

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

ABSTRACT

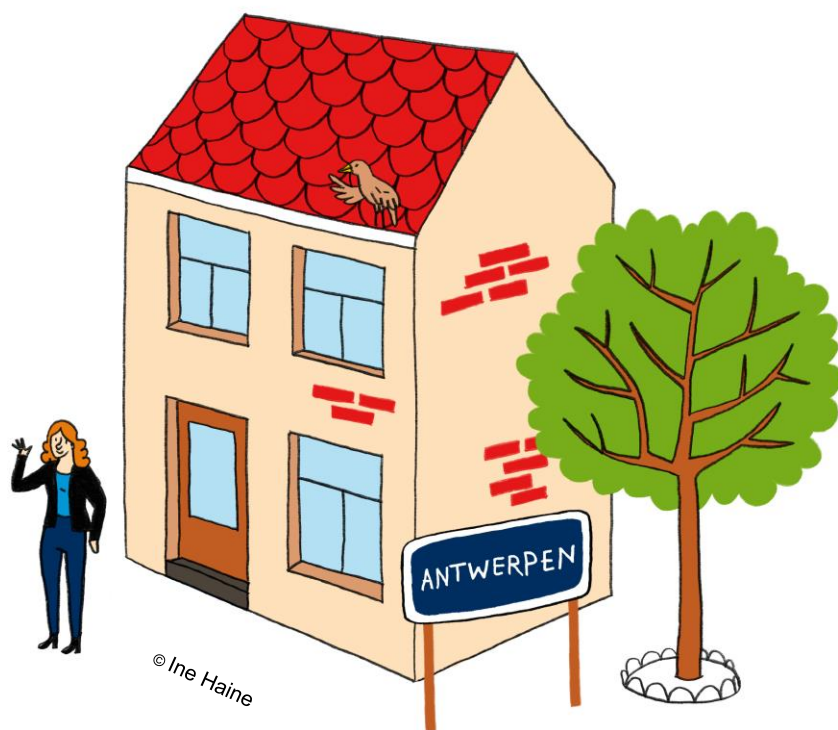
This evaluation report describes the mature phase of implementation of CURANT, a social policy intervention supporting the social integration and self-reliance of unaccompanied young adult refugees in Antwerp (Belgium). CURANT's holistic support delivery model includes intensive customised guidance, professional support, affordable housing and cohabitation with a Dutch speaking "buddy". The report discusses the dynamics of intercultural, supportive communal living, and investigates if and how CURANT has affected the competencies and social networks of refugees and buddies.

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SECOND EVALUATION REPORT

June 2019

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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 designed to offer various types of support to unaccompanied young adult refugees in the city of Antwerp (Flanders, Belgium). For an elaborate introduction to the project CURANT, please see the first project report '*Groundwork for evaluation and literature study*' (Mahieu & Ravn, 2017).

The European Union's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) granted funding for the realization of this project to the city of Antwerp, through an Urban Innovative Action (UIA) grant. A consortium of six institutions is responsible for the implementation and evaluation 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 partners, with OCMW Antwerpen (Public Centre for 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 "stakeholders", "project partners" or "project team". CeMIS, in contrast, is assigned the task of evaluator of the project and thus not considered as an (executive) stakeholder.

This report is part of an on-going evaluation study conducted during the three-year implementation of CURANT running from November 1, 2016, to October 31, 2019. In May 2017, the first project report; '*Groundwork for evaluation and literature study*', was published (Mahieu & Ravn, 2017). This report was the first step of a theory-driven evaluation study (TDE, see Chen, 2015) examining CURANT. The first report offered a concise descriptive introduction to CURANT including a brief overview of the above-mentioned stakeholder organizations, basic information on the resources of the project and some contextual information. The report also discussed the stakeholders' *change model*, which is a causal theory incorporating the stakeholders' assumptions and expectations regarding the programme. It is an inductively

produced theoretical model whose creation was facilitated by the researchers and authors of the report (Mahieu & Ravn) but grounded firmly in the stakeholders' ideas about the intervention and the role of their own organisation in it. Drawing on the stakeholders' change model, the third section of the report highlighted some of the central concepts and dynamics of the change model and related these to academic understandings. The authors presented 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. This 'Groundwork Report' revealed what the stakeholders believed to be the main issues that needed to be addressed, and in what ways this should be done.

The *First Evaluation Report* (Ravn et al., 2018) was the next step in the evaluation study. This report drew on data gathered in the initial phase of CURANT (from May 2017 to January 2018). This report focused on the experiences of the unaccompanied young adult refugees and their flatmates, referred to in the project as 'buddies'. It explored buddies' motivations and expectations to enter the project, their interpretation of their role as a 'buddy', and their overall (preliminary) experience of communal living with a young refugee. The analysis of refugees' stories covered the latter's social networks, and the social support they derive from these networks, refugees' aspirations and expectations for their future, their first experiences in CURANT and in cohousing and the relationship with their buddies.

Different from the First Report, the present *Second Evaluation Report* is based on the mature phase of implementation. The data used in this second report have been gathered primarily in 2018 and the first months of 2019, and thus give us insight into the project at full speed. As in this period already a significant number of participants has left the project, we can also look back on finished trajectories of refugees and buddies.

At the time of writing this report, the CURANT project is still ongoing, which has its implications for the evaluation study. An important share of the refugees and the buddies are still participating at the time of publication of this report, since CURANT runs until 31 of October 2019. CURANT also continues to evolve and stakeholders and participants adapt their ideas and strategies continuously; consequently, our findings do not always reflect how CURANT is operating at the time of publication of this report. In addition, we stress that while

the current report's focus is on drawing lessons from CURANT, it refrains from listing concrete recommendations. However, end of October 2019 a final report will be published, formulating recommendations for future support, integration and housing policies.

The report's main authors are Rilke Mahieu and Laura Van Raemdonck, both researchers at the Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies (CeMIS) at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. We also wish to thank Stiene Ravn, Rut Van Caudenberg and Femme Swinnen for their invaluable contribution to the qualitative data collection. In addition, we are grateful to the entire CURANT project team, for their assistance in the quantitative data collection, their willingness to share their insights and idea and overall support to the evaluation study.

The evaluation study is supervised by professor dr. Noel Clycq (Edubron - University of Antwerp). Sadly, the study's second supervisor, professor dr. Christiane Timmerman, director of CeMIS, passed away in February 2019.

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INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH DESIGN

EVALUATION APPROACH AND FOCUS

As highlighted in the *Groundwork for Evaluation and Literature Study* (2017), the evaluation study of CURANT draws on the *Theory-Driven Evaluation Approach* (TDE). While there are many variations in the meaning and usage of this approach, a TDE is particularly useful “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). As CURANT is an innovative and complex intervention, the usage of TDE was considered appropriate. Characteristic for TDE is also its strong concern with understanding the effectiveness of a specific programme from the point of view of the different stakeholders involved which underpins its relevance for social policy interventions such as CURANT:

If a programme is effective, such approaches should identify which elements are essential for widespread replication. Conversely, if a programme 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 (...). (Coryn et al., 2011: 207)

At the heart of theory-driven evaluation is the formulation of a “programme theory”, to be defined as a set of explicit or implicit assumptions by stakeholders about what action is required to solve a social or societal problem and why the action will respond to this problem. As such, “the purpose of the 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). As an evaluation approach, TDE is therefore not only results-oriented, but also process-oriented. More than other evaluation methods, it looks at the transformation process(es) between intervention and outcomes.

An intervention normally entails four different phases: planning, initial implementation, mature implementation and final outcomes (Chen, 2015). While in reality the

timeline of the CURANT was somewhat more complicated (as distinct phases were not delineated neatly), CURANT's evaluation study follows these phases. The first step was to draft a 'change model' describing the expected changes due to the intervention (Donaldson, 2007). The general question the change model answers is "how do the stakeholders expect their intervention to work?" The change model of the CURANT intervention was discussed and untangled in the first CURANT project report '*Groundwork for evaluation and literature study*' (see Mahieu & Ravn, 2017).

The second step in the theory-driven evaluation was an exploratory evaluation of the initial implementation phase (pilot phase) of the intervention. This resulted in a First Evaluation Report (2018), analysing refugees' and buddies' first perceptions and experiences in the intervention. The analysis here focused on the buddies and the refugees that entered the project in its first year. Based on the first experiences of the CURANT participants, it allowed some preliminary insights into CURANT's strengths and weaknesses and the validity of the core assumptions underlying the project design.

The third step of the evaluation study focusses on the mature phase of implementation (the second year of implementation), and has resulted in the Second Evaluation Report. In this phase, CURANT was up-scaled strongly, leading to a total of 81 refugees and 77 buddies in the project (both finished and on-going trajectories) in May 2019. These were living (or had been living) in four distinct types of housing, spread over the city of Antwerp: 23 two-bedroom flats, 9 four-bedroom houses, 1 student house with 12 studios and 1 cohousing site (BREM16) with 16 two-bedroom flats. In total, the CURANT housing offered room for 63 refugee-buddy pairs. Besides the shift in scale, the project team's approach and implementation practices have shifted too, as various types of challenges along the road have led to refinements and changes. Different from the previous, more exploratory project report, the Second Evaluation Report aims at assessing the impact of the CURANT approach on its participants (refugees and buddies). Did the project stakeholders' main assumptions (i.e. with respect to the overall problem orientation of CURANT, and its goals and strategies to attain them) materialise? If we can detect positive changes among the participants, to what extent can we attribute these shifts to the CURANT approach characterized by communal living and case management?

Finally, a fourth and last step of the evaluation study will be a policy-oriented report focussing on the lessons learned and making policy recommendations (to be released in October 2018).

In Chapter 1 of the present report, we offer background information on the profiles of refugees and buddies who participated in CURANT. In Chapter 2, we discuss one of the two main innovative elements in CURANT's approach: the communal living between refugees and locals. We offer a rich, in-depth picture of the particular social dynamics this form of communal living engendered, taking into account the perspectives of refugees, buddies and project partners. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, we zoom in on the individual level, investigating to what extent CURANT has triggered changes with regard to a number of variables. These variables are related to the central goals of CURANT:

- to make the social networks of refugees and buddies larger and more diverse (Chapter 3)
- to increase the self-reliance of refugees in their new country of settlement, by developing relevant skills and knowledge for participation in society (Chapter 4)
- to strengthen buddies' intercultural competencies (Chapter 5)

In Chapter 6, we discuss CURANT's second pillar, the individualised case management, on the other. In the final Chapter 7, the main conclusions are listed by answering six main questions about CURANT:

- Did the CURANT setup of communal living facilitate regular, informal, meaningful, spontaneous contact between refugees and Dutch-speaking locals?
- Did CURANT engender diversification in the social networks of refugees and Dutch-speaking locals?
- How did CURANT's setup of communal living contribute to refugee integration?
- What are the major strengths and pitfalls of CURANT's case management approach?

- What was CURANT's outcome in terms of refugees' participation in education and on the labour market?
- What are the major limitations to CURANT's approach?

Before moving to the first chapter, we explain how we conducted the evaluation study in the next section.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The evaluation is based on a mixed-method approach, including both qualitative and quantitative methods. The backbone of the methodology is longitudinal qualitative methods, collected throughout the implementation of CURANT. Due to the complex and innovative project design, ever-shifting implementation, and the relatively small scale of the project it was most appropriate to rely on qualitative methods because these lead to an in-depth understanding while also allowing for flexibility. However, in order to get a broader picture, we also use quantitative methods. Indeed, the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings strengthens our research methodology: while the quantitative data allow us to see certain tendencies more easily, their underlying dynamics can only be understood by looking into the rich qualitative data collected over the course of this research project.

The **qualitative data** involves interviews with refugees¹, buddies and project team (i.e. the project team members working at the five stakeholder organisations: the Public Centre for Social Welfare, JES vzw, Vormingplus Antwerpen, Solentra, Atlas). For refugees and buddies, interviews were conducted in different stages of their trajectory of CURANT, conducted at the start of CURANT, after one year in CURANT, and at the end of CURANT². In addition, four interviews were held with refugees that had left the project. In total, 48 in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 different buddies and 42 different in-depth interviews with 24

¹ The programme theory and design of CURANT are based on these distinctive categories (see Groundwork for Evaluation and Literature Study, 2017). For analytic reasons and to ensure readability, we use the labels of "refugees" and "buddies" throughout the report as these represent the two main categories of CURANT participants. However, we wish to stress how both groups are internally diverse in many ways. These labels represent one single aspect of the respondents' multiple identities, which is not necessarily important or accurate to themselves.

² In addition, four interviews were conducted with refugees after their CURANT trajectories.

different refugees. In addition, on various occasions (i.e. during observations of project activities) informal conversations took place with other buddies and refugees. In the selection of respondents, a wide variety is aimed for, among other with regard to Dutch language proficiency (for refugees), ethnic background (for both groups), the type of accommodation in CURANT (for both groups) and gender (for the buddies). Furthermore, the sample includes refugees and buddies that started cohousing at different periods in order to capture the experiences of participants that enter the project at various stages of its implementation (see First Evaluation Report, Ravn et al. 2018). All quotations used in this report were translated from Dutch to English. Consequently, quotations do not reflect newcomers' Dutch language skills, which were varied. For the project partners, in total 19 focus groups or individual interviews were held whereof in total 30 different project team members from the five executive partners. In this report, we draw most strongly on the final interviews with all respondent groups (stakeholders, buddies and refugees), because these are most informative for the central question of this report: what has been the impact of CURANT on its participants? In addition, throughout CURANT the researchers conducted observations of various of CURANT's activities, including intake and matching sessions, buddy training and meetings, training programmes for refugees, resident meetings (in the larger accommodations), and so on. These observations are especially important to get a first-hand experience of the implementation of the project's goals and strategies. **The amount, systematic collection and variation of research data ensure a solid framework for analysis, in which different perspectives and experiences are represented.**

Additionally, **quantitative research** methods have been used. A **baseline survey** was conducted with 65 refugees and 58 buddies. The baseline survey consisted of certain descriptive statistics (e.g., age, sex, country of birth, socio-economic status) and specific questions that were relevant to understand the respondents' position at the beginning of the project (e.g., refugees: 'What was your place of residence just before entering in CURANT?' and buddies: 'What was your main motivation to participate?'). Similar to the qualitative methodology, the quantitative methodology takes a **longitudinal approach**. When CURANT participants left the project, a **final survey** was conducted in which some questions from the

baseline survey were replicated and some evaluative questions were added³. In total, 31 refugees and 29 buddies completed both the baseline and the final survey, allowing us to make systematic comparisons between participant's situations at the start of CURANT (within the first months of their entry into the project) and at the end of CURANT. It allows us to identify evolutions on certain variables and thus answer the question of how refugees and buddies have changed throughout the project. Other longitudinal data included in this report are consecutive language assessments, conducted by Atlas⁴ at the beginning and the end of the trajectories of 22 refugees.

Importantly, all correlations and boxplots in this report are of a descriptive nature. They are included to show tendencies, which allow us to formulate hypotheses. In order to claim causal statistical relationships, further analyses with larger datasets would be needed. However, the rich qualitative data usually allows us to formulate grounded, plausible explanations of observed tendencies. In Annex 1, attached to this report, we offer an overview of the main statistical methods used. Annex 2 provides descriptive tables on which statistical analysis is based.

Before presenting our findings, it is important to clarify one point about the sample size of the different quantitative datasets. Beside longitudinal data, occasionally descriptive statistics are presented of slightly larger groups (33 refugees and 31 buddies) that have conducted the final survey. The reason why the sample size of the longitudinal data is smaller is that some respondents participated in the final survey, but not in the baseline survey or vice versa. In addition, for some statistics (mostly those in the first chapter), we used project registration data from the Antwerp Public Centre for Social Welfare and Vormingplus Antwerpen that include all CURANT participants: 81 refugees and 77 buddies. Hence, the sample size or "n" may shift throughout the report due to different sample groups and/or

³ For refugees and buddies who's trajectories in CURANT were still on-going at the time of data collection (Jan-Feb 2019), the post-intervention survey was conducted yet but on the condition that they were in CURANT for 6 months or more.

⁴ Not for all 22 actual language test was conducted, for some the assessment of the language competency was based on the entrance requirement for their current education track, implying that that they actually have a higher Dutch language competency.

missing values. In Annex 1 we discuss to what extent the smaller samples are representative for the participant populations.

CHAPTER 1: WHO PARTICIPATED IN CURANT?

In the First Evaluation Report (2018), a descriptive overview was presented of the profiles of the buddies and refugees. However, this analysis was based on a small group of participants, mainly those that entered CURANT in 2017. As at the time of publication of the Second Evaluation Report (June 2019), CURANT is approaching its end (October 2019), therefore we can present a more complete picture of the entire group of participants, consisting of 81 refugees and 77 buddies. The data is based on registration data OCMW Antwerpen (Public Centre for Social Welfare) collected on the refugees (N=81), Vormingplus' registration data on the buddies (N=77), and baseline surveys conducted by CeMIS with the refugees (N=65) and buddies (N=58).

1.1. REFUGEE PROFILES

1.1.1. *Basic demographics*

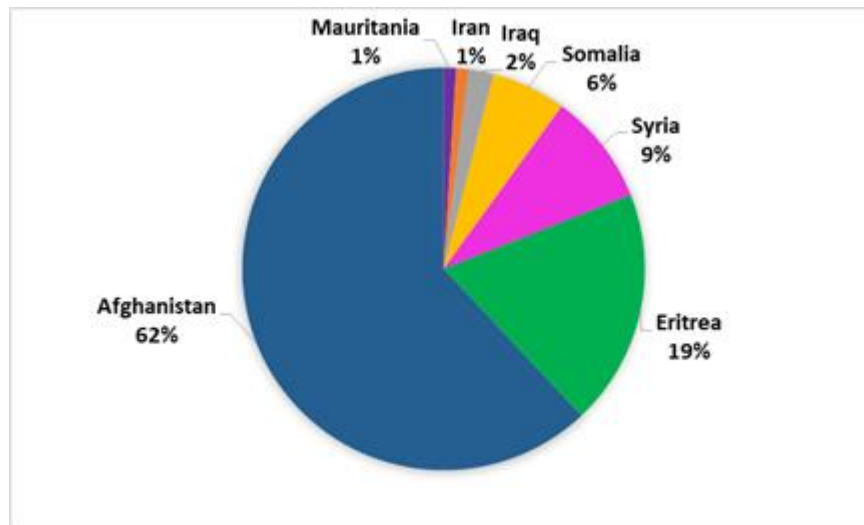
In total, 81 refugees participate (d) in CURANT. Their average age was 19 years (minimum 17 years, maximum 25 years). Most refugees were male (n=77, 95%). Only 4 out of 81 participants (5%) were female. This sharp gender imbalance reflects the general figures on the gender of unaccompanied minors in Belgium.

Statistics on 65 refugees that conducted the baseline study (with one missing value) illustrate that about half of the young refugees are the firstborn of the family (n=33, 51%). Fifteen out of 65 refugees (23%) are the second born of the family.

1.1.2. *Country of birth*

Most refugees came from Afghanistan (n=50, 62%). Other refugees' countries of birth are Eritrea (n = 15, 19%); Syria (n=7, 9%); Somalia (n=5, 6%); Iraq (n=2, 2%); Iran (n=1, 1%) and Mauritania (n=1, 1%). These figures, and in particular the high number of Afghans, are similar to general figures on unaccompanied minors in Belgium.

Figure 1: Newcomers' country of birth

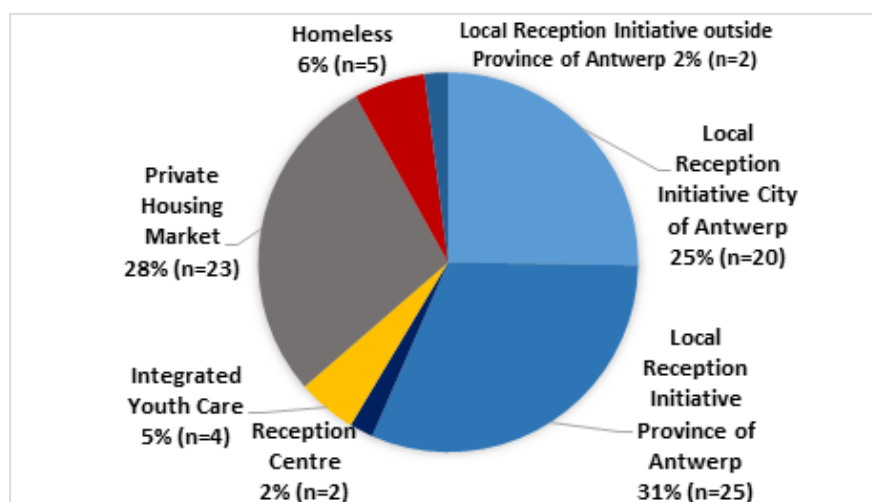


Source: OCMW Antwerpen (Antwerp Public Centre for Social Welfare) registration data on all refugee participants

1.1.3. Previous housing

More than half of the refugees (45 out of 81, 56%) were living in Local Reception Initiatives of the City or Province of Antwerp just before entering in CURANT. A considerable share of the CURANT participants (28%), however, had lived in private housing, which was usually of bad quality, and a small group (6%) was homeless before CURANT. This indicates that for a large share of the unaccompanied young adult refugees' their housing need was based on the *temporality* of their current situation (in government-funded residencies), while for another part of the group it was related to the *low quality* of their current living situation (on the private housing market). This difference is important, as these previous housing experiences with housing may affect participants' expectations and experiences.

Figure 2: Newcomers' previous housing



Source: OCMW Antwerpen (Antwerp Public Centre for Social Welfare) registration data on all refugee participants

The previous housing situation is important for two reasons. First, it is central in understanding refugees' housing preferences, and their sometimes sceptical or hesitant attitude towards communal living, especially in larger accommodations. Mostly, refugees **preferred smaller types of accommodations** and in particular, living in a 2-bedroom apartment, to larger ones. Refugees' previous negative experience in reception centres and local reception initiatives, where they were living together with large groups of other asylum seekers, often sharing rooms with many others, and having almost no private spaces, is central here. One boy expresses how this negative experience explains why he wants to live in a 2-bedroom apartment:

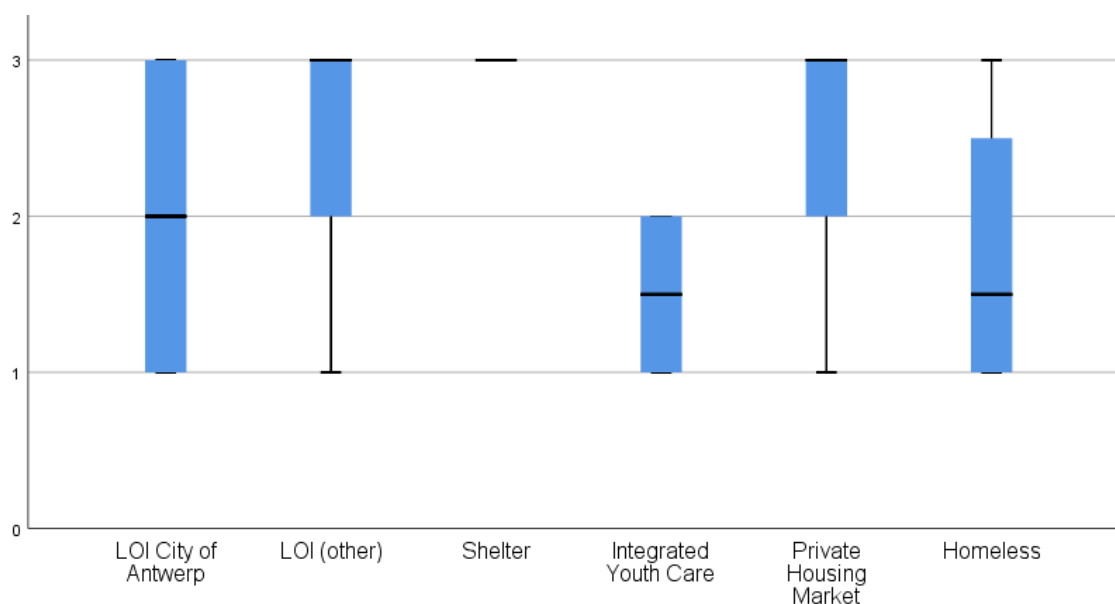
I: When they asked you at the beginning of CURANT with how many people you wanted to live, what did you say? R: I said I wanted to live with two. Definitely. I do not want to live with four. I: Why don't you want to live with four? R: Since my first days in Belgium, I have always lived together with other boys [in the reception centre and the local reception initiative]. And it was always, for two years, always noise, always fights, always. And I always wanted to study, but I could not. I'm coming here [to CURANT] for the tranquillity. (Afghan refugee)⁵⁶

⁵ To assure confidentiality, all citations are anonymous. All citations come from interviews conducted by the researchers with project participants (refugees, buddies, project team members).

⁶ The usage of "I:" and "R:" in citations refers to "Interviewer" and "Respondent".

