



# Young newcomers at the crossroads of new beginnings: A contextual framework on experiences in urban Belgium

Minne Huysmans

Supervisors

Prof. Dr. Dominique Verté  
Dr. Pieter Meurs

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## Dissertation committee

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### Supervisors

Prof. dr. Dominique Verté  
Faculty of Psychology and Educational  
Sciences  
Department of Educational Sciences  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Dr. Pieter Meurs  
Faculty of Psychology and Educational  
Sciences  
Department of Educational Sciences  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

### Chairman

Prof. dr. Tom Vanwing  
Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences  
Department of Educational Sciences  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

### Jury

Prof. dr. Ilse Derluyn  
Faculty of Psychology and Educational  
Sciences  
Department of Social Work and Social  
Pedagogy  
Universiteit Gent

Prof. dr. Johan Vanderfaillie  
Faculty of Psychology and Educational  
Sciences  
Department of Clinical & Life Span  
Psychology  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Lieve Bradt  
Faculty of Psychology and Educational  
Sciences  
Department of Social Work and Social  
Pedagogy  
Universiteit Gent

Prof. dr. Jean-Pierre Vanhee  
Faculty of Psychology and Educational  
Sciences  
Department of Educational Sciences  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Ilke Adam  
Faculty of Political Sciences  
Institute for European Studies  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel



## Preface

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During the summer of 2015, when the Arabic spring abruptly stagnated in Syria and Egypt and conflicts throughout the world reached new peaks. Many thousands of people; men, women, youngsters, kids, were forced to search for new livings.

Some temporary, many permanent.

The sceneries and images in Turkey, the Greek Islands, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Austria, Calais, The Maximilian Park in Brussels became part of our collective memory.

Heads of state, NGO's, organisations, we as a society and we as individuals wrestled with our role in the matter, our responsibility. In this quest, a rhetoric of extremes emerged: human rights versus a pull effect, refugees versus economic migrants, open borders versus Schengen should be reconsidered, it also is our responsibility versus protection in their own region, rights versus duties.

As researchers we also were challenged in our role, our stake, our responsibility. Research is not just abstract and theoretical. It is also practical and specific. It is engaged. Engagement has an ethical component to it: who are we to be as individuals, professionals, as a society? And how do we want to approach the other? Who is the other and who are we?

The other who is divided in a multitude of categories: refugee, migrant, transit migrant, trans migrant, exile, nomad, foreigner, illegal, emigré... just to name a few.

The research in our department, went away from the abstract: the refugee, to focus on the human, the person, the individual: young newcomers. Newcomers, an adjective with an expiration date: when does one stop being new?

Young people who we consider embodying more than that one image, that one explaining, determining label around which an entire life is structured: REFUGEE. They are each and every one of them, youngsters with unique stories who are adding new chapters, color and nuance to their past.

The summer of 2015.

A hundred and twenty-two young newcomers who applied for protection in Belgium in the aftermath of the summer of 2015, gave their voice to this dissertation. A research focusing on how these youngsters build and rebuild their lives in a new environment. A research that focusses on how this environment opens and closes itself for 'the other'. A research that

focuses on how different environments and approaches could switch lenses and cooperate more closely. A research that focuses on a more balanced approach between a welfare and a youth perspective, a more balanced approach between vulnerability and resilience.

This dissertation longs for those connections, those perspectives where the newcomers of today are the authors and painters of the history of tomorrow. We all have a stake in the white space between a written past and an open future. A space and place ready for a collective story.

## Acknowledgments

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THE SUN NEVER SAYS

Even  
after  
all this time  
The sun never says  
to the earth

"You owe me."

Look what happens  
with a love like that.

It lights  
the whole  
sky.

(Hafiz, 1320 – 1390)





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## PART 1. INTRODUCTION

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In this introductory chapter the different interrelated concepts and points of entry of this dissertation will be discussed. The chapter starts by defining and contextualising the 'young newcomer'. These youngsters, who establish a new living in Belgian cities, are our main focus. We explore their paths into this new context by engaging with the legal frameworks around refugees and newcomers in a global, European and domestic context. The concepts of citizenship on the one hand, and social support on the other, will give us a top down and bottom-up perspective to explore young newcomers' access to society at large. The concept of citizenship is used to explore the origin of the demarcation between insiders and outsiders and its contemporary implications for newcomers. The concept of social networks and social support allow to establish a framework to study the importance of local, national and transnational supportive networks in order to build and establish a new living in a brand new context.

*"In the first place we don't like to be called refugees. We ourselves call each other 'newcomers' or 'immigrants' [...] We did our best to prove to other people that we were just ordinary immigrants. We declared that we had departed of our own free will to countries of our choice, and we denied that our situation had anything to do with so called "Jewish problems" (...) We wanted to rebuild our lives, that was all. In order to rebuild one's life one has to be strong and optimistic. So, we are very optimistic" (Hannah Arendt, 1943, p. 110).*



## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1. Young newcomers and the urban context

#### 1.1. Facts and figures

Migration and forced migration have always been part of human history (Castles, 2003; International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2013). The United Nations (UN, 2002) estimates that at the dawn of the 20th century roughly 33 million individuals lived in countries other than their own. By the year 2000 that number had reached 175 million. During the same period, the population of the world grew threefold, from 1.6 to 5.3 billion. Migration, by contrast, increased almost six-fold. Strikingly, more than half of the increase of migrants from 1910 to 2000 occurred in the last three decades of the 20th century (UN, 2002). The last decades, this human process intensified, reaching historical numbers, from 222 million migrants in 2010 up to 245 million in 2015 (IOM, 2018; UN, 2014). Nevertheless, this equates only 3.3 per cent of the global population. The great majority of people in the world do not migrate across borders but within borders; with an estimated 740 million internal migrants in 2009 (IOM, 2018).

The global refugee population grew from 2.4 million in 1975 over 10.5 million in 1985 to 12.1 million by the year 2000 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1995, 2000). Today 68.5 million people are forcibly displaced by war, genocide, exploitation and conflict (UNHCR, 2019). Forced migration increased with 70% over the past twenty years (UNHCR, 2016). More than half of all refugees worldwide originate from just three countries: The Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, and Somalia (UN, 2016). Turkey became the largest refugee-hosting country worldwide, with 3.8 million refugees (Migration Data Portal, 2019). Also, the countries in western Europe became important destination countries (Jennissen, 2015). Nearly one third (76 million) of all international migrants live in Europe (UN, 2016). In Belgium, the number of asylum seekers increased from 17,000 in 2014 up to 45,000 in 2015 (Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil), 2016; Immigration Office, 2016; Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (OCGRS), 2017). In 2018, 23,443 people applied for international protection, mostly originating from Syria, Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq (OCGRS, 2019).

Half of the refugee population are children and youngsters under the age of eighteen (UNHCR, 2017; IOM, 2018). Since 2010, approximately 50 million children migrated over borders (UNICEF, 2016). In 2017, Belgium hosted 7,594 Refugee Minors of which 733 were Unaccompanied Minor Refugees (URM) (Immigration Office, 2018). This group represents one third of the asylum-seeking population, and therefore is an important stakeholder in the asylum and migration policy and social care system of Belgium (Eide & Hjern, 2013; Kevers & De Haene, 2014; OCGRS, 2017).

## 1.2. Conceptualisation of the term 'newcomers'

Within the literature, many categories are used to describe those living outside their countries of origin: foreigner, migrant, illegal migrant, émigré, exile, nomad, ... These categories are just a few of the labels used to define the other (Isin, 2009). The term 'migrant' is often confused with 'refugee'. Both may come from places facing structural violence, economic hardship, chronic poverty, political instability and a lack of access to basic resources, which can form the context and crystallise in a trigger for leaving (Muzurovic, Tipping, Mental, & Goldman, 2002). However, two main differences between refugees and migrants are the valence of movement and the urgency of departure (Muzurovic et al., 2002). Migrants, on the one hand, generally move towards the dream of a better life and the realisation of life goals unattainable in their home country. Their migration is often the result of a well-considered decision-making process, informed by the experience of others who have gone before. Refugees, on the other hand, are by definition moving away from situations of persecution. Their primary goals are often those of immediate physical safety and survival. The decision to flee is regularly made with great haste. Valued personal possessions as well as the less tangible life goals, aspirations and projects towards the future are left behind.

The term 'newcomers' grasps this diversity. It refers to migrants and refugees within their first years after arrival in a new country (Hynie, Crooks, & Barragan, 2011). Moreover, its semantics shift focusses from past to future and from bane to potential. It concerns those who recently arrived in a country, regardless of their motives or background (Agentschap integratie en inburgering, n.d).

## 1.3. Newcomers and the city

The world is becoming increasingly urban and cities are characterised by diversity and heterogeneity (Blokland, Hentschel, Holm, Lebuhn, & Margalit, 2015; Schrooten, 2012). In 1950, 30% of the world population lived in cities. Today, we are reaching 55% (UN-Habitat, 2016). By 2025, 60% of the world population will live in cities. In the following 50 years, two out of three individuals will live in a city and by the end of this century this will be three out of four (Saunders, 2011; Smith & Guarnizo, 2009). Although urbanisation is not new, the acceleration by which it occurs, makes it one of the central properties of the 21st century (UN-habitat, 2016).

Cities play a central role as hubs and cross points in migration processes (De Winter, 2015). For a majority of youngsters with roots in migration, cities have become a place where they want to establish a new living (Mansouri & Johns, 2016; Schillebeeckx & Albeda, 2014; Siemiatycki, 2005). In many cases, urbanisation is primarily the result of migration (McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2014). Its engine is global mobility, creating an inseparable connection between migration and urbanity (Guadagno & Lee, 2015; Smith & Guarnizo, 2009). This shift



between a life in rural areas towards an urban living is a collective and final one (Smith & Guarnizo, 2009). Today, nearly two out of three refugees who arrive to a new country, live in urban areas (IOM, 2018; UNHCR, 2019). This evolution strongly changed the social and cultural mix of European cities, leading to ethnically diverse, multicultural and cosmopolitan cities (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009).

Like other European cities, Brussels also underwent this transition. The demography of our capital became larger, denser and more diverse (Deboosere, Eggerickx, Van Hecke & Wayens, 2009; Loeckx, Oosterlynck, Kesteloot, Leman, Pattyn, Reyckler, & Vanbeselaere, 2012; Smith, 2001). Brussels silently transformed to become one of the most diverse cities in the world. Over 60% of the Brussels population has roots in migration (Lee & Guadagno, 2016). Brussels became a network city, a junction in a worldwide web of cities. Cities are no longer spatially defined but rather *"a crossroad of social relations constituted by the interactions of local, national, and transnational actors and the networks through which they operate"* (Smith, 2001, p. 184).

## 2. Refugee policy frameworks

The concept 'refugee' covers a vast diversity of people, interpretations and positions, which leads to confusion and misuse. Moreover, despite the legal definitions (e.g. the Geneva Convention of 1951), the concept is also object of political instrumentalisation and politicised interpretations (Cole, 2015; Wood, 1985). As a consequence, 'the refugee' has become somewhat a rhetorical figure rather than an individual human being entitled to protection and support (Cole, 2015).

Migration, globalisation, the rise of supra- and transnational states like the European Union (EU), refugee flows and the conceiving of international human rights generated a complex relation between home and host societies (Isin & Turner, 2002). Since the issues at stake are global in kind, an adequate response cannot be other than equally global (Marchetti, 2009). And thus, the discussion about access to new societies enlarged from the national to the international stage (Smith & Guarnizo, 2009). Refugees are reliant on international bodies to guarantee their rights, and on international and non-governmental organisations for support and protection (UNHCR, 2010).

### 2.1. The global context

Refugees are those who have been unjustly expelled from their political community, resulting in a separation from the state and the community. 'Solving' refugees' exile is therefore not only question of halting refugees' flight and reversing their movement, but requires political action restoring their citizenship (Long, 2011). A milestone document in this context is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1948, the Declaration was announced by the United

Nations General Assembly as a common standard of achievements for all people and all nations. It set out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected. This declaration takes recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world (UN, 2019).

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an international human rights regime has emerged. Nevertheless, the relation between states and newcomers can be difficult as the Universal Declaration is silent on states' obligations to grant entry to immigrants or to uphold the right of asylum (Benhabib, 2005). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right to emigrate (the right to leave a country) but not the right to immigrate (the right to enter a country) (Benhabib, 2005; Marchetti, 2009; Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010). There is no sovereign power to enforce human rights at a global level (Isin & Turner, 2007). In many parts of the world, host countries fail to live up to international human rights standards as well as basic provisions of the Refugee Convention that they have signed (Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010).

The Geneva Convention of 1951 relating to the Status of Refugees, and its Protocol added in 1967, are the second most important international set of legal documents regulating cross-border movements (Benhabib, 2005). Under international law, states are obliged to protect non-citizens and those residing within their national borders. Due to the strict requirements for refugee status provided in the Geneva Convention, being granted the status is difficult for most forced migrants. The strict legal criteria and status determination procedures often employed by either host governments or carried out by the UNHCR on behalf of the governments mean that many remain outside the protection of international refugee law (Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010).

With the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), a special emphasis on the position of minor refugees was made. This legal framework of the United Nations engaged with measures to ensure that a child who is seeking the refugee status shall receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of international human rights (Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, 2019).

On 19 September 2016 Heads of State and Government came together for the first time at the global level within the UN to discuss issues related to migration and refugees. This sent a powerful political message that migration and refugee matters had become major issues on the international agenda. In adopting the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the 193 UN Member States recognised the need for a comprehensive approach to human mobility and enhanced cooperation at the global level. They set in motion a process towards the development of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which was

adopted in 2018 in Marrakesh. The Global Compact covers all dimensions of international migration and is designed to support international cooperation on the governance of international migration. It is also designed to protect the safety, dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, regardless of their migratory status, and at all times support countries rescuing, receiving and hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants (IOM, 2019).

Because of supranational legislation, refugees can rely on a strong basis for protection against persecution of their civil and political rights. At the same time their social, economic and cultural rights remain very neglected by host states. These so called 'second generation' rights include the right to development and self-determination, health, education and participation (Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010). The Global Compact touches upon the above-mentioned rights by enhancing the integration of migrants after arrival in the host country, addressing their needs and capacities as well as those of receiving communities (IOM, 2019). This multitude of rights can be seen within a framework of durable solutions to the refugee 'problem' (Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010). The three durable solutions (i.e. repatriation, resettlement and local integration) envisage to restore a refugee's access to citizenship, and through citizenship the protection and expression of their fundamental human rights (Long, 2011). Another core principle of refugee law is the duty of non-refoulement, that is, of the refugee-receiving state's duty not to return refugees to the country where their lives are threatened (Lim, 2013).

## 2.2. The European context

In addition to the international agreements, Europe also developed a framework to regulate immigration and asylum policies. Since the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), EU Member States have been aware of the need to harmonise conditions of entry in member countries, embedding immigration and asylum policies within an EU framework (Benhabib, 2002). The resolutions of the European Council (1999) reiterated this commitment to European integration based on respect for human rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law. The Council emphasised that these principles cannot be seen as the exclusive preserve of the Union's own citizens (Benhabib, 2002). The Treaty of Maastricht on its turn, made provisions for a 'Union citizenship', where members of the Union states can settle anywhere in the Union, take up jobs in their chosen countries and vote as well as stand for office (Benhabib, 2002).

Although EU Member States are signatories to the Geneva Convention, they have demonstrated an increasing unwillingness to accept the growing number of spontaneous asylum seekers or to give them a permanent status (Kofman, 2005). Their interventions are mostly temporary and exceptional (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003; Isin & Turner, 2007). Even in the context of Schengen countries, some of the national borders are now being physically fenced.

EU Member States are dividing the incoming migrants into potential insiders and definite outsiders based on various risk assessments and statistics concerning refugees' countries of origin but also on the receiving countries' estimated capacities to take asylum seekers (Kallio & Mitchell, 2016). The heightened arrival of migrants and asylum seekers has put a strain not only on many Member States' asylum systems but also on the Common European Asylum System as a whole. In particular, this exposed the weaknesses of the Dublin System, which establishes the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application based primarily on the first point of entry (European Commission, 2019). For these reasons, the Commission is proposing to revise and replace the current asylum instruments to better manage migration flows and offer adequate protection to those in need. In 2016, the Commission presented a draft proposal to make the Dublin System more transparent and enhance its effectiveness, while providing a mechanism to deal with situations of disproportionate pressure on Member States' asylum systems. The proposal includes a fairness mechanism based on solidarity which includes a corrective allocation mechanism and takes into account resettlement efforts made by a Member State to house those in need of international protection direct from a third country. This should acknowledge the importance of efforts to implement legal and safe pathways to Europe (European Commission, 2019).

Another result of the new flows of migration was the controversial EU-Turkey Statement. In March 2016, the heads of state or government of the 28 EU Member States and Turkey agreed on the EU-Turkey Statement to end the flow of irregular migration from Turkey to the EU and replace it with organised, safe and legal channels to Europe (European Commission, 2019). European leaders had met in Brussels and, blithely disregarding their international obligations, agreed that every person arriving irregularly on Greek islands, including asylum-seekers, should be returned to Turkey. As an element of the agreement, Turkey would receive 6 billion euros to assist the vast refugee community hosted in the country, Turkish nationals would be granted visa-free travel to Europe and, once the number of irregular arrivals dropped, a "voluntary" humanitarian scheme to transfer Syrians from Turkey to other EU countries would be activated. However, the premise on which the deal was constructed, namely that Turkey is a safe place for refugees, was flawed. In the months following the agreement, the Greek Asylum Appeals Committees ruled in many cases that Turkey does not provide effective protection for refugees. Struggling to meet people's basic needs, the Turkish authorities are failing to ensure that refugees and asylum-seekers are able to live in dignity (Amnesty International, 2017).

Today, other policy contexts also engage in their supportive role towards newcomers. In this sense, the Council of the European Union drew engagements on the role of youth work in the context of migration and refugee matters (The Council of the European Union, 2018). The Member States indicate that young people, including young refugees, are deemed to be competent individuals with abilities and strengths, capable of shaping their future. In order to

do so, strategies and frameworks on the empowerment and integration of young refugees are developed to allow them to become active members of society. The Member States also stress on cooperation by establishing a clear framework of the different sectors which are part of the integration process, including youth civil society organisations led by young refugees (The Council of the European Union, 2018).

### 2.3. The domestic context

The broader Belgian policy framework regarding the status of refugees is based on the Geneva Convention (1951), its protocol (1967) and a core principle of refugee law: the duty of 'non-refoulment' (Keytsman & De Valck, 2015). For those seeking refuge who are not covered by the Geneva Convention, the European Union introduced a new form of protection, namely 'subsidiary protection'. This status protects those fleeing for war, torture, inhuman treatment, death penalty or execution (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013). This type of protection is temporary and based on the evolution of security in the home country (Dewael, 2006).

In the context of asylum and migration, Belgium counts one federal State Secretary and at the same time several regional Ministers. The departments of education, well-being, youth, culture, integration, justice, ... are all implied in the daily lives of young newcomers (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, s.d.). When it comes to minors, The Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (OCGRSP) makes a distinction between Accompanied (ARM) and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM). The OCGRSP (2015, p. 1) defines ARM on the one hand as "any child who, in any residence procedure, is accompanied by (a) parent(s) or legal representative. European children accompanied by (a) parent(s) are also called accompanied minors". These youngsters are under 18 years old and they or their parents applied for asylum. URM on the other hand, relates to those younger than 18 years originating from a country outside of the European Economic Area (EU member states, Norway, Lichtenstein and Iceland). URM reside in Belgium without parent(s) or legal guardian, applied for asylum or resides without legal documents in Belgium. URM are entitled to a guardian by the ministry of Justice. This guardian protects and watches over the legal rights of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor until his adulthood (Cambien et al., 2015). URM are protected by the Belgian state until a sustainable solution is found in repatriation, resettlement or local integration (Cloet, 2007).

A broadening of the focus towards the support of young newcomers occurred in Flanders when the Minister of Youth bundled forces of the cultural and youth sector (Department Culture, Youth and Media, s.d.). This policy department claims that contact with other youngsters is crucial to adapt to a new context, learn the language, new habits and cope with trauma. It also advances integration and opens the minds of Belgian youngsters. The Flemish Youth Council and youth sector strongly believes in the role of youth work(ers) to facilitate this

process. A collective platform, 'GloBall' was created to support youth workers in their role towards newcomers (The Flemish Youth Council, 2018).

### 3. Citizenship

Newcomers arrive in a different environment, a place where their relation to this new context has to be negotiated, contested, regulated or even created. A central concept in the creation of the relation between newcomers and the context wherein they settle is 'citizenship'. Citizenship is created both top down by law and legislation as bottom-up by membership and participation.

By being a citizen or member of a community or nation, everyone is understood to belong somewhere (Dunne, 2006). For many young people who migrated, the question of 'where do I belong' is key (Anthias, 2008). Newcomers tend to experience belonging in relation to their access to rights and services. But there is also a strong desire to belong in a more emotional and culturally meaningful way, a desire which is blocked by cultural differences and experiences of exclusion (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). Citizenship is a concept which has both inclusionary and exclusionary forces. This is what Lister (as cited in Invernizzi & Milne, 2005, p. 83) describes as the *"Janus-faced nature of citizenship, which operates simultaneously as a mechanism of both inclusion and exclusion and also as a language of both discipline and resistance..."*

The notion of belonging refers to the idea that citizenship involves more than the narrow passport-holding sense of citizenship, and encompasses broader understandings of inclusion, acceptance, attachment and connection (Dobrowolsky, 2007). Furthermore, belonging is not just related to membership, rights and duties but it is also related to the social places and the emotional and social bonds with such places: being accepted as part of a (urban) community, feeling safe within it and having a stake in the future of such a community of membership. To belong is to share values, networks and practices (Anthias, 2008).

#### 3.1. Citizenship: a brief overview of the concept

Citizenship is a hard to define and disputed conception (Invernizzi & Milne, 2005). Many scholars stress the difficulty to find a universal definition; a discussion that stretches over numerous centuries. Ancient scholars as Cicero or Diogenes of Sinope already discussed the concept. Today, there is still no consensus in scientific literature on the content (e.g. Brander et al., 2003; Carton, Callens, Dejaghere, & Hooghe, 2009; Van Puymbroeck, Blondeel, & Vandevoordt, 2014), and no clear path to approach and study this subject (Isin & Turner, 2002). Many attempts, philosophical debates, sociological analyses, political disputes and educational approaches try to answer the question on what citizenship is (Schugurensky, 2006).

According to Staeheli (2011), citizenship takes on different aspects for people in different contexts and seems to be defined as much by what it is as by what it is not. At its broadest, citizenship is an umbrella concept depicting the interaction between humankind, society and the citizen (Carton et al., 2009). At its smallest, it can refer to the enjoyment of rights, political or civic engagement, experiences of collective identity and solidarity, or the possession of formal national membership (Lim, 2013).

Two main contemporary conceptions of citizenship can be found. The first stresses on the rule of law and the enjoyment of rights and duties, the latter focusses on membership and participation (Bloemraad, Kortweg, & Yurdakul, 2008; Bowden, 2003; Dunne, 2006; Isin & Turner, 2007; Leung, 2009; Leung, 2013; Schattle, 2005). Several scholars have focused on these features via distinct but related aspects, for example citizenship as status (rights) and citizenship as a practice (Isin, 2009), and participation and belonging (Bloemenraad et al., 2008). All emphasised on the link between rights and duties on the one hand (Turner, 1997; Isin & Turner, 2007) and membership on the other hand. Benhabib (2005) molds the three components of citizenship (rights, duties, and membership) into the collective identity of citizens which is to be seen as a 'universal status' (Lister, Smith, Middleton & Cox, 2003). Everyone is understood to be a citizen by virtue of membership of the community or nation. At its thinnest, citizen means 'person'. A thicker understanding draws on notions of 'belonging' to either the local, national or transnational community (Lister et al., 2003).

Indeed, the concept of citizenship does not specify the meaning and role of the citizen. Consequently, citizenship inherently refers to various normative and ideological aspects: it presupposes an ideal of how a citizen should behave (Meurs, 2019). With regards to the issue of newcomers, it is important to grasp this normative tension. It brings about the paradox of the non-naturalized citizen (Schinkel, 2007). This refers to the tension between citizenship considered from its formal status (having formal rights and duties) and citizenship as the conception of a socially and politically engaged citizen: someone can act as a citizen while simultaneously not enjoying the status of formal citizenship. The opposite can also be true. This is certainly the case for newcomers: they are considered citizens and at the same time they can't be: they are citizens, insofar the state grants them citizenship in a formal sense: they are not citizens, insofar 'society' is a construction, constantly in review, in which the newcomer is always perceived as an outsider (Schinkel, 2007).

As a consequence, many newcomers exist for extended periods in the liminal zone of displacement, aspiring to a viable state citizenship while simultaneously resisting and challenging the logic of the nation state system through the maintenance of multiple transnational links (Mc Nevin, 2013; Smith & Guarnizo as cited in Nunn, McMichael, Gifford & Correa-Velez, 2015).

### 3.2. Citizenship and young newcomers

Arriving into a completely new context is simultaneously a blessing and a curse. One finds safety and stability, yet this is found in an unknown, new and complex society. It is a confrontation with several new social structures and cultural habits, that influence the perceptions on citizenship of young newcomers (Nunn et al., 2015). In research conducted by Wenersjö (2015), young newcomers found it hard to get involved in their new living environment and had the feeling of being different, of not belonging. Newcomers who are resettled during adolescence occupy an ambivalent position in relation to formal state citizenship. Many leave their country of origin as children or are born elsewhere, while others experience forced displacement within their homeland. This means that, prior to resettlement, many young newcomers have only briefly, if ever, experienced state membership, and only as minors. Furthermore, growing up as 'wards of the international community', many young newcomers have not experienced the 'family feeling' of national membership, and therefore may not experience the nation state as an important site of belonging (Nunn et al., 2015).

Newcomers' perspectives on citizenship are rarely examined in either academic or public policy debates, which rather concentrate on the broader legal and political aspects of citizenship changes in national citizenship laws and policies and/or normative arguments about how citizenship should be conceived, making claims about newcomers' attitudes towards citizenship from afar (Bauböck, 1994; 2003; Miller, 2000; Soysal, 1994 as cited in Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006). In the context of young newcomers, much of the research into citizenship tends to focus on participation and less on the legal status of being a citizen (van der Welle, 2011). This is however important for most young newcomers. A formal recognition opens perspectives and gives security (Nunn et al., 2015).

## 4. Social networks and social support

### 4.1. Conceptualisation of social networks and social support

Despite its popularity and voluminous development, the term 'social support' still stimulates debates on its conceptualisation and operationalisation (Song, Son, & Lin, 2011). There are many labels found in research literature to describe aspects of social relationships; social support, social integration, social ties, social bonds and social networks (Albright et al., 2016). Simultaneously, social support is also often confounded with other network-based but distinct social factors such as social cohesion, social integration and social capital. Nevertheless, these different perspectives mostly stress on the relationship-based, assisting nature of social support (Song et al., 2011). Social support is believed to be one of the key elements to cope with challenges related to migration (Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, & Mooren, 2016) and to magnify newcomers' well-being (Jasinkaja-Lahti et al., 2006).



Social networks are defined as the vehicle through which social support is provided (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). A social network is an interactive field of persons, who provide the 'give and take' of helpfulness and protection (Berkman, 1986; Gottlieb, 1985). Social networks are complex systems with multiple levels that cannot be understood as the sum of the relations between the individual and specific network members. Networks have holistic structural and functional properties that transcend these individual relationships (Levitt, 2005). There are many aspects that define social networks (Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Sidra, 2008). Social networks in the 21st century include a wide array of partners (Fingerman, 2009). Networks can be formal or informal, exist between specific individuals or be part of a wider community (McCabe, Gilchrist, Harris, Afridi, & Kyprianou, 2013). Most people report a few very close relationships and hundreds of peripheral connections. They differ in emotional quality, closeness, stability and density (who knows whom in the network). Undoubtedly, close relations are essential for human survival. Yet more peripheral ties may also enhance life quality and allow people to flourish (Fingerman, 2009).

Different from social support, the social network is the structure of an interactive process. Social support is the function, the core, the heart (Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997). Structural dimensions of a social network refer to the form and distribution of support within the network (Valenta, 2008). People build up new relationships, make new acquaintances and lose touch with others. Some relations can be developed solely to fulfil a specific goal and then disappear again once it is accomplished. Others may last a lifetime (Bø, Degenne, & Forsé, as cited in Valenta, 2008). These functional dimensions, with its affective, emotional or psychological components is what makes social relations truly important (Antonucci, Ajrouch, & Birditt 2013). They all refer to qualitative features of the relation between the individual and other people in the network (Song et al., 2011). These varying types of support may be provided by diverse people in various ways and at different times. For newcomers, these forms of support may cross national boundaries. In this way, transnational links with people 'back home' may continue to play a supportive role after migration (Ryan et al., 2008). Social support thus is a multidimensional construct (Song et al., 2011), contributing to one's well-being (Langford et al., 1997).

#### 4.2. The Convoy Model of Social Relations

A theory that stresses the importance of one's social context is the Convoy Model of social relations, developed by Khan and Antonucci (1980). The Convoy Model provides a means of conceptualising the structure and function of social relationships within the individual's social network at any given point in life (Franco & Levitt, 1998). The model departs from a lifecycle perspective and sees individuals as embedded in a personal network that gives and receives support. This aspect of a life cycle is important to understand social support. Our needs and living conditions evolve as we move through our lives. The form and amount of support on a

given place in a given time strongly depends on the needs and circumstances, past influences, present and future (Khan & Antonucci, 1980).

The Convoy Model of social relations is presented as an alternative to traditional approaches that fail to capture the complexity of social relationships across time and context, with a special emphasis on emotional closeness (Levitt 2005). The model indicates that a network of relationships moves with a person throughout his or her lifetime, changing in structure but providing continuity in the exchange of support (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt 1993). Within the Convoy Model, structural and functional properties of social networks can be described as they are at any given point in time but also in terms of changes that take place across time and situation. The term 'convoy' rather than 'network' is used to capture both the protective function and the dynamic nature of a social network as it moves with the individual through the life cycle (Levitt, 2005).

To define the social convoy empirically, Kahn and Antonucci (1980) developed a network diagram consisting of three concentric circles to represent a visual image of the convoy (see Figure 1). Individuals are asked to arrange their network members according to their closeness and importance to the individual within their network (Franco & Levitt, 1998). The convoy measure involves placing close and important individuals into three concentric circles surrounding an individual and representing three levels of closeness: close, closer, closest (Antonucci et al., 2013).

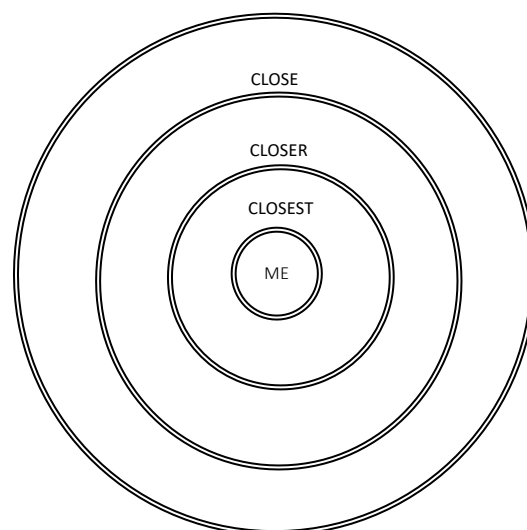


Figure 1. The Convoy Model of social relations by Khan and Antonucci (1980)

#### 4.3. Social networks and young newcomers

Research investigating young newcomers' personal experiences after their arrival to host-societies (Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping, & Goldman, as quoted in O'Toole Thommessen, Corcoran, & Todd, 2015; Wernesjö, 2015) and their support needs (Stewart et al., 2008) are scarce. Young newcomers may strongly vary on their cultural background, the reasons and mode of migration, the means available for them and the context wherein they settle (Hynie et al., 2011). Nevertheless, they all have a rupture in their social network that needs to be (re)build in the new living environment. Upon arrival in a new country, young newcomers cannot simply rely on a strong and supportive network. They are confronted with a multitude of social challenges, broken relationships, new balances within the family or challenges related to their identity (Hynie et al., 2011).

