seekers. To answer this question, particular attention was paid to broader theoretical concepts, such as undocumented migrants' agency, as well as their capacity to create semi-regular spaces for themselves, despite the hardships. These concepts were tailored to the specificity of the Finnish context, but they corresponded well with the vast international literature on the topic. The studied aspects (see Chaps. 4 and 5) included accommodation (i.e. where undocumented migrants live or stay overnight); employment (i.e. who is employed and in what kinds of jobs, as well as the key issues pertaining to legal and illegal jobs); social networks (i.e. having family and friends in Finland and abroad and communicating with them); and health (i.e. what migrants do when they face health problems and how local authorities provide them with healthcare). The material to answer this research question was drawn from surveys and ethnographic observations involving undocumented migrants, and from interviews with local authorities, experts, and workers dealing with undocumented migrants (see Sects. 2.3 and 2.4). As previously mentioned, the underlying theoretical concept was undocumented migrants' agency, and how they create new in-between spaces and categories (regular/irregular, legal/illegal) through their everyday experiences, practices, and survival strategies.

The fourth research question focused on a particular aspect of undocumented migrants' everyday lives (thus supplementing the third research question), specifically concerning which undocumented migrants in Finland used the internet and social media and how they used it. This was extremely important, since the internet and social media have become an essential part of migrants' everyday lives. We focused first on digital divides (i.e. access to the internet and social media, the ability and resources to use them, and their effects on undocumented migrants) and how these digital divides developed between leaving their countries of origin and finally in arriving Finland. The internet and social media play a vital role for asylum seekers

and undocumented migrants in different stages of their asylum-related journeys and processes (Dekker and Engbersen 2014; Leurs and Ponzanesi 2018; Merisalo and Jauhiainen 2020a, b). We also considered the role of misinformation and rumours on the internet and in social media. The material to answer this question came from the survey and ethnographic observations involving undocumented migrants in Finland (see Sects. 2.3 and 2.4).

1.1.2 Outline of the Chapters

In Chap. 2, we present our data and raise the issue of methodology in studying undocumented migrants. This is a particularly important topic, since many migrants live marginalised lives and are threatened by authorities and enforcement policies. We begin by describing the data, which consisted of responses by undocumented migrants to a lengthy (92-question) semi-structured survey conducted between October 2018 and January 2019 in various parts of Finland; ethnographic notes (around 70,000 words) taken between April 2018 and January 2019 regarding undocumented migrants' everyday lives (primarily, but not only, in the capital—Helsinki); and two short but comprehensive surveys (10–12 questions) conducted among local authorities in Finland in 2017 and 2018, concerning the services provided to undocumented migrants. To obtain supportive material, we conducted 20 thematic interviews with experts and workers who dealt with undocumented migrants and, furthermore, visited various NGOs and public authorities to talk with their representatives. In addition, in the autumn of 2020, we contacted experts to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on undocumented migrants in Finland. For the analysis of the survey material, we used descriptive statistics and cross tables, and we analysed the ethnographic notes and interviews through content analysis. We triangulated the data and combined several qualitative and quantitative materials and methods (Flick 2018).

We next present a detailed overview of why and how we conducted the surveys and ethnographic observations, discussing our challenges and shortcomings and how we could (or could not) overcome them, thus enhancing the transparency of the research process. We also discuss at length the ethical foundations of our research and its reporting; for example, we strictly followed the national ethical guidelines for conducting research and the EU data protection regulations (European Commission 2018; TENK 2018). We deeply respected the confidentiality and security of the undocumented migrants we studied, so we do not reveal any specific places where undocumented migrants met, worked, or stayed; nor do we use any photographs, since they could be used as tools to identify migrants and their locations. We always asked for consent to conduct the research, but did not require the migrants to sign consent forms, because they would have been suspicious or afraid of giving consent in such a formal way. We also highlighted their right to withdraw from the research at any time, as well as to refuse to talk about issues they did not want to discuss or to leave survey questions unanswered. We carefully

managed anonymity and confidentiality, and respected the migrants' feelings and beliefs on every occasion.

In Chap. 3, we describe how people become undocumented migrants in Finland and the challenges of using clear-cut, dualistic categories (categorical fetishism; Crawley and Skleparis 2018) and applying them to undocumented migrants' lives. Our main emphasis is on explaining who has the right to reside in Finland and who does not. The Finnish legislation does not include the notion of an 'undocumented migrant' or 'paperless person': nevertheless, this expression (literally, in Finnish, *paperittomat*) is commonly used in Finland to classify a person who does not have the legal right to reside in Finland. Actually, many national authorities prefer to call these people 'illegal immigrants' (Poliisihallitus 2017; Savino 2016; Sisäministeriö 2016), rigidly applying the above-mentioned dual categorisation and binary logic; for example, a person can enter Finland legally, but remain there illegally after his/her visa has expired or when he/she otherwise should have applied for a residence permit. A person can also enter the country without valid permission (i.e. without a visa when such is required), or with counterfeit documents, and remain in the country. In Chap. 3, we therefore explain the asylum process from the viewpoint of both the authorities and undocumented migrants. The asylum processes slowed significantly after the arrival of many asylum seekers in Finland in 2015, and it took several years for many asylum seekers to receive a final decision. In 2019, some people who came to Finland in 2015 were still going through the asylum process. Many of them lodged court appeals after their initial rejections, and some also made new subsequent asylum applications with or without substantial modifications to the initial request. While the steps in the asylum process are logical and clear for the migration officials and the courts, many asylum seekers do not understand this complex process and are therefore unable to follow the steps or provide the required evidence to gain asylum (Gill 2016), thus becoming undocumented migrants.

In Chap. 4, we explore the everyday lives of undocumented migrants in Finland, their agency, and their active creation of spaces between legality and illegality, and regularity and irregularity. As we mentioned, there are many kinds of undocumented migrants, with differing demographics, levels of education, and countries of origin. In some respects, their everyday lives are similar, but in others, quite different. Obviously, the common structural factor is that they do not have the authorities' permission to live, reside, and work in Finland; therefore, many find it challenging to meet the basic necessities of life, such as finding a place to sleep or obtaining work to earn the money for accommodation, food, and clothing. We focused on their social networks, considering the family and friends of undocumented migrants in Finland and outside the country. We also studied their aspirations in terms of their journeys to and within Finland, and why some considered leaving Finland and returning to their countries of origin, while others did not.

