



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

Minne Huysmans, Dominique Verté, Pieter Meurs & Jan Vanhee

# Context

































# CONTEXT of the RESEARCH



# Context

The number of people living outside their country, has never been this high (Isin, 2009).

- 1910: 33 m
- 2000: 175 m
  - World population 1910 – 2000: x3 van 1,6 naar 5,3 B
  - Migration 1910 – 2000: x6
- 2010: 222 m
- 2015: 245 m
  - Refugees 2019: 68,5 m mainly from The Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan & Somalia (UN, International migration report).
    - + 70% in 20 years
    - 50% under 18 years old (UNICEF, 2016)



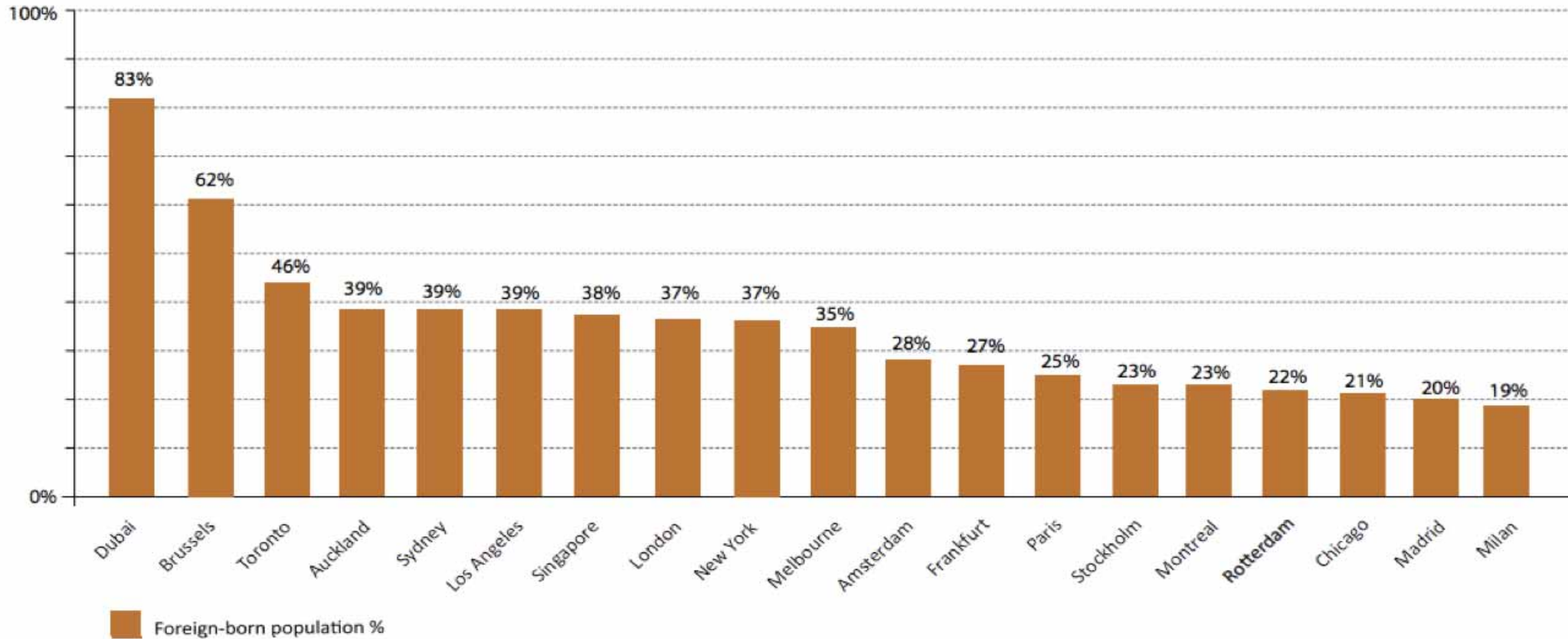
# Context

- Shift of the world population from rural to urban
  - 2025: 60% of the world population will live in cities.
  - 2050: 70%
  - By the end of this century  $\frac{3}{4}$  of world population will live in an urban environment
  - Once people 'urbanise' or migrate towards urban environments, they almost never return.