Second, the previous type of accommodation seems to “predict” to some extent the outcome of communal living. The boxplots in Figure 3 show central tendencies and variance within our data on the assessment of the communal living experience (see Chapter 2) by the newcomers’ residence before entering in CURANT⁷. The boxplots indicate that refugees who entered in CURANT after living in a youth care residence (Integrated Youth Care) or being homeless, more often had a more negative communal living experience in CURANT. While the subgroups are small, they raise the hypothesis that participants which such a background has more troubles fitting into the CURANT concept of communal living. For the other groups, we can observe that refugees who lived in private housing or in an Local Reception Initiative outside of Antwerp or elsewhere (“LOI other”), communal living in CURANT seemed more positive compared to those coming from the city’s LOI.

Figure 3: Visual presentation of the distribution of communal living assessment by the newcomers’ residence before entering in CURANT



Source: Communal living assessment by the project stakeholders on a 3-point Likert Scale (bad-mixed-good) and baseline survey of the refugees (n=65)

Note 1: An explanation on how to interpret box plots can be found in annex 1 of this report

Note 2: A cross tabulation with frequencies can be found in annex 2 of this report.

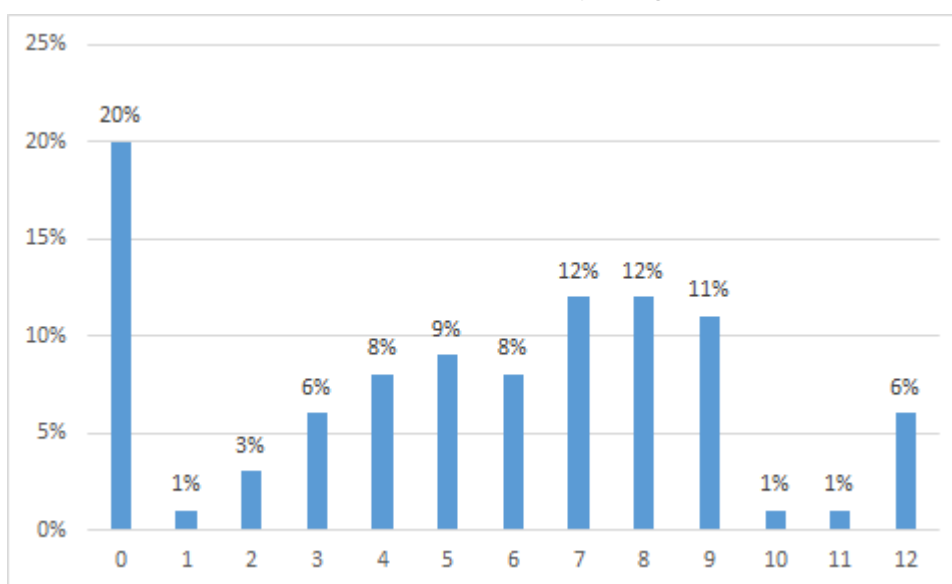
⁷ Noteworthy, certain categorical groups of the variable “residence before CURANT” are too small (number of respondents < 15). Therefore, we cannot report on effect size.

Note 3: in this boxplot, the category “LOI (other)” contains both LOI in the wider province of Antwerp and outside of it.

1.1.4. Years of schooling in the origin country

A considerable group of the CURANT participants had received very limited schooling before entering in CURANT. A share of 20% (n=13) did not receive any schooling before coming to Belgium, while another 35% (n=23) had at least 1 year, but not more than 6 years of schooling. On average, participants had 5.37 years of schooling.

Figure 4: Newcomers' years of schooling in the country of origin



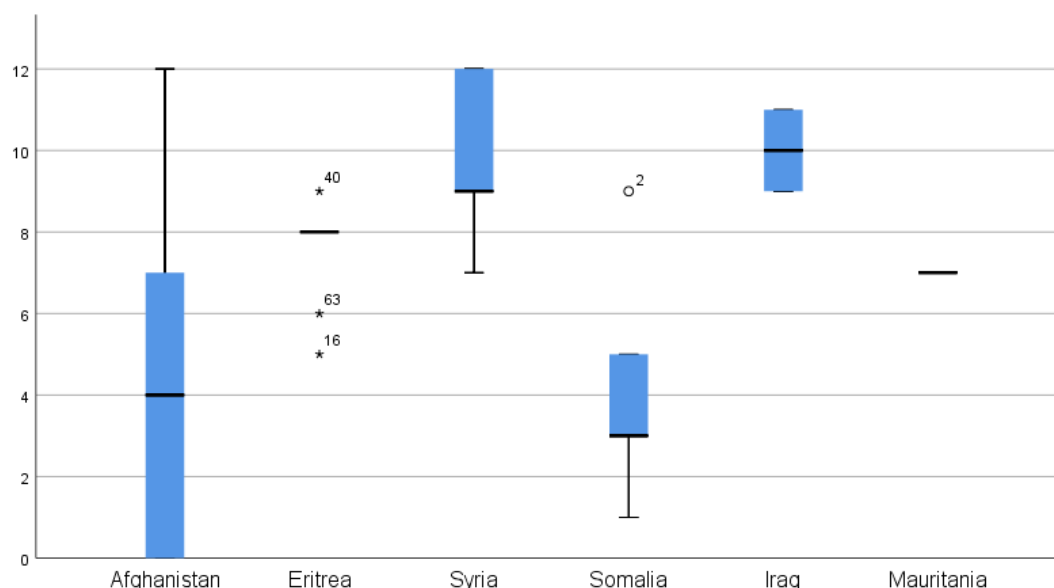
Source: Baseline survey among the refugees (n= 65).

The boxplots in Figure 5 show some tendencies and variance within the data on the newcomers' years of schooling in the country of residence by country of birth⁸. The boxplots below show that Afghan refugees are the only nationality group where having 0 years of schooling occurred: 13 out of 42 Afghan respondents never attended school.⁹

⁸ As certain categorical groups of the variable “country of birth” are too small (respondents < 15), we cannot report on effect size.

⁹ For a cross tabulation with frequencies, see Table 10 in Annex 2.

Figure 5: Visual presentation of the distribution of the newcomers' years of schooling in the country of residence by country of birth



Source: Baseline survey of the refugees (n=65)

Note 1: Explanation on how to interpret box plots can be found in Annex 1 of this report.

Note 2: The one person born in Iran is considered Afghan in these statistics as he has Afghan nationality.

Between years of schooling in the country of origin and other variables, there are a number of interesting associations¹⁰. These associations show that:

- Refugees that had more years of schooling are generally not the first born in the family.
- The number of years of schooling in the origin country influences the expectations/aspirations refugees with regard to obtaining a diploma: a higher number of years is associated with higher educational aspirations.
- Years of schooling influences refugees' confidence to speak Dutch at the end of CURANT.

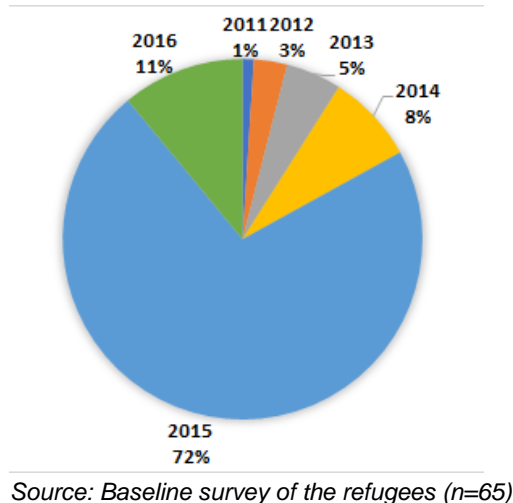
Important to note, we present descriptive associations only. Further research is required to establish causality.

¹⁰ For the statistics, see Table 11 in Annex 2.

1.1.5. Year of departure from the country of origin

The refugees in CURANT left their country of origin between 2011 and 2016. Seventy-two % of the refugees (n=46) left in 2015. Figure 6 gives a more detailed overview.

Figure 6: Newcomers' year of departure from the country of origin



Source: Baseline survey of the refugees (n=65)

1.2. BUDDY PROFILES

1.2.1. Basic demographics

In total, 77 buddies participated in CURANT. Their average age is 25 years (minimum 20 years, maximum 31 years). The group of buddies is gender-balanced, with 52% male (n=40, 52%), and 48% female (n=37). As only four female refugees participated in CURANT, an implication is that most female buddies are cohabiting with male refugees. The four female refugees are all living with a female buddy.

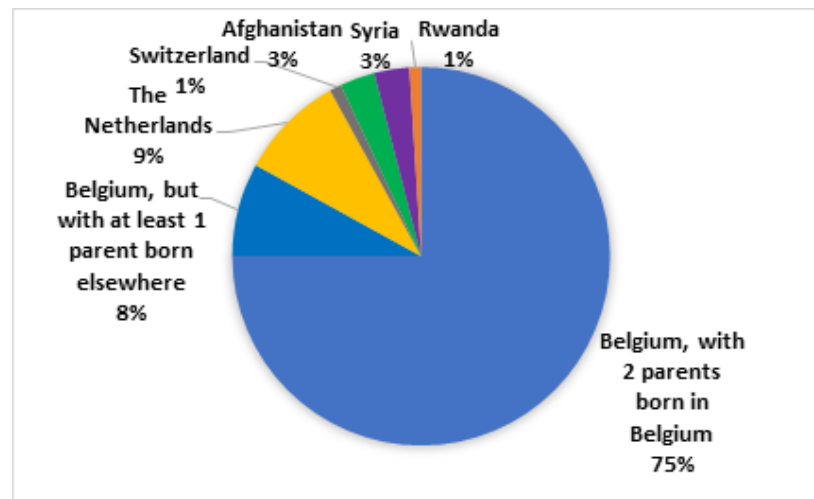
1.2.2. Country of birth

Most buddies are born in Belgium (n=64, 83%). Other countries of birth are the Netherlands (n=7, 9%); Switzerland (n=1, 1%); and Rwanda (n=1, 1%). Out of the 64 buddies that are born in Belgium, six buddies (8%) have at least one parent born elsewhere (e.g. the Netherlands or Suriname). Among Dutch-born buddies, many have parents born outside of the Netherlands (e.g. Morocco or Suriname). As a result, several of the buddies participating in CURANT with a Belgian or Dutch nationality have a migration background. In addition, four

buddies are refugees who live in Belgium for some time now (usually around 5 years). Their countries of origin are Afghanistan (n=2, 3%) and Syria (n=2, 3%).

Figure 7 offers an overview of buddies' countries of origin, including for the Belgian-born group information on the country of birth of their parents.

Figure 7: Buddies' country of birth



Source: Vormingplus registration data on all buddies (n=77)

1.2.3. Socio-economic status

When entering CURANT, 69% (n=40) of the buddies were employed (for at least 50%), 17% (n=10) of the buddies were full-time students, 5% (n=3) of the buddies were combining their studies with a (part-time) job or were doing an unpaid internship, and 9% (n=5) of the buddies were job seekers¹¹. When asked about to what extent buddies could manage their finances, 11% (n=6) answered this was “difficult”, for 11% (n=6) it was “somewhat difficult”. 21% (n=12) answered “somewhat easy”. More than half of the buddies (58%, n=32) answered “easy” (29%, n=16) to “very easy” (29%, n=16) on this question.

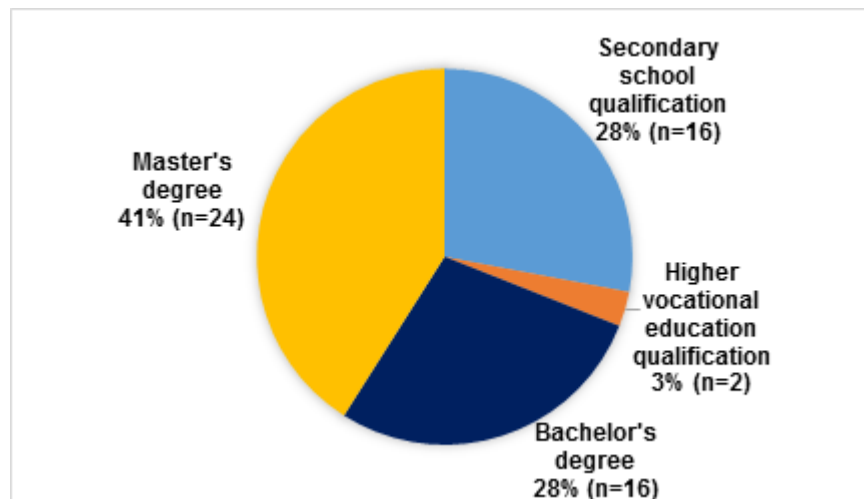
Important however, is that the job positions and educational situations of buddies often shifted during their participation in CURANT, which seems characteristic to this age group. The volatile nature of their educational and professional situation is also reflected in the Final Survey, where 81% said to be employed full-time or part-time for most of the time in

¹¹ These statistics are based on the baseline survey among the buddies (n=58)

CURANT, while only 12% was still studying full-time. Others were job seekers or combining work and study. This indicates how during CURANT, the share of buddies that was active on the labour market grew. However, the difference between the baseline and final surveys may also be resulting from the smaller sample size of the Final Survey (n=32).

With regard to their educational background, the majority had obtained a degree in higher education (72%) before entering in CURANT; all others had obtained a secondary school qualification. It should be noted that among the latter group, some are still in full-time education and can be expected to obtain a degree in higher education in the near future.

Figure 8: Buddies' highest diploma



Source: Baseline survey among the buddies (n=58)

1.2.4. Main motivations to participate in CURANT

In Figure 9, we give an overview of buddies' self-reported motivations to participate in CURANT. The three most outspoken reasons for buddies to participate in CURANT are a desire to contribute to a better world (89%), finding it meaningful to help people that need it (89%) and being worried about the fate of young refugees in our society (85%).

The few respondents who gave strongly agreed with the motivation, "I like helping people since I have been in a similar situation" were buddies with a refugee background and one buddy who was adopted as a child¹². In addition, for buddies with a difficult childhood

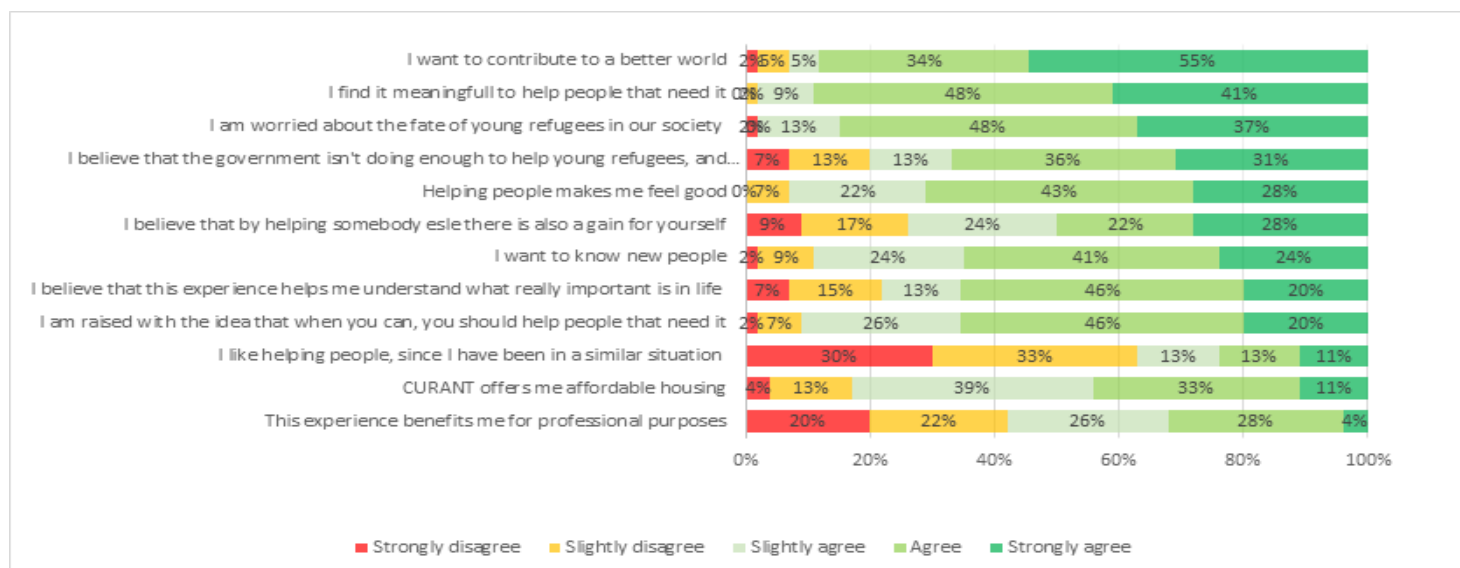
¹² Source: Baseline survey of the buddies (n=58). None of the Afghan buddies participated in the baseline survey.

experience (e.g. financial hardship, living in residential youth care) or a migration experience, this also stimulates them to participate in CURANT.

Notably, most buddies agree that to some extent the affordability of the housing in CURANT was important, though for only a limited group this was very important. Therefore, while material benefits are not unimportant, for most buddies other motives dominate.

Professional motives (i.e. the idea that participating in CURANT will offer professional benefits) seem overall less important.

Figure 9: Buddies' motivations to participate in CURANT



Source: Baseline survey of the buddies (n=58)

1.2.5. Previous experiences with voluntary work

A very large share of the buddies (86%, or 50 out of 58) has volunteered before. Given this importance of previous voluntary work among the buddies, we can assume that their participation in CURANT is driven by similar motivations as their participation in previous voluntary work. When we looked into associations between “having done voluntary work” and different types of motivation to participate in CURANT, we identified a significant positive

association¹³ with the motivation “I believe that the government isn't doing enough to help young refugees and that the support of citizens is necessary”. Arguably, this reflects the buddies’ engaged attitude with regard to social issues or injustices, which may also explain their previous involvement in voluntary work. In addition, the beneficial outcomes of previous volunteering experiences (such as personal fulfillment, a larger friends group) may also stimulate to seek more of these experiences, for example through CURANT.

1.2.6. Living abroad

Fifty-five per cent (32 out of 58) of the buddies have stayed abroad three months or longer, which is a relevant indicator for the buddies’ previous intercultural experiences. In most cases, a stay abroad was related to a study exchange programme (n=21, 36% of all buddies). Some stayed abroad to do volunteer work abroad (n=3, 5%), worked abroad (n=7, 12%) or were simply having a long holiday abroad (n=5, 7%). For some, it was related to their migration background, as they were living with family in their country of origin (n=5, 7%). In addition, some were living abroad together with their parents (e.g., diplomats), who stayed abroad for professional reasons.

¹³ Association between “I believe that the government isn't doing enough to help young refugees and that the support of citizens is necessary” and having done voluntary work before CURANT: Eta = .27*, Eta squared or η^2 = .07*. ANOVA test on the association between experience with voluntary work and motivation to participate (Source: Baseline survey of the buddies, n=58, * Significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)).

CHAPTER 2: CURANT'S INTERCULTURAL, SUPPORTIVE COMMUNAL LIVING: MAIN SOCIAL DYNAMICS

“How is the communal living between those young refugees and their buddies actually going?” was definitely the most-asked question throughout the implementation of CURANT. A common answer given by CURANT's participants and the project team alike was that communal living between refugees and locals was in many ways similar to other types of cohousing and communal living. Many of the issues arising were not unique to the CURANT setup or to intercultural communal living in general. **Notwithstanding similarities with other forms of communal living, throughout the project also certain particular dynamics and challenges arose.** As one buddy notes, living together with young refugees is “communal living with a twist”. The aim here is to define this “twist”: in what respects has the communal living experience in CURANT been (experienced as) particular, both in terms of its positive dynamics and outcomes and in terms of its challenges?

While the variety in experiences makes it difficult to generalize, in this chapter we present an overview of **the main dynamics of intercultural, supportive communal living.** We start by presenting a global picture of communal living experiences. Then, we discuss how buddies and refugees assessed their relationship. In the next and most extensive part, we investigate how different factors affect the social interaction among housemates, such as differing motivations to participate in CURANT, gender differences, communication issue, varying views on social life, socio-economic differences, the number of inhabitants and housing design. By no means, this is an exhaustive list; rather, it is composed of those elements that were either raised directly by the participants or emerged from the analysis. Finally, we point out a number of CURANT activities and design elements that intervene in the social dynamics between housemates.

2.1. GLOBAL PICTURE OF THE COMMUNAL LIVING IN CURANT

To obtain a global picture of the social interaction between all buddies and refugees, the final assessments of all matched duos¹⁴ done by Vormingplus and the case managers of OCMW are a valuable source of information. Over the course of the project, these team members had regular contact with all buddies and refugees and were usually involved in cases of conflict or other problems in the communal living sphere. Therefore, within the project team, they are in the best position to assess buddy-refugee relations. In addition, different from participants, they are able to adopt a comparative perspective as they know all matched duos¹⁵.

According to their assessment, over half of all matched duo's (45 out of 82 matched duo's) are seen as having cohabitated in an overall "positive" manner, some of these (n=21) were seen as "very positive" or even "outstanding". Reasons to consider a communal living situation positively are:

- Regular contact and communication among housemates, indicating a certain level of mutual involvement.
- Mutual respect between housemates
- A supportive environment for the refugee, due to a dedicated buddy¹⁶

¹⁴ This assessment was done in January 2019, and regards all matched duo's (82) who lived in CURANT at that moment or before. It does not include the small group of participants who entered later, or the few refugees who were not assigned a buddy yet. In 2 separate group interviews, the OCMW's case managers on the one hand, and Vormingplus team members, on the other were asked to classify all matched duo's according to their assessment of the quality of the communal living. It should be noted that all past and on-going matched duo's were assessed, with the exception of those that started very briefly before or after the moment of assessment (end of Jan. 2019). Of the 82 matched duo's assessed, 23 concern finished trajectories (i.e. the duo's no longer live together, either because they left CURANT or because they were rematched with another buddy or refugee), while for remaining 59 the communal living was on-going. As a result, while for the first group it regards a more complete, and final assessment, for on-going trajectories it is more a snapshot at the moment of assessment and it is not excluded that the (future) final assessment would have been different.

¹⁵ In other parts of the report, we draw more strongly on self-assessments by the participants.

However, these datasets are based on smaller N, while the project team assessed all matched duos.

¹⁶ The self-reported data from buddies illustrates the importance of this supportive environment in a positive assessment by the project team. If buddies reports feeling successful in providing support to his/her refugee housemate, their trajectories are usually also classified positively by the project team strongly. (Statistical association of $r = .74^{***}$, Source: Communal living assessment by the stakeholders and final survey of the buddies (n=58))

- A general lack of frustrations about the other housemate's behaviour or attitude
- In general, the presence of a good "vibe" in the house (e.g., marked by doing leisure activities together, or by doing other things together)

Importantly, among these "successful" cases, there is wide variation in terms of the frequency and nature of social contact among housemates, the amount and type of support offered/asked for, etc., which demonstrates how communal living takes many different shapes.

At the other side of the spectre, all team members¹⁷ agree that **in 15 cases, the communal living was overall "negative"**. Reasons to consider the experience of communal living as negative are the following situations:

- A complete lack of social contact and communication between housemates
- A wide divergence in expectations between the housemates (e.g. in terms of their social interaction, the support offered by the buddy, the closeness of their relationship), causing dissatisfaction for one or both housemates
- The persistent presence of frustrations of one (or both) housemate(s) about the other housemate's behaviour or attitude
- An irreparable breach of trust, caused by a particular incident (e.g. theft or an attack on the physical integrity)
- A "weak" buddy who was not able to offer any support, but would rather need support himself (e.g., because of psychological or financial issues)

In most of these cases, there has been an early dropout from CURANT by one or both flatmates. If one or both flatmates stayed in CURANT, this led to a rematch with someone else. When refugees were matched for a second time, the subsequent experiences were usually more positive¹⁸. In contrast, when buddies were rematched after a negative experience with

¹⁷ The case managers and Vormingplus team.

¹⁸ In the 8 cases of a rematch because of problems with the first buddy, 6 had a more positive communal living trajectory with their second buddy, and for 2 their subsequent trajectory was also negative.

their first refugee housemate, this was usually not followed by a more positive experience¹⁹. However, it should be noted that for buddies, more often than for refugees, a negative first experience led to a decision to not continue their participation in CURANT. In such circumstances, buddies seemed to conclude for instance that they had wrong expectations about the communal living.

Importantly, **for a significant group (n=28) the experience was not unanimously labelled as “positive” or “negative”, but rather perceived as “somewhere in between”**. This highlights the complexity of assessing interpersonal relations and support in a communal living setting. In the case of (n=7) the quality of a matched duo’s communal living was unanimously labelled as of a “mixed” nature. For these cases, project team members agreed that there was either a permanent blend of positive and negative elements (e.g., no reported problems, but also a lack of meaningful contact) or a more fluctuating condition, meaning that throughout the project the situation shifted (e.g., a generally positive experience, but a sudden escalation of problems at the end leading to a drop-out of one or both house mates).

For the remaining group of 21 duos, Vormingplus team members and the OCMW social workers had diverging assessments. In those cases, usually, Vormingplus made a more negative assessment than the case managers (e.g., when Vormingplus team members considered communal living situations as “negative” and social workers considered them as “mixed”). Arguably, this difference in perspectives reflects the different expectations of the communal living of their primary contact group. For the case managers; this was the group of refugees, who had more modest expectations about the social interaction with their buddy, and were, therefore, less often disappointed about this aspect. For Vormingplus; this was the group of buddies, who had generally higher expectations, and were therefore more often disappointed and in addition, more vocal.