In Chap. 5, we focus on a particular and sometimes crucial aspect of undocumented migrants' lives: their health and access to healthcare. As evidenced by earlier studies, tightening immigration policies reduce undocumented migrants' access to health services, thus increasing health challenges and adversely affecting mental

health outcomes (Martinez et al. 2015). All undocumented migrants have experienced challenging situations in their lives, and most have very tragic memories of specific traumas preceding their asylum-related migration to Finland. Some undocumented migrants have illnesses that require constant care or frequent medical intervention, but for various reasons, not all of them visit medical practitioners; for example, many do not know where to go, are too afraid to visit a doctor in a public healthcare centre, or do not have enough money for private healthcare. The Constitution of Finland guarantees the right to urgent healthcare for everyone, and this provision is the task of local authorities. Based on our survey of Finnish municipalities, we studied their viewpoints regarding healthcare provision for undocumented migrants. Furthermore, we paid attention to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on undocumented migrants in Finland and, in particular, their access to healthcare during the pandemic. The law is the same for everyone (including undocumented migrants) in Finland, but the local healthcare micropractices (Bendixsen 2018) and public services differ greatly in respect of undocumented migrants.

In Chap. 6, we discuss undocumented migrants' use of the internet and social media. In Finland, practically everyone has a mobile phone, internet use is extremely common, and free wi-fi is available in many urban places. Mobile phones, the internet, and social media have become fundamental elements facilitating asylum-related journeys (Dekker and Engbersen 2014; Merisalo and Jauhiainen 2020a, b) and this relates to asylum seekers' everyday lives: some of them become undocumented migrants afterwards, so their experiences are relevant in the context of this book. Before starting their asylum-related journeys, not all migrants had access to the internet, social media, and mobile phones; however, ultimately, almost everyone must become familiar with these tools, and the digital divides for asylum seekers generally shrank during their journeys. We explored how undocumented migrants used the internet and social media, which of them did not use these tools, and the effects of their use or non-use on the migrants' lives. In addition, we paid attention to the effect of rumours and fake news and information, on the internet and in social media, on undocumented migrants' decisions and actions.

In Chap. 7, we present our conclusions and reflections on our study. We highlight the key theoretical and empirical findings about undocumented migrants in Finland and, more broadly, our contributions to the academic discussion concerning irregular migration and undocumented migrants. We also suggest key topics that should be addressed further in the research and make some recommendations for policymakers and for the undocumented migrants themselves.

When a person has been an undocumented migrant and survived, he/she frequently wants to forget that period. Recollection is never pleasant, although it may have been a life-changing period, for better or worse. In Western societies, very few undocumented migrants rise to positions that give them the opportunity or motivation to read about other undocumented migrants; therefore, undocumented migrants will probably never read this book, in Finland or elsewhere, but if any of them read it, we will be delighted.

The following section presents a short overview of the literature concerning irregular migration. In particular, the section addresses the topics and the relevant

literature that informed the content of the subsequent chapters. Running through the analysis, and connecting the various dimensions of the lives of undocumented migrants, the following topics were prominent: estimates of the number of undocumented migrants in Europe; the challenges that the various definitions of ‘undocumented migrant’ pose; the unofficial in-between spaces that undocumented migrants occupy, defying every attempt at categorisation; the undocumented migrants’ agency and how they fight to survive; their liminal status and how policies contribute to this liminal status; and the creation of semi-regular spaces, and the ‘performances of citizenship’, they construct in order to be recognised and accepted in the host country. Following the literature overview, Sect. 1.3 discusses the specific context and case of Finland and underpins the analysis of the following chapters.

1.2 Overview of the Literature

Any one of us may know an undocumented migrant; however, the majority of people are unaware of this possibility, despite the millions of undocumented migrants who live in Europe and in the rest of the world (Düvell 2011). They often live in the same cities, towns, or villages as ourselves, but we know little about them. Undocumented migrants are poorly, if ever, addressed by national organisations and statistics (Horison 2019) and remain under-researched (Triandafyllidou 2016).

Even when we see undocumented migrants, we rarely recognise them. The migrant might be someone we saw this morning while rushing to the railway station: that young man with a black leather jacket and blue jeans speaking on his mobile phone at the entrance. She might be the young woman with two children, strolling in the park during our daily jog. They might be the middle-aged dishwasher we glimpsed while we paid for dinner in a local restaurant; or the noisy youngsters we never really looked at while hurrying to the mall; or the grey-haired man sitting on the park bench, mumbling something with his eyes half closed. Any or all of them could be undocumented migrants or simply regular residents of our cities and countries.

It is hard to understand how undocumented migrants live if we have never been an undocumented migrant, do not know any undocumented migrants, and/or have not conducted any research about them. Nevertheless, people concerned about contemporary societal challenges read newspaper articles about undocumented migrants and see media broadcasts about their lives, while public authorities dealing with undocumented migrants gain some familiarity with basic aspects of their lives, such as access to shelter, healthcare, and legal assistance. An undocumented migrant without the right to remain in a country (see European Council 2003) has very few rights and must face continual challenges in order to reside in his/her current location. This fact is well known by workers in enforcement agencies with a duty to expel undocumented migrants, politicians who make relevant laws and policies, and activists or compassionate individuals who help undocumented migrants in various ways. Usually they focus on one or two crucial issues in the lives of

undocumented migrants and do their best to ensure that these people can live safely. Activists, policymakers, and members of enforcement agencies, however, rarely have the time and opportunities to fully consider the lives of undocumented migrants, especially the diversity of undocumented migrants and how such diversity is continuously changing and evolving. Moreover, they never have contact with a full range of undocumented migrants. This is what prompted the authorship of this book: the desire to provide them with information about the diversity and challenges of undocumented migrants' lives, founded on research- and evidence-based results and theoretical conceptualisation.

No one knows exactly how many undocumented migrants live in Europe. Moreover, 'reliable statistics on stocks or flows of irregular migrants, the well-being of migrants in irregular situations, or the extent to which they have access to services such as health and education, are generally not available' (IOM 2020). Still, they have become an important social phenomenon, which cannot be ignored and requires revised policies and interventions at the EU, national, and local levels. The Pew Research Center estimated that, in 2017, 'at least 3.9 million unauthorised immigrants – and possibly as many as 4.8 million – lived in Europe' (2019: 4). Removing asylum seekers from these numbers, since they are not strictly unauthorised migrants, there would still be 3–4 million undocumented migrants: around 0.6%–0.8% of the total EU population (see also the *Clandestino* figures; *Clandestino* 2009a, b, 2019; Düvell 2011). Despite efforts to establish an effective counting methodology, the accuracy of these numbers can be contested, and it is evident that the recent growth in the number of such migrants was due to the sudden increase of asylum seekers who arrived in Europe in 2015, when 1.3 million asylum requests were received in the EU (IOM 2020). As a result of this increase of incoming migrants and the fear that their arrivals might continue, asylum policies quickly became a political issue and many EU countries tightened their asylum and immigration policies (Brekke and Staver 2018; Czaika and Hobolt 2016), including Finland (De Haas et al. 2016; Prime Minister's Office of Finland 2015; Saarikkomäki et al. 2018; Wahlbeck 2019). Since 1999, the EU has been working to create a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and improve the current legislative framework; however, as the post-2015 situation shows, EU asylum policies have in many respects failed. Not all member states adhere to the commonly agreed principles, and not all are willing to share the burden of ongoing asylum requests; therefore, in 2020, the European Commission (EC) proposed a new Pact on Migration and Asylum as a comprehensive European approach to migration, aimed at improving and accelerating procedures throughout the asylum and migration system and ensuring the fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity (European Commission 2020). Its approval and implementation depends on the will of all member states, which is difficult to achieve. However, many organizations fear that this pact would make the asylum seekers' access to the EU even more difficult and their forced return easier and faster.

