

COHOUSING AND CASE MANAGEMENT FOR UNACCOMPANIED YOUNG ADULT REFUGEES IN ANTWERP (CURANT)



GROUNDWORK FOR EVALUATION AND LITERATURE STUDY

ABSTRACT

How to stimulate unaccompanied young adult refugees' inclusion in society? This report discusses *CURANT*, a social policy intervention combining intensive individualized guidance, cohabitation with a local flatmate, training and therapy with the aim of supporting social integration. The stakeholders' underlying assumptions are untangled, and the intervention's core ideas are connected with academic literature.

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Appendix: The *Change Model* of CURANT

Background and acknowledgements

This report concerns the social policy intervention *Cohousing and case management for Unaccompanied young adult Refugees in ANTwerp* (CURANT). CURANT is an innovative urban intervention offering various types of support to unaccompanied young adult refugees in the city of Antwerp (Flanders, Belgium).

The European Union's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) granted funding for the realization of this project to the city of Antwerp. A consortium of six institutions is responsible for the implementation of CURANT: *OCMW Antwerpen, Jes vzw, Atlas Inburgering en Integratie, Vormingplus Antwerpen, Solentra*, and the *Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies (CeMIS, University of Antwerp)*. The first five institutions are the *executive* stakeholders, OCMW Antwerpen¹ (Public Centre of Social Welfare of Antwerp) taking the lead in the design, coordination and implementation of the intervention. These executive partners will be labelled throughout this report as "the stakeholders". CeMIS, in contrast, is involved as the *evaluator* of the project and thus not considered as a stakeholder.

'*Groundwork for evaluation and literature study*' presents the first step of a theory-driven evaluation study (TDE, see Chen 2015) examining CURANT. During the three-year implementation of this intervention (from 1st of November 2016 to 31st of October 2019), various other reports will be published including a first (after 1 year) and second (after 2 years) evaluation report.

The report offers a concise descriptive introduction to CURANT first, including among others a brief overview of the above-mentioned stakeholder organizations, basic information on the resources of the project and limited contextual information. Second, the report discusses the stakeholders' *change model*, i.e., a causal theory incorporating the stakeholders' assumptions and expectations regarding the intervention. It is an inductively produced theoretical model whose creation was facilitated by researchers (the authors of this report) but grounded firmly in the stakeholders' ideas. Drawing on the stakeholders' change model, the third section of the report highlights some of the central concepts and dynamics of the change model and relates these to academic understandings. The authors present an overview of academic literature on refugee integration processes and related public policies. As such, it provides the scientific backbone to the stakeholder-based theory on CURANT.

The report's authors are Rilke Mahieu and Stiene Ravn, both researchers at the Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies (CeMIS) at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. The evaluation study is supervised by prof. Dr. Christiane Timmerman and prof. Dr. Noel Clycq. The research for this report has been conducted in cooperation with the CURANT stakeholders mentioned above.

¹ In the rest of the report we will refer to the Public Centre of Social Welfare as the 'coordinating partner' since the municipality of Antwerp assigned the coordination of CURANT to this institution.

Introduction to CURANT

This section briefly introduces the project *Cohousing and case management for Unaccompanied young adult Refugees in ANTwerp*². It briefly describes the target group, local context in Antwerp, intervention, aims, resources and stakeholder consortium. As such, it provides the necessary background information for the next section (stakeholder theory of CURANT).

The central target group of CURANT are unaccompanied minors with a refugee status or subsidiary protection who are about to turn into adulthood, or who have done so recently. More precisely, it aims at unaccompanied young adults aged between 18³ and 21. While a heterogeneous group, the individuals under concern share following features: (a) their arrival in Belgium as minors⁴ without parents or other legal guardians and (b) their legal protection by the Belgian state through their refugee status or subsidiary protection status⁵. As this report will argue, within the broader refugee population they represent a distinctive group. However, unlike for unaccompanied minors (UMs) or unaccompanied minor refugees (UMRs), no standardised terms and abbreviations are in use to designate this group after their 18th anniversary. As no appropriate term is available for this category⁶, in this report we will refer to them as ‘unaccompanied young adult refugees’. For readability reasons, we often refer to them as ‘young (adult) refugees’.

As statistics on unaccompanied young adult refugees in Belgium are not available, we need to rely on statistics on unaccompanied *minors* to get an idea of the size and profile on the target group. As a part of a general increase of refugee flows to Belgium, the number of unaccompanied minors peaked in 2015. That year, 3.099 minors entered and applied for asylum in Belgium. Due to the closure of borders along the Balkan route and the refugee deal between the European Union and Turkey, numbers dropped to 1.076 in 2016 (CGVS, 2016). Regardless of this decline, a large number of former unaccompanied minors – young adults now – are currently constructing their lives in Belgian society.

² <http://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/antwerp>

³ For practical reasons, young refugees can enter the project at the age of 17, however only if their birthday is within the three first months of their participation in CURANT.

⁴ Refugees that enter Belgium unaccompanied at the age of 18, 19 or 20 are not necessarily excluded from enrolment in the project. However, as the primary target group of the project remain refugees who have entered Belgium as an unaccompanied minor, those will be exceptions.

⁵ The refugee status is granted according to the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951. As a refugee, individuals are initially granted the right to stay in Belgium for 5 years, after which they are given permanent stay (CGVS, 2016). Subsidiary protection is granted to those who cannot be defined as a refugee but who would face a real risk of suffering serious harm if he or she returns to the country of origin. The status of subsidiary protection is temporary. It is initially granted for one year and can be extended as long as the risk of serious harm in the country of origin exists. After five years, they are granted a permanent stay (CGVS, 2015).

⁶ This group is sometimes labelled as *ex-unaccompanied minor refugees*. However, we reject this term as it is confusing: it might as well concern minors whose situation shifted from unaccompanied to accompanied (i.e. who are joined by parents through family reunification).

The CURANT stakeholders, who encounter these individuals through their regular services and activities, have also observed this. Regarding the origin country of the intervention's target group, Afghans have been constituting the largest nationality group among unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in Belgium since 2009 (CGVS, 2016; EMN, 2014). In 2016, 51% of the total amount of unaccompanied minors applying for asylum originated from Afghanistan, followed by 8.6% from Guinea and 7.1% from Syria. Unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in Belgium are mostly male; in 2015 more than 9 out of 10 was male (Agentschap Inburgering & Integratie, 2015). Like adult asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors have fled from their country of origin to Europe for various reasons, including persecution, harm and/or human rights violations in their country of origin (EMN, 2014). The reasons as to why unaccompanied minors prefer Belgium to other European countries are the presence of family, friends or a large community from their own ethnic and/or national background. It is important to note that the act of fleeing the country of origin towards a European member state is usually not initiated and determined by the minors but by parents or a smuggler (EMN, 2014).

Despite the growing amount of (mainly Afghan) unaccompanied minors in Belgium (CGVS, 2016), little information is available on this particular group and their resettlement process in Belgian society, especially after they reach adulthood (except: Vervliet et al., 2015). However, as the CURANT stakeholders testify, based on their experience with minor and young adult refugees, this resettlement process in Belgium is characterized by many obstacles and challenges. As the CURANT project proposal, which reflects the intervention designers' assumptions, states

“When these minors reach the age of adulthood (+18), they are no longer able to benefit from subsidized shelter, enrolment in reception classes, customized trainings, and the support from a legal guardian. By definition this vulnerable group of young adults is unqualified, not in education, employment and training, and develops into protracted dependence of social welfare.” (Page 1, CURANT Project Proposal)

As will be discussed in later in this report, the CURANT consortium aims at radically breaking with this reality, by providing a cluster of different intervention actions. Central elements in the intervention design are a cohabitation scheme with volunteer flatmates for the young refugees, the provision of integrated, individually tailored guidance and counselling focused on activation, education, independent living, language, leisure, social integration and psychological therapy. The cohabitation scheme also requires substantial investments by the stakeholders in suitable real estate, aiming at the purchase, renovation and rent of in total 75 housing units. Different forms of cohabitation schemes will be provided: cohabitation in two-bedroom apartments with common areas (such as kitchen and bathroom), cohabitation of several refugee-buddy pairs sharing one community house and cohabitation in 25 modular units on one site.

Beside the provision of integrated, individually tailored assistance and counselling and the prospect of cohabitation in a decent accommodation with a local flatmate, there is a financial incentive for

young refugees to enter the project. Most importantly, the price of the refugee's room in the shared apartment is relatively low (€335 including fixed costs), compared to local prices in Antwerp. The flatmate rents his/her room at the same price. In addition, their cohabitation does not affect the refugee's or flatmate's welfare benefits and taxes, where this would be normally the case under Belgian law.

In terms of the time schedule, the first pairs of refugees and flatmates will enter the project in May 2017. By the end of the project (31st of October, 2019), at least 75 and up to 135 refugees should have participated in the project. The length of participation in CURANT for the refugees is at least one year. If necessary, this can be prolonged with 6 months.

The intervention's budget comes mainly – 80% or €4,894,303.32 – from the European Commission's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which has granted the stakeholders a subsidy under the Urban Innovative Action grant (UIA) from the 1st of November 2016 to 31th of October 2019. The remaining share of the budget (20%) is covered by the six consortium partners.

The intervention will be coordinated by OCMW Antwerpen (public institution, Public Centre of Social Welfare of the city of Antwerp), and executed by a consortium consisting of five partners⁷: OCMW Antwerpen, Jes vzw (NGO, youth-oriented outreach and urban lab), Atlas Inburgering en Integratie (public institution, training and counselling to newcomers), Vormingplus Antwerpen (NGO, adult education and volunteer support) and Solentra (NGO, diagnostic and therapeutic support for migrant and refugee children and families).

Since CURANT goes beyond existing public policies in Belgium in various respects, it can be considered an innovative intervention. However, it is not starting from scratch nor operating in a vacuum; it is embedded in existing policies, expertise and networks on the federal (Belgian), regional (Flemish) and local (Antwerp) level with regard to newcomers and refugees. For instance, when asylum seekers receive a positive decision on their asylum procedure, they automatically become targets of the regional integration policy for newcomers, implying entitlement to specific services but also particular obligations (Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, 2017). Regarding the local context, Antwerp as a city with an increasing share of inhabitants with foreign ancestry⁸ (by 2015, 45,8% of its population, Buurtmonitor 2016), has developed particular expertise with regard to minorities and newcomers (and refugees, as a particular category of newcomers). This local know-how is also reflected in the CURANT consortium⁹. While their organizations have different perspectives,

⁷ Formally, CeMIS (the evaluating institution) is also part of the consortium; however, it has no executive role. Therefore, it is not considered as a "stakeholder".

⁸ Defined here as being born with a foreign nationality, or having a parent who has been born with a foreign nationality.

⁹ With the exception of Solentra, which is a Brussels-based NGO, the CURANT stakeholders are Antwerp-based organizations who, firmly embedded in local civil society and institutional infrastructure, target local audiences.

missions and statuses (e.g. some are NGOs while others are public institutions), all stakeholders have expertise relevant to CURANT. In fact, as will be explained in the second part of this report, it is one of the major rationales of the intervention to bring together relevant expertise that is currently fragmented across institutions, with the aim of developing a common, integrated approach for unaccompanied young adult refugees. Stakeholders feel that currently, institutions focus too strongly on their own domain while neglecting or being unaware about others'. They hope that by bringing together different perspectives in a single intervention, exchange will be realised and the threshold will be lowered to make referrals (i.e. sending clients to another institution for more appropriate help). In the stakeholder consortium, experience-based knowledge is present on following issues related to CURANT¹⁰:

- Management of a large-scale client monitoring system (OCMW Antwerpen)
- Assistance of social welfare clients through individual case management (OCMW Antwerpen)
- Provision of social housing (OCMW Antwerpen)
- Detection and treatment of refugees' mental health problems arising from psychological trauma, grief, chronic stress, etc. (Solentra)
- Development of a culturally sensitive approach to care for (young) refugees (Solentra)
- Empowerment of vulnerable urban youngsters, especially with regard to their educational or labour market position (Jes vzw)
- Stimulation of young newcomers' participation in leisure time activities, language education and education (Atlas Inburgering & Integratie)
- Development of tailored integration programs for young newcomers (Atlas Inburgering & Integratie)
- Recruitment, training and motivation of volunteers (Vormingplus Antwerpen)

However, relevant expertise extends beyond the CURANT stakeholders. While it is not the aim of this report to describe the broader policy and civil society context in Flanders with regard to young adult refugees in detail, a few points should be mentioned here. First, apart from the consortium partners, a range of institutional and civil society actors is active in the domain of refugee incorporation. For instance, various NGOs, such as *Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen* have built up advocacy networks and information platforms on refugee-related matters in Flanders. Second, beside the CURANT stakeholders, various other public institutions provide services for young refugees. We only mention two important institutions here, as they have been identified by the CURANT stakeholders as crucial external partners, who will also be involved in the implementation of CURANT. First, there is the provision of reception education (OKAN, *Onthaalklas voor Anderstalige Nieuwkomers*) for all underage non-Dutch speaking newcomers by the Flemish government. After completing one year of reception education, newcomers generally transfer to mainstream education, and receive continuing support by an individual school coach following up their educational trajectory up to two years after terminating reception education (as long as they are enrolled in regular education). This type of

¹⁰ This is a non-exhaustive list, summing up the most relevant types of expertise.

support continues after newcomers reach the age of 18. Thus, adult CURANT participants still enrolled in mainstream secondary education can still rely on this type of support. Second, young adult refugees who are no longer enrolled in mainstream education are referred to public employment services (VDAB, *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling*). As many of the refugee youth participating in CURANT will be using its facilities in the near future, the stakeholders consider it crucial to cooperate closely with this institution too. This reflects the CURANT stakeholders' concern not to just create new services through their intervention, but also to ensure a continuum of care involving regular public services. As we will discuss later on, these external partners and relations are important to acknowledge because the success of the CURANT intervention also depends on them. Moreover, it also shows the limits of our evaluation study, as external partners' activities – and more broadly, external dynamics – will not be studied in this evaluation.

Stakeholder theory of CURANT

This section discusses the above-mentioned stakeholders' *change model*, that is, the causal theory incorporating these stakeholders' assumptions and expectations regarding the intervention. The model is graphically illustrated by the figure *CURANT Change Model V1.1*, to be found in the appendix of this report.

First, we introduce our evaluation approach, including the basic terminology and methodology used. Then, we elaborate on the stakeholders' perspectives on CURANT: what are the main problems, actions and aims underlying this intervention, according to the stakeholders? To put it simply: *why* this intervention and *how* to realize its goals? While seemingly easy questions to answer, the analysis of the stakeholders' views illustrates the multifaceted nature of the social problems to be addressed, and the complex design of the intervention.