While the communal living assessment was done by the project team, it is important to note that there is a clear correlation with several variables based on self-assessments by

¹⁹ 4 buddies decided to be rematched, after a first negative communal living experience. In 3 cases, the second experience was also negative.

the refugees and buddies alike (Final survey)²⁰. Compared to refugees who had a negative or mixed communal living assessment, **refugees whose communal living trajectory was assessed as “positive”, tend to report²¹:**

- to have more frequent contact with their buddy during CURANT
- to have more friends born in Belgium
- to estimate CURANT’s impact on the frequency they use Dutch more highly
- to estimate CURANT’s impact on their understanding of Dutch more highly
- to feel more confident to use Dutch
- to have gained a better understanding of Flemish/Belgian habits

This demonstrates that the project team’s positive assessments are correlated with refugees’ self-assessments (at least for these variables). In addition, while causality cannot be established, the statistical analysis demonstrates how many outcomes are clearly interlinked, which is reflected in the qualitative data (also see Chapter 4).

With regard to the comparison of buddies’ self-assessments and the project team’s assessment (see table below), we observe how **buddies whose communal living trajectory was regarded positively, reported more often²²:**

- To have tight relationships with their housemates²³
- To feel a strong sense of agency with regard to the project. In particular, they feel heard by the project team and were satisfied by the training they received before entering the project (by Vormingplus²⁴).
- To think having effectively supported their refugee housemate²⁵

²⁰ For statistical use, the assessment data was transformed into a 3-point Likert scale, distinguishing between 1) negative communal living assessment, 2) mixed communal living assessment, to 3) positive communal living assessment.

²¹ For the statistical background to this analysis, see Table 12 in Annex 2.

²² For the statistical background to this analysis, see Table 17 in Annex 2.

²³ Here, the term does not distinguish between the matched refugee, or other co-buddies/refugee living in the same house.

²⁴ We identify **strong** positive relationships **between** buddies positive communal living assessment and buddies positive perception of stakeholders taking their wishes in account ($r = .69^{***}$) and buddies being more satisfied with the training they received before entering in CURANT ($r = .79^{***}$).

²⁵ Regarding their perception of being effectively supportive towards their housemate, we identify a **strong** positive relationship with the buddies’ perception of being able to support their housemate ($r = .74^{***}$).

- To have acquired personal growth through co-housing, especially with regard to knowledge about other cultures and well-being.

Again, the high amount of correlations between project partners' assessment on the one hand, and buddies self-assessments on the other, indicates that buddies usually rely on similar indicators to assess their communal living experiences, such as the tightness of interpersonal relations with housemates and the level of support offered.

2.2. HOW DO HOUSEMATES ASSESS THEIR RELATIONSHIPS?

While the previous section provides a global and more external perspective on what constitutes “positive”, “mixed” or “negative” communal living, an important question is however how refugees and buddies assess their relationships. The findings we discuss here are based on qualitative and quantitative data collected with the refugees and buddies²⁶.

The buddies' final survey consists of general questions about their feelings towards their housemates, including for the 4-bedroom and larger accommodations not only their matched refugee but also other buddies and refugees. Remarkable here is that half of the buddies (56%) characterised their relationship with their other housemates as “superficial” (28% (n=8) slightly agree, 21% (n=6) agree, 7% (n=2) strongly agree), confirming the observation of the project team that in many cases, communal living was not paired with friendship. Below, we discuss more extensively two distinctive types of housemate relations: those of the matched refugee-buddy duos, on the one hand, and those with other housemates (in case different matched duos live together), on the other.

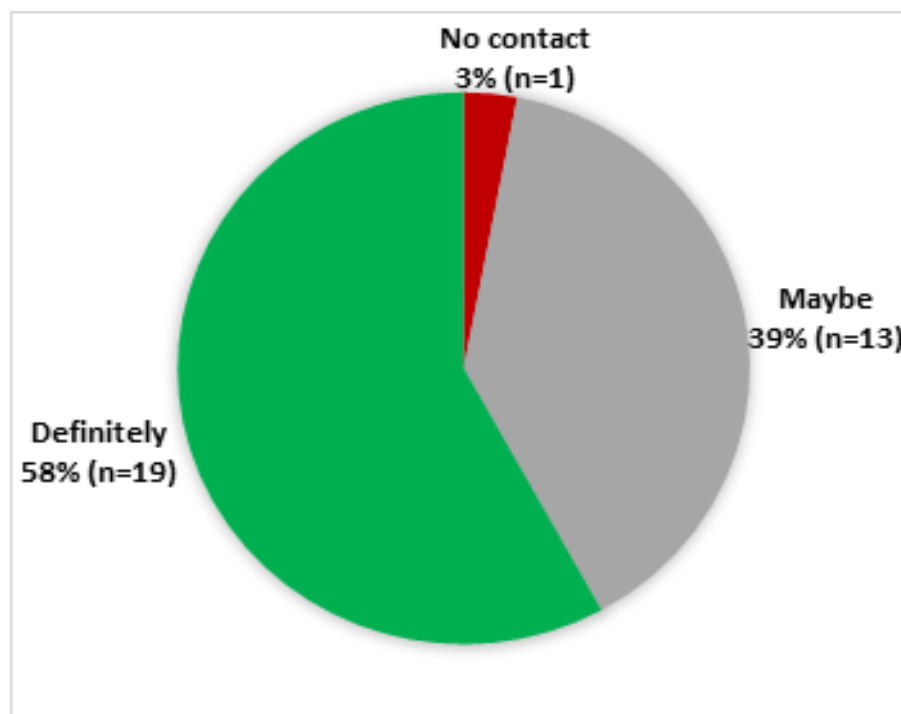
²⁶ Overall, the topic of buddy-refugee relationships was represented more strongly in the data collected with buddies compared to the data on the refugees, as for the latter group many other topics needed to be explored with regard to their customised trajectories and the case management.

2.2.1. Relations between matched refugee-buddy duos

An important question is how refugees and buddies assess their mutual relationship after a long period of living together. In final surveys and interviews with both groups of participants, questions were asked in order to assess the durability of this relationship.

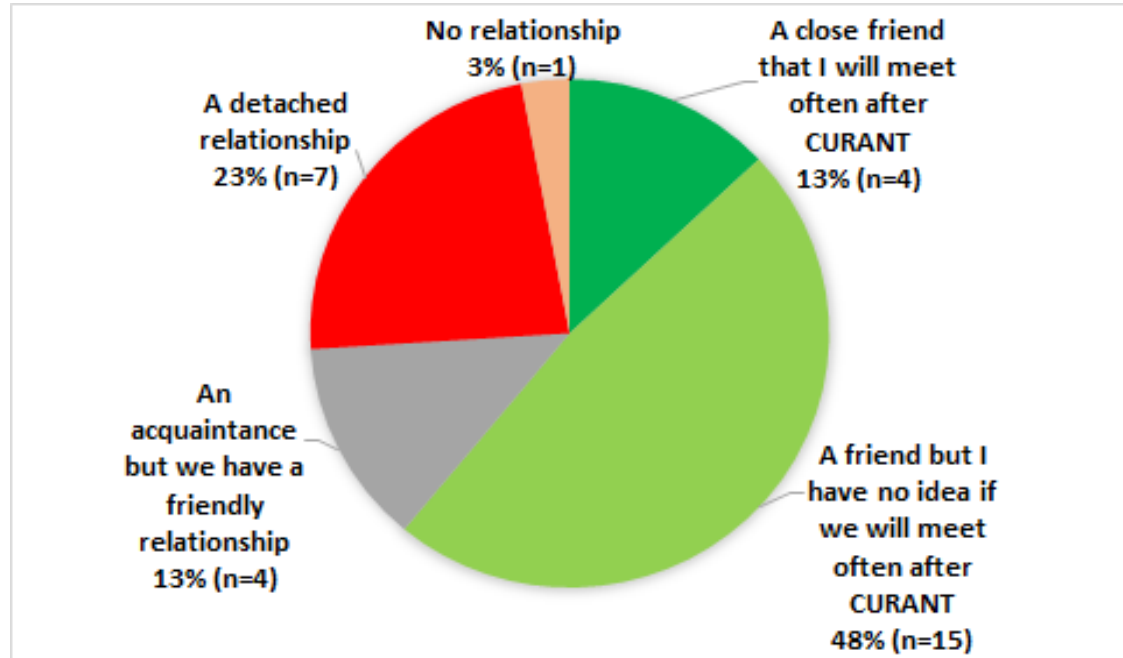
The pie charts below indicate the different attitudes of both refugees and buddies. While only a small group of buddies (13%) is convinced that they will meet often after CURANT, around half of the refugees think they will stay in touch “definitely”. However, from the duos where a buddy and/or refugee has already left CURANT, we know that “staying in touch” sometimes means little more than sending a WhatsApp from time to time or following one another on Facebook. It does not necessarily involve meeting another in person. There are definitely exceptions, though, where for instance participants who left the project continue to visit their former house in order to meet former housemate(s) still living there.

Figure 10: Refugees' expectations of the durability of their relationship with their matched buddy. Question: “After CURANT, will you stay in touch with your buddy?”



Source: Final survey of the refugees (n=29)

Figure 11: Buddies' perceptions of their relationship with their matched refugee. Question: "The refugee I was matched with is"



Source: Final survey of the buddies (n=29)

In addition, negative perceptions about their relationship with their matched housemate appear more pronounced on the side of the buddies: around one quarter says to have a "detached relationship" or "no relationship", reflecting situations where social contact was limited or problems prevailed. However, this is not reflected in the refugees' answers, as we can assume that "staying in touch maybe" is only answered if their relationship with their matched buddy is regarded as (at least to some extent) positive. Again, this may indicate how refugees' expectations about the social interaction with their housemate are lower.

However, **there are also cases where more tight relationships emerged between the refugees and their buddies.** In such cases, more often than as "friends" these housemates prefer to frame one another as similar to family members. Buddies, on average 6 years older than the refugees, often express how they feel more like a caring "big brother" or "big sister" to the refugee, who is then perceived as a "the little brother". The use of the notion of being "family" rather than "friends" or 'housemates' also implies the (older) buddy takes a

considerate, responsible attitude towards the (younger) refugee. This was, for instance, the case with one female buddy and her housemate:

“I really like him. And he’s someone, I see him as my little brother. I ask him very often “How is school going? How is football going? And learning?” Because I know he also finds school important. ... And when he said once that at school, it was still going well, I said to him “I am happy to hear this; I am actually proud that you manage to achieve this.” Yes, the mere fact that he combines all those things... Yes. But I have this tendency, I want to take care of him.” (Female buddy)

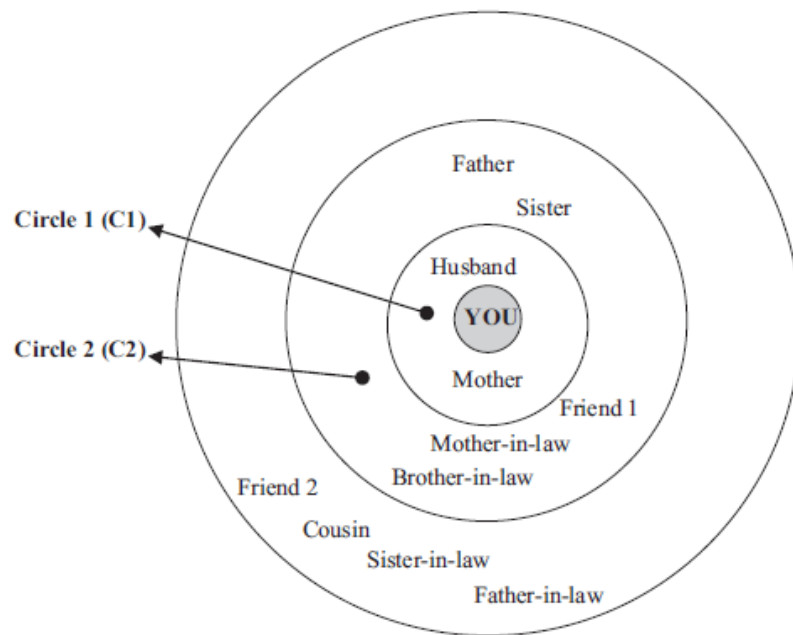
However, some buddies having good relationships with their refugee housemates point to the fact that in CURANT, their social interaction is embedded in a specific context and therefore think that “If this [context] ceases to exist, then it is a bit of a mystery what will be left”. Often, housemates’ expectations about future contact (after CURANT) depend on the frequency of common outdoor activity during CURANT, like through a hobby or other shared interests. In sum, while some may stay in touch, **for most refugees and buddies the communal living in CURANT rather seems to mark a temporary phase in their lives**, in which newly built relationships are of a volatile nature.

Another type of data that give us insight into buddy-refugee relations, are data based on the use of a convoy social support model²⁷ used with buddies and newcomers. Participants were asked to place in the inner circle (C1) those individuals who “are most close to them”²⁸; in the second circle (C2) “those that are not quite as close, but are still very important”; and in the third circle (C3) those that “are not quite as close, but still important”. The following figure offers a visual presentation of this model:

²⁷This instrument allows us to map different variables characterizing individual’s social networks. First, respondents were asked to think of the people they feel close to and that play an important role in their life. They were asked to write the names of these people down on stickers. Second, respondents were asked a number of questions about all names written down (e.g., age, sex, place of residence, ethnic background, communication language, frequency of contact), and were asked to add this information on the stickers. Finally, they were asked to position them in a circle diagram, containing 3 concentric circles. The centre of the circle diagram represented the respondents themselves. The first circle surrounding them represented those people respondents have the closest relationship to, and that play a very important role in their life. The second represented people that are still important but less compared to those in the first circle, etc. The result is a visual image of the respondents social network.

²⁸ It was emphasised that these people can live anywhere; in Belgium or elsewhere.

Figure 12: Example of a Convoy Model Diagram



Source: Gamarro, Canavarro, & Boivin (2011)

Fourteen buddies participated in this research method during interviews at the beginning and end of their CURANT trajectory. Of these 14, four did not include their (former) refugee housemate in their social network at the end of their CURANT trajectory. Only in one of these cases, this was directly linked to a negative experience, in the other cases, buddy described their relationship as friendly but distant. They felt more as acquaintances or neighbours, and did not expect to keep in touch after CURANT. In another case, the buddy did include other housemates (a buddy and another refugee) in his social network, but not his matched refugee. The other 10 buddies did include their matched newcomer in their social network diagram, however, in most cases; he was positioned at the outer circle of their network diagram. While all expressed hope to stay in touch, they often thought the contact would wither away. Overall, the comparison between buddies' social networks at the beginning and end of their CURANT participation shows how this is often subject to significant changes. This indicates how buddies are in a transitory phase in their own social lives, which might also be related to the buddies' shift from student to professional lives.

We also utilised this research methodology in interviews with the refugees. Of the 12 who participated in this exercise at the end of CURANT, around half of the newcomers (7 out of 12 newcomers) include their buddy in their social network. Three of these even positioned their buddy in the inner circle of the diagram, which indicates a very strong connection, as this is generally a place where only family members are located. While this shows that sometimes, tight relations have emerged, it is also remarkable that in a considerable number the buddy is not even mentioned.

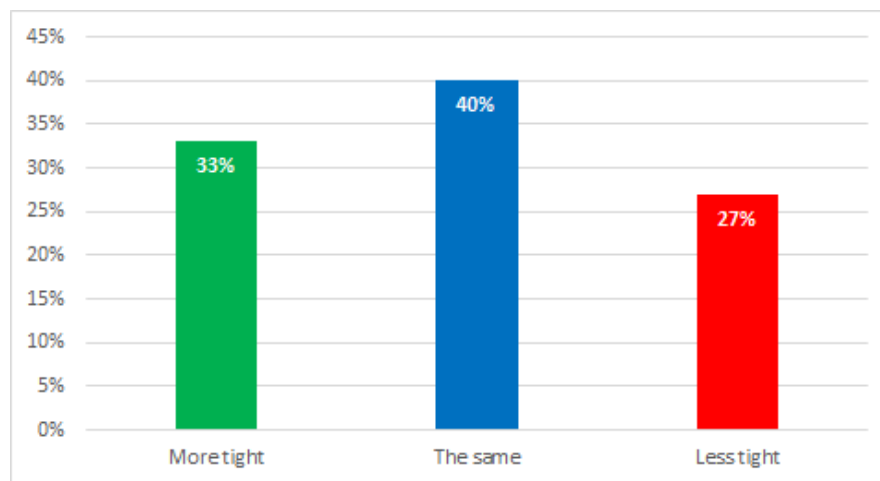
2.2.2. Relationships with other housemates

An important note for the 4-bedroom houses and larger accommodations in CURANT is that in such types of housing interpersonal relations transcend the relationships between matched duos since inhabitants (can) develop relations with the other buddies and refugees living in the same place. Indeed, the possibility to socialize with many people is considered as one of major benefits of these types of housing, and people in 4-bedroom houses and larger accommodations saw this as a major advantage of living there: that among your housemates, you can choose whom to socialize with.

The outcomes of the above-mentioned convoy model method illustrated that this also happened to some extent, because respondents in those accommodations tended to include their matched refugee *and* other housemates (co-buddies and other refugees) in their social networks. This highlights how - irrespective of who people are “matched” to by the project team - people built relationships with other housemates.

Interestingly, both the qualitative and quantitative research methods indicate that buddies perceive no significant difference between relationships with their matched refugee and other refugees living with them. For example, Figure 13 shows that a considerable group does not distinguish between their different refugee housemates (40%). For the other buddies, who indicate having more varied relationships, relationship(s) with other refugees are as frequently “more tight” and “less tight” compared to the relationship with their matched refugee.

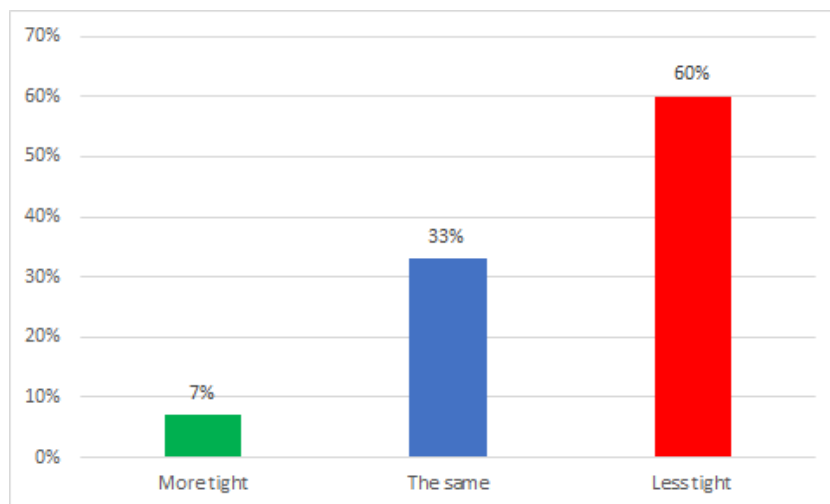
Figure 13: “The relationship with my matched refugee is [more tight - the same - less tight] compared to the relationship with other REFUGEES in my house”



This information is also confirmed by qualitative data: **within the communal living setting, it does not really matter anymore who is matched with which “buddy” or “refugee”, all people living under the same roof and interact irrespective of being matched or not.** For instance, buddies can (and do) also offer support to non-matched refugees. While we had no comparative question in the survey with refugees, the qualitative data suggest that refugees perceive this in the same way, as they, for instance, seek support from *all* their housemates (other refugees included); not just their matched buddy.

It is only in communication with the project team that the distinction between matched persons and other housemates is maintained. As a result, buddies report that they find these labels somewhat artificial. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all housemates are perceived similarly. As Figure 14 shows, **buddies tend to build stronger relationships with co-buddies than with refugees.** Sixty % mentioned their relationship with co-buddies living in the same house was tighter than the relationship with their matched refugee. The opposite case (i.e. a more tight relationship with the refugee) occurred almost 10 times less. This dynamic was obvious in the 12-bedroom student house, where buddies built strong relationships with co-buddies, and relationships with refugees were often a bit more distant or fluctuating in intensity.

Figure 14: “The relationship with my matched refugee is [more tight - the same - less tight] compared to the relationship with other BUDDIES in my house”



Source: Final survey with buddies (n=29)

The qualitative data underpins the observation that relationships between co-buddies were generally good. Only in one exceptional case, two buddies did not get along (among other reasons, due to their different life styles and diverging approaches to their “buddyhood”), leading to a separation.²⁹ When different refugees were living under the same roof, there was more variation in their relationship. In several cases, they got along well and offered one another companionship. Notwithstanding, there were also cases where tensions existed between them. In sum, these findings indicate that ideally, in matching procedures attention should be paid to all housemates (and not only to finding a good refugee-buddy match).

2.3. NATURE OF THE SOCIAL INTERACTION BETWEEN BUDDIES AND REFUGEES: INFLUENCING FACTORS

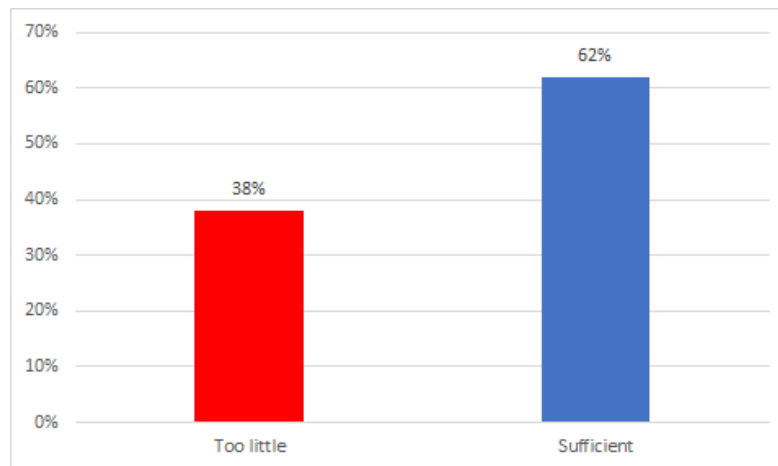
Throughout CURANT, a general observation was that some of the refugee-buddy duos are leading separate lives despite living together. Clearly, living under one roof is not a guarantee for in-depth or extensive social contact. As pointed out above, in many cases, the

²⁹ One buddy moved to another place, the other buddy stayed in the same place.

social interaction between refugees and buddies remains rather superficial and only a limited amount of buddy-refugee relationships seem to evolve into long-lasting friendships.

When buddies were asked to assess the frequency of contact with their housemates, we see that an important share thinks the social contact with their refugee housemates was too little; while others found there was sufficient contact. This is illustrated by Figure 15.

Figure 15: “During your participation in CURANT, how much contact did you have with the refugee you were matched with?”



Source: Final survey of the buddies (n=29)

An important question, therefore, is what factors explain variations in social contact between housemates. In the following sections, we present a number of factors that are of importance here. Clearly, none of these factors offers single explanations, and some factors are interrelated. **By addressing these factors, we demonstrate how the development of buddy-refugee relationships in CURANT is more than just a matter of “having a good chemistry” between two matched individuals.** While it is obvious that matching personalities and shared interests are important, we identify a number of more structural characteristics of the participants and the living environment important for understanding why frictions emerged in some cases, while remaining absent in others.

We start by addressing how a number of differences between buddies and refugees matter in the social dynamics between them. We look into differing motivations to enter the project; gender; communication; social lives; different daily schedules, lifestyles and eating

patterns; and differences in socio-economic position. The analysis illustrates how differences between housemates are often experienced as challenging, but are also leading to valuable learning experiences. Finally, we look into the characteristics of the housing.

2.3.1. Motivation to enter and stay into communal living

One important difference relates to the refugees' and buddies' different motivations to participate in CURANT. For buddies, their decision to participate in CURANT was dominated by altruist motives. While other more material motivations were also present (to find a decent, affordable flat), these were usually not decisive in their decision to participate in CURANT. However, our quantitative data revealed a significant negative relationship between the variable "ability to manage my finances" and the motivation to participate in CURANT because of the affordability of the CURANT housing³⁰. This indicates that for buddies who are less privileged (and thus having a lower score on "ability to manage my finances"), the affordability of CURANT housing is more important than for others. However, while the buddies' financial status seems to impact upon their motivations, it does not seem to affect the outcomes of the communal living: no significant relationship was found between buddies' financial status and the communal living assessment.

In addition, in contrast to the refugees, many buddies had previous experience with communal living, and if not, were familiar with it and open to it. Indeed, buddies' willingness to socialise with their housemates was an important admission criterion, if they did not express a clear interest in the basic principles of communal living; they were advised against entering the project.