# Context Belgium



**Figure 1** Foreign-born population in major cities



*Source:* Compiled by IOM from various sources – see list at the end of the References section.



**Main scope:**

**SOCIAL NETWORKS & SOCIAL SUPPORT**

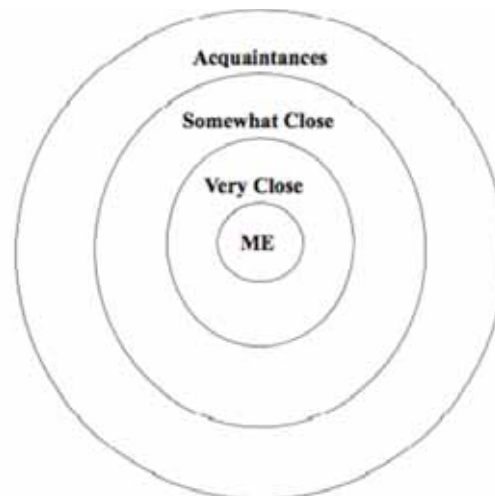
# SOCIAL NETWORKS

- One of the main contributing factors to adaption, well-being and overall quality of life = development of close and meaningful relations (Choi, 2014).
- The lives of newcomers is characterised by a rupture in their social network and the loss of support (Mels et al., 2008). The support newcomers experience in relation to their new environment is essential for well-being (Simich, 2003).
- Little is known about the role of these new networks in the lives of these youngsters (Mels et al., 2008; Wells, 2011).



# Social networks – social support

- Social networks: *"the vehicle through which social support is provided"* (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980)
  - Important for well-being over the life course (Antonucci et.al., 2013)
  - Quality of social network is more valued than the quantity (Blazer, 1982)
- Quality + quantity: convoy model of social relations (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980)
  - Focus on structure (social network) and function (social support) of social relations



(Convoy Model of Social relations)

# The research



# Participants

- Qualitative interviews in 2 Stages

## Stage I

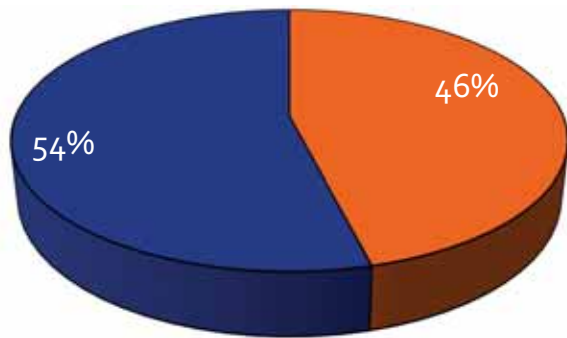
- 63 young newcomers
- Average of 16 years old
- Average stay in Belgium of 12 months
- Duration of the interviews: 68 min
  - Total: 71h 10min