A. Introduction: the evaluation approach

As this report draws on the *theory-driven evaluation approach* (TDE), it is useful to introduce this approach first. While there are many variations and their meaning and usage often differ, theory-driven evaluation generally refers to “any evaluation strategy or approach that explicitly integrates and uses stakeholder, social science, some combination of, or other types of theories in conceptualizing, designing, conducting, interpreting, and applying an evaluation.” (Coryn et al., 2011: 201). Since “TDE can be used to good effect in case of research or evaluation of an intervention in a complex setting and in case of a new type of intervention, for which the understanding of the causal mechanisms needs to be established.” (Van Belle et al., 2010: 3), we considered it appropriate for CURANT. Characteristic for TDE is also its strong concern with social progress (Coryn et al. 2011), which underpins its relevance for social policy interventions such as CURANT:

“If a program is effective, such approaches should identify which elements are essential for widespread replication. Conversely, if a program fails to achieve its intended outcomes or is ineffective, a theory-driven evaluation should be able to discover whether such breakdowns can be attributed to implementation failure (...), whether the context is unsuited to operate the mechanisms by which outcomes are expected to occur (...), or simply theory failure (...).” (ibid, 2007)

At the heart of theory-driven evaluation is the formulation of a “program theory”, to be defined as a set of explicit or implicit assumptions by stakeholders about what action is required to solve a social, educational or health problem and why the action will respond to this problem. As such, “the purpose of theory-driven evaluation is not only to assess whether an intervention works or does not work, but also how and why it does so.” (Chen, 2012). More than other evaluation methods, it looks at the transformation process between intervention and outcomes. To grasp and evaluate these processes,

a first step is to draft a 'change model' describing the expected changes due to the intervention (Donaldson 2007). It complements the 'action model' that prescribes the concrete design of the intervention.

In the next section, we present and discuss the change model of the CURANT intervention. The change model is a causative or descriptive theoretical model, linking the intervention actions with the expected changes and, on a more general level, the (expected) outcomes of the intervention. The model presents a structured overview of the core causal assumptions of the intervention. Assumptions about the causal processes through which an intervention or a treatment is supposed to work are crucial for any intervention, because its effectiveness depends on the truthfulness of the assumptions (Chen, 2015, 67). To put it simply, if invalid assumptions dictate the strategies of a program, it is unlikely to succeed.

The general question the change model answers is "how do the stakeholders expect their intervention to work?" Specific questions the model answers are the following:

- (1) What is (are) the social problem(s) that incited the stakeholders to create the intervention?
- (2) What are the core actions of the intervention?
- (3) What determinants or variables does the intervention aim to change, in order to reach its goals? In TDE, these dependent variables are called *mediators*, as they clarify the assumed mediating causal mechanisms between the intervention actions and the outcomes (Chen, 2015).
- (4) What factors condition or enable the mediating causal mechanisms? In TDE, these factors are labelled as *moderators*: it concerns external or independent factors which are expected to impact upon the mediating causal mechanism of the intervention but which cannot be altered by the intervention. Moderators can be among others the intervention clients' sociodemographic characteristics, implementers' characteristics, client-implementer relationships, the mode and setting of service delivery (Chen, 2015: 322). Moderators are especially important to predict and explain intervention failure.
- (5) What are the desired outcomes of the intervention, on the short and long term?

A central feature of the change model presented in this report is that it is *stakeholder-based*. It draws on the particular expertise, everyday experiences and viewpoints of the stakeholders, not on scholarly hypotheses as postulated in academic research. As such, it is an inductive model, not a deductive one. This focus on stakeholder perspectives is deliberate, as throughout the theory-driven evaluation literature, the centrality of stakeholder perspectives and involvement of stakeholders in evaluation is emphasized strongly. Among others, Chen (2015) is a proponent of such an inductive approach. In order to grasp the stakeholders' viewpoints on the intervention, various data sources can be used (Van Belle et al. 2010). The primary source used in the results we present in this report,

are group interviews with team members from the five stakeholder organizations involved (OCMW Antwerp, Jes vzw, Atlas Inburgering en Integratie, Vormingplus Antwerpen, Solentra). In total, six group interviews were conducted, each with between two and four team members of one respective stakeholder organisation¹¹. The total number of participants in the group interviews was 17. These included different profiles of team members: project designers on the one hand, and a variety of implementers¹² on the other (project coordinators, social workers, educational workers, youth workers, and psychotherapists). A secondary source was the project proposal, as submitted by the stakeholders to the funding agency. This document describes at length the aims of the project, tasks of each stakeholder and the required budgets. In addition, the researchers participated in all major preparatory meetings during the first months of the project, allowing them to grasp more directly the priorities and viewpoints of the different partners. The researchers' presence at those occasions allowed them for example to observe discussions among the project team members and to have informal conversations with them.

A second defining characteristic of the change model presented below is that it concerns a new intervention, which has not been implemented yet. At the time of publication of this report, the intervention is in the initial phase, as the first participants will enter the project from May 2017 on. In contrast to evaluations where theory-driven evaluation is employed to assess a running intervention and the change model is reconstructed in retrospective, in the case of CURANT the evaluation study runs parallel to the implementation of the intervention; it follows the intervention as this unfolds. As a result, the current change model (Version 1.1) is more of a tentative nature, a first 'draft' with the explicit aim to adjust the model based upon in-depth, empirically grounded evaluations after one and two years of implementation respectively.

A third feature characterizing the CURANT model is that the intervention is both complex and complicated (Rogers 2008). It is complicated, as due to the involvement of many stakeholders and external partners and the holistic nature of the intervention, causal effects will be multiple and intertwined. In addition, the intervention can be characterized as complex, as the expected causal effects will not be linear but complex, including reciprocal causal effects or effects occurring only after reaching a 'tipping point'. Under such circumstances, it is recommendable to consider the creation of the change model as a repeated action throughout the evaluation process, rather than a single action at the beginning of it (Rogers 2008). In fact, there has been a more general tendency in TDE literature to dismiss simplistic linear models; recent work has advocated for more contextualized, comprehensive program theory models (Coryn et al. 2011).

¹¹ For the leading institution, OCMW Antwerpen, two group interviews were conducted: one with the intervention's designers, and one with social workers involved in the implementation.

¹² Several of the implementers were involved in the design of the project too, however.

B. The core elements of the change model: intervention, determinants & goals/outcomes

The following parts reads as the diagram legend of Change Model V.1.1 (see appendix). It offers a step-wise explanation of all components of this diagram. After reading it, one should be able to grasp why the stakeholders created CURANT and how it is supposed to reach its goals.

As explained above, our analysis is based on group interviews with CURANT team members¹³. To illustrate how the Change Model is grounded in the interviewees' experiences and ideas, a selection of interview quotes are highlighted.

(1)The problem

What were, according to the stakeholders, the major social problems urging them to initiate and design this intervention? Briefly, the intervention was created to address the vulnerable condition of one particular subgroup within the refugee population: "former unaccompanied minor refugees", that is, young adult refugees who used to be unaccompanied minors and who have been granted asylum status or subsidiary protection. In addition, as they turn into adulthood they are still 'unaccompanied', meaning that no family reunification has taken place. According to the stakeholders, who are all in one way or another concerned with this group, these youngsters' major problems are multifaceted and situated on different levels:

On an individual level, these young refugees experience a lack of social support, due to their adult status. In addition, they lack essential skills needed for full participation in Belgian society, including language skills but also social and cognitive skills. Furthermore, they lack clear and realistic future aspirations. They are commonly struggling with negative feelings related to trauma, loss and chronic stress and feel socially isolated.

¹³ In total, 17 CURANT team members participated in the interviews. Of these, three were project designers, four had (mainly) coordinative tasks, eight were social workers (including youth workers, social-cultural and educational workers), and two were psychotherapists.

However, the CURANT stakeholders emphasize their desire to go beyond an individualistic analysis of these young refugees' condition. They detect deficiencies in current public policies and services addressing this target group. In the first place, current policies and services in Belgium are insufficiently grounded in expertise on these young refugees. As a result, public institutions lack the right approach. In addition, relevant services are strongly fragmented across institutions, with little coordination. Finally, the stakeholders agree that there are limits to what public services can offer to young refugees; for instance, genuine emotional and long-term support is something that lies beyond the reach of professional social workers.

"We often see how regular care services for refugees are inefficient. This is the result of the fact that caregivers often lack cultural sensitivity or fail to grasp the deep impact of psychological problems on refugees' behaviour."
(Psychotherapist)

"The fact that CURANT provides decent, affordable housing also means that these young refugees won't be living in housing where, let's say, mushrooms are growing on the walls. This is a huge problem in Antwerp. In our services, we encounter many young refugees who are living in houses where you wouldn't even let your dog enter, while paying a monthly rent of €500 to €600."
(Social worker)

The stakeholders have a strong awareness that certain problems young refugees face are situated on the societal level. A major social problem according to them, which is especially pressing locally in the city of Antwerp, is the lack of decent, affordable housing for young refugees. While local Antwerp citizens experience this problem too, the problem is seen as especially pressing for young refugees, who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination on the private housing market due to having a foreign name and appearance, a low proficiency in Dutch and (usually) a dependency on a social welfare benefit.

Another social issue many young refugees struggle with according to the stakeholders are the limited possibilities to encounter local, Dutch-speaking citizens. The networks they are able to build up, for example through attending

Dutch language classes, living in a local reception centre, or attending education for newcomers, mainly lead – according to stakeholders – to intra-ethnic contacts or inter-ethnic contact with other newcomers, much less to inter-ethnic social networks with Dutch-speaking locals. Vice versa, young (native) locals lack social spaces where they can interact deeply with young refugees. In addition, they often lack social skills to build in-depth relationships with newcomers. This, as the stakeholders argue, is an obstacle to the young refugees' social integration.

"Just look at your own friends: basically, 80% are copies of yourself, as you watch the same films, do the same stuff and share the same interests. How many native Belgians have an in-depth relationship with someone having a different religious background, for instance? I don't think many have. To a large extent, this has to do with an attitude – a lack of openness to the unknown. Many people feel threatened by what they don't know."
(Psychotherapist)

(2) The intervention

What are the concrete measures the stakeholders take in order to address the above-mentioned problems? Again, we can discern three levels.

First, there are actions targeting young adult refugees directly. More in particular, it regards young refugees who fulfil a range of eligibility criteria. First and foremost, they have to be unaccompanied and between the age of 18 and 21 (or turning 18 in 3 months). In addition, they need to have a basic Dutch language proficiency, they have to show motivation to participate

“Not CURANT’s separate components - the idea of cohabitation, case management of welfare clients etc. - but the *combination* of all of them in a holistic intervention was considered truly innovative by the European sponsors.”
(Project designer)

“We have received a lot of positive reactions to our idea of cohabitation of newcomers and locals. Many people are open to the philosophy of CURANT. Without the existence of this positive vibe and breeding ground, this project wouldn’t be possible.”
(Project designer)

in all of CURANT’s training and social activities and do not display problematic or pathologic behaviour. CURANT offers a broad range of actions to the selected candidates. As such, it aims at being a holistic intervention. This is a deliberate choice, as taking into account different life domains (social networks, education, wellbeing, etc.) in an integrated manner is considered a requirement by the stakeholders to overcome the various social problems pointed out above.

Importantly, the focus on *young* adults - many participants are 18 or about to turn 18 when entering the project - reveals the strongly *preventive* nature of CURANT. To a large extent, the aim of the intervention is to shield the participants from the social problems mentioned above through preventive actions (training, etc.) with the aim of avoiding the development of a problematic condition of dependency and rather than helping (older) unaccompanied adult refugees in a vulnerable situation. This explains why the intervention targets the age group of 18-21: there is a strong belief among the stakeholders that *young* adults will benefit most from the intervention.

Second, there are a number of intervention actions targeting a secondary participant group, the refugees’ flatmates. These too have to fulfil certain criteria: they have to be aged 20 to maximum 28 when entering the project, be motivated to participate in the training and social activities and display sufficient intercultural sensitivity. The main aim of the interventions addressing this group is to support these individuals socially and strengthen them individually, in order to enable them to build up a healthy, supportive but egalitarian relationship with the refugee-roommate. The stakeholders’ assumption is that if this support would be absent, problems in this pair’s relationship would arise more often and would remain unresolved. This in turn would lead to (more) early dropouts or a lack of motivation to persevere if troubles emerged.

Importantly, the intervention actions targeting the young refugees directly also serve as *indirect* support mechanism for the flatmates: if personal assistance, guidance, training, psychological

support etc. would be absent for the refugee, the refugee would rely more strongly on his/her flatmate with the risk of overburdening the flatmate. For example, the refugee would rely more on the flatmate for administrative and practical affairs, or would not have the support of a psychotherapist readily available in case of emerging psychological issues, putting a strain on the relationship with the flatmate. In addition, the social worker providing the personal, centralized support and guidance to the young refugee serves as a contact point for the flatmate in case of problems. Therefore, the availability of a range of services to the young refugee also functions as a

“By involving local volunteers, CURANT aims for collective empowerment. However, whenever you work with vulnerable groups, such as refugees, professionals are needed too. In CURANT, the psychologists, social workers, training staff, etc. create a protective, supportive environment where the volunteers can flourish. In my own organisation too, we often employ volunteers. We therefore understand the importance of having sound volunteer policies, including the provision of professional support for the volunteers.”
(Project coordinator)

‘safety net’ for the flatmate. Moreover, the flatmate is informed about the activities his/her flatmate refugee is participating in (e.g. training sessions), and asked to attend some of them. This direct involvement of the flatmate with the intervention actions targeting refugees is also hoped to affect the overall motivation of the young refugees.

“Candidate-volunteers have told us that they find it reassuring to know that a team of professionals is ready to assist them in the project..”
(Project coordinator)

Third, the intervention also provides a range of actions on the stakeholder level. This includes capacity building, coordination of all the intervention actions (through an overarching project coordination team, as well as ‘case managers’ on the level of the individual refugees) and various forms of cooperation. As it is one of the central premises of the project that structural cooperation among public institutions concerned with young refugees is lacking currently, the program sets up various mechanisms to ensure

cooperation among the stakeholders, but also with crucial external partners, such as regular education for newcomers and the public employment services.