Although important, a one-sided perspective on the past is too often the scope of migration researchers (O'Toole Thomessen et al., 2015; Tyrer & Fazel, 2014), whilst the current context can have a comparable impact on their well-being (Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010; De Haene, Loots, & Derluyn, 2014). Building a supportive network is an important post-migration factor, enhancing feelings of belonging in a new country (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014; Zetter et al., 2006). Additionally, the focus lies too often on young newcomers as individuals, separated from the context where they live in, the networks surrounding them (Chase & Allsopp, 2013) and the mutual relation that occurs between both (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Their well-being should rather be approached from a contextual perspective where individual characteristics play a central role just like the relation with family, social and societal support (Hart, 2009). Forced migration needs to be seen as a social process in which social networks play a central role (Castles, 2003), and contributes to understanding the experiences of young newcomers (Wells, 2011).

The process of establishing supportive ties in the host society is far from self-evident (Ryan et al., 2008), as social networks may be deficient and social relations may be disrupted or devalued in the host country (Stewart et al., 2008). One of the main contributing factors for young newcomers facilitating adaption, well-being and overall quality of life in the asylum country lays in the development of close and meaningful social relations (Berthold, as quoted in Choi, 2014; Carswell et al., as quoted in Choi, 2014; Sierau, Schneider, Nesterko, & Glaesmer, 2019; Strijk et al., as quoted in Choi, 2014). Indeed, supportive networks can positively influence newcomers' feelings of belonging (Stewart et al., 2008).

## 5. Research outline

*"Even among ourselves we don't speak about this past. Instead, we have found our own way of mastering an uncertain future. Since everybody plans and wishes and hopes, so do we. Apart from these general human attitudes, however, we try to clear up the future more scientifically. After so much bad luck we want a course as sure as a gun"* (Arendt, 1943, p. 111).

Although migration is a global phenomenon, still very little is known about the lives and aspirations of those immediately involved, especially young newcomers (Bloch, Sigona, & Zetter, 2014; Omata, 2014). Young newcomers bare tough experiences from the past, impacting their adjustment in their new homes (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006; Hart, 2009). In research, their daily lives have mostly been linked to these past adversities. Additionally, the focus is mainly on young newcomers as individuals, separated from the context where they live in, the networks surrounding them (Chase & Allsopp, 2013) and the mutual relation that occurs between both (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Moreover, young newcomers are framed within a discourse of trauma, loss and vulnerability (Maegusuku-Hewett, Dunkerley, Scourfield, & Smalley, 2007). This stereotype perception of these youngsters as 'youth at risk', a group susceptible for various types of psychological constrains, can affect their self-esteem. This focal point tends to pathologise people with a refugee background (Lustig et al., as cited in Correa-Velez et al., 2010), fails to acknowledge the wholeness of an individual's life, casts individuals as victims of their past, and does not recognise the possibility of new futures (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Experiencing a sense of coherence between the past, the present and the future is important for one's sense of significance in life (Balsera, 2014).

In spite of the fact that, the decision to flee is regularly made with great haste and life goals have been obscured, it can be hard to spread your wings when framed like victims (Muzurovic et al., 2002). Therefore, researchers underline the importance to approach young newcomers not only from a victim perspective but also as potential winners with the ability to develop themselves in a constructive way (Eide & Hjern, 2013; Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, & Mooren, 2016). Their vulnerable position indeed makes part of their life stories (Mels, Derluyn, & Broekaert, 2008), however, this dissertation chooses to focus on the construction of a supportive present and future where young newcomers voice their relationship with this new society. In doing so, this dissertation emphasises on several paradigm shifts. Firstly, a shift from a symptom approach on psychological constrains (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010; De Haene, Loots, & Derluyn, 2014) towards an empowering lens (Van Regenmortel, 2009) on needs and strengths of young newcomers. The idea of empowerment refers to a process in which people increase and enlarge their (individual and collective) potential to act and consequently enrich their lifeworld and autonomise their living conditions (Meurs, 2019). Secondly, it implies a shift from the pre-migration and migration context towards a view on the present and a glimpse on the future. Thirdly, a shift from an exclusive regard on the individual towards a mutual

connection between young newcomers and their supportive environment. An environment that is believed to be essential in the building of new lives (Eide & Hjern, 2013). Fourthly, there is a shift from an approach of young newcomers as foreigners and asylum seekers to a focus on young people (Derluyn, 2011; Maegusuku-Hewett et al., 2007). This dissertation therefore uses a focal point on young newcomers instead of young refugees. This implies a primary focus on their live stage as young people, full-fledged citizens, youngsters in a new environment and young people on a tipping point, the verge to a new society, instead of a focus on status; refugee or asylum seeker.

This dissertation addresses three research gaps related to social networks and social support. Firstly, the complexity by which social support works for different groups of newcomers has been largely overlooked in research (Stewart et al., 2008). A way to deal with this complexity is by using of the Convoy Model of social relations (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). This model has been widely employed in research with adult populations but studies of convoy development in childhood and adolescence have been less frequent (Levitt, 2005). Such studies could lead to vital knowledge for interventions and for the establishment on how to best support these groups at early stages. Secondly, by adding a timely perspective, this dissertation describes how social networks evolve during the first years of residence in urban Belgium. It identifies needs and strengths of newcomers' supportive networks. Thirdly, the voices of newcomer youth are quite absent within existing literature. Few studies have previously enabled newcomer youth to identify and voice what has been helpful in the receiving country (O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015). Some of those qualitative studies have established the important role social networks play in the process of integration, providing both practical and emotional support (Beirens, Hughes, Hek, & Spicer, 2007). Similarly, research focusing on young newcomers has found network building and connectedness, to foster conditions for settlement in the host community and promote a sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence in the future (Beirens et al., 2007; Save the Children, 2000). The four studies in this dissertation build on these insights and are dedicated to the role supportive social networks play in the lives of Accompanied and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (ARM-URM) in the early stages after their arrival in the host country. They aim to identify support needs in the social network of young newcomers, applying the Convoy Model of social relations.

This dissertation:

- 1) Theoretically explores the meaning of citizenship, its impact on young newcomers and the intermediary role of youth work in Europe
- 2) Explores the supportive role of social networks of young newcomers, shortly after arrival in the urban context
- 3) Explores the supportive role of social networks of young newcomers, by applying a timely perspective, three years after arrival in the urban context

Figure 2 provides a schematic overview of this dissertation and its studies. The dissertation is built around three main scopes, based on context and on content. The context-based frame is the EU and the Belgian urban environment. The dissertation applies the European context in order to gain insight in how the transnational impacts on the local. The local are those cities, where a majority of newcomers settle. Therefore, this research is contextualised within cities larger than 40.000 inhabitants in Flanders and Brussels. Nevertheless, the focus is not on the urban or transnational context but on young newcomers in this context. In order to generate knowledge on how young newcomers (re)build their daily lives, this dissertation focusses on the relation between these youngsters and their living environment. The content-based topics are closely connected to the context. The first one relates to citizenship, while the second one relates to social support; both dealing with the connection between the individual and his/her broader urban living environment. Both, reflecting and studying how young newcomers (feel they) belong to their new homes. With citizenship the dissertation focusses on the relation between the nation-state and our globalising world; the balance between citizenship as a formal status, and citizenship as a practice; and the difficult relation of young newcomers with citizenship. More specifically study 1 theoretically explores different citizenship perspectives and concepts in relation to young newcomers and youth work in a European context. Youth work is central to this dissertation because it embodies the paradigm shift from a focus on young newcomers as refugees towards young newcomers as youth. The second content-based point of interest aims to contribute to knowledge on how young refugees create and rebuild a supportive network in their daily lives by reconstituting their social networks. Study 2 and study 3 describe the supportive networks surrounding young newcomers shortly after arrival in urban Belgium. Study 2 analyses the social networks of young newcomers, more specifically URM. Study 3 explores the position of ARM by applying the Convoy Model of social relations of Khan and Antonucci (1980). Study 4 explores the supportive networks of young newcomers three to five years after arrival in urban Belgium. This allows the generation of a broad and profound overview of the establishment of new livings from the very beginning of their arrival up to five years later.

In doing so, this dissertation applies both a top down as a bottom-up perspective to understand the establishment of a new living in urban Belgium. This dissertation additionally creates a link between the individual and the broader context surrounding them; citizenship and social support. Furthermore, citizenship and social support are also connected to each other by their focus on belonging, participation and membership to a local, national or transnational community.

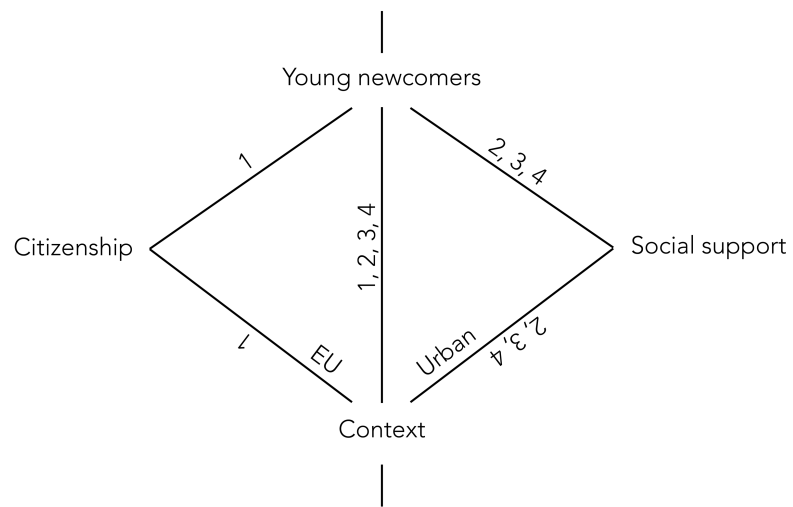


Figure 2. Overview of the dissertation and its studies





## Chapter 2. Methodological approach

The present dissertation stresses on experiences, needs and strengths of young (minor) newcomers (both accompanied and unaccompanied)) who (re)build their lives in urban Belgium. More specifically this dissertation aims to map minor newcomers' experiences and needs related to citizenship theoretically, and to social networks and social support empirically in two stages of interviews. Study one is a theoretical work stressing on the interplay between young newcomers, citizenship and youth work. With this article we conceptualise citizenship from an historical and political perspective. In doing so, creating a framework wherein we can understand the impact of citizenship on the daily lives of young newcomers. Study one originates from an extensive literature review on cosmopolitan citizenship and adds to it a European policy framework and a youth work perspective. Both the policy and the youth work perspective emerged out of a close collaboration with the Flemish administration (department of youth) and the EU-CoE Youth Partnership (partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth).

Studies two, three and four originate from two rounds of data collection with young newcomers. From January to May 2017, 63 young newcomers who recently (max. 18 months) arrived in urban Belgium were interviewed (stage one). From January to May 2018, a second round (stage two) of interviews was conducted with 59 young newcomers who arrived between 2,5 to 5 years ago in urban Belgium. The Human Sciences Ethical Commission of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel approved the research project (Ref: ECHW\_073\_02).

### **1. Research design**

This dissertation is characterized by a qualitative research design, engaging with an interpretivist approach to explore young newcomers' supportive networks. In doing so, this dissertation aims to understand support needs of young newcomers through an examination of the interpretation of those needs by young newcomers themselves (Bryman, 2016). According to Neuman (2011) the interpretivist approach is helpful to emphasize a very close and detailed reading of lived realities. This helps to engage with profound and systematic understandings of young newcomers' needs and strengths.

By supplementary applying a 'critical social science' perspective this dissertation aims not to only understand but also to influence and change the adverse living conditions young newcomers might face (Neuman, 2011). This critical perspective was reached through triangulation (Neuman, 2011). A research triangulation was deployed by engaging with multiple researchers in data collection and analysis. A theoretical triangulation is established by combining theory on how global structures and concepts of citizenship impacts on the individual. This approach is combined with the experiences and needs articulated by young newcomers themselves. In doing so, connecting the individual to the broader context impacting his/her daily reality (De Boer & Smaling, 2011). The close relationship with civil

society and decisionmakers (see list of publications at the end of this dissertation) allows us in line with the critical social science base, to transform results into policy and 'real change' for those immediately involved. This research and dissertation therefore becomes a means and not a goal in itself (Giroux, 2003).

## **2. Procedure and data collection**

The points of interest in this dissertation are not solely derived from literature, an important part is prompted by civil society in Brussels and Flanders. From the very beginning we chose to install a close and mutual relation with more than 60 organisations in the field of youth work, governmental migration agencies and NGO's. This network deepened the research focus, created a confidential relationship with young newcomers and fostered a better flow of the research output towards local policy by integrating results through lectures, memberships of migration organisations and via several working groups such as UNICEF with their 'What do you think report' or the National Commission on the Rights of the Child who provides the official Belgian report concerning the daily lives and needs of young newcomers to the UN. This explorative research network allowed us to engage in a strong and supportive professional network that reflects on its own role and position by taking the voices of young newcomers as a loud hailer for today's and tomorrow's decisions.

Participants were recruited by using a purposive sampling procedure. Throughout this procedure we strived for a broad diversity of participants based on gender, the asylum procedure, city of residence in Belgium and country of origin. In order to reach and recruit participants, a diverse set of organisations, all involved in the daily life of young newcomers were contacted. The building of this network occurred through meetings, info sessions and individual appointments with young newcomers and employees. The partner organisations also fostered the link with the parents when possible. Participants were recruited via reception facilities for asylum seekers, such as the Red Cross and the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil). Others were included by local and small-scale reception facilities, reception schools and youth work organisations. The inclusion criteria were refined by selecting participants between 13 and 18 years old, who reside no longer than 18 months in a Belgian city larger than 40,000 inhabitants for stage one. Stage two selected participants between 13 and 18 years old, who reside between 2,5 to 5 years in a Belgian city larger than 40,000 inhabitants. The inclusion of the urban context is motivated by the role cities play as hubs and cross points in migration processes (De Winter, 2015). Superdiverse cities are home to a majority of youngsters with roots in migration (Mansouri & Johns, 2017). Cities have become a place where newcomers do want to establish a new living (Schillebeeckx & Albeda, 2014; Siemiatycki, 2005). Today, almost two out of three refugees who arrived to a new country, lives in urban areas (UNHCR, 2019). Exclusion criteria were based on the psychosocial well-

being of newcomers (estimated by the partnering reception facilities) and on the personal decline of young newcomers and/or their parent(s) or guardian.

Once the participants agreed to participate in the research an informed consent was signed by the youngster and their parents or guardian (available in Dutch, French, Arabic, Pashto or Dari). They were informed about the voluntary nature of their involvement, their right to refuse to participate and the confidentiality of their responses. Once the participants signed the informed consent form, trained researchers administered a qualitative in depth-interview with open-ended questions in the language and location of the participants' choice. In 15 out of 122 interviews an interpreter attended the interviews. The qualitative data collection in both stages comprised questions on experiences regarding participants' social networks and social support by using the Convoy Model of social relations of Khan and Antonucci (1980). In order to explore the social networks and supportive relationships, a hierarchical mapping procedure using the Convoy Model of social relations (Khan & Antonucci, 1980), being the diagram of concentric circles (Khan & Antonucci, 1980) was conceived. The purpose of the circles diagram is to provide participants with a framework to describe their social support networks. This mapping method does not assume a structure about who is or should be a network member. Rather, it enables participants to describe their social support networks according to their personal feelings of closeness (Antonucci, 1986). Convoy members are mapped from the participants perspective on the basis of affective closeness and importance. Support functions tap the affective, affirmative, and aid domains specified in the Convoy Model of social relations (Levitt, 2005).

We did not aim to test the model; instead, we use it as a conceptual lens to describe and interpret the composition, function and adequacy of ARM's social networks. In doing so, this model, serves as a starting point for our qualitative analysis, which focuses on the (re)building of social supportive networks shortly after arrival in urban Belgium.

### **3. Participants' characteristics**

The demarcation of participants, as listed below, is in line with registration numbers of OCGRS (2017) at the eve of the fieldwork on the countries of origin of newcomers to Belgium. More than half of all refugees worldwide originate out of three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia (UN, 2016). For studies 2, 3 and 4 two rounds of qualitative data collection were deployed. In stage one qualitative data from 63 participants who recently arrived in urban Belgium were derived. In stage 2 a comparable focus lead to 59 interviews with young newcomers who live around three years in urban Belgium. In the following section a more detailed overview of the participants can be found (Table 1, 2 and 3).

### 3.1. Stage one

Table 1. Characteristics of the interviews, stage one (N = 63)

Average age of participants (min. - max.)	16,5 years (13 years – 18 years)
Average period in Belgium (shortest period – longest period)	16 months (2 months – 18 months)
Total duration of interviews	71 hours
Average duration of the interviews (min. - max.)	68 minutes (50 minutes - 102 minutes)
Number of interviews with interpreter	14

Table 2. Characteristics of the interviews, stage two (N = 59)

Average age of participants (min. - max.)	17 years (13 years – 19 years)
Average period in Belgium (shortest period – longest period)	35 months (26 months – 68 months)
Total duration of interviews	94 hours
Average duration of the interviews (min. - max.)	95 minutes (45 minutes - 199 minutes)
Number of interviews with interpreter	1

Table 3. Characteristics of the participants, stage one and stage two (N = 122)

Gender	Woman	29
	Men	93
Country of origin	Afghanistan	52
	Syria	38
	Eritrea	5
	Palestine	2
	Albania	3
	Iraq	5
	Indonesia	1
	Romania	1
	Iran	3
	Cameroon	1
	Nigeria	1
	Somalia	5
	Libya	1
	Sri Lanka	1
	Guinea	1
	Congo DRC	1
	Pakistan	1
City of residence	Aalst	6
	Antwerp	19
	Bruges	1
	Brussels	17
	Dendermonde	14
	Ghent	9
	Hasselt	4
	Kapellen	5
	Kortrijk	3
	Leuven	8
	Mechelen	12
	Ostend	4
	Sint-Niklaas	9
	Turnhout	11
Asylum procedure	Subsidiary protection	27
	Refugee status	58
	Ongoing procedure	34
	No recognition	3
Status	URM	61
	ARM	61

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## PART 2. EXPERIENCES, NEEDS AND STRENGTHS OF YOUNG NEWCOMERS WHO (RE)BUILD THEIR LIVES IN URBAN BELGIUM

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### Chapter 3. Young refugees, citizenship, cosmopolitanism and youth work policy – theoretical discussion on the current trends in Europe\*

This analytical paper seeks to address the link between young refugees, citizenship and youth work policy within a European framework. The aim is to build upon the emerging reflection on how to ensure faster and more efficient integration and participation of young refugees in Europe.

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Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2016). Young refugees, citizenship, cosmopolitanism and youth work policy – theoretical discussion on the current trends in Europe. *Journeys to a new life: Partnership between the European Commission and the council of Europe in the field of youth*. <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/refugees-seminar?inheritRedirect=true>

## 1. Introduction

It is often reported that the number of people living outside their country of birth is now the highest in history (Isin, 2009). The UN estimates that in 1910 roughly 33 million people lived in countries other than their own; by 2000 that number had reached 175 million. During the same period, the world's population grew threefold, from 1.6 billion to 5.3 billion. Migration, by contrast, increased almost sixfold over the course of these 90 years. Strikingly, more than half of the increase of migrants from 1910 to 2000 occurred in the last three decades of the 20th century (UN International Migration Report as cited in Benhabib, 2005).

Over the last 15 years, international migration has continued to grow, from 222 million migrants in 2010 to 245 million in 2015. Nearly one third of all international migrants live in Europe (76 million) (UN International Migration Report, 2015). In 2014, the total number of refugees in the world was estimated at nearly 20 million (UN International Migration Report, 2015). Today, more than 40 million persons are displaced within countries, while the number of refugees and asylum seekers has surpassed 24 million (UN General Assembly, 2016).

We have many categories to describe those living abroad: foreigner, migrant, irregular migrant, illegal alien, immigrant, wanderer, refugee, émigré, exile, nomad, sojourner and many more (Nyers as cited in Isin, 2009). The difference between immigrants and refugees can be fuzzy, as there is often similarity in the settings from which both groups originate (immigrants and refugees may both come from places facing severe difficulties). As in all migratory movements, the decision to leave has two elements: a context and a trigger (Muzurovic, Tipping, Mental, & Goldman, 2002). The general context is well known (widespread poverty, economic hardship, political instability, insecurity, poor educational prospects, ...). Specific triggers for departure occur in the direct environment (family conflict, violent incidents, the death of a relative, or threats made against the family). A key factor specifically attracting young people to Europe is the aspiration to live in a country that offers freedom, respect for human rights, guaranteed work and education; all improving one's day-to-day life (Mougne, 2010; Fournier, 2015).

There are, however, two main differences between refugees and migrants: the reason behind their movement and the urgency of departure. Immigrants generally move toward the dream of a better life and the realisation of life goals unattainable in their home country. Their migration is often the result of a well-considered decision-making process, informed by the experience of others who have gone before (Valdés, 1991 as cited in Muzurovic et al., 2002). Refugees, on the other hand, are by definition moving away from situations of persecution, and their primary goals are often those of immediate physical safety and survival. The decision to flee is regularly made with great haste. Left behind are valued personal possessions, as well as the less tangible life goals, aspirations, and projects towards the future (Muzurovic et al., 2002).



Although the refugee label claims to be apolitical, through law and policy making, it establishes highly politicised interpretations (Wood, 1985 as cited in Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010), where being granted the status is difficult for most forced migrants (Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010). As argued by Zetter (1988 as cited in Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010), this label both stereotypes and institutionalises a certain status. In doing so, the refugee becomes affected by various simultaneous interpretations. Despite the legal definition (as stipulated by the Geneva Convention of 1951), refugees also become subject to political instrumentalisation (Cole, 2016). In doing so, narrowing “the refugee” to a rhetorical figure over “the refugee” as a physic-legal person for whom protection is a right. On the other hand, there is also a focus on refugees and specifically young refugees based on their status rather than approaching them as young persons in vulnerable situations (Derluyn, 2011).

And so, one of the key effects of global migration is that people move to places where they do not – yet – have a full formal recognition or citizenship, consequently facing exclusion from participation in key aspects of society (Smith & Guarnizo, 2009). For displaced people, citizenship is crucial (Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006; Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010), and can be seen as a fundamental part of refugee integration (Bloch, 2000 as cited in Stewart & Mulvey, 2014). While the significance of formal state citizenship has been somewhat obscured in recent decades by a focus on other forms of transnational citizenship (as we will see in this paper), the perspectives of young people from refugee backgrounds still largely depend on it (Nunn, McMichael, Gifford, & Correa-Velez, 2015) for their access to personal security, protection under the law and equal access to social and political rights, but nevertheless remaining sceptical about whether formal citizenship will result in equal treatment. This mistrust is based on the discrepancy between the expectations and promises of equity and fairness associated with citizenship, and of the reality in which many naturalised migrants are subject to discrimination, oppression and exploitation (Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006). Inequality, based on ethnicity may cause recent immigrant youth to do less well than the youth of previous waves (Gonzales, 2011).

## **2. Citizenship: a marriage between rights and membership**

Let us briefly take a look in our rear-view mirror and return to the very roots of citizenship and its importance for young migrants and refugees. Citizenship stresses a multitude of aspects related to the concept: claims, a status and a practice, empowerment, formal and substantive access to society, national and transnational features (Isin, 2009). Citizenship is about the enjoyment of rights of various kinds, about political and civic engagements, about experiences of collective identity and solidarity, and about the possession of a formal national membership status (Lim, 2013). Citizenship has manifold meanings because it is defined in relation to its Roman and Athenian ancestors (Tully, 2008). This is where, according to several scholars, the cradle of our two main conceptions of citizenship can be traced back to (Bloemraad, Kortweg,

& Yurdakul, 2008; Bowden, 2003; Dunne, 2006; Isin & Turner, 2007; Leung, 2009; Leung, 2013; Schattle, 2005).

The core idea in the Athenian polis was to enable citizens to live a good life (Schattle, 2005), and in order to do so, Aristotle fostered participation and deliberation among citizens who knew and trusted each other (Bowden, 2003). Membership and participation were key aspects in this context (Dunne, 2006).

The Roman approach was more formalistic and stressed an extensive mix of rights and duties in order to protect and engage the citizen of a bounded polis. The Roman ideal of citizenship was a legal status, where citizens enjoyed defined rights and immunities (rights to residence, travel, security, welfare, ownership, ...) in exchange for some degree of loyalty, of which many are still present in modern societies (Dunne, 2006).

The Roman and Athenian heritage reflects upon today's tensions between citizenship as participation, and citizenship as a legal status. It also reflects a continuing struggle with the exclusionary aspects of citizenship (Invernizzi & Milne, 2005), particularly those based on gender, class, ethnicity and religion (Bloemraad, Kortweg, & Yurdakul, 2008). This is what Lister (2004 as cited in Invernizzi & Milne, 2005) describes as the *"Janus-faced nature of citizenship, which operates simultaneously as a mechanism of both inclusion and exclusion and also as a language of both discipline and resistance"*. Young refugees are also subjects of these exclusionary aspects. Young refugees also face, amongst other inequalities, a double exclusion from citizenship: first as young people and second based on ethnicity (Cockburn, 1998).

Kabeer (2005) brings to the fore the ideal of citizenship from the standpoint of those being excluded. Because this ideal is being articulated by groups who have experienced exclusion, these values are closely linked to a vision of what a more inclusive society is to be. Four values of inclusive citizenship emerged. First, justice, articulated in terms of "when is it fair for people to be treated the same and when is it fair that they should be treated differently?" Second, recognition "of the intrinsic worth of all human beings, but also recognition of and respect for their differences". Third, self-determination or "people's ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives". And fourth, solidarity, that is, "the capacity to identify with others and to act in unity with them in their claims for justice and recognition" (Kabeer, 2005 as cited in Lister 2007). This value could be said to reflect a horizontal view of citizenship which accords as much significance to the relations between citizens as to the vertical relationship between the state and the individual (Lister, 2007).

Kabeer's focus is a counterpart definition for the formal features of citizenship (rights and duties) around the state. This analogue definition is what Cockburn (2005 as cited in Invernizzi & Milne, 2005) calls *"membership of a community in which one lives one's life and involves in*

*the struggle for membership and participation in the community*". This allows Cockburn to say that *"If young people are to play an active role in shaping the future direction of society and thus the common good, they must be able to participate in the decision-making that affects their lives"*. Rather than passive recipients of the legal status of citizenship, conveyed by nation states, citizens also define citizenship through practices and in relationships with others and communities (Moosa-Mitha, 2005 as cited in Larkins, 2013). It is one's ability to realise *"genuine participation in the larger political, social, economic, and cultural community"* (Gordon & Lenhardt, 2007 as cited in Lim, 2013).

This can be seen as a broadening of the scope of citizenship to different kinds of citizenship and conceptualising it as a practice in addition to a "thing" or a legal status (Aleinikoff & Bosniak as cited in Lim, 2013). This has led to a definition of citizenship in which the emphasis is more on norms, practices, meanings, identities (Isin & Turner, 2002) and experienced "belonging" (Lim, 2013). Although refugees tend to experience belonging in relation to their access to rights and services, there is also a strong desire to belong in this more emotional and culturally meaningful way – a desire which is blocked by experiences of exclusion by the mainstream population and cultural differences (Fozdar & Hartley, 2014).

Rights, duties and membership are the building blocks of citizenship, and this gives it a universal status (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003). Everyone is understood to be a citizen by virtue of membership of the community or nation. Membership entails belonging, and belonging is a pacemaker for participation. Dunne (2006) sees the freedom to participate with others in the joint practice of self-government, solidarity among citizens, and equality, as crucial in the conception of citizenship. Full equality is not only endorsed by membership but also highly based on the rights approach (Marchetti, 2008). For Marshall (1950 as cited in Bloemraad et al., 2008), the notion of full equality sees rights not only as valuable in themselves, but also as the means to ensure the solidarity necessary for the functioning of a social and democratic welfare state. In this way, citizenship rights and legal status promote participation and a sense of belonging, which in turn facilitates social cohesion and common political projects, but nevertheless leaves unresolved how to transform formal into substantive equality (Bloemraad et al., 2008), fairness, economic well-being, dignity (Heisler, 2005), or political participation (Bloemraad et al., 2008). The social climate of the host community plays a key role for young refugees in becoming established in the host society, and in the development of a positive relationship with the broader host community (Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett 2010). Young people tend to place a high premium on this constructive social participation in the local community, which for many represents the essence of good citizenship (Lister et al. 2003), expressed by the degree of connectedness with the community (Barber, 2009; Jans, 2004). This connectedness is linked to membership, defined as the feeling of being part of a territorial or relational community. Young people want to influence through participation, making their own contribution in a reciprocal relationship. Young people seek a

positive relation between themselves and the community, where they can satisfy needs as a group or as community members; and where they look for a shared emotional connection, defined by the sharing of a common history, significant events, or the quality of social ties (McMillan & Chavis, 1986 as cited in Barber, 2009).

The concept of citizenship has expanded to embody what Gordon and Lenhardt (2007 as cited in Lim, 2013) have described as one's ability to realise "*genuine participation in the larger political, social, economic, and cultural community*". For migrants and refugees, the acquisition of citizenship is a condition for equal participation in the economic, social and political spheres of the receiving society. This desire for equal participation has to be seen in the context of their experiences with discrimination (Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006), and their will to transform themselves from subjects into rightful citizens (Isin, 2009).

### **3. Europe and youth participation: a tool for citizenship**

The positive effects of participation, both on a personal and a societal level, have increased the importance of participation on every single policy level (Roggemans, Smits, Spruyt, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2013). Participation (social, societal and policy) is seen as a bridge to adoption and integration in society and as valuable for citizenship (Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006). As formulated by the Council of Europe (2003): "*The active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional levels is essential if we are to build more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies. Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election ... Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space, and the opportunity – and where necessary the support – to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society*".

Since the European Commission's White Paper (A new impetus for European Youth 2001), much attention has been paid to youth participation, making this aim part of Europe's genetic code. This was achieved through resolutions of the European Parliament fostering participation, social integration, and social inclusion of young people in Europe. In a subsidiary way the Commission decided to affiliate in this domain, due to the low rates of engagement of young people in public life; in doing so, reinforcing what had already been undertaken by member states (Reding, "A contract for the future"). In Viviane Reding's introduction to the White Paper, noticeable links to "citizenship as participation" are to be found: The young people consulted see themselves as responsible citizens and as such they wish to be further involved in the life of their community and claim a place in the process of formulating policies. The consultation of these young people clearly expresses a sense of "citizenship from below", a completion of citizenship that is conceived through participation (by taking part in the life of schools, neighbourhoods, associations and so on). As we have seen in the previous section,

participation is one of the key aspects of citizenship where young people engage in claiming and expanding their rights and access to the citizenry. This participatory reflex reflects the "passive" or "active" nature of citizenship – that is, whether it is state-driven or not (developed from above or below) (Turner, 1990). Participation is catalogued as "citizenship from below", in the sense of active political participation or contestation (Bauböck, 2009). Rather than passive recipients of the legal status of citizenship, conveyed by nation states, citizens define citizenship through practices and in relationships with others and communities (Moosa-Mitha, 2005 as cited in Larkins, 2013). It is one's ability to realise "*genuine participation in the larger political, social, economic, and cultural community*" (Gordon & Lenhardt, 2007 as cited in Lim, 2013).

The White Paper expresses a notable active interpretation of citizenship, where young people see themselves as claimers and not as eligible receivers of rights. For the European youth policy makers, participation is also seen as a generator of active citizenship. In doing so, the European youth policy in 2001 (by the adoption of the White Paper) is at the more passive side of citizenship. The White Paper firmly stresses participation as a tool for policy making via different kinds of consultation of young people; through one-off or ongoing, spontaneous or organised events. European youth policy makers additionally see information on European affairs as a key aspect in the active participation of young people in Europe, and especially minorities and grass-roots movements.

The fostered participation described in the White Paper seeks a balance between the will of young people to engage in European democracy on the one hand, but also their fear and mistrust of the institutional structures and negative outcomes of globalisation surrounding them. Both aspects (information and participation in policy making) are valuable from the standpoint of citizenship, because they include the stakeholders in decision making, but the broader focus of citizenship (rights), granting young people and certainly excluded groups the needed access to the citizenry, is less visible.

The EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018 is in line with the White Paper and stresses the potential of participation by encouraging young people to actively engage in society. The EU Youth Strategy renewed the framework for European co-operation in the youth field for the period 2010-2018. This resolution seeks to encourage young people to participate in the democratic process and in society. Key words are dialogue with young people in the shaping of national policies, the participation of under-represented groups, and engaging young people from an early age in participation processes.