The access of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants to the EU (Finland included) was restricted after 2015, resulting in declining numbers of asylum seekers. In 2018, 638,000 asylum applications (of which 581,000 were first-time

applications) were presented in the EU: about half (50%) of the 2015 number (Eurostat 2019). In Finland, the number of asylum applications in 2018 was around 4500 (14% of that in 2015; Migri 2020). In 2017–2018, almost one million people (866,400) gained asylum in the EU (Eurostat 2019) and, in Finland, more than 8000 decisions (about 1% of the number in the EU) resulted in the applicants receiving asylum or subsidiary protection status. Nevertheless, in 2018, of the initial decisions on asylum applications, 63% in the EU and 57% in Finland, did not lead to asylum or subsidiary protection (Eurostat 2019; Migri 2020). Many rejected asylum seekers did not leave and, consequently, millions of undocumented migrants now live in the EU member states in illegal or semi-legal conditions. The large European countries (Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), Italy, and France) host the majority of undocumented migrants, and many of them come from non-EU countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Russia, Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, and Eritrea (Pew Research Center 2019, 15)—troubled countries in which the everyday is overshadowed by various political, social, and economic struggles and conflicts.

Irregular migration is a contemporary phenomenon and it is not likely to go away or to be stopped (Düvell 2012), since countries do not have the resources to apprehend all undocumented migrants and expel them from their territories (Ambrosini 2017; Van Meeteren 2014). The issue of undocumented migrants is particularly tangible as Europe moves into the 2020s. In the EU, it is difficult for many countries to respect the commonly agreed international treaties on migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees (see Czaika and Hobolt 2016; Lavenex 2018; Scipioni 2018; Trauner 2016); hence, such countries have chosen to securitise their borders, making decisions about who can enter and reside within their territories, who should be banned or expelled, and/or whether people can request asylum. The right to stay becomes a shifting political threshold that can be changed expediently; for example, an asylum seeker or undocumented migrant may be expelled if he/she commits a crime, and how severe a crime must be to justify removal may be a political decision. Such a threshold can also be extended to non-native people who have gained the country's citizenship through naturalisation. As a result of committing a crime, their citizenship can also be withdrawn, leading to expulsion.

In some countries, entering or residing without permission is an administrative offence, and in others a criminal offence, but rarely does such an offence mean that the person will be imprisoned (Smith and LeVoy 2017; Triandafyllidou 2016). The EU changed its migration and asylum policies in response to the so-called refugee 'crisis' in 2015. In particular, in 2015, the EU launched the European Agenda on Migration in order to better manage issues such as irregular migration, smuggling, people trafficking, and other problems relating to border control (Czaika and Hobolt 2016). The EU also aimed to facilitate return migration. In various European countries, immigration policies, and especially the asylum process, require from migrants a clear-cut, rational, linear, and coherent account of the reasons why they moved to the country, and how they plan to conduct their lives there (Geiger and Pécout 2013). As Gill (2016) maintained, the inability to provide such clear, organised, and classifiable reasons could result in the rejection of the asylum requests, and consequently, migrants' irregular status. The legal requirements of

the asylum process often clash with the life situations of those migrants (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Feldman 2011), which often include dramatic events, non-linear decisions, incoherent actions, and unresolved psychological traumas (Andersson et al. 2018; Bustamante et al. 2018; Carswell et al. 2011; Silove et al. 1997; Tedeschi 2021a). Overall, in the EU, interventions such as increasingly tight border controls, or the imposition of visa requirements in the latter 2010s, may have increased the number of undocumented migrants, since people flee from one country to another to seek safety and a better life—in the case of this book, in Finland.

These immigrants might have had ‘documents’, even if they are called undocumented – however, they often hide them to avoid deportation (i.e. removal), for example. Asylum seekers might also find themselves with irregular status: ‘People who enter a country without documents and then file an asylum application have an uncertain legal status until their application is processed’ (Triandafyllidou 2016: 5). As mentioned previously, they can become undocumented thereafter, if they do not fulfil the criteria for international protection and/or they do not manage to obtain a residence permit for the host country.

Even an EU citizen can reside in another European country and be irregular in some way: for instance, if the person does not register his/her presence in the country within 90 days, as is the case in some European countries, including Finland. Nevertheless, he/she cannot be expelled for this reason alone. Irregular migration is considered to be unlawful (e.g. unauthorised entry, or entry by deceit or without permission, etc.) and, if detected, it usually triggers a removal order. Many terms are associated with state- and non-state-led policies and practices that try to define these migrants. For undocumented migrants, terms such as irregular migrant, paperless person, *sans-papiers*, or unauthorised migrant, may be used to describe them (Anderson and Ruhs 2010), but usually mean someone who resides in a country without the legal right and proper permission to do so and whose exact location and activities are not usually known to, and registered by, the authorities (Douglas et al. 2019; McBrien 2017; PICUM 2017). Anderson and Ruhs (2010) claimed that academics often call such people ‘irregular’ or ‘unauthorised’ so as to avoid identifying with particular political positions. States, however, tend to call them ‘illegal’, which connects their non-regular status with border policies and the protection of the security of nations. Conversely, some members of the civil society, including NGOs, prefer to call them ‘undocumented’, ‘paperless’, or ‘*sans-papiers*’, indicating their sympathy for these people (Bendixsen 2017) and stressing their vulnerable position as potential victims of human trafficking and exploitation, as well as their deprivation of basic rights (such as access to public services, or to the official job and housing markets). Scholars have increasingly emphasised the need to consider undocumented migration more ‘as a phenomenon to be studied rather than as a problem to be solved’ (De Genova 2002; see also Anderson and Ruhs 2010). In this sense, going in the direction of opening up to the rich nuances and complexities of this phenomenon, Düvell (2008: 487) points out how publications often offer only a simple dichotomy implying that an immigrant is either legal or illegal, but the reality is much more complex. In general, there are three aspects that determine an

immigrant's status: entry, residence and employment. Each aspect can be regular or irregular and various combinations are possible.