Below is a list of all intervention actions, in accordance with Change Model V1.1 (see appendix).

a) Intervention actions focusing on the young refugees

- PERSONAL, CENTRALIZED (PROFESSIONAL) SUPPORT for the young refugees is offered by a social worker (meeting on a weekly basis at the refugee’s place)
 - Close follow-up and support in administrative and practical issues, including budget management
 - Coordination of the individualized learning & training trajectory which is part of CURANT
- Various forms of TRAINING & LEARNING

- o Tailored 10-day training trajectory in group sessions
 - o Thematic training sessions
- GUIDANCE TOWARDS REGULAR (care and other) SERVICES, such as:
 - o The suitable regular educational and training offer of the stakeholders (e.g. Dutch language courses at Atlas, Summer school for young newcomers) and other institutions (VDAB, CAW, etc.). This ensures a continuum of care for the refugee, also after leaving the intervention.
 - o The suitable regular leisure offer in Antwerp

“Our care does not stop after the refugee has left CURANT. We aim to provide after-care too. Therefore, it is important to cooperate with external partners, among others stakeholders providing public welfare and employment services.”
(Social worker)

- PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY in order to cope with the negative feelings or problematic behaviour resulting from trauma, a sense of loss, and other psychological issues related to their status as a young refugee, an adolescent and a newcomer.
- SHELTER: The provision of affordable, decent, stable housing for at least 1 year, up to 1.5 year.
- COHABITATION with a local flatmate in a shared apartment: the shared living space offers a durable setting for regular, informal, meaningful social interaction with a young, local citizen.

“We expect the relationship between the refugee and the flatmate to develop rather spontaneously, driven by mutual curiosity and everyday social interaction. It won’t be artificial or orchestrated.”
(Social worker)

b) Intervention actions focusing on the flatmates

- COHABITATION with a young refugee in a shared apartment: the shared living space offers a durable setting for regular informal, meaningful social interaction with a young refugee.
- TRAINING for the local flatmates, as a preparation for cohabitation in general, and with a young refugee in particular.
- A STRUCTURE FOR PEER SUPPORT, through feedback activities, and guided peer learning among the flatmates.

“In our organisation, we strongly believe in the value of group-oriented social dynamics. In CURANT too, we will be organizing group sessions for the flatmates, as a platform to exchange experiences among peers. Group activities will nourish their motivation and will offer informal support.”
(Social worker)

c) Intervention actions focusing on the stakeholders

- **TRAINING:** stakeholder expertise is transferred to CURANT staff members of the other stakeholders, through tailored training sessions.
- **COOPERATION** (internal and external), **COORDINATION** (of intervention actions), **INNOVATION:** An important driver of the intervention is the need to find an efficient and effective working modus for the stakeholders. The stakeholders will cooperate with relevant external partners, as well as develop a framework for cooperation among the project stakeholders. This cooperation will happen on two levels: on the project level, there will be coordination of all intervention actions (including their financial, administrative, legal etc. dimensions) by a project coordination team. This team also ensures internal communication, by setting up regular meetings with the entire project team. On a case level, a social worker will coordinate individual young refugee's participation in various intervention actions (e.g. training sessions, therapy, etc.), as this 'trajectory' is tailored to the needs of each refugee. During *case meetings*, all caregivers of a particular youngster meet up and decide upon a common, integrated strategy to help

"The plurality of perspectives on young refugees among the different CURANT stakeholders can be an advantage, but also a pitfall. In order to avoid misunderstandings in the CURANT team, we need to *recognize* these different 'lenses', and to talk about them. This is a time-consuming but necessary process."
(Project coordinator)

this refugee. The implementation of a new working modus for service provision to young refugees also entails a range of innovative methods, distinctive from regular public services in Belgium. Among others, the intervention includes following innovations:

- an intensive, outreaching social work approach to the young refugees (weekly house visits as the default method, rather than monthly appointments at the Public Centre for Social Welfare)
- the introduction of innovative ways of sharing information and coordinating services across institutions
- the adoption of an integrated, holistic approach including and coordinating services of various institutions (the stakeholders)
- a lower client/social worker rate than usual in the OCMW Antwerpen, which gives the social worker much more time to follow up individual clients
- authorisation to make an exception to welfare and housing regulations, leading among others to a more beneficial calculation of the refugees' social welfare benefits (than would otherwise be the case when they would cohabitate)

"In regular social services in Antwerp, each social worker assists around 50 welfare clients. Contrastingly, in youth care, the ratio is 1 out of every 4 to 5 youngsters. In the design of CURANT we tried to find a middle ground and decided to provide one case manager per 18 young adult refugees. The case manager's assistance is however supplemented by the support of the other professionals involved in CURANT, as well as the refugee's flatmate."
(Project designer)

- **OUTWARD COMMUNICATION:** the stakeholders consider it important to communicate positively on the project and target group, as a counterbalance to negative or uninformed media coverage of refugees.

d) Social interaction as the result of cohabitation

In the change model, a separate box indicates one particular element of the intervention: the particular social interaction occurring in the cohabitation setting. While the intervention provides the physical (shelter) and social (cohabitation) conditions of social interaction between the refugee and his/her flatmate, the occurrence of meaningful, regular informal social interaction should not be taken for granted. It is rather an *assumption* of the stakeholders that this type of interaction will take place (and will be stimulated by various intervention actions), not an intervention action itself. Moreover, different from the other intervention components, this social interaction is considered to be a largely spontaneous process between the refugee and his volunteer flatmate, while all other intervention actions are led by *professionals*, whose actions are guided by professional expertise, ethics and protocols.

How do the stakeholders define the (ideal) social relationship between the refugee and his/her flatmate? Importantly, this relationship is usually defined by contrasting it with the relationships young unaccompanied refugees often built up with professional caregivers, such as social workers or teachers. Stakeholders stress that, in contrast to professional caregivers, flatmates should not have a too strong sense of responsibility with regard to the refugee's wellbeing. Stakeholders fear that a 'paternalistic' attitude of the flatmate will lead into a dependency of the refugee on the flatmate, while also overstressing the flatmate's capacities.

"The volunteer flatmate does not *replace* a social worker, nor does (s)he have to take up a social worker's duties. It is someone who is simply *there*, an approachable person. Someone the refugee can ask anything, even the most embarrassing questions. Living together, they will also encounter obstacles, which they can solve together. And throughout this process, they will learn from each other."
(Social worker)

Stakeholders describe following features as essential in the relationship between refugee and flatmate:

"As social workers, we can bring young newcomers to youth organizations, sport clubs etc., but our actions do not always have the desired impact. In contrast, if the flatmate says 'hey, let's go playing soccer together' or 'I'm going to meet my friends for a drink tonight, do you want to join?', it will be a more spontaneous, more organic way to extend these youngsters' social networks."
(Social worker)

- It is characterised by spontaneous social interaction, because it is based on a shared interest (shared accommodation), not on a one-sided request for assistance.
- It should be a less hierarchical, a more balanced, two-way relationship - unlike the relationship between a caregiver and caretaker. It is seen as less stigmatizing, because relationships with caregivers essentially define the young refugees as a 'vulnerable group' in need of help, while the relationship with the flatmate is more 'normal'. Flatmates do not have superior

knowledge; they equally struggle with problems. It is seen as more equal as unlike caregivers,

flatmates do not know the 'system' (administrative procedures, regulations, etc.) in depth and (may) encounter similar problems as the young refugees themselves. The result is that often, they will undertake a search for information or solutions together, as equal partners, while contrastingly, caregivers usually know 'all the answers'.

"In a professional care relationship there is always a power imbalance: you have the therapist/caregiver who has a certain expertise on the one hand, while you have the caretaker who needs assistance on the other hand. Inevitably, there is a hierarchy. While in CURANT, the flat mate and the refugee are on equal terms"
(Psychotherapist)

- Because the relationship is not rooted in care services, it has the potential to be more durable. Relationships with caregiver usually wither away after the care formally ends.

- The age similarity (the limited age difference between refugee and flatmate) is considered to

have a positive impact on the above aspects, and further increases equality.

"I really hope the cohousing will engender a *chemistry* between the refugee and the flat mate. You know, I see young newcomers on a daily basis, and every day they ask me: 'I have to learn Dutch, I have to integrate, but I don't have any Flemish person in my entire network'. (Social worker)

(3) The determinants

In theory-driven evaluation approach, two main types of variables or 'determinants' can be discerned: mediators and moderators (Chen, 2015). Mediators, on the one hand, are variables/factors the intervention wants to influence. The assumption is that the intervention actions will cause change on the value of these variables. Examples include attitudes, skills, knowledge, networks, etc. of the target group. The mediators that are central to the stakeholders' causal theory of CURANT are listed below.

Moderators, on the other hand, are independent factors that may have an intervening effect on the causal processes the intervention engenders. They are not influenced by the intervention itself (or only to a limited effect) but their absence/presence may influence whether the intervention causes a change on the level of the mediator. Examples are static background characteristics (gender, ethnic background), background characteristics at the start of the intervention (age, psychological profile, Dutch language proficiency at the beginning) and external, contextual factors. Moderators offer an answer to the question whether the intervention works in a similar manner with all individuals and under all circumstances. Moderators cannot be changed themselves, however, that does not mean that intervention designers are completely helpless with regard to their effect. If a moderator is considered to have a negative effect, intervention designers can reorganize the intervention in order to minimize its effect. This has happened in CURANT with certain moderators, by defining eligibility criteria and an additional screening procedure for the target groups entering the projects (refugees and their flatmates) (see above). The moderators considered important by the stakeholders have been listed below, following the list of mediators.

a) Mediating causal mechanisms

Two questions are central with regard to the mediating causal mechanisms: first, what actors and factors does CURANT seek to influence through the intervention actions? Second, how will these changes be triggered exactly, that is, what intervention actions will influence them?

With regard to the first question, in the change model of CURANT (see figure in the appendix), all mediators are listed under “determinants”. Again, different levels can be discerned: factors on the level of the individual refugee participants of CURANT, factors on the level of the flatmates and on the level of the stakeholders. To a lesser extent, changes are expected on the level of society. What is remarkable is the amount of determinants (in contrast to more simple interventions, targeting a single determinant), and the breadth of most of the mediators (in contrast to targeted interventions, e.g. aiming at changing one particular skill or type of behaviour). These features relate to the complexity of the social problems the intervention addresses (see above) and the holistic, multi-layered nature of the intervention design.

With regard to the second question, that is, what intervention actions trigger what changes, a high number of arrows between both elements of the model can be observed. Most intervention actions trigger change in more than one determinant, and all determinants are influenced by various actions. In the list of mediators below, we indicate for each mediator by which intervention actions it will be influenced (*in italics*), according to the stakeholders.

- **ATTITUDES** of the refugees: adoption of (more) durable life aspirations with regard to their life in the receiving country (beyond a ‘survival modus’, focused e.g. on earning money quickly). Their locus of control will also shift; they will feel more in control of their own lives, taking initiative to reach their life goals. They will also develop a realistic future perspective, which means that aspirations are building on personal capacities (e.g. actual skills and talents) and opportunities available in Belgian society (e.g. focus on technical skills) also taking into account the length of time it takes to learn certain skills (e.g. Dutch language). *Influenced by following intervention actions: learning & training sessions, psychological therapy.*
- **SKILLS** of the young refugees: the intervention will influence a range of skills, which will be acquired both through formal learning processes (mainly in the training sessions) as well as through informal learning processes taking place in the social interaction in the shared apartment.

“Some of these youngsters arrive here with very high expectations regarding to their position in our society and in particular in the labour market. They expect to find a good job quickly and to raise enough money to support their families back home. However, to be honest, in reality there is usually a mismatch between their skills and our labour market. In addition, because many are nearly illiterate, their learning progress is very slow: it often takes them 2 to 3 years to reach the Dutch language level needed to enter technical training. Therefore, upon arrival in Belgium they are often deeply disappointed. The realization that achieving higher education will be hard, if not impossible, is a bitter pill to swallow for them. Therefore, it is important to help them to turn this sense of disillusionment into a positive future ideal.”
(Project coordinator)

- Improvement of verbal Dutch language proficiency. *Influenced by all intervention actions, but especially by the social interaction with the flatmate.*
- Improvement of social and cognitive skills: the young refugees will acquire a better understanding of Belgian society and institutions. This includes both practical knowledge, such as about the institutional context (e.g. where to find particular help to find a job? What institution to go to for a particular problem?), but also about cultural norms and values. *Influenced by learning and training sessions, by the social interaction with the flatmate, by the guidance towards institutions and by the personal, centralized support.*
- Skills to live independently: the young refugees will learn how to manage their budget properly, how to deal with administrative affairs in a responsible manner, etc. *Influenced by the personal, centralized support, by the social interaction with the flatmate, by training and learning sessions.*
- Self-knowledge: the refugees will acquire a better understanding of their own talents, interests and competences, especially those matching with the receiving country education, labour market and leisure opportunities. *Influenced by learning and training sessions, by the social interaction with the flatmate and by the personal centralized support.*
- FEELINGS of the young refugees: the stakeholders aim at affecting the wellbeing of the young refugee positively:
 - Increasing psychical wellbeing and trauma relief. *Influenced by the psychological therapy and by the learning and training sessions.*
 - Higher self-esteem: as the result of broadening their social network beyond professional caregivers, to 'normal' relationships with ordinary citizens (flatmates). Their flatmates also do not know the 'system' (administrative procedures, regulations, jurisdiction, etc.) in depth (unlike caregivers) and encounter similar problems as refugees. *Influenced by the social interaction.*
 - Reduction of chronic stress: related to finding housing due to the provision of stable, decent housing. *Influenced by shelter and by the guidance towards institutions.*
 - General wellbeing: being at peace with the pace and nature of the trajectory followed with regard to work and/or study in Belgium. *Influenced by the personal, centralized support, psychological therapy and the learning and training sessions.*
- SOCIAL NETWORKS of the young refugees: Developing ethnically diverse, informal networks

"We note that, in the first months or even years after arrival in the receiving society, young refugees often operate in a 'survival modus'. All their energy is absorbed by learning the language, coping with this new situation etc. It is only when their situation stabilizes, - usually after they have acquired refugee status and found stable accommodation - that unsolved, long-slumbering psychological issues suddenly emerge. Because CURANT contributes to a stable situation, early detection is very important."
(Psychotherapist)

with peers. *Influenced by the social interaction with the flatmate, influenced by the learning and training.*

- FINANCIAL BUDGET of the refugees: Due to relatively low cost of housing, having a full social welfare benefit and assistance with budget management, possibility to make some savings for the future (e.g. to buy a computer, or to pay deposit on private market). *Influenced by shelter, personal and centralized support and learning and training sessions.*

Beside the factors on the level of the young refugees participating in CURANT, the stakeholders also hope to cause changes on the level of the flatmates of the refugees.