In this Youth Strategy 2010-2018 there is a strong focus on youth work. The first step for this implementation was the Declaration of the 1<sup>st</sup> European Youth Work Convention in 2010. The convention introduces a holistic vision of youth work as a social practice (and later on – in the

2<sup>nd</sup> convention – as “supporting youth agency”); in doing so, stressing a broad range of activities (social, cultural, educational and political), maximising participation by, with, and for young people. Youth work now became a practice defined by youth, researchers and policy makers, based on participation and empowerment, but also built on global arguments and values such as human rights, anti-discrimination and tolerance.

Whilst the White Paper, the Resolution and the 1<sup>st</sup> convention saw participation as a central target, a goal in itself, and as a means for empowerment and inclusion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention made a remarkable addition. The precursors of the 2<sup>nd</sup> convention drew on notions of citizenship as participation, whilst the 2<sup>nd</sup> convention recognises inequalities and additionally stresses the Roman conception of citizenship and the enjoyment of rights. In doing so, it made efforts to transform the formal access of young people to the citizenry into substantive access to society. When magnified, however, the translation of the above goals untangles an opposite focus. Like the previous conventions, this paper continues to address inequalities by reinforcing youth, and particularly youth at risk by making them stronger, more autonomous, active and responsible in order to reflect and resist on their circumstances.

This attention is also highlighted in “Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union”, with three central tenets from the perspective of youth, namely a focus on young people, personal development and voluntary participation. These goals are of great value in the empowerment of youth throughout Europe but are less consistent in the emancipation of excluded youth and the global challenges and inequalities they face in relation to their access to citizenship. There are, however, common rights in the European context that are potential lead outs for young refugees’ emancipation. There is for instance, the famous reference in the Treaty of the European Union in Articles 165 and 166 TFEU as the basis for EU action in the youth field. The inclusion of “youth” as a concept in EU policy dates back to the Treaty of Maastricht, which entered into force in 1993. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which has the same legal value as the treaties (Article 6 TEU), includes an article on children’s rights (Article 24). Article 165 TFEU provides for Union action in order to encourage the development of youth exchanges and exchanges between socio-educational instructors, that is youth workers, and – with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty – to encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe. Article 166 enables the EU to implement a vocational training policy to support and supplement the action of the Member States. It tasks the Union with facilitating access to vocational training and encouraging mobility of instructors and trainees, particularly young people. In addition to these articles, children and young people benefit from EU policies in other fields, such as education, training and health, or in relation to the rights and protection of children and young people.

This paper so far has argued that citizenship, both as a practice and as a formal recognition, are important in the lives of young refugees. When analysing the successive European Youth Work Conventions, we see a strong emphasis on the empowerment of youth and their participation in decision making. However, the different conventions overlook the counterpart of citizenship, namely the formal and substantive access to the citizenry young people and especially refugees have or lack. There seems to be little notice of refugees' emancipation in the subsequent conventions. In the following section, we want to bring cosmopolitan citizenship to the fore as a powerful moral argument for an open and more inclusive society and, in doing so, providing youth work with ethical munition regarding refugees' emancipation and empowerment.

#### 4. Refugees and the cosmopolitan argument

Refugees are a problem for traditional definitions of citizenship. They break the state-nation-territory triad that conventionally and formally defines citizenship in refugees' home and host states (Nyers, 2007 as cited in Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010). History, moreover, demonstrates that refugees have continually challenged the illusory stability of the nation-state polity throughout the 20th century (Long, 2011).

Migration, whether it is transnational or international, voluntary or forced, legal or not, highlights the increasing interconnectedness of polities, economies and societies (Heisler, 2015). This increasing flow of people, culture, economic and political interests led to a range of "translocational" social processes. These not only affect those who are directly "on the move", but also the locales in which they settle, converting them to translocational spaces, and so affecting in different ways everyone who lives within these spaces (Anthias, 2008), hence dramatically changing the local, national and international context where citizenship is defined, granted and enacted (Saunders, 2010). In doing so, the growth of transnationalisation has called into question fixed conceptions of citizenship and its spatial dimensions and grounds (Jacobson, 1996 as cited in Schuster & Solomos, 2002; Kallio & Mitchell, 2016; Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010). The state and the national polity, therefore, no longer appear as the self-evident loci of citizenship (Kallio & Mitchell, 2016). Migration, globalisation, refugee flows and human rights have enlarged citizenship to a transnational matter (Isin & Turner, 2002), and the notion has acquired meanings that go well beyond the formal rights-based status only (Kallio & Mitchell, 2016).

Like citizenship, its global counterpart, cosmopolitan citizenship, is rooted in the ancient world, where the Stoics elaborated the concept (Leung, 2009). According to Held (2005 as cited in Leung, 2009), the Stoics were the first to refer to themselves as cosmopolitans in their affirmation of man's membership of the universal city rather than a local polis. Asked where he came from, Diogenes of Sinope answered: "*I am a citizen of the world*" (Leung, 2009). For

other Stoics, such as Cicero and Seneca, the world was seen as a single community (Leung, 2013), and the basis of cosmopolitan belonging is the *"equal worth of reason and humanity in every person"* (Leung, 2009), which Hierocles symbolised by the slogan: *"unity amid difference"* (Leung, 2013). Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant, on his turn, was interested in advancing the cause of human progress by working out the best form of global structure, conceived as a pacific federation of states bound by cosmopolitan right, thus turning each individual into a *"citizen of a universal state of mankind"* (Leung, 2009; Leung, 2013). At the same time, Kant was also aware of the sovereign will of the Nation State and its perfect right not to be coerced into entering such a world republic. The compromise was to limit cosmopolitan right to the condition of universal hospitality, meaning *"the right of the stranger not to be treated with hostility when arriving on someone else's territory"* (Leung, 2009).

Contemporary cosmopolitanism keeps on building upon the Stoic/Kantian tradition, but regards it as more relevant in today's world, where global problems cannot be resolved by bounded communities, and where the sovereignty of states is challenged by cross-border flows of information, finance, goods and people (Benhabib, 2005; Brown, 2002; Delanty, 2000; Dower, 2003; Held, 1995; Hutchings & Danreuther, 1999; Linklater, 2007 as cited in Hoerschelmann & Refaie, 2014). Cosmopolitan citizenship is about a vision of global justice that focuses on the welfare of the individual regardless of his or her geographical or cultural location (Leung, 2013). Kant's arguments were of great influence on the shape of international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but an essential part of what Kant saw as necessary for a global legal order is usually neglected. What is overlooked is Kant's emphasis on the status of individuals under what he called *"cosmopolitan law"* (Kleingeld, 1998). Pogge (1992 as cited in Bowden, 2003) identified three central Kantian tenets common to cosmopolitanism: (1) individualism – the primary unit of concern is the individual rather than any other sub-groupings, nations or states; (2) universality – the primacy of the individual as the central unit of concern is afforded to all human individuals without exception; and (3) generality – the primary concern for the individual is extended to all humanity. One's concern for others does not stop at the border, nor is it the privilege of only those who share one's own ethnicity, religion, or other features held in common.

In this context, cosmopolitan law is not concerned with the interaction between states, but with the status of individuals in their dealings with states of which they are not citizens. Moreover, it is concerned with the status of individuals as human beings, rather than as citizens of states (Kleingeld, 1998).

Kant's theory invites the citizens of separate states to have a deeper moral concern for human beings elsewhere, providing a bridge to transnational citizenship (Linklater, 1998). The claims of refugees on the protection of other states is founded on loyalties superseding territorial allegiances and resting on humanitarian solidarity. Refugees have always embodied the cosmopolitan ideal; their appeal to humanitarian principles resonates within broader calls for



global citizenship (McKinley, 2009). World citizens remain members of bounded communities, but the act of imagining themselves as participants in a universal society in which all human beings are respected as ends in themselves places powerful moral constraints on the wrongful exercise of state power (Linklater, 1998). It is morally desirable and politically possible to uncouple citizenship from the state, just as citizenship was detached from the city (Chandler, 2003; Linklater, 1998), and extend it from the nation to humankind as a whole (Chandler, 2003).

Breaking down distinctions between citizens and aliens and building institutional arrangements which provide outsiders with opportunities for representation and voice (Linklater, 1998), within new forms of political arrangements dedicated to a world political system (Anthias, 2008), are necessary responses to the contemporary problems of national democracy (Linklater, 1998). The pluralisation of the demos would be more consistent than a mere translation of the national demos into global or European demos, which could only ever reproduce national logic on a larger scale (Lacroix, 2015). The point is thus not to reconstitute sovereign authority over a wider territorial domain but to promote multiple sites of political responsibility which represent transnational allegiances as well as loyalties to nation states. The sovereign state, therefore, cannot claim to be the only relevant moral community (Linklater, 1998). Since the issues at stake (migration, transnationalism) are global in kind, an adequate response cannot be other than equally global (Marchetti, 2009).

Various images of Europe defend widening the boundaries of political community to bring citizens and aliens together as equal associates with transnational networks of joint rule. They envisage the practice of universalising legal and political rights in the absence of morally relevant differences between persons (Linklater, 1998) and the banality to think of the world in terms of naturally divided nations (Billing, 1995 as cited in Andreouli & Howarth, 2013). They are alert to the need to combine the logic of universalisation with measures which combat economic and cultural exclusion. These visions of Europe imagine a condition in which supranational institutions underwrite the legal, political, social and cultural rights of all European citizens (Linklater, 1998).

Since the Treaty of Amsterdam, signed in 1997, EU member countries have been aware of the need to harmonise conditions of entry and naturalisation in member countries, embedding immigration and asylum policies within an EU framework. The resolutions of the European Council, reached in Tampere, Finland in 1999, echoes this commitment to European integration, based on respect for human rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law. The subsequent Treaty of Maastricht made provisions for a "Union citizenship", where members of Union states can settle anywhere in the Union.

The obverse side of membership of the Union is a sharper delineation of the conditions of those who are non-members. The rising movement of asylum seekers from different parts of Africa and the Middle East to the European Union has made the national borders of European states extremely visible. Even in the context of Schengen neighbours, some of these national borders are now being physically fenced (Benhabib, 2002). Based on various risk assessments and statistics concerning their countries of origin, but also on the receiving countries' estimated capacities to take asylum seekers, European states are dividing the incoming migrants into potential insiders and definite outsiders (Kallio & Mitchell, 2016). Key components of citizenship have located its definition within either status or practice, as membership of a nation state or as being a bearer of rights. Cosmopolitanism, in its turn, sees people as belonging to a range of social relations and political and cultural communities across nation states (Anthias, 2008). Within this social process the emphasis is less on legal rules and more on norms, practices, meanings and identities (Isin & Turner, 2002). Nevertheless, the movement towards a human rights basis for citizenship also has a great potential for inclusion, particularly among the many excluded groups (Lister, 1998 as cited in Invernizzi & Milne 2005). Human rights and citizenship have long been closely intertwined (Nash, 2009), and If citizenship is to be understood as a "bundle of rights", then human rights are their translation on a global level (Nash, 2009; Schuster & Solomos, 2002). The contemporary discourse of citizenship fluctuates between nationality and humanity, reflecting heightened attention to diversity and globalisation and the rhetorical strength of human rights (McKinley, 2009).

Cosmopolitanism, as the universalisation of human rights, is represented in an array of UN conventions (Ong, 2006). Since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an international human rights regime has emerged. Benhabib (2005) understands this to mean the development of interrelated and overlapping global and regional regimes that encompass human rights treaties as well as customary and international soft law.

On the downside of the spectrum, the Universal Declaration is silent on states' obligations to grant entry to immigrants, to uphold the right of asylum, and to permit citizenship to alien residents. These rights have no specific addressees and they do not appear to anchor specific obligations of compliance on the part of second and third parties (Benhabib, 2005). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises a limited right to freedom of movement across boundaries: it recognises the right to emigrate (the right to leave a country), but not a right to immigrate (the right to enter a country) (Benhabib, 2005; Marchetti, 2009; Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010). The paradox is that human rights are not connected to duties and they are not based on past contributions. The United Nations Declaration implies obligations, but they are not clearly defined, and there is no sovereign power uniformly to enforce human rights at a global level (Isin & Turner, 2007).

The Geneva Convention of 1951 Relating to the Status of Refugees, and its Protocol, added in 1967, are the second most important international set of legal documents governing cross-border movements (Benhabib, 2005). Under international law, states are obliged to protect non-citizens and those residing within their national borders. Refugees thus have a strong basis for protection against persecution and abuse of their civil and political rights. But their social, economic and cultural rights falling under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) remain very neglected, and host states are often reluctant to award them to refugees. These so-called “second generation” rights include the right to development and self-determination, the right to food, health, education, participation and the right to livelihood more generally (Mehta & Napier-Moore, 2010).

European states are signatories to the Geneva Convention but have demonstrated an increasing unwillingness to accept the growing number of spontaneous asylum seekers or to give them a permanent status (Kofman, 2005). Their reach is limited and uneven, and their intervention intended to be temporary and exceptional. These regimes and organisations are, furthermore, dependent on states for legitimacy, enforcement, access and funding (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004 as cited in Nunn et al., 2015; Isin & Turner, 2007).

Conceiving of cosmopolitan citizenship – summarised – means to seek a possible connection between the national and the transnational, between struggles for equal rights and collective self-determination initiatives. Conceptualising cosmopolitan citizenship means recalling that citizenship is also a status, and not only a form of political action (Lacroix, 2015). Transnational migration brings to the fore the constitutive dilemma at the heart of liberal democracies: between sovereign self-determination claims on the one hand and adherence to universal human rights principles on the other (Benhabib, 2005). It must not be forgotten that such principles exist to augment, not replace, the role of nation states (Haddad, 2008 as cited in Nunn et al., 2015).

Finally, for youth work, this article is an appeal on the political voice of youth work. The participation of young refugees continues to be a natural reflex of the youth sector. But the youth sector as a whole can also keep on challenging systems and hold decision makers and organisations more accountable about the impact their decisions have on the formal and substantive access of young refugees to society at large.

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## Chapter 4. Jonge nieuwkomers in de stad: De permanente werf van sociale netwerken. Het bouwen en herbouwen van netwerken bij Niet Begeleide Minderjarige Vreemdelingen in Belgische steden\*

### **Abstract**

De voorbije twintig jaar is er een groeiende belangstelling voor de rol die sociale netwerken spelen in migratieprocessen. Voor Niet Begeleide Minderjarige Vreemdelingen (NBMV) betekent hun migratie een breuk in hun sociale netwerk. Ze dienen nieuwe netwerken vorm te geven in een nieuwe leefomgeving. Via een doelgerichte heterogene steekproef werden voor dit artikel 34 NBMV geïnterviewd die recent naar België migreerden. Hierbij werd gefocust op hun sociale netwerken en de sociale steun die deze netwerken leveren. Uit de resultaten blijkt dat het leven en netwerk van NBMV voor een belangrijk deel rond het opvangcentrum georganiseerd wordt. Dit lokale netwerk valt niet noodzakelijk samen met de buurt of de stad waar jongeren wonen, maar valt veeleer samen met het formele netwerk dat jongeren ondersteunt. Hierbij worden nauwelijks linken gelegd naar de ruimere samenleving. Deze lokale verankering zorgt voor een bereikbaar netwerk, waar NBMV veel contact mee hebben en steun uit halen. De vele verhuisbewegingen naar verschillende opvangcentra zorgen er echter ook voor dat netwerken sterk versnipperd raken en dat NBMV net als tijdens hun migratie meermaals moeten investeren in de bouw en heropbouw van een ondersteunend sociaal netwerk.

During the past decades, there is a growing interest in the role social networks play in migration processes. In the case of Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM), the migration movement means a rupture in their social network, forcing them to rebuild new networks in their new environment. 34 URM who recently migrated to Belgium were interviewed, stressing on social networks and social support shortly after arrival. The results demonstrate that the daily lives of URM are structured around the reception facilities, with little links to the neighbourhood or city they are living in. URM's social support networks derive from their formal network. This local embeddedness makes URM's network accessible and supportive, but also homogeneous with little links to the broader society. Due to frequent movements from one reception centre to another, social networks are instable and URM have to regularly invest in the building and rebuilding of their social networks.

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## 1. Introductie

Migratie heeft altijd deel uitgemaakt van de menselijke geschiedenis (International Organization for Migration, 2013). De laatste decennia werden de connecties tussen mensen en plaatsen intenser en bereikte migratie wereldwijd historische aantallen (Schrooten, 2012; United Nations, 2014). Nooit eerder leefden zoveel mensen buiten hun geboorteland als vandaag (Isin, 2009). Ondanks het globale fenomeen dat 'migratie' geworden is, is er bijzonder weinig geweten over het leven en de aspiraties van de betrokken personen (Omata, 2014).

De landen in Noordwest-Europa zijn voor veel vluchtelingen belangrijke bestemmingslanden geworden (Jennissen, 2015). In augustus 2016 verbleven 7.594 minderjarige vluchtelingen (begeleid en niet-begeleid) in de opvangcentra in België. Ze vertegenwoordigen daarmee bijna 1/3<sup>e</sup> van de geregistreerde asielzoekers en vormen zo een belangrijke groep in zowel de hulpverlening als het asiel- en migratiebeleid in België (Kevers & De Haene, 2014).

De voorbije decennia is er een groeiende belangstelling voor de rol die sociale netwerken spelen in migratieprocessen, de vestiging in het nieuwe land en de banden met het thuisland (Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Sidra, 2008). Migranten en vluchtelingen, allen hebben ze een breuk in hun sociale netwerk gemeenschappelijk en dienen ze nieuwe netwerken vorm te geven in hun nieuwe leefomgeving (Hynie, Crooks, & Barragan, 2011).

Sociale netwerken zijn de relaties die mensen met elkaar verbinden (McCabe, Gilchrist, Harris, Afridi & Kyprianou, 2013). De steun die hieruit voortvloeit zorgt voor een gevoel deel uit te maken van een nieuwe samenleving, verhoogt de tevredenheid en de veerkracht (Mels, Derluyn, & Broekaert, 2008, Young, 2001 geciteerd in Stewart, Simich, Shizha, Makumbe, & Makwarimba, 2012) en verkleint tegelijk ook het risico op stress en discriminatie (Stewart et al., 2012).

Sociale netwerken worden ook gezien als de weg waarlangs sociale steun wordt geleverd (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). Hierbij vormt het sociale netwerk de structuur, het skelet van het interactieve proces, en is sociale steun het uiteindelijke doel, het hart of de functie van deze netwerken (Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997). Sociale steun is zo een multidimensionale constructie die op een verschillende manieren gecategoriseerd wordt (Song, Son, & Lin, 2011). De samenstelling van netwerken wordt via een aantal structurele en functionele of relationele dimensies in kaart gebracht. Zo zijn de grootte (het aantal mensen in het sociale netwerk), de bereikbaarheid (de afstand tussen mensen in het netwerk) en de dichtheid van het netwerk (de mate waarin de mensen in het sociale netwerk elkaar kennen), voorbeelden van structurele eigenschappen. Op het relationele niveau wordt vooral naar de duurzaamheid van het netwerk gekeken en de steun die gegeven en gekregen wordt (Valenta, 2008). Hierbij zijn er verschillende vormen van steun mogelijk (House, 1981 geciteerd in Song et al., 2011); emotionele steun (empathie, zorgen voor, vertrouwen, affectie), instrumentele



steun (tastbare hulp, financiële en materiële steun, diensten, werk), informatie (over de leefomgeving, oplossingsgerichte ondersteuning) en beoordelingssteun of appraisal (het krijgen of geven van informatie die helpen in iemands persoonlijk groeiproces). Ryan et al. (2008) voegen hier nog companionship aan toe, het samen tijd doorbrengen met elkaar in een informele, vrijetijdscontext.

De meeste mensen hebben een klein aantal dichte, hechte, intieme relaties en vele honderden meer perifere relaties (Fingerman, 2009). Deze intieme steunrelaties, ook wel 'strong ties' genoemd zijn vooral zeer belangrijke bronnen van emotionele steun. De zwakkere relaties of 'weak ties' zoals toevallige ontmoetingen, leveren vooral instrumentele steun die op langere termijn belangrijk is in de context van integratie (Granovetter, 1973; Rose, Carrasco, & Charboneau, 1998 geciteerd in Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003). Ook al zijn deze 'strong ties' uitermate belangrijk, hebben ook de zwakkere relaties een belangrijke functie in het verhogen van de levenskwaliteit van mensen (Fingerman, 2009) en in het waarborgen van praktische steun en informatie (Wells, 2011).

Al deze aspecten samen, schetsen een volledig beeld over hoe jonge nieuwkomers nieuwe netwerken bouwen, welke steun ze hieruit krijgen of geven en hoe ze oude netwerken onderhouden of heropbouwen (Wells, 2011). Sociale netwerken zijn met andere woorden dynamisch, ze evolueren mee met de noden van nieuwkomers. Noden die bij aankomst sterk kunnen verschillen van noden die ontstaan naargelang nieuwkomers vertrouwder raken met de nieuwe context (Ryan et al., 2008).

Zeker voor jonge nieuwkomers, en in de context van dit onderzoek 'Niet Begeleide Minderjarige Vreemdelingen (NBMV)', hebben deze netwerken een nog centralere rol omdat deze groep jongeren kwetsbaarder is door hun eerdere ervaringen en leefomstandigheden (Mels et al., 2008), meer risico loopt op sociale uitsluiting (Beirens, Hughes, Hek, & Spicer, 2007) en psychische problemen (O'Toole Thommessen, Corcoran, & Todd, 2015). De situatie van NBMV wordt bovendien sterk gekenmerkt door een breuk in hun sociaal netwerk en het verlies van ouderlijke steun (Mels et al., 2008). De sociale steun die nieuwkomers ervaren buiten hun familiale netwerk, zeker voor degenen die belangrijke delen van hun netwerk verloren in hun thuisland is essentieel voor hun welzijn (Simich, 2003).

Ook al wordt de situatie van NBMV gekarakteriseerd door een breuk in hun sociale netwerk, is er weinig geweten over de rol die deze en nieuwe netwerken spelen in het leven van deze groep jongeren (Mels et al., 2008; Wells, 2011). Bovendien zijn studies naar de persoonlijke ervaringen van jonge nieuwkomers kort na aankomst in een nieuw land bijzonder schaars. Kwalitatieve studies over deze onderwerpen kunnen vitale informatie opleveren over hoe deze groep jongeren het best ondersteund kan worden in de eerste periode na aankomst (O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015). De focus van dit onderzoek bouwt verder op de hogerop

beschreven onderzoeksleemtes en heeft zo tot doel om de ervaringen van NBMV in beeld te brengen. Het onderzoek neemt zowel kwantitatieve aspecten van het sociale netwerk (de structuur), als meer kwalitatieve delen van het netwerk (de functie) van NBMV kort na aankomst in België onder de loep.

## 2. Data & methode

### 2.1. Onderzoeksontwerp

Dit artikel kadert binnen een ruimer kwalitatief onderzoeksproject dat een contextueel overzicht geeft van ervaringen, noden en krachten van jonge, minderjarige nieuwkomers (zowel NBMV als Begeleide Buitenlandse minderjarigen) die hun leven (her)opbouwen in Belgische steden. Het gaat hierbij concreet om het in kaart brengen van ervaringen en noden met betrekking tot a) sociale netwerken, en b) sociale steun en c) burgerschap. Tussen januari 2017 en mei 2017 werden hiervoor 63 jonge nieuwkomers die maximaal 18 maanden in stedelijk België wonen geïnterviewd.

Steden spelen namelijk een belangrijke rol als aantrekkingspolen en knooppunten in migratiestromen (De Winter, 2015). Superdiverse steden, zijn het nieuwe thuis voor een meerderheid van de jongeren met wortels in migratie (Mansouri & Johns, 2016; Schillebeeckx & Albeda, 2014). Drie op vijf vluchtelingen leeft vandaag in urbane gebieden (UNHCR, 2016). Dit heeft de socio-culturele mix van de Europese grootsteden grondig veranderd en heeft zo geleid tot etnisch diverse, multiculturele en kosmopolitische steden (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009). Steden zijn binnen dit onderzoek daarom de context waabinnen we de sociale netwerken en sociale steun bij NBMV bestuderen. Dit doen we vanuit de hypothese dat de diversiteit van onze (groot)steden de (her)opbouw van sociale netwerken bij NBMV faciliteert.

Voor dit artikel gebruiken we de 34 interviews met NBMV en wordt er gefocust op hun sociale netwerken en de sociale steun die daaruit voortvloeit. De Ethische Commissie van de Humane Wetenschappen aan de Vrije Universiteit Brussel keurde het onderzoek goed (ref: ECHW\_073\_02).

### 2.2. Procedure en dataverzameling

Voor de rekrutering van de respondenten werden verschillende organisaties gecontacteerd die allen betrokken zijn in het dagelijkse leven van jonge nieuwkomers. Er werden hiertoe vergaderingen, infosessies, individuele afspraken georganiseerd voor jongeren en medewerkers om het onderzoek voor te stellen. De organisaties die meewerkten bij de rekrutering contacteerden indien mogelijk ook ouders en voogden.

Via een doelgerichte heterogene steekproef werden respondenten gerekruteerd. Hierbij werd gestreefd naar voldoende variatie op basis van herkomstland, geslacht, verloop van de asielprocedure en woonplaats in België. 23 jongeren werden via grootschalige opvanginitiatieven van Fedasil en het Rode Kruis geselecteerd. De overige 11 respondenten werden via Lokale en Kleinschalige Opvanginitiatieven (LOI's) betrokken. Hierbij werden de inclusiecriteria voor alle respondenten verder verfijnd naar NBMV tussen 15 en 18 jaar, die maximaal anderhalf jaar in stedelijk België verblijven. De voornaamste exclusiecriteria lagen bij het psychosociaal welbevinden van de jongere (ingeschat door een hulpverlener van de partner organisatie) op het moment van het interview en weigeringen van jongeren of voogden om deel te nemen.

Voorafgaand aan het interview werd een geïnformeerde toestemming (in het Nederlands, Frans, Engels, Arabisch, Pasjtoe of Dari) ondertekend door de deelnemer en zijn of haar voogd. Deelnemers werden hierbij geïnformeerd over de vrijwilligheid van hun deelname, hun recht om een deelname te weigeren en de vertrouwelijkheid van de verkregen informatie. Eenmaal de geïnformeerde toestemming ondertekend, namen getrainde onderzoekers de individuele, semigestructureerde, beschrijvende diepte-interviews af. De interviews werden in de door de respondent verkozen taal en locatie gehouden. Bij zeven interviews werd een sociaal tolk ingezet die tolkte tussen de moedertaal van de jongere en het Nederlands. Alle interviews werden digitaal opgenomen en verbatim getranscribeerd, waarna de opname werd vernietigd en de transcriptie geanonimiseerd. De gemiddelde duur van de interviews bedroeg 68 minuten (met een totale duur van 38 uur).

### 2.3. Eigenschappen van de respondenten

Het huidige onderzoek maakt gebruik van kwalitatieve data van 34 respondenten (zie tabel 1). Om een evenwichtige spreiding tussen grootsteden, centrumsteden en secundaire steden te realiseren, werden respondenten in Aalst (n=2), Antwerpen (n=4), Brussel (n=8), Dendermonde (n=11), Kapellen (n=5) en Leuven (n=4) gerecruteerd. Meer dan de helft van alle vluchtelingen wereldwijd, komen uit slechts drie landen; de Arabische Republiek Syrië, Afghanistan en Somalië (UN, International Migration Report, 2015). De grootste groep respondenten komt uit Afghanistan, gevolgd door Syrië, Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalië, Albanië, Iran en Pakistan. Deze afbakening ligt grotendeels in lijn met cijfers over de herkomstlanden van NBMV van het Commissariaat-Generaal voor de Vluchtelingen en Staatlozen (CGVS, 2017). Gemiddeld waren de respondenten 13 maanden in België (het kortste verblijf is 3 maanden, het langste verblijf is 18 maanden). De gemiddelde leeftijd van de respondenten is 16 jaar (de jongste is 15 jaar oud en de oudste 18 jaar oud) en deze keuze werd gemaakt op basis van cijfers van de Dienst Voogdij (2016) en Fedasil (2016), die aantonen dat de grootste groep NBMV in deze leeftijdscategorie zit. We gebruiken hierbij de cijfers van 2016 omdat dit het jaar was waarin de respondenten in België aankwamen.

Tabel 1. Overzicht respondenten

Respondent	Geslacht	Leeftijd (in jaren)	Land van herkomst	Periode in België (in maanden)
Respondent 1	Man	15	Afghanistan	18
Respondent 2	Man	15	Afghanistan	18
Respondent 3	Man	17	Syrië	17
Respondent 4	Man	16	Afghanistan	12
Respondent 5	Man	17	Afghanistan	12
Respondent 6	Man	16	Afghanistan	12
Respondent 7	Man	17	Eritrea	6
Respondent 8	Man	16	Eritrea	6
Respondent 9	Man	16	Afghanistan	14
Respondent 10	Man	15	Afghanistan	14
Respondent 11	Man	17	Afghanistan	16
Respondent 12	Man	15	Afghanistan	12
Respondent 13	Man	15	Afghanistan	13
Respondent 14	Man	17	Afghanistan	13
Respondent 15	Man	17	Afghanistan	14
Respondent 16	Man	17	Afghanistan	16
Respondent 17	Man	17	Afghanistan	14
Respondent 18	Man	17	Eritrea	3
Respondent 19	Man	17	Syrië	5
Respondent 20	Man	16	Syrië	6
Respondent 21	Vrouw	16	Nigeria	6
Respondent 22	Vrouw	16	Afghanistan	17
Respondent 23	Man	18	Syrië	18
Respondent 24	Vrouw	18	Somalië	18
Respondent 25	Man	16	Syrië	18
Respondent 26	Man	17	Albanië	6
Respondent 27	Man	16	Afghanistan	14
Respondent 28	Man	16	Afghanistan	18
Respondent 29	Man	16	Iran	18
Respondent 30	Man	17	Afghanistan	18
Respondent 31	Man	16	Afghanistan	6
Respondent 32	Man	16	Afghanistan	9
Respondent 33	Man	16	Afghanistan	14
Respondent 34	Man	17	Pakistan	12

## 2.4. Data analyse

Bij het coderen en analyseren van de data werd een combinatie gehanteerd van thematische of inductieve analyse (vertrekkende vanuit de data) en een deductieve analyse (vertrekkende vanuit concepten) of methoden (Cho & Lee, 2014; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Gibbs, 2007; McGraw et al., 2017). Voor de deductieve codering werd een codeboom ontwikkeld op basis van verschillende bronnen die een link maken tussen sociale steun en vluchtelingen (e.g., Behnia, 2003; Beirens et al., 2007; Brown, 2002; Levitt, Weber, & Guacci, 1993): (1) Sociale steun en de structurele dimensie (hoe ziet het sociale netwerk eruit) en (2) sociale steun en haar functionele dimensie (welke ondersteunende rol speelt het sociale netwerk). Binnen deze codeboom werden inductieve codes via sublabels bij de hoofdlabels toegevoegd.

Verskillende onderzoekers werden betrokken bij het coderen. Deze codering verliep individueel, waarbij consensus over de codeboom bereikt werd na overleg met één expert in kwalitatief onderzoek en drie experts in sociale netwerken en sociale steun.

De interviews werden gecodeerd met het software programma MAXQDA12 om de thematische analyses te faciliteren (Baarda et al., 2015; Oliveira, Bitencourt, Teixeira, & Santos, 2013).

## 3. Resultaten

### 3.1. Het sociale netwerk van NBMV in België: de structuur, het skelet

Na een vaak woelige en lange reis, begint de overgrote meerderheid van de respondenten in België zonder ondersteunend netwerk. Tijdens hun reis maken NBMV vaak nieuwe maar hoofdzakelijk tijdelijke netwerken. Ze reizen afwisselend perioden alleen, dan weer in een groep met vrienden of familieleden. De omstandigheden in hun thuisland en/of onderweg zorgen er voor dat familieleden elkaar kwijtraken. Alle in België opgebouwde relaties zijn dan nieuwe relaties die ontstaan in en rond het opvangcentrum waar jongeren verblijven. Deze netwerken zijn doorgaans niet gelinkt aan hun ruimere woonomgeving en stad. Concreet worden de sociale netwerken van NBMV opgebouwd (1) met mensen en organisaties die een formele, professionele rol opnemen in hun leven, (2) met andere nieuwkomers en (3) in de vrijetijd. Eén jongere vertelt dat het niet eenvoudig is om nieuwe contacten te leggen: *"Als je ergens nieuw toekomt is dat echt moeilijk. Je komt niemand tegen, alles is nieuw maar je hoopt dat dat gaat veranderen"* (respondent 24).