Differently and as expected, for refugees, their primary motivation to enter CURANT was their pressing need for housing. Indeed, a central aim of the project was to provide decent housing to unaccompanied, young adult refugees, who had to leave residential care soon (upon turning 18) or who were living in low-quality housing or were homeless. This does not mean that other motives were absent, though; many refugees expressed a clear interest in

³⁰ $r = -.27, p < .05$. Source: Baseline Survey of the buddies (n=58).

making Belgian friends or learning the Dutch language. For instance, the two excerpts below, coming from interviews with refugees, demonstrate this:

I: Why did you participate in CURANT? Did you have specific expectations about cohousing with Belgians? R: I did not enter in CURANT because it was cheap or so... I entered in CURANT because I wanted to learn Dutch. (Afghan refugee)

I: Did you have the feeling it would be useful to cohabitate with Belgians or would you have preferred to live with other newcomers or other people that came from Iraq? R: No, to cohabitate with Belgians is better for me. I: To cohabitate with Belgians is better? R: Yes. I: Why? R: Erm, because I came to this country, I have to learn the language; I have to learn what people in Belgium do [...] I want to interact with them. Why? Because I came to Belgium. I: And do you feel that by cohabiting your Dutch language skills have improved? R: Yes, yes. (Iraqi refugee)

Next to this finding, it is interesting to assess whether newcomers' aspirations or expectations before entering in CURANT influence the outcomes of their communal living trajectories. Analysis of the quantitative data reveals three significant relationships between communal living assessment (see section 2.1) and the refugees' expectations as indicated on the Aspirations Scale for Refugees and Migrants (ASRM)³¹.

Based on our data about refugees' expectations³², we can argue that:

- Communal living trajectories are more successful when refugees have higher expectations about "meeting new people" and "starting a family".
- Communal living trajectories are less successful when refugees had high expectations to earn money for their family in the country of origin.

Important to note, we only reported hypotheses based on descriptive data. Further analyses should be conducted for causal relationships. We also investigated statistical relationships between buddies' motivations to enter CURANT³³ and communal living assessments, however, here no (statistically) significant relationships emerged. This suggests

³¹ Source: baseline survey with refugees (n=65)

³² For statistical background of the analysis, see Annex 2 "Data of the refugees"

³³ Source: baseline survey with buddies (n=58)

that it ultimately does not matter what was their (self-reported) motivation to participate in CURANT, as this does not seem to affect the “success” or “failure” of communal living.

While many refugees clearly value the opportunity CURANT offers in terms of for intercultural contact (especially, getting to know Belgians and to learn Dutch), **it is much less clear to what extent all candidate-refugees were genuinely interested in *living together with a local buddy in collective housing***. There are different signals raising doubt that this is the case.

First, the project team, which was in charge of the intake interviews and screening of candidate-refugees, signalled that a considerable share of candidates wanted to live alone and that for some this was a reason to *not* enter into CURANT. This sceptical or even negative view of some refugees on communal living is caused by at least two elements. On the one hand, is based on their unfamiliarity with the concept of communal living (non-family members living under one roof); on the other hand, it can be explained by negative experience with the group-based accommodation in refugee reception centres and local reception initiatives. Aware of this issue, however, after the first months of the implementation of CURANT, the project team introduced a more extensive intake procedure including more attention to informing them about the concept of communal living to the refugees (e.g., what to expect from their flatmates, how it differs from living with family).

Second, there was a lack of alternatives: if candidate-refugees declined the offer to participate in CURANT, there was no alternative support and housing programme without the communal living component. Therefore, it was an all-or-nothing decision. Under such circumstances, candidate-refugees’ decision to enter CURANT does not necessarily reflect a deliberate choice for communal living but more an escape route out of a precarious (housing) situation.

Third, related to the project goals, stakeholders feared that if they were ‘too picky’ and only allowed candidate-refugees enter who had an outspoken motivation for communal living, the project’s output goals (i.e. to have at least 75 refugee participants) would not be reached.

Fourth, it was clear how the applicant³⁴ of candidate-refugees sometimes convinced them to participate in CURANT as they thought this would be “good for them”.

As a result, while some candidates were looking forward to living in a warm home shared with housemates, quite some refugees entered CURANT who had only limited motivation to enter into communal living. This project team member’s quotation illustrates the various attitudes of the refugee participants with regard to communal living:

I think that, if you would ask someone such as [refugee A], if you would ask him to be honest, that he would say, “Yes, I would rather like to live alone”. While if you would ask the same to [refugee B] or [refugee C], you would see [in their reaction] a sort of appetite to ... They really enjoy having people around them, doing things together. (Project team member)

Consequently, due to differing motivations, the refugee participants and their housemates often had a different “starting position” with regard to communal living. This is important as different motivations are also related to different expectations about the mutual social interaction: if the motivation to enter into communal living is low, little is expected of it, and even minimal contact is perceived as “just fine” (or maybe even preferred above contact that is more extensive). In contrast, if one is eager to enter a communal living project to build new relationships, expectations about social contact with housemates are higher, and minimal social contact is seen as dissatisfactory or even a “failure” of the communal living project. **This divergence in mutual expectations could explain a number of the “negative” communal living trajectories.** Often, the pattern here was that buddies were having high expectations about the social contact with their housemate(s), and were disappointed when this did not materialise. For instance, when their housemates were often away from home or tended to “lock themselves up” in their rooms, buddies were dissatisfied. However, the inverse also happened, with buddies being often unavailable and their refugee housemates being dissatisfied about the lack of companionship or support received.

³⁴ Candidate-refugees did not apply themselves: their application was filed by an “applicant”, usually their guardian or a professional caregiver working at their previous shelter (LOI). During the first intake, the candidate-refugee was accompanied by this person.

The qualitative data seem to underpin that if buddies had very high expectations of the social contact with their housemate, this was followed more often by a negative communal living experience. Probably, buddies for whom socializing was an important motivation (and who were having high expectations about the nature of the relationship with their refugee housemate) were more often dissatisfied if social contact remained more limited. This contrasts with the refugees' positive relationship between communal living assessment and their aspiration to "meet new people"; for refugees the latter seemed a marker that they were suitable for or interested in communal living. For other types of motivations, there was no significant association with more positive or negative assessments of the communal living. It should be noted, that throughout CURANT the project team also shifted its expectations about the social contact between housemates. This shift in expectations affected the communication to candidate-buddies, as they warned too "idealistic" buddies to not have too high expectations.

A component of the expectations about social contact regards expectations concerning the social support offered to and asked for by the refugees. Quantitative data indicates that the perception of the buddy about being successful in providing support to his/her housemate has a significant and strong relationship with the communal living assessment by the project team³⁵. This finding suggest that when buddies are willing and able to provide appropriate support to their matched refugees, communal living experiences are more satisfactory for both groups. In addition, it indicates how the supportive nature of the buddy-refugee relationship was considered an important criterion by the project team in considering the overall outcome of communal living as "positive".

³⁵ Association between 'I believe that I was able to support my housemate' and communal living assessment ($r = .74^{***}$). Source: Communal living assessment by the stakeholders and Final Survey of the buddies ($n=29$) $^{***} P < .000$.

2.3.2. Gender-mixed communal living

Since most refugees participating in the project are male (95%) and half of the buddies are female (48%), most of the CURANTs accommodations are gender-mixed³⁶. A primary concern of the project team related to the participants' gender: was it a good idea to have female buddies cohabiting with male refugees? This concern became even more accentuated after a refugee participant (allegedly) attempted to assault his female buddy in the first months of the project. After this incident, the project team decided to continue with the practice of making gender-mixed matched duos, however, they adjusted the screening strategy and developed a more extensive screening procedure. During the intake procedure (intake interviews with a social worker and psychotherapist and group sessions led by an educational worker and psychotherapist), special attention was given to the refugees' viewpoints on gender relations. Refugee boys' positive attitude to gender equality and their willingness to cohabit with a female flatmate were an absolute requirement to be matched to a female buddy. In order to avoid problematic social dynamics, only refugees with an open attitude were matched with female (or gay) buddies, while refugees with more conservative beliefs were linked to male, heterosexual buddies. It should be noted that no other serious gender-related incidents occurred.

The question arises whether we seen differences in the outcomes of gender-mixed matched duos compared to male duos. The quantitative analyses indicate that there is no significant association between communal living assessments and the buddy's gender. This means that in the assessment of communal living trajectories as "successful" or not, it does not matter whether the buddy is male or female. Consequently, **there are no indications that the communal living of young male refugees with (local) women would be necessarily more difficult than with men.** However, while the gender of the buddy was no decisive factor in the "success" or "failure" of communal living trajectories, this does not mean that gender is unimportant. **Contrarily, the stories of female buddies and their housemates indicate that**

³⁶ In various of the 4-bed room houses, one female buddy was living with a male buddy and 2 male refugee, and in the larger accommodations too there was a mix of female and male buddies.

gender differences do matter in various – though sometimes subtle – ways in their daily experiences of communal living.

First, more than male buddies, female buddies report how they sometimes develop “motherly” feelings or behaviour towards their refugee housemate(s), or feel that they are perceived as such. For instance, when they tend to be the (only) person who wants the house to be clean and who complains about this, they feel that they are acting like a “mother” to their housemates. Often, female buddies see their own “motherly reflexes” as something negative and say they want to suppress them.

Second, in a few cases, refugees developed deeper feelings for their female flatmate. In response to or in anticipation of this, female buddy often delineates their buddy role more clearly towards their housemates, something male buddies do not (have to) do. For instance, various female buddies stress towards their housemates that they want to be “like a sister” to them as shown in the quotation below:

I: Which recommendations would you give to other buddies willing to enter such a project? R: Erm, try to be very clear about your relationship with the newcomer from the beginning. I was clear from the start; I had directly indicated my limits. My recommendation is to refer to a brother-sister relationship. Why? The boys came from an environment where family means everything. When you relate your relationship with them to a family relationship, they would be triggered less to think about it in other ways. You can like each other and have respect for one another on a certain level, but not in a romantic way. (Buddy living with an Iraqi refugee)

Some newcomers expressed discomfort with the love life of their female buddy. For instance, in one case a refugee thought his female buddy was having several bed partners, something that sparked his incomprehension and anger:

I: Did you ever had a conversation about religion in the house? R: No, we talk about... Yes! Sometimes the girls in Belgium sleep with two or three boys at once, that is not good. When S. [female buddy] asks ‘Why is this not good?’ I need to explain that to us it means as if you are acting like a prostitute. For instance, if a girl sleeps with three boys... / I: Do you mean ‘a threesome’? / R: Yes, when I see that S. [female buddy] sleeps with two boys, it makes us upset. It’s not good. (Syrian refugee)

The same young adult explains how he started acting in a 'protective' way towards his female buddy's friend while being on a party together.

R: And if we go to a party with a decent Belgian girl, you will see how different she will act. She will start drinking and act crazy. I don't recognise that girl anymore... I: You dislike how she acts on a party? R: For instance, D. [Belgian female buddy] is 'perfect'. But when we arrived at the party, she started drinking and hooking up with a boy. I took her aside and told her: 'leave the man, behave well. You can dance, but don't start drinking'. I don't like it when girls change partners all the time, it makes me jealous. / I: You become jealous because you are in love with her? / R: No, I don't like it when other guys act disrespectful towards my friends, touching them, you know... But if it is her boyfriend, then it is okay. Then I won't make a problem out of it. (Syrian refugee)

However, as the girls felt their independence was impaired by this behaviour, at a later stage, the intercultural mediator and psychotherapist (both part of the project team) provided intensive guidance to the boy about how to act around (Belgian) girls and how to express himself in an appropriate manner, leading into an improvement of his relationship with his buddy. In another case, a female buddy was in a relationship, but her housemate expressed uneasiness whenever he was around to visit and stay over. Here too, the psychotherapist was mobilized at a later stage to talk with the boy.

While in (non-intercultural) gender-mixed communal living arrangements these type of tensions could occur too, here the adolescent age of the refugees in combination with their background may contribute to this type of situations. With regard to their age, as stressed by the psychotherapist team members, the boys are going through a transitory development phase towards adulthood. Regarding their background, some refugees refer in these cases to the societies they grew up where gender norms (ideas about how men and women are expected to act and be) and gender relationships are different.³⁷ As a result, some of the boys find it difficult to interpret their female buddies' social behaviour and to decipher the dominant social codes with regard to appropriate/inappropriate male behaviour around

³⁷ Gender relations are "the specific subset of social relations uniting women and men as social groups in a particular community, including how power – and access to/control over resources – is distributed between the sexes." (European Institute for Gender Equality)
<https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1207>

women. Sometimes, this leads to misunderstandings on both sides: at one occasion a female buddy invited her refugee housemate over to her room to watch a film together because she found it too crowded in the living room. For her, it was an attempt to get to know her housemate better, which was more difficult when surrounded by others. However, this move was wrongly interpreted by the boy and seen as an invitation for “more”. As a result, she was surprised and displeased when he suddenly put his arm around her shoulder and tried to kiss her, while he also did not understand her angry reaction. Another female buddy mentions that some male refugee housemates declared their love to their female buddies, and that they (the girls) had to make clear “that we are not here to be your lover!” They also report that this misunderstanding was temporary, as their message was understood after a while (also due to the extra attention paid to this issue by project team members). It should be noted that in at least one case, the project team thought that the misinterpretation of a female buddy’s behaviour was (also) caused by the girl’s attitude, as she seemed to have peculiar expectations about the communal living and expressed this by sending ambiguous signals to her housemate about the nature of their relationship.

A third gender-related issue emerging out of the interview data is that housemates behave in a more self-conscious way in gender-mixed cohousing. One refugee boy from Somalia says he would act “more crazy” if he would be living with a man. Now that he lives with a girl, he acts more “quiet”, with “more respect”. Similarly, female buddies report how in the communal rooms, they adapt their behaviour:

I won't make out with my boyfriend on the couch or something (...) Maybe I wouldn't worry about it as much with R. [her fellow Belgian male housemate] as I do with them [the male refugee flatmates]. (...) Because I know how they think about certain things, like gender stuff, I notice how they see me different from the way they see R. So then, I'll also adapt myself a little bit, like I always wear a bathrobe. I will never walk around in my underwear in the hallway or anything. Because I might run into one of the boys [refugee flatmates]. (Female buddy)

Being more self-conscious about their behaviour and adapting, for instance, the way they dress is something both refugees and buddies mention to do “out of respect” for their flatmates. The fact that the girl, quoted above, explains that she would probably not be as

discrete in her behaviour if she were only living with her native Belgian male housemate suggests how she acts the way she does not because she is a girl cohabiting with boy, but because she is a girl cohabiting with boys of another cultural background who (according to her) thinks differently about “gender stuff”.

While diverging viewpoints and opinions about gender-relations sometimes lead to uncomfortable situations (e.g., when a buddy’s boyfriend spending the night causes clear discomfort with the refugee and the buddy, therefore, decides to limit the frequency of boyfriend visits, or in the example above where one refugee was putting his arm around his buddies shoulder) in other cases they are experienced more as a source of “interesting discussions” and learning opportunities about perceptions and attitudes regarding gender relations on both sides. Therefore, while both for female buddies as well as male refugees, gender-mixed communal living is sometimes challenging as it raised additional issues compared to non-gender-mixed communal living, we also see how it fertile environment for mutual learning about different views on gender relations and norms, especially with regard to Belgium and the refugees’ origin countries. However, in exchange and learning, effective communication is essential. In the next section, we discuss this aspect.

2.3.3. Communication

One of the main objectives behind the mixed communal living arrangement is to provide a setting that allows the young refugees to improve their knowledge of the local language (Dutch) and the language used by societal institutions. In accordance with the project aims, the language of communication between the refugees and their local flatmates is primarily Dutch. Indeed, as we will discuss further in this report (see 4.1), refugees’ Dutch language proficiency seems to be boosted by the social contact with his/her buddy.

While the difference in Dutch language proficiency between refugees and their buddies opens up opportunities for language learning, the downside is that communication among housemates does not always run smoothly. This affects the social relations between housemates in various ways.

First, buddies frequently mention how communication problems complicate a fundamental aspect of communal living: shared household responsibilities. Sometimes, necessary basic information about household machines (e.g. how to use the washing machine), cleaning (e.g. what products to use), kitchen utensils (e.g. not to use sharp cutlery in a Teflon pan) is not understood by the refugees, leading to buddies' frustration. This buddy expresses his frustration about it:

*Especially language is important. This month, suddenly all our cupboards were empty and all our pots and pans were gone. Nobody knew where these were gone, what could we do about it? However, in my previous (student) house, this kind of things happened too. I: And when this happened, when all pots and pans disappeared, or for any other moments where the language constituted a difficulty, did you find ways or strategies of dealing with this? R: No. And that's exactly the problem, in fact. **If we talk about this, it is our frustration that we have not found a way to solve this kind of problems, these small issues like, the washing machine, they always use way too much washing powder, which destroys the machine.** We have told this many times now, that you can't do this, but still, it happens and we cannot find a solution for it – like "how can we make them understand". And these are frustrations because we still haven't found a way to overcome this language barrier, or whatever barrier, that causes this problem. (buddy in student house, emphasis added)*

There are several examples of buddies who dropped out of CURANT because of growing frustrations about this type of problems, and more generally, an inability to find ways to communicate effectively. However, it is clear in those cases that "language differences" are never the sole explanation for a negative communal living situation, rather it accumulates with other issues (such as too high expectations on the side of the buddy).

Second, due to language and cultural barriers, nuances in messages sometimes get lost: buddies report how certain messages are often taken too literally. This illustrates how communication remains challenging even if their refugee housemates are more proficient in Dutch.

Like, if you mention "can you bring not too many friends home" that all of a sudden, they are afraid to bring any of their friends. And, this happens often, that you simply do not understand one another, often with regard to household stuff, which is very difficult to explain. Also, because, when I want to say something to for example [one of the buddy's refugee housemates], I

feel that he feels being attacked very quickly. While I just wanted to mention something, I did not have the intention to make him feel bad, but this kind of communication is very often misunderstood. And I think that the inverse is this case too: that they [the refugees] sometimes want to share something, just tell us something, and that we understand it [wrongly] as a request for help. That we think “ah, we need to help them” but that they just want to tell something. I: Do you have an inclination to do this as well? R: yes, I do, I’m like “Oh, do I need to arrange something for him? No? But why... Oh he just wants to tell me something. (buddy in student house)

Third, particularly for conversations concerning personal matters, besides other factors (such as housemates’ general social skills, cultural and gender differences and psychological vulnerability) also language is experienced as a barrier. As a result, in most houses more in-depth conversations between buddies and refugees remain relatively rare. This, in turn, affects the creation of a more tight relationship.

2.3.4. *Everyday social life in an intercultural communal residency*

This section reflects on social dynamics within the house more extensively, by discussing some of the central social functions of the communal housing in CURANT. Communal spaces are a potential place of encounter for the inhabitants, where they for instance can cook and eat together in the communal kitchen or can watch television together. In addition, the communal and private spaces in the CURANT houses also constitute meeting points for housemates’ broader social networks. While the practice of cooking and eating together happened less frequent than expected, the practice of friends visiting even became a topic of discussion and negotiation in CURANT. A final element marking the everyday relations between housemates in CURANT regard the individual daily schedules and routines of housemates.

A) Visiting practices

An important implication of the concept of communal living is that you are not only sharing a house with one or more housemates, but that you also affected directly by your housemates’ social lives. In CURANT, it became clear how diverging views on the social

function of the house (as a meeting spot for one's social network) may lead to tension between housemates but also offers opportunities.

While it is difficult to generalise, we observed that some of the refugees received many (co-ethnic and peer-group) visitors. Sometimes they stayed over for longer periods (e.g., two weeks or longer). This often resulted in tensions with their buddies who generally attach more value to their private space compared to the refugees, who are valuing the wishes of their peer group more. One refugee explains why friends are always welcome to him:

I: How often are you bringing friends over? R: Hmm, maybe once a month or so. I: And do you introduce them to W. (new female buddy) or R. (former male buddy)? R: No, because in the Afghan culture, it is not always the case that we need to make an appointment or so, or 'inviting people over'. We only say, "I will come to you", that's it. I: You want to be an 'open door' for your friends? R: I cannot say 'no' to them. [laughs] I: Do you think it's different here in Belgium? R: Very different. Here in Belgium you first have to invite people over and see when they have time. I: What do you prefer? R: Hmm, I don't know. I: You don't mind people will invade your house, even when you are busy? R: No, no. I: Why? R: Because they are friends." (Afghan refugee)

The desire to be able to invite many friends seems to contradict with the earlier finding that many refugees prefer living alone over communal living. However, "living alone" is mainly seen as attractive because it implies that you do not have to take into account other housemates' desires. The freedom to receive more visitors was one of the reasons why some refugees aspired to live independently (rather than in communal living) as shown in the quotation below:

R: To live alone is better. I: Why? R: Because then you can do what you want. I: Did you feel limited in what you could do here in CURANT? R: Yes. I: What do you mean? R: Chances are that when I invite friends over, my buddy will tell me that she doesn't like that. I always need to keep that in mind. I: Would you prefer to cohabitate with Afghan people? R: Not cohabiting, but rather receive more visitors. (Afghan refugee)

The project team and buddies also associated these "visiting practices" to the more collectivist attitude of the refugees. However, the precarious living situations of many refugees' peers offer an additional explanation for the frequency and amount of friends

staying over. Having lived in precarious conditions themselves, refugees might want to offer shelter to their friends, even if only for short periods or just a few nights. In addition, eating/partying at home may be the result of a lack of alternatives (as they cannot afford to go to a restaurant/bar or are 'unwelcome' there).

As many buddies - and stakeholders too - were unprepared for these visits, it became an important topic of discussion among buddies and the project team. What amount/frequency of visits is "acceptable" (for the housemates)? And is it acceptable that these (one or multiple) visitors stay over for a longer period, and if so, for how long? Where to draw the line? In addition, what behaviour is expected of visitors? While these are primarily normative questions, and therefore not subject to our investigation, we want to draw attention to **how the presence of visitors affects the social dynamics between housemates**.

In some cases, the presence of unexpected visitors bothered the buddies deeply, for instance, because the presence of many strangers in their house affected their sense of 'home' negatively. For the following buddy, it was one of the main reasons leading to his decision to drop out of CURANT.

When I came back from holiday, I came home and thought "this does not feel like homecoming". The fact that you're coming from a foreign location, you are finally back home and then you find strangers in your house... You don't even have the time to put away your suitcase and to take a seat, for a minute. To be at ease. It was dirty everywhere. It was simply not... it didn't really feel like a home. (buddy in a four-bedroom house)

However, it should be noted that refugees sometimes also felt uneasy around their buddies' visitors, for instance when their partners visited (see above, 2.3.2) or when they failed to understand and participate in buddies' friend groups' Dutch conversations.

While the "visitor issue" emerged in all types of housing, in the larger accommodations (12-bedroom student house and the cohousing site with 16 2-bedroom units) an additional problem was that if visitors were around, it was also not clear who invited them, thus leading to the impressions that often "strangers" were hanging around or even claiming the communal space:

[Downstairs] there are always strangers. People you don't know, or never saw before. They are simply sitting there or sleeping or cooking - while you don't even know them. They don't present themselves. (buddy in student house)

An important element that seems to bother other housemates in having strangers around at home is not their mere presence but their attitude. If visitors do not present themselves, use communal facilities (e.g., the TV in the living room, the communal bathroom) without asking, or use the house's facilities without their acquaintance being around, some other housemates consider this as inappropriate or even rude. A language barrier (when the visitors spoke little or no Dutch, or did not make an effort to do so) often contributes to a negative view of these visitors. Not surprisingly, if frustrations grow this affects the relationship between housemates negatively.

Buddies also report how they find it important that their housemates inform them (in advance) when visitors are staying for the night, or if a large group is visiting. If this happened unannounced, buddies found it more disturbing than if it was announced. However, this contradicts with refugees' often more spontaneous way of interacting with friends, as illustrated by the first quotation of this section in which the respondent explains his 'open door'-policy towards his friends. It is important to be aware of the fact that an intercultural cohabiting setting can suppress refugees' hospitality values. Unannounced visits can cause conflict or stress as it leaves the refugee housemate with a stressful dilemma: accepting their friends' unannounced visits (which matches his personal and/or cultural values) or rejecting them to respect his housemate's wishes.

However, buddies report that, while they found visits often uneasy at first, their viewpoint shifted across time, as they got used to their housemate's social life and "strangers" become familiar faces after a while. Buddies also report important advantages of seeing their housemate's friends. For instance, buddies appreciate how they got to know so many of their housemate's friends because when they walk around in the neighbourhood they are suddenly greeted by many other newcomers. In addition, it is also an opportunity to see their own refugee housemate in a different "role", thus helping buddies to get to know their housemate

better. Finally, they enjoy socialising with co-ethnic friends of their housemate because it offers them an opportunity to hear different stories and to learn more.

*“I see it as enriching, that I got to know much more people than just C. & L. [my refugee housemates]. **It is, in fact, nice that their social life happens in our house in the first place.** It is something I missed a bit with my fellow buddy. He never brought home any of his friends; his social life was situated outside the house. As a result, you are automatically excluded from his social life. For them [the refugees] it was different: **our house was simply the place to be, for everyone [of their friends].** As a result, when I walk on the street they all greet me by my name. That’s super nice, I think. (buddy in a four-bedroom house, emphasis added)*

However, in the larger arrangements, these positive effects were more limited – which can be explained by the larger number of inhabitants: if you have 12 or more housemates, it is more difficult to get to know all other inhabitants’ social networks. In addition, the inhabitant turnover (new housemates moving in or out) was higher, further adding to this problem.

B) Cooking and eating together

A core activity in most communal living projects is cooking and eating together. Also in intercultural activities, preparing and sharing food together are approved strategies to bring people together. **Remarkably, in the CURANT houses, cooking and eating together was rather rare.** Only in few houses, housemates took turns in cooking: once a week or every month they shared a meal. In the majority of houses, housemates mostly ate at different moments or cooked and ate separately at the same moment. In many houses there had been plans and attempts to cook and eat together, but these plans were often not realised, or only once.