As it is apparent from the above, the definition of undocumented migrant is far from clear and definite criteria are hard to find. This is because, as McAuliffe and Koser (2017: 344) explain, 'irregularity is not a fixed experience – regular migrants may become irregular, irregular migrants may be regularised'. Therefore, being irregular and undocumented is an ontologically 'in-becoming' status (MRCI 2007) and, in this sense, any attempt to define it is likely to fail. The authors also asserted that the phenomenon is, *per se*, multifaceted. People move for different reasons, using different means of transportation, and choosing paths that are rarely predictable. This further adds to the complexity of the phenomenon, and the lack of data does not help in disentangling such a conundrum; therefore, when studying the phenomenon, the context is of the utmost importance (McAuliffe and Koser 2017). On the contrary, general, fixed, and one-fits-all categories, as well as universal concepts and theories, are likely to fail when applied to irregular migration and undocumented migrants. In this, and other, migration contexts, 'terminological distinctions are often vague and limited in usefulness' (Taylor 2017: 3). More specifically, within the binary logics of regular/irregular or legal/illegal, which are commonly applied to these people by nation-states, there are numerous permutations that can barely account for the real lives of undocumented migrants. In fact, irregular migration is produced by law-based immigration systems, which determine status (legal/illegal) according to a person's movements and residency (Dauvergne 2008). For Könönen (2020), without immigration regulations, there would be no legal or irregular migration; only human mobility. Anderson and Ruhs tried to move away from the dichotomies by using a third term—the notion of compliance:

Compliant migrants are legally resident and working in full compliance with the conditions of their immigration status. Non-compliant migrants are those without the rights to reside in the host country. Semi-compliance indicates a situation where a migrant is legally resident, but working in violation of some or all of the conditions (Anderson and Ruhs 2006: 2).

Whatever term is used to define this population, it is certain that their lives remains in fact in a fluctuating state of 'in-between categories' (Sarausad 2019), which allows for the creation of semi-legal (Kubal 2013) and semi-regular spaces, and practices of agency and citizenship, which seriously challenge the politics of borders and the above-mentioned binary logics. The latter tend 'to reduce the complexity of human life into a stripped down plan, the pursuit and realisation of which subsequently results in the sidelining of the everyday stuff of life itself' (Gill 2016: 141). The lived spaces (Lefebvre 1991) of migrants, which are composed of non-linear events, actions, dreams, and decisions that support survival, can be set against such abstract conceptualisations of space. In a more or less explicit fashion, all the above-mentioned works examined irregular migration, not as a static phenomenon, but rather as an evolving process of becoming, involving multiple varying and often contradictory dimensions. The latter are materialised (and can be observed) in migrants' everyday relationships and survival micropactices: their survival strategies, labour, semi/illegal activities, social networks, precarious living

conditions, practices of agency, and similar (Tedeschi and Gadd 2021). All these dimensions, applied to the Finnish context, will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Furthermore, scholars have been investigating the phenomenon of irregular migration in its multiple facets, such as (immigration) policies on undocumented migrants (Czaika and Hobolt 2016; Triandafyllidou and Dimintriadi 2014; Van der Leun 2006), the controversial issues surrounding their citizenship (Nordling et al. 2017), their agency (Hellgren 2014; Mainwaring 2016; Schweitzer 2017), and their capacity to fight back despite the hardships they encounter, to mention but a few. Empirical research has scrutinised the living conditions of undocumented migrants to shed light on elements such as vulnerability (Schweitzer 2017), exploitation (Bloch et al. 2009), the use of social media (Dekker and Engbersen 2014), traumatic experiences (Bustamante et al. 2018; Priebe et al. 2016), sometimes-limited social relationships (Sigona 2012), precarious mental and physical conditions (Muntaner et al. 2010), and practices of agency (Sigona 2012; Triandafyllidou 2017). The livelihoods of undocumented migrants have also been thoroughly considered in numerous ethnographic studies (e.g. Fontanari 2017; Khosravi 2010a, 2010b; Picozza 2017). These scholarly works have shown that the everyday livelihoods of these individuals are heavily affected by structural frameworks, welfare and migration regimes (Ambrosini 2013), and the formality/informality of labour markets (Hellgren 2014), as well as the institutional/political structures in different national contexts (Koopmans et al. 2005). This may give rise to the growth of semi/illegal activities in order to survive (Ambrosini 2018), mostly linked to the extensive social networks and informal relationships that undocumented migrants rely on when trying to settle in a country (Tedeschi and Gadd 2021).

While migrants' spaces and practices have often been reported and analysed in the international literature, in relation to underlying general concepts such as agency, citizenship, and liminality, which resonate with these practices, every European country and, within it, every urban context is different, and this must be carefully considered when applying those concepts to, and/or setting up and evaluating classifications and taxonomies of, the irregular migration phenomenon (Tedeschi 2021c). With our research, we aimed to set up theoretical conceptualisations (paying particular attention to migrants' ontological condition of living in-between categories, their agency, their ability to create semi-legal spaces, and their survival), but fine-tuned and modified according to the actual context of Finland, and specifically focusing on rejected asylum seekers. We aimed to capture various dimensions of the everyday practices of undocumented migrants, and how they survive through hardships and find new ways to make ends meet in the host countries (Finland, in this case). Such attention to the context also showed that formulating effective policies and implementing them universally at the international, national, and local levels, can be extremely difficult. Nevertheless, 'cities and local communities are important sites wherein actual migration management is practically taking place on a day to day basis' (Triandafyllidou and Ricard-Guay 2019: 123).

The majority of undocumented migrants live in an in-between condition of liminality, unable to either arrive or stay and, in a few cases, even leave (Tsoni 2016): 'Liminal legality is neither an undocumented status nor a documented one but

may instead have the characteristics of both' (Ambrosini 2018: 5–6). There are, for instance, situations in which the migrants cannot be deported (i.e. removed to their former home countries), despite their presence being unrecognised as legal in the destination country. In the majority of cases, the condition of liminality involves the always-present possibility of being deported—which Gibney (2008) rightly referred to as a deportation turnaround in democratic states (see also Anderson et al. 2011)—and hence the constant precariousness of everyday life for undocumented migrants (De Genova 2002; Moffette 2018). Undocumented migrants are forced to live invisible in-between lives (Menjívar 2006) and build a society parallel, and unknown, to the official one: 'Implementation of laws under the current immigration regime makes immigrants occupying liminal legal statuses vulnerable to blocked social mobility, persistent fear of deportation, and instability, confusion, and self-blame' (Abrego and Lakhani 2015: 266). This makes them 'wear masks' (i.e. assume different identities in order to survive): they may be 'becoming animals, becoming women, becoming amphibious, becoming imperceptible' (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2008: 224). These very liminal situations are the consequence of a series of political constructs and interventions that have emerged only recently, since people have been mobile throughout history: 'The basic juridical apparatus necessary to classify systematically international mobility in terms of a legal/illegal distinction is less than a century old' (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010: 390). Indeed, irregularity per se 'should primarily be seen as deliberately produced by certain state authorities and laws, rather than being the consequence of individual migrants' actions in neglect or violation of immigration restrictions' (Schweitzer 2017: 318):

The false belief in the existence of a fair and equitable immigration system is then used to further the production of 'illegality' by juxtaposing the good migrant who 'fairly' applied for immigration authorisation with the undocumented migrant who 'cheated' or is attempting to 'cheat' the system by jumping the proverbial immigration queue (Villegas 2010: 151).