(1) In België zijn er heel wat diensten ontwikkeld om NBMV op te vangen, te ondersteunen en te begeleiden. Het formele netwerk verwijst naar de professionele relatie tussen respondenten en deze dienstverleners: voogden, advocaten, de opvangcentra, integratie- en inburgeringsorganisaties, Openbare Centra voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn (OCMW), Centra

Algemeen Welzijnswerk (CAW), het Onthaalonderwijs voor Anderstalige Nieuwkomers (OKAN) of Dispositif d'accueil des élèves primo-arrivants (DASPA), jongerenorganisaties en vrijwilligers. Dit formele netwerk is vaak lokaal verankerd in de onmiddellijke (woon)omgeving van de NBMV, betrokken en aanwezig in het dagelijks leven van deze jongeren. Vooral de toegewezen voogd, de individuele begeleider en indien van toepassing vrijwillige steunfiguren (een peter en meter) zijn belangrijke mensen in het leven van deze jongeren.

Via de Dienst Voogdij hebben alle respondenten een wettelijke vertegenwoordiger, een voogd, maar is er een grote diversiteit in de plaats die voogden innemen in het sociale netwerk van NBMV en de frequentie waarmee ze elkaar zien. Voor heel wat respondenten is hun voogd een belangrijke vertrouwensfiguur. Het is iemand die zowel praktisch (begeleiding en ondersteuning doorheen de asielprocedure), als emotioneel betrokken is (iemand waarop ze kunnen rekenen en terugvallen bij afwezigheid van hun ouders): *"Mijn voogd is veel voor mij, zij weet alles over mij"* (respondent 22). Daarnaast zijn er verschillende jongeren die verwijzen naar hun voogd, maar hen geen centrale positie geven in hun netwerk, noch er op regelmatige basis contact mee hebben: *"Yes, I have a tutor. But I barely see her. I don't know why (...) She is far away for me"* (respondent 21).

De plaats die individuele begeleiders innemen in het leven van respondenten is veel rechtlijniger. Ze zijn belangrijk en hun rol wordt gewaardeerd. Alle NBMV vermelden begeleiders van onthaal- en opvangcentra in hun sociale netwerk. Meestal gaat het dan om de individuele begeleider die deze jongeren intensief begeleiden en van daaruit een dichte en belangrijke plaats innemen in het formele netwerk van NBMV: *"Ik heb geen huis nu. Mijn begeleiders zijn nu zoals mijn mama of papa"* (respondent 2).

Opvallend is dat een kleine groep jongeren een veel groter en meer aanwezig (formeel) netwerk heeft, met daarin ook een meter en een peter. Dit zijn mensen die zich op vrijwillige basis inzetten als een steun- en vertrouwensfiguur voor één jongere. Zij vormen vaak een belangrijke brug tussen enerzijds de wereld van de hulpverlening, de opvangcentra voor nieuwkomers en het dagelijkse leven in België anderzijds: *"Ik heb sinds één maand een peter en een meter. Zij hebben voor mij een telefoon gekocht en ook kleren. Zij hebben ook twee kinderen, twee dochters. Zij zeggen 'broer' tegen mij"* (respondent 16).

(2) Bijna alle respondenten geven aan dat hun netwerk (van peers) in België veel kleiner is dan in hun moederland, maar hebben er vertrouwen in dat dit positief zal evolueren. Dit netwerk van vrienden ontstaat in de opvangcentra en bestaat bijna uitsluitend uit mensen met dezelfde etnische roots, meestal afkomstig uit hetzelfde land en met een vergelijkbaar migratieverhaal. Slechts enkele respondenten hebben een netwerk dat hun eigen etnische en culturele achtergrond overstijgt. Hierbij zitten geen of nauwelijks Belgische jongeren, ook al hopen ze dit anders te zien.

Deze diversere contacten ontstaan in de OKAN-school, maar nog veel vaker in de vrije tijd bij sportclubs. Ook al blijven deze contacten vaak beperkt tot de context waar ze plaatsvinden

(school en sportclub), beschouwen respondenten ze als waardevol omdat dit hen het gevoel geeft een plaats te verwerven in hun nieuwe leefomgeving.

(3) Naast de vrijetijd bij sportclubs, wordt een groot deel van de vrijetijd van NBMV ingevuld met activiteiten die het opvangcentrum organiseert. Het gros van deze activiteiten is er met en voor jongeren die in het centrum verblijven. Op deze manier verdiepen jongeren de banden die ze hebben met andere jongeren in het opvangcentrum, maar worden er evenwel geen linken gelegd naar de ruimere woonomgeving en samenleving. Het gaat hierbij vaak om sportactiviteiten zoals voetballen of zwemmen en uitstappen naar bijvoorbeeld de cinema, de bowling, de dierentuin, een stad: *"Ik speel ook voetbal met een groep van de organisatie. We gaan soms zwemmen of schaatsen of bowlen. (...) Soms doen we ook een uitstap buiten Brussel. Zij geven verschillende activiteiten waaruit wij kunnen kiezen"* (respondent 23).

Er zijn ook heel wat jongeren die zelf hun vrije tijd invullen. Sport in een club, en in het bijzonder de fitnessclub; is een belangrijke ontmoetingsplaats voor hen. Anderen zetten hier dan weer de nationale sport uit hun moederland verder. Cricket is naast voetbal of worstelen een vaak voorkomende hobby. De sport(en) die sommige respondenten beoefenen vergroten hun netwerk. Sommigen gaan heel gedreven om met hun sport en komen zo op veel plaatsen, ontmoeten andere leeftijdsgenoten en creëren zo nieuwe netwerken voor zichzelf.

*"Ik woon nu in Leuven maar ik wil eigenlijk naar Brugge of Antwerpen gaan, omdat ik daar veel vrienden heb. Ik heb daar veel vrienden waarmee ik cricket speel. Ik ben al eens in Tielt, dicht bij Brugge gaan spelen. Ik doe dat met een andere jongen van Afghanistan, maar ook van Syrië en Marokko"* (respondent 4).

Slechts een beperkt aantal NBMV vindt meteen bij aankomst in België een permanent en langdurig verblijf binnen het opvangnetwerk. Al de nieuwe sociale netwerken zijn hierdoor onderhevig aan regelmatige veranderingen door de frequente verhuisbewegingen van jongeren. De meeste NBMV verhuizen minstens drie tot vier keer voor ze in een stabielere en soms kleinschaligere, zelfstandige woonvorm terechtkomen. Opvallend hierbij is de beperkte inspraak en de grote geografische afstand ten opzichte van de vorige verblijfplaats: *"Na mijn interview ging ik naar Neder-Over-Heembeek voor een maand. Daarna verhuisde ik naar een centrum in Antwerpen. Dan hebben ze een sociaal huis voor me gevonden daar. Nu woon ik hier in een sociaal huis in Leuven"* (respondent 24). Deze verhuisbewegingen hebben als gevolg dat recent opgebouwde relaties in het sociale netwerk na een verhuis weer verdwijnen en dat NBMV op de nieuwe woonplaats opnieuw moeten investeren in de opbouw van een ondersteunend en duurzaam sociaal netwerk:

*"Vrienden zijn belangrijk voor mij... Ik heb geen vrienden in België. In het ander centrum had ik wel twee vrienden. Maar nu niet meer. We zijn nu apart. Eén vriend is naar een sociaal huis in Kapellen verhuisd en de andere vriend is terug bij zijn familie. Ik heb nu geen vrienden meer in het centrum"* (respondent 14).

Sommige respondenten slagen erin om met een klein aantal van deze jongeren contacten te onderhouden na een verhuis: *"Ik neem vaak de trein naar Antwerpen. Ik vind Antwerpen een leuke stad. Ik heb daar veel vrienden. Echte vrienden van Somalië, maar ik heb daar ook een vriendin van Afghanistan, van Marokko en eentje van Nepal"* (respondent 24).

### 3.2. Sociale steun in netwerk van NBMV: de functie, het hart

In het komende deel worden de verschillende vormen van steun, zoals in de introductie besproken (emotioneel, instrumenteel, advies & informatie, appraisal en companionship) en de wisselwerking tussen het geven en krijgen van steun bij NBMV in België, behandeld.

De afwezigheid van familie is zeer prominent aanwezig in de narratieven van NBMV. Vooral de beginperiode in België is hierbij voor alle respondenten een zeer moeilijke periode. De grootste groep respondenten heeft geen enkel sociaal contact meer in hun thuisland. Heel vaak wordt deze breuk veroorzaakt door het overlijden van één of beide ouders. Soms leven hun ouders nog maar kunnen ze hen niet meer bereiken of weten ze niet waar ze zich precies bevinden. Als deze primaire contacten wegvallen, zijn er meestal geen andere linken meer met het thuisland.

Het gevoel er alleen voor te staan, niemand te kennen, op niemand te kunnen terugvallen, niet te weten hoe het leven er zal uitzien, weegt voor velen zwaar door. Heel veel jongeren voelen zich alleen. De steun die ze van hun ouders kregen, is nu een grote leegte: *"Ik probeer niet te veel over mijn familie te praten. Ik mis mijn familie, ik mis mijn zus. Soms heb ik mijn hart niet onder controle"* (respondent 5).

(1) Emotionele steun. Hoewel deze warme, affectieve familiale relaties niet meer nabij zijn en het sociale netwerk klein en instabiel is, ervaart de grootste groep respondenten wel emotionele steun. Deze ondersteuning komt nu van een klein netwerk dat regelmatig van samenstelling verandert. Het zijn dan vaak mensen uit het professionele netwerk, steunfiguren en vrienden. De sociaal assistenten maar nog meer de individuele begeleiders in het opvangcentrum, zijn veruit de belangrijkste personen bij het geven van steun, betrokken zijn, luisteren en raad geven, ... *"De assistenten zijn belangrijk. Ze zijn goed voor ons, ze hebben respect voor iedereen. Ze kijken naar ons als hun eigen kinderen"* (respondent 31).



Deze emotionele steun is belangrijk maar is tegelijk begrensd. Veel respondenten geven aan niemand echt in vertrouwen te nemen. Toch zijn het slechts enkelingen die bij niemand terecht kunnen voor steun. Alle andere respondenten voelen zich emotioneel ondersteund hetzij door een deel van hun formele netwerk, hetzij door vrienden en uitzonderlijk ook (online) bij hun familie. Bij enkele jongeren die een familielid in België hebben wisselen positieve en negatieve ervaringen elkaar af: *"Mijn nonkel woont al heel lang in België. In het begin woonde ik bij hem, ik moest dan niet naar een centrum. Na 9 maanden ben ik vertrokken. Ik kan niet vergeten wat ze met mij hebben gedaan. Ze hebben slechte dingen met me gedaan"* (respondent 23).

Vrienden zijn voor het gros van de jongeren de personen die emotioneel het meest en het vaakst nabij zijn. Voor één op drie jongeren zijn dit zelfs de enige fysiek aanwezige emotionele steunbronnen. Deze vrienden, zijn ook jongeren die gevlucht zijn uit hun moederland en die ze hoofdzakelijk leren kennen in de opvangcentra waar ze verblijven. Respondenten spreken over hen als zeer belangrijk, 'broeders' in hun leven.

Het is voor veel jongeren echter moeilijk om de continuïteit te bewaren en keer op keer dichte relaties aan te gaan met leeftijdsgenoten, en om ze met dezelfde emotionele intensiteit te onderhouden na een verhuis: *"Vroeger had ik hier een heel goede vriend, Ahmad. Hij is een Syrische jongen. We konden praten, we konden samen verdrietig zijn over onze familie. Hij is nu verhuisd naar een ander huis, ik weet niet waar"* (respondent 9).

(2) Instrumentele steun. Naast de hogerop beschreven affectieve, emotionele relaties van NBMV is ook praktische, meer doelgerichte ondersteuning een belangrijke vorm van steun die voortvloeit uit een sociaal netwerk. Deze instrumentele steun staat voor de concrete ondersteuning die jongeren krijgen of geven: het leveren van diensten, financiële ondersteuning, materiële hulp, ...

De praktische ondersteuning die NBMV krijgen komt voort uit een klein deel van het professionele netwerk, de voogd en de sociale assistenten. Het gaat om ondersteuning in het dagelijks leven, maar evenzeer meer planmatige hulp in transitieperiodes van bijvoorbeeld een leven in het centrum naar zelfstandig wonen. De voogd biedt praktische ondersteuning bij de voorbereiding van interviews bij het CGVS, bij het vinden van een advocaat, het opstarten van procedures voor gezinshereniging of het opsporen van familieleden. De sociale assistenten zijn dan weer belangrijk bij de dagelijkse zeer concrete ondersteuning; bed, bad en brood maar ook bij het zoeken van een duurzamere woonvorm op maat voor de jongere.

Een minderheid van de respondenten vindt steun bij hun informele netwerk. Het gaat soms om een vriend of een familielid die occasioneel helpen bij het vinden van onderdak of een studenten job. Toch zijn het bij deze respondenten, hoofdzakelijk de steunfiguren die hen ondersteunen: *"Mijn peter koopt soms dingen voor mij, om me blij te maken, om me niet triestig te voelen"* (respondent 6).

(3) Advies en informatie. Naast deze praktische ondersteuning is het formele netwerk van NBMV ook heel aanwezig bij het geven van advies en informatie om hen wegwijs te maken in België. Opvallend is dat naast de sociaal assistenten en de voogd, ook leerkrachten vaak vernoemd worden. Het gaat hierbij om advies en informatie die ze krijgen bij het overkomen en oplossen van problemen, het nog niet volledig begrijpen van hun leefomgeving of spanningen tussen respondenten en andere jongeren in het opvangcentrum of op school. Maar het gaat ook om advies over de keuze voor een bepaalde studierichting of het mee nadenken over hun leven 'na het centrum': *"De assistenten zijn zoals mijn vader en mijn moeder. Ze helpen me met veel, ze praten veel met mij. In het begin begreep ik veel dingen niet over de cultuur en zo. Ze hebben me daarover uitgelegd"* (respondent 16).

Ook vrienden zijn bij een kleine minderheid van de respondenten belangrijke informatiebronnen. Ze zoeken elkaar op als ze met vragen of problemen zitten en ondersteunen elkaar op school. Ze proberen op elkaars ervaringen te bouwen en vinden de mening van hun leeftijdsgenoten belangrijk bij het nemen van beslissingen: *"Als ik ergens mee zit probeer ik het eerst zelf op te lossen, na te denken. Als het mij niet lukt ga ik naar een vriend"* (respondent 10).

(4) Appraisal. Dit type steun zet persoonlijke groei voorop via feedback die men krijgt die belangrijk is voor zelfevaluatie en persoonlijke groei. Deze steun is quasi volledig afwezig in het netwerk van de respondenten in dit onderzoek: *"Mijn nonkel leeft ook in België. In het weekend ga ik bij hem. Hij leert me veel. Wat ik moet doen, wat ik niet moet doen. Wat goed en fout is. Wat te zoeken"* (respondent 8).

(5) Gezelschap of companionship. Deze vorm van steun draait tot slot om het samen zijn in een informelere context. Slechts enkele jongeren zijn niet of slechts beperkt omringd in hun vrije tijd. Het gaat hierbij om NBMV die een klein, geïsoleerd netwerk hebben of die niet tevreden zijn met hun leefsituatie op dit moment: *"Ik doe niks hier in België. Ik ga naar school en kom dan terug naar huis"* (respondent 25).

(6) Wisselwerking, wederkerigheid. Er is een groot verschil in de wisselwerking tussen NBMV en hun netwerk als het gaat om het krijgen en/of geven van sociale steun. Deze worden in de formele relaties maar ook bij steunfiguren sterk in één richting gestuurd; het netwerk dat een jongere ondersteunt. Allen leveren zij 'een dienst' aan een jongere. Hierdoor zijn deze relaties eerder 'zwakke relaties' omdat wederkerigheid ontbreekt. Hoewel ze 'zwak' zijn, is er wel heel vaak sprake van een sterke emotionele, affectieve relatie tussen hen. Dit geldt ook voor de zo vaak vernoemde, maar niet langer fysiek aanwezige ouders in het netwerk van NBMV. In het netwerk dat jongeren opbouwen met peers en uitgebreide familie in België zit veel meer wisselwerking binnen de verschillende vormen van sociale steun. Een aantal jongeren vindt het tot slot ook belangrijk om zelf steun te geven en iets terug te geven aan de samenleving die hen zelf zoveel steun gaf. Deze steun is altijd gelinkt aan het helpen van mensen in een

kwetsbare positie: *“Elke dinsdag en elke vrijdag gaan we anderhalf uur helpen in een woonzorgcentrum. We maken thee, soms doen we de afwas, het maakt niet uit. Ik vind het heel belangrijk om te kunnen helpen”* (respondent 6).

#### 4. Discussie

Op basis van de hierboven beschreven resultaten pleiten we voor een shift in de benadering van NBMV als jonge vluchtelingen naar een benadering van NBMV als jongeren. Veel NBMV worden namelijk door hun statuut van asielzoeker of vluchteling gescheiden van de leefwereld om hen heen. Deze shift in perspectief laat toe om een evenwichtigere verdeling te krijgen tussen een welzijns- en een jeugdbenadering of een evenwichtigere verdeling tussen kwetsbaarheid en veerkracht. Een focus op het jeugdwerk en het regulier onderwijs biedt mogelijkheden om een brug te slaan tussen NBMV, Belgische jongeren en de ruimere samenleving. Een wens die veel NBMV articuleren.

(1) Sociaal netwerk. Hoewel bijna alle respondenten aangeven een breuk in hun sociale netwerk te hebben ervaren en een kleiner sociaal netwerk te hebben in België, is het wel een netwerk waar de verschillende leden ervan, tijdelijk sterk verbonden zijn met elkaar. Het leven van NBMV is voor een belangrijk deel lokaal geconcentreerd en gestructureerd rond het formele netwerk en het opvangcentrum. Deze densiteit wijst erop dat de verschillende mensen en organisaties in het netwerk van een jongere elkaar kennen en een jongere omringen. Dit lokale netwerk valt niet noodzakelijk samen met de buurt of de stad waar jongeren wonen en weinig linken mee hebben, maar valt veeleer samen met het formele netwerk dat jongeren ondersteunt. Deze lokale verankering zorgt voor een bereikbaar netwerk, waar respondenten veel contact mee hebben.

Tegelijk is er ook een grote verscheidenheid in de locatie waar deze netwerken ontstaan en verder vorm krijgen. Onderzoek van Ryan en collega's (2008) bevestigt deze spreiding, waarbij netwerken zowel lokaal verankerd zijn als zich uitstrekken over een breed geografisch gebied. Door de vele verhuisbewegingen van centrum naar centrum en van stad naar stad, maar ook over landsgrenzen heen, ontstaan contacten en sociale netwerken op nationaal en soms transnationaal niveau. Het zijn echter wel de lokale netwerken die belangrijk zijn in het aanleveren van sociale steun (Ryan et al., 2008) en die ook volgens onderzoek van Mels en collega's (2008), hoofdzakelijk in de opvangcentra ontstaan.

De vele verhuisbewegingen kunnen er echter ook voor zorgen dat netwerken sterk versnipperd raken. Bij een verhuis wordt doorgaans geen rekening gehouden met het opgebouwde sociale netwerk en de steun dat het netwerk levert. Een aantal NBMV slagen er toch in om contacten te onderhouden met een klein aantal vrienden die ze in vorige centra leerden kennen. Deze relaties zorgen voor continuïteit in het leven van deze jongeren en vergroten tegelijk ook hun linken met andere steden wanneer ze elkaar in het weekend of tijdens vrijetijdsactiviteiten bezoeken. Deze relaties worden als waardevol gezien omdat het

vreedschappen zijn met jongeren die hun levenscontext en –verhaal goed kennen en zelf ervaren hebben (Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003).

Alle andere relaties in het netwerk op de voogd na, drogen op na een verhuis. De voogd is als wettelijk vertegenwoordiger, een centrale en continue figuur in het leven van NBMV maar wordt door jongeren zelf niet altijd zo gezien. Individuele begeleiders zijn tijdelijk doorgaans heel centrale mensen in het netwerk van deze jongeren. Dit geldt zeker ook voor steunfiguren. Het klein aantal respondenten die een meter of peter heeft plaatst hen zeer centraal in hun sociale netwerk.

Na een vaak woelige reis en de vele verhuisbewegingen in België komen jongeren in 'rustiger vaarwater' terecht door een duurzamere opvang. Deze stabiliteit creëert mogelijkheden voor NBMV om zich te verankeren. In deze context beginnen jongeren te bouwen aan hun toekomst en zien NBMV na een relatief korte periode in België hun toekomst in dit land. Dit heeft enerzijds te maken met het opgebouwde sociale netwerk maar wordt evenzeer beïnvloed door de afwezigheid, of het niet meer in leven zijn van voor hen belangrijke mensen in hun thuisland. Bij deze jongeren verdwijnt elke band met hun moederland waardoor ze zoeken naar een nieuw leven en toekomst in België. Deze nieuwe Belgische context is dan het enige ankerpunt dat sommige respondenten nog hebben. Bijna alle jongeren voelen zich of willen zich in de toekomst verbonden voelen met België en Belgische jongeren en willen van daaruit soms ook participeren in hun leefomgeving en 'iets terug geven aan het land dat hen zo geholpen heeft'. Onderzoek van Mansouri en Johns (2017) bevestigt deze resultaten, maar ziet ook drempels om sociale netwerken te bouwen die voorbij hun eigen etnische gemeenschap reiken. Het zijn vaak structurele drempels die sterk gelinkt zijn aan de migratiecontext (Mansouri & Johns, 2017). Hierbij speelt negatieve beeldvorming, de onwil van Belgische jongeren (Mels et al., 2008), of van de ruimere samenleving om wederzijdse sociale relaties aan te gaan (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, & Reuter, 2006). De NBMV in dit onderzoek hebben zelden contact met Belgische leeftijdsgenoten.

(2) Sociale Steun. Sociale steun wordt gezien als een sleutelement om de uitdagingen gelinkt aan migratie aan te pakken (Sleijpen, et al., 2016) en het welzijn van nieuwkomers te vergroten (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006). De meeste jongeren hebben een klein aantal dichte, hechte, intieme relaties en vele honderden meer perifere relaties. Deze intieme steunrelaties, of 'strong ties' zijn vooral zeer belangrijke bronnen van emotionele steun (Fingerman, 2009). De zwakkere relaties of 'weak ties', leveren vooral instrumentele steun (Granovetter, 1973; Rose, Carrasco, & Charboneau, 1998 geciteerd in Simich et al., 2003), praktische steun en informatie (Fingerman, 2009; Wells, 2011). Ondanks de vele veranderingen van context, netwerken en levensomstandigheden slagen veel NBMV erin om een ondersteunend netwerk op te bouwen. De sociale steun die uit deze netwerken voortvloeit moet wel begrepen worden als steun die altijd te kort zal schieten in vergelijking met de belangrijkste mensen in hun leven, hun ouders. Ook al zijn ze doorgaans niet meer in leven of bereikbaar, het zijn mensen die een prominente plaats blijven hebben in de narratieven van deze jongeren (Mels et al., 2008).

In België zijn het meestal vrienden met dezelfde, recente migratieachtergrond die emotioneel het dichtst bij de jongeren staan. Ze houden elkaar gezelschap, kennen elkaars levenswandel en kunnen deze vanuit hun persoonlijke ervaring ook begrijpen. Een klein aantal vrienden is ook een constante in hun leven. Het zijn sterke vriendschappen die ontstaan in opvangcentra en die onderhouden worden na een verhuis, zelfs als deze jongeren ver van elkaar wonen. Ook onderzoek van Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber en Mooren (2016) bevestigt deze resultaten.

Ook individuele begeleiders uit het opvangcentrum en indien van toepassing steunfiguren zijn zeer belangrijke bronnen van emotionele en praktische steun. Het zijn professionals en vrijwilligers die jongeren als oprecht betrokken ervaren. Deze resultaten zijn niet in lijn met onderzoek van Sleijpen en collega's (2016) en Mels et al. (2008) die stellen dat het formele netwerk vooral een functionele rol spelen door te voorzien in basis- en praktische behoeften.

Om de vele positieve effecten van sociale netwerken en sociale steun te kunnen waarborgen, is er een sterke nood aan een snellere, stabielere verankering en een duurzame opvang en begeleiding van NBMV bij aankomst in België. Jongeren zijn te vaak voorwerp van verhuisbewegingen waar ze weinig tot geen inspraak in hebben. Veel NBMV zijn vanaf hun vertrek uit het thuisland in een permanente bouw en heropbouw van sociale netwerken en dit heeft invloed op het leven dat ze hier proberen op te bouwen en de steun die hieruit kan voortvloeien. Ook de linken met de ruimere Belgische samenleving kunnen verder gefaciliteerd worden door de buurten en de ruimere omgeving rond opvangcentra te betrekken bij het dagelijkse leven van NBMV. Hierin zien we een centrale rol weggelegd voor steunfiguren die op maat van de noden en wensen van jongeren en met de ondersteuning van individuele begeleiders belangrijke sleutelfiguren kunnen worden in het leven van NBMV.

## 5. Literatuurlijst

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## Chapter 5. Young newcomers' convoy of social relations: The supportive network of Accompanied Refugee Minors (ARM) in urban Belgium\*

### **Abstract**

During the past decades, there is a growing interest in the role social networks play in migration processes. Research has demonstrated that accessing and establishing supportive ties in the host society is far from evident. This study aspires to voice the ways by which supportive networks are created and maintained across multiple borders. We voiced these networks from the perspective of Accompanied Refugee Minors (ARM), by applying Khan and Antonucci's Convoy Model of social relations (1980). The model is used as a conceptual lens to describe the composition, function and adequacy of ARM's social networks. In order to do so, 25 ARM who recently migrated to urban Belgium were interviewed.

In the daily lives of ARM we see multiple barriers towards a full access to urban society. Their migration movement means a rupture in their social network, forcing them to (re)build networks in their new living environment. The establishment of new social networks in urban Belgium are far from self-evident due to the lack of links in this new environment both to migrant and native communities, and to formal care providers. Most of these social networks are small but reachable. Due to the central role parents play in the daily life of ARM, welfare organisations seem to be less involved in their supportive role towards the vulnerable position of ARM. Additionally, this group of newcomers is positioned in an intermediate position: on the one hand they are mostly seen as 'accompanied children' on the other hand they are young refugees. The protective role of their parents masks their vulnerability and support needs. In doing so, our society unintentionally organises segregated lives in reception facilities, educational contexts and in the broader urban communities.

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## 1. Introduction

Migration and forced migration have always been part of human history (Castles, 2003; IOM, 2013). The last decades however, this human process intensified, reaching historical numbers (Schrooten, 2012; UN, 2014). The global newcomer population grew from 2.4 million in 1975 to 12.1 million by the year 2000 (UNHCR, 1995, 2000). Today 68.5 million people are forcedly displaced by conflicts (UNHCR, 2019). As a consequence, forced migration increased with 70% over the past twenty years (UNHCR, 2016). Half of this population are children and youngsters under the age of eighteen (UNHCR, 2017; Vervliet, Vanobbergen, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2015). Yet, little is known about the lives and aspirations of those immediately involved (Bloch, Sigona, & Zetter, 2014; Omata, 2014).

Although 85% of those seeking refuge find protection in a neighbouring country (UNHCR, 2019), the countries in western Europe also became important destination countries (Jennissen, 2015). In the context of this study, in Belgium the number of asylum seekers increased from 17,000 in 2014 up to 45,000 in 2015 (Fedasil, 2016; Immigration Office, 2016; OCGRS, 2017). In 2018 23,443 people applied for international protection, mostly originating from Syria, Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq (OCGRS, 2019). In February 2017, at the eve of the fieldwork for this study, Belgium hosted 7,594 Refugee Minors. Within this group the Belgian asylum procedure makes a distinction between Accompanied Refugee Minors (ARM) and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM). The OCGRS defines ARM as “any child who, in any residence procedure, is accompanied by (a) parent(s) or legal representative. European children accompanied by (a) parent(s) are also called accompanied minors”. These youngsters are under 18 years old and they or their parents applied for asylum. The largest number of minors leaving their country are ARM (Piegeschke, Sihorsch, & Christiansen, 2019) and represent 1/3 of the asylum-seeking population. Therefore, ARM are an important stakeholder in the asylum and migration policy and social care system of Belgium (Eide & Hjern, 2013; Kevers & De Haene, 2014; OCGRS, 2017).

Those living outside their countries of origin may vary strongly on their cultural background, the reasons and mode of migration, the means available for them and the context they settle (Hynie, Crooks, & Barragan, 2011). Nevertheless, they all have a rupture in their social network that needs to be (re)build in the new living environment (Hynie et al., 2011). Armed conflict disrupts an individuals’ ecosystem (Boothby, 2008), separating families and peers, shifting institutional, social, and cultural contexts, that generally interrupts support for young newcomers who arrive in exile with limited resources (Dryden-Peterson, Dahya, & Adelman, 2017). Previous research has demonstrated that the process of accessing and establishing supportive ties in the host society is far from evident (Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008). Social networks may be deficient and social relations may be either disrupted or devalued in the host country (Stewart et al., 2008).

Forced migration, therefore, also needs to be analysed as a social process in which social networks play a central role (Castles, 2003), and help us to understand the experiences of young newcomers, in this context ARM (Wells, 2011). One of the main contributing factors for young newcomers facilitating adaption, well-being and overall quality of life in the asylum country lays in the development of close and meaningful social relations (Sierau, Schneider, Nesterko, & Glaesmer, 2019; Berthold as quoted in Choi, 2014; Carswell et al. as quoted in Choi, 2014 Strijk et al. as quoted in Choi, 2014). In doing so, supportive networks can positively influence newcomers' feelings of belonging (Stewart et al., 2008).

### 1.1. Social Networks and Social Support

Social networks are defined as the vehicle through which social support is provided (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). Gottlieb and Berkman (as quoted in Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997) portray the social network as an interactive field of persons, who provide the 'give and take' of helpfulness and protection. Where social networks can be understood as the structure; social support is the function of this interactive process (Langford et al., 1997). Structural dimensions of a social network refer to the form and distribution of relations within the network (Valenta, 2008), to include a wide array of partners (Fingerman, 2009). The most common structural dimensions of a social network are size, reachability, density, centrality of specific individuals and durability (Valenta, 2008). These networks can be formal or informal, operating between specific individuals or as part of a wider community of members (McCabe, Gilchrist, Harris, Afridi, & Kyprianou, 2013). People build up new relationships, make new acquaintances and lose touch with others. Some relations can be developed solely to fulfil a specific goal and then disappear again once it is accomplished. Others may last a lifetime (Bø, Degenne, & Forsé as quoted in Valenta, 2008).

The functional dimension, on its turn with its affective, emotional, or psychological components is what makes social relations important (Antonucci, Ajrouch, & Birditt, 2013). They all refer to the qualitative properties of the ties between the individual and other persons in the network (Song, Son, & Lin, 2011). There is an existing typology of four defining attributes of social support into which all acts of support can be assigned: (1) Emotional support is believed to be the most important category through which the perception of support is transferred to others (Langford et al., 1997) and indicates that a person is valued and accepted. (2) Instrumental support focusses on the tangible, concrete provision of financial aid, material resources and services. (3) Informational support helps one to define, understand and cope with challenges in life by providing information about the environment, or assistance in problem solving. (4) Appraisal support includes information or communication relevant to one's self-evaluation (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; House as quoted in Song et al., 2011; Mels, Derluyn, & Broekaert, 2008). Ryan and colleagues (2008), add (5) social companionship (i.e., spending time with each other in recreational activities) to the attributes of social support.

These varying types of support may be provided by diverse people in varied ways, at different times, and for migrants these forms of support may cross national boundaries. In this way, transnational links with people 'back home' may continue to play a supportive role after migration (Ryan et al., 2008). These relations can also be kin or non kin-based, take place on a frequent basis or only within a crisis situation (Lin, Dean, & Ensel as quoted in Song et al., 2011), come from multiple formal and informal sources of peers, family and professionals (Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003).

Social support is thus a multidimensional construct (Song et al., 2011). Within the process of each defining attribute of social support exchange or reciprocity must be present for the support to be sustainable. They are all helpful and protective to the person receiving the support, enabling an exchange of reciprocal supportive actions, contributing to one's well-being (Langford et al., 1997).