One important explanation given by buddies was that it was very difficult to plan social activities with their refugee housemate(s) because refugees’ social life is not based on “planning ahead” - while buddies found it important to fix such activity in beforehand. A result

was that after a few attempts, housemates usually gave up their cooking plans. In addition, housemates appeared to be eating at different moments, pointing at different daily schedules (see section C below). However, refugees also mention Belgians' (more) individualised lifestyles as a reason why they are not eating together often:

*I: Do you think Belgians are more selfish? R: Yes, definitely. I: Can you give an example? R: Erm yes, eating, definitely. **When Belgians are about to have dinner, they will never say, "Do you want to join for dinner?" That is very different in our culture, we would always invite people to join us.** I: Can you give other examples? / R: Yes, there are different examples. For instance, we believe that real friends won't matter who is buying what. When we are out to have dinner and the bill arrives, everyone wants to pay. We will refuse that a person wants to pay for his own meal. That is impossible for us. In our culture, there will always be one person that pays for everyone. And everyone would say: 'I pay', 'No, I pay'. We never split such bills. Money is not that important to us. (Afghan refugee, bold emphasis added).*

In addition to the above explanations, other reasons also explain the absence of this shared activity. For instance, housemates usually have different religious beliefs (different from most buddies, many refugees are (to a more or lesser extent) practising Muslims, eating halal and not consuming alcohol) and are accustomed to different cuisines. Consequently, "typical" Belgian food may not necessarily be in line with the refugees' diet. Buddies, on the other hand, sometimes reported to not really like the cuisines of their housemates. Finally, some refugees and buddies seemed to have limited cooking skills (yet), which may be linked to their age.

C) Daily schedules

A general factor affecting the frequency and nature of social interaction between housemates regards the extent to which housemates' daily schedules are similar or different. Among buddies, there is a wide variation in their time spent at home. Usually, students are more often at home than those buddies who are working. However, there are several exceptions – such as buddies who work part-time, self-employed people working at home and those in-between jobs. Among refugees too, there is variation: while some are in full-time educational tracks or occupations (e.g., a job internship or training), others have a less fixed

scheme, especially in their first months in CURANT (e.g., because their school started only later).

When buddy and refugee's day schedules differ strongly, this is not conducive to the development of a close bond. On a general level, this is because when daily schedules are different, the chance to meet spontaneously decreases, which in turn lowers the chance that a closer relationship will develop. In addition, if housemates' daily schedules are very different, frustrations may grow because mutual expectations about the communal living are not met.

Some refugees remark or complain that their buddy housemates are actually often away from home, and cannot offer them the support (e.g. companionship, informational support) they need because they are not around often. Similarly, when buddies are not home very often, they sometimes express a sense of guilt about their inability to offer support and companionship to their refugee housemates. In turn, buddies also express dissatisfaction when their refugee housemate is not around often, because they feel this does not allow them to realise a central purpose of communal living: to offer support to their refugee housemates. Various refugees with a full-time education or job also mention how they are exhausted when coming home, and that this limits social interaction with their housemate(s) because they lack the energy to socialise, especially in Dutch.

In contrast, some buddies were home often. These usually saw this as an important element in developing a more in-depth relationship with their housemates. They felt that being home made them more approachable to their housemates. In addition, it allowed them to get to know their housemates better and to offer more support. Indeed, buddies stressed how certain flexibility is needed to do things together with their refugee housemates; joint activities usually take place spontaneously when both housemates have time; and not because these were planned.

On a general level, we can conclude that opportunities for relationship building diminish when housemates are having a busy schedule – for instance, because of a demanding full-time job, full-time education, a demanding hobby, language and educational programmes they are attending - when they are (finally) home, they often feel too exhausted to interact

and spend time together which influences the frequency and depth of interactions. This is not to say that having little time for one another is *necessarily* perceived as problematic, though, as there are several cases where a more distant, loose relationship was considered as “fine” by all housemates. Usually, this was the case if refugees were quite self-reliant, and buddies were occupied by their own activities.

2.3.5 Differences in the socio-economic situation

A significant gap between refugees and (most) buddies regards their financial situation: while all refugees are living on a welfare allowance, most buddies are employed. Even if buddies’ income is rather low (e.g. in the case of students) many can rely on a broader network that can help them out in case they have material or financial needs. In addition, many refugees either are in the midst of a family reunification procedure (which is expensive) or are structurally supporting family members living in their origin countries by sending remittances. Differently, buddies usually do not have any family responsibilities; they “only” have to take care of themselves. The financial inequality and difference in terms of responsibilities have several implications for the communal living in the CURANT houses.

While none of the buddies offers money to their housemates (something which is also strongly advised against by the project team), the refugees receive do receive various forms of material or tangible support (see also 4.1). Frequently, buddies support their housemates through small gestures, such as driving them somewhere by car (which is something none of the refugees has or can afford), helping them to buy something online (for which sometimes a credit card is needed, something the refugees do not have), sharing certain household items (kitchen utensils, a desktop computer, a washing machine...) or lending or donating spare furniture, a mattress and bed-linen, or a bike to the refugee. This indicates how financial inequality between buddies and refugees impact upon the type of support given by buddies.

The following quote of one buddy shows however how giving material support is loaded. While appreciated by refugee housemates, giving and taking material support also evokes an uneasiness on both sides since it highlights their differing (financial and social) positions:

When he [my refugee housemate] passed his exam for a very difficult course, I was really like “Okay, now you deserve a present. Because if I would graduate, I would also receive a gift, and you don’t have anyone who can give you something, so I would love to do so. But do you allow me to do this, or not? Because this always a difficult issue [whether he will accept this gesture] I: And what did you do? R: Wel, I asked him the day before yesterday, and I also wanted to know what he would like to have. (...) After some inquiry, it was decided that he wanted shoes. (...) I have not decided yet whether I will buy a voucher, which allows him to buy shoes himself. Or that we would go shopping together, but the moment that I would pay at the counter, would be too difficult for him. So I think that I will rather buy a voucher. I also started studying again, and he told me “I also want to do this for you, when are you graduating? So I told him “in 5 years only, so no need to hurry’ (buddy in a four-bedroom house)

The interiors of the CURANT houses also reflect to some extent this financial inequality. Because refugees have no budget to spend on decoration, besides the basic furniture provided by CURANT, almost all furniture, household machines, kitchen utensils and decoration belongs to the buddies. The refugees usually bring only a limited amount of personal belongings, and often, they store most of their items in their own private room (their bedroom). However, beside financial reasons, refugees’ insecure future also diminishes their initiative to decorate the house. Resultantly, communal spaces are filled with the personal belongings of buddies. This affects the social dynamics between housemates, because the refugees are using the buddies’ items (e.g., kitchen utensils, pots and pans), while the inverse only happens rarely. Indeed, **the possibility to share stuff is one of the more typical advantages of communal living and happen in all communal living communities. However, here it is more pronounced and unidirectional because of the sharp inequalities in financial and material resources between refugees and (most of) the buddies.** While is it positive that refugees have access to these resources, it is also a double-edged sword, as it also means that they are in a dependent position vis-à-vis their housemates, implying they have to owe certain gratitude to the buddy. It also means that they have to care of their housemate’s item, and if they fail to do so, buddies are displeased. A common source of irritation among buddies concerns the inappropriate use by refugees of the buddies’ personal belongings - the most common complaint being that their refugee housemates are damaging the non-stick pan because they were stirring in it with a fork. In some cases, this type of frustrations put a strain on the buddy-refugee relationship,

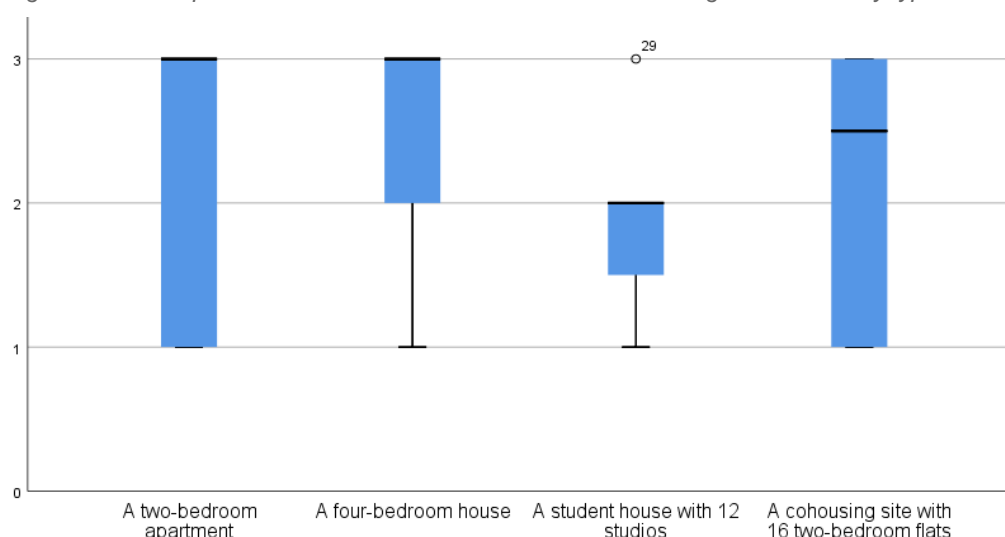
because it was interpreted by the buddies as “a lack of respect” for their personal belongings. In order cases, it was not perceived as such, but more as the result of the inability to find proper ways to communicate (see 2.3.3). This also demonstrates how seemingly trivial problems often have a deeper impact on interpersonal relations in communal living.

2.3.6. Different communal living arrangements

As in CURANT there are four different types of housing configurations, an important question is how the number of inhabitants affects the experience of communal living. Are refugee-buddy duos more “successful” if they live in a two-bedroom apartment, four-bedroom house, a student house (with 12 bedrooms) or on a larger cohousing site (with 16 two-bedroom apartments)?

The boxplots in Figure 16 show central tendencies and variance within our data on the communal living assessment by types of residences in CURANT. The assessment score is represented on a 3-point Likert scale (1= negative assessment, 2= mixed assessment, 3= positive assessment). It is important to note here that half of all matched duos lived in the two-bedroom apartments (n=40). This is much more than the duos that had lived in four-bedroom houses (n=17), duos that have lived in the student house (n=7), and duos that lived in the cohousing site with 16 two-bedroom flats (n=10).

Figure 16: Visual presentation of the distribution of communal living assessment by types of residence



Source: Communal living assessment by the stakeholders on a 3-point Likert Scale (negative-mixed-positive) and type of residence codes of 74 refugees

Note 1: Explanation on how to interpret box plots can be found in annex 1 of this report.

Note 2: A cross tabulation with frequencies can be found in annex 2 of this report.

First, the boxplots show how the median score of communal living assessment lies higher in smaller accommodations (an apartment with one housemate or a house with three housemates) compared to larger residences (a student house with 12 studios and a cohousing site with 16 two-bedroom flats). This suggests that residences inhabited by two and four housemates more often lead to successful communal living than the larger accommodations in CURANT.³⁸ This observation should be nuanced somewhat, as BREM16 (the cohousing site with 16 two-bedroom flats) opened at a rather late stage in the project schedule (November 2018), implying that communal living there was in an early stage at the time of assessment³⁹. However, this does not hold truth for Klapdorp (the student house with 12 studios), where the median is even much lower. Moreover, if the project team⁴⁰ were asked which of the “positive” trajectories they considered as “very positive/outstanding”, almost all of these were located in smaller accommodations (12 in two-bedroom apartments, and 8 in or four-bedroom

³⁸ As categorical groups of the variable “types of residence” are too small (respondents < 15), we cannot report on a *statistical* effect size, though.

³⁹ In addition, it should be noted that duos lived there together for a relatively limited period of time (at the time of assessment between 3 and 4 months), and that considering this, the rate is actually quite high yet (since in other places, problems only emerged after a few months or at a later point).

⁴⁰ By either the team of case managers of OCMW, by the Vormingplus team or by both. In the boxplots, these are included in the broader category “positive”

houses, and only 1 in one of the larger arrangements BREM16 (1)). This finding also corresponds with results from the qualitative data and the project team's observation that particular challenges arise in larger communal housing forms.

Second, in 2-bedroom apartments, variation in assessment scores is high⁴¹, indicating that 2-bedroom apartments 'produce' positive as well as negative trajectories. In contrast, in 4-bedroom houses, the share of negatively assessed communal living situations is lower than in 2-bedroom apartments.

The above findings indicate that **the scale of the communal living arrangement (in terms of the number of inhabitants) matters**, and should be considered a factor of importance to understand the outcomes of communal living. Our qualitative research, especially the interviews with inhabitants of all types of living arrangements, and the focus group interviews with project partners underpin this finding. More in particular, the above observations also lead to the conclusion that **4-bedrooms houses seem most appropriate for the supportive, intercultural communal living concept CURANT wishes to promote**. Not only do they lead to positive outcomes (reflected in a relatively high rate of "positive" communal living trajectories in 4-bedroom houses), in addition, their set-up also seems to mitigate some of the challenges that communal living pose (reflected in a relatively low rate of "negative" trajectories).

To grasp better the above results, Table 1 gives an overview of the major characteristics of each form of communal living relevant to social interaction. The overview is based on the CURANT participants' and the project team's experiences and reflections with regard to the different forms of communal living. It highlights the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of living. For instance, a common complaint in 2-bedroom apartments was "there is nowhere to hide" and "no one else to talk to" when problems emerge, while in large accommodations effective social control is impossible, paving the way to mutual distrust or discussions when e.g. something is lost or broken in the communal space. As one buddy living in the student house says:

⁴¹In the assessment scores in BREM16, variation is also high, however this is probably mainly related to the overall low number of trajectories there.

*I would find it better to live in a house or an apartment because there would be fewer inhabitants. **Because when you live with many people, this means that a lot of discussions and problems can arise.** So better to live with few people but definitely not alone. With “few” I mean two up to five or six, that would be ok for me. Not with 12 like here, that’s misery. (buddy in a student house)*

In addition, in the 12-bedroom student house people found it more difficult to build a deeper relationship with their housemate because it was often “too crowded for a personal talk”. On the positive side, people report to enjoy the socially more vibrant atmosphere in large accommodations - “there is always someone to chat with” - and appreciate the social transparency of the 2-bedroom apartment (with only one person to take into account). In larger accommodations, buddies also appreciate the presence and support of other buddies. For refugees, an advantage is there that there is always someone around to offer support, and that support by co-ethnics is more easily accessible. As is clear from the table below, where characteristics of all types of accommodations are compared more systematically, **4-bedroom houses often combine “the best of two worlds”⁴².**

⁴² An alternative explanation for the results would be that instead of the housing form itself, selectivity in the allocation of inhabitants to different types of housing (i.e. buddies and refugees are not allocated randomly to the 4 different types of locations) explains differential outcomes. Indeed, buddies and refugees were asked about their preference for a particular type of living. However, overall this selectivity effect seems rather limited, as due to practical constraints initial preferences were often not decisive (e.g. most refugees preferred small accommodations, but if these were not available they ended up in larger accommodations). In some cases, the project team considered particular types of housing as more appropriate for particular reasons. For instance, psychologically vulnerable refugees were usually not moved into larger accommodations because of their need for a calm environment. However, again, due to practical constraints, the project team also had to depart from this principle.

Table 1: Comparison of advantages and disadvantages related to types of communal living residencies

	Living per 2 (=1 housemate)	Living per 4 (=3 housemates)	Larger accommodations (student house, cohousing site)
Possibility to be involved in other inhabitants' social lives (e.g. familiarising with their networks, developing a close relationship)	Easy	Fairly easy	More difficult
Social control of other housemates (e.g. of commitment to household responsibilities)	Easy	Fairly easy	Difficult
Support by other housemate(s) in case of an unsatisfying relationship with the matched housemate	Not available	Available	Available
Companionship by another housemate (s) in case of an unsatisfying relationship with the matched housemate	Not available	Available	Available
Transparency of the social environment	High	Medium	Low
Communication with all inhabitants	Relatively easy	More complicated	Complicated

2.3.7. Housing design

In CURANT, participants were spread around over a total of 34 different locations, each with their distinctive physical characteristics, such as the design of the interior space, size and other features (e.g. presence of outdoor space and specific facilities). An important question

is to what extent these differences matter: do they have an impact on the social dynamics within the house? Are some types of accommodation found to be more “appropriate” for communal living than other types? **We observe that (the lack of) certain design features with regard to the communal space affect buddy-refugee relations, as they discourage/encourage social interaction or even increase/decrease the probability that problems will occur⁴³.** Below, we mention some recurring elements that are perceived as barriers to (positive) social interaction among housemates.

A) Size of the communal space

For a number of 2-bedroom apartments, and the 2-bedroom units at the cohousing site BREM16, we would argue that these are actually too small for the concept of communal living, a finding also confirmed by project partners. A limited communal living space implies that the risk of bothering one another is high (e.g., when watching TV, when inviting visitors), which requires a higher level of tolerance and flexibility on both sides. Especially in case of problems (e.g., an argument between the housemates), the risk is higher that things get out of hand because “there is nowhere to hide”. In contrast, in larger 2-bedroom apartments it is easier to respect one another's privacy.

In the student house Klapdorp, where 12 housemates live together and share a common living room, kitchen and outdoor space, the size of the communal space is an issue too: its size is disproportionately small for the number of inhabitants. In addition, communal furniture and facilities (e.g., chairs, tables, sofa, and kitchen equipment) were insufficient to accommodate the group of inhabitants. It is therefore impossible to all eat together, or to watch TV together. Due to the limited space, residents report how the communal area often feels too crowded, which incites them to withdraw in their private rooms. In addition, they report that while it is nice to have always someone to talk to, it is also difficult to have conversations that are more private since you are rarely alone in the communal area with two people.

⁴³ This finding is mainly based on house visits to the places where the informants of the qualitative research lived, which were 16 different locations (including Klapdorp and BREM16). In addition, in interviews with project partners other locations were described.

B) Position of the communal space within the house

Remarkably, in one of the 4-bedroom houses, a complaint was that the house was “too big”. However, this does not really refer to the size of the house; rather, it refers to the house’s design consisting of separate compartments and levels. In this house (as in most of the 4-bedroom houses), the entrance corridor gives direct access to the inhabitants’ private bedrooms upstairs via the stairs. The communal rooms are separate rooms located on a different level. Only if you enter the communal room, you can see if there is someone else. In addition, you do not pass the communal rooms “by chance”; you need to enter them deliberately. By buddies, this has been mentioned recurrently as something negative, because in such a house, some people tend to go upstairs immediately when coming home, rather than passing by the communal room (which offers a chance for spontaneous social interaction). Especially in the first months, entering the communal room seemed to be a threshold for some of the refugees. In addition, in such houses, people also often did not know who was home or not, which is not conducive for a sense of mutual involvement.

A similar problem was mentioned in the larger accommodations (student house Klapdorp and cohousing site BREM16). The communal room in Klapdorp is a separate room downstairs, which can be circumvented when entering/leaving the house. In addition, in order to meet other inhabitants, one has to do a more deliberate effort to go and sit in the communal room, an effort that constitutes a threshold. However, if the communal room was empty most of the times, inhabitants seeking contact were less inclined to do this effort and tended to withdraw in their own rooms or units. In BREM16, communal rooms are separate from the private units, and can only be accessed via a door outside. In addition, the different communal rooms there are not clustered. Their physical characteristics all increase the threshold for inhabitants to use communal areas.

C) Unattractive communal space

Another important element regards the attractiveness of the communal rooms and especially the living room: are these comfortable, attractive, easily accessible spaces that

invite inhabitants to hang around there? In contrast, does it concern unattractive spaces that are mainly avoided, and only used when really needed?

As the decoration of the communal space is to some extent influenced by housemates' own behaviour (e.g., to what extent they decorate and clean the communal space), the cause and effect of unattractiveness is usually difficult to establish. However, in case it regards construction features, the causal effect is clear. In one four-bedroom house, the communal space was not only very small; in addition, sound insulation with the neighbours was also minimal. As a result, even when talking at a moderate volume, neighbours complained about noise disturbance. This clearly had an effect on the social dynamics among housemates.

If communal spaces are considered unattractive (for whatever reason), this not only affects housemates' mutual social interaction but also how they organise their social lives. For example, one buddy reports to not invite friends over, because the house is unsuitable for inviting guests: it is too dim, the living room is too small and sound insulation is minimal. Rather, he prefers to go outdoors to meet his friends elsewhere. However, this not only means that he is less available for his housemates, but that his social life and networks remain out of sight for his refugee flatmates, thus stripping the communal space of some of its social functions. Retrospectively, this buddy says to regret that he has not invited people over more often, because this would have created for instance more Dutch language learning opportunities for his housemates:

If I should have done one thing differently, it is that I could have invited more people over here, because if you invite someone over, you have conversations about different topics and conversations that are more informal. For Dutch language [competencies of the refugees] this would be an added value, in addition, it would revitalise our conversations, we wouldn't be talking for the 10th time about the same topic. (buddy in a 4-bedroom house)

In sum, it is clear how different features of communal space have an impact on the social interaction between housemates, and that in some of the CURANT accommodations not

the basic principles of social contact design⁴⁴ were not always met. However, there were many apartments and houses in CURANT that seemed fit for communal living, as the communal space was spacious, having a central position within the accommodation and perceived as cozy by its inhabitants.

2.4. PROJECT INTERVENTIONS WITH REGARD TO THE COMMUNAL LIVING

Importantly, the social dynamics between housemates in CURANT are not only influenced by characteristics of the participants (e.g., gender, language, etc.) or by the nature of the collective housing environment (amount of housemates and housing design). It is crucial to point at how **the project set-up influences these social dynamics too**. This happens in two different ways. First, *before* the communal living started, through a selection and matching procedure of candidate-participants including group sessions for refugees and a training sessions for buddies. Second, *during* the communal living, for instance through mediation between housemates in case of problems and community building-activities. Some of these interventions focus on stimulating positive social dynamics among housemates (e.g., community building activities) while others are remedial measures aiming at defusing and resolving problematic social dynamics between housemates.

In fact, the project design, and particularly the top-down nature of selection and matching of participants, has deep implications on the social dynamics observed. CURANT's regulated approach contrasts sharply with traditional forms of communal living that are essentially bottom-up regulated⁴⁵. Because of the top-down nature of the set-up of communal living (especially through the selection and matching of housemates), participants (and in particular, buddies) often consider the project team as somehow "responsible" when problems emerge and expect that the project team assists them in solving them. Resultantly,

⁴⁴ For more information on social contact design in communal housing, see for example Williams (2005).

⁴⁵ Usually, in communal living projects, the inhabitants decide everything from A to Z: who are the members of the cohousing community, how the housing looks like, what commitment is required etc.

when the project team failed to address these issues, buddies were often blaming the project team more than their housemates or themselves. Similarly, when a particular communal living situation turned out unsuccessfully, the project team also felt (at least partly) responsible for this, and questioned, for instance, the screening and matching procedures.

As a result, the project team invested much more time than expected in interventions with regards to the communal living during the project. Below, we list and discuss the main project interventions, **thus pointing to the fact that the social interaction between housemates in communal living is also affected by external, project-related interventions.** Some of the interventions with regard to the communal living were built into the initial design of CURANT (such as the screening and matching, the buddy training and session), although, evolved strongly when putting into practice. Other were added later (e.g., the intercultural mediator, a crisis room) because the project team felt they were needed. In addition, there was an ad hoc approach for crisis situations. As we argue, these interventions have been sometimes successful in preventing or defusing problematic situations, but a major drawback was that participants sometimes expressed a sense of being over-controlled and regulated by the project team. One buddy indicates this problem:

***R: I always feel like ‘I am participating in a project’ instead of ‘cohabiting with people’.** / I: Does this has a negative impact on your experience? / R: Yes, I believe that at the beginning it is important that you receive certain support, but I found that they should loosen up the support a bit. Because I am almost one year and a half in the project and... now I don’t need such intense support anymore, I just want to cohouse with people. If you are always gonna oblige people to receive support then it stays a project. **I really hoped that I could forget that I was participating in a project.** Now it is always ‘How is it going with the newcomer?’ and not ‘I am cohabiting with this housemate’.” (Buddy in student house).*

However, in contrast, many other buddies did expect that the project team was standing by and ready to intervene with ready-made solutions. **Project team members, especially those having most contact with the participants, note how because of the high responsibility of/expectations towards the project team, the project was often very demanding for them.** At times, they felt overloaded because what they were doing in CURANT

was actually exceeding their professional competencies. For instance, the Public Centre for Social Welfare social workers, who tend to focus on individual cases in regular social services, in CURANT also, had to manage complex group dynamics among inhabitants of a collective housing setting. Vormingplus, on the other hand, who have expertise in group-based educational and volunteer activities, are now confronted with difficult individual situations involving vulnerable buddies.

Below, we list and briefly discuss different project-led interventions that were implemented during the CURANT project with the aim of preventing or altering “problematic” social dynamics. We do not aim at describing them in detail; we only focus on how these affect the social interaction between housemates.