Moreover, the condition of "illegality" is produced, not only by institutions like the police and the immigration authorities, but also by officials in education, health, and housing and by private employers or landlords, who all verify migration documents (Khosravi 2010a: 96). Liminal situations are therefore created ad hoc by control micropractices at the local level (Bendixsen 2018), or even at EU borders (in Greece, to cite but one), where people are kept with undecided status for long periods of time, with the idea of guaranteeing the flexible governance of migration. In this way, however, what is created is in reality 'a new form of governance that further disentangles territory from rights' (Papoutsi et al. 2019: 2200); thus, irregular migration, per se, turns out to be a political construct and its 'governance . . . is not simply about managing in a restrictive way population movements, but it is constitutive of the very phenomenon of irregular migration' (Triandafyllidou and Ricard-Guay 2019: 115). Political constructs and the obsession for dual categorisations and binary logics (regular/irregular, legal/illegal, etc.) in migration policies are what Crawley and Skleparis (2018) called 'categorical fetishism', which leads to practical consequences in terms of the sociopolitical, working, health, and living conditions (Moffette 2018) of undocumented migrants.

Undocumented migrants' political rights are very limited, so they cannot vote in the place or country where they reside. Despite the fact that there are millions of them in Europe, and hundreds of thousands in several EU member states, many restrictions prevent them from organising themselves as a group to demand political rights (Varsanyi 2006). Some have access to work and are employed, but rarely in work that aligns with their background education and experience. Instead, they have to work long hours and are often paid substantially less than natives, if they are paid at all (Sigona 2012). For such jobs, they do not necessarily pay taxes, but they may be obliged to pay a commission to the person who organises the job and ensures that such work (legal, in principle) is not revealed because there are irregularities in its conduct. The employment conditions and situations of undocumented migrants in countries outside Europe and North America are often even worse (for example, Afghans in Iran; see Jauhiainen and Eyvazlu 2018). Undocumented migrants rarely have work-related health insurance or other general access to healthcare. Health services might be offered to them, at least in cases of emergency, if they know about and dare to use them (Bloch 2014; World Health Organisation 2017). Some need to change their place of residence every night, which forces them to be constantly mobile. Others hide in one place and do not go outside at all. Some move around, but try to remain unnoticed while doing so. Sigona (2012: 56–57) mentioned how 'undocumented migrants soon learn to be cautious, to navigate through the city without being visible, "to be streetwise"'. Still, many of them try to be just 'ordinary people' with simple wishes: to live safe, meaningful lives with family and work. Undocumented migrants must live in the system, yet remain outside of it at the same time: again, they live undefined in-between lives. Their lives are determined by short-term practices (Bendixsen 2018; De Certeau 1984) that might eventually become long-term experiences guaranteeing their survival in countries that are rejecting them. They need to sleep, eat, work, and possibly enjoy some leisure time, but only in the shadow of the system—the system we call a welfare society, neoliberal society, or any kind of society. This is what being undocumented means—being visible in principle, but invisible in practice:

In/visibility is a condition that is sometimes imposed on migrants and minorities, for example, in the media or in everyday interactions with persons belonging to the majority; in other instances, it is something that the individuals or the groups strive for' (Leinonen and Toivanen 2014: 164).

On the other hand, recognition of undocumented migrants' rights through ad hoc policies might lead to unwelcome visibility, intensifying mechanisms of repression (Tervonen et al. 2018), or far-right violent reactions.

Despite all this, the unofficial, in-between lived spaces that they occupy in their everyday survival practices and strategies make them individuals with proper agency, as the vast literature on the topic has already demonstrated. Undocumented migrants have their own agency, despite their activities being constrained by many external factors:

Irregular migrants are able, albeit with much more existential difficulties, to generate income through work, find places to sleep, fall in love (and sometimes reproduce and raise children),

establish personal relationships, buy household appliances and even represent themselves in the public space (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010: 398).

While scrutinising immigration policies, their binary logics, their fixed classifications and taxonomies, and their effects in the everyday lives of these migrants remain a compelling topic, the focus should be less on the former and more on the latter (Schweitzer 2017): ‘Policies and intermediaries thus become hurdles to overcome, costs to assess, or opportunities to seize, while the focus remains on the human agent rather than on the policy and its effectiveness’ (Triandafyllidou 2017: 3). In this sense, Mainwaring (2016) noted how obscuring migrants’ agency actually serves the politics of borders and the alleged security of nation-states: indeed, active migrants might be classified as villains, or as a threat to security, whereas depicting them as passive victims, without agency, reinforces control. We are again facing a binary logic (active/passive), which fails to describe the actual agency of these people. Going beyond the binary logics and rigid classifications, Mainwaring showed how ‘at the micro level, they [the migrants] negotiate their mobility and contest migration controls, sometimes circumventing or even subverting them; in the aggregate, these flows of people are politically powerful’ (2016: 19). Migrants are thus powerful enough to create spaces for themselves between legality and illegality. Indeed, ‘many of their everyday (inter)actions, claims and decisions – from making friends to accessing public services – are premised on, as well as reflect, their being (at least partially) recognised not only as *de facto* members of society but often also as subjects of politics’ (Schweitzer 2017: 320). Similarly, Hellgren called this the social membership of undocumented migrants, ‘which refers to actual participation in society, for example integration into the local neighbourhood and labour market, regardless of legal status’ (2014: 1177). Indeed, lately, some ‘irregular migrants as political actors have also gained a greater presence in the public sphere’ (Sager 2018: 175). Rather than focusing on the policies that construct these migrants as passive political subjects, this gives a voice to them, their willingness to fight back, their construction of interstitial spaces, and their hidden, but nonetheless real, agency and capacity to act.

By emphasising the creation of semi-legal spaces, and the actual agency of undocumented migrants, rather than the policies affecting them (as if they were passive actors), it is possible to highlight how they creatively perform ‘experiments of citizenship’ whereby, through their practices, they find ways to survive in host countries (Ambrosini 2016; Datta et al. 2007) and to ‘escape the pervasive politics of representation, rights and visibility’ (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2008: 224). McNevin noted how, in France, the undocumented migrants’ ‘demonstrations, occupations ... have been marked by a distinct cultural presence that includes foreign-language placards, music, dress, and performance’ (2011: 107). Other scholars have talked about informal citizenship, whereby the involvement of undocumented migrants in various official activities and institutions—again, their creation of semi-regular spaces—and/or their contribution to an underground economy make them *de facto* citizens (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014; Sassen 2002). These in-between spaces can also be created ‘through acts of solidarity between citizens

and undocumented migrants as they act together to resist control of migration' (Nordling et al. 2017: 3). It has also been recognised how many times undocumented migrants actively fight their current conditions to try to achieve better ones and to actively construct their subjecthood (Grønseth 2013; Strange et al. 2017). All these struggles, as Nordling et al. (2017) recognised, might be actual enactments of citizenship, regardless of the binary logics and classifications confining them to the restricted realms of illegality and irregularity.