## 1.2. The Convoy Model of Social Relations

The Convoy Model of social relations, developed by Khan and Antonucci in the 1980's, provides a means of conceptualizing the structure and function of the social relationships within the individual's social network at any given point in life (Franco & Levitt, 1998). It is presented as an alternative to traditional approaches that fail to capture the complexity of social relationships across time and context (Levitt, 2005), with a special emphasis on emotional closeness. People across their life course, from young to old and in various settings, quite readily identify close and important persons, uncovering elements of social relations that are universal across diverse populations (Antonucci et al., 2013). The model is viewed as a network of relationships that moves with a person throughout his or her lifetime, changing in structure but providing continuity in the exchange of support (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1993). Within the Convoy Model, structural and functional properties of social networks can be described not only in terms of their status at any given point in time, but also in terms of changes that take place across time and situation. The term convoy rather than network, is used to capture both the protective function and the dynamic nature of the social network as it moves with the individual through the life cycle (Levitt, 2005). In doing so, conceptualising social relations as a convoy enables a parsimonious representation of a highly complex human circumstance (Antonucci et al., 2013).

According to the Convoy Model, individuals are surrounded by supportive others who move with them throughout the life course. These relationships vary in their closeness, their quality (positive or negative), their function, and their structure. Although the quantity of relationships is important, relationships quality is more predictive of most positive outcomes on health and well-being (Antonucci et al., 2013).

To define the social convoy empirically, Kahn and Antonucci (1980) developed a network diagram consisting of three concentric circles to represent a visual image of the convoy (see Figure 1). Individuals are asked to arrange their network members according to their "closeness and importance" to the individual within their network (Franco & Levitt, 1998). The convoy measure thus involves placing close and important individuals into three concentric circles surrounding an individual and representing three levels of closeness: close, closer, closest (Antonucci et al., 2013). Antonucci (1986, p.10-11) describes people in the inner circle as "those people to whom you feel so close, that you love so much that it is hard to imagine life without them". The middle circle is described as 'people to whom you may not feel quite that close but who are still important to you'. And finally, outer-circle members are people with whom there is a significant but usually singular relationship (Antonucci, 1986; Levitt, 2005; Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1994).

Inclusion of persons in the convoy is determined by the individual's emotional attachment to the person and by the role of the person in relation to the individual. Persons who are strongly linked to the individual both affectively and by role status, are likely to occupy the inner circle and to provide relatively high levels of support (Levitt et al., 1993). Nevertheless, most of those nominated for convoy membership provide at least some form of support (Levitt, 2005). Research based on the Convoy Model has generally found a strong linkage between attachment and support. Inner circle relations typically provide high levels of support (Asendorpf & Wilpers as quoted in Levitt, 2005).

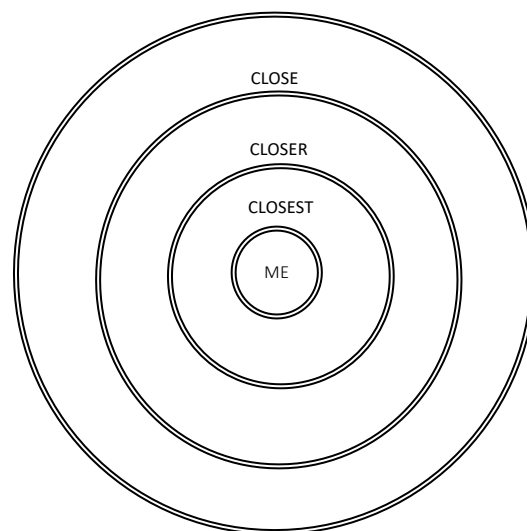


Figure 1. The Convoy Model of social relations by Khan and Antonucci (1980)

### 1.3. Research objective

This study was conducted in the urban environment of Belgium. Cities play a central role, as hubs and cross points in migration processes (De Winter, 2015). Superdiverse cities are home to a majority of youngsters with roots in migration (Mansouri & Johns, 2017). Cities have become a place where newcomers do want to establish a new living (Schillebeeckx & Albeda, 2014; Siemiatycki, 2005). In 2016, three out of five refugees who arrived to a new country, lives in urban areas (UNHCR 2016). Today, that is nearly two out of three (UNHCR, 2019). This evolution strongly changed the social and cultural mix of European cities, leading to ethnically diverse, multicultural and cosmopolitan cities (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009).

Research investigating newcomers' personal experiences after their arrival to host-societies (Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping, & Goldman as quoted in O'Toole Thommessen, Corcoran, & Todd, 2015; Wernesjo as quoted in O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015), and their support needs (Stewart et al., 2008) are scarce. Moreover, the specific experiences of Accompanied Refugee Minors (ARM) are mostly neglected in research, even though they account the largest number of minors leaving their country (Piegenschke et al., 2019).

This research addresses two research gaps. First, the complexity by which social support works for different groups of newcomers has been largely overlooked in research (Stewart et al., 2008). A way to deal with this complexity is by using of the Convoy Model of social relations (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). This model has been widely employed in research with adult populations, but studies of convoy development in childhood and adolescence have been less frequent (Levitt, 2005). Such studies could lead to vital knowledge for interventions and for the establishment on how to best support these groups at early stages.

Second, the voices of newcomer youth are quite absent within existing literature. Few studies have previously enabled newcomer youth to identify and voice what has been helpful in the receiving country (Wernesjo as quoted in O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015). Some of those qualitative studies have established the important role social networks play in the process of integration, providing both practical and emotional support (Boswell as quoted in Beirens, Hughes, Hek, & Spicer, 2007; Wilkinson & Marmot as quoted in Beirens et al., 2007). Similarly, research focusing on young newcomers has found network building and connectedness, to foster conditions for settlement in the host community (Save the Children, 2000) and promote a sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence in the future (Richman as quoted in Beirens et al., 2007; Kidane as quoted in Beirens et al., 2007; Stanley as quoted in Beirens et al., 2007). Therefore, this qualitative study will explore the role supportive social networks play in the lives of Accompanied Refugee Minors (ARM) in the early stages after their arrival in the host country. In doing so, we aim to identify support needs in the social network of ARM, applying the Convoy Model of social relations.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

The present study is embedded in a broader research project on experiences, needs and strengths of young (minor) newcomers (both accompanied and unaccompanied)) who (re)build their lives in urban Belgium. From January to May 2017, 63 young newcomers who recently arrived in urban Belgium were interviewed. For this study, we analysed the data derived from 25 semi-structured interviews with ARM, focusing on the Convoy Model of social relations by Khan and Antonucci (1980). The Human Sciences Ethical Commission of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel approved the research project (ECHW\_073\_02).

### 2.2. Procedures, Data Collection and Analysis

ARM were recruited by using a purposive sampling procedure. Throughout this procedure we strived for a broad diversity of ARM participants based on gender, the asylum procedure, city of residence in Belgium and country of origin. In order to reach and recruit participants, a diverse set of organisations, all involved in the daily life of young newcomers were contacted. The inclusion criteria were refined by selecting participants between 13 and 18 years old, who reside no longer than 18 months in a Belgian city larger than 40,000 inhabitants and applied for asylum in Belgium. Exclusion criteria were based on the psychosocial well-being of newcomers (estimated by the partnering reception facilities) and on the personal decline of ARM and/or their parent(s).

Once the participants agreed to participate in the research, an informed consent was signed by the youngster and his/her parents (available in Dutch, French, Arabic, Pashto or Dari). They were informed about the voluntary nature of their involvement and the confidentiality of their responses. Once the participants signed the informed consent, trained researchers administered a qualitative in depth-interview in the language and location of the participants' choice. In seven interviews an interpreter attended the interviews. The qualitative data collection comprised questions on experiences regarding participants' social networks and social support by a hierarchical mapping procedure using the Convoy Model of social relations of Khan and Antonucci (1980). The average length of the interviews was 69 minutes, with a total length of 31 hours.

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed ad verbatim and read through repeatedly. The interviews were coded and analysed using the software program MAXQDA12, facilitating thematic content analyses (Baarda et al., 2015; Oliveira, Bitencourt, Teixeira, & Santos, 2013). In doing so, analyses occurred both deductive, concept-driven, and inductive, data-driven (Cho & Lee, 2014; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Gibbs, 2007; McGraw et al., 2017). For the

deductive coding, a codebook was developed from research literature on the Convoy Model by Khan and Antonucci (1980) and more recent literature linking social support to refugees (Behnia, 2003, Beirens et al., 2007; Brown, 2002; Levitt, Weber, & Guacci, 1993): (1) social support and her structural dimension (what does the social network look like) and (2) social support and the functional dimension (which supportive role does the network play). Within this template, inductive coding took place for the creation of sublabels in the main labels, which allowed new themes to emerge from the interviews.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. The Composition of the Social Networks

*"The very beginning in a new country is the toughest because you don't know the language, you don't know anyone"* (participant 23).

Arriving in a new country partially means; building up new social networks. Partially, because all of the participants live with their nuclear family in Belgium; many after a family reunification and a period in a transit country. ARM explain they had to find out how and where to establish a supportive network, leaving many of them with a small social network in their first months and years after arrival in urban Belgium.

When looking closer into the composition of these social networks, the relation between kin and non-kin and the presence of formal nodes (i.e. caregivers, social workers, migrant community organisations...), same patterns in almost every network can be distinguished. Namely, small, ethnically diverse networks of newcomers, with little links to native Belgian youngsters and to the broader urban society in general.

This diversity is there due to the friendships build in the reception schools (called OKAN or DASPA) every newcomer has to attend in order to learn the language (i.e. Dutch or French):

*"I don't have contact with Belgian kids. I don't have Belgian people in my school. At school, I only have one Syrian friend, so I always go to him. I sometimes go to his place in the weekend; we go play football together"* (participant 6).

Albeit most new nodes are created in the reception schools, a few participants also indicated to establish new, mostly equally diverse relationships during leisure time activities or in their neighbourhood:

*"My friends, I mostly meet them outside in the park. They are from everywhere; Syria, Iraq, Belgium, Afghanistan, also from the reception centre, but also from outside"* (participant 2).



The network of peers is new, small and thus vulnerable and in spite of the fact that all participants live with their family in Belgium, also, the kin network is subject to changes between 'home' and 'here'. A broad majority of the participants lives in Belgium with their nuclear family: mother, father and siblings. This implies a physical rupture with their broader family. In some cases, the nuclear family is also subject to a -temporary- rupture where family members are still on their way to Belgium or one of them passed away. A minority of the participants already had their broader family living in Belgium upon arrival.

A last aspect in the composition of young newcomers' networks is the presence of formal nodes; professionals who provide welfare services and facilitate the establishment and connection with the Belgian society. One important formal connection has already been discussed: the reception schools. In addition to the friends they make at school, most of the participants also describe a clear and important link with their teacher, as being someone who is present in their supportive network. For half of the participants, teachers are their only formal contact. Overall, the role and position in the network of formal actors is mostly vaguely discussed. Only casually a participant gives one of those actors a more central place in their social network. There is not one main organisation but mostly the Public Social Welfare Centre (OCMW), non-profit organisations such as Caritas International, or social workers in reception facilities such as The Red Cross, are discussed members of the social network. The role these formal actors embody is not always only to assist ARM, but also to guide the entire family:

*"In the very beginning we had the help from a social worker to get started. Little by little and by experience we started to find our own way around and learned what to do (...) But if needed, they still help us"* (participant 19).

It is self-evident that when young newcomers move from one country to another; social networks are challenged in their durability; the networks in Belgium are generally non existing upon arrival and the relations with close ones in their home country and sometimes transit country have to be rethought. As Rima explained: *"I was still little when I left. I don't have friends in Syria anymore. I don't remember them. (...) I don't have many friends here, only 2 girls; Martha and Sarah. At school I have Arabic friends. But now, like Sarah also, they all went to another school. First, we were all together but now not anymore. That's difficult"* (participant 14).

Only a small minority of the participants finds continuity in their social relations; some travelled to Belgium with their broader family, already had family members living in Belgium or managed to keep close online contact:

*"My father's brothers all live here; after school I always go play with my nephew in the park"* (participant 23).

Besides the establishment of new networks and the maintenance of older networks in other parts of the world, also the anchorage of these diverse networks evolves. An important part of the participants has networks that cross multiple borders; local connections, connections in the home country and connections in a transiting country like Turkey. The biggest part of this group lived several months or even years in Turkey before moving to Belgium. In doing so creating new social networks between home and Belgium of which some still exist. As one participant indicated: *"My memories are childhood memories; long gone. When I started to grow, I already lived in Turkey. I was there for 4 years. (...) I didn't have much time for myself; I had to work. (...). I didn't go to school there, but I had friends, good friends"* (participant 9).

The links with home are very divergent; some still have contact with their family and friends. In some cases, the entire family left the country to find new ground in different parts of Asia (mostly Turkey and exceptionally Jordan) and Europe, in yet other cases the nuclear family still has to be reunited. The story of Rahman demonstrates the complexity of these networks: *"Arriving in Belgium wasn't easy. We had a difficult journey. My grand mom and my uncle died in Iraq, later my grandpa also passed away in Turkey. My uncle, he now lives in Switzerland. It has been one year and a half since I last saw him. I really would like to see him and his 2 kids"* (participant 4).

The networks created in Belgium are mostly located in the immediate living environment; the intensity and closeness of these ties strongly varies but are always present in the neighbourhood, the city or exceptionally in multiple Belgian cities. Although they are often described as superficial, most participants have good faith in a positive evolution. As one participant explained: *"I like Turnhout, it is a beautiful city, but I don't know it very well. (...) I don't have contact with my neighbours, but my dad does; he knows two neighbours. One of them borrows the lawnmower to us, or they help to translate letters my dad receives and doesn't understand"* (participant 14).

In succession to the anchorage of the social network, another distinction can also be made regarding the reachability of these networks. Although networks get smaller, fragmented and their composition reconstituted, for a large majority of the participants the close nodes are reachable on a regular basis:

*"My brothers and sister, they are on their way to Belgium. They will arrive on the 14th of April. It has been 4 months since I last saw them. I talk a lot with my sister in Jordan; she is there alone with my brothers, she has to take care of them, cook for them. We help her through the phone"* (participant 20).

### 3.2. The Supportive Function of the Social Networks

*"You can change friends, but you only have one family, they can never leave you. They can help me with everything"* (participant 17).

The places different people occupy in the convoy is closely related to the supportive role they play in this network. All the participants very easily indicate those who are (less) important people in their supportive network. When ARM fill in the drawing of the Convoy Model, most of the participants by far count, their nuclear family (mostly their parents) to the most important members of their supportive network. One participant indicated: *"My dad isn't just my father, he's my friend. I can talk about so many things with him. He can tell me right from wrong"* (participant 18). Less frequent, this inner network is also larger to count grandparents or siblings in it. In some cases, ARM also included friends next to their family, to their closest nodes:

*"My parents are the most important people in my life, but not for everything. I also have my best friend; he is Turkish, we talk, we talk normal. I need him close to me"* (participant 24).

A less clear distinction is made into the next circles of the convoy; the boundaries between the closest nodes of family and friends and the other nodes are very clear to all young newcomers. However, the difference between the somewhat close contacts and acquaintances, or between the second and third circle in the convoy are rather fluid. In doing so, including a variety of people and positions; mostly consisting of friends in Belgium from OKAN/DASPA and/or the home country. One participant explained: *"My friends at OKAN, we are close to one another; we have the same dreams, the same background..."* (participant 19). Sometimes these outer circles also include teachers, professional care givers and acquaintances in the neighbourhood. One participant indicated: *"I will not put any organisation on this drawing, because I have little experience with them. There is however one social worker who helps my family out. She can help me with questions about school, or documents..."* (participant 8).

As listed above, most young newcomers have a rather small but resourceful network. This implies that specific individuals in the network play multiple supportive roles, making them 'central' members in their network. Additionally, this 'centrality' also relates to the contact frequency with specific nodes in the network. In doing so, this aspect of the 'adequacy' of a social network reveals both quantitative and qualitative components of a social network. Only a very limited number of participants account multiple persons as central in their network. Next to their parents, siblings and friends; they always flag their teacher:

*"My teacher is very important to me because she is always there for me; she is close to me. She asks me how I am doing, she helps me" (participant 15).*

Next to this 'centrality', the 'reciprocity' of relations is also an important element in the 'adequacy' of a social network; whether the exchange of support runs in a mutual way or rather in one direction. Only in a few cases, participants have relationships without mutuality. For the very large majority however, a mutual or reciprocal relationship is established with some members of their social network. This means that they are both on the giving and receiving sides of social support. The reciprocity is largely generic, where members of the network 'can count on me'. One participant indicated: *"If they need money, if they need love, if they are in trouble with their family. In difficult times, they can count on me"* (participant 3). These mutual relations are the most specific when it concerns close friends and the inner circle family members. In different examples participants play an intermediate role:

*"I help my mom and dad; they don't understand Dutch, so I translate for them. Now I'm also a translator at school; when new Arabic kids arrive, I help to translate everything. I now am also a member of the students council; I like to do good, I like to help" (participant 15).*

A supportive network provides emotional, instrumental and informational support, appraisal and social companionship. Overall, not all types of support are present and are mostly delivered by a small set of people in young newcomers' networks. One of the most important properties of a social network is its emotional closeness and support. There is a large body of affective words, used by the participants to express the emotional support they receive. It is about feeling at ease with close ones, the feeling of being loved, the feeling of being missed, known, understood, valued, the kindness and reliability of relations, being trustworthy. Next to these carrying words, also the content of these relations indicates an emotional closeness. They talk about the people they share their dreams with, stand up for them, encourage them, comfort them, make them happy and make them laugh. The core of this emotional support is mostly delivered by a small set of very important people in young newcomers' lives; (the inner circle) family, friends and occasionally teachers:

*"My sister means the world to me. She loves me. All the problems that I might face; I talk about it with her. I always try to tell her how I feel" (participant 22).*

Also, their relationships with peers at 'home' and/or in Belgium are a source of emotional support:

*"I met them here in Belgium, Shana and Leyla and also Farah and Fatima. (...) We do not only share the same past, we share everything with each other. (...) They are like sisters to me. I'm not afraid to tell them things, I feel no shame with them" (participant 4).*

A small group of participants moreover includes their teachers next to friends and family as an essential source of emotional support. One participant explained: *"My teacher is also important. She is kind, she talks to me, we laugh together. She says I'm smart and gives me a lot of compliments. I enjoy that"* (participant 18).

The instrumental support provided to the participants, lays in practical assistance; help with documents that need to be filled in, help to translate, help with school related questions, help to find one's way in a new environment, help with questions or problems, help with leisure activities, ... A small group of participants lacks any form of instrumental support and less than half of the participants indicates having resourceful instrumental support from a formal care provider. In different interviews these formal actors are present in the first period after arrival, but the instrumental support provided is mostly limited in time. The case of Rima illustrates how fragile this type of support is: *"When we arrived, we had an assistant who helped us. Well, she didn't help me, she was there to help my mom and dad. She found a school for me. This was only in the beginning, now there is nobody coming to us anymore"* (participant 14).

In doing so, a large majority of the participants does not receive any form of instrumental support provided by a formal care giver, other than the reception schools they attend. Instead, friends and close family are the most mentioned providers of this type of support. This is, however, often a complex construction:

*"I got a lot of help from my family. (...) My father received help from his friends. They assisted him on his journey from turkey to Belgium. My dad and his brother were in Belgium first. They arranged a good life for all of us. So, once we arrived, I didn't really need help from anyone. I had my dad to help me"* (participant 13).

A third type of support is 'informational support'. A small group of participants has no one to furnish them with information or advice related to their daily lives and dreams, and only a very small minority of participants receives this kind of support from formal care providers:

*"In the beginning I would have liked to have someone close to me to show me the way, to help me figure out things, bring me to school, advise me, ... Than I would know, and I could continue by myself. Just for 2 or 3 months"* (participant 15).

Informational support is mostly provided by parents and very often also by friends and teachers in the reception schools. School teachers are present in the narratives of the participants:

*"Miss Nena also helps me to choose what to do after OKAN; she tells me what she thinks is good or not good for me"* (participant 21).

Although the urban environment is also new to them, making it more difficult to provide practical types of support, the greater part of participants receives informational support from their friends and family. Muhammed summarised the interplay between the different support givers in his life: *"I share my dreams with my dad. He then gives me advise. One day I want to have my own business. I want to be a truck mechanic, not a car mechanic; a truck mechanic. I already know quite a lot about fixing cars. Before, in Syria my grandfather taught me how to repair cars during summer holidays. I have the feeling that people support me; my parents, the teachers, the school principle..."* (participant 15).

The second to last type of support is 'appraisal'. This type of support concerns information relevant to ones' self-evaluation. This is a less frequently discussed topic throughout the interviews. Elaborated examples of what type of appraisal support participants receive is difficult to extract:

*"My mom is there for me; she can be angry at me, but she can also comfort me and be there for me. She is my mom"* (participant 4).

The last type of support is social companionship; the time young newcomers spend with others in recreational activities. This leisure time is mostly spent with friends. In less than half of the interviews young newcomers participate in organised activities. In these activities there is always a social aspect; meeting other people whether it is in a fitness club, dance classes, swimming courses, scouting, art school, a football club.

A very large majority always tells about the time they fill in with one very special friend or with a group of friends; friends they mostly met at school, in their city or reception facility. Friends they spend time with hanging about the train station, in the neighbourhood, swimming or playing football:

*"I have friends, I know people, not a lot but still I know people outside the reception centre and in the neighbourhood, but I only have one real friend; Daan. I go to his place, if I have a question, he helps me, even his parents help me. Daan, he is my best friend; we really tell things to each other. (...) I stay at his place, to sleep, we play computer games..."* (participant 1).

There is however also a small group of participants with little to do outside of school:

*"Life here is very different from life in Syria. There, I had many people surrounding me, many people to be with. I had a lot of friends. Here I don't have many people to be with. I am home during most of the time, I don't have anybody to hang out with"* (participant 12).

## 4. Discussion

This study aspired to voice the experiences of young newcomers, more specifically those accompanied by their parents (ARM), with regards to the creation and maintenance of their social supportive networks. In order to do so, we engaged with this complex reality by using Kahn and Antonucci's Convoy Model of social relations (1980).

(1) Social networks. Our results show that the journey of ARM between home and Belgium does not occur in one straight line. Additionally, the results confirm earlier research that finds that refugee families do not undertake this journey as a unit (Ryan et al., 2008). As a consequence, young newcomers create new and complex social networks in multiple countries: they have both local, national and transnational relationships as they are in contact with people of their current place of residence, while also staying in touch with relatives and friends in their country of origin and third countries (Herz, 2015). This study shows, however, that moving from one country to another also implies leaving a part of ones' network behind and arriving in a new context with little social links next to their nuclear family. This means that the durability, continuity as well as the quality of social networks of young newcomers are continuously under pressure: young newcomers have to look for new balances between the maintenance of existing social networks and the creation of new networks. Indeed, as Klvaňová (2010) points out, the creation of new social relationships and networks implies a transformation and sometimes even the withering away of old networks. This contrasts with the core idea of the Convoy Model, where social networks are considered to be dynamic and thus evolving, but with a continuity in the exchange of support (Levitt et al. 1993; Levitt 2005). In our results, in early stages after arrival, this dynamic nature is problematic and vulnerable. The uncertain continuity of social networks contrasts sharply with the crucial need for social relations as sources of empowerment (Klvaňová, 2010).

Our study shows that the key places for the creation of new networks are primordially the reception schools, followed by the neighbourhood and sometimes the city. Most of these places offer social networks that are small but accessible. These rather small networks are ethnically very diverse peer networks with other young newcomers, with rare links to native Belgian youth, formal care providers, migrant community (organisations) and the broader urban society. An urban society, which is thought to be a facilitating hub in the adaption in to society (Mansouri & Johns, 2017). Not only does this reflect structural barriers in the establishment of mutual social networks with the broader society as Mansouri and Johns (2016), and Jasinkaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola and Reuter (2006) argue, it can also explain why ethnic group solidarity providing newly arrived immigrants with a range of community benefits (Ryan et al., 2008) often does not apply for young newcomers.

(2) Social support. Our study confirms that social support is one of the key elements to cope with challenges related to migration (Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, & Mooren, 2016) and to magnify newcomers' well-being (Jasinkaja-Lahti et al., 2006). Young people mostly have a small set of intimate, strong, close ties and hundreds of more peripheral relationships. Those close ties are important sources of emotional support (Fingerman, 2009).

Although young newcomers in this study only recently arrived in urban Belgium, the supportive network surrounding them is a very local (Ryan et al., 2008) and resourceful one, with high levels of adequacy. Both centrality and reciprocity are very distinctively present. This means that ARM have central supportive networks, mostly filled up by their parents who adopt multiple supportive roles and occasionally are supplemented by a broader network of family and friends. Also, the reciprocity of these relations, represented by the mutuality of the relations in ones' network, is strongly present in the inner circle family and friends, where people can count on them for support. The Convoy Model thus successfully grasps and explains the importance of centrality and reciprocity within the inner circle of social support. When looking further into the concentric circles of the Convoy Model of social relations the intensity and closeness of relations strongly declines. A strong gap occurs between the core and the periphery of these ties. These places in the convoy are mostly populated by friends of the reception schools and sometimes also teachers, professional caregivers or acquaintances in the neighbourhood. The place people occupy in the Convoy Model is closely linked to the support they provide in the daily lives of ARM.

In line with results from Fingerman (2009), emotional support is strongly provided by parents with whom ARM have very strong affectional relationships. Less frequent is the emotional support provided by friends. Teachers are the most mentioned support providers in a formal position, as individuals who encourage and empower ARM. In addition, this type of support is thoroughly discussed by ARM indicating an important presence and content of this type of support. Although it is meagrely discussed by young newcomers, affirmational support is important in the early stages of settlement. Receiving affirmation from familiar others is also critical. Affirmational support provides not only emotional coping assistance but also a bridge in adaptation through shared experiences (Simich et al., 2003). As elaborated as emotional support, social companionship is comprehensively discussed by young newcomers. Where they create connections with their urban environment by hanging about in the popular neighbourhoods of their city. Instrumental and informational support are often related to ones' adjustment into an unknown environment. It, therefore, implies the assistance of others (i.e. formal actors) to find ones' way in a new set of rules, norms, values and bureaucratic agreements. This type of support thus implies knowledge of the environment. Therefore, the formal network is seen as the main provider of this type of functional support (Mels et al., 2008; Sleijpen et al., 2016). Nonetheless, this type of support is mainly provided by friends and family who to a greater or lesser extent are also new to this context. Also, ARM themselves, actively engage in these types of support by helping their parents and friends with practical support. This strongly contrasts with literature where specially the less close relationships are seen as



providers of these more practical forms of support (Fingerman, 2009; Granovetter as quoted in Simich et al., 2003; Rose, Carrasco, & Charboneau as quoted in Simich et al., 2003; Wells, 2011). But this also shows that newcomers used shared information, resources and tactics to make the best of their position (Williams, 2006).

To conclude, in the daily lives of ARM we see multiple barriers towards a full access to urban society. Most of the ARM in the present study, have little links to both the formal and informal society, and mostly rely on their parents for support. Where their parents on their turn, in some cases receive assistance from formal care providers. Due to the central role parents play in the daily life of ARM, welfare organisations seem to be less involved in their supportive role towards (vulnerable) young newcomers. Especially compared with URM in the work of Huysmans and colleagues (2019) where social organisations are very prominent support providers, we see a low threshold in the case of ARM. In doing so, parents are sometimes wrongfully seen as providers of all types of support whilst their knowledge and access to this new living environment also is limited. Especially in the more practical forms of support we see gaps left to fill in for formal actors. Additionally, this group of newcomers is positioned in an intermediate position: on the one hand they are mostly seen as 'accompanied children' on the other hand they are young refugees. The protective role of their parents masks their vulnerability and support needs. Within their position as refugees they are guided in education and housing but insufficiently guided in their access to more diverse social networks, urban fabric and broader society.

In doing so, our society unintentionally organises segregated lives in reception facilities, educational contexts and in the broader urban communities. This is mainly caused by a focus on this group of newcomers based on their status as 'accompanied children' and asylum seekers, refugees, foreigners, exiles or nomads, rather than a focus on these young newcomers as youth. This study therefore is a plea for a more balanced approach between a perspective on care and well-being towards a perspective on youth. A perspective that is alert for their new and sometimes vulnerable position but at the same time is aware of their emancipated role as young people.

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## Chapter 6. Young newcomers' convoy of social relations three years after arrival in urban Belgium\*

### **Abstract**

During the past decades, there is a growing interest in the role social networks play in migration processes. Research has demonstrated that accessing and establishing supportive ties in the host society is far from evident. This study aspires to voice the ways by which supportive networks are created and maintained across multiple borders and realities. We voiced these networks from the perspective of young newcomers (both Accompanied Refugee Minors (ARM) and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) three years after their arrival to Belgium, by applying Khan and Antonucci's Convoy Model of social relations (1980). The model is used as a conceptual lens to describe the composition, function and adequacy of young newcomers' social networks. In order to do so, 42 youngsters who recently migrated to urban Belgium were interviewed.

Young newcomers with an ARM status have small but valued networks that are mostly informal and locally anchored in the city they live. Most ARM have networks that grow from relations and places with people in the same position; newcomers. A network that connects these youngsters to the broader reality surrounding them is often a missing link. Valuable examples, like god families and youth work activities show to increase this connection and expand social networks both in quantity and quality.

For URM their road and access to the broader society is bumpy: they do not have a stable basis of family to lean on, but they also lack stable living conditions. The multiple movements complicate their connection with their immediate and broader living environment. Connections occur in between people and less in between places. Nevertheless, URM also have important and very close links with peers and personal assistants who surround, support and comfort them, even after their professional relation no longer exists.

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## 1. Introduction

Children and youngsters under the age of eighteen, count for half of the refugee population worldwide (UNHCR, 2017; IOM, 2018). Since 2010, approximately 50 million children migrated over borders (UNICEF, 2016). In 2017, Belgium hosted 7,594 Refugee Minors of which 733 were Unaccompanied Minor Refugees (URM) (Immigration Office, 2018). This group represents one third of the asylum-seeking population, and therefore is an important stakeholder in the asylum and migration policy and social care system of Belgium (Eide & Hjern, 2013; Kevers & De Haene, 2014; OCGRS, 2017).

Those living outside their countries of origin may vary strongly on their cultural background, the reasons and mode of migration, the means available for them and the context they settle (Hynie, Crooks, & Barragan, 2011). Nevertheless, they all have a rupture in their social network that needs to be (re)build in their new living environment (Hynie et al., 2011). Previous research has demonstrated that the process of accessing and establishing supportive ties in the host society is far from evident (Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008). Social networks may be deficient and social relations may be either disrupted or devalued in the host country (Stewart et al., 2008).

Young newcomers often lose their entire social networks and must leave most family and friends behind (Soller, Goodkind, Greene, Browning, & Shantzek, 2018). Forced migration, therefore, needs to be analysed as a social process in which social networks play a central role (Castles, 2003). Strong social networks have shown to correlate with emotional wellbeing in urban refugee populations (Stevens, 2016). In fact, one of the main contributing factors for young newcomers facilitating adaption, well-being and overall quality of life in the asylum country lays in the development of close and meaningful social relations (Sierau, Schneider, Nesterko, & Glaesmer, 2019). In doing so, supportive networks can positively influence newcomers' feelings of belonging (Stewart et al., 2008).

### 1.1. Social Networks and Social Support

Social networks are defined as the vehicle through which social support is provided (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). Gottlieb and Berkman (as cited in Langford, Bowsher, Maloney & Lillis, 1997) portray the social network as an interactive field of persons, who provide the 'give and take' of helpfulness and protection. Where social networks can be understood as the structure; social support is the function of this interactive process (Langford et al., 1997). Structural dimensions of a social network refer to the form and distribution of relations within the network (Valenta, 2008), to include a wide array of partners (Fingerman, 2009). The most common structural dimensions of a social network are size, reachability, density, the centrality of specific individuals and durability (Valenta, 2008). These networks can be formal or informal, operating between specific individuals or as part of a wider community of members (McCabe, Gilchrist,



Harris, Afridi, & Kyprianou, 2013). People build up new relationships, make new acquaintances and lose touch with others. Some relations can be developed solely to fulfil a specific goal and then disappear once it is accomplished. Others may last a lifetime (Bø, Degenne & Forse; as cited in Valenta, 2008).

The functional dimension, on its turn with its affective, emotional, or psychological components is what makes social relations important (Antonucci, Ajrouch, & Birditt, 2013). They all refer to the qualitative properties of the ties between the individual and other persons in the network (Song, Son, & Lin, 2011). There is an existing typology of four defining attributes of social support into which all acts of support can be assigned: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support and appraisal support (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Mels, Derluyn, & Broekaert, 2008). Emotional support is believed to be the most important category through which the perception of support is transferred to others (Langford et al., 1997) and indicates that a person is valued and accepted. Instrumental support focusses on the tangible, concrete provision of financial aid, material resources and services. Informational support helps one to define, understand and cope with challenges in life by providing information about the environment, or assistance in problem solving. Appraisal support includes information or communication relevant to one's self-evaluation. Ryan and colleagues (2008), add social companionship (i.e., spending time with each other in recreational activities) to the attributes of social support.