## Stage II

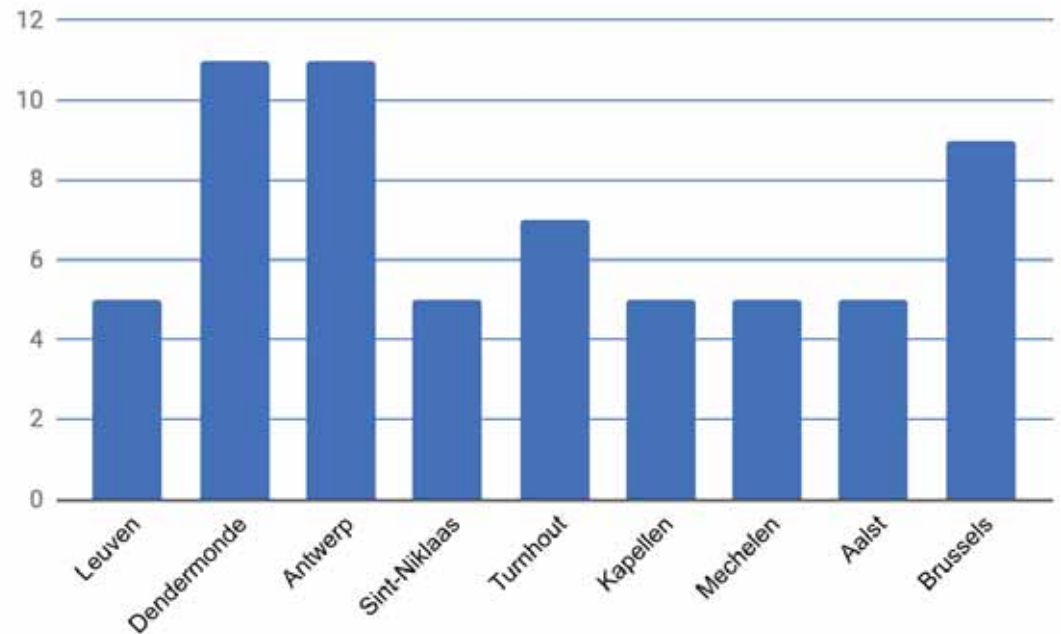
- 62 young newcomers
- Average of 17 years old
- Average stay in Belgium of 35 months
- Duration of the interviews: 95 m
  - Total: 99h