- SKILLS of the flatmates: Generally, stakeholders expect the social skills of the flatmates to grow, because of these individuals' interaction with their refugee flatmate but also through their interaction with fellow flatmates. In particular, their intercultural sensitivity will increase throughout the intervention. *Influenced by the social interaction, the training sessions (for flatmates) and the peer support structure.*
- FINANCIAL BUDGET of the flatmates: due to relatively low cost of the housing provided by the intervention, flatmates too will be able to save money or spend it on other purposes. *Influenced by shelter.*

As CURANT aims at causing change in the stakeholder institutions, on this level too, changes are hoped to occur:

- EMPLOYEES' SKILLS: the stakeholders hope to increase the skills of their employees (project team members) to deal with the particular target group of the intervention. While the transfer of expertise among the stakeholders is an important element here, stakeholders also stress how they will learn from the intervention, and especially from their direct engagement with refugees and flatmates alike. *Influenced by training (for stakeholders), influenced by the social interaction.*
- ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE & CULTURE: the intervention should incite new ways of thinking about, new types of services provision and more generally, new working modes for young refugees in the stakeholder institutions involved. *Influenced by training (for stakeholders), by cooperation, coordination and innovation.*
- ORGANISATIONAL NETWORKS: The stakeholders hope to initiate experts' and practitioners' network with regard to former unaccompanied young adults. *Influenced by cooperation, coordination and innovation.*

"What distinguishes recently arrived refugees from youngsters originating from the established immigrant communities in Belgium, is the former's lack of connection to their neighbourhood. We, as outreach workers, we know quite well how to 'read' neighbourhoods and how to reach out to the local youngsters there. However, young refugees are usually sent to us by other organizations, such as public centres for social welfare, youth care centres and reception education schools. This requires a different approach than the one we are used to in outreach."
(Social worker)

Finally, CURANT stakeholders hope the intervention will also impact upon the broader audience's perception of refugees. *Influenced by outward communication.*

b) Moderating causal mechanisms

Beyond the various factors the stakeholders wish to influence directly through the intervention, stakeholders indicate a range of more external, independent factors that are likely to influence the central causal processes triggered by the intervention. They are important to address, as they might offer (one of the) explanation(s) for the success or failure of intervention actions. Stakeholders also reflected on these factors during the group interviews. They also clarified how they try to take into account these moderators as far as possible and feasible. Due to the initial stage CURANT is currently in - at the time of the stakeholder group interviews and the writing of this report, the intervention had not started yet -, the list is rather based on hypothetical reflections about what factors might interfere rather than on actual examples stemming from the intervention's implementation.

In the Change Model (see Appendix), the main moderators are listed at the bottom of the model.

- BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REFUGEE:

- o Enrolment in full-time education: if the young refugee is still enrolled in full-time education, various caregivers related to the school context (such as personal coaches) already offer support and guidance. Under such circumstances, the stakeholders expect the benefit of additional professional support to be limited, and might be even difficult to realize, because the school takes a leading position here. On the contrary, young refugees who are not in full-time education are expected to benefit a lot from the various types of professional support CURANT offers. However, as other elements of the intervention remain very valuable for the first group too (such as the cohabitation, the psychotherapy) the attendance of full-time education was no criterion for exclusion.
- o The psychological condition of the young refugee at the start: this factor is considered pivotal in understanding their progress during their participation. If he/she is psychologically burdened (e.g. because of untreated trauma or a 'frozen' grief process), more patience will be needed and the pace of progress will be much slower. Moreover, a temporary downturn is possible in their progress when the grief process and trauma solution process starts up. In addition, the presence of severe psychological issues will affect the social interaction with the flatmate. To avoid overburdening the flatmates,

"Early detection and treatment of psychological problems is an absolute priority in CURANT. Psychological issues may constitute a major obstacle in refugees' integration process. Problems may be related to trauma, but this is not always the case, often they are related to a sense of grief and loss, chronic stress and other factors."
(Psychotherapist)

candidate-participants are screened¹⁴ before intake; those with very severe psychological issues are not eligible to enter the project.

- o Dutch language proficiency: it is considered necessary that the young refugee has acquired a certain level of Dutch language proficiency. As a result, participants are required to have sufficient proficiency in Dutch (which is ensured through the screening before intake). The stakeholders estimate that a too low level of Dutch language proficiency would seriously impact various intervention actions, e.g.:
 - For the training sessions, it is deemed necessary that participants have a certain level of understanding of the Dutch language. If this is too weak, certain training methods (such as participatory ones) will be difficult to apply and will have little effect (because they will not trigger the internal changes in perspectives/attitudes etc. aimed at). The use of interpreters is not considered an appropriate solution here, as the training sessions also want to prepare the refugees for real-life settings such as a job interview where no interpreter will be available.
 - For the cohabitation, the expectation is that if Dutch language proficiency is low, the quality and quantity of social interaction between the flatmate and volunteer will decrease. Partly, this will be compensated by using alternative communication means (other languages than Dutch, more body language), however, it is expected that generally more problems will arise, as it will be more difficult to deal with e.g. conflicts and emotions properly.
- o Low SES: Based on the general profile of unaccompanied minor refugees, the stakeholders expect that most candidate-refugees will be low educated, some even illiterate. As a consequence, their progress pace might be low. It is deemed crucial that not only the stakeholders but also the flatmates adopt a patient attitude in this respect. A too overwhelming, impatient attitude on behalf of the flatmate with regard to the development of their relationship and progress of the refugee will lead to frustration and will cause friction on both sides.
- o Migration trajectory and transnational family relations of the refugee: depending on (among others) the region of origin and the reason for their flight, refugees have different

¹⁴ Candidate-participants are screened by a psychotherapist (Solentra) and a social worker (OCMW Antwerpen) of the CURANT team via an in-depth interview. At this interview, the person who has registered the refugee for enrolment in CURANT (e.g., a legal guardian, reception education teacher, etc.) is also present. If needed, an interpreter is provided. Criteria that are being addressed during screenings include motivations to participate, Dutch verbal proficiency, and psychic vulnerabilities (e.g., how would the youngster react to particular situations or emotions). Other topics addressed are the young refugee's social life, current housing situation, preferences with regard to a flatmate, and the refugee's qualities as a potential flat mate (e.g., clean vs. messy, often home vs. away most weekends). If the candidate is considered suitable for the project, the information obtained during these interviews is used to match the refugee with a suitable flatmate at a later stage.

migration trajectories and different transnational relations to the family back home, affecting their aspirations for their lives in Belgium strongly. For instance, based on their experiences with the target group, stakeholders testify how many Afghan boys were the eldest son in their family; send away by family with a clear goal to earn money quickly for their family. If they save money in Belgium, it is possible that they will remit their savings directly to their families back home. Class differences (of their families back home) are also deemed relevant here, as to explain different perspectives on their lives in Belgium. For instance, unaccompanied young Iraqi refugees in Belgium tend to come from upper-class families, and were used to a high living standard. Therefore, they often face more difficulties of adapting to living in Belgium with limited means.

- **INEQUALITIES BETWEEN THE REFUGEE AND THE FLATMATE:** Stakeholders were well aware of the likelihood of a large gap between the flatmate and the refugee in terms of their SES, their cultural frameworks and the size, composition and resources available in their respective social networks.
 - **SES and cultural frameworks:** Many young refugees are low educated, while most flatmates are highly educated, and coming from middle class families. This gap may put a strain on their relation in various ways. For refugees coming from low-educated and conservative backgrounds, cohabitation might require a larger effort on both sides (due to a gap between cultural referential frameworks, mentalities), or even impossible with certain types of flatmates (e.g. a homosexual flatmate). In addition, stakeholders expect that the gap in financial means may also cause friction, as the flatmate has a larger budget to spend than the refugee does.
 - **Social networks:** flatmates are likely to have a larger and different social network than the refugees. Most notably, they will have a family network, whereas this is lacking per definition for unaccompanied refugees. This inequality may affect the refugee's wellbeing negatively, for example if the refugee feels lonely when the flatmate is absent over the weekend or celebrating holidays at the family house. Even if the flatmate invites the refugee to participate in certain aspects of his/her social life, this may not always have a positive effect: the refugee might become more strongly aware of what he/she is missing out (family).

"We have to be realistic; not all relationships between refugees and their flatmates will evolve into deep friendships. This is not necessarily due to racism or a sense of superiority on behalf of the flatmates, rather, it is a matter of sharing the same interests."
(Project coordinator)

- **SET-UP OF THE HOUSING UNITS:** The vicinity of other refugee/flatmate pairs in the same housing unit is expected to affect the social interaction between the refugee and his/her flatmate strongly. However, stakeholders expect ambiguous effects here. On the one hand, they think the beneficial effects of the flatmate-refugee relationship will be tempered if they share their living space with (various) others or if many other pairs live nearby. There is the expectation that the quality and quantity of social interaction between the refugee and volunteer flatmate will decrease, e.g. because the refugee would interact more with fellow peers of the same background. For example, the

"I believe large housing units (where multiple pairs cohabitate) have pro's and con's. If many people live together closely, and the relationship between the refugee and his flatmate isn't going so well, this is less problematic as both can look for alternative social contacts within the same building."
(Social worker)

"I can imagine that if you enter a large collective housing community, you will feel at ease more quickly than when you move into a two-bedroom apartment with a single person you don't know yet. Therefore, the advantage of the first type is that the threshold to enter is lower, it feels more protective. However, the second type enables a stronger connection with your roommate."
(Social worker)

refugee would seek help with his/her co-ethnic peer, rather than his/her flatmate. In turn, this would lower the need to practice Dutch and make him/her more dependent on the co-ethnic peer network. Especially in larger housing units, there is the fear that these processes will result in two separate, segregated groups. On the other hand, stakeholders expect positive dynamics to take place if different pairs live close by. This allows them to find peer social support nearby when needed (a 'listening ear'). In addition, when a group of local flatmates and refugees live together in the same building, this may create a motivating, inclusive 'community vibe'

among them. Striking a balance between too many other pairs nearby and being too isolated is thus considered the ideal situation. However, beside these substantial arguments, stakeholders stress how pragmatic choices will be made in relation to the housing market offer.

- **NEGATIVE SOCIETAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS REFUGEES, AND (MUSLIM) MINORITIES.** The stakeholders think that generally circulating stereotypes and xenophobia may thwart certain processes in the intervention.
 - Everyday negative attitudes and discriminatory practices affect the experiences of the refugees, e.g. in their search for housing, educational trajectories, labour market experiences, daily interactions etc. These are external to this intervention, but the sense of "not being welcome" may influence the wellbeing and motivation of the refugee strongly, and may for example make it difficult to build up a long-term future perspective in Belgian society.
 - On the other hand, fear of being labelled as 'racist' or 'anti-Muslim' may create a taboo sphere in the social interaction between refugee and flatmate where certain things cannot be discussed openly or are misinterpreted. This in turn hinders conflict resolution. For instance, a flatmate might be afraid to ask any information about the refugee's cultural/religious habits and values, or afraid to tell that certain habits bother him/her.
- **COMPOSITION OF THE REFUGEE PARTICIPANT GROUP.** The dominance of particular

nationalities (Afghans) and one gender (male) in the population of unaccompanied refugees might spark particular social dynamics in the group activities in the project. For instance, there might be less incentive to speak Dutch, and less opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds. Furthermore, the stakeholders prefer a more heterogeneous ethno-cultural group composition for the training sessions. However, in other parts of the intervention homogeneity creates opportunities, such as in group therapy, where the common language and cultural framework makes it possible to work with a single interpreter.

- **SUPPORT FOR THE FLATMATE BY HIS/HER OWN SOCIAL NETWORK.** If the pre-existing social networks (family, friends) have a positive, supportive stance towards the intervention, this will strengthen the resilience of the flatmate in case of troubles. His/her personal social network may provide the necessary emotional support. On the contrary, if the own social network has a more negative or sceptical stance towards the intervention, it might cause a need to 'prove' oneself to 'make the project succeed'.
- **ATTITUDE OF THE FLATMATE.** The stakeholders assume that a certain maturity; openness and flexibility on behalf of the flatmate is necessary to develop an equal, supportive, healthy relationship with the refugee, and to make the development of intercultural (and other) competencies through cohabitation possible. If one is too much occupied with oneself (and especially, one's own adolescent issues), or is generally inflexible or incompetent in social relations, this will not be possible. The flatmates should in particular have the capacity to question one's own cultural referential framework. In addition, a paternalistic attitude is seen as highly counterproductive. As the stakeholders consider this essential, a few measures have been taken to ensure this: first, a minimum age limit is introduced: only youngsters from 20 on can enter the project. Second, a maximum age limit has been introduced (28) to avoid the development of a parent-child-like relationship. Third, a screening of candidate-flatmates defines if the candidates have a suitable attitude¹⁵.
- **COMPOSITION OF THE FLATMATE PARTICIPANT GROUP.** Stakeholders hope that the flatmates will be somewhat representative for the broader society and include a variety of people. Stakeholders see the value of having diversity in terms of the ethno-cultural background and SES. Flatmates with an

"The flatmates should be a diverse group too, ideally. We should not act as if local people in their twenties are all in full-time job positions and, on top of this, have time left to care for a young refugee. No, many local young people are also unemployed, studying, etc. Moreover, it would be very valuable to have some locals with a more difficult life trajectory, coming from a less privileged background, because they might serve as a role model to the young refugees."
(Social worker)

¹⁵ In the project, candidate-flatmates are screened by Vormingplus. During an interview, two staff members of Vormingplus assess the candidates' motivation to participate in the project, the candidates' expectations regarding living together with a refugee, to what extent the candidate's interest in participating in the project is supported by his or her parents and friends, what type of flatmate he or she would be, whether he or she is already in contact with individuals from a different ethnic-cultural background, etc. If the candidate is selected to enter the project and if he or she confirms his or her interest in participating in the project via mail after the screening interview, the information obtained during these interviews is used to match the flatmate with a suitable refugee at a later stage.

immigrant background are considered to understand certain issues refugees are struggling with better than others, such as minority-related issues. However, due to their own 'personal story' with regard to these matters, they might have a defensive attitude with regard to their own background or religion, which may in turn also hinder their intercultural sensitivity to others (as that requires a more relaxed attitude with regard to one's own norms and values).

(4) Short-term outcomes of CURANT

A fourth element of the change model of CURANT are the expected outcomes of the intervention. The outcomes are the concrete, measurable aspects of the goals of an intervention. The stakeholders distinguished between short-term and long-term outcomes. The first entail the outcomes as realised at the end of the project, while the long-term outcomes will only be realised after a longer period. Due to the limited length of the intervention (in total 3 year, with the length of participation for the refugees ranging from one up to 1.5 year), the focus of the stakeholders will be on obtaining short-term outcomes. Similarly, due to practical constraints the evaluation study will focus on these short-term outcomes rather than on long-term outcomes.