These varying types of support may be provided by diverse people in varied ways, at different times, and for newcomers these forms of support may cross national boundaries. In this way, transnational links with people 'back home' may continue to play a supportive role after migration (Ryan et al., 2008). These relations can also be kin or non kin-based, take place on a frequent basis or only within a crisis situation (Lin, Dean, & Ensel, as cited in Song et al., 2011), come from multiple formal and informal sources of peers, family and professionals (Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003).

Social support is thus a multidimensional construct (Song et al., 2011). Within the process of each defining attribute of social support exchange or reciprocity must be present for the support to be sustainable. They are all helpful and protective to the person receiving the support, enabling an exchange of reciprocal supportive actions, contributing to one's well-being (Langford et al., 1997).

## 1.2. The convoy Model of Social Relations

The Convoy Model of social relations (see Figure 1), developed by Khan and Antonucci in the 1980's, provides a means of conceptualising the structure and function of social relationships within the individual's social network at any given point in life (Franco & Levitt, 1998). It is presented as an alternative to traditional approaches that fail to capture the complexity of social relationships across time and context, with a special emphasis on

emotional closeness (Levitt, 2005). People across their life course, from young to old and in various settings, quite readily identify close and important persons, uncovering elements of social relations that are universal across diverse populations (Antonucci et al., 2013). The model is viewed as a network of relationships that moves with a person throughout his or her lifetime, changing in structure but providing continuity in the exchange of support (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1993). Within the Convoy Model, structural and functional properties of social networks can be described not only in terms of their status at any given point in time, but also in terms of changes that take place across time and situation. The term convoy rather than network is used to capture both the protective function and the dynamic nature of a social network as it moves with the individual through the life cycle (Levitt, 2005). In doing so, conceptualising social relations as a convoy enables a parsimonious representation of a highly complex human circumstance (Antonucci et al., 2013).

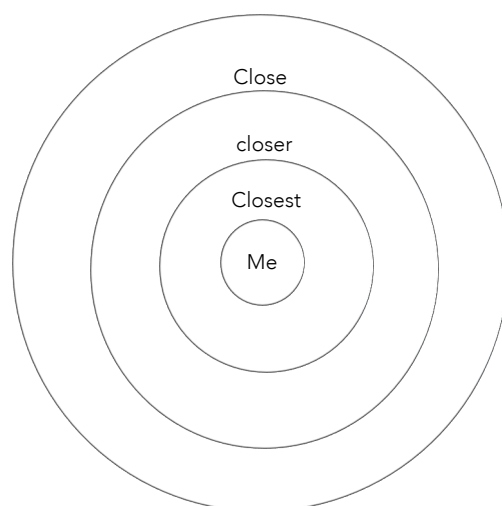


Figure 1: The Convoy Model of social relations by Khan and Antonucci (1980)

### 1.3. Research Objective

Research investigating newcomers' personal experiences after their arrival to host-societies (Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping, & Goldman; Wernesjo, as cited in O'Toole Thommessen, Corcoran, & Todd, 2015), and their support needs (Stewart et al., 2008) are scarce. Moreover, in spite of the significance of social support in positive outcomes, there is a lack of research on these youngsters' social relations and supportive networks 'home', abroad and in the resettlement countries (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015).

This research addresses two research gaps. First, the complexity by which social support works for different groups of newcomers has been largely overlooked in research (Stewart et al., 2008). A way to deal with this complexity is by using of the Convoy Model of social relations (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). This model has been widely employed in research with adult populations (e.g. Schwartz & Litwin, 2019), but studies of convoy development in childhood

and adolescence have been less frequent (Levitt, 2005). Such studies could lead to vital knowledge for interventions and for the establishment on how to best support these groups at early stages.

Second, the voices of newcomer youth are quite absent within existing literature. Few studies have previously enabled newcomer youth to identify and voice what has been helpful in the receiving country (Wernesjo as cited in O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015). Some of those qualitative studies have established the important role of social networks in the process of integration, providing both practical and emotional support (Boswell as cited in Beirens, Hughes, Hek, & Spicer, 2007; Wilkinson & Marmot as cited in Beirens et al., 2007). Similarly, research focusing on young newcomers has found network building and connectedness, to foster conditions for settlement in the host community (Save the Children, 2000) and promote a sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence in the future (Kidane as cited in Beirens et al., 2007; Richman as cited in Beirens et al., 2007; Stanley as cited in Beirens et al., 2007).

Therefore, this qualitative study will explore the role of supportive social networks in the lives of Accompanied and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (ARM and URM) who arrived in urban Belgium around three years ago. These youngsters are in an intermediate stage of their lives after arrival in the host country. We aim to identify support needs in the social network of ARM and URM on the doorstep of their transition from newcomers to citizens by applying the Convoy Model of social relations. Although our primary focus is on young newcomers regardless on their status, the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (OCGRSP) makes a distinction between Accompanied (ARM) and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM). The OCGRSP (2015, p. 1) defines ARM on the one hand as "any child who, in any residence procedure, is accompanied by (a) parent(s) or legal representative. European children accompanied by (a) parent(s) are also called accompanied minors". These youngsters are under 18 years old and they or their parents applied for asylum. URM on the other hand, relates to those younger than 18 years originating from a country outside of the European Economic Area. URM reside in Belgium without parent(s) or legal guardian, applied for asylum or resides without legal documents in Belgium. URM are entitled to a guardian by the ministry of Justice. URM are protected by the Belgian state until a sustainable solution is found in repatriation, resettlement or local integration (Cloet, 2007).

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1. Research design**

The present study is embedded in a broader research project on experiences, needs and strengths of young (minor) newcomers (both accompanied and unaccompanied) who (re)build their lives in urban Belgium. More specifically the project aims to map minor newcomers' experiences and needs related to social networks, social support and citizenship. From

January to May 2018, 59 young newcomers who arrived in urban Belgium between 2,5 to 5 years ago were interviewed. The series of interviews used in this study is a follow-up of our previous interviews with 63 newcomers who recently arrived in Belgium (max. 18 months), allowing for a timely perspective on the establishment of new livings (Huysmans et al., 2019).

For this study, we reached saturation after analysing the data derived from 42 semi-structured interviews with young newcomers (21 ARM and 21 URM), focusing on the Convoy Model of social relations (Khan & Antonucci, 1980).

## 2.2. Procedures and data collection

Both ARM and URM were recruited by using a purposive sampling procedure. Throughout this procedure we strived for a broad diversity of those participants based on gender, status, the asylum procedure, city of residence in Belgium and country of origin. In order to reach and recruit participants, a diverse set of organisations, all involved in the daily life of young newcomers, were contacted. The building of this network occurred through meetings, info sessions and individual appointments with young newcomers and employees. Where applicable, the partner organisations also fostered the link with the parents. Participants were recruited via (reception) schools, welfare services, (small scale) reception facilities for asylum seekers, youth organisations, guardians and integration agencies. The inclusion criteria were refined by selecting participants between 13 and 18 years old, who reside no longer than 5 years and no shorter than 2,5 years in a Belgian city larger than 40,000 inhabitants. Exclusion criteria were based on the psychosocial well-being of newcomers (estimated by the partnering reception facilities) and on the personal decline of young newcomers and/or their parent(s).

Once the participants agreed to participate in the research an informed consent was signed by the youngster and their parents (available in Dutch, French, Arabic, Pashto or Dari). They were informed about the voluntary nature of their involvement, their right to refuse to participate and the confidentiality of their responses. Once the participants signed the informed consent form, four trained researchers administered a qualitative in depth-interview with open-ended questions in the language and location of the participants' choice. In one interview an interpreter attended the interviews.

The qualitative data collection comprised questions on experiences regarding participants' social networks and social support by using the Convoy Model of social relations of Khan and Antonucci (1980). In order to explore their social networks and supportive relationships, the hierarchical mapping procedure of the Convoy Model of social relations was used (Khan & Antonucci, 1980). The purpose of the circles diagram is to provide participants with a framework to describe their social support networks (see Figure 1). This mapping method does not assume a structure about who is or should be a network member. Rather, it enables participants to describe their social support networks according to their personal feelings of closeness (Antonucci, 1986). Convoy members are mapped from the participants perspective

on the basis of affective closeness and importance. Support functions tap the affective, affirmative, and aid domains specified in the Convoy Model of social relations (Levitt, 2005).

We did not aim to test the model. Instead, we use it as a conceptual lens to describe and interpret the structure (composition), function and adequacy of ARM's and URM's social networks. In doing so, this model serves as a starting point for our qualitative analysis, which focuses on the (re)building of social supportive networks in the years after arrival in urban Belgium.

The researchers all used the same question protocol, applying the same questions and the same construction. Questions were conceived in order to maximise the participants' voice and at the same time reduce the influence of the researchers (Rosenthal, 1993). This perspective facilitated a co-construction of narratives. This approach uses the stories of the participants and how they connect one reality to another. In doing so, representing the world as experienced by the participants (Riessman, 2008). This co-construction of narratives was reached throughout the use of creative methods, drawings of their social networks and the people who (are or used to be) important in their lives today and before (Baarda et al., 2013; Dedding, 2013). The participants made the drawings themselves and those drawings remained present throughout the interview. This allowed us to reflect, add or modify the constitution or role of one's social network during the entire interview (Adriansen, 2012).

### 2.3. Participants' characteristics

The present study used qualitative data from participants (n=42) with both an ARM and URM status who lived in Brussels (n=8), Antwerp (n=7), Ghent (n=7), Hasselt (n=4), Turnhout (n=4), Kortrijk (n=3), Sint-Niklaas (n=3), Ostend (n=2), Mechelen (n=2), Aalst (n=1) and Bruges (n=1). The inclusion of the urban context is motivated by the role cities play as hubs and cross points in migration processes (De Winter, 2015). Superdiverse cities are home to a majority of youngsters with roots in migration (Mansouri & Johns, 2017). Cities have become a place where newcomers want to establish a new living (Schillebeeckx & Albeda, 2014; Siemiatycki, 2005). In 2016, three out of five refugees who arrived in a new country live in urban areas (UNHCR, 2016). Today, that is even nearly two out of three refugees (UNHCR, 2019). This evolution strongly changed the social and cultural mix of European cities, leading to ethnically diverse, multicultural and cosmopolitan cities (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009).

The demarcation of participants, as listed below in table 1, is in line with registration numbers of The Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (2017) on the countries of origin of newcomers to Belgium. More than half of all refugees worldwide originate out of three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia (United Nations, 2016).

On average, participants lived 34 months in Belgium (shortest stay 26 months, longest stay 68 months). The average age of the participants is 17 years (the youngest is 13, the oldest is 19 year), with a balance in gender for ARM and with respect for the over representation of boys with an URM status. The asylum procedure of one participant was still ongoing. 20 participants were granted the refugee status, 18 participants were Subsidiary protected and three young newcomers were denied international protection. The average length of the interviews was 104 minutes (with a total length of 71 hours).

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

Participant	Gender	Status	Age (in years)	Country of origin	In Belgium since (in months)
Participant 1	Male	URM	18	Afghanistan	29
Participant 2	female	ARM	16	Iraq	30
Participant 3	Male	URM	16	Afghanistan	30
Participant 4	Male	URM	18	Afghanistan	36
Participant 5	Male	URM	18	Somalia	32
Participant 6	Male	URM	17	Afghanistan	29
Participant 7	Male	ARM	16	Afghanistan	68
Participant 8	Male	URM	17	Afghanistan	31
Participant 9	Male	ARM	16	Afghanistan	30
Participant 10	Male	ARM	17	Syria	30
Participant 11	Male	ARM	16	Syria	30
Participant 12	Male	URM	17	Somalia	33
Participant 13	Male	URM	18	Eritrea	36
Participant 14	Female	ARM	16	Iran	36
Participant 15	Male	URM	16	Afghanistan	26
Participant 16	Male	URM	19	Afghanistan	36
Participant 17	Male	URM	18	Afghanistan	30
Participant 18	Male	URM	18	Afghanistan	30
Participant 19	Male	ARM	18	Syria	30
Participant 20	Female	ARM	15	Afghanistan	43
Participant 21	Male	URM	18	Afghanistan	30
Participant 22	Male	ARM	18	Somalia	34
Participant 23	Male	URM	17	Afghanistan	36
Participant 24	Male	ARM	18	Afghanistan	36
Participant 25	Male	URM	18	Afghanistan	36
Participant 26	Male	ARM	18	Syria	28
Participant 27	Male	ARM	16	Syria	28
Participant 28	Male	URM	17	Afghanistan	30
Participant 29	Male	URM	18	Afghanistan	28
Participant 30	Male	ARM	19	Syria	29
Participant 31	Female	ARM	19	Somalia	28
Participant 32	Male	URM	17	Afghanistan	29
Participant 33	Female	ARM	15	Palestine	32
Participant 34	Male	ARM	17	Syria	60
Participant 35	Male	ARM	17	Syria	32
Participant 36	Female	ARM	13	Syria	32
Participant 37	Female	ARM	16	Syria	29
Participant 38	Female	ARM	18	Syria	44
Participant 39	Male	URM	17	Albania	30
Participant 40	Female	ARM	18	Guinea	41
Participant 41	Male	URM	18	Afghanistan	30
Participant 42	Male	URM	19	Iraq	32

## 2.4. Data analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed *ad verbatim* and read through repeatedly. The interviews were coded and analysed using the software program MAXQDA12, facilitating thematic content analyses (Baarda et al., 2015; Oliveira, Bitencourt, Teixeira, & Santos, 2013). This is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The analysis process involves a careful, more focused re-reading and review of the data. This iterative process consisted of various cycles of coding and discussing the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the coding and analysing process of the data a thematic analysis was diploid. In doing so, analyses occurred both deductive, concept-driven, and inductive, data-driven (Cho & Lee, 2014; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Gibbs, 2007; McGraw et al., 2017). For the deductive coding, a codebook was developed from research literature on the Convoy Model of social relations by Khan and Antonucci (1980) and more recent literature linking social support to refugees (Behnia, 2003; Beirens et al., 2007; Brown, 2002; Levitt, Weber, & Guacci, 1993): (1) social support and her structural dimension (what does the social network look like) and (2) social support and the functional dimension (which supportive role does the network play). Within this template, inductive coding took place for the creation of sublabels in the main labels, which allowed new themes to emerge from the interviews. Several researchers were involved in the coding process. Interviews were individually coded by the main researcher. Consensus on the codebook was achieved through discussion with one expert in qualitative research methods and two experts in social networks and social support.

Prior to reporting the findings, the data were revisited a final time to cluster the themes according to the research themes and select representative quotes and examples that illustrate these themes. Examples are used both in support of the findings and to balance the voices of the researchers and the participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The Composition of the Social Networks

Although we included 21 Accompanied (ARM) and 21 Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) as participants for this article; their status shows to be subject of change throughout their journeys. A very large majority of the ARM participants arrived in Belgium unaccompanied by their parents. Some of them where only reunited after receiving the refugee status. In doing so, engaging with a family reunification procedure. Several of the participants with an URM status, are still assessing their possibilities for a family reunification today, more than three years after arrival in Belgium. In other situations, the entire core family undertook their journey together. In many other cases, one of the parents made the journey to Belgium alone, before bringing over the rest of their family members:



*"My dad was the first one to come to Belgium. I think he arrived here five or six years ago. I followed later, about three years ago. So, I could move directly into my dad's house. My brother is also here now. (...) One year ago, my mom arrived"* (participant 17).

### 3.1.1. Composition of the social network

When looking closer into the composition of these networks, three aspects are crucial; the diversity of the social networks based on ethnicity, the relation between kin and non-kin and the presence of formal care providers. Clear differences occur between the social networks of ARM and those of URM. When it comes to the diversity of the social network, more than half of ARM have social networks that mainly consist out of people with roots in migration, mostly refugees. Their ethnically diverse network often emerges in the reception schools (called OKAN or DASPA schools) they have to attend in their first years after arrival in order to integrate into the local context and learn one of the countries languages. The important minority of ARM who have a more diverse network, to also include Belgian youngsters have different contexts where they create these networks; OKAN schools, regular schools and leisure time activities in sport clubs. As in the case of URM, the same variety occurs. There is however one supplementary context for the creation of social networks; the reception centres or as many participants call it; 'camps'. Most networks include a wide variety of ethnicities with a refugee background, they meet in the reception centres, OKAN or DASPA schools, regular schools and leisure. Different from ARM, URM have less people with (native) Belgian roots in their networks. Their networks are however larger than the networks of ARM and evolve out of the reception facilities they attend(ed):

*"Most of my friends are from Afghanistan, but also from Somalia, Morocco, Turkey, Syria, ... We all met in the camp. It's not that we see each other all the time, but we are still in touch. Some I see every day, others in the weekend, some on the phone. (...). In the weekend I go to Sint-Niklaas, Antwerp or Leuven to visit them"* (participant 32).

Within the relation between kin and non-kin, little less than half of the ARM lives in Belgium with their core family (i.e. parents, brothers and/or sisters). One participant indicated: *"I now live in Leuven with my mom and dad. I have two sisters and two brothers. My brother is 22, so he lives by himself in Brussels. My sister and my little brother, they were born here"* (participant 21). In other cases, the core family is present, but does not live together anymore. These youngsters live with one of their parents. A third and considerable group of participants with an ARM status lives in Belgium with their core family but is also surrounded by extended family (i.e. uncles, aunties, grandparents, nephews and nieces). One participant explained: *"My dad and his brother already lived in Belgium. I have three uncles living here, also nieces of my dad. So, when I arrived, I already had a lot of people close to me"* (participant 6).

URM, are by definition unaccompanied by their parents, but that does not necessarily mean they are entirely separated from their family. A small minority of participants indeed has links with members of their core or extended family in Belgium or Europe. In some cases, it concerns a brother or sister, in other cases nephews or nieces are also present in Belgium:

*"At first, I was alone. When I arrived in my second camp, I made a friend. This friend also knew my brother. He and my brother lived together in another camp. I didn't even know my brother was also in Belgium, our plan was to go to England. (...) It took me one year to find him"* (participant 35).

Nevertheless, the vast majority of URM, lives without close nor extended family. One participant explained: *"I have so many people surrounding me and yet, I can feel lonely. I would love to have my family here. But for now, it's not possible, we don't have the money"* (participant 41). An important majority of this group of URM has suffered family loss, mostly their father. In all these cases a direct link with the instable living conditions led to the killing of (one of) their parents. For these youngsters, this event was a strong trigger to leave their country of birth. An important part of them, has no contacts with their family 'back home'.

A third and last element in the composition of a social network can be found in the presence of formal care providers (e.g. social workers, care givers, guardians, teachers, public welfare organisations, reception facilities, ...). Professionals who provide welfare services to enhance newcomers' well-being and facilitate the establishment and connection with the Belgian society. Linked to ARM, the formal network can be described as temporarily present. A large majority of the participants mentions their reception school (OKAN or DASPA) and their teachers as important network members. This are often also places that facilitate the creation of networks with peers. Beside these care providers, in little less than half of the interviews youth work organisations that specifically work with newcomers and sport clubs are mentioned as places where they engage in recreational activities with other youngsters (with a refugee background). A minority of ARM talks about social services and welfare providers, social workers, NGO's, or integration offices, as part of their social network. Their presence is mostly directed towards their parent(s) and to a small extent to these youngsters. The number of formal nodes is small and mainly concerns welfare services and their social workers providing assistance (housing, schooling, leisure) in the first period after arrival.

With respect to URM, the formal network is very extensive. They talk about a multitude of people with a great diversity of formal roles in their day to day live. Although this formal network is extensive in numbers, it has a more limited core of professionals who matter to most URM. Almost all the participants talk about the Public Social Welfare Centre (OCMW), the social workers in the reception facilities, their teachers and their guardian as important stakeholders in their social network. By far, URM stress the important role social workers (more specifically their personal assistants) play in their day to day lives. These 'personal assistants'

are social workers who have a closer trust relationship with one youngster in a reception facility and act as reference figures in their daily lives. Guardians are also often mentioned but not always positively estimated by URM. To a much lesser extent also volunteers who engage in the daily lives of URM (godmother and godfather), lawyers, youth organisations that work with newcomers and sport clubs are acknowledged. Besides the quantity of formal care providers, there is also a regular shift in the people who are present in the networks of URM. In other words, the above-mentioned professional roles remain available but the people who execute those roles changes on a regular basis due to moves from one reception facility to another and finally to a more personalised living environment (like a student room or a house shared with other newcomers). Several youngsters, however, keep in touch with their personal assistants after moving:

*"Samira, I met her in my camp in Turnhout. She was my assistant; she is like a sister to me. I see her once or twice a week, we also chat. (...) She was my assistant but then I had to move, so now she became my friend"* (participant 30).

### 3.1.2. Durability, anchorage and reachability of the social network

It is self-evident that when young newcomers move from one country to another; social networks are challenged in their durability. This durability concerns the stability of relations and the balance between old and new relations. Since the connection of the participants to their (core) family already has been discussed in the previous section, our focus point here is the durability of young newcomers' broader social network. A majority of ARM still maintains their relationship with close ones in their home country: family and in some cases, friends. Although durable, the intensity and closeness decreases throughout the years:

*"I feel alone, left alone. I am not really alone but still; I am away from my friends. I still hear them but that's different. I can't gossip anymore; I don't know who's in their school, who's in their lives. This brought a distance in our relationships. When I see people laughing together, I remember the moments I did the same at home, I really miss my friends"* (participant 6).

As in the case of URM, a vast majority has social networks that transcend their time in Belgium. These durable links only exist with their core, in some exceptional cases with extended family and sometimes family members or friends who also live in Belgium or Europe. Other connections (e.g. with friends in their home country) are rare to still be present:

*"When I arrived in Belgium, it was late at night. So, I decided to go to my friend's house in Antwerp. He is also an Afghan boy. He was my neighbour in Afghanistan and now he lives here with his family"* (participant 41).

Long lasting relations have to be rethought after arrival. At the same time new relations emerge in their current living environment. These networks are constantly challenged in their durability due to transnational movements and regular relocations from one city to another after arrival in Belgium.

When looking closer into the social networks of ARM, in a grand majority of the cases, their anchorage is the most strongly rooted in the neighbourhood and the city they live in. As one participant indicated: *"We live in a street where people know each other. We already know many people. It's a street famous for its Moroccan shops. It's a friendly neighbourhood"* (participant 35). In many cases these locally anchored networks also exceed the neighbourhood, to include the city they live in:

*"I have always lived in this street, but not in the same house. This is my third house in Belgium. (...) The people, who live here, we know each other. Sometimes, people even go out in their pyjama's. (...) My school is close to my house, so I know the people, I know their parents. We play in this city"* (participant 38).

The anchorage of URM's network shows a more fragmented image. Although instable, a vast majority of the participants still maintains an anchored network with (extended) family in their home country. One participant explained: *"My family is still in Afghanistan, they are important to me. I call them, but it's very expensive; it costs me 10€ for a five minutes call. So, I can't call a lot, usually once every three weeks"* (participant 18). Further, in a vast majority of cases the anchorage of URM's networks rises across multiple Belgian cities. During their residence in Belgium many URM underwent various moves from one city/centre to another. These relocations generated networks with peers in-between cities:

*"I don't feel at home in Hasselt. I liked Turnhout, I liked Ghent. I don't know people in this neighbourhood"* (participant 30).

In succession to the 'durability' and 'anchorage' of social networks, a third distinction in one's social network can be made regarding the 'reachability' of these networks. Although networks get fragmented across various contexts and their composition reconstituted, almost all the ARM manage to create or maintain networks that are reachable on a regular basis. For one part of these youngsters this is a network that is very locally organised. This implies that their current network is geographically close and available in their current city of residence. For the other part this is a network that crosses borders but where 'those who matter' are reachable even though they may not be geographically close:

*"My best friend, I talk to her every day on WhatsApp. She now lives in a camp in Uganda. She has always been my best friend. She left Somalia with her family before me. I love her, she is my best friend"* (participant 14).

Due to multiple moves in-between cities, there is no clear line in the reachability and proximity of URM's social networks. The most reachable networks are those with friends and (former) formal care providers. Much more fragmented and non-routinous are contacts with 'home'. This implies that their network is reachable and close by for different types of support offered by friends and formal care providers, but at the same time also geographically dispersed for close types of connections and support:

*"I can't reach my family because they have to go to a special place where there is connection. So, they can call me, but I can't reach them. I hear them once a month, once every two months; mostly when there is something to celebrate"* (participant 33).

### 3.2. The supportive function of the social networks

#### 3.2.1. The Convoy of social relations for young newcomers

While the previous chapter engaged with quantitative components of young newcomers' social networks, this chapter stresses the qualitative features of ones' social network, namely the support provided by their network. Participants were asked to arrange their network members according to their "closeness and importance" to them. This Convoy measure involves placing close and important people into three concentric circles, representing three levels of closeness: close, closer, closest. The places different people occupy in the convoy is related to the supportive role they play in this network. All the participants very easily indicate those who are (less) important people in their supportive network:

*"All the people on this drawing are important to me; they help me in one way or the other. They give me this feeling I'm not alone"* (participant 41).

ARM locate the biggest part of their network in the inner circle of their Convoy, where after the composition gradually declines in the outer circles. In little less than half of the interviews, not all circles of the Convoy are occupied. In the inner circle, the participants count their nuclear family (mostly their parents) to the most important members of their supportive network. In little less than half of the interviews, also brothers and/or sisters are included and only in some cases ARM draw their extended family into the core of their network. One participant explained: *"My parents, they are important to me, there is no life without them. We are always together; our bond is really strong"* (participant 1).

Next to their nuclear family network, most ARM also include friends as closest people in their network. As one participant explained: *"My friends, the ones I often see, the ones I play music with, my classmates. They are important, I see them every day and after a while you are not just friends anymore. It is like you are living together. I sometimes see my friends more then I see my parents"* (participant 16).

In a few cases, professional care providers, mostly teachers are also included in ARM's inner circle network. One participant indicated: *"My teachers miss Katrine, Bram and Karen, they really understand me, they are nice to me"* (participant 6). Moving one circle further into the second ring of ARM's Convoy to people who occupy a 'closer' position to ARM. This circle is mostly reserved for friends; friends they met in Belgium, friends from school, friends in their home or transiting country. In a few cases this part of the network also includes their school, teachers and extended family. One participant explained: *"I missed school for more than one year due to the situation in Syria. I now know how important school is to me"* (participant 16).

The outer circle of ARM's social network is regularly left empty. In different cases participants include friends, professional care providers and sometimes family to this circle:

*"I was young when I left Afghanistan, so I don't really know my family there. I think it's a big family. I don't hear them anymore, but my parents do. I don't have the time to have contact. And they don't always have access to internet"* (participant 8).

URM on their turn, also locate the biggest part of their network in the inner circle of their Convoy, where after the amount of people gradually declines in the outer circles. In one out of three interviews, not all circles of the Convoy are occupied. In the inner circle, an important minority of URM only draws their parents in the Convoy. However, in all the other cases friends and often a multitude of professional and volunteer care providers are also included. One participant explained: *"Sarah is the person who helped me out in the beginning, she did so much for me. She was the first person who really helped me. She now is my 'godmother'. She still visits me although I live in Ostend now and she still lives in Dendermonde. I also visit her. We see each other quite often. She treats me like I am her son"* (participant 37).

In the second ring of the Convoy, people who occupy a 'closer' position to URM are friends and in many cases only friends. One participant indicated: *"You know, me and my friends we have been through a lot together. We lived in the same camp. We know each other for three years now"* (participant 36). Often this circle also includes professional care providers next to friends; guardians, social workers, assistants and welfare organisations.

The outer circle of URM's social network is left empty in almost half of the interviews. In different cases participants include additional friends from the reception centres or school. In other cases, and to a lesser extent URM draw, professional care providers on this circle.

### 3.2.2. The adequacy of young newcomers' social relations

The adequacy of young newcomers' networks can be measured through the centrality of specific individuals and the extent to which these relations are reciprocal; whether the exchange of support runs in a mutual way or rather in one direction. Besides quantitative

components of a social network, like its size or density, the adequacy of a social network relates to the extent to which those networks are resourceful and supportive to young newcomers. Just like the inner circle network, the core family of ARM occupy a very central position in their supportive network. In more than half of the interviews, participants additionally include a limited number of close friends. An important minority of ARM gives a specific teacher a central role in their network. One participant indicated: *"I am very happy at school. My teachers are really kind to me. They make my body and how I feel good. They are there for me, we sometimes talk for a long time about how I feel"* (participant 11).

Not all ARM's relations are based on reciprocity. Professional relations are one direction oriented. But it is clear that most of the central relations are very mutual, especially those with parents and to a lesser extent with friends. One participant explained: *"I believe that by helping others, you also help yourself"* (participant 16). The reciprocity of these family relations very regularly concerns helping in the housekeeping, translating for parents, assisting brothers and/or sisters, comforting friends, helping neighbours with a refugee background:

*"You don't just get help from people. It's a mutual relation. I help people and people help me. For example, I help my older brother with schoolwork. He is much older than me, but he didn't have the chance to go to school. He is 25 and just started learning"* (participant 7).

URM put friends centrally in almost every supportive network. In a few cases friends are the only people who occupy this position. Although close in the Convoy, family members are only in a small minority of cases central in URM's networks. In more than half of the interviews professional care providers or volunteers fill in a central position for URM. More specifically social assistants and to a lesser extent godmothers and godfathers are important support providers:

*"Anne was truly good to me; my heart was broken, and she was there for me, every day. She was there for me; she took me outside for a walk. I still hear her on Messenger"* (participant 39).

Reciprocity is present between close friends and family members in their home country. In an important part of the cases, URM support friends and family financially:

*"I was in school; fourth grade 'Hotel management'. I had to stop when my mom called me to tell me she is sick and in need of money. So, I decided to stop school and start looking for a job to support her. My brother and sister in Afghanistan are still too small to work, so I have to do it"* (participant 36).

### 3.2.3. Support provided by young newcomers' social network

#### Emotional support

A supportive network provides emotional, instrumental and informational support, appraisal and social companionship. Overall, all types of support are present in the networks of young newcomers. In an important minority of the cases some practical forms of support lack in the networks of URM.

One of the most important properties of a social network is its emotional closeness and support. In the case of ARM several individuals play a supportive role; core family, friends and professional care providers, mostly teachers. One participant indicated: *"We cried a lot in the beginning, we were missing our mom. When I cried, my sister was there to comfort me"* (participant 18).

There is a large body of affective words, used by the participants to express the emotional support they receive; It is about feeling loved, heard, understood, comforted, special, valued, important, encouraged, understood, being like family for each other, ... Parents and friends occupy a central position. But the role of teachers is also very much stressed upon. Also, godmothers, godfathers and in exceptional cases a guardian are emotionally very important:

*"My godmother and godfather, they are like family to me. I would have never thought that after three years so much would have happened together. They mean so much to me, I really trust them. Even when my mom arrived in Belgium, they helped me to arrange her stay. I can't believe they did so much"* (participant 9).

For most URM emotional support is closely related to what they miss most; the closeness and warmth of their family. For an important part of these youngsters this means that they do not engage in close emotional relationships with anyone. One participant explained: *"Here I have to do everything by myself, you see. In Afghanistan I had my mom and dad to help me. Here, I have to think for myself, I have to live alone"* (participant 35). Several youngsters reflect on feelings of loneliness regarding the emptiness their loved ones leave behind:

*"I miss my mom, I always miss her, but I see her in my dreams every night. When I'm working hard or helping someone; I miss her. When I have news, when I see kids on the streets with their mom; I miss her, or when I did something good for school or work, I have no one to share it with. So, I write it on a piece of paper and put it in my pocket, so I can remember"* (participant 24).

Although the absence of family has severe constrain on URM's perceived emotional support, almost all participants engage in solid emotional supportive networks with friends and (professional) care providers. Personal assistants are most mentioned in this context as people



who know them, who comfort them, who listen and understand them, as people they often still hear even though they don't play this formal role in their lives anymore. Friends from the reception centres and friends from school become very central figures in one's life:

*"Some of my friends are like brothers. If something is going on, we first call each other. We don't have family here, so we are family for each other"* (participant 34).