# Participants STAGE I

## Accompanied vs Unaccompanied Minors

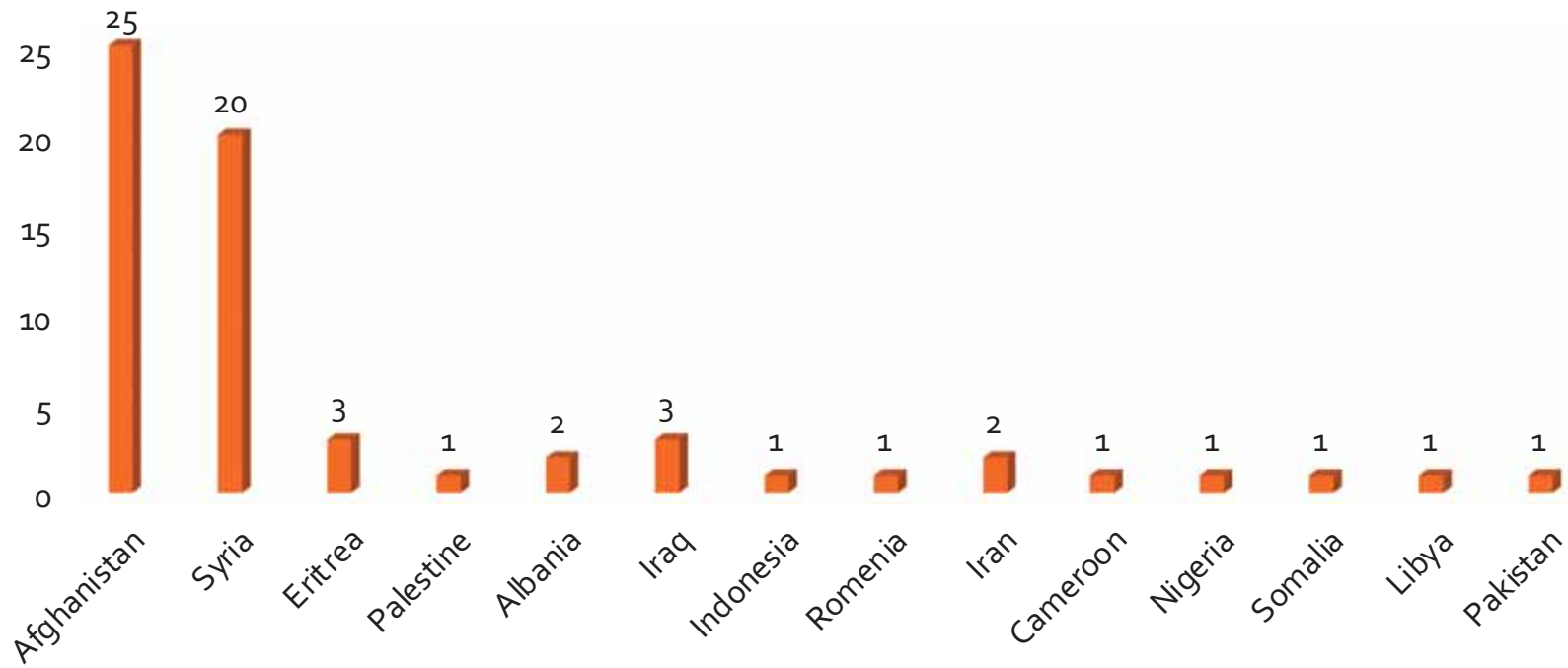


■ accompanied (=29)    ■ unaccompanied (=34)



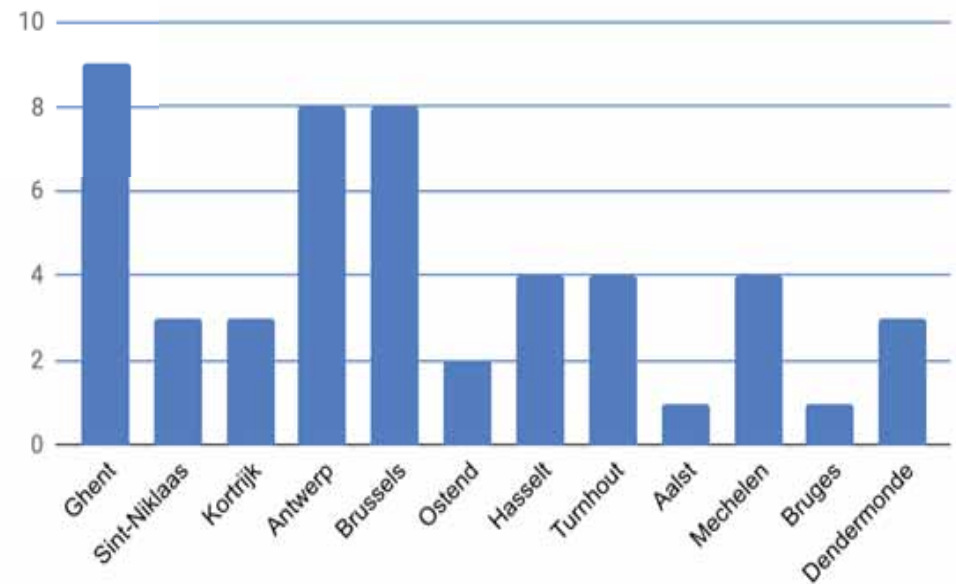
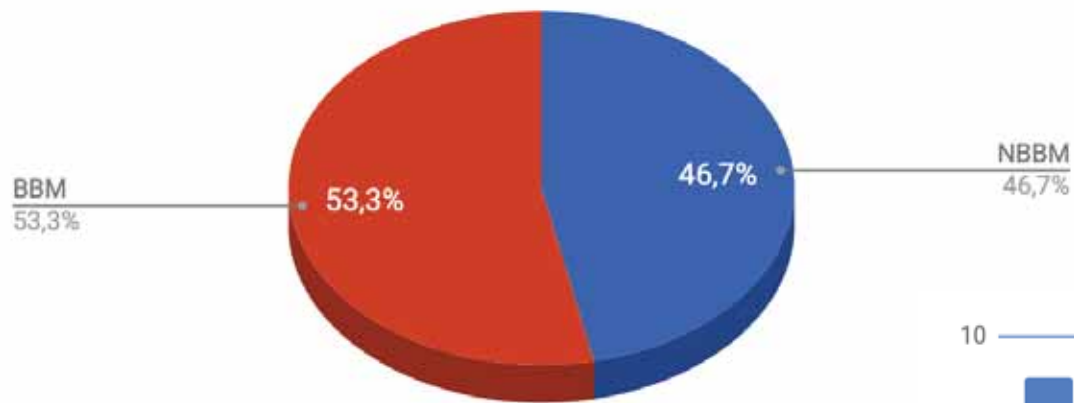