As previously mentioned, context remains of paramount importance for understanding the phenomenon of irregular migration. Most research on undocumented migrants has been conducted in countries with certain commonalities. Firstly, the number of undocumented migrants is absolutely and/or relatively high in some European countries, such as Germany and the UK. The United States (US) has also long been a country in which many studies about undocumented migrants have been conducted. In recent years, the political debates concerning the border between the US and Mexico, unauthorised migration to the US, and the rights of undocumented Mexican people in the US, have become very significant social and political topics, and have attracted the attention of scholars (see Cornelius 2008; Gonzales et al. 2019; Massey et al. 2016; McThomas 2016; Slack et al. 2016). Issues concerning undocumented migrants have, however, become strongly evident elsewhere in the world, in Latin America, Asia, Africa, as well as in some less-developed countries. While irregular migration and undocumented migrants in less-developed countries are important topics, they are not discussed in this book. The growing presence of migrants, and the political debates and social movements concerning them, are shaping the social borders between regular and irregular migrants, as well as between migrants and the wider society, thus changing the self-representation of undocumented migrants and their connections to citizenship and membership for example in the US society (see Batzke 2018).

Recently, the topic of undocumented migrants has become more visible in northern Europe as well. Scholars have particularly addressed the healthcare issues of undocumented migrants in, for example, Sweden (see Andersson et al. 2018; Nordling et al. 2017; Wahlström Smith 2018) and Norway (see Bendixsen 2019; Myhrvold and Småstuen 2019; Onarheim et al. 2018). Paradoxically, undocumented migrants appear to experience greater hardship in advanced welfare states, such as Scandinavian countries, which apply strict immigration controls (Bendixsen 2018; Faist 1993), and have strongly regulated labour markets, than in Southern Europe, which by contrast has a higher degree of institutional informality (Arango and Jachimowicz 2005). Düvell (2011) demonstrated that, when a country applies strict immigration rules, the number of undocumented migrants in that country increases. This was the case in Finland. Indeed, in 2016 there was a legal turnaround, with immigration regulations becoming stricter than in the past (Aer 2016). Because of these changes in the law, it has become harder for asylum seekers to gain asylum in Finland (Tedeschi and Gadd 2021), which has increased the number of undocumented migrants. The possibilities to extend the temporary residence permit became also more difficult. Furthermore, the punitive application of immigration law to

foreign offenders plays a significant role in the production of deportable and undocumented migrants (Könönen 2020).

1.3 The Context of Finland

Regarding undocumented migrants, Finland has many similarities with other Western European countries from the administrative and legal perspectives. As a member of the EU since 1995, the national legislative framework and policies in Finland connect to EU-level directives, regulations, and policies. Officially abolishing border controls for mobility within the Schengen Area has facilitated mobility to and from Finland within the EU member states, including the mobility of undocumented migrants. The absolute number and relative proportion of undocumented migrants in Finland are small and, therefore, the national and local authorities' experiences with them are rather limited. Finland thus differs substantially from many Western European countries. As emphasised in this book, each country has a specific context evolving over time. Sometimes, similar laws and policies regarding undocumented migrants are executed differently with different results; therefore, when examining the control and governance of irregular migration and the everyday lives of undocumented migrants in Finland, contextual particularities must be considered. The following paragraphs present key contextual factors to illustrate the circumstances of undocumented migrants in Finland, and these settings and topics are elaborated in detail in the forthcoming chapters.

The first contextual factor derives from the geography of Finland. It is, territorially, a rather large European country (338,000 square kilometres; i.e. 10% larger than Italy and 40% larger than the UK), but it has only 5.5 million inhabitants (i.e. only 9% of the number in Italy and 8% of that in the UK); therefore, the average population density in most parts of Finland is very low, at 1–10 people per square kilometre, especially in central, eastern, and northern Finland. Scattered villages in these areas usually have only hundreds of inhabitants, and the few towns have populations of tens of thousands. Finland is also a very northern country, meaning that winters are cold and long: the northernmost parts are covered by snow for half the year and, even in the southernmost regions, the average daily low temperatures fall below freezing point for 4 months annually. These basic geographical aspects of Finland differ substantially from many Southern and Western European countries, framing everyday life opportunities for undocumented migrants in Finland; for example, everyone (including undocumented migrants) needs to live in a heated building.

The second (crucial) contextual factor is the demography of Finland. The composition of Finland's population has generally been, and has been perceived as, very homogenous until recently. The indigenous Sami population (less than 0.2% of the national population) and the Roma minority (Finnish Kale; less than 0.2% of the national population) in Finland both speak the Finnish language. Other long-term minorities in Finland, such as Tatars and Jews, are very few. Furthermore, in 1990,

Table 1.1 People with foreign backgrounds in Finland, 1990–2018

	1990	2000	2010	2018
Total born abroad	32,800	99,000	202,400	335,400
Total born in Finland	4800	14,300	34,600	67,200
Overall total	37,600	113,200	237,100	402,600
Born abroad—Foreign mother tongue	20,700	85,200	189,700	323,700
Born in Finland—Foreign mother tongue	1200	8900	25,800	54,400
Total	21,900	94,100	205,500	378,100

Source: Statistics Finland (2019)

across the whole country, there were less than 40,000 people with foreign backgrounds (people with one parent or both parents born abroad), totalling 0.8% of the population, and only half of them had a mother tongue other than Finnish.

Later, the size of the foreign-background population in Finland grew rapidly, to 113,000 people (2.2%) in 2000, 237,000 people (4.4%) in 2010, and 403,000 people (7.3%) in 2018—more than a tenfold increase in three decades (Table 1.1). This recent rapid growth of the foreign-background population has also encouraged certain right-wing political parties and their supporters to be openly hostile toward refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants. In addition, the country's short experience of people with slightly different outlooks, according to Keskinen and co-workers (2018), has contributed to the current situation, in which those belonging to ethnic minorities in Finland are subject to surveillance by several agencies, resulting in unwanted police stop and ethnic profiling in their everyday environments. Such scrutiny affects the everyday lives, mobility, and locations of undocumented migrants in Finland.