### Instrumental support

A second type of support is instrumental support; this is a very practical type of support related to the deliverance of goods and services, financial or material resources. A great deal of these type of support relates to assistance in order to learn Dutch or French; support which is given by OKAN/DASPA schools but also by their parents. In several cases this is the only type of instrumental support ARM talk about. Much more present is the relation to other services provided by their parents and their friends and social welfare organisations in the establishment of new livings. One participant indicated: *"In the very beginning I lived in a camp in Antwerp with my family. We had a lot of help from my dad's friends. They found us a house, a school for me, they helped us with our documents, everything"* (Participant 10). In another quote the interplay between the support provided by their core family and social welfare is exemplary for both positions: *"My dad already lived here for two years, before we came. He also had help from the assistant of the OCMW. My dad taught us everything about Belgium"* (Participant 19). In a vast majority of the interviews, ARM speak about this type of support in the past sense as a type of support that was needed in the first period after arrival but often does not apply anymore in the present sense:

*"Today I am more independent. I can arrange things myself"* (Participant 16).

For URM more people take up this supportive role, mostly from a professional perspective. For most URM establishing a new living implies a series of actions that are not always self-evident. As one participant indicated: *"Many things are difficult for me; I try to find a student job, but I don't get answers. I try to find me a house; I send many messages, but I don't receive their answer"* (participant 23). This is where professional care providers step in, especially in their first period after arrival. However, as needs evolve, there is continuity in the instrumental assistance provided by social assistants and the Social Welfare Service (OCMW). An evolution that departs from a life in a reception centre and the enrolment in education, leisure, school, towards more autonomous ways of living and the financial support needed to do so. In this process the role of their guardian is stressed upon in an important majority of the cases, as someone who helps URM with 'legal things'; finding a reception centre or house and school, their asylum procedure, legal documents, ...

## Informational support

In addition to the emotional and instrumental support discussed above, a third type of support is 'informational support'. 'Teachers' are the most mentioned individuals and almost the only professionals when it comes to the provision of information and advice for ARM; they are mostly described as people who are very much available and ready to help, talk, explain, as people who are important to them:

*"My teacher, misses Cooman is really patient, she understands that many things are still new for us and that we have to learn"* (participant 6).

While only in one case for ARM, several URM lack any form of information and advice. A vast majority however can count on professional caregivers, mostly social workers/ personal assistants and to a lesser extent friends and volunteers, like a god family. URM talk about their assistants as people who are very available, who explain, who listen, who they see very often.

## Appraisal

The second to last type of support is 'appraisal'. This type of support concerns information that is relevant to ones' self-evaluation. Appraisal support is a less frequently discussed topic throughout all the interviews. ARM talk on an affectional, emotionally connected level when it comes to their parents of which several are already represented in the section on emotional support. Nevertheless, elaborated examples of what type of appraisal support participants receive is difficult to extract:

*"My family teaches me the traditions"* (participant 19).

For many URM these close affective relations with parents and loved ones are less reachable. Examples are just like in the case of ARM, little elaborated.

A minority of participants talks about their mother, personal assistant, guardian or teacher in the context of appraisal support. As one participant explained: *"My mom, she always helps me, she listens, she teaches. She teaches me how to be kind, what to do in my life"* (participant 31).

## Social companionship

The last type of support is social companionship; the time participants spend with others in recreational activities. This leisure time is mostly spent with friends. Little less than half of ARM has in one form or other, activities they engage in with friends. These activities are mostly organised by youngsters themselves. It is about hanging about together, going to the gym,

go swimming, going to the cinema, playing music together, playing soccer, go climbing, ... A small minority of ARM have different contexts and different people they engage with, during leisure time:

*"I go to the football two times a week. It's a project in the neighbourhood. I also go to a youth centre where I play pool, table soccer, table tennis, PlayStation...It's nice, I can relax, I can talk...Now we are going to make a movie about our lives. I will be in this movie"* (participant 11).

A comparable group, the same size as the previous group, has little to do in their leisure time:

*"I have busy days. I go to school all day. when I come home, I work for school, help in the housekeeping, help cooking. By then, it's already evening. So then, I don't go out anymore"* (participant 21).

URM, almost always have the companionship of friends. One participant indicated: *"You can't leave alone, you need to have friends. There is Musa, we live together, we eat together, we play together"* (participant 32). A majority of URM does not engage in formally organised leisure activities:

*"In the camp I played football all the time; there were many activities. Now, I live alone and then I have to decide for myself. I don't like to do things alone"* (participant 22).

These youngsters have close friends with whom they spend their leisure time playing cricket in the park. One participant indicated: *"There are so many people together, you could think we are in Afghanistan"* (participant 22). But also, just having a good time and laughing together, going to the mall, cinema, bowling, fitness, football, eating together, visiting each other in the weekends, ... A big minority of URM however participates in activities, next to their time with friends; these youngsters go to youth camps organised by refugee organisations, play sports in a club, do activities with assistants from their reception centre, ...

*"I am a volunteer in an organisation that works with refugees. I like to work with kids. I would like to do it as a job later. I want to let them have fun, something I never had as a child"* (participant 25).

## 4. Discussion

One of the main sensitivities for this article was to approach young newcomers from a youth perspective. By doing so, shifting focus from young refugees in a variety of statuses, towards young people. When analysing the results, the differences that prevailed between youngsters with a specific status were too distinct. Therefore, we chose to contrast youngsters accompanied and unaccompanied by their parents (ARM & URM), while remaining attentive towards a youth perspective on newcomers. In doing so, this study aspired to voice the experiences of young newcomers, with regards to the creation and maintenance of their social supportive networks three years after arrival in urban Belgium. In order to do so, we engaged with this complex reality by using Kahn and Antonucci's' Convoy Model of social relations (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980).

### 4.1. The Composition of the Social Networks

Although the ARM or URM status young newcomers have changes throughout the years, it nevertheless has an important impact on the structure and creation of young newcomers' social networks. This evolution in status mostly occurs in a shift from Unaccompanied towards Accompanied Refugee Minors by different modes of family reunification. This evolution in status is facilitated by the 'Family Reunification Directive' that determines the conditions for reunification. In the case of URM who are recognised as refugees, EU Member States are required to authorise the entry of residence of their first-degree relatives (Parusel, 2016). Our participants follow a less chronological line, where some were reunited shortly after arrival, others only after receiving the refugee status and in doing so engaging with a legal family reunification procedure. Also, Ryan and colleagues (2008) found that refugee families do not undertake their journeys as a unit. However, our study adds that it can take up to three or more years after resettlement, before the unity of families gets reconstituted.

Despite the considerable crossover in-between status, implying that many young newcomers with an ARM status have (shortly) also been young newcomers with an URM status, there is a substantial difference in the composition of their social networks. Young newcomers with an ARM status have the presence of their core family but are not numerically and affectively as connected as young newcomers with an URM status to their broader living environment. This contrasts with findings of Cheung and Phillimore (2014) who found that length of residency broadens one's social network, reflecting on newcomer's agency (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015). In our results, one's status also impacts one's social network in addition to the duration of residence.

Results on the composition of social networks often engage with the presence of ethnic communities in newcomers' social networks. The additional presence of language barriers limit people's opportunities to meet and get to know people from outside their circle of family and friends with roots in migration (Hanley et al., 2018). Additionally, Mels and colleagues (2008) focus on the negative stereotyping of newcomers and the unwillingness of Belgian youngsters to engage with one another. An unwillingness that is also visible in the broader society (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, & Reuter, 2006).

In our study barriers mainly evolve from the conception of the reception and welfare services who unintentionally have a devised reality between newcomers and society. In doing so focussing more on their status as refugees than on their life stage as young people. Thereby, connecting them too little with the 'outside world'. URM too often move from one city to another, from one centre to another and from one care system to another, all challenging the fragile constitution of their social networks three years after arrival. This can lead to a lack of knowledge of local resources outside of their immediate social circles. Social networks who are important for their well-being but are limited in terms of accessing new information, resources or opportunities (Hanley et al., 2018).

The presence of their core and sometimes even extended family is an essential part of the social networks of all young newcomers with an ARM status in our research. From this very core of their social network onwards, these youngsters mostly engage with a stable network of peers with a refugee background. To a lesser extent they also engage in a diverse network that in different cases exceeds their own ethnical and refugee background. This concerns care providers and mostly their reception schools, teachers and youth organisations where they engage in meaningful relations with their care providers and peers.

Young newcomers with an URM status lack close and meaningful links with their (core) family in Belgium. At the same time, they engage in large but more unstable supportive networks than most young newcomers with an ARM status. Their networks evolve from the reception centres they live(d) in, to include other youngsters with a refugee background. The establishment of close relationships with co-ethnic peers provides a sense of cultural continuity, of being understood, and of sharing experiences and history (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015). Nevertheless, young newcomers with an URM status in our research also establish networks in (reception) schools and leisure and to a small extent also with peers without roots in migration. Additionally, young newcomers with an URM status have formal networks that are considerably larger than those of ARM. Nevertheless, the core of this extensive network is limited (teachers and personal assistants) and those occupying these professional positions regularly switches. This instability contrasts with one of the core ideas of the Convoy Model, where social networks are considered to be dynamic and thus evolving, but with a continuity in the exchange of support (Levitt et al., 1993; Levitt, 2005). The uncertain continuity of social

networks contrasts with the crucial need for social relations as sources of empowerment (Klvaňová, 2010).

These switches in social networks are not new to young newcomers'; they have all suffered a rupture in their social network by leaving their country of birth. Although most of them manages to maintain these 'overseas' relations, they devalue in intensity and emotional closeness. Young newcomers with an ARM status quickly settle in a specific context and by doing so, create a solid basis for the creation of durable relationships in their new local living environment. This stability facilitates new relationships but also the maintenance of older and close links over multiple borders. This is partly in line with research from Herz (2015) stating that young newcomers have both local, national and transnational relationships as they are in contact with people of their current place of residence, while also staying in touch with relatives and friends in their country of origin and third countries. Our results show that the connections in their countries of origin and even more in third countries are much more limited both for young newcomers with an ARM as an URM status.

For young newcomers with an URM status however, these social network ruptures are more robust and frequent. They leave home and loose part of their close relations there. After arrival they keep facing difficulties in engaging with durable networks due to frequent moves, changes in school context and changes in professional care providers. Nevertheless, most of these youngsters manages to maintain a link with those meaningful to them whether it is across borders or across cities.

The broader urban context is thought to be a facilitating hub in the adaption into society (Mansouri & Johns, 2017). In the context of this research this applies for young newcomers with an ARM status but not for those with an URM status. The latter mainly create their supportive networks in their care facilities, with other refugees and with care providers and thus are formally constituted. While the former more easily engages in the local urban community they live in. This reflects the structural barriers in the establishment of mutual social networks with the broader society as Jasinkaja-Lahti and colleagues (2006) and Mansouri and Johns (2017) argue. Structural barriers that are unintentionally created by the asylum and welfare system and not cooped by the diversity or the presence of informal, urban and ethnic group networks. Networks that can provide newly arrived immigrants with a range of community benefits (Ryan et al., 2008), but often does not apply for young newcomers.

The Belgian reception and asylum system departs from a 'child's Rights' perspective, providing both protection and assistance to young newcomers until they reach adulthood. Although URM are strongly surrounded and supported by the Belgian asylum and welfare policy, it simultaneously and unintended creates barriers towards a durable access to their broader living environment. Young newcomers with an URM status are too often subject of decisions made over their heads leading to changes in their living environment, professional

care providers and contacts with peers. Receiving social support from others who have had similar experiences has been found to be helpful for improving refugees' mental health (Soller et al., 2018). Their relationship with other refugee youngsters is important, because they can relate to one another by knowing and empathising with their lived realities and having gone through comparable difficulties (Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003).

#### 4.2. The supportive function of the Social Networks

As stated above, young newcomers with an ARM status have small but close and resourceful social networks. When looking closer into their social relations by applying the Convoy Model, the very heart of these networks is reserved for their parents and friends. In doing so, combining long lasting relations with new friendships. The following circles are very regularly left empty. This implies that a small set of family and friends in the first circle and teachers and friends in the second circle provide a multitude of supportive roles. The work of Fingerman (2009) confirms that young people mostly have a small set of intimate, strong, close ties but contrasts this with hundreds of more peripheral relationships. Undoubtedly, close relations are essential for human survival. Yet more peripheral ties may also enhance life quality and allow people to flourish. Those peripheral ties are often absent in the social networks of ARM.

Young newcomers with an ARM status show to have strong core networks with high levels of adequacy. This adequacy is derived from the fact that those occupying a central position in their network have a strong mutual and emotional connection with each other. A special place is very regularly reserved for teachers, both in reception and regular schools. They have a close, emotional relation but are also very present in the provision of more practical forms of support and in ARM's connection to their broader living environment. Although these teachers have a one direction professional role towards these youngsters, ARM feel a strong mutual emotional connection and closeness. The work of Rousseau and Gudzer (2008) suggest that refugee families tend to underutilise welfare services, making of schools a key place to connect with their host society and an access point for support. Schools are seen as one of the most influential service systems for young newcomers (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

The different types of support are well provided by the social networks of ARM. Emotional closeness mostly exists in relation to their parents, siblings, peers and teachers. This trespasses findings of Fingerman (2009) who sees this position mainly occupied by parents. Our results show that although a great deal of these relations are relatively new, they already reached an important level of emotional closeness and support. Friends, mostly refugees but also Belgian youngsters, are present when it comes to leisure, the companionship they give to one another and the emotional closeness that evolves out of their time together. This is in line with results of Oppedal and Idsoe (2015) who suggest that newcomers report high levels of support from their friends, implying that they have been quite successful in establishing social networks in their local communities.

Formal care providers are not very present in the supportive networks of young newcomers with an ARM status; both emotionally and practically; ARM mostly count on their parents and friends for more practical types of support. This strongly contrasts with literature where specially the less close relationships are seen as providers of these more practical forms of support (Fingerman, 2009; Granovetter as cited in Simich et al., 2003; Rose, Carrasco, and Charboneau as cited in Simich et al., 2003; Wells, 2011). But this also shows that newcomers used shared information, resources and tactics to make the best of their position (Williams, 2006). Although ARM do not see it as a shortcoming in their network, they are a lot less surrounded by formal care providers when compared with URM. This formal support is often related to ones' adjustment into their broader environment and thus implies knowledge of this environment (Mels et al., 2008; Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, & Mooren, 2016). Nonetheless, this type of support is mainly provided by friends and family who to a greater or lesser extent are also new to this context. Also, ARM themselves, actively engage in these types of support by helping their parents and friends with practical support.

Young newcomers with an ARM status have small but valued networks that are mostly informal and locally anchored in the city they live. Most ARM have networks that grow from relations and places with people in the same position; newcomers. A network that connects these youngsters to the broader reality surrounding them is often a missing link. Valuable examples, like god families and youth work activities show to increase this connection and expand social networks both in quantity and quality.

In contrast to ARM, young newcomers with an URM status are looking for new balance between their network as it was 'back home' and their new realities. They do all include their parents to the very core of their social networks. Although, physically not present and often not alive, parents remain essential in their networks. In the work of Oppedal and Idsoe (2015) contact with families abroad, results in high levels of support, in spite of the barriers to physical contact and direct communication.

After three years a diversity of people, in a diversity of roles and in a diversity of contexts occupy the most central positions in URM's networks. The core and second ring of their Convoy has friends, professional and volunteer care providers, next to their parents as essential in their lives. It is remarkable that so many people already occupy such a central position in URM's lives after a relatively short period of three years. Just like it is the case for ARM, many URM leave the more peripheral circles empty.

Parents are the most important people to young newcomers with an URM status, but friends are the most central to them. Friends who are connected to their new living environment and therefore can actively engage in reciprocal and supportive relations. they have been through comparable hardship and experience the same doubts and benefits in their new living environment. URM spend a great deal of their time together, just being together.



These youngsters strongly miss the emotional closeness of their core family and find difficulties to engage in this type of relationship with anyone else. This often leads to feelings of loneliness. Nevertheless, almost all youngsters sooner or later engage in close and emotionally meaningful relations with peers and (professional) care providers. This professional care is so central to URM because they fulfil a great deal of their support needs. They are both emotionally as more practically very important support providers. In this role a special place is reserved for personal assistants. Personal assistants often evolve from their professional role, towards a relationship based on friendship or voluntary care provision after their professional relationship finds closure. Those relations often are close during their formal period but reach higher levels of emotional closeness after becoming informal and voluntary. This evolution is also visible in the care needs of URM throughout time; a need that evolves from very essential but basal support in housing, school, leisure, ... towards instrumental and informational support in order to live more autonomously. In this evolution, new organisations step in, in a more practical guidance. Simultaneously, the closer professional relations evolve towards voluntary connections with higher levels of emotional closeness.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aims to identify support needs in the social networks of ARM and URM on the doorstep of their transition from newcomers to citizens. The differences in the establishment of new livings occurs through differences in status. Young newcomers with an ARM status have the immediate presence of their core family. This close and stable basis creates fertile ground to connect with their direct living environment and in different cases also with the diversity of society. They feel the essential support from their family, friends and teachers on their way to citizens.

For URM their road and access to the broader society is bumpy: they do not have a stable basis of family to lean on, but they also lack stable living conditions. The multiple movements complicate their connection with their immediate and broader living environment. Connections that occur in between people and less in between places. Nevertheless, URM also have important and very close links with peers and personal assistants who surround, support and comfort them, even after their professional relation no longer exists.

Young newcomers strongly shape their social network within the professional care system they find themselves in; reception schools, reception facilities and leisure. An enlargement of the context where their lives are shaped, can enlarge the diversity, quality and quantity of ones' network. The most ideal situation would be that young newcomers can express their support needs and how they can be met. A project like 'give the world a home' (Geef de wereld een thuis) of the Flemish foster care service, the Flemish youth care service and the Flemish Refugee Action are a strong practice towards a more durable connected society. Projects that strengthen social cohesion merit a higher place on the political agenda because it enhances local integration more promptly (Zetter et al., 2006). This focus on social cohesion does not

only benefit society, it is also voiced by young newcomers who long to connect more deeply to the Belgian society and the Belgian youth. There are several examples of young newcomers who engage as volunteers so they 'can give something back' to the society that welcomed them. Their voluntary work can be another network enlarger and connector when diploid in (collaboration with) youth work organisations, schools and the reception facilities.

The evolution and trajectory of young newcomers as refugees towards young people as youth is not finished after a period of three to five years. Although young newcomers anchor in their new living environment, the lives they create and the support they receive are derived from their refugeehood.

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## PART 3. DISCUSSION

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## Chapter 7. General discussion

### 1. Introduction

Our world is becoming increasingly connected, increasingly urban and increasingly diverse (Blokland et al., 2015; Schrooten, 2012). Cities play a central role as hubs and cross points in migration processes (De Winter, 2015). For a majority of youngsters with roots in migration, cities became a place where they establish a new living (Mansouri & Johns, 2017; Schillebeeckx & Albeda, 2014; Siemiatycki, 2005). Such displacement however, is not without problems and obstacles. One of the key aspects for young newcomers in establishing a new life, is that they are often forced to move to places where they cannot immediately enjoy full rights as citizens (Finchman, 2012). This leads to a complex interplay and specific fields of tension between a receiving society that not automatically grants access to newcomers (rights and protection) and newcomers on their turn, who engage with practices of citizenship in order to connect with their new urban living environment (Nunn et al., 2015). Much of the research into citizenship with young newcomers tends to focus on participation and less on the legal status of being a citizen (van der Welle, 2011). This is however important for most young newcomers. A formal recognition opens perspectives (Nunn et al., 2015). Therefore, our first research goal engaged with the exploration of a legal framework around citizenship. A legal framework on the intersection between young refugees and young people and between a local and global approach to the concept.

In research goals two and three, we approached forced migration against the backdrop of an urban reality, and as a social process in which social networks play a central role (Castles, 2003), and contributes to the understanding of the experiences of young newcomers (Wells, 2011). Moreover, a supportive network enhances feelings of belonging in a new country (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014; Zetter et al., 2006). Young newcomers all have a rupture in their social network that needs to be (re)build in their new living environment. Upon arrival in a new country, they therefore cannot simply rely on a strong and supportive network. In research goals two and three we engaged with a bottom-up perspective on how young newcomers anchor in Belgian cities. This anchorage is translated in the connection between young newcomers and the social networks surrounding them from the very beginning in a new country and city up to five years of residence.

Both the top-down approach of citizenship in study one and young newcomers' bottom-up experiences in the consecutive studies offer a solid ground to contrast the lived experiences of young newcomers with the global context surrounding and impacting them (research goal four). This allows the generation of a broad and profound overview of the establishment of new livings. By doing so, also connecting the individual and the broader context surrounding them. Furthermore, citizenship and social support are also connected to each other by their

mutual focus on belonging, participation and membership to a local, national or transnational community.

The current chapter provides a general discussion on the main findings of the dissertation and how they interrelate with each other. In this conclusive chapter, the four studies included in the previous parts (see Figure 1) were used to formulate an integrated overview of the study results. Together they respond to the three main research objectives indicated in Chapter 1. Furthermore, a number of implications for policy and practice are specified, as well as the shortcomings of the dissertation. Second to last, suggestions for future research are made and this part ends up with a general conclusion.

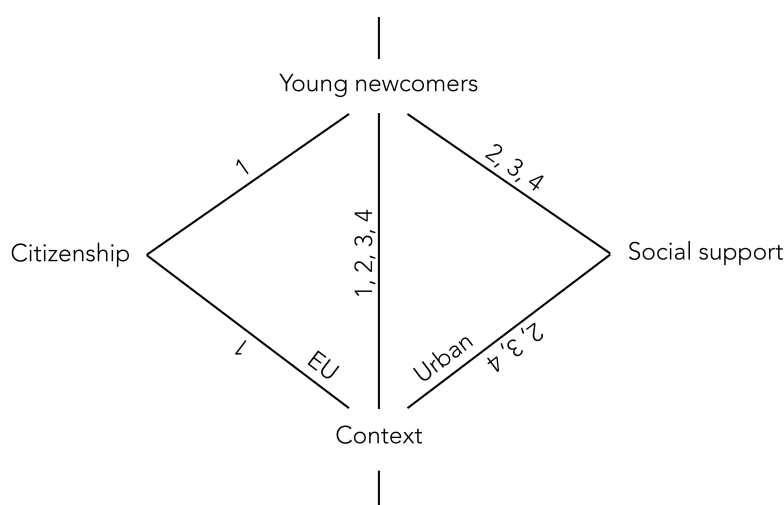


Figure 1. Overview of the dissertation and its studies

## 2. Discussion of the main findings in relation to the research objectives

### 2.1. Research objective 1: theoretically exploring the meaning of citizenship, its impact on young newcomers and the intermediary role of youth work in Europe

Our first research objective sketches the contours impacting the lives of young newcomers. In line with the paradigm shifts described in Chapter One, we sought to address young newcomers from an empowering youth perspective. First, with a focus on the concept of citizenship, this dissertation focussed on the relation between the local and our globalising world, on the tension between citizenship as a formal status and citizenship as a practice and on the difficult relation of young newcomers with citizenship. Youth work and youth work policy were approached in their role as potential facilitators and advocates to access citizenship. Second, we searched for the points of overlap between young newcomers as refugees and

young newcomers as youth. By doing so, being attentive for their unique position both as youngsters and as refugees. A key player and context who embodies a youth perspective when working with refugees is the (European) youth work field. This field empowers young people on their path to full-fledged citizens and potentially plays an important role in advocating and creating the context wherein young newcomers can fully participate as citizens.

Study 1 demonstrates that a key feature for young newcomers in their receiving societies is the aspiration to live in a country that offers freedom, respect for human rights and education (Mougne 2010; Fournier, 2015). At the same time, being granted the refugee status is difficult for most forced migrants (Mehta & Napier-Moore 2010). As such, one of the central effects of global migration is that people move to places where they do not – yet – have a full formal recognition or citizenship, consequently facing exclusion from participation in key aspects of society (Smith and Guarnizo 2009). This access to society is far from self-evident because of the exclusionary nature of citizenship (Invernizzi & Milne, 2005).

The antithesis of exclusion is membership. Membership entails belonging, and belonging is a pacemaker for participation (Dunne, 2006). In order to belong and participate there must be a strong rights approach (Marchetti, 2008). EU Member States are based on a strong rights approach and are signatories to the Geneva Convention. Nevertheless, they have demonstrated an increasing unwillingness to accept the growing number of spontaneous asylum seekers (Kofman, 2005). Their interventions are mostly temporary and exceptional (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003; Isin & Turner, 2007). EU Member States are dividing the incoming migrants into potential insiders and definite outsiders based on various risk assessments (Kallio & Mitchell, 2016). The heightened arrival of migrants and asylum seekers has put a strain on the Common European Asylum System (European Commission, 2019).

This restrictive focus on migration on the European level strongly contrasts with the focus of the same Europe on participation. Indeed, the positive effects of participation have increased its importance on every single policy level (Roggemans, Smits, Spruyt, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2013). Participation is seen as a bridge to adoption in society and as valuable for citizenship (Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006). The participation of young people is a core aspect of European policy (Commission of the European Communities, 2001; Council of Europe, 2010). Youth work proves to have a key role towards young newcomers advocating their participation and empowerment but is often too little too late to enhance young newcomers' access to society from a rights perspective. This is an advocacy position left to fill in, especially from an EU perspective; a strong political platform to combine a rights approach with an empowering basis; a rights perspective as a pacemaker for participation.

The 2001 White Paper on youth, the EU Youth Strategy from 2010-2018 and in the study "Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union, 2014" expresses a notable active interpretation of citizenship, where young people see themselves as claimers and not as eligible receivers of rights. For the European Youth Policy makers, participation is

seen as a generator of active citizenship. The broader focus of citizenship (rights), granting young people and certainly excluded groups the needed access to the citizenry, is less visible. The Youth partnership, Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth drew engagements on the role of youth work in the context of migration and refugee matters. Young people, and thus also young refugees, are deemed to be competent individuals with abilities and strengths, capable of shaping their future, allowing them to become active members of society. The Member States therefore stress on cooperation of the different sectors which are part of the integration process, including youth civil society organisations led by young refugees (Youth Partnership, 2016).

Whilst the White Paper, the EU resolution, the Council of Europe and the 1<sup>st</sup> European Youth Work Convention (2010) saw participation as a central target, a goal in itself, and as a means for empowerment and inclusion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention (2015) made a remarkable addition. The precursors of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Convention drew on notions of citizenship as participation, whilst the 2<sup>nd</sup> convention recognises inequalities and additionally stresses on the enjoyment of rights. In doing so, it made efforts to transform the formal access of young people to the citizenry into substantive access to society. When magnified, however, the translation of the above goals untangles an opposite focus. Like the previous conventions, this paper continues to address inequalities by reinforcing youth, and particularly youth at risk by making them 'stronger', 'more autonomous', 'active' and 'responsible' in order to reflect and resist on their circumstances. These goals are of great value in the empowerment of youth throughout Europe but are less consistent in the emancipation of excluded youth and the global challenges and inequalities they face in relation to their access to citizenship.

Today, other policy contexts more explicitly engage in their supportive role towards newcomers. This heightened youth perspective emerged along our research activities. They build on the same empowering logic as the previous papers and resolutions but are more entitled to it by their presence on a local scale. The Minister of Youth in Flanders, bundled forces of the cultural and youth sector (Department Culture, Youth and Media, s.d.). This policy department claims that contact with other youngsters is crucial to adapt to a new context, learn the language, new habits and cope with trauma. The Flemish Youth Council and youth sector strongly believes in the role of Youth Work(ers) to facilitate this process. A collective platform, 'GloBall' was created to support youth workers in their role towards newcomers (The Flemish Youth Council, 2018).

The participation of young newcomers shows to be a natural reflex of the youth sector. In study 2 and study 3, we see little effect of these goals on young newcomers' participation in democratic life and youth work. Youth work (organisations) are only exceptionally supportive members of young newcomers' social networks. We see however a great effect in a limited amount of cases of the positive outcomes for those who do participate (study 4). In these cases,

young newcomers see youth work as a place where they engage in recreational activities with other youngsters, mostly with a refugee background. These youth work activities show to increase their connection to their broader living environment and expand social networks both in quantity and quality. Nevertheless, these networks often remain in the same ethnic circle, creating too little links to the broader diversity of today's urban societies.

In general, our studies show only a limited role for youth work in the lives of both Accompanied and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors. At the same time, young newcomers stress on a clear willingness to participate in their new communities on the one hand and to belong (emotionally and based on status) on the other. Structural barriers linked to their migration context show an additional need for a rights and participation approach to counter a multitude of barriers towards a substantive access to society. Therefore, a more balanced approach between their perspective as young newcomers and young people, between vulnerability and resilience, between empowerment and emancipation, and between welfare organisations and youth work organisations is needed.

The youth sector as a whole can challenge systems and hold decision-makers and organisations more accountable on the impact their decisions have on the formal and substantive access of young newcomers to society at large, whilst maintaining their focus on what the sector is historically strong at: engaging and empowering young people.

The cosmopolitan ideal shows to be a valuable, additional framework that can inspire youth work by combining both an empowering and an emancipating perspective on young newcomers. Cosmopolitan citizenship brings both perspectives together; rights but also participation on a larger scale. The cosmopolitan perspective thus is important because it fosters on an essential aspect of refugee hood; protection and respect for human rights. But it also enhances and encourages participation and consequently belonging.

Cosmopolitanism sees people as belonging to a range of social relations, political and cultural communities (Anthias, 2008). Within this social process the emphasis lays on norms, practices, meanings and identities (Ilsin & Turner, 2002). But also sees the movement towards a human rights basis as a great potential for inclusion (Lister, as cited in Invernizzi & Milne, 2005).

Cosmopolitanism, is seen as relevant in today's world, where global problems cannot be resolved by confined communities, and where the sovereignty of states is challenged by cross-border flows of information, finance, goods and people (Benhabib, 2005; Brown, 1997; Delanty, 2000; Dower, 2003; Held, 1995; Hutchings and Danreuther, 1999; Linklater as cited in Hoerschelmann & Refaie, 2014). Since the issues at stake (migration, transnationalism) are global in kind, an adequate response cannot be other than equally global (Marchetti, 2009).

Cosmopolitan citizenship is about a vision of global justice that focuses on the welfare of the individual regardless of his or her geographical or cultural location (Leung, 2013). In this context, cosmopolitan law is not concerned with the interaction between states, but with the status of individuals in their dealings with states of which they are not citizens. Moreover, it is

concerned with the status of individuals as human beings, rather than as citizens of states (Kleingeld, 1998).

## 2.2. Research objective 2: Exploring the social networks of young newcomers and their supportive role, shortly after arrival in the urban context

Forced migration needs to be seen as a social process in which social networks play a central role (Castles, 2003). Young newcomers, all have a rupture in their social network that needs to be (re)build in their new living environment. Upon arrival in a new country, they cannot simply rely on a strong and supportive network (Hynie et al., 2011). Building these networks is an important post-migration factor, enhancing feelings of belonging in a new country (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014; Zetter et al., 2006).

Study 2 and study 3 voiced the ways by which social supportive networks are created, maintained or lost across multiple borders shortly after arrival in urban Belgium. Study 2 analysed the social networks of young newcomers, more specifically URM. Study 3 explored the lived experiences of ARM by applying the Convoy Model of social relations of Khan and Antonucci (1980). The perspective of young newcomers as young people instead of merely refugees, is one of the central tenets to this dissertation. The lived realities of young newcomers with an ARM or URM status however are so different, that it also became a point of interest in the analysis and further deployment of this research.

### 2.2.1. The structure of the social networks

The journey of young newcomers between home and Belgium does not occur in one straight line and refugee families do not migrate as a unit (Ryan et al., 2008). Very regularly young newcomers have stayed long terms in a transiting country. Remarkably this is more the case for ARM in study 3 who often spent years in a transiting country, than for URM in study 2, who undertake a journey of several months before arriving to Belgium. These movements across countries temporarily creates a complex weave of social networks in multiple contexts.

Our results indicate that moving from one country to another implies leaving a part of ones' network behind and arriving in a new context with little social links (study 2) next to their nuclear family (study 3). The durability, continuity and quality of relations thus gets challenged. Consequently, young newcomers have to look for new balances between the maintenance of social networks left behind, and the networks to be in urban Belgium. This process inevitably leads to the transformation of social networks (Klvaňová, 2010). In doing so, as seen in in both study 2 and study 3, the social networks with friends and family in their home country strongly evolve and often even desiccate. In study 2 we argued this is one of the decisive reasons for URM to focus up on their future in Belgium and their willingness to fully engage, participate and connect with their new living environment.