"CURANT is an experimental intervention. Essentially, this means that there is room for trial and error. This allows us, the stakeholders, to reorient the intervention when we face obstacles along the way."
(Project coordinator)

Importantly, stakeholders do not expect that the intervention will 'work' for all participants. Stakeholders speak of an estimated "success rate" of about 60%-70%. In addition, it is stressed how success should not be measured against absolute outcomes, but rather in terms of the progress made by each individual. If the intervention has triggered substantial change for the individual, then it is successful. The yardstick of success is the difference between

the refugee's positions at the start versus the end of the intervention, implying that there is no predefined standard outcome to be expected for all. What counts most for the stakeholders is whether the young refugees are on the 'right track' towards appropriate employment or study. It is thus a process-oriented rather than result-oriented approach to success. The stakeholders realize that this process takes time, and it would be counterproductive to hurry this process by pushing the refugees too quickly into a job or study track.

Apart from substantial criteria to define success, the flow pattern is considered important. If a large number of participating refugees is enrolled in the project for a period longer than 1 to 1,5 years, a lower total number of refugees will be able to participate (than the 135 anticipated for), which is considered negative.

The short-term outcomes for CURANT are situated on different levels: on the level of the young refugees, on the level of the flatmates and on the level of the stakeholders.

a) Short-term outcomes for the young refugees

When the young refugees leave the project after approximately 1.5 years, the stakeholders' primary expectation is that these youngsters will be empowered significantly. This empowerment entails different dimensions: individual empowerment, the strengthening of social networks and increased participation in society.

1. **INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT.** At the end of the intervention, the young refugees should (a) have a clear, realistic future vision and plan with regard to their life in Belgium, especially with regard to work/study (b) feel well and welcome in Belgian society (c) have acquired a higher Dutch language proficiency (c) be more resilient, due to the social skills acquired and the increased wellbeing (d) be well prepared for independent living, among others due to knowledge incorporated, increased skills to manage a personal budget and to manage administrative affairs (e) know where to find help or support (in public institutions and beyond).
2. **SOCIAL NETWORK** of the refugees. This network should have changed both in quantitative as well as in qualitative terms: it should (a) be larger than before, (b) be of a more ethnically and linguistically diverse nature (including in particular relations to locals), (c) transcend relations with caregivers and other professionals, by including relations to ordinary citizens (d) have the capacity to offer support, as a rescue line in the future to call upon for informal help and support.
3. **PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY** by the young refugees. Refugees should participate in different societal domains (volunteer work, organised leisure activities, labour market and study) or have a clear perspective to do so in the future. This means they are engaged in targeted preparation (e.g., through training).

b) Short-term outcomes for the flatmates

On the level of the flatmates, stakeholders also expect them to have strengthened following skills:

STRONGER SOCIAL SKILLS of the flatmates, and in particular intercultural competences allowing them to connect more easily with newcomers in the future.

c) Short-term outcomes for the stakeholders

Beyond the direct effect on the young refugees and flatmates involved, CURANT aspires goals on other levels too. The CURANT stakeholders hope that the intervention will leave a positive, durable imprint on their organization's functioning in two ways:

- **MORE SUITABLE ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES FOR YOUNG UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEES:** the public policy stakeholders' organisations have found a more effective approach for the target

group. This is the result of, among others:

- An increased expertise of the CURANT stakeholders with regard to the target group
- Experience-based insight in the effect of various management and methodical innovations that are tested in CURANT. If proved effective, these innovations can be introduced more durably and more broadly in the stakeholders' organization.
- **DURABLE COOPERATION ACROSS INSTITUTIONS:** the stakeholders want to have consolidated structural cooperation between the stakeholders with regard to their activities and policies for young unaccompanied refugees. In particular, the realization of an efficient personalized integrated trajectory across institutions is aimed at. This includes finding an efficient *modus operandi* for sharing information on individual clients across institutions (through a shared ICT application), while respecting a shared deontology and privacy regulations. In turn, this integrated trajectory should also benefit the refugee.

"Each of the stakeholder organizations has its own priorities, its own interests and its own protocols. If we manage to develop a natural way of cooperating among the stakeholders during the three years of CURANT, which will eventually lead into an integrated working *modus*, that would be a success."
(Project coordinator)

d) Side-effects

Beside the above-mentioned outcomes, some beneficial side effects are forecasted by the stakeholders. Since these side effects do not take a central position in the intervention's logic, they are not included in the change model. However, these effects are still worth mentioning:

- **PERCEPTIONS ON REFUGEES** Stakeholders expect the intervention to affect the perceptions regarding refugees among the families and broader social networks of the flatmates. As the latter will share their experiences and maybe introduce the refugee in their broader network, the flatmate's friends and family will have the opportunity to interact directly with a young refugee.
- **INTEGRATION OF THE REFUGEE'S FAMILY IN THE RECEIVING SOCIETY** In case the young unaccompanied refugee still has close family in the country of origin, he/she might apply for family reunification during or after his/her participation in CURANT. If family reunification happens, it is hoped that the young refugee's empowerment (as a result of the intervention) will also benefit his/her family members. It is a spill over effect: for instance, the young refugee will be able to help his/her parents better with administrative issues, with housing questions, etc.

(5) Long-term outcomes

Beyond the short-term outcomes, the stakeholders hope that CURANT will lead to the following more broadly defined long-term outcomes. The stakeholders have not defined a clear timeframe for these outcomes, but there is consensus that these outcomes are the result of long, complex processes – not a matter of a few years. Furthermore, stakeholders are aware of the limited scope of CURANT: the number of participants is too small to lead to large shifts in macro-societal indicators. Therefore, the

long-term outcomes reflect to some extent an idealized future, where the outcomes are reached if the intervention would be expanded on a larger scale (e.g. by repeating it across time).

First, stakeholders hope that CURANT will engender structural integration of refugees. More in particular, they hope the participation rate of former unaccompanied young adult refugees on the labour market and in education will rise.

Second, stakeholders wish to accomplish more social cohesion. This would be the outcome of two intertwined processes: on the one hand, as a result of the intervention, refugees will be able to integrate socially in mainstream society, while on the other hand, the intervention will realise a more welcoming and understanding society with regard to the refugees. Regarding the

“We believe in a *communal* approach to care. An approach that contributes to a society where people help each other much more. These young refugees would benefit strongly from such an approach”. (Project coordinator)

“Refugees are always asked to ‘adapt’ to our society, but in reality, refugee integration requires a two-way adaptation. Through the cohabitation component in which local citizens cohabitate with refugees, CURANT is supporting this idea.”

(Psychotherapist)

latter, CURANT is expected to demonstrate the importance of the role of volunteers and, more broadly, civil society in the integration of refugees, as such supporting the view that integration is a two-way process. Equally, the project will raise awareness among a wider audience about the concrete barriers young refugees encounter in their everyday lives, such as finding decent, affordable housing. As such, stakeholders hope the intervention can be a leverage for change in public perceptions on refugees and integration.

Third, stakeholders hope that due to CURANT, more appropriate public policies will be designed and implemented. These include various elements and go beyond the intervention’s narrowly defined target group (unaccompanied young adult refugees). First, stakeholders desire public policies and social services that recognize and fully take into account the specific needs of unaccompanied young adult refugees. Part of this process are ongoing awareness-raising efforts targeting other institutions. Second, stakeholders aim for the dissemination of the service provision model. While this model has been developed in CURANT for the particular target group of young unaccompanied refugees, the stakeholders assume it might be valuable for other types of vulnerable groups as well. Third, stakeholders hope that the interventions’ results will trigger a more flexible legislative framework with regard to cohousing. In particular, structural barriers¹⁶ to

“We are really interested in collective housing. We believe various vulnerable target groups could benefit strongly from this concept. For example, in our organisation, we have a support project for ex-detainees too. Just imagine they could enter this type of housing after their release from prison; that would facilitate their reintegration in society strongly. Therefore, we would like CURANT to pave the way here, and take the lead in showing how cohabitation can be implemented as an answer to existing needs.”

(Social worker)

¹⁶ These will be discussed more in detail in the literature study.

cohousing (such as current regulation in Belgium with regard to the domicile of students, and the linking of social welfare benefits to the income of flatmates) could be reduced. Finally, stakeholders assume that public policy improvements will benefit future young adult refugees as well as a broader range of the stakeholder's clients (e.g., refugees accompanied by family members) and other people who want to cohabitate (while not being family).

Central concepts of CURANT: theoretical framework

In this section of the report, we take the stakeholder-driven change model of CURANT one step further, by connecting it to the academic literature. We identify central theoretical concepts and empirical findings from relevant studies. In the literature study below, we will combine international literature on general concepts, processes and factors with empirical findings and reports on the specific Belgian and regional (Flemish) context¹⁷.

Through the various interventions of the project, CURANT aims to tackle the challenges unaccompanied young adult refugees are confronted with. The main challenges, as well as elements in the stakeholders' approach to these challenges, will be linked to academic literature. In the sections below, we will focus on three main problems that were put forward by the stakeholders and that lay at the basis of the development of the intervention: first, on the micro-level, the vulnerable condition of unaccompanied young adult refugees due to their status as "care leavers", second, on the meso-level, their lack of social support and social networks, and third, on the macro-level, the housing problems they encounter.

A. Vulnerable condition of unaccompanied young adult refugees leaving care

One fundamental reason for the creation of CURANT is the particular vulnerable condition in which the group of unaccompanied young adult refugees often find themselves in. This vulnerable condition can be attributed to their multi-layered (formal, juridical, etc.) status in which different dimensions come together each entailing various challenges and difficulties. Some scholars have identified a range of interconnected aspects defining the particular condition of unaccompanied minor refugees (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008; Herz & Lalander, 2017). First of all, as **refugees** they are confronted with demanding psychological issues such as multiple losses (e.g., loss of home, family members, belonging, culture, etc.), traumatic experiences and post-migratory stress (stress emerging due to being in a new country and having to cope with new rules, regulations, a new language) (Sack, 1998). Second, unaccompanied minor (and young adult) refugees are vulnerable due to their **young age**. In addition to migration-related stress, this group is also struggling with identity development and other processes related to adolescence, a critical period in life. Third, these young individuals are **unaccompanied** and thus separated from their parents or other primary caregivers. Research has shown that the absence of parents increases the risk of experiencing traumatic events during the

¹⁷ As migrant integration is a regional policy matter in Belgium, it is important to take into account the context in Flanders, the region in which Antwerp is situated.

refugee process and complicates resettlement in a new host country (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). Compared to refugees and local native peers with parental caregivers, unaccompanied minors experience significant higher levels of traumatic stress reactions, internalizing problems, and stressful life events (Bean et al., 2008). In addition to the above mentioned dimensions of the multi-layered status of unaccompanied minors, there is a fourth dimension to the specific status of the target group of CURANT exposing them to other risks and difficulties. The youngsters that will participate in the project are not only unaccompanied refugees, they have also made the legal transition from minor into adult (18+) which deprives them of various support measures offered by the Belgian state to minors (EMN, 2014). The fact that these young adults are **no longer entitled to special care and support provisions** is found to increase their risk of social exclusion (Stein, 2006). CURANT addresses existing lacunas in research and policy focuses because it targets the specific group of unaccompanied young adult refugees that are confronted with additional challenges due to this fourth dimension. While most attention has been paid to unaccompanied *minor* refugees, considered as a very vulnerable group too, little is known about those who reach the age of adulthood and are suddenly cut out from several forms of assistance (De Graeve & Bex, 2016; EMN, 2014).

Literature on unaccompanied minor refugees tends to focus on the psychological difficulties encountered by this group (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2007; Eide & Hjern, 2013; Oppedal & Idsoe, 2012; Reed et al., 2012; Vervliet et al., 2014). These studies have shown that unaccompanied minors in Belgium are experiencing higher levels of anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to children within their families and native adolescents (Bean et al., 2007). Unaccompanied minors are generally at high risk of developing mental health problems due to (traumatic) experiences pre-, during and post migration (Derluyn et al., 2008; Reed et al., 2012). Moreover, the risk of suffering from psychological distress is strengthened for this particular group as they are lacking a vital resource of social support, namely support from parents or other legal guardians (Mels et al., 2008). We can assume that the transition from minor into legal adults at the age of 18, does not change the fact that unaccompanied refugees are often confronted with psychological difficulties and mental health problems. Instead, the stress related to adult responsibilities may cause an additional burden.

A crucial factor herein is that in Belgium unaccompanied minor refugees are provided with different formal support measures such as the appointment of a legal guardian, enrolment in reception education and housing in state-led centres, until they reach the juridical age of adulthood. From that moment on, they are treated as any other refugee adult. Once minor care recipients reach the age of 18, they are expected to become 'adults' instantly and take responsibility and full citizenship at a far younger age and in far less time than their host country peers (Stein, 2006). Research has shown that young people who are forced to leave care due to reaching the age of adulthood are generally more likely to have poor educational attainments, become homeless or end up in poor housing, become young parents, have higher levels of unemployment and mental health problems and engage in criminal activity (Barn, 2010; Stein, 2006).

Despite the high risk of social exclusion on various life domains, it goes without saying that not all trajectories of young people leaving care end up negatively. The group of care leavers is heterogeneous and consists of individuals each with their own personal characteristics contributing to different outcomes. Still, as a group they are at higher risk of exclusion and poor life chances (Stein, 2006). There are a number of factors that can positively influence and predict for care outcomes. Research has shown for example that it is crucial to structure the care leaving process by providing a sound pathway plan to help plan the transition and after care trajectory of youngsters (Stein, 2006; Wade, 2011). Scholars have stressed the importance of expanding current knowledge and insights on care leaving pathways and on the ways in which social workers and other caregivers can assist care leavers, especially refugee youth, in this phase (Wade, 2011). Continuous professional support after leaving care is also found to play a crucial role for youngsters' outcomes on the longer term. Social workers can serve as valuable sources of social support, but support from family and friends is even more important (Broad & Robbins, 2005; Cashmore & Paxman, 2006). Another element that is crucial in predicting young people's living conditions 4 to 5 years after leaving institutionalized care is stability and continuity in accommodation and housing (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006). Specific groups of care leavers face additional disadvantages due to their status which can reinforce their risk of exclusion. Ethnic minority youth, a category to which unaccompanied minors belong, is one of those groups. These youngsters face similar challenges to other people leaving care, however, they may also face identity problems causing them additional stress (Barn, 2010; Stein, 2006). Due to the absence of a stable supportive family and community environment, ethnic minority youth may experience a lack of belonging and feel disconnected from their residence society dominated by a different ethnic-cultural majority population, especially when confronted with discrimination and racism (Barn, 2010).

We can conclude that the target group of this study is confronted with various vulnerabilities and challenges due to their specific multi-layered status as unaccompanied young adult refugees that are no longer entitled to special care facilities and supportive measures available for minors. In addition, the vulnerable condition of this group, one of the main drivers for the creation of CURANT, is widely recognized and discussed in international academic literature as well. In the following section, we will discuss some concepts that take up a central role in the way in which CURANT aims to support and help the target group on an individual level.