2.4.1. Selection of candidates (refugees and buddies)

The selection of refugees was quite essential in terms of its influence on social dynamics between housemates, as those candidates who were considered as not appropriate for communal living were not allowed. A major reason to be considered “inappropriate” related to the psychological condition of the candidate-participant: if refugees were considered as too vulnerable, for instance, because they were suffering from a severe trauma (PTSS, post-traumatic stress disorder), or were having a very low Dutch language proficiency, they were not allowed into the project in order to not overburden the buddy and/or to not jeopardize the social interaction between the future housemates. Similarly, for buddies, certain flexibility and social skills were required to enter into the project. However, for them self-selection was more important, as less appropriate candidate-buddies were not denied entry but rather discouraged to participate.

Likely, if this screening process had not taken place (i.e. if all applicants were accepted without any restrictions), much more problems would have arisen in the communal living. Indeed, in a number of cases where the refugees’ psychological problems (due to PTSD or for other reasons) emerged at a later stage only, or the buddy turned out to have limited social skills (due to an unstable psychological condition), this puts a strain on the social housemates’

social contact, leading to a new matchings or even drop-out of CURANT. With regard to Dutch language competencies, the threshold to enter was often somewhat lower than the one set initially. Often, this was reflected in more superficial contacts between buddies and refugees, due to communication barriers (see 2.3.3).

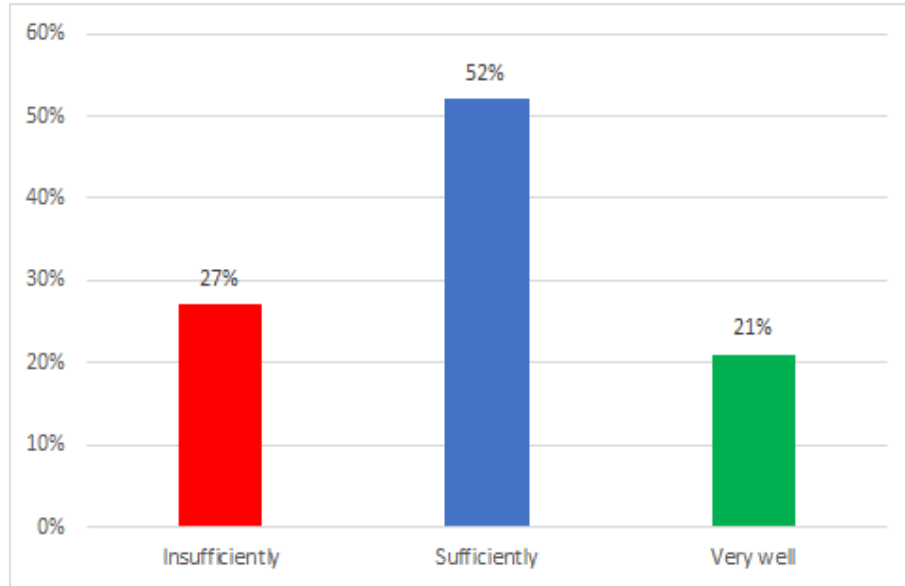
It should be noted that the focus on 'vulnerable' but not 'too vulnerable' refugees also represented an ethical dilemma to the project team; since CURANT's main aim was to make vulnerable young refugees more self-reliant in mainstream society. The exclusion of the most vulnerable amongst them was therefore not an easy decision to make.

2.4.2. Buddy training and monthly buddy sessions

Before starting their CURANT trajectory, all buddies participated in a compulsory series of training sessions by Vormingplus. The aim was to give new buddies some background information on the condition of refugees in Belgium (e.g., including a game about the different elements in asylum procedures and basic jargon on the topic), and to create some basic intercultural awareness through reflection on the interpretation of human behaviour generally, and possible issues emerging in communal living, in particular.

The approach of the training evolved throughout the project (along with the shifting insights of the project team) and considered as useful by most buddies. As Figure 17 points out, while around 1 out of 4 buddies did not have the feeling that the training session prepared them well for the communal living, almost 3 out of 4 did find it useful.

Figure 17: “In what sense did the training sessions that you attended at the beginning of CURANT prepare you well for the communal living?”



Source: Final survey of the buddies (n=29)

The variation displayed in the Figure 17 is probably related to two factors: first, among buddies, there was wide variation in terms of their previous cohabiting experiences and their previous intercultural experiences (e.g., reflected in the buddies’ profile as described in the first part of this report). Moreover, some had professional experience in working with newcomers or refugees. Likely, those with relevant previous experiences learned less in comparison to those without them. Second, especially in the beginning of CURANT (2017), Vormingplus struggled in finding the right training approach matching the diverse backgrounds of the buddies. However, later on, an appropriate format was found. Probably, some of the buddies in early training trajectories were less satisfied about the trainings.

Noteworthy, there is a strong positive relationship between the buddies’ evaluation of the training received before entering in CURANT, and communal living assessment⁴⁶. This may be the case because dissatisfied buddies (who had a negative experience) may blame “insufficient” training as one of the causes of their negative communal living experience, while buddies with a positive experience perceived these training sessions more positively.

⁴⁶ $r = .79^{***}$. For more detailed statistics, see Table 17 in Annex 2.

After the initial trainings, buddies were invited to participate in monthly intervention sessions led by Vormingplus. They were expected to attend at least six sessions. Generally, buddies were positive to very positive about the group-oriented monthly buddy sessions organised by Vormingplus. Buddies value the opportunity to share their daily worries, fun stories, ideas and feelings about communal living with other buddies and say to feel inspired or supported by listening to other buddies' similar or different stories. Different from their own families and friends, co-buddies are going through a similar experience and therefore understand better one another issues. In addition, the accessibility and listening ear of the Vormingplus team is appreciated. Finally, the fact that Vormingplus team has no notification obligation to the CURANT's project leader (OCMW), and that therefore confidentiality was assured, was very important to them.

However, the value of monthly buddy sessions seems especially high for buddies who do not live in larger accommodations. In the student house, for instance, the presence of a large group of buddies there (six in total) is perceived as a source of support: if there is an issue, it can be discussed with others there. As one buddy living there notes:

A lot of the buddy sessions are organised in such a manner that as buddies, you are exchanging about your experiences, but in fact in Klapdorp we are I think, we can say this about ourselves, we are yet quite committed. We have this type of conversations yet among ourselves, we live with six [buddies], and have those exchanges like 'ooh I was concerned about this, how would you react to it?' We've had this type of conversations yet, while many buddies that are living in 2-bedroom apartments or 4-bedroom houses, they do get something out of it [the buddy session]. So I don't want to... these sessions can be useful, but for me, they were simply not. (Buddy in the student house)

In addition to being a platform to share experiences, during some of the buddy sessions experts were invited to address specific topics of relevance. All stakeholder partners were invited to explain their organisation's aims and working modus, and some external experts (like a journalist) came to talk about adjacent topics. Finally, a few cultural activities on relevant topics were organised, such as a film screening on a documentary on newcomer integration in Antwerp.

It is obvious how the buddy sessions lead to reflection among the buddies with regard to their own social behaviour (towards their refugee housemate) and their housemates' behaviour. **For instance, buddies inspired one another to try a certain “approach” to solve a problem or to improve communication, or buddies learned about potential pitfalls listening to others’ stories. Some buddies shared their personal experiences with their refugees and received advice or support from others, thus reaffirmed or questioning their own attitude.** However, this is not to say that a one-size-fits-all model (one type of “ideal buddy”) was propagated, mostly it was stressed how everyone could choose one’s personal approach as a buddy. However, certain attitudes were generally praised, such as taking a patient attitude in developing a relationship, not expressing too high expectations about social contact, communicating clearly, etc.

In expert sessions, such as the one led by the Solentra psychotherapists sometimes advice about how to act/react in certain circumstances was given. For instance, it was advised not to ask too soon or to directly about the refugee’s journey to Europe or reasons for flight, because these are very sensitive issues. It was rather advised to adopt a more passive stance, allowing the refugee to raise this issue him- or herself. Indeed, in later interviews and observations during buddy sessions, it seemed that buddies had internalised this advice into their own approach. In sum, peer-to-peer exchange, as well as expert views, influence how buddies position themselves vis-à-vis their housemate(s).

2.4.3. Mediation between housemates in case of tensions

Throughout the project, various forms of tailored mediation between housemates took place. While not integrated into the initial project design, after a few months of implementation, an intercultural mediator was appointed. His appointment was felt like a relief to the project team; because it meant that case managers (OCMW social workers) and Vormingplus could pass on problematic communal living cases to someone else, thus alleviating their own tasks. In addition, the advantage was that the intermediary, as a third party, would have a more independent approach. The core task of the intercultural mediator was to intervene on request (especially by buddies and the project team) in case of problems

with regard to the communal living. The fact that the intercultural mediator was having the same ethnic background and/or mother tongue of some of the refugee participants was seen as a benefit by the project team. More generally, as one project team member notes, his foreign background was important, as he is not perceived as “the umpteenth white male person who is coming to fix things”. A few buddies mention how the intercultural mediator helped to solve communal living problems. For example, in one case, a Syrian boy had troubles in knowing how to behave appropriately around his female housemates. After a small incident, which was reported to the intercultural mediator, the boy was approached by the intercultural mediator on the one hand, and by a psychotherapist, on the other. According to one of his housemates, this more intensive guidance really helped because “He is much more relaxed now, you can really observe this. Much more at ease, in a natural way.”

However, for many buddies, the intercultural mediator was mainly seen as someone who could mainly assist with small, rather communicative issues, but not with more complex communal living problems. For instance, one buddy whose relation with his housemates was very distant, despite his self-proclaimed efforts to socialize:

I: Was it proposed to you, to use an intercultural mediator? (...) R: After a while, it was proposed to us (...) Erm, yeah I did not really believe in it [his approach]. Because he said us like “you have to do more things together. You have to leave your [own] room more often. However, this did not really change anything (...) In theory, this probably all works... you know, that will be probably the right guidelines to tell me, but in reality, it doesn’t make a difference. I told then, like, I don’t want to waste time on this. (buddy in a four-bedroom house)

In one other case, buddies asked to mediate because their housemate insisted to smoke inside the house despite their warnings, thus violating the conditions of the rental contract. However, they were unhappy about the way of mediating⁴⁷ and decided to not use it again in the future.

⁴⁷ However, as one project team member notes, “the role of the intercultural mediator is actually very vague”, leading to a personal definition by the intercultural mediator of his function and approach. This became particularly clear when he left the project and was replaced by someone else, who had a completely different approach in which the importance of cultural differences was rather downplayed.

In the beginning, we didn't really know how to approach this issue [the fact that one refugee housemate smoked inside the house]. Therefore, we thought, "Ok, let's go and ask the intercultural mediator, maybe he has some tips for us". But he didn't do this well, according to us. Because he simply came here when we were both outdoors, he came ringing the door and told [our refugee housemate] "you are not allowed to smoke inside" and left again, that was it. What we wanted is that he would coach us, in order that we would be able to say this to [our housemate]. As a result, we thought "we won't do this again [contact the intercultural mediator]. That wasn't a good experience. (buddy in a four-bedroom house)

In several problem situations, buddies tended to approach other project team members to mediate, give advice or intervene, such as the case managers, the Vormingplus team members, the educational worker or the psychotherapist's team. In addition, some buddies made use occasionally of an interpreter, not necessarily because there were problems but rather to have a more in-depth conversation with their housemate, which they found very helpful.

Finally, for specific issues, individual mediation was replaced by a more collective approach. Here, a larger group of refugees and buddies was invited. This collective approach consisted of tailored training about persistent housing-related issues. The best example was training about garbage sorting in one of the larger accommodations, as this was a major issue bothering many inhabitants and also causing structural problems (since the household waste collection services refused to collect the badly sorted waste).

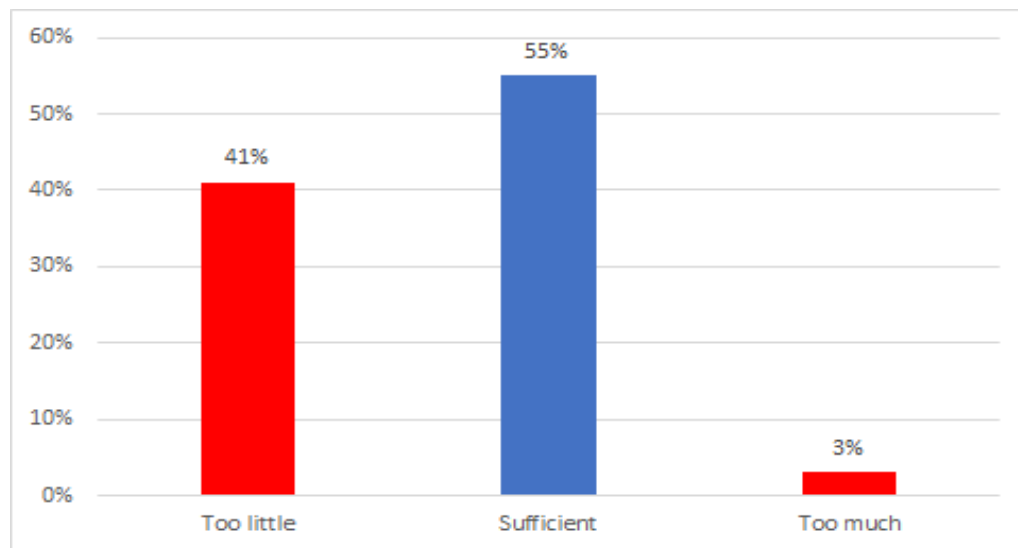
2.4.4. Community building activities

The project team also attempted to create a "community vibe" among all CURANT participants, by organizing occasionally community activities for all participants. Examples were a sports match, a BBQ and festivities for "one year CURANT".

When asked about these activities, around 2 out of 5 buddies complained that there should have been more of these activities (see Figure 18 below). There was only one person who thought that there were too many of these activities. However, if asked to what extent

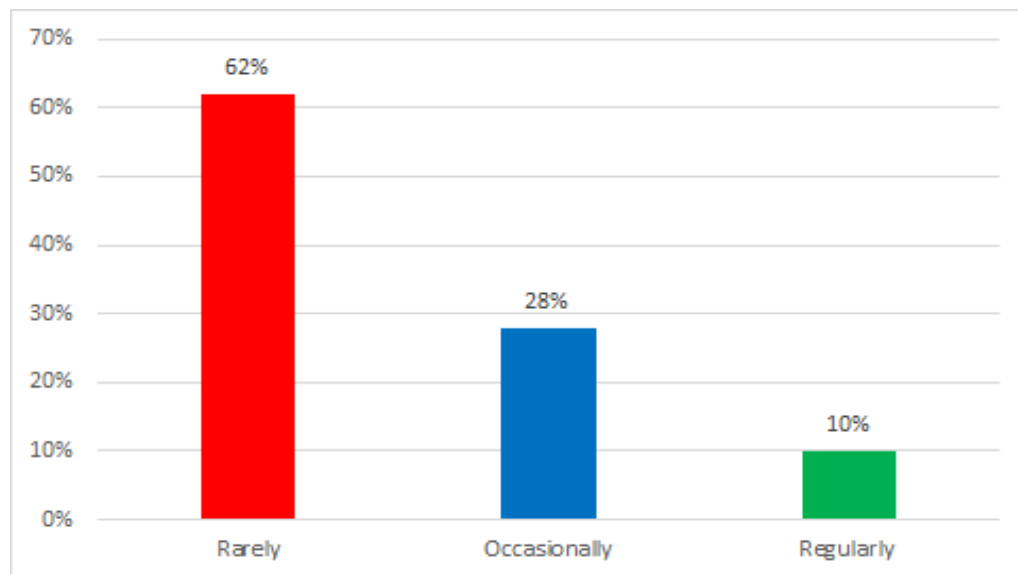
they have actually participated in these activities, 62% (n=18) of the buddies say they rarely participated in them (see Figure 19 below). When asked why they do not attend buddies often raise “busy schedules” as an explanation. Others say they only want to participate if their housemate can be there as well.

Figure 18: “What did you think about the number of communal activities organised by CURANT?”



Source: Final survey of the buddies (n=29)

Figure 19: “How often did you participate in activities organised for buddies and refugees together?”



Source: Final survey of the Buddies (n=29)

2.4.5. Inhabitant meetings

In the two larger accommodations, inhabitant meetings were implemented as a way of creating a forum where all inhabitants could discuss and decide upon practical arrangements. At first, the project team left the initiative to the inhabitants⁴⁸, as they wanted to organise this independently. However, when the inhabitants felt this did not work out well, they asked the project team to take the lead. The project team did so by inviting all inhabitants to meet up. The focus of these meetings was to make agreements about household rules and tasks, while also stimulating inhabitants to organise social events. However, the turnout was fluctuating, and the outcome rather mixed.

⁴⁸ The inhabitants of the student house. The cohousing site was only opened one year later, in November 2018.

CHAPTER 3: CURANT'S IMPACT ON THE DIVERSIFICATION OF REFUGEES' AND BUDDIES' SOCIAL NETWORKS

Above, we addressed the particular relations between buddies and refugees in CURANT. However, how are refugees' and buddies' broader social networks affected by the CURANT experience? An important assumption informing the project design is that cohabiting with a Dutch-speaking buddy would help refugees to diversify their social network, and in particular, to include more Dutch-speaking, native peers as friends in their network. In addition, CURANT provided or improved access to a broad range of training, education and other group activities, where other participants from CURANT (or other newcomers and/or locals) participated - thus offering another impulse to broadening their social network (for an overview of these activities, see Chapter 6, Figure 27).

Similarly, the project team assumed that buddies' networks would also become more diverse in terms of their ethnic composition, by including more non-Belgian friends.

In the baseline and final survey with both refugees and buddies, a range of questions was included about the composition of their peer group, which allows us to assess longitudinal changes in peer group composition for the two groups.

3.1. DID THE PEER GROUPS OF REFUGEES DIVERSIFY?

With regard to the friend groups of the refugees, following characteristics of their friends were inquired: their sex, mother tongue (same or another), religion (same or another), place of residence (Antwerp or elsewhere), national origin (same or another), communication language (Dutch or another language) country of birth (Belgium or elsewhere), whether they and whether they were in the same school or not.

Looking at the longitudinal survey data, presented in the table below (Table 2), we see that for three characteristics of the friend circle composition, there was a statistically significant change in the refugee's peer groups throughout their participation in CURANT.

First, there was a statistically significant shift⁴⁹ in terms of the mother tongue of the refugees' friend group: we see a **significant decrease in the share of peers with the same mother tongue**. Remarkably, the category saying at the beginning of CURANT that almost all or all of their friends have the same mother tongue as themselves is decreased by half. This finding points at the ethnocultural diversification of the refugees' friend networks, which may relate to new friendships with native Belgians as well as with other newcomers of different origins.

Second, in refugees' friend groups, **the share of Belgian-born friends increased significantly**. Here, the category saying at the beginning to have no or almost no friends born in Belgium is almost decreased by half. Similar to the findings with regard to the share of same mother tongue speakers, the increasing share of Belgian-born friends indicates ethnocultural diversification in the refugees' friend networks; however, here fellow newcomers are excluded.

Third, there was a significant shift in terms of the **age of their friends' group**: at the end of CURANT, a higher share was having the same age compared to before.

⁴⁹ Refugees' friends network characteristic 'friends born in Belgium' increases at a rate of .68[.14, 1.22], $t(30) = 2.57$, $p < .05$ when leaving CURANT. Refugees' friends network characteristic 'friends that are about the same age as you' increases at a rate of .74[.11, 1.38], $t(30) = 2.39$ $p < .05$. when leaving CURANT. Refugees' friends network characteristic 'friends that have the same mother tongue as you' diminish at a rate of -.45[.88, .02], $t(30) = -2.13$, $p < 0.05$ when leaving CURANT.

Table 2: Refugees' peer group characteristics at the beginning and end of their CURANT trajectories.

	Survey Timing	N	None-almost none	Less than half	Half	More than half	Most-all	Intensity	
		T otal	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	Mean (SD)	Mean differ.
How many friends have the same sex as you have?	Start	31	2 (6.5)	4 (12.9)	4 (12.9)	11 (35.5)	10 (32.3)	3.74 (1.24)	
	End	31	1 (3.2)	1 (3.2)	4 (12.9)	10 (32.3)	15 (48.4)	4.16 (1.13)	.42
How many friends have the same mother tongue as you?	Start	31	2 (6.5)	4 (12.9)	3 (9.7)	6 (19.4)	16 (51.6)	3.97 (1.33)	
	End	31	2 (6.5)	7 (22.6)	3 (9.7)	11 (35.5)	8 (25.8)	3.52 (1.29)	-.45*
How many friends have the same religion as you?	Start	31	1 (3.2)	5 (16.1)	6 (19.4)	6 (19.4)	13 (41.9)	3.81 (1.25)	
	End	31	2 (6.5)	4 (12.9)	6 (19.4)	8 (25.8)	11 (35.5)	3.71 (1.27)	-.10
How many friends live in Antwerp?	Start	31	0	8 (25.8)	6 (19.4)	7 (22.6)	10 (32.3)	3.61 (1.20)	
	End	31	3 (9.7)	1 (3.2)	14 (45.2)	6 (19.4)	7 (22.6)	3.42 (1.18)	-.19
How many friends have the same origin as you (for example Afghan, Syrian, Iraqi,... origin)?	Start	31	2 (6.5)	5 (16.1)	6 (19.4)	7 (22.6)	11 (35.5)	3.65 (1.31)	
	End	31	0	9 (29)	11 (35.5)	7 (22.6)	4 (12.9)	3.19 (1.01)	-.46

With how many friends do you speak Dutch sometimes, or always?	Start	31	5 (16.1)	10 (32.3)	6 (19.4)	5 (16.1)	5 (16.1)	2.84 (1.34)	
	End	31	2 (6.5)	7 (22.6)	8 (25.8)	12 (38.7)	2 (6.5)	3.16 (1.07)	.32
How many friends are about the same age as you?	Start	31	5 (16.1)	10 (32.3)	8 (25.8)	4 (12.9)	4 (12.9)	2.74 (1.26)	
	End	31	1 (3.2)	4 (12.9)	8 (25.8)	15 (48.4)	3 (9.7)	3.48 (.96)	.74*
How many friends lived with you at the reception centre LOI or another place of residence in Belgium?	Start	31	4 (12.9)	12 (38.7)	3 (9.7)	8 (25.8)	4 (12.9)	2.87 (1.31)	
	End	31	7 (22.6)	10 (32.3)	7 (22.6)	5 (16.1)	2 (6.5)	2.52 (1.21)	-.35
How many friends are or were in the same school as you?	Start	31	5 (16.1)	18 (58.1)	2 (6.5)	1 (3.2)	5 (16.1)	2.45 (1.29)	
	End	31	9 (29)	9 (29)	10 (32.3)	1 (3.2)	2 (6.5)	2.29 (1.13)	-.16
How many friends were born in Belgium?	Start	31	21 (67.7)	6 (19.4)	1 (3.2)	2 (6.5)	1 (3.2)	1.58 (1.06)	
	End	31	11 (35.5)	9 (29)	5 (16.1)	4 (12.9)	2 (6.5)	2.26 (1.26)	.68*

Source: Longitudinal data of the refugees (based on baseline and final survey) (n=31)

SD: Standard Deviation

Mean of a 5-point Likert Scale (none or almost none = 1, most or all of my friends = 5)

Significant at * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed)

A plausible explanation for the ethnocultural diversification of refugees' social networks is that at least some of the refugees included their buddy, other Belgian and non-coethnic housemates here as part of their 'peer group' at the end of CURANT. In addition,

through some of the group activities in CURANT, or experiences outside of CURANT (school, internship) they might have got in touch with Belgians and other newcomers. It is also possible that for those refugees having a positive experience with communal living in CURANT, this might have lowered the threshold to contact with other native Belgians. For example, one boy from Eritrea expresses how his perception altered:

R: I used to think that all Belgians are racist or something. When you go outside, nobody will talk to you. In Africa, people are more open, you help each other. In Africa, it's better than here, and here it's also better than in Africa. Each country has its advantages and disadvantages. I: Is it because nobody talked to you, that you thought everyone was racist? R: Belgians are a bit closed. However, if you make contact, [they are] good people. (...) Now I think, "Belgium is good". It feels like my country. When Belgium was playing football [in the World Cup] I supported them." (Eritrean refugee).

As such, this positive experience act as a counterbalance to more negative, previous experiences with Belgians. Some buddies also support the idea that in the future, their refugee housemates will make contact more easily with Belgians (and other strangers), because of their CURANT experience.

I think he will somehow... allow a strange person or someone with Belgian nationality maybe more easily [to his network] because he has experience with it (...). Anyway, living together with a complete stranger is very positive in many ways. Like socially, you [learn to] make more easily contact. The threshold lowers a bit. (Buddy of an Afghan refugee)

This seems to correspond closely with the fact that **refugees report enhanced general social skills** at the end of CURANT. In the Final Survey (n=33), 97% indicates that upon exiting the project, their social skills have improved (when exiting the programme [30% (n=10) a little better; 46% (n=15) better; 21% (n=7) a lot better]⁵⁰.