# Participants STAGE I



# Participants Stage II

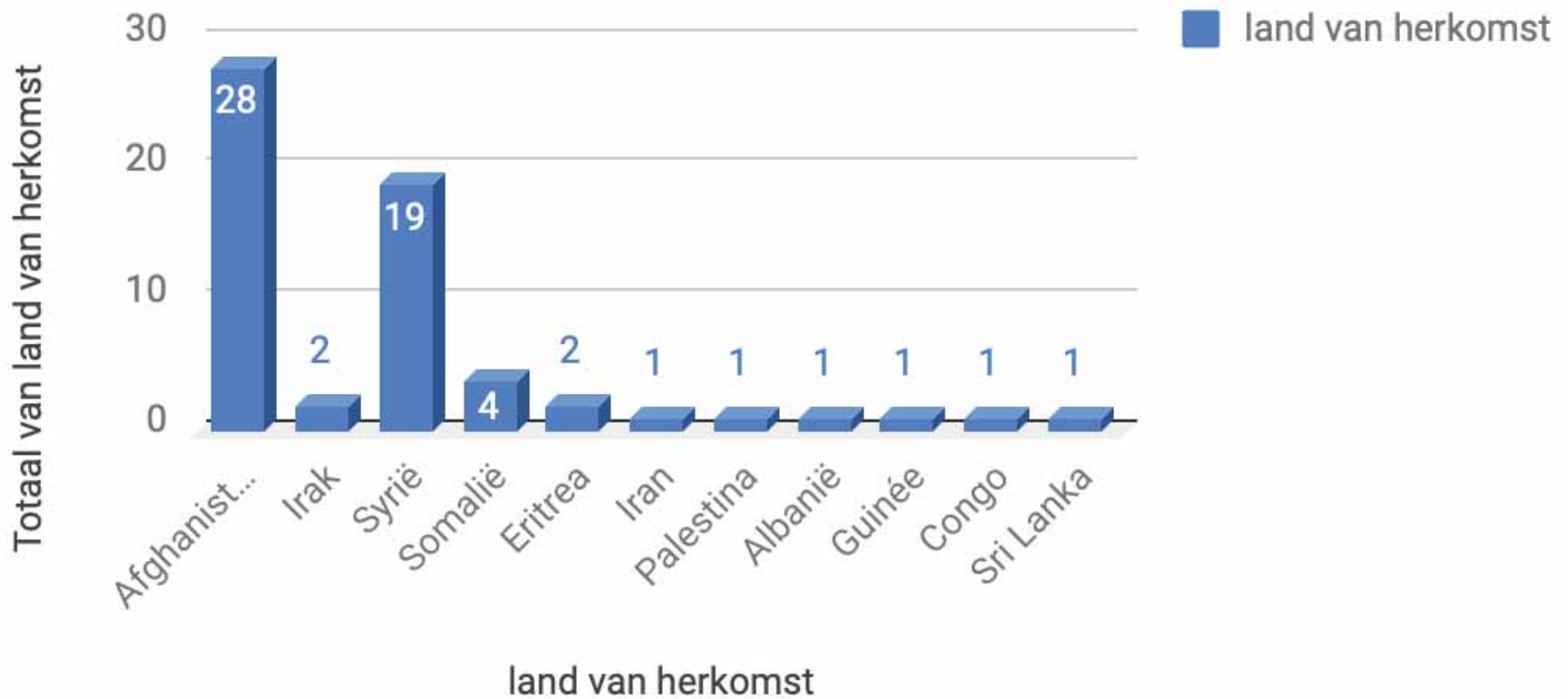
Totaal van (N)BBM





## Participants STAGE II

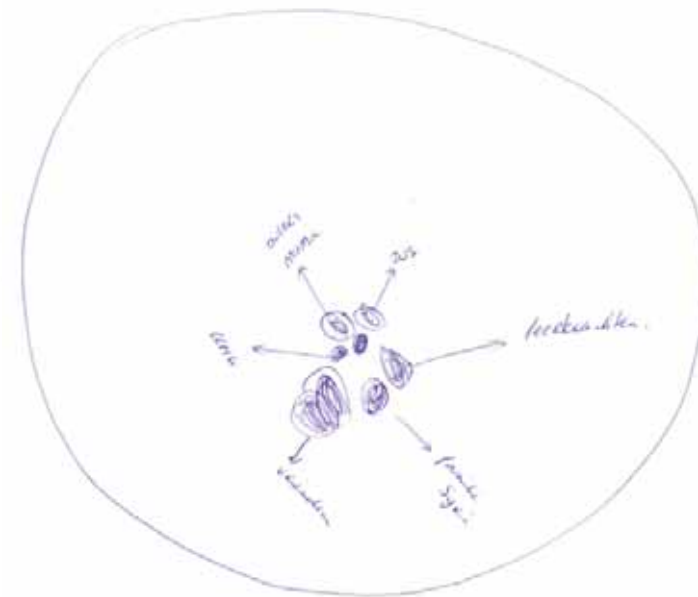
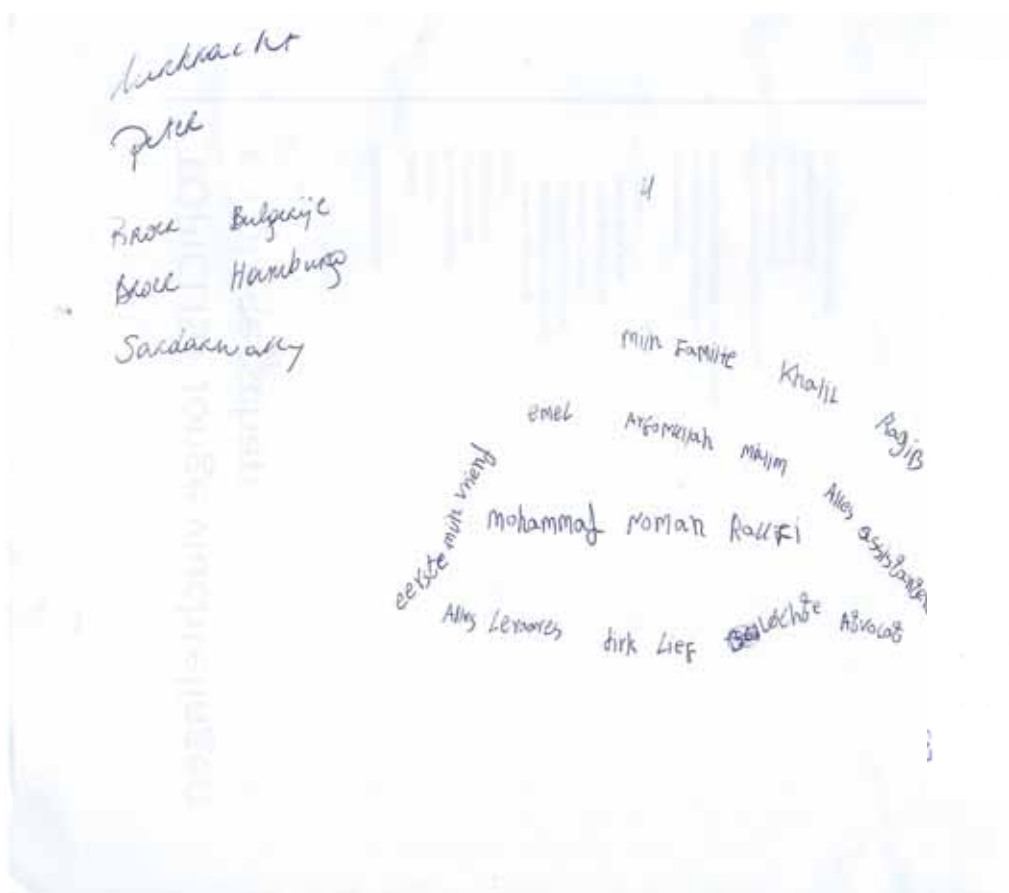
### land van herkomst



# Results



# Sociaal netwerk & social support shortly after arrival





Noman, 17 years, Afghanistan, Unaccompanied, 14 months in Belgium, ongoing procedure.