The establishment of new social networks in urban Belgium are far from self-evident. In Study 3 we mentioned the key places for the creation of these small but reachable networks are the reception schools, the neighbourhood and sometimes the city. Young newcomers anchor fast in their neighbourhood and create and expand their network both from there and from school. The networks that emerge are ethnically very diverse peer networks, with rare links to native Belgian youth, formal care providers and the urban society. It is notable that, although the Belgian urban environment is ethnically very diverse, young newcomers, as argued in both study 2 and study 3, mostly create links with other young newcomers and not necessarily with the same ethnic groups or the urban diversity already longer present in Belgian cities. Those limited links to the broader urban society contrast with findings of Mansouri and Johns (2017). For these scholars, the urban fabric is thought to be a facilitating hub in the adaption into society and provides newly arrived immigrants with a range of community benefits (Ryan et al., 2008).

The establishment of social networks of ARM, as described in study 3, strongly contrasts with the networks of URM we investigated in study 2. The networks of URM are dense and mainly build around reception facilities with other young newcomers, and formal care providers and hold little links to their broader living environment. Especially their relations with friends with a refugee background are seen as valuable because these youngsters have experienced comparable life stories (Simich et al., 2003). This very local anchorage leads to reachable networks with high levels of contact. At the same time, due to regular move outs from one city to another, many of those newly created networks are shredded along multiple cities, sometimes vanish or have to be rethought. Too little attention is being paid to these newly created networks and the role they play in the lives of URM when moving youngsters from one reception facility to another. Multiple movements are a persistent part of their life stories ever since they left their home country.

The social networks and support for young newcomers that we have analysed in study 2 and study 3, contrast with the core idea of the Convoy Model, where social networks are considered to be dynamic and thus evolving, but with a continuity in the exchange of support (Levitt et al., 1993; Levitt, 2005). In our results, in early stages after arrival, this dynamic nature is problematic and vulnerable. The uncertain continuity of young newcomers' social networks contrasts sharply with the crucial need for social relations as sources of empowerment (Klvaňová, 2010).

### 2.2.2. The function of the social networks

Social support is one of the key elements to cope with challenges related to migration (Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber and Mooren, 2016) and to magnify newcomers' well-being (Jasinkaja-Lahti et al., 2006).

Although young newcomers only recently arrived in urban Belgium (Study 3), the supportive network surrounding them is a very locally anchored and resourceful one, with high levels of adequacy. This means that ARM have very central and reciprocal supportive networks, mostly filled up by, or towards their parents who adopt a vast diversity of supportive roles. The place people occupy in the Convoy Model is closely linked to the support they provide in the daily lives of ARM. From a professional perspective, schoolteachers are seen as important network members and providers of emotional support. Other roles are mostly occupied by friends and family. Although different types of support imply knowledge of the environment, support is mainly provided by friends and family who to a greater or lesser extent are also new to this context.

The supportive networks of ARM (Study 3) are in line with those investigated in study 2, where the social support for URM is also provided by a small set of supportive others. Those who fill in these positions, however, are very different; friends and formal care providers. It is remarkable that despite the many changes of context, networks and living conditions, Study 2 revealed that URM manage to build and rely on a supportive network. This support, however, has to be approached as falling short when compared to the people who most matter to these youngsters; their parents. Indeed, as argued by Mels and colleagues (2008), although URM's parents often are not present in their daily lives, they remain central characters in the narratives of URM's.

Friends with a comparable, recent migration background are the people who are emotionally closest to most URM (Study 2). A core of this group is a constant source of support from the very beginning in a reception facility up to now, even when living far away from each other. Personal care providers and when applicable, voluntary care providers (god families), are perceived as truly involved in their daily lives.

The results of study 3 are very much in line, but in essence also very different from the results derived from study 2. Both studies reveal comparable barriers towards a full access to society in the daily lives of URM and ARM. Where most URM have a solid formal network surrounding and guiding them, there are little connections to the informal society. Also, for Wells (2011) most of the networks young newcomers connect to, are institutional rather than community networks. In contrast for most of the newcomers we investigated in study 3, there are little links to both the formal and informal society, mostly relying on their parents for support and their parents on their turn, receive assistance from formal care providers. Like many URM, also ARM have little links to the broader -urban- society.



This means nothing other than the fact that our society unintentionally organises segregated lives in reception facilities, educational contexts and in the broader urban communities. This is mainly caused by a focus on this group of newcomers based on their status as asylum seekers, refugees, foreigners, exiles or nomads, rather than a focus on these young newcomers as youth. The results of both studies therefore are a plea for a more balanced approach between a perspective on care and well-being and a perspective on youth. A perspective that is aware of their new and vulnerable position but at the same time is aware of their resilience as young people. In line with study 1, studies 2 and 3 are a reminder to both empowerment and emancipation and thus between formal and substantive access for young newcomers to their new living environment. A place where they wish to build their present and future and a place where they wish to contribute to and connect with the diversity of the cities, they live in.

### 2.3. Research objective 3: Exploring the social networks of young newcomers and their supportive role, three years after arrival in the urban context

This research objective, elaborated in study 4, aspired to voice the experiences of young newcomers, with regards to the creation and maintenance of their social supportive networks three years after arrival in urban Belgium. In order to do so, we engaged with this complex reality by using Kahn and Antonucci's' Convoy Model of social relations (1980).

Study 2 and study 3 demonstrate that young newcomers have fragile networks in their first period in Belgium. Although the composition of ones' network considerably differs between URM and ARM, they all experience a division between themselves (as newcomers) and the society surrounding them and between the formally or informally organised support. Study 4, displays comparable realities.

#### 2.3.1. The structure of the social networks

Research objective 2 (study 2 and study 3) show us that one's status as accompanied or unaccompanied refugee minor has a huge impact on the establishment of new livings in urban Belgium. Research objective 3 and study 4 demonstrate us, that this continues to be so, years after arrival. In study 2 we saw that many young newcomers with an URM status only became unaccompanied after leaving family behind or losing them on their journey to Belgium. Study 4 teaches us, that several of these networks get reconstituted. In doing so, many URM shift status to ARM. Nevertheless, as in the case of study 2 and study 3 also in study 4, one's status keeps on impacting the constitution of social networks and the support derived from it. The networks of ARM show to be smaller and affectively less connected to their broader living environment when compared to URM.

The establishment of new social networks in urban Belgium are far from self-evident, as demonstrated in study 2 and study 3. In study 3 we argued that young newcomers anchor quickly in their neighbourhood and create and expand their small, ethnically diverse network of newcomers both from there and school. The networks of URM investigated in study 2, are dense and mainly build around reception facilities with other young newcomers, formal care providers and hold little links to their broader living environment. Their regular moves from reception facility to reception facility constrains their attachment to place. In study 4, we see that these youngsters keep on facing difficulties to engage with durable networks due to frequent moves, changes in school context and changes in professional care providers. Nevertheless, most of these youngsters manages to maintain a link with those meaningful to them whether it is across borders or across cities. In doing so, the broader urban context who is thought to be a facilitating hub in the adaption into society (Mansouri & Johns, 2017), does apply for young newcomers with an ARM status but does not for those with an URM status. The latter mainly create their supportive networks which are formally constituted. While the former more easily engages in the local urban community they live in.

With regards to research objective 3, study 4 teaches us that the social networks of URM are still hooked in this logic of moves from one city to another, from one centre to another and from one care system to another, all challenging the fragile constitution of their social networks three years after arrival. Some professional care providers and friends with comparable lived realities maintain in the core of their networks. As for ARM, study 4 shows that these youngsters follow the track established after their first months of residence (study 3). The local anchorage of their network is still present and ethnically diverse. This anchorage creates a solid basis for the creation of durable relationships in their local living environment. This stability is important because, it facilitates new relationships but also the maintenance of older and close links over multiple borders. At the same time, study 4 teaches us ARM manage to expand their network to sometimes exceed their own refugee background, when compared to study 3, shortly after arrival.

### 2.3.2. The function of the social networks

It is remarkable that despite the many changes of context, networks and living conditions, URM in study 2 manage to build and rely on a supportive network of friends and professional care providers. But also, where most URM in study 2, have a solid formal network surrounding and guiding them, there are little connections to the informal society.

Young newcomers in study 3 established a supportive network surrounding them from the very beginning. This supportive network is, very locally anchored, resourceful, with high levels of adequacy and emotional support. It also shows to be a durable network, that is still maintained and deepened in the years after arrival (study 4). This means that ARM have very

central and reciprocal supportive networks from the early stages after arrival up to three years later with their parents, friends and teachers. These teachers, both in reception and regular schools have a close, emotional relation but are also very present in the provision of more practical forms of support and in ARM's connection to their broader living environment. Our results in study 4 show that although a great deal of this relations with friends (sometimes Belgians and mostly refugees) and teachers are relatively new, they already reached an important level of emotional closeness and support. Although ARM in study 4, do not see it as a shortcoming in their network, they are a lot less surrounded by formal care providers when compared with URM in study 2 and study 4. This formal support is often related to ones' adjustment into their broader environment and thus implies knowledge of this environment (Mels et al., 2008; Sleijpen et al., 2016).

In study 4, ARM have small but valued networks that are mostly informal and locally anchored in the city they live. Most ARM have networks that grow from relations and places with people in the same position; newcomers. A network that connects these youngsters to the broader reality surrounding them is often a missing link. Valuable examples, like god families and youth work activities show to increase this connection and expand social networks both in quantity and quality.

For URM in study 2 and study 4, parents remain essential to their supportive network. They are at the very core of their Convoys, even though their supportive role is limited, parents remain emotionally irreplaceable. Parents are the most important people to young newcomers with an URM status, but friends are the most central to them. Friends who have comparable livelihoods and share a great deal of their time together. Additionally, study 4 is in line with study 2, demonstrating that a diversity of people, in a diversity of roles and in a diversity of contexts occupy the most central positions in URM's networks. It is remarkable that so many people already occupy such a central position in URM's lives after a relatively short period of three years. Next to their parents and friends, also personal assistants are essential, both emotionally as more practically. Personal assistants often evolve from their professional role, towards a relationship based on friendship or voluntary care provision with higher levels of emotional closeness, after their professional relationship finds closure.

The evolution and trajectory of young newcomers as refugees towards young people as youth is not finished after a period of three to five years as we see in study 4. Although both ARM and URM anchor in their new living environment, the lives they create and the support they receive are derived from their refugeehood. From the perspective of participation and the rights approach in study 1, a comparable division can be detected. Most youngsters obtained an official protection, but it is a temporary one to be yearly renewed for five years. From a participation perspective, much of the activities young newcomers engage with are to some extent directed towards newcomers.

At the same time, the differences in the establishment of new livings also occurs through differences in status. Young newcomers with an ARM status have the immediate presence of their core family. This close and stable basis creates fertile ground to connect with their direct living environment and in different cases also with the diversity of society. For URM their road and access to the broader society is bumpy; they do not have a stable basis of family to lean on, but they also lack stable living conditions. Their connections occur in between people and less in between places.

### **3. Implications for practice and policy**

One of the central tenets of this dissertation, is the role social, supportive networks play in the lives of young newcomers. These networks, as critically analysed by using the Convoy model of Social Relations, show to be crucial in the adaption and overall quality of life for young newcomers in their first years after arrival. Young newcomers both accompanied and unaccompanied, and both within their first months and years after arrival manage to engage with a small and fragmented but nevertheless, supportive network.

Although the ARM or URM status of young newcomers changes throughout the years, it nevertheless has an important impact on the structure and creation of young newcomers' social networks. This evolution in status mostly occurs in a shift from Unaccompanied towards Accompanied Refugee Minors by different modes of family reunification.

Throughout the years, the differences in the establishment of new livings occurs through differences in status. Despite the considerable crossover in-between status, implying that many young newcomers with an ARM status have (shortly) also been young newcomers with an URM status, there is a substantial difference in the composition of their social networks. Young newcomers with an ARM status have the presence of their core family but are not numerically and affectively as connected as young newcomers with an URM status to their broader living environment. Young newcomers with an URM status, strongly shape their social network within the professional care system they find themselves in reception schools, reception facilities and leisure. An enlargement of the context where their lives are shaped, can enlarge the diversity, quality and quantity of one's network.

#### **3.1. Towards a contextual integration of support**

Although societies became diverse and especially cities shed to cross points in migration processes, young newcomers have to little links with the broader context surrounding them; an aspiration pronounced by many. Both this dissertation and research by Wernesjö (2015), stress on the difficulties newcomers encounter when connecting to the local society. Barriers mainly stem from the conception of the reception and welfare services who unintentionally have a separated reality between newcomers and society. They tend to focus more on their

status as refugees than on their life stage as young people. As a consequence, there is little connection between them and the 'outside world'.

Homogenous relations with other newcomers can be found in their leisure time. On the one hand, there are little initiatives young newcomers participate into. On the other, young newcomers participate to often in activities where only other newcomers are active in, for example in their reception facility. Special attention goes to ARM, who generally have small networks, where the formal care provision is mostly directed towards the parents.

Social support derives from a professional context and succeeds in providing young newcomers with different types of support. Nevertheless, their support is strongly confined within the reception care and directed towards the individual. This focus creates supportive networks that are embedded in the reception context but fail to recognise the relational connection with their broader environment, especially the neighbourhoods and cities wherein they are settled.

Additionally, professional networks of support are too fragmented by the way in which they are conceived: a multitude of people in a multitude of roles and with a multitude of employee changes. A more stable and smaller scaled reception care is crucial in order to deepen social relations and the support they provide.

Indeed, the reception care and the way it is structured plays a central role in how social networks get constructed and reconstituted. The Flemish Refugee Action (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen) stresses on the role of foster care for the scale, support, intimacy and the autonomy it provides to young newcomers with an URM status (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, s.d.). From the perspective of this dissertation foster families are also an additional link to Belgian society. Young newcomers stress that god families play an important supportive and network role; enlarging and deepening young newcomers' connection to their living environment, but also anchoring their network more locally and sustainably. When engaging in foster care, additional attention has to be given to the maintenance of social networks with other young newcomers, which are experienced as very important to them. The maintenance of close relationships with co-ethnic peers provides a sense of cultural continuity, of being understood, and of sharing experiences and history (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015).

The most ideal situation would be that young newcomers can express their support needs and how they can be met. Also, UNICEF (2004, 2018) stresses this need for a more individualised support, based on freedom, autonomy and independency, alongside accompaniment and support. A project like 'give the world a home' (Geef de wereld een thuis) of the Flemish foster care service, the Flemish youth care service and the Flemish Refugee Action are a strong example of the above articulated needs. But also, the creation of directly accessible places by the Youth Welfare Agency (Agentschap Jongerenwelzijn), meeting the needs for small scaled reception facilities is a good practice to follow.

### 3.2. Towards a balanced approach between a youth and a refugee perspective

One of the key implications of our research that can facilitate a more integrated and durable network of support is to be found in a more balanced approach between a youth perspective and a refugee perspective when supporting young people with a refugee background. Research points out that young newcomers have faced multiple adversities (Mels et al., 2008; Beirens et al., 2007; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015). Therefore, a solid care facility is needed. Nevertheless, their vulnerability to often masks their resilience and their youth perspective. The support young newcomers receive departs from their background as refugees but can also add these new perspectives to it. This leads to a connection between them and young people in their local communities, school, leisure, fostering participation and inclusion in general.

The educational system for newcomers (OKAN and DASPA) plays an important supportive role in the lives of many young newcomers. At the same time, alike the reception facilities, they maintain a division in between newcomers and the Belgian youth. Crossovers and connections between newcomers in reception classes and youngsters in regular education are recommended as a counter movement for segregated classrooms. Inclusive classes, with customised support can establish a faster connection between young newcomers and the youth in Belgium.

The same logic goes for young newcomers' leisure time activities. Many of those activities are (in)formally filled in with other young newcomers. A closer connection between youth refugee organisations, regular youth work and sport clubs can lead to closer and more inclusive connections in local society. The past years a multitude of good practices arose; Global, 'Thuis in het Jeugdwerk', 'City Pirates', 'Becoming part of Europe', 'Journeys to a New Life: the role of youth work in integration of young refugees in Europe', ...

Young newcomers often express their gratitude towards the Belgian society for the role it plays in providing a new present and future in a safe environment. Out of this gratefulness, young newcomers often stress their willingness to participate more actively in society. There are several examples of young newcomers who engage as volunteers so they 'can give something back' to the society that welcomed them. Their voluntary work can be another network enlarger and connector when diploid in (collaboration with) youth work organisations, schools and the reception facilities.

### 3.3. Links with home and third countries

Many young newcomers have an important emotional connection with (people in) their home country. It is, however, difficult to maintain those relationships. Distance, practical difficulties, different realities, decent, the movement of families and friends, all play a role in the obstacles many young newcomers face in maintaining those close ties. Although family members and friends in their home countries cannot easily relate to young newcomers' new realities, they are important sources of emotional support and should thus be maximally implied in their supportive networks.

Many URM are, even years after arrival still assessing possibilities to connect or to reunite with their core family. Programs like the Red Cross who searches for family members in the home countries is a valuable practice, but not always known. Additionally, a lack of financial means and support complicates their possibilities to connect with close ones.

In the case of ARM, the networks they create are dispersed in their home country but also in transiting countries. Since many ARM have lived for long periods of time in a third country, they established new livelihoods there that disperse after leaving those countries. In doing so, these youngsters loose connection with an important part of their network both home and in transit countries and live in Belgium with rather limited social networks.

It is therefore important to recognise that the lives of young newcomers are rooted in different contexts and across many borders. In order to experience continuity in life, the full spectrum of their networks should be addressed and when possible involved in the supportive networks of young newcomers.

### 3.4. Enhancement of the formal and substantive access to society

Study one demonstrated the importance of a combined focus on both a formal access to society by enhancing the rights of newcomers and their simultaneous need to belong in a more profound way by having a substantive access to society and participation in community life. The youth (work) sector in the European Union and the Council of Europe have a role to play in creating and maintaining the outlines for newcomers to become and be full-fledged citizens; a strong focus on refugee rights, Children's Rights and Human Rights in general.

On the other hand, studies 2, 3 and 4 point out that young newcomers wish to participate more actively in society and connect with her diversity. This substantive access can be created by a more local and urban approach to citizenship and migration (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003; Uitermark, Rossi, & Van Houtum, 2005; Sassen, 2001). A local (migration) policy that bundles forces with the different sectors and realities involved in the lives of newcomers and connects it with the growing diversity of cities. A local approach that creates safe, non-discriminatory, inclusive and stimulating places that enhance a rights approach for newcomers (Guadagno & Lee, 2015).

Local administrations can play a key role in supporting and financing initiatives that connect young newcomers to their neighbours and local initiatives. Cooperation between schools,

cultural and leisure-time associations, youth work, youth centers, social workers, sport clubs and others who enhance the connection over lines of division are of great value.

Projects that strengthen social cohesion merit a higher place on the political agenda. A higher degree of social cohesion enhances societies social capital which on her turn stimulates local integration more promptly (Zetter et al., 2006). As mentioned, the focus on social cohesion does not only benefit society, it is also voiced by young newcomers who long to connect more to the Belgian society and the youth in Belgium. These positive encounters determine the way young newcomers define and practice citizenship (Tonkens, Hurenkamp, & Hendriks, 2008).

### 3.5. Faster asylum procedure and relational reception policy

Finally, studies 2, 3 and 4 show the long waiting time young newcomers undergo in their asylum procedures, before having certainty about their permit to stay or not to stay in Belgium. This is especially the case for URM. Previous research pointed the negative impact of this period in limbo on young newcomers' aspirations and well-being (Montgomery, Rousseau, & Shermarke, 2001; Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). A more transparent and informative procedure with clear lines of decision making can cope the above-mentioned negative effects.

In line with the asylum procedure, also the reception policy plays a negative role in the creation of supportive networks and durable relations. Especially in the case of URM, continuous moves from one reception facility to the next, challenge their newly constituted networks in their first years after arrival. These moves are embedded in the three stadiums of the reception procedure for refugees; observation, stabilisation and guided autonomy (Fedasil, 2014). The Flemish Refugee Action, advocates for a new reception system with a shorter evaluation period in order to assess newcomers needs, where after personalised care can be installed.

## 4. Limitations of the dissertation and directions for future research

### 4.1. Applying additional perspectives to the study of social support and citizenship with young newcomers

This dissertation engaged with a timely perspective by interviewing both youngsters who recently arrived (studies 2 and 3) and youngsters who already resided three years and more (study 4) in urban Belgium. This perspective allowed us to gain insights in how social networks get build and reconstituted from the very beginning up to a more stable settlement in Belgium. Nevertheless, a longitudinal focus, would foster a more precise and in-depth image on how young newcomers evolve from the very beginning of their journey onwards. People



across their life course, from young to old and in various settings, quite readily identify close and important persons, uncovering elements of social relations that are universal (Antonucci et al. 2013).

Longitudinal research gathers data at different time points and constructs an evolving image of people and their social relations across time (Neuman, 2011). Especially the 'panel study' opens perspectives for a deeper knowledge of the lived experiences of young newcomers. This type of longitudinal research allows to observe stability or change in the lives of those implicated through the data collection across multiple time points with exactly the same people (Neuman, 2011).

Social support is believed to move with a person throughout his or her lifetime, changing in structure but providing continuity in the exchange of support (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, and Levitt 1993). In the case of young newcomers who regularly experience ruptures in their supportive networks a longitudinal perspective would benefit the reconstruction of how young newcomers precisely create, loose and reconstruct their networks.

The youngsters involved in this dissertation are all categorised within a specific age group; 13 to 18 years old. This focus was applied because a vast majority of newcomers belongs to this age group. Nevertheless, in recent years there is also a growing number of young and very young newcomers arriving to Belgium (Jeugdhulp, 2019). Their perspectives and the perspectives of those who reach adulthood should also be included in future research. At the age of 18, young newcomers' status cannot always automatically count on the continuation of the received support (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2019).

Additionally, this dissertation is entirely built on qualitative research methods through semi structured interviews. This implies that results are not generalisable to the entire population of newcomers (Baarda et al., 2015). Supplementary and more varied methods would lead to deeper understandings (Riessman, 2008). A mixed method approach combining both quantitative samples of social network analysis with qualitative and longitudinal aspects of social networks and citizenship could considerably deepen our understanding of both concepts. The design respects a timely order and gives a dominant status to the voices of newcomers, where after they can be confronted with larger scaled measurements. When conducted it gives multiple sources of evidence and provide fuller, deeper, more complex and a more comprehensive explanation to the lived realities (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011).

Literature suggests the important role cities across the world as hubs and cross points in migration processes (De Winter, 2015). For a majority of youngsters with roots in migration, cities became a place where they want to establish a new living (Mansouri & Johns, 2016;

Schillebeeckx & Albeda, 2014; Siemiatycki, 2005). We therefore engaged with this urban context. Nevertheless, the links created in the urban sphere do not reflect the diversity of western cities. Moreover, young newcomers' social supportive networks have little links to the urban fabric. Research combining this knowledge with a central focus on cities could lead to vital know how on the exact role cities play in the lives of young newcomers.

#### 4.2. Applying an international perspective to social support and taking into account the experiences of support providers in the network of young newcomers

Studies 2, 3 and 4 show the importance of both formal and more informal types of support in the lives of young newcomers. What is more, young newcomers' networks in urban Belgium mostly emerge in a formal context. These types of support, although valuable are very locally conceived. United Nations treaties (such as the 1951 Geneva Convention) and European laws (like the Human Rights treaty) around refugeehood are translated into local policy. The conception of the reception facilities and integration paths are thus very different depending on the country one wants to settle.

A more global or European exploration of social support initiatives and the points of difference and overlap could enhance a further homogenisation of reception facilities and support. Most European states follow those conventions, but there has been only limited development towards harmonization of policy in this area. Within the European integration policy, resettlement policy remains largely under the control of individual states and reflects individual notions of nationhood and citizenship (Duke, Sales, & Gregory, 1999). Up till now, little attention has been paid to these variations. The differences between localities, creates 'uneven geographies of asylum accommodation' (Zill, van Liempt, Spierings, & Hooimeijer, 2018).

Also, the way by which different formal support providers conceive their role towards young newcomers can be contrasted to the role they play from the perspective of young newcomers. Services for refugees and asylum seekers frequently experience gaps in delivery, access and coordination (Phillips, Hall, Elmitt, Bookallil, & Douglas, 2017). Knowledge on the role these care providers see for themselves and the way different care and support providers communicate and collaborate in a convoy of social relations, can help to harmonise and deepen the support given to young newcomers.

Future research on young newcomers can consider the use of insights from ecological perspectives, such as the bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory focuses on how person-environment exchange influence individuals' functioning over time

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The model specifies five layers of environmental systems; the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem (Greenfield, 2012).

## 5. General conclusion

This dissertation applies both a top down as a bottom-up perspective to understand the establishment of a new living for young newcomers in urban Belgium. Additionally, a link between the individual and the broader context surrounding them is established through citizenship and social support.

Citizenship shows us that that a key feature for young newcomers in their receiving societies is the aspiration to live in a country that offers freedom, respect for human rights and education (Mougne 2010; Fournier, 2015). At the same time, being granted the refugee status is difficult for most forced migrants (Mehta & Napier-Moore 2010). And so, one of the key effects of global migration is that people move to places where they do not – yet – have a full formal recognition or citizenship, consequently facing exclusion from participation in key aspects of society (Smith and Guarnizo 2009). This access to society is far from self-evident because of the exclusionary nature of citizenship (Invernizzi & Milne, 2005).

With regards to social support shortly after arrival, the results demonstrate that the daily lives of URM are structured around the reception facilities, with little links to the neighbourhood or city they live in. URM's social support networks derive from their formal network. This local embeddedness makes URM's network accessible and supportive, but also homogeneous with little links to the broader society. Due to frequent movements from one reception centre to another, social networks are instable and URM have to regularly invest in the building and rebuilding of their social networks.

In the daily lives of ARM, we see multiple barriers towards a full access to urban society. Their migration movement creates a rupture in their social network, forcing them to (re)build networks in their new living environment. The establishment of new social networks in urban Belgium are far from self-evident due to the lack of links in this new environment both to migrant and native communities, and to formal care providers. Most of their social networks are small and reachable. Due to the central role parents play in the daily life of ARM, welfare organisations seem to be less involved in their supportive role towards the vulnerable position of ARM. The protective role of their parents masks their vulnerability and support needs. In doing so, our society unintentionally organises segregated lives in reception facilities, educational contexts and in the broader urban communities.

The lived realities three years later, build on comparable experiences. Young newcomers with an ARM status still have small but valued networks that are mostly informal and locally anchored in the city they live. Most ARM have networks that grow from relations and places with people in the same position; newcomers. A network that connects these youngsters to

the broader reality surrounding them is often a missing link. Valuable examples, like god families and youth work activities show to increase this connection and expand social networks both in quantity and quality.

For URM their road and access to the broader society is bumpy: they do not have a stable basis of family to lean on, but they also lack stable living conditions. The multiple movements complicate their connection with their immediate and broader living environment. Connections that occur in between people and less in between places. Nevertheless, URM also have important and very close links with peers and personal assistants who surround, support and comfort them, even after their professional relation no longer exists.

The evolution and trajectory of young newcomers as refugees towards young people as youth is not finished after a period of three to five years. Although young newcomers anchor in their new living environment, the lives they create and the support they receive are derived from their refugeehood.

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## List of publications and contributions

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### Membership in steering groups

UNICEF Belgium (2018). 'What do you think?' report on adherence to the rights of the child for young newcomers.

Commission Nationale pour les Droits de l'Enfant (2018-2020). Official report from Belgium to the UN regarding the rights of the child for young newcomers.

Flemish government, department of Youth (2018 - ...). Network group on Youth research. Network of researchers in the field of youth.

Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie (2018). Member of the programming group of the 'Bewogen Festival' on newcomers in the city.

Samenlevingsopbouw, CAW, Brussels Platform Armoede and Kenniscentrum Wonen, Welzijn & Zorg (2018 - ...). Inclusive Brussels. Aims to support vulnerable refugee families in their access to society.

Demos (2019-2020). Action research on Social Integration of newcomers in collaboration with 16 youth work organisations.

King Baudouin Foundation (2020 - ...). Project BOOST, aiming at guiding vulnerable youngsters in Brussels in their access to society.

### Membership in the board of Civil Society Organisations

Volta vzw (2017 - ...). Music centre in Brussels. Co-founder and chairman of the Board.

Growfunding (2016 - ...). Social impact crowdfunding platform. Co-founder and chairman of the Board.

Minor Ndako (2019 - ...). Care facility for young (newcomers) and their context. Member of the Board.

Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel (2019 - ...). Advocacy on the right to the city for vulnerable groups in urban society. Member of the Board.

Demos vzw (2018- ...). Public research and advocacy organisation in the fields of youth, culture and sports. Member of the General Assembly.

Brussels Platform Armoede (2019-...). Advocacy with and for vulnerable groups in urban society. Member of the General Assembly.

### Research projects

Innoviris (2018-2021). Co-author of a co-create project 'Buurtwinkel in Sint-jans Molenbeek'. Commissioned by Innoviris.

OVP (2017). Co-author of a project on Educational Renewal Projects of the VUB. Project on a Mobile Learning Unit (MAEBAR), commissioned by the VUB.

Univer.city (2018). Co-author of a project on Community Service Learning. Project on MAEBAR, commissioned by the VUB.

## **Publications**

Huysmans, M., & Claes, E., (2015). Conflictbeleving en herstelrecht in Brussel. Tijdschrift voor Herstelrecht, 3(15), 53-68.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J., (2016). Young refugees, citizenship, cosmopolitanism and youth work policy – theoretical discussion on the current trends in Europe. Journeys to a new life: Partnership between the European Commission and the council of Europe in the field of youth. <https://pjpeu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262364/Young+refugees+citizenship+cosmopolitanism-Minne+Huysmans.pdf/6263ea10-566f-beb4-95de-25621dd3ac4b>

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## **Personal communications at conferences as 1<sup>st</sup> author**

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2017). On the doorstep to society. Young newcomers with a refugee background: a contextual framework on aspirations, expectations & experiences. Congress presentation at the Becoming Part of Europe Congress on the role of youth work in supporting young newcomers, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2018). On the doorstep to society. Young newcomers with a refugee background: a contextual framework on aspirations, expectations & experiences. Symposium presentation of migration research in practice of the University of Ghent (CESSMIR), Ghent, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2018). Designing inclusion: inclusive urban spaces for migrants & refugees. Presentation at a research seminar of the University of Sheffield, the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and Politecnico Milano in Brussels, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2018). URM: the building and rebuilding of social networks & social support in Urban Belgium. Symposium presentation at the Needs and care practices for refugees and migrants of the University of Ghent (CESSMIR), Ghent, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2018). Young newcomers' social networks & social support in Urban Belgium. Congress presentation at the Becoming Part of Europe. Congress on the role of youth work in supporting young newcomers, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2018). Newcomers in the city; about citizenship and social networks. Presentation on a network session on refugees: research and policy implications of the Flemish Government, department of Integration. Brussels, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2018). Newcomers in the city; about citizenship and social networks. Presentation on a symposium on Arts and Sports Research between the UK and The Netherlands. Leeuwarden, The Netherlands.

Huysmans, M., Van Hoeck, B., & Hannes, M. (2018). Terpoceen: nieuwkomers in de stad. Presentation at the Boekenbeurs Antwerpen, de Groene Waterman. Antwerp, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., Vanhee, J., Keukeleire, C., & Stevens, J. (2018). Terpoceen: nieuwkomers in de stad. Official booklaunch. Brussels, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2019). Toegang tot zorg en hulpverlening in Brussel voor kwetsbare groepen. Presentation at the Staten Generaal Welzijn en Zorg in Brussels, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2019). Presentation of Terpoceen at the 'Bewogen Festival' on newcomers in the city. Brussels, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2019). Brussel als levend lab: koffie drinken in de Maebar. Podcast for Radio 1 and 'Universiteit van Vlaanderen'. Brussels, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2019). Young newcomers' access to the citizenry. Presentation of research on a network session of 'de Marge vzw'. Antwerp, Belgium.

Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2019). Young newcomers' citizenship, social networks & social support in Urban Belgium. Congress presentation at the Becoming Part of Europe. Congress on the role of youth work in supporting young newcomers. Ghent, Belgium.

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Huysmans, M., Verté, D., & Vanhee, J. (2020). Newcomers in the city; about being a youngster instead of a refugee. Presentation on a network session on young newcomers in Brussels. Flemish Government, department of integration. Brussels, Belgium.