Finally, an additional question is whether the composition of friends groups is associated with the length of refugees' trajectory in CURANT. If refugees have had a *longer* trajectory in CURANT, did this affect the composition of their peer group at the end of CURANT in any significant way? This is the case for two variables: the length of the trajectory is

⁵⁰ See Figure 21 in this report. Source: Final Survey with Refugees (n=33)

associated negatively with the number of friends with the same origin⁵¹, as well as with a lower amount of friends that lived with them at the reception centre, LOI or another place of residence in Belgium⁵²⁵³. Based on this association, we can hypothesize that **the longer the refugees were cohabiting in CURANT with locals, the less they interacted with people of the same origin and the less they remained in contact with peers they have lived with at the reception centre or local reception initiative (LOI) before**. However, we need to be very careful in establishing a causal effect, for two reasons. First, with regard to the variable “amount of friends of the same ethnic origin”, the causality may be inverted: it may be the case that those with a larger and stronger co-ethnic network, tend to stay for a shorter period in CURANT than those with a smaller/weaker co-ethnic social network. With regard to the co-ethnic peers they lived with at the reception centre/LOI or elsewhere, this association might be affected by the fact that the long communal living trajectories in the sample started usually earlier than the shorter ones. Therefore, maybe a time effect is at play: over time, relationships with friends from the past may be withering away anyway.

3.2. DID THE PEER GROUPS OF BUDDIES DIVERSIFY?

While diversification of refugees’ networks was a primary aim of CURANT, a second aim was to also diversify the peer groups of buddies. Do we find any evidence that buddies’ social networks, and in particular, their friend groups, diversified over the course of CURANT? In the baseline and final survey with the buddies, the basic characteristics of their friend group were inquired. In particular its composition in terms of gender, mother tongue, usage of language, place of residence (Antwerp or elsewhere), country of residence, and ethnic background were inquired about (see table below).

The comparison of baseline and final survey values indicates that over the course of CURANT, **buddies’ friend groups did not alter significantly in terms of their demographic**

⁵¹ $r = -.38^*$

⁵² $r = -.51^{**}$

⁵³ Source: Final survey of the refugees ($n=31$) *Significant at $p < .05$, **Significant at $p < .005$ (2-tailed)

composition. Unlike what we would have expected, there is no increased share of “friends with a different mother tongue” or “friends born outside of Belgium”.

Table 3: Buddies' peer group characteristics at the beginning and end of CURANT

	Survey	N	None- almost none	Less than half	Half	More than half	Most -all	Mean	
	Timing	Tot.	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	Mean (SD)	Differ
How many friends have the same sex as you have?	Start	29	0	4 (13.8)	10 (34.5)	11 (37.9)	4 (13.8)	3.52 (.91)	
	End	29	0	2 (6.9)	9 (31)	16 (55.2)	2 (6.9)	3.62 (.73)	.10
How many friends have a different mother tongue as you?	Start	29	12 (41.4)	15 (51.7)	2 (6.9)	0	0	1.66 (.61)	
	End	29	11 (37.9)	15 (51.7)	2 (6.9)	0	1 (3.4)	1.79 (.86)	.13
With how many friends do you speak another language sometimes, or always?	Start	29	15 (51.7)	11 (37.9)	3 (10.3)	0	0	1.59 (.68)	
	End	29	16 (55.2)	10 (34.5)	3 (10.3)	0	0	1.55 (.69)	-.04
How many friends live in Antwerp?	Start	29	2 (6.9)	11 (37.9)	8 (27.6)	5 (17.2)	3 (10.3)	2.86 (1.12)	
	End	29	12 (41.4)	10 (34.5)	14 (48.3)	4 (13.8)	0	2.72 (.75)	-.14
How many friends live outside Belgium?	Start	29	11 (37.9)	15 (51.7)	3 (10.3)	0	0	1.72 (.65)	

	End	29	14 (48.3)	13 (44.8)	1 (3.4)	1 (3.4)	0	1.62 (.73)	.10
How many friends were born outside Belgium?	Start	29	12 (41.4)	14 (48.3)	3 (10.3)	0	0	1.69 (.66)	
	End	29	12 (41.4)	14 (48.3)	3 (10.3)	0	0	1.69 (.66)	0
How many friends have the same cultural background as you (for example Flemish, Moroccan,... origin)?	Start	29	2 (6.9)	4 (13.8)	1 (3.4)	14 (48.3)	8 (27.6)	3.76 (1.21)	
	End	29	2 (6.9)	1 (3.4)	5 (17.2)	14 (41.4)	9 (31)	3.86 (1.12)	.10

Source: Longitudinal data of the buddies (based on baseline and final survey) (n=29)

SD: Standard Deviation

Mean of a 5-point Likert Scale (none-all of my friends)

At first, these findings seem to contradict the finding in this report that some (a minority, though) of the buddies developed tight relations with their refugee housemate(s). Nevertheless, there are some plausible explanations. A first possible explanation is that those buddies considering their refugee flatmates as part of their friend group already had diverse friend groups and that therefore there is no significant effect on the composition of their friend group. The qualitative fieldwork findings suggest that some of the tightest relationships emerged with buddies who had a rather diverse group of friends yet. For those, newly established friendships with their CURANT housemates did not affect the composition of their groups of friends. Second, the number of buddies that consider their refugee flatmate as a “friend” at the end of CURANT remains small. Even when a good relationship is established, buddies often do not consider their housemates as a real “friend”, because, as noted earlier they often framed their relationship differently - more as a “brother” or an acquaintance. Possibly, if this was the case, their newly established relations with their refugee housemate(s) was not taken into consideration when describing their friend groups.

CHAPTER 4: CURANT: CATALYST FOR REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN BELGIAN SOCIETY?

At the beginning of CURANT, stakeholders expressed the desire that the unaccompanied refugees participating in CURANT would become more self-reliant in the Belgian society. More, in particular, they had following aims:

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). (Groundwork for Evaluation and Literature Study, 2017)

A major innovative aspect in CURANT is the inclusion of communal living as an instrument to support refugees' integration process into Belgian society. However, due to the innovative character of this approach, it was also somewhat unclear *how* this would happen actually. Therefore, in the following section (4.1.), we discuss how communal living constitutes a social environment boosting the integration of young unaccompanied refugees in different respects.

In section 4.2, we shift the focus of analysis to the individual level: do we find evidence that refugees' skills, well-being and knowledge relevant to participation in Belgian society, have actually improved? In our analysis, we discuss several elements, such as Dutch language skills, well-being, institutional knowledge, practical skills, participation in education and the labour market, administrative skills and financial skills.

4.1. COMMUNAL LIVING AS A SUPPORTIVE AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUNG UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEES

An important assumption of CURANT was that in the context of communal living, buddies would take up a supportive role. It is confirmed by our data that in many of the CURANT accommodations, this did happen. Therefore, **we conceptualise communal living between locals and newcomers as a setting where different types of support to newcomers are readily available.** The idea of cohousing as a supportive environment sticks closely to the notion of “solidarity housing” and assumptions that diverse cohousing communities contain a diverse pool of resources of which especially inhabitants with fewer resources can benefit (Williams, 2005). This centrality of support in the “success” or “failure” of communal living, calls for a closer and more systematic investigation of what this support entails. Above we have raised yet some examples of “support” (e.g. sharing stuff) including their deeper implications (e.g. highlighting the dependency of refugees), but what types of support have we observed in the CURANT housing? Drawing on the existing literature on social capital (Heaney & Israel, 2008; Mattson & Hall, 2011; Wills, 1991), we can classify the support offered in a setting of communal living in five categories. Table 4 gives an overview of these categories.

Table 4: Types of social capital and support

Types of social capital and support	Definition
Tangible support	Any physical, concrete or direct ways of support provided by others (also referred to as “instrumental support”). It ranges from financial assistance, material goods, to actual services.
Informational support	Type of support that provides useful or needed information to the individual. Occasionally it is referred to as “guidance” or “advice” as it can contribute to resolving a specific problem.
Companionship	Type of support that gives someone a sense of social belonging (also referred to as “network support”). It encompasses the presence of companions to engage in shared social activities.
Emotional support	Type of support that meets an individual’s emotional or affective needs.

Esteem support	Type of support that bolsters an individual's self-esteem or beliefs in their ability to handle a problem or perform a needed task ("you can do it!").
----------------	--

Source: Composed by the authors, based on Heaney & Israel, 2008; Mattson & Hall, 2011; Wills, 1991

In the next sections, we give examples of all forms of support within the communal living context of CURANT.

4.1.1. Companionship, emotional and esteem support

A distinctive feature of communal living is that there is often someone around at home. Some refugees see the mere presence and companionship of flatmates as a source of support:

[W]hen you are alone it will be difficult to study. If you are alone, you are more likely to start thinking about your past and problems, and then you will get stress... Now, I am happy. I am living in the moment, attending training every day. (Afghan refugee)

"Having someone around" is thus perceived as a source of distraction, helping refugees to think less about their past and problems, and to focus more on their future. One Somalian refugee explains how he would not want to live alone because then he would have no one to talk to and "you're just by yourself the whole time". While he and his buddy do not spend much time together, the mere fact of having another person present in the house seems to make him feel better. In larger communal living arrangements, where multiple refugees and buddies cohabitate, this companionship support also involves other refugees:

Alone is not good. (...) Someone alone, he thinks about everything. (...) Yes, when I am alone, more stress. Here [in the house] [it is] good, I talk to people. Do you know Y. [refugee flatmate]? (...) He sits here sometimes to watch television. Do a few activities. (Afghan refugee)

However, this positive effect of housemates on well-being should not be taken for granted, as housemates may as well be a source of stress. As various examples from section 2.3. on social interaction between buddies and refugees illustrated, living together also implies that one has to take into account one another's desires and tolerate one another's behaviour

– even if these deviate strongly from their owns. However, overall, in terms of emotional well-being refugees tend to stress the positive impact of having someone around.

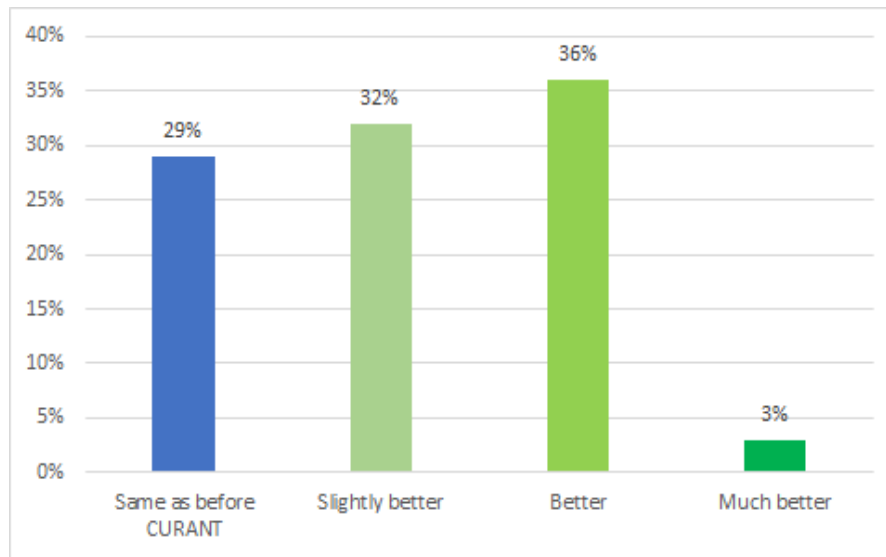
Regarding **emotional support**, the interview data show that while buddies want to offer a listening ear and show concern when their housemate does not seem to feel well, most of them refrain from prying too much out of fear to be seen as an “interrogator”. Moreover, this wait-and-see attitude is also encouraged during training sessions for buddies, where they are advised against asking direct questions about the refugees’ story and past. As a result, buddies tend to leave the initiative to the refugees to talk about their personal background and issues and focus more on building a relationship of trust. On their side, refugees sometimes refrain from sharing their worries because they do not want to burden their housemates. The following boy, for example, does not like to talk too much about his family, because he does not want to bother his buddy with his own worries:

When I have problems, I don't want other people to... for instance if I don't feel so well, I don't want others to feel like that (...) For instance, when I'm afraid, when I'm sad, I wouldn't tell this to him, maybe he would feel like that too. (Afghan refugee)

Still, the fact that someone is around to interact with is regarded as positively, and probably explains to some extent why refugees and buddies alike estimated the well-being of refugees improved over the course of their participation in CURANT. Remarkably, **all refugees** that participated in the Final Survey (n=33) **reported enhanced levels of well-being at the end of their trajectory** [16% (n=5) slightly better; 55% (n=17) better; 29% (n=9) a lot better] (also see further in this report).

The buddies’ perception with regard to the impact of cohabiting on their refugee housemates’ well-being is presented in Figure 20 below. Among buddies, more than 7 out of 10 estimate that there is an improvement in their refugee housemate’s well-being [32% (n=9) slightly better; 36% (n=10) better; 3% (n=1) a lot better]. Twenty-nine % or 8 out of 28 buddies perceived no improvement.

Figure 20: “Through cohabiting, my housemate’s well-being is...”



Source: Final survey of the buddies (n=28)

Finally, yet another type of support took place which may explain increased the refugees’ increased well-being. **Esteem support** includes encouragement when noticing self-doubt and praise when something is achieved. While other persons (such as family) are usually more important for refugees in this regard, there are various examples of buddies who for instance express their pride and admiration about their housemate’s progress, for instance in terms of Dutch language skills and overall self-reliance, or particular accomplishments such as passing a difficult exam. A few buddies also join their housemate at their school’s parent night, as a way of encouraging their refugees’ educational careers.

4.1.2. Tangible and informational support

A specific advantage of support in a cohousing setting is the easy accessibility and almost permanent availability of **informational support** to more vulnerable inhabitants. In addition, buddies are able to detect particular needs related to the refugees’ day-to-day activities and often offer help spontaneously when they see their housemate struggles with something. The quote of a Syrian refugee below shows how the cohabiting setting (student

house) facilitates informational support. He has experienced how the face-to-face assessment works better (or faster) compared to texting people to ask for assistance:

What I used to do if I did not understand something: I took a picture of it and show it to my teacher or social worker when I saw her. However, the people here [in this house], they support you on the spot... I can go downstairs if I have a question or so, it is perfect. However, it is only perfect when they are around. If I am in my room and I would text Y. [buddy that also lives in the same house and who is often around, but in fact not his matched buddy], he would not answer fast. But when he is present, I can ask him face-to-face and he will assist directly.” (Syrian refugee)

With regard to **tangible support**, buddies frequently share some of their belongings such as certain household items (e.g., kitchen utensils, a desktop computer). Other examples of tangible support that occurred quite often in the described communal living settings were preparing a meal for each other, driving someone to their appointment, assistance with making a phone call or appointment in Dutch, and assistance with moving in or out their accommodation. Buddies also offer support by accompanying refugees when they have to visit formal institutions, such as a hospital or school. For instance, when one refugee from Afghanistan mentioned he would like to attend drawing classes, his buddy took him to the open house of the School of Arts. Another example is a buddy who accompanied their housemates in at the police station to act as a mediator:

I have accompanied him once to the police station to explain something. But he actually made the appointment by himself and then he just asked me to join him so that I can support him with my language skills. (Female buddy of an Afghan refugee living in a 4-bedroom house)

Also “taking care of each other” when a housemate is for instance sick, falls under tangible support, though it also has an emotional component. An Afghan refugee explains that just before entering in CURANT he had knee surgery and was not very mobile. He perceived living at the cohousing site BREM16 as an opportunity to have easier access to informal support in this period of recovery:

I: Why did you sign up for CURANT? / R: Before I entered in CURANT, life was difficult. I was in a lot of pain because of my knee injury [that I got from

soccer]. After I finally had surgery, I decided to sign up for CURANT. A friend of mine whom I was cohabiting in a social house told me about CURANT. I realised that it is better to be one year in CURANT until I am completely cured. After that, I can go on with my life. In social housing, it would be difficult; there I don't have many friends available. Nobody will assist me, bring stuff, do groceries... When I entered in CURANT, everybody assisted me. When I was in bed, they brought me food, until I was better. (Afghan refugee living at a cohousing site with 16 two-bedroom flats)

Notably, in the case outlined above it was not necessarily his matched buddy who provided assistance as his buddy had a busy schedule during that time. When asked who assisted him, he referred to other people (newcomers and other buddies) in this large cohousing site.

Often, forms of tangible support are intertwined with informational support such as is the case in translation of a letter, or assistance with homework and studying as shown in the quotation below:

*Both boys [Afghan and Iraqi housemates] are attending a VCA course [a course on safety, health and environment in the work place] course, which is incredibly difficult. The reading material contains the symbols and safety precautions they have to consider at construction sites. However, the language in this course is so technical and complicated. **Hence, I tried to assist them with studying. The course includes a huge amount of questioning material [about 500 questions], including trick questions. After they picked one of the multiple choice answers, I let them explain why they picked that answer, so that I could adjust their reasoning when I noticed they did not understand properly what was asked in the course.** For this course, in particular, small nuances in questions resulted in wrong answers rapidly. It's the fifth time now they have to retake this exam and passing is obliged to graduate from their broader educational programme. (Female buddy in a four-bedroom house)*

As this excerpt makes clear, Dutch language difficulties constitute a significant barrier to refugees, a point that we also elaborate on in other sections (see 4.2.4 and 4.2.5). It is therefore no surprise to find that this is a major domain of informal support (see 4.2.1).

Specific forms of **informational support** may include a wide range of practices such as explaining how certain things work (e.g., how to register for a public transport card, how to

recycle, how to use a kettle and a laundry machine) or guidance on what is expected at your student job, advice on which doctor or hospital refugees , and so on.

Because they [Afghan and Iraqi housemates] were so self-reliant already, I only had to teach them small thing such as [things] regarding the household, like the difference between a towel and a dishcloth [laughs] (Female buddy in a four-bedroom house).

Distinctive about offering informational support in a communal living context is that information about household skills takes an important role. Notwithstanding they having been in precarious living situations before, during and after their flight, for a significant group of refugees it is the first time they live independently (in Belgium) since as minors they stayed in government-funded accommodation. **Just as for their native peers, many of the tasks and routines related to renting and maintaining a house**, including making small repairs, sorting the waste and putting garbage outside at the right moment, communicating with the landlord, negotiating with neighbours, dealing with a power cut-off, adjusting the thermostat, reading the energy meter, using the washing machine etc.; **and to living independently more generally**, such as organising the cleaning and cooking, buying groceries, paying bills **are new to them**. In addition, the mostly male newcomers have often grown up in social settings where household responsibilities were an almost exclusively female matter; and where other tasks (such as waste sorting) were absent or organised wholly differently. Especially the somewhat older and/or female buddies tend to highlight how they “educate” their younger, male housemates in the essentials of household tasks, not just by explaining them, but also by setting the example and demonstrating them for instance how to clean (e.g., what utensils and cleaning products to use). Therefore, while more difficult to pinpoint, it is obvious how young refugees also learn by observing their housemates’ household practices. This leads to a type of practical skills that are often overlooked in discussions on “newcomer integration” but indispensable, as a lack of these skills may, for instance, lead to homeowners’ and neighbours’ annoyance, or may even have financial consequences (e.g., fines due to incorrect garbage sorting). Typically, it is also **a sort of knowledge that is not addressed in formal educational**

tracks⁵⁴. However, it should be stressed that in several cases, the young refugees do know quite well, how to go about these issues, or in a few cases, are even more self-reliant than their housemate. For quite some buddies it was also their first experience in living independently, which was reflected in their tendency to turn to the project team for practical help in this domain (e.g. with questions like ‘what to do if the central heating does not work’ ‘how to replace a light bulb’ etc.).

Occasionally, tangible and informational **support is not only provided by the refugees’ housemates but also by the buddies’ broader social network**. In one case, a friend of the buddy comes by weekly to offer supplemental training to a refugee struggling with French classes (a compulsory subject in regular education in Flanders). Regularly, parents of the buddies jump in to assist the refugee with small services and favours, such as repairing their bike, teaching them how to use a sewing machine, or helping out when they need special care:

Once I had an accident. I drove my bike into a pole... I had an operation on my cheek and my teeth and then Lies really helped me a lot. And her father and mother too (...). They made a lot of soup for me because for one month, two months I couldn’t eat. (Afghan refugee).

Important to note, we do not claim or suggest that all forms of social support are always taking place. **First, what support is offered depends strongly on the “demand”, on the one hand** (what support the refugees wants) **and the “offer”, on the other** (i.e. what buddies have to offer, based on their capabilities and willingness). Second, as indicated earlier in this report, there was a considerable amount of matched duos where their relationship was tense or distant. In those cases, support was more limited (e.g. only informational support). In sum, whether or not particular types of support emerge ultimately depends on many factors, such as the particular needs (e.g., small social network vs. large social network), capacities (e.g., language and social skills) and personalities (e.g., more introvert vs. more extravert) of both flatmates and the nature of their relationship.

⁵⁴ An exception here are orientation courses, as for instance provided by Atlas. However, project team members stress that it is difficult to transfer this type of practical knowledge to young newcomers in a formal educational setting, a hands on approach is more effective.

4.2. CURANT'S IMPACT ON REFUGEES' SELF-RELIANCE IN BELGIAN SOCIETY

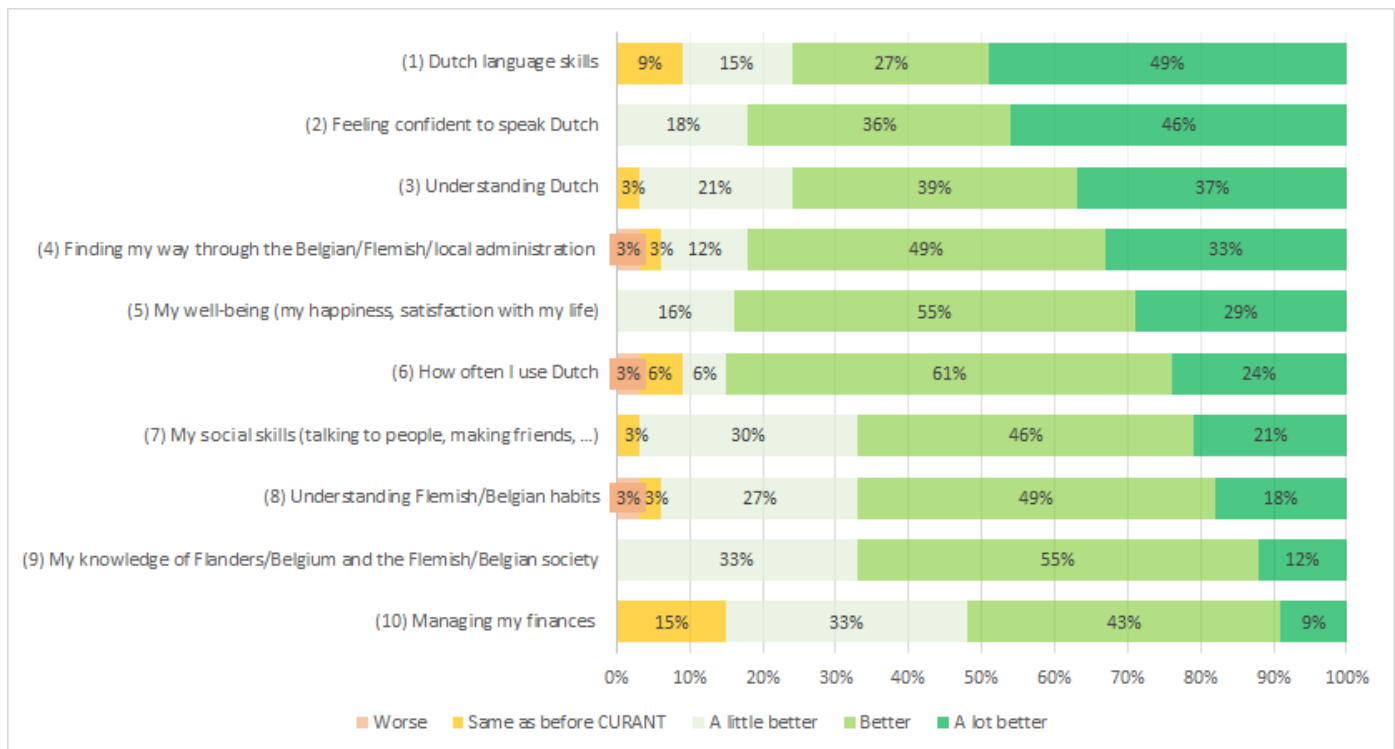
A basic assumption of the project is that unaccompanied young refugees are missing a number of skills, such as Dutch language skills and practical skills related to independent living. In addition, as newcomers, they lack certain knowledge about Belgian society, its cultural repertoires, routines and institutions. This “basic knowledge” is seen as essential to participate in different societal domains: its labour market, educational system, the housing market and civil society. In addition, the low sense of well-being of unaccompanied young refugees was a primary concern (See Groundwork for Evaluation of CURANT 2017).

Because the refugees are young and unaccompanied, they are framed in the project ideology as individuals who are not (yet) self-reliant and in need of support (see Groundwork for Evaluation and Literature, 2017). However, the quotation below illustrates our observation that **some refugees in the project are more self-reliant than assumed at first**, thus illustrating this groups' strong coping skills.

I am often surprised how self-reliant they are [my refugee housemates]. It is rather rare that they come to ask for assistance such as “I cannot understand this letter”. If they need to be somewhere, they search on the internet how to get there with public transport, they organise it themselves. They are very independent, really self-reliant. At the beginning of this project, I thought that I needed to support them in a more tangible manner, but this was not the case at all.” (Female buddy in a four-bedroom house)

Notwithstanding the fact that many refugees display certain levels of self-reliance independent of support by buddies or CURANT professionals, our findings indicate how their integration into Belgian society benefits from their participation in CURANT. When refugees are asked to assess how CURANT has affected their Dutch language skills, well-being, social skills, financial management and knowledge of the Flemish/Belgian society, they usually say these aspects have been affected positively, as indicated in the figure below.