In addition, the geographic distribution of the foreign-background population is very uneven in Finland. In the northern, eastern, and central parts of Finland, the foreign background residents in rural municipalities account for only 1–2% of their populations. In many municipalities, there are often only tens of such individuals, if not fewer. Consequently, in practice, it is very unlikely that an undocumented migrant, or any foreigner or a Finn from outside of these communities, would remain unnoticed there. In Finland, therefore, an undocumented migrant can find easier hiding places and a bigger reference group in the capital and in some larger southern Finnish towns, where there are more people with non-Finnish backgrounds. Internationally, the only major urban area in Finland is the capital, Helsinki, and its surroundings, with roughly 1.5 million inhabitants, of which about half live in Helsinki itself. There, the average proportion of the foreign-background population is about 15% (around 250,000 people in total; i.e. more than half of all foreign-background people in Finland). In particular, almost four out of five (78%) all Somalis, more than half (54%) of all Iraqis, and almost half (45%) of all Afghans in Finland live in the capital (Tilastokeskus 2020). These are also the nationalities contributing to the largest numbers of undocumented migrants in Finland. Outside the capital, there are six large towns with 100,000–250,000 inhabitants, each having 10,000–30,000 inhabitants with foreign backgrounds. In some neighbourhoods of

the capital and the largest towns, 30–40% of the population has a foreign background; however, the local ethnic diversity is large. More than 100 nationalities live in Helsinki and other large towns, making each ethnic group rather small (Heino and Jauhiainen 2020).

The third contextual factor is the small number of undocumented migrants. This is not surprising, because Finland is a remote northern country with a small population and few foreign-born people. Nevertheless, there have always been ‘mobile’ people of foreign or unknown backgrounds in the country over the last 100 years of independence, and for decades they comprised only a few hundred people, excluding the war years. As discussed in Sects. 3.3 and 5.3 in more detail, about 14% of Finnish municipalities have recently noted undocumented migrants living in their territories—mostly in and around the large towns. Many smaller municipalities have less than 10 undocumented migrants; only in a few large towns are there hundreds and, in Helsinki, perhaps more than 1000 (see Jauhiainen et al. 2018, 2019).

The arrival of undocumented migrants in Finland was facilitated by the rather easy access from Sweden and Norway, simply by crossing the land border. For decades, the citizens of Nordic countries have had visa-free access to Finland, with no official formalities. The southern neighbour Estonia (which has no land border, but instead a sea passage of 80 km between the two countries) has belonged to the EU since 2004, and currently both Sweden and Estonia inhabit the Schengen Area; however, the eastern border (the longest national external border of the EU) with Russia, and previously the Soviet Union, has always been strongly secured and guarded, in practice preventing irregular migration to Finland.

Compared with many Western European countries, the absolute number of the visa overstaying population in Finland is small and its share of undocumented migrants is rather low (Könönen 2020), as is also the case in Sweden (Andersson et al. 2018). In the past 10 years, there have been more cases of overstaying EU citizens in Finland. These have been mainly Roma from Bulgaria and Romania (unable to register their stays due to insufficient funds to remain in Finland), or some Estonians staying longer in Finland for family or employment reasons (but not bothering or wishing to register their stays in Finland) (Könönen 2020). EU citizens (even the visa overstaying ones) usually have the means to become legal residents in Finland; thus, they do not belong to the category of undocumented migrants. According to the Ministry of the Interior and the health authorities, in the early 2010s, the number of undocumented migrants in Finland was estimated to be around 3000–3500 people (Keskimäki et al. 2014; Sisäministeriö 2012; see also Asa 2011). In western neighbouring Sweden, there were ten times as many, whereas in Estonia there were very few, (perhaps less than a tenth of the number in Finland). Such differences derived partly from the differences in the migration, asylum, and naturalisation policies of the respective countries during the past decades: compared with Finland, Sweden has been much more open (although becoming stricter following the 2015 immigration; see Krzyżanowski 2018) and Estonia has been much less open to foreign arrivals.

During the past two decades, around 3000–5000 people annually have requested asylum in Finland. In 2015, however, an eightfold growth occurred, compared to the

Fig. 1.1 Asylum applications in Finland, 2005–2020 (Source: Migri ([2020](#)))

year before (Fig. 1.1). EU countries received 1.3 million asylum applications and, of those, 32,477 were in Finland (about 2.5% of all applications in the EU). Of this latter number, over 20,000 were presented by Iraqi nationals, and this number in Finland was, after Germany, the second largest in the EU (Jauhiainen [2017](#)). The sudden arrival of such a large number of people was a surprise to the Finnish authorities, so the asylum system became backlogged and the asylum process slowed. In 2020, the number of asylum applications in Finland became much lower than in the previous years, mainly due to the COVID-19-related lockdowns creating major challenges for asylum seekers (see Sect. 3.4).

As discussed in the following, and in detail in Sects. 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5, many asylum applications were rejected in 2016 and 2017, but not all rejected asylum seekers wanted to leave Finland. Many appealed to the Administrative and even Supreme Administrative Courts and/or submitted subsequent asylum applications based on different or more precise grounds, thus prolonging their legitimate stay in Finland. Regardless of petitions, thousands of asylum seekers were rejected from 2016 onwards; an entry ban was announced for them, but many did not leave Finland. They—mainly youngish Iraqi men—became undocumented migrants, sometimes called the ‘new paperless’ (*uuspaperittomat* in Finnish) in the media. In addition, in 2015–2018, about 7400 people ‘disappeared’ from the asylum process: they left the process unfinished and the authorities did not know whether they had left Finland (Yle.fi [2019](#)). A particularity of Iraqi former asylum seekers was that their removal to Iraq became difficult, because many did not have the valid personal identification documents required for international travel and the Iraqi authorities were, in any case, reluctant to receive them (see Sect. 3.3). To a lesser extent, similar challenges were faced by some rejected Afghan asylum seekers; therefore, the number of undocumented migrants inevitably started to increase. In early 2019, we estimated that around 4000–4500 undocumented migrants were living in

Finland. This included 3000–3500 rejected asylum seekers, of whom up to two out of three were Iraqi nationals, mostly men (for details of the estimation and composition of undocumented migrants, see Sects. 3.4 and 4.2). Some other estimates deemed the number of undocumented migrants to be between 3000 and 10,000 (Diakonissalaitos 2019), but the higher number included visa overstayers and similar as well as asylum seekers disappeared from the asylum system.

Ultimately, no one—not the government, the ministries, the Finnish Migration Service Migri, the police, local authorities, NGOs, or scholars—knew precisely how many undocumented migrants were living in Finland, who they were, what they did and would like to do, or how to solve the challenges of undocumented migrants in the country in ways that would satisfy the migrants themselves, local communities, and the broader society. The people who had no right to stay and reside in Finland (mainly rejected asylum seekers, but also those who came to Finland without permission) became the main empirical source for this book (see Sects. 2.3 and 2.4). The lives of undocumented migrants in Finland are not unique, but have commonalities with the experiences of undocumented migrants living in other countries (see also Tedeschi 2021a), as well as differences, as discussed throughout this book. Furthermore, the analysis showed how difficult it is to provide a ‘universal’ definition of an undocumented migrant (McAuliffe and Koser 2017), and the extent to which the differences between the various ‘types’ of migrants become blurred in real life.