Empowerment: strengthening youngsters' resilience & agency

As described in the report's discussion of the CURANT Change Model, empowering the participating refugees individually is considered a fundamental outcome of the CURANT project. Academically, empowering processes have been described as:

“(...) those (processes) where people create or are given opportunities to control their own destiny and influence the decisions that affect their lives. They are a series of experiences in

which individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, gain greater access to and control over resources, and where people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives” (Zimmerman, 1995: 583).

By empowering the refugees, the stakeholders wish to increase refugees’ capability to construct their lives in their new society of residence and to build a positive future. The stakeholders aim to empower the participating refugees by learning them appropriate skills and providing them with the right resources, rather than directing or paternalizing the young refugees. Within this main project objective two key concepts stand out, namely ‘resilience’ and ‘agency’. The stakeholders want to assist the refugees in becoming more *resilient* (e.g., by providing them with different trainings to acquire various skills). In doing so, the project stakeholders aspire to assist refugees to better function and cope within the vulnerable condition they often find themselves in. Simultaneously, the stakeholders of the project have emphasized the importance of refugees’ *agency* in the project, in the sense that pampering is deemed counterproductive. Stakeholders want the young refugees to become independent agents of their own lives in the host country. As such, the intervention also anticipates life after the refugees’ participation in CURANT.

a) Resilience

Interestingly, this attention to resilience can also be found in academic literature. While research primarily highlights the vulnerability of unaccompanied minor refugees and the difficulties this group is confronted with during early years of resettlement, other studies stress these youth’s strength and resilience. In spite of their vulnerabilities, many unaccompanied minor and young adult refugees cope well on the long term (Carlson et al., 2012; Eide & Hjern, 2013; Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2009). They tend to be very resourceful human beings with a strong drive to realise a positive future for themselves (Eide & Hjern, 2013).

Current research on unaccompanied minors studies this population from a predominantly psychological perspective. There is however a risk to this narrow focus, because the high incidence of mental health issues and the particular response of refugees to psychological distress is analyzed from a Western individualist and psychopathological frame (Sleijpen et al., 2016). It is important not only to focus on the individual psychopathological level, but also on the wider structural social, political and cultural context in which these youngsters are developing their coping strategies (Reed et al., 2012). It is therefore crucial to move beyond victimization and emphasize and study the resourcefulness of these individuals. Unaccompanied refugee youth develop strategies to deal with their circumstances. They cope in various different ways according to their own priorities and personal situations (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2009). Carlson et al. (2012) have summarized existing research on risk and resilience with unaccompanied minor refugees and found that several protective factors can act as a buffer against the multiple risks these youngsters are exposed to (e.g., trauma, loss of parents, abuse, etc.). These factors can protect them from developing poor outcomes

and can thus explain youngsters' resilience. Protective factors on the individual level include personal temperament, good coping skills, religiosity, intelligence and schooling. Second, family systems are proven to be crucial protective factors. Although unaccompanied minor and young adult refugees migrate and resettle without the presence and direct support from parents, extended family ties in the host country or the existence of a solid family system before emigration helps youngsters to adapt and cope. Third, connectedness to community organizations or institutions such as school or church have been found to be protective (Ibid. 2012). Sleijpen et al. (2016) made an overview of 26 qualitative research studies on factors that help young refugees in dealing with trauma and coping with the many challenges they face in their turbulent lives. The authors came to the following list of six key sources of resilience: social support (from family, co-ethnic people, peers and professionals), acculturation strategies (finding ways to resettle in a new country of residence), education, religion, avoidance (suppression of traumatic memories as a coping strategy), and hope (clear goals and future perspectives). Generally, research on the concept of resilience has mainly concentrated on positive developments in the lives of children faced with hardship. These studies more than often study risk and protective factors and focus on outcomes. Ungar (2008) stresses that it is important to reflect on the fact that our understanding of resilience is also culturally bound. The author argues that resilience research so far has been very Western-based and focused on individuals with a lack of attention for their sociocultural context. The meaning we attribute to 'resilience' and the type of individuals we would describe as resilient differs across cultures.

We can conclude that despite the many accumulative risks they are confronted with and the often vulnerable condition they find themselves in, unaccompanied young refugees are resilient individuals. The challenge might therefore be how to appeal to resilience in refugee youth and assist them in reinforcing protective factors that can provide them with the necessary building blocks to navigate towards stronger resilience (Reed et al., 2012). Focus should thus not only be on how to individually strengthen refugee youth, but also on how to create a conducive societal environment that allows them to grow stronger and more competent to function well in our society.

b) Agency

A second important element that we find both in one of the main aspired outcomes of the CURANT project (empowering the participating refugees), as well as in academic literature, is the agency of refugee youth. Several scholars have pointed out the importance of agency for the wellbeing of refugees (Chase, 2013; Valtonen, 1998) as well as for the development of social support networks in the host country (Korac, 2003). In contrast, when unaccompanied young refugees lack control over their lives in the receiving country, this creates feelings of exclusion and loneliness (Herz & Lalander 2017).

When asylum seekers are granted the status of refugee or subsidiary protection, they start the process of resettling in a new country of residence. In Belgium, they become targets of regional integration policies upon their acquisition of a refugee status (Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, 2017). During resettlement processes refugees can appeal to various forms of institutionally organized social support. However, resettlement policies for refugees are not always meeting refugees' needs for social support. In addition, refugees should not be conceived as simply passive recipients of care depending entirely on governmental support. They are pro-active individuals that develop personal help- and support-seeking strategies and construct their own supportive social networks (Lamba & Krahn, 2003; Williams, 2006). These networks are important resources from which refugees actively seek help depending on their individual priorities and objectives (Williams, 2006). While resettlement systems and government programs in host countries provide assistance and control refugees' resettlement, refugees thus remain agents of their resettlement process and develop their own strategies to find the support and help they need (Simich et al., 2003).

Unaccompanied refugee youth are well aware of the fact that they are subject to a certain care system due to the fact that they are labelled as an unaccompanied minor (or young adult) refugee. While this categorisation is primarily a governmentality issue, the classification as 'unaccompanied' has deeper implications. Herz and Lalander (2017: 13) argue that "being labelled as 'unaccompanied' or 'alone' seems to further reinforce feelings of loneliness and even shape the young people's sense of self, in terms of identity." As a result, unaccompanied minors sometimes reject this label. In her research on the wellbeing of unaccompanied refugee youth in the UK, Chase (2009) discusses how the youngsters describe themselves as being locked in a system with different series of phases each consisting of surveillance and control. Even though the young refugees attach great value to the sense of security that this system has brought them, they also have a strong sense of being under permanent observation, critical examination and judgement, not only by government officials but also by social workers and society in general. The author found that this partially explains why some refugees refuse to share certain information and remain silent. This act of resistance restores their sense of agency vis-à-vis a set of structures and systems that are perceived as controlling their lives. Being able to exert agency is also crucial in planning a secure future. Rebuilding a positive future vision, in which they have a sense of belonging and are able to visualize their role in society and in the world, is crucial to refugees' wellbeing. It is important to feel in control again (Chase, 2013).

Agency is also an important aspect in the construction of social support networks during resettlement processes of unaccompanied refugee youth. We will zoom in on the importance of social support and the formation of social networks in the next section, in this paragraph we will briefly discuss how agency can impact social network development of refugees positively. Korac (2003) conducted a comparative study on refugees' perceptions and experiences in two differing systems of integration in Italy and in the Netherlands. While the refugees in Amsterdam were subject to a state-led settlement process to address their needs and enhance their integration in Dutch society, the refugees in Rome had not encountered any kind of institutionalized assistance during their

integration process. While the lack of integration policy and institutionalized support in Rome had caused difficulties in terms of financial stability and employment, it also resulted in higher levels of refugee agency. The refugees in this study established more spontaneous contacts, ties and networks outside their own group boundaries and developed inter-ethnic social networks that proved to be valuable sources of support.

We can conclude that while it is crucial to continue support for the group of unaccompanied young adult refugees and include them in a care system, scholars agree upon the need to leave space for agency (Chase, 2013; Korac, 2003; Lamba & Krahn, 2003; Simich et al., 2003; Valtonen, 1998; Williams, 2006). Indeed, as Kissoon (2010) argues, the recognition of personal agency and refugees' capability to contribute to their new society must be a prerequisite for any integration policy strategy. In the Change Model, based on the stakeholders' assumptions, empowerment of the participating refugees is seen as the fundamental goal of the project, with strengthening resilience and fostering agency as its main dimensions.

B. Lack of supportive networks

A second crucial problem that lies at the basis of CURANT is the lack of social support experienced by unaccompanied young adult refugees, especially after having left the institutional care facilities provided for unaccompanied minors. First of all, they lack direct parental support since they are on refuge without the presence of parent(s) or other primary caregivers. Second, as mentioned above, they are deprived of several institutional support measures due to their recent legal transition from minor into adult. A second main objective of CURANT is therefore to bridge this gap and provide the participating youngsters with different types of support. A distinction can be made here between formal and informal social support; the former provided by professional caregivers while the latter will be ensured through cohabitation with a flatmate. Social support is thus an important element throughout the entire intervention; it is a determinant the project stakeholders aim to influence through different intervention actions (see the Change Model above).

Scholars equally consider the lack of social support for the group of unaccompanied young adult refugees as problematic. On the one hand, studies on 'care leaving' tend to stress the importance of social support for after-care outcomes and wellbeing (Cashmore & Paxman, 2008; Stein, 2006). On the other hand, immigrant and refugee studies have been underlining the significance of both formal and informal social support in the post-migration lives of refugees (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Reed et al., 2012; Simich et al., 2005).

It should be noted that social support takes a central role in refugees' and migrants' lives generally, not only those of unaccompanied refugees. The resettlement process that newcomers go through when reconstructing their lives in a new host country involves many demanding cultural and psychological changes. Adaptation to, and resettling in, a new society is a very stressful and

challenging process for all types of migrants. Social support resources are crucial to help refugees and migrants cope with migration and acculturation stresses (Mels et al., 2008). Compared to other immigrants, social support is particularly fundamental in the lives and resettlement processes of refugees since social capital is often the only form of capital available for refugees upon arrival in the host country. Financial capital is mostly missing and human capital, such as educational degrees or diplomas, is often unrecognized and thus not valid in the host society (Lamba & Krahn, 2003). Formal institutional social support in the host society certainly plays a key role in resettlement processes and has been considered as having a positive impact on refugees' mental health and psychological functioning (Reed et al., 2012). Other forms of more informal support, such as relationships with native and/or co-ethnic peers has also been proved to have positive implications for young refugees' psychological wellbeing and adjustment (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015). The development of new close social relationships is also found to be a crucial element in the (re)construction of the meaning of 'home' for unaccompanied young refugees, who can no longer rely on a family-based conceptualisation of 'home' (Wernersjö, 2015). It is through their social relationships that they make sense of their belonging in the receiving society (Ibid).

Unaccompanied young adult refugees, as 'care leavers', are faced with an early and abrupt transition from minority into adulthood. While their peers can rely on a continuation of financial, emotional and social support during and after this legal transition (e.g. continued housing at the family house, and financial support by the parents), care leavers generally cannot. Therefore, these youngsters face additional challenges with fewer support resources (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006). Research on young unaccompanied asylum seekers leaving the care system in the UK shows that the degree and quality of social support these youngsters' receive is a crucial determinant for their future outcomes. Even if these young refugees are suffering from severe distress due to traumatic experiences, they will make greater achievements in their lives when they have social support available (Broad & Robbins, 2005).

The CURANT project aims to address the problem of lacking support for unaccompanied young adult refugees by providing them with different types of social support. These types of support measures can broadly be divided into two categories which can also be found in academic literature: formal and informal social support. In the next two sections we will focus on these two types of support.

(1) Institutionalized social support

Through various interventions, CURANT aims to provide formal support for the participating refugees in the project. Formal support includes personal centralized support, learning and training, etc. These intervention actions are designed and will be implemented by the various stakeholders of the project.

The strong need for more and continuous formal social support provisions for unaccompanied minor and young adult refugees is also emphasized in academic literature. Several scholars argue that the

current institutional support systems are not meeting youngsters' needs (De Graeve & Bex, 2016; Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008; EMN, 2014; Kohli, 2005). As previously stated, the abrupt disappearance of institutional support once unaccompanied minor refugees turn 18, such as the support of a guardian and professional caregivers, is called into question (Wernesjö, 2015). Support from institutional actors is thus certainly important for the resettlement processes of unaccompanied minor and young adult refugees (Stein, 2006; Wade, 2005). In contrast, when authorities are not required to monitor or follow-up on youngsters that were supported until the age of 18, many of these young people disappear from the radar completely (Wade, 2005).

A comparative study of the European Migration Network (2015) in 26 European member states and Norway shows that some member states draft individualized aftercare plans to prepare and assist unaccompanied minors in the transition from minority into adulthood. Others design specific integration programs for former unaccompanied minors or implement monitoring systems for this particular target group. Belgium, however does not belong to one of those countries. Compared to many European member states, the institutional arrangements in Belgium for former unaccompanied minors are very limited (EMN, 2015). Research on the role of different forms and types of social support in resettlement processes of former unaccompanied minors is therefore particularly relevant and valuable for the Belgian context.

While we have argued in this literature review that the very limited institutional support for unaccompanied young adult refugees should be problematized, institutional support for unaccompanied minor refugees in Belgium has been described as insufficient too (De Graeve & Bex, 2016; Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). According to De Graeve & Bex (2016) the Belgian policy framework on unaccompanied minor refugees focuses on children's rights, with 'equality' as a key value. In currently prevailing policy discourses, it is seen as crucial to provide equal treatment and care for all those who are labelled as an 'unaccompanied minor'. Emphasis is therefore put on the streamlining, professionalization and institutionalization of care for this target group. However, one of the results of these processes is that it is seen as a sign of unprofessionalism when caregivers become emotionally too involved or committed. Therefore, De Graeve & Bex (2016) question the current focus in Belgian care policies and claim it fails to meet youngsters' actual needs. Derluyn & Broekaert (2008) agree that unaccompanied minor refugees in Belgium do not receive the support and care they need. According to these authors this is the result of the dominant legal perspective that is used on these individuals. They are first and foremost considered as 'migrants' and not as 'children'. This prevailing legal perspective, as opposed to a psychological perspective taking into account the psychological and developmental needs of this group, is used as a base to build the care and reception system on. The authors conclude that this results in a system with minimalist interpretation of 'care', neglecting actual care needs.