Figure 21: “Due to my participation in CURANT, I notice the following changes in myself ...”



Source: Final survey of the refugees (n=33)

Note: The descriptive statistics can be found in Table 15 in Annex 2 to this report.

While on all these aspects refugees indicate an improvement, the variation across variables in the table shows well how some aspects seem to be affected more strongly than others are. This will be discussed more in detail in the next sections.

An important remark before discussing each element separately is that our statistical analysis also points at **the interrelation between many of these variables** (see table below). For example, a (perceived) improvement of Dutch language competence is associated positively with most other variables (i.e. enhanced social skills, enhanced well-being, enhanced ability to manage their finances, enhanced institutional knowledge of Flanders/Belgium, improved understanding of Flemish/Belgian cultural habits, and improved understanding of Flemish/Belgian administration).

In addition, the table shows to what extent the amount of contact newcomers had with their buddies played a role in (perceived) integration outcomes. This is the case for following

variables: overall Dutch language skills, understanding of Dutch, frequency of usage of Dutch, well-being, institutional knowledge of Flanders/Belgium, understanding of Flemish/Belgian habits, and their perception of keeping in contact with their buddy after CURANT. Based on these associations, we can hypothesize that **refugees that had more contact with their buddy gained more skills and knowledge that could improve their participation in Belgian society.** Important to note is that we only reported descriptive statistics. Further analyses are required to substantiate causal relationships.

Table 5: Significant Spearman correlations between amount of contact the newcomer had with his/her buddy and self-reported improvement of skills, well-being and knowledge due to CURANT

	Contact buddy	Keep in touch	Dutch Lang. Skills	Underst. Dutch	Dutch Confid.	Dutch Freq.	Social skills	Well-Being	Finances	Cult1	Cult2	Admin.
1	-	.58**	.42*	.52**	/	.51**	/	.42*	/	.39*	.36*	/
2		-	/	/	/	.46*	.41*	/	/	/	.62*	/
3			-	/	.68***	.36*	.37*	/	/	.42*	/	/
4				-	.52**	.53**	.54**	.61***	.42*	.62***	.51**	.42*
5					-	.44*	.44*	.41*	.46*	.51**	.39*	.43*
6						-	.53**	.46*	/	.45*	/	/
7							-	.51**	/	.44*	.47*	.47*
8								-	/	.67***	.55**	.46*
9									-	/	/	.62***
10										-	.69***	.54*
11											-	.62***
12												-

Source: Final survey of the refugees (N=31)

Note: we only reported significant correlations * Significant at $p < .05$; ** significant at $p < .005$; *** significant at $p < .001$ (2-tailed)

1) How much contact did you have with your buddy during CURANT? (on a 3-point Likert Scale: little-much)

2) After CURANT, will you still keep in touch with your buddy? (on a 3-point Likert Scale: no-definitely)

Evaluation whether CURANT contributed to...(on a 5-point Likert Scale: worse-much better, the same applies for all variables below)

3) Overall Dutch language competence

4) Understanding Dutch

5) Feeling confident to speak Dutch

6) How often do I speak Dutch?

7) Social skills

8) Well-being

9) Ability to manage their finances

10) (Cult 1) Institutional knowledge of Flanders/Belgium

11) (Cult 2) Understanding of Flemish/Belgian cultural habits

12) understanding of Flemish/Belgian administration

4.2.1. Dutch language competencies

One of the main objectives behind the mixed communal living arrangement is to provide a setting that allows the young refugees to improve their knowledge of the local language. In accordance with the project aims, the language of communication between the refugees and their local flatmates is primarily Dutch. In addition, it was expected that the overall participation of refugees in training, education, internships, etc. would improve their Dutch language competencies.

Both qualitative and quantitative research data indicate that the refugees' Dutch language skills have improved significantly over the course of their participation in the project. As illustrated by Figure 21 (see above in 4.2), at the end of their CURANT trajectory refugees report feeling more confident to speak Dutch. Nearly all indicate to understand Dutch better, to have improved Dutch language skills and use the Dutch language more frequently compared to before CURANT⁵⁵. Consecutive language assessments, conducted by Atlas⁵⁶ at the beginning and end of 22 refugees trajectories, also underpin the improvement of Dutch oral and written language competencies: on average, refugees entered the CURANT project with A2 Waystage Dutch language skills (e.g., ability to hold a brief conversation, ability to write short sentences) and left CURANT with B1 Threshold Dutch language skills (e.g., ability

⁵⁵ All respondents (n=33) felt more confident to speak Dutch at the end of their trajectory [18% (n=6) a little better; 36% (n=12) better; 46% (n=15) a lot better]. 91% (n=30) of the refugees reported improved Dutch language skills [15% (n=5) a little better; 27% (n=9) better; 49% (n=16) a lot better]. 97% (n=32) of the refugees indicate they could understand Dutch better [21% (n=7) a little better; 39% (n=13) better; 47% (n=12) a lot better]. 91% (n=30) of the refugees report that they use Dutch more often at the end of the trajectory compared to the beginning [6% (n=2) a little better; 61% (n=20) better; 24% (n=8) a lot better].

⁵⁶ Not for all 22 actual language test was conducted, for some the assessment of the language competency was based on the entrance requirement for their current education track, implying that that they actually have a higher Dutch language competency.

to hold longer and more structured conversations, ability to write a simple application letter)⁵⁷. Mixed model analyses⁵⁸ substantiated the significance of this improvement.

Noteworthy, while survey data indicate an overall improvement in Dutch language competencies, they do not prove that this evolution is directly linked to their participation in the CURANT programme. However, qualitative data offer sufficient evidence to establish a link. In particular, there are plenty of indications for how **the communal living setting constituted a supportive environment for Dutch language learning**. Many refugees report how after a period of living in a mixed setting, they feel more confident to speak Dutch and use Dutch more often now:

Before CURANT, I was ashamed to speak Dutch, I rather kept silent. However, due to CURANT, this feeling of shame disappeared. Because I went to school, but also because I spoke a lot with my buddy. (Afghan refugee)

My Dutch is quite better than before, because before I lived alone. Now I live with people. Now I feel more confident to ask questions, for example, when we're watching TV together, then I will dare to ask what the programme is about, or what is the meaning of this word is. (Iraqi refugee)

[Before], I was living in an LOI [local reception initiative for asylum seekers]. There I always spoke Pashto, never Dutch. Only in class, in school [I did]. Here I come home and I always speak Dutch. Always, with S. [my Iraqi refugee housemate] and W. and L. [my Belgian buddies]. (Afghan refugee)

As highlighted in the second quote, in a communal living situation Dutch language learning is embedded in everyday domestic practices, such as watching TV. It also indicates how television is employed as a learning tool rather than being merely a source of leisure. Menial tasks such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, doing groceries etc. are also common sources of conversation. In addition, as the third statement highlights, during their initial

⁵⁷ The score levels (A2, B1) refer to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. For more background information on the CEFR, see <https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>

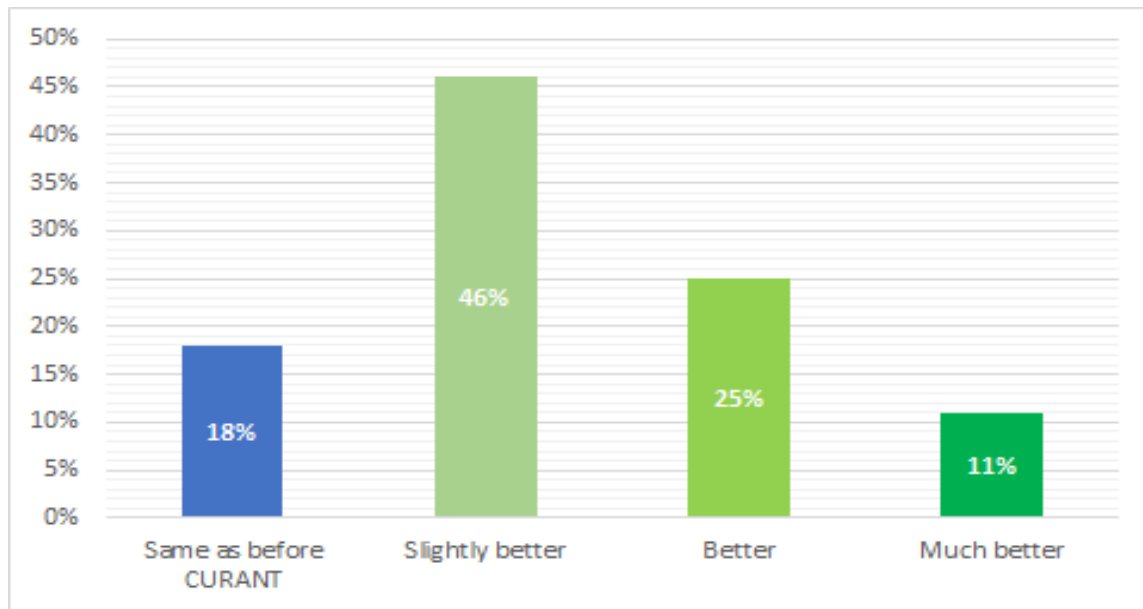
⁵⁸ Refugees' verbal Dutch language skills increased at a rate of .66[.42, .90], $t(20) = 5.82$ $p < .000$ upon leaving CURANT. Refugees' written Dutch language skills increased at a rate of .82[.62, 1.03], $t(20) = 8.49$ $p < .000$ upon leaving CURANT.

period in Belgium, refugees have little opportunities to practice Dutch, and in particular, to have informal conversations with native Dutch speaking peers.

Buddies, on their part, report that after a while they find it easier to talk with their housemate. This is mainly because their flatmate's language level has improved, but likely, it is also because they are able to adapt their own vocabulary better to the newcomer's proficiency in Dutch and have become more skilful in communicating with a Dutch language learner. In addition, buddies indicate how they use an array of strategies to support their housemates' language learning process. For instance, they give positive affirmation concerning their housemates' Dutch language level (esteem support, also see 4.1.1), explain the word (s) he does not understand or help them to understand formal letters. Furthermore, some deliberately create "speaking opportunities" for their newcomer flatmates, for instance by encouraging them to use the common rooms by putting facilities there (e.g., a desk with a shared computer) or by hanging around in the common room themselves (to highlight their availability for a talk). During conversations, buddies say to intentionally ask side-questions, in order to move beyond superficial "how are you / I'm fine" conversations. While many of these activities clearly serve other goals too, such as establishing a relationship or building trust, creating opportunities to practice Dutch are an important driver in social interactions between refugees and buddies.

As the refugees themselves think, most buddies estimate the Dutch language skills of their housemates have improved. Buddie, though, report overall more moderate progress compared to refugees self-evaluation. The buddies' evaluation is illustrated below in Figure 22. Eighty-two per cent (23 out of 28) of the buddies that have completed the final survey (1 missing value) estimate that their refugee housemate's Dutch language skills have improved over the course of CURANT [46% (n=13) "slightly better", 25% (n=7) "better", and 11% (n=3) "much better"]. However, around half of the buddies perceive this improvement as rather minimal (46%), and few buddies think the improvement is very large. Five buddies (18%) even perceive no improvement at all.

Figure 22: “Through cohabiting, my housemate’s Dutch language skills are...”



Source: Final survey of the buddies (n=28)

4.2.2. Understanding of Belgian everyday life, norms and institutions

A second element regards the acquisition of knowledge about Belgian society and in particular the (cultural) norms and values that are prevailing, on the one side, and Belgian and local institutions (e.g. social services), on the other. Project stakeholders identified a lack of understanding of these aspects as a major barrier to integration (see Groundwork for Evaluation).

Looking at their self-assessment of these aspects, we can observe how refugees feel their knowledge has improved a lot due to their participation in CURANT. Figure 21 (see above, 4.2) shows that:

- All refugees (100%, n=33) reported having an enhanced understanding of Flemish/Belgian society upon leaving the project [33% (n=11) a little better; 55% (n=18) better; 12% (n=4) a lot better].
- Ninety-four % (n=33) of the refugees reported a better understanding of Flemish/Belgian habits upon leaving the project [27% (n=9) a little better; 49% (n=16) better; 18% (n=6) a lot better].

- Ninety-four % (n=33) of the refugees reported finding their way more easily in Flemish/Belgian and local administration at the end of their trajectory [12% (n=4) a little better; 49% (n=16) better; 33% (n=11) a lot better].

Our qualitative data suggest that both communal living, as well as specific project activities and services related to the refugees' individualised trajectories (see Chapter 6, Figure 27), have contributed to this improvement. In the context of communal living, buddies often engaged in explaining aspects of Belgian society. For refugees, the everyday interaction with local housemates helped them to decipher Belgian society and its (tacit) cultural, social and other rules, norms and institutions. Many of the buddies regard their own willingness to explain Belgian society as a central part of their commitment. For instance, one buddy describes himself as "a teacher-buddy", as he often explains things that are more commonly understood in Belgium, such as euthanasia in case of an incurable disease. However, in the process of explaining this, he is also aware of how he is learning about Afghan views on this topic. Another buddy has taken the habit of explaining his own social activities (e.g., going out, going to festivals) to his refugee housemate, as a way of familiarizing him with the "ordinary" social life of young Belgians. Sometimes, learning is about implicit social conventions in Belgian society, for instance regarding the importance of keeping appointments and being in time. Some buddies also even observe how their housemates incorporate certain of their own habits:

I: Do you believe they [her refugee housemates] have learnt certain things about Flanders and Belgium? R: Hmm, yes for example regarding politics and elections. We have talked about it a lot and now you notice that they are really informed. I think they have taken over certain habits as well... Such as what they are watching on television. In the beginning, they were always watching childish television programmes whereas now they are more likely to watch the news bulletin. (Female buddy living in a four-bedroom house)

What is distinctive beside its multi-directional nature is how intercultural exchange is based on everyday practices and experiences, embedded in the shared living space. **Housemates learn about one another's daily habits, social life, preferences etc. not merely**

by talking about it, but also by direct observation. For example, a buddy recalls how when a local police officer came by to register all housemates' official address, his refugee housemate was frozen by fear. This made the buddy reflect on the different police cultures in Belgium and the refugee's origin country (where police are highly corrupt and repressive), and how this affects the refugee's attitude towards Belgian police.

Like in language learning, learning about each other's culture and society is triggered by domestic activities, such as watching TV. Buddies frequently report how they watch TV programmes together with their housemates and discuss the content. For example, watching "Married at First Sight"⁵⁹ and other dating programmes prompts conversation about relationships and different views on them. Sometimes TV programmes are deliberately chosen for this purpose, which points at intentionality in learning: in one of the houses, a popular Belgian children's programme about the human body and sexuality as well as a show about transgender people and drag queens are watched together, as the buddy wants to spark discussions about these sensitive issues.

While the project has the aim to familiarize newcomers with Belgian society, it is clear that in practice, learning happens in different directions. For instance, newcomers also pass acquired information on to other newcomers, and buddies report how they learn about the refugees' background and viewpoints. Newcomers assist buddies with installing certain objects in their houses, etc.

At the project level too, certain activities seem to have contributed to refugees' institutional knowledge and related practical skills, which enhance their self-reliance in Flanders. It was generally these activities that refugees identified as important as illustrated by the quotation below:

I: Can you describe one project activity that was very helpful and important to you? R: Hmm, all things are important. Practising job interviews and searching for work was very helpful to me [cf. JES trajectory, individual support by educational and youth workers]. We went also to Herentals for

⁵⁹ A TV programme in which two strangers are matched by others and marry upon their first meeting.

three days [cf. integration summer course organised by Atlas], I found that a good activity as well. (Afghan refugee)

In addition, it is likely that the social workers' administrative and practical assistance in the context of the individual case management has also contributed to the refugees' sense of knowing their way through Belgian, Flemish and local administration. However, it is often difficult to localise where exactly the refugees have picked up their newly gained skills and knowledge.

4.2.3. Administrative and financial skills needed for independent living

This paragraph examines if the newcomer is adequately prepared to live on his own after the project. We focus especially on administrative and financial skills here, as the point of learning about household tasks has been covered elsewhere in this report. Overall, many refugees seem to have gained (some) skills needed for independent living. For example,

I have also learnt for example, that once I will be living alone, it will not be a problem for me. I ... know where things are, how things have to be done, what I have to pay. I have learnt such things. (Afghan refugee)

Sometimes, this was clearly linked with project activities by the different stakeholders that were implemented specifically to prepare the newcomer for independent living. These were considered important to most newcomers in the project:

R: CURANT prepares us for independent living because this will be 'tough' for us. So they are telling us how to save money and stuff like that. I found this very good. I: And do they provide guidance on how to handle all the invoices you will receive? R: Yes, they assisted with that the first days I entered in CURANT. Also, Atlas organised activities on how to pay invoices. But nowadays it is easy as everything is in your smartphone, you don't need to go to a depository financial institution anymore... (Somali refugee)

I believe they [my refugee housemates] have gained more insight into how things work in our society. For instance on our social security system; living wage, increased refunds, medical care insurances, and so on. (Buddy)

With regard to financial skills, Figure 21 (see above) shows how most refugees feel that their capacity to manage their finances has improved due to CURANT (15%: same as before CURANT, 33%: slightly better, 43%: better, 9%: a lot better). However, it is also clear how compared to all other indicators (such as improvement in Dutch language skills, well-being etc. - explained in other sections), improvement here was much more modest. In fact, it is the domain where refugees report the least progress.

Notwithstanding the observation that CURANT seems to have contributed to some specific financial and administrative skills, buddies and the project team are worried about the refugees' ability to manage their finances after they leave CURANT. This concern is especially large with regard to the payment of energy bills. In all CURANT accommodations, the inhabitants pay a monthly fixed price of €85 for energy costs (water, electricity and gas) and the internet. However, as a result, refugees and buddies alike are unaware of the actual costs of their monthly energy consumption. This is considered as especially problematic because some of the refugees' excessive energy consumption; caused by leaving windows open during winter, turning the heating very high, leaving doors open inside the house, or taking a bath every day.

I noticed that my Afghan housemate spoiled a lot of water. Sometimes after bathing, he decided to take a shower to wash down. Apparently, water is free of charge in Afghanistan. I had to tell him that actually in Belgium it costs a lot of money. That is important for him to realise, as now our rental contract includes fixed energy costs. (Female buddy living in a four-bedroom house)

*We have a housing contract with fixed costs paid by the OCMW. My impression is that both boys [Afghan and Somali housemates] have no clue what fixed costs are. They don't have a sense of reality on this is because we are living in an awesome house and we only have to pay 335 euro each month. Chances are low that the boys will end up living in such a good house when they leave CURANT. I believe CURANT could have made the boys more conscious about realistic housing costs in Flanders by showing them invoices of electricity and water. Perhaps social workers could have emphasised the importance of budgeting related to these costs. **I found that this financial element is lacking in CURANT, which is a pity that it is so important to their preparation for independent living.** It makes me worried. (Female buddy living in a four-bedroom house, emphasis added).*

As the first excerpt shows, unawareness among refugees about energy and water waste is partly related to different standards in their origin countries. However, it is probably something most young people are unaware of when living independently for the first time, and that is usually learned by experience. However, in the case of vulnerable groups, this may have detrimental effects, as they are not able to afford such high bills. Moreover, it may endanger their housing security as financial issues may lead to problems with the landlord.

As this problem of energy waste became clearer throughout the implementation of the project, buddies and the project team alike became more alert to the topic of energy waste and tried to raise awareness, among others by organising a particular training session on energy use. Yet the doubt remains among the project stakeholders whether CURANT has prepared refugees sufficiently for the private housing market, where usually actual energy costs have to be paid. More generally, the project team expresses the fear that the relatively cheap accommodation has created a “bubble” or artificial situation for the refugees. CURANT has improved the financial and housing situation of refugees temporarily, but afterwards, they will return to a more difficult financial situation.

With regard to refugees’ financial situation, in the Baseline and Final Surveys questions were included asking refugees to assess their financial situation. Table 5 displays refugees’ evaluation of their ability to make ends meet with their budget in their country of origin, during CURANT, and expectations of this ability after CURANT on a 6-point Likert Scale (ranging from “with great difficulty” to “very easy”). A paired samples T-test was conducted to compare all means between these 3 points in time, showing that there was only one significant difference in means, which is between “in the country of origin” and “during CURANT”⁶⁰. **This indicates that refugees felt they could make a living with their budget more easily during their time in**

⁶⁰ It should be noted that the lack of a statistically significant difference in means between “during CURANT” and “expectations after CURANT” might be due to the fact that the variable “after CURANT” was assessed during the final months of the refugees’ trajectory and therefore only indicates their perception about how they will cope with their financial budget after CURANT. It would have been more appropriate to assess the actual situation of refugees who have already left the project, but in the context of this evaluation research, this was not possible.

CURANT, compared to their situation in their country of origin. This underpins the assumption that CURANT has offered some “room to breathe” with regard to their financial budget compared to their situation in their country of origin. However, it should be noted that this difference is rather small. There are two explanations for this: on the one hand, the mean value of the ability to make ends meet in the country of origin was relatively high ⁶¹, affirming the presumption that the refugees were usually not living in poverty in their origin countries⁶². Second, even when the housing price is affordable in CURANT, it remains challenging to survive on an integration allowance in Belgium⁶³.

Table 5: Refugees self-reported ability to make ends meet with their budget (house, food, education,...)

	Survey Timing	N Total	Intensity Mean (SD)	Mean Difference
In the country of origin	Start	26	3.08 (.27)	No significant difference in means between 'after CURANT'
During CURANT	End	28	3.58 (1.10)	The difference with in the country of origin: .50*
Expectations after CURANT	End	28	3.29 (1.18)	No significant difference in means

Source: Longitudinal data of 28 refugees

*p < .05 (2-tailed)

Note 1: Mean of a 6-point scale (with great difficulty (= value of 1), to very easily (value of=6))

A final aspect to note with regard to financial skills is how for unaccompanied refugees their co-ethnic network or peer group plays an important role in the management of their finances. Many of the young refugees are using informal saving schemes within their friend's circle. Informal saving schemes where money was lent to friends without a defined timeline for return was the most often mentioned type of saving scheme. In most cases, refugees

⁶¹ Mean =3.08, indicating “with some effort” on a 6-point Likert Scale ranging from “with great difficulty” to “very easy”.

⁶² The Mean of “ability to manage finances in their country of origin” lies even higher when including all refugees from the baseline survey (n=65, Mean 3.25, SD 1.63).

⁶³ Mean = 3.58, indicating a value between “with some effort” and “fairly easy” on a 6-point Likert Scale ranging from “with great difficulty” to “very easy”.

became familiar with this informal financial system in their country of origin, for instance, because they have borrowed a huge amount of money there for smuggling them to Europe. One Somali refugee stated during an interview that his entire escape route cost his family about €42 000. His family was extorted by the smugglers to pay smaller pieces of this amount during different stops of his travel. This additionally causes stress for the refugees, as they are expected to pay these debts back at a certain point. The two quotations below illustrate how they are involved in informal saving schemes:

I: I heard that you also lend money to one another. R: Definitely. I: Did you also do this? R: Definitely. I: It is about large or small sums of money? R: 1000, 2000. I: So do you trust your co-ethnics completely, for 100%? R: Yes I: And is the money always returned, or? R: Definitely. And if they do not return it, it is no problem. I: Is it because those people, because you regard them as a family for you, even though you have only gotten to know them recently? R: I have a friend, my friend is from Tajikistan if he calls me now "I need 1000 euro". [Then] I give it. [If] I need €1000. [Then] he will bring it to me, en then he will not ask it back before I return it [myself]. It is like that. (...) I: And is there never a quarrel about this, about such things? R: About money? No. I hope there never will be. I: Did it never happen to you before? R: No. I: But you did already give money? R: Erm, yes. And if you want to be real friends (...) [then] money is absolutely nothing." (Afghan refugee).

I: You acquired your driver's licence [recently], didn't you? R: Yes (...) I: Did you have a driving instructor, who taught you? R: Yes, for 20 hours I: Oh, really? Isn't it a large amount of money to pay for the driving school? Did you receive any help? R: I borrowed money for the driver's licence, with friends. One friend (gave) 100, another friend 200, yes. Every month I pay 100 for the same. I: Yes. and will you be able to return it in the future? R: Yes I return. Now yet. (...) I: And those friends, where did you get to know them? R: From in Antwerp I: And how would you explain that they trust you, to give this money because in Belgium it does not happen very often [to lend money to friends] R: Friends from school, I don't know. I: Did you offer them money before R: Yes I: Ah so, there is reciprocity, in fact? R: Yes. Sometimes, he needs something, I give, sometimes I need, he gives." (Iraqi refugee)

While it is clear how these informal financial structures are to some extent a continuation of practices from the origin country, they may also be perceived as alternative financial systems available to people who have limited access to formal financial systems. For example, the boy in the second excerpt is unlikely to have access to a bank loan (as an integration allowance recipient), unless at very unfavourable conditions. Further research is

needed to investigate the practice of informal financial systems among unaccompanied refugees more in-depth.