The fourth contextual factor is the political and social reaction to the growing number of undocumented migrants. As mentioned, the law in Finland does not explicitly use the term ‘undocumented migrant’. Instead, it defines, in a reverse way, who has the right to stay and reside in Finland (those with a fixed-term or permanent residence permit or those with Finnish citizenship; see Sect. 3.2). Those who do not have the legal right to remain in Finland are indeed undocumented migrants (i.e. people residing illegally in Finland).

Undocumented migrants became a topic frequently discussed in the national and local media in Finland after 2015. There is a specific social configuration (Elias 1981) in Finland in terms of irregular migration. Many undocumented migrants are rejected asylum seekers who have had extensive contact with the state and local authorities and many organisations that provide help to asylum seekers. This has created challenges for the media, authorities, and the general public in distinguishing the terminology for, and practices of, refugees from those relating to asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. The media, and especially social media, are laden with anecdotal information and comments regarding this group of people and their lives in Finland. Numerous articles and news reports have been published since 2015 about undocumented migrants in the two most widely distributed newspapers: the daily *Helsingin Sanomat* and the evening paper *Ilta-Sanomat*, although sometimes confusing them in the articles with refugees, asylum seekers, or other immigrants. Through this mediatisation, the issue became politicised. Many political parties have attempted to gain more voters by asking for stricter policies against irregular migration to Finland. In the summer of 2019, True Finns, the country’s most anti-immigrant political party (which especially opposes undocumented migrants)

became the most popular in the polls among the electorate in Finland (Tamminen 2019). In Finland, as elsewhere in contemporary Europe, very few political parties have actively tried to support undocumented migrants in becoming full members of society. Instead, in the spring of 2016, the national government pushed for stricter asylum and immigration policies, including more restrictions and requirements for arriving migrants. Such a political move was excused as harmonising the Finnish national asylum and immigration policies with the EU ones. As indicated, at the same time, such policies were being tightened in many other EU member states (Brekke and Staver 2018; Czaika and Hobolt 2016; De Haas et al. 2016; Prime Minister's Office of Finland 2015; Saarikkomäki et al. 2018; Wahlbeck 2019). One immediate concrete result in Finland was that the asylum acceptance rate for Iraqi men (the largest group of asylum seekers) decreased substantially from 2015 (84%) to 2016 (24%). To justify such a sudden change, Migri, the national authority responsible for asylum application decisions, claimed that applications' grounds and profiles of Iraqi men differed greatly between 2015 and 2016; however, a later independent analysis showed that no major differences existed in the Iraqi applicants' backgrounds and asylum application arguments between 2015 and 2016—Migri simply interpreted evidence given by asylum seekers differently (Saarikkomäki et al. 2018). Later, Migri was revealed to have had many difficulties processing asylum applications, especially in 2015–2017, which led to inconsistencies in its asylum decisions (see Sect. 3.3).

Furthermore, in 2016, the national authorities (an inter-ministerial working group) established national guidelines for public authorities on dealing with undocumented migrants. It was expressed very clearly that the presence of these migrants in Finland was illegal. They had no right to reside or work in Finland, but certain (minimum) services needed to be provided for them (Sisäministeriö 2016; see Sect. 5.1 for details). The authorities also suggested using the term 'illegal immigrant' (in Finnish, *laiton maahanmuuttaja*). The possibilities for undocumented migrants to be informally employed in Finland became much harder than for many of those living in larger Western European countries (see Sect. 4.4). Finland has a rather small foreign-background population; hence, the labour participation rate of immigrants and refugees (especially those from sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, and Iraq) in Finland is substantially smaller than that of Finns (see City of Helsinki 2019), indicating structural challenges for their integration into the labour market, and the labour force in many typical sectors (such as construction) in which undocumented migrants are employed in Western European countries has, in Finland, provided only limited informal employment opportunities for undocumented migrants.

As discussed, undocumented migrants (especially rejected asylum seekers remaining in Finland) have been rather few in Finland; hence, over the years, they have not raised local or national concerns, with the possible exception of some national security-related authorities and more right-wing political parties and their supporters. By the mid-2010s, therefore, no uniform practices had developed in Finland regarding how to deal with them in important sectors such as healthcare, social welfare, and education. Nevertheless, as in many Western European countries,

according to the legal framework, emergency healthcare was made available for all undocumented migrants, undocumented migrants had the right to request social benefit support if they needed it, and undocumented migrants' children had access to free primary education (see Sects. 4.5, 5.1 and 5.2). Due to public service deficits, NGOs and private individuals started to offer support to undocumented migrants in their everyday lives, in this way helping them to create semi-legal spaces of survival and counter state migration control (Nordling et al. 2017). Several NGOs thus currently help undocumented migrants with health, accommodation, and legal issues, and this practice is tolerated by the authorities, including the police. There is even, sometimes, competition over who can help these migrants and in what ways, even though this help does not, and cannot, cover all aspects of their lives.

Regarding the governance of undocumented migrants and the implementation of national legislation and policies, it is important to note that local authorities in Finland possess substantial autonomy. National authorities cannot dictate the organisation of key services such as healthcare and education, the practical provision of which is the duty of local authorities. There is room for manoeuvre at local levels, resulting in local differences in service provision for undocumented migrants (see Sect. 3.3 and Chap. 5). While the minimum services are defined by the law, local authorities may provide additional services. In fact, the City Council of Helsinki decided, in 2017, to extend the provision of healthcare services to adult undocumented migrants. Helsinki and a few other large towns had already decided that underage and pregnant undocumented migrants would have a similar right to healthcare as registered inhabitants of these localities. Nevertheless, there were, and continue to be, differences between the principles and practices of law. As discussed in Sects. 4.5, 5.2 and 5.3, not all undocumented migrants can use these services and not all local authorities know how to provide them.

The fifth contextual factor is that undocumented migrants have not been studied extensively in Finland. Prior to this study, no comprehensive research was conducted on undocumented migrants and their everyday lives in Finland. Very few researchers have addressed undocumented migrants, and usually only within a narrow scope (Keskimäki et al. 2014; Kynsilehto and Puumala 2017; Könönen 2018a, 2018b, 2020; Leppäkorpi 2011; Ollus et al. 2013; Tervonen and Enache 2017; Tervonen et al. 2018; Thomsen and Jørgensen 2012). Recognising such a research gap, scholars started to publish scientific articles about the topic (e.g. Gadd and Lehtikunnas 2019; Jauhiainen 2017; Jauhiainen and Gadd 2019; Jauhiainen et al. 2018; Heino and Jauhiainen 2020; Tedeschi 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Tedeschi and Gadd 2021). Undocumented migrants are not yet recognised as a major social issue in Finland and it is difficult to obtain related research funding and gain recognition that research about the topic is needed to underpin sustainable evidence-based policies.

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