Mohammad, 17 years, Syria, Accompanied, 16 months in Belgium, refugee status.

# First period in Belgium

## URM

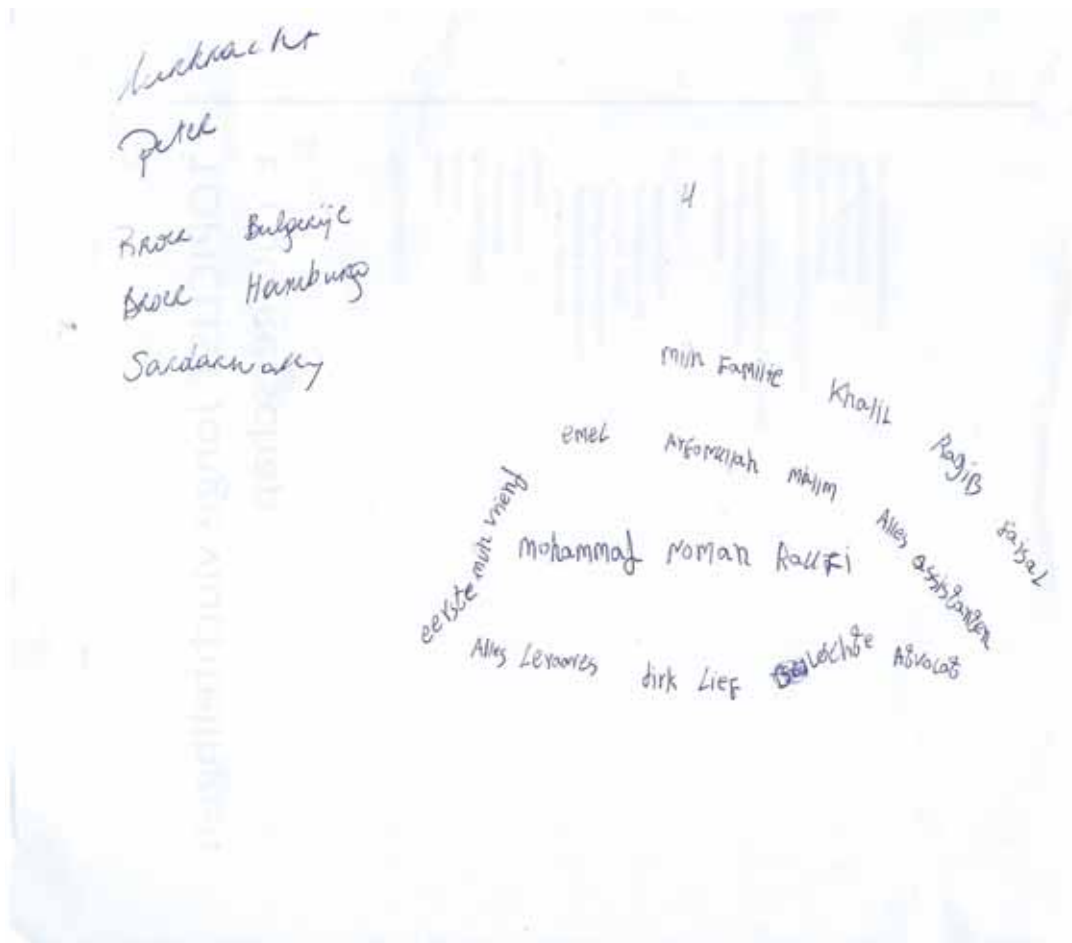


*"The first day, well I came from Germany by train. Somebody told me Belgium was a good place to go, so I took the train to the Brussels North Station. I was alone in the train, I was alone in the North Station, It was dark & the immigration office was closed. So I sat in the park, just by myself, it was cold and late. I was going to sleep there. There weren't many people in the park but there was a boy from Afghanistan. He asked me; where do you come from and what are you doing here? So I explained myself. Then he said; come, come to my house. So we went, we had dinner together and he gave me a place to sleep. The next day I registered myself at the office of migration".*



(Said, 15, Afghanistan, 18 months in Belgium, ongoing procedure).



# Social Networks URM



Noman, 17 years, Afghanistan, Unaccompanied,  
14 months in Belgium, ongoing procedure.

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- Strong need for a faster and more stable anchorage and a durable reception and guidance for URM after arrival
  - Based on their status as asylumseekers and refugees many URM are separated from 'the world outside' surrounding them. Need for a more balanced approach between a focus on youth and a focus on well-being.
  - A focus on youth work and the general educational system could provide a bridge between URM, youth in Belgium and society at large. A desire articulated by many.
  - Involve neighbourhoods surrounding reception facilities in the daily lives of URM
    - Important role for volunteers (godfamilies).

# URM after 5 years in Belgium for URM

*"I have so many people surrounding me and yet, I can feel lonely. I would love to have my family here. But for now, it's not possible" (Sarah, Afghanistan, 30 months in Belgium).*



# URM

## Social networks:

- Decreasing connection to home country
- Still little connection to 'the outside world'
- Multiple movements still challenge durable networks.
  - Large but unstable networks
  - Co-ethnic and divers
  - Sometimes also with peers without roots in migration
  - Maintenance of meaningful relations across borders or cities
- Large amount of people in core of the network
  - Small formal core (teachers and personal assistants even after prof role stops)
  - Parents= most important