So far, we have discussed literature on institutional support for unaccompanied minor and young adult refugees from a global perspective. Another stream of literature focuses on the function of

professional caregivers and their relationship with refugee youth. There appears to be a tension in the role of professional caregivers, such as social workers, as it balances between 'care' and 'control' (Chase, 2009; Humphries, 2004; Kohli, 2006). Social work has always had an ambivalent function, especially when it comes to working with children or young adults and in the field of migration. This is the case because they provide care to those in need of it while they are also obliged to comply with government priorities and migration policies often involving control (Kohli, 2006). There seems to be a general agreement in academic literature that the caring role of social workers has diminished as they are being pushed more into becoming part of the surveillance process. As a consequence they are increasingly becoming associated with a role of control rather than care (Humphries, 2004; Kohli, 2006).

In their qualitative study on the care system for unaccompanied minor refugees in Belgium, De Graeve & Bex (2016) found that services provided by social workers or other state officials are often perceived as patronizing. Youngsters regularly felt that advice and decisions made for them were based on stereotyped views and were insufficiently taking into account young refugees' desires and ambitions. They felt that they were often denied agency which results in them feeling even more powerless, instead of empowered. This indicates how services designed to help this target group can be perceived as mechanisms of control. In addition, young refugees are aware of the professional status of caregivers, i.e. the fact that these spent time with the refugees as part of their job, not because of a desire to develop durable, personal relationships (Herz & Lalander 2017). Resultantly, some consider their caregivers' behaviour as based on how caregivers are supposed to act towards refugee youth (according to professional rules of conduct), not as spontaneous human interaction (Ibid).

Trust is a very important element in the relationship between social workers and refugee youth (De Graeve & Bex, 2016; Kohli, 2006). Constructing and developing a relationship of trust is a challenging and time consuming process. Unaccompanied young adult refugees, especially those who are still enrolled in an asylum procedure, have often been told not to trust anyone and to be cautious about speaking and sharing information as this could have consequences for the outcome of the asylum procedure they are in. Kohli (2006) conducted research on social work practices with unaccompanied asylum seeking youth in the UK and found that effective practice always entailed an emotional commitment of the caregiver towards the young caretaker. However, there are usually limits to the care professionals can provide. A study on social support for refugees in Canada shows that supportive programs and services provided to newcomers do not always have the desired impact because service providers such as social workers are constrained by various barriers (e.g., limited mandates, inadequate funding, staff shortage, etc.) (Stewart et al., 2008).

To conclude, formal institutional support is fundamental in the resettlement processes of unaccompanied young adult refugees. Moreover, there is a strong need to continue formal support after these individuals have made the legal transition from minority into adulthood. However, studies

have shown that the institutional care system and social work with these youngsters do not fulfil all support needs of unaccompanied refugee youth. Social workers are often associated with control denying refugees of agency. In addition, while they might be valuable in providing instrumental and/or informational support, they are commonly not perceived as a source of the much needed emotional support. Formal support is thus important in the lives of unaccompanied young adult refugees, but it does have some important shortcomings.

The approach of CURANT can be situated against the background of these insights from the state of the art. The CURANT project provides a continuation of formal institutional support provisions for the group of unaccompanied refugee youth after they have turned 18 (e.g., accommodation, language lessons, education, training, etc.). The participating refugees will be enrolled in an intense supportive and integrated trajectory which will be managed and coordinated by the social workers of the Public Centre of Social Welfare. However, next to these forms of formal support, CURANT entails another part focusing on informal support, namely, through cohabitation with a local flatmate. As described in the Change Model (see above), the project stakeholders assume and aspire that by facilitating interaction between the refugee and a local peer, a mutually supportive informal relationship can grow. In addition, a crucial supposition of the project is that cohabitation will expand the social network of the participating refugees beyond relations with professional caregivers and including native peers. It is assumed that such social networks will facilitate refugees' integration. Therefore, the shortcomings of formal institutional support as described in academic literature, might possibly be (partially) overcome or complemented by the additional informal support facilitated within CURANT. In the next section, we will discuss academic literature concerning informal social interethnic interaction and the importance of social networks in the lives of unaccompanied young adult refugees.

(2) Informal supportive mechanisms

The stakeholders' main rationale for providing cohabitation with a local buddy are also reflected in academic literature. Besides the need for formal institutionalized support and care for unaccompanied young adult refugees, scholars stress the importance of informal forms of social support and the creation of social networks for refugees' resettlement processes (Korac, 2003; Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Morrice, 2007; Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015). Before zooming in further on literature concerning the forms of informal social support facilitated in CURANT, it is important to note that unaccompanied young adult refugees can derive social support from various other non-institutional resources and networks. Social networks important to refugees' resettlement may also consist of transnational ties with people and communities in the origin country (Williams, 2006). Refugees might need or find social support in different life spheres and attribute various degrees of importance to them. One study for example found religion to be facilitating the coping strategies of unaccompanied minors while they are adjusting to living in a new country. According to this study, when unaccompanied minors perceive themselves as self-reliant they are more likely to turn to

religion as a source of emotional support. Faced with the challenge of creating new social networks, these young refugees often prefer to seek guidance and support from their trusted religion over their close environment (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010). Regarding the support unaccompanied minor and young adult refugees derive from their family, evidence is diverging. Oppedal & Idsoe (2015) found that for unaccompanied minor refugees in Norway that are in contact with their family abroad, family is considered to be an important source of support. However, in their study on unaccompanied asylum seeking boys in Belgium, Mels et al. (2008) show that the family system is almost non-existent as a support resource. While CURANT facilitates and stimulates interaction with native members of the society of residence, contact with co-ethnics is also an important resource as it provides youngsters with informational and instrumental support (Mels et al., 2008).

In the next section, we will discuss academic literature concerning forms of informal social support that CURANT aims to facilitate: the creation of qualitative informal interethnic social interaction leading towards a supportive relationship between the participating refugee and his or her local flatmate and the development of culturally diverse social networks in a spontaneous, non-institutional context.

a) Informal interethnic interaction & culturally diverse networks

The general assumption behind the inclusion of the element of cohabitation with a local peer in CURANT is that the interaction between the participating refugee and flatmate will result in a meaningful supportive relationship that will have a positive impact on both parties.

Several scholars have highlighted the general importance of social networks in resettlement processes of refugees and other migrants (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Simich et al., 2005; Reed et al., 2012). Research has shown that reconstructing informal social networks with both native and co-ethnic peers in the new host society provides adolescent refugees with a higher sense of self-worth (Kovacev & Shute, 2004). Moreover, these peer networks enhance their cultural integration and help young refugees in dealing with discrimination (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015). Morrice, for instance, (2007) advocates a greater recognition and provision of informal and social learning opportunities for refugees. Such opportunities grants individuals access to informally learned social and cultural norms, tacit knowledge and skills. However, in academic literature the outcomes of interethnic contact are considered rather ambiguous. In his contact theory, Allport (1954) highlights the positive effects of intergroup contact. The author states that increased interethnic contact reduces prejudices between majority and minority group members under four key conditions: equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and support of authorities (Pettigrew, 1998). Conflict or group threat theories (Blumer, 1958) suggest the opposite and claim that increased contact between different interethnic group members results in higher levels of intergroup conflict. The presence of the minority group is perceived as a threat to established privileges or interests from the majority group which results in conflicts between majority and minority group members.

Notwithstanding, for example Mels et al. (2008) reveal that asylum seeking youngsters hold strong desires to interact and connect with Belgian peers. Despite efforts to make contact and interact with them, the young refugees experience barriers and limitations in making Belgian friends. On a structural level, a lack of financial or transportation means constitute a barrier. On a cultural level, interaction can be blocked due to a reluctance in the Belgian host society towards refugees. Other research has shown that the amount of cross-ethnic contact is much lower for native Belgians than for individuals with a different ethnic-cultural background living in Belgium as they initiate more cross-ethnic contact (Van den Broucke et al., 2015). When youngsters' efforts in establishing social interaction with native peers is rejected, this negatively influences their self-esteem and wellbeing (Mels et al., 2008). Interestingly, a study on the role of social support in the acculturation and mental health of unaccompanied asylum seekers in Norway shows different results (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015). Besides the importance of family support, the participating youngsters of this quantitative study reported high levels of social support from peer networks consisting of both ethnic Norwegian and co-ethnic friends. The unaccompanied asylum seekers in this Norwegian study did succeed in interacting with natives and establishing networks within the local communities. As this had a positive impact on their mental health and resettlement process, the scholars conclude their study by advocating systematic interventions that facilitate the creation of, and participation in, culturally diverse peer networks including members of the country of residence. These authors argue that such interventions can serve as valuable actions that can have a positive impact on refugees' mental health.

b) Befriending programs

As mentioned above, CURANT aims to provide informal social support for the participating refugees by stimulating and facilitating the development of meaningful interethnic contact and culturally diverse networks through cohabitation. As such, CURANT can be considered to be a 'befriending program' including however - rather uniquely - the component of cohabitation. In her literature review on the concept of befriending, Balaam (2015) found that in academic literature befriending is generally conceptualized as follows:

"Befriending is presented as a positive social intervention that has both an individual and a community or social focus. Befriending provides individual support through the creation of an emotionally connected one-to-one relationship; however, at the same time it is also a socially based intervention addressing the interplay between the individual and the community or social setting of which they are an integral part" (Balaam, 2015: 8).

Different from other, spontaneously emerging friendships, befriending is in essence an arranged form of friendship in which two people are matched with each other, usually for a limited period of time, and starting from an asymmetrical relationship. Befriending programs have been implemented for various target groups including refugees (Behnia, 2007). So far, we have not been able to find befriending programs comparable to CURANT, which underlines the truly innovative character of

this intervention. There are befriending programs for refugees aspiring the same objectives, but in existing programs the intensity of the social interaction is lower than in CURANT as the component of cohabitation is absent. Behnia (2007) made an overview of 25 befriending programs in Australia, Canada, England, and the United States that match refugees with volunteers to create a supportive environment and enhance refugees' integration. In these programs, voluntary befrienders assist refugees in a number of activities such as banking, shopping, helping to find a job, integration exams, etc. The volunteers sometimes accompany refugees to doctor visits, immigration interviews or job services. Besides these forms of administrative and instrumental support, emotional support was also provided through home visits or attending refugee hearings. The research results show that befriending programs are beneficial for the integration of refugees. Volunteer befrienders become resources of different types of support, they help refugees cope with resettlement and adaptation stresses and they play a role in extending the social support networks of refugees. However, the research overview also reveals that befriending programs struggle to keep volunteers as they often lose motivation after a certain amount of time. Reasons for loss of interest include: not having the resources or time due to changing personal conditions, not feeling needed or helpful, finding refugees' needs too demanding, experiencing difficulties due to cultural differences or language barriers, being overwhelming by past traumatic experiences of the refugees, having opposite ideological convictions and experiencing a lack of trust from the refugee. To overcome these challenges, it is important for organizations to provide ongoing training and support, as will also be the case in CURANT (see e.g. the training and peer support mechanism for flatmates).

In Flanders, befriending programs in general (not specifically targeting refugees) are also a rather new phenomenon. Van Robaeys & Lyssens-Danneboom (2016) have mapped befriending programs in Flanders. Of the 78 befriending programs studied in the report, ten targeted individuals with a migrant background, of which five programs focused on newcomers in particular. The objective of most programs is to reduce social isolation and exclusion of the target group through the volunteers' social support and assistance. In 44% of the programs, the refugee and volunteer meet multiple times a month, in 22% they meet on a weekly basis. In one third of the befriending programs, the contact frequency largely depends on the demand of the refugee. When refugee and volunteer do meet, contact generally lasts between one and three hours.

Research on the impact of befriending programs both internationally and in Belgium is scarce (Behnia, 2007; Van Robaeys & Lyssens-Danneboom, 2016). It is important to study refugees' as well as voluntary befrienders' experiences and perceptions with befriending programs since it is a fairly new and complex concept that differs greatly from other, more spontaneously developed friendships.

C. Housing problems

A third major component of CURANT is the provision of decent and stable housing for the young adult refugees. NGOs, scholars and practitioners in the field have highlighted the obstacles refugees encounter when seeking housing after leaving their initial, state-organised accommodation.

It has been demonstrated how structural elements related to housing and asylum - such as national systems, jurisdictional structures and the presence of local stakeholders - play an important role in the early housing careers of refugee newcomers (Kissoon, 2010). A number of structural problems in Belgium and Flanders result in housing difficulties for the target group of CURANT, for other newcomers and for individuals with a migrant background. We will first discuss structural problems in the general housing situation in Flanders, the second paragraph covers difficulties and discrimination for ethnic-minority groups and the third paragraph discusses additional problems for refugees.

'Steunpunt Wonen' is a policy oriented research collaboration between several universities in Flanders, Brussels and the Netherlands. In 2013, this institution published a large scale study on the housing situation of Flemish households (Winters et al., 2013). The study revealed a number of structural problems in the Flemish housing market. The results show that the affordability of housing in Flanders has evolved negatively since 2005. The affordability of housing is generally assessed through the use of a housing quote which represents the share of income that is being spent on housing. When Flemish households exceed the average housing quote of 30% this constitutes as affordability problems. Affordability problems have increased most strongly in the private renting market, where one in five households is experiencing affordability problems according to the quote method. Also in the homeownership market and in the social rental market an increase in affordability problems has been identified. Furthermore, housing problems are more strongly present in urban areas. In the private renting market in urban areas, the percentage of affordability problems rises up to as much as 57%. While it is being used most regularly, the method of housing quota is not the best criteria to assess affordability of housing since it does not make distinctions according to income and household types. The 30% rule does not reveal anything on the amount of money that is left after paying for housing. Therefore, the report also examined affordability by investigating the remaining income of households after housing expenses. By using the minimum budgets set forth by the Flemish government, the report finds that 13% falls under the minimum norm and thus encounters affordability problems. When zooming in on the different ownership statutes, the proportion of affordability problems according to the 'remaining income' method is largest for social housing (34,5%) and the private rental market (30,4%). The researchers of the report also focused on the quality of housing in Flanders and subjected 5.000 houses to a thorough screening. They examined to what extent the houses are in accordance with the standards of the Flemish Residential Code. In total, 37% of the houses were of 'inadequate quality' which on scale corresponds to about one million Flemish houses. The report concludes by stating that the

government should intervene in the market in order to overcome housing problems in Flanders. Most importantly, action is needed to decrease the percentage of affordability problems, particularly in the private and social rental market and to increase the share of houses that complies with quality standards (Ibid).