  - Friends= most central

= emotionally and practically very meaningful

# URM

- Evolution from newcomer to citizen is still bumpy
- No stable basis of family nor stable living conditions
- Little connections with their city
- Strong connection with people
- Social networks are strongly shaped within the professional care system
  - Enlarging this context will enlarge the diversity, quantity and quality of their networks

# First period in Belgium

## ARM





# ARM

## Social networks:

- Journey to Belgium does not occur in a straight line
- Upon arrival non existing network.
  - Fast local anchorage with family
- Social networks are created
  - Reception schools
  - Neighbourhood
  - City

= small but accessible networks  
= Ethnically divers (newcomers)  
= little links to Belgian society (formal, youth in Belgium, migrant communities,...)

# ARM

- Most ARM have little links to both the formal and informal society.
- Support mainly from parents, little organisations.
  - Protective and supportive role of parents masks support needs.
  - A broadening and deepening of networks is not supported, leading to small, fragile and homogenous networks.

*“I got a lot of help from my family. (...) My father received help from his friends. They assisted him on his journey from turkey to Belgium. My dad and his brother were in Belgium first. They arranged a good life for all of us. So, once we arrived, I didn’t really need help from anyone. I had my dad to help me” (Rima, 15, Syria).*

# ARM after 5 years in Belgium

# ARM

- Maintenance of links with home at lower intensity
- Numerically and affectively much smaller networks than URM, rooted in neighbourhood and city = reachable network
- Presence of core and sometimes extended family is essential part of their network
- Stable network of peers mostly with refugee background
- Social networks are maintained
  - (Reception) schools
  - Sportclubs
  - Youth work organisations (for refugees)



## General recommendations

- Towards a contextual integration of support
- Towards a balanced approach between a youth and a refugee perspective
- Links with home and third countries
- Enhancement of the substantive access to society
- Faster asylum procedure and relational reception policy

**Minne Huysmans**  
[minne.huysmans@vub.be](mailto:minne.huysmans@vub.be)  
**+32/479 522 991**



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