In addition to these general structural problems in the Flemish housing market, refugees and other migrants encounter various additional obstacles and difficulties. Several reports have highlighted the challenges that refugees and other ethnic minorities face in acquiring affordable and decent housing in Flanders (Benhaddou & DeVriendt, 2014; Pannecoucke & De decker, 2015; Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2016). A major issue is the persistent problem of discrimination of ethnic-cultural minorities in the Flemish housing market and particularly in the private rental market (Benhaddou & DeVriendt, 2014; Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2016). *Minderhedenforum* is a NGO representing ethnic-cultural associations in Flanders and Brussels and aims to speak up for people with an immigrant background. In 2012, this NGO published a study on rental housing discrimination based on practice tests in the housing markets in Antwerp and in Ghent. The significant results show that one third of the candidate-tenants with a foreign name that were seeking a house in the private rental market were treated unequally (Lahlali, 2012). A second follow-up report that consisted of quantitative and qualitative research with 399 respondents with a migrant background pointed out that ethnic-cultural minority households are generally in a much weaker position in the housing market than Flemish ones. Of the respondents of the study that were renting in the private rental market 66,67% spend more than 33% of his or her wage on housing (Benhaddou & DeVriendt, 2014). The average for Flemish households is 51,7% (Winters et al., 2013). Another puzzling result is that almost 80% of the renters is moderately satisfied to very dissatisfied about their social living environment. 50% of the respondents has experienced discrimination in the Flemish housing market, of which only 10% officially reported this to an institution (Benhaddou & DeVriendt, 2014).

In addition to the previously discussed general structural housing problems in Flanders and the particular challenges for ethnic-cultural minorities, refugees are confronted with even more obstacles (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2016). *Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen*, a Flemish NGO defending the rights of people on refuge, has listed a number of structural problems for refugees in their search for affordable and decent housing. A first severe problem is the short time span in which refugees have to find accommodation. Within two months after asylum seekers, including unaccompanied young adults, have been recognized as a refugee or have been granted the status of subsidiary protection, they have to find a house and leave the reception centre or local reception structure (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2016). Sometimes, this period can be extended, at maximum with one more month (Integratie & Inburgering, 2016). Finding appropriate housing is a very hard task especially since most refugees do not master the local language yet and are ignorant with respect to how the Belgian housing market functions. The assistance they receive from staff in reception centres is very limited.

While it is generally challenging to find decent, affordable housing on the private housing market, this is even more so the case for people depending on social welfare, which includes the target group of CURANT. As there is a structural deficiency of social housing in Flanders, these social benefit recipients are also obliged to seek housing on the private housing market. Homeowners are however commonly unwilling to rent to social welfare recipients. Furthermore, when asylum seekers have just been granted their status as refugee or subsidiary protection, they often lack financial capital necessary for the deposit. They often did not have the chance to work yet or save money, also because they have often spent a lot of money on their way to the country of residence. As a consequence, during early stages of refugee resettlement, a lot of these individuals are dependent on social welfare. However, newcomers can only claim social welfare once they can prove to the local Public Centre of Social Welfare (OCMW) that they have found a house and have obtained an official address in Belgium. This means that a great deal of refugees is struggling to find financial resources to pay the deposit and the first month of rent (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2016). It is possible to apply for financial help to pay the rental deposit before becoming a client of the Public Centre of Social Welfare (website OCMW). However, in its report, Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen argues that every local Public Centre of Social Welfare handles the applications at a different speed and sometimes applicants have to wait for more than one month before their file is being handled which severely impacts their chances of finding a house in this short time span (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2016).

Given the accumulation of problems, it is not surprising to find that refugees' housing conditions tend to be poor, with high levels of overcrowding and characterised by instability, and that refugees occupy a weak, marginal position when competing for decent, affordable accommodation on the private housing market (Phillips, 2006). In addition, the youngsters participating in CURANT, being unaccompanied young adults that have left care, constitute a group that has often been replaced to other locations and lack the solid basis and safety net of stable family or other significant others (Barn, 2010). More generally, as Phillips (2006: 547) argues, beyond satisfying refugees' basic needs for shelter, institutional support should also include a tailored package of long-term support "to facilitate the transition to permanent accommodation, independent living and a better quality of life". To realise this, she considers the adoption of holistic, inter-agency approaches a must. Drawing of experiences across Europe, Phillips also observes that "housing and integration strategies are more likely to work when they develop partnerships with voluntary organisations with specialist knowledge and skills, with a view to working towards more culturally sensitive mainstream provision for asylum seekers and refugees" (2006: 551). These ideas are reflected in the CURANT design, as tackling the housing needs of young adult refugees' is embedded in a holistic intervention.

CURANT's answer: Collective, mixed housing

One of the most central elements of CURANT is the provision of small-scale, mixed collective housing units in which matched pairs of a refugee and local resident live together. CURANT provides different

cohabitation forms: two-bedroom apartments where refugee and flatmate share a kitchen, living room and bathroom, apartments or houses where more than one couple will cohabit and share common areas and a site with 25 modular units which will be built from scratch. The centrality of housing in CURANT is reflected in the budget share allocated to the renovation and construction of housing units, as the investment work package of CURANT takes more than half of the total budget. It is also mixed, as it is a deliberate choice of the stakeholders to match newcomers with local citizens. Due to project-related constraints, the cohabitation period is restricted in length to about 1.5 year. The decision of the stakeholders to include the provision of housing as an indissoluble element of the broader intervention is based upon different elements.

In the first place, stakeholders wish to tackle the housing market deficiencies addressed above. As the leading stakeholder (OCMW Antwerpen) purchases, constructs, rents and renovates appropriate accommodation, the stakeholders act as an intermediary between the refugees and the housing market. By intervening directly in the housing market, it thereby eliminates a major obstacle young adult refugees encounter upon when leaving state-funded accommodation at the age of 18: finding a decent, low-cost accommodation in a short time span. It is the stakeholders' view that the provision of decent, secure shelter to the young adult refugees is a necessary condition to enable evolution in any other domain, such as in the development of the refugees' social skills or improving wellbeing. Stakeholders repeatedly refer to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) to make this viewpoint clear. In Maslow's pyramid, physical and psychical needs - including shelter - constitute the primary level of human needs. These needs must be met before the individual's motivation will focus on higher level needs, such as social belonging and self-actualization. However, this idea has also been underpinned by empirically-based research with refugees. Phillimore (2011: 584) notes that the lack of secure housing, which is not only a problem for asylum seekers but continues after acquiring refugee status, hinders the development of relationships with local people or maintenance of cultural traditions, "as most of their energy is focused upon survival". In fact, as Phillips (2006) argues, housing is a key dimension in the integration process:

"The housing conditions and experiences of refugees clearly play an important role in shaping their sense of security and belonging, and have a bearing on their access to healthcare, education and employment. The ability to access safe, secure and affordable housing is also likely to have an impact on community relations, the level of secondary migration by refugees, and the development of a migrant household's capacity for secure and independent living" (2006: 539).

However, the stakeholders' motivation to provide housing to the young adult refugees participating in CURANT goes beyond tackling structural housing market problems. A second motivation is the idea that housing and especially collective housing, i.e. housing where people not belonging to the same household share (part of) the available infrastructure and space, can be used as a leverage for social integration for newcomers. As explained in the CURANT change model (see above), common

housing infrastructure is supposed to provide a setting for in-depth, durable informal social interaction between the refugee and his/her flatmate. It is assumed that this interaction will result in meaningful social ties between the cohabitants and that informal learning processes will take place. Different from befriending programs (see above) which mostly consist of sporadic home visits or accompanying refugees at certain activities (e.g., doctor visits) (Behnia, 2007; Van Robaeys & Lyssens-Danneboom, 2016), the contact between the refugees and flatmates will transcend the frequency and depth of social interaction in other befriending programs.

The CURANT approach to housing draws on the concept of *collective living*, as a way of living where people not belonging to the same family unit share (a part of) their living space and infrastructure. This is far from a new phenomenon. In Northern Europe and North America, plenty of examples can be observed in urban as well as rural settings, for decades (Vestbro, 2000). However, extant collective housing projects are usually not concerned in particular with the inclusion of newcomers, let alone unaccompanied refugees. Looking at leading examples of collective living in Scandinavia, collective living rather emerged as a response to shifting needs within the (local) national community, due to for instance decreasing solidarity and housing crises. In Sweden's *kollektivhuset* the main driver was practical: the collective housing was 'reducing housework in order to enable women to combine work in production and family responsibilities' (Ibid: 165). Differently, in the Danish *bofaelleskab* the ideal of creating a stronger sense of community was prevailing. In both cases, living in a (large) community housing infrastructure with shared facilities was considered a durable alternative to single-family housing units. This is unlike CURANT, where the collective living setting is conceived as rather temporary, as a transitory phase towards independent living. Also, different from most collective living project in Western countries, CURANT is not a grassroots initiative but state-organised. In addition, the scale is different: CURANT mainly provides small-scale cohabitation, with usually only two people sharing the common infrastructure, while collective living usually concerns large groups.

While the above-mentioned archetypes of collective living seemingly bear little similarity with the cohabitation setting created in CURANT, there are other categories of communal housing that show more similarities. First are the community houses, dorms or hostels where loose individuals live together on a more temporary basis, with a relatively high turnover. An example here are student dorms, where each student has a separate bedroom and all facilities are available in shared spaces. Usually, the low cost of the living space prevails as a motivation to move into this kind of accommodation. However, the nature of social interaction and social commitment in this kind of setting may vary strongly. Due to the temporary nature of the accommodation (1.5 year at maximum) and the young age of the CURANT participants, it resembles to some extent this type of collective living. The CURANT stakeholders also plan to build a larger housing unit, where 25 pairs of CURANT participants will reside, but will also have communal facilities and rooms¹⁸. However, different from similar types of accommodation, in CURANT a strong commitment (to the CURANT project goals) is

¹⁸ These 'modular units' will be built in 2017, and should be ready for use by the end of February, 2018.

required of the participants, while stakeholders also provide a broad range of supportive measures. It should be noted that there are ongoing projects creating student dorm-like mixed accommodation for young adult refugees and local students, an example here being *Startblok Riekerhaven* in Amsterdam. However, as no scientific evaluation is available of these programs (yet), it is hard to estimate their effect on refugees' integration in the host society. State-organised accommodation for unaccompanied adolescent minors is also somewhat akin to the notion of community houses. Beside the placement of unaccompanied minors in foster families, it is a common practice to shelter them in a 'group home' for unaccompanied minors, under the supervision of professional caregivers preparing them for independency (see e.g. Wernesjö 2010). A fundamental difference however is that this type of collectivity is not voluntary but rooted in child protection's group-oriented residential policies. Differently, the participation in CURANT is voluntary, and the cohabiting residents define to a large extent their own living rules.

A second type relevant to CURANT is collective living involving cohabitation of (potentially) socially vulnerable individuals (such as elderly, ex-psychiatric patients, ex-detainees, etc.) together with others with a more favourable background. This type of collective living has also been labelled *solidary housing* and prioritizes a deliberate social mix (Thys et al. 2012). The core idea of solidary housing is to create an atmosphere of active solidarity among a group of cohabitants including socially vulnerable people, in order to reduce the negative material and psychological effects resulting from the vulnerable condition of some of the group members. This enables an increased autonomy and reduces the risk of downward spiral of debts and social isolation. A good example are intergenerational projects where students and elderly cohabitate: by living together, feelings of loneliness and unsafety may be reduced for the elderly, while the students get access to affordable housing. More generally, intergenerational relationships and solidarity are restored (Thys et al. 2012). Different from classic collectivist communities, such as the Scandinavian examples cited above, here solidarity with vulnerable people is at the heart of the cohabitation project. This should not obscure that in other models of collective living sometimes care services are provided for children or elderly too, and that some cohousing projects turned out to be "a good solution for the weak in an insecure urban environment." (Vestbro 2000: 169). Similar to solidary housing projects, CURANT stakeholders consider the social mix of inhabitants as a pathway to empowerment. Differently however, is that stakeholders stress the equality of the relationship between the young refugee and his/her flatmate (see above), and dismiss the asymmetry characterising social housing.

However, it should be noted that in Belgium, collective living arrangements meet with important juridical barriers, due to the lack of a legal framework for collective living forms in Belgium (Samenhuizen, 2017; Thys et al. 2012). The issue is increasingly being raised as cohabitation initiatives could be very productive in countering and dealing with some important general demographic, societal and housing trends. Flanders is being confronted with a population growth that goes hand in hand with an ageing society. Simultaneously, the size of households is decreasing as the amount of households consisting of one or two members is growing. Furthermore,

cohabitation could positively impact a number of economic (e.g., housing affordability problem), social (e.g., increasing individualism, loneliness) and ecological issues (e.g., spatial occupancy) (Provincie Antwerpen, 2015). One fundamental constraint on cohabitation today due to the lack of a legal framework, is the risk of serious financial consequences for cohabitants that receive benefits from the state. In cohabitation, two individuals live under the same roof and risk being considered as 'living together' and thus as one household. When one or more of the cohabitants is a benefit recipient he or she can entirely or partly lose his or her social, unemployment, sickness or disability benefit (Samenhuizen, 2015). In 2009, the Flemish government undertook a first initiative to take measures to stimulate and support cohousing in the form of a resolution (Dua et al., 2009). In the agreement of the Flemish Government of 2014-2019, cohousing was officially mentioned for the first time. In the agreement it is stated that the government should facilitate innovative ways of living such as cohousing (Vlaamse Regering, 2014). Later on in 2015, a resolution was accepted in the Flemish Parliament on the facilitation of different types of living arrangements (Vlaams Parlement, 2015). The most recent step towards the beginning of establishing a legal framework was made on the 21st of April 2017 when the Flemish Government has decided to open the floor to pilot project experimenting with different forms of community housing.

Confronted with the premature legal framework in Flanders, the CURANT stakeholders consider it as part of their intervention to press for a shift in policy practices and legislation. In the context of their own intervention, they do so by realizing the exemption of the CURANT participants from disadvantageous regulations.

Conclusion

As clear from this report, CURANT aims at triggering substantial changes in the lives of unaccompanied young adult refugees in Belgium. As a first step in the evaluation of this ambitious project, this report has disentangled the stakeholders' views systematically, and structured their central assumptions in a stakeholder theory - the CURANT *Change Model*. In addition, the first steps have been taken to ground this intervention in relevant academic theory on refugee integration in the host society. As such, the report represents a dialogue between practitioners' perspectives on the one hand, and scholarly empirical and theoretical findings on the other.

However, it should be clear that this is only the first, preliminary step. Ahead lies the evaluation of the actual intervention, launched in May 2017. This evaluation will first assess to what extent the change model is reflected in actual outcomes, and secondly, look into the various challenges related to the implementation of such a complex intervention. Based on the evaluation outcomes, the preliminary change model will be refined and the intervention will be adapted.

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CeMIS: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/rg/cemis/>

OCMW Antwerpen: <http://ocmw.antwerpen.be/>

Solentra: <http://www.solentra.be/en/Home>

Vormingplus Antwerpen: <http://www.vormingplusantwerpen.be/>

Jes vzw: <http://www.jes.be/>

Samenhuizen vzw: <http://www.samenhuizen.be/>

Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen: <http://www.vluchtelingenwerk.be/>

Appendix

CURANT CHANGE MODEL V1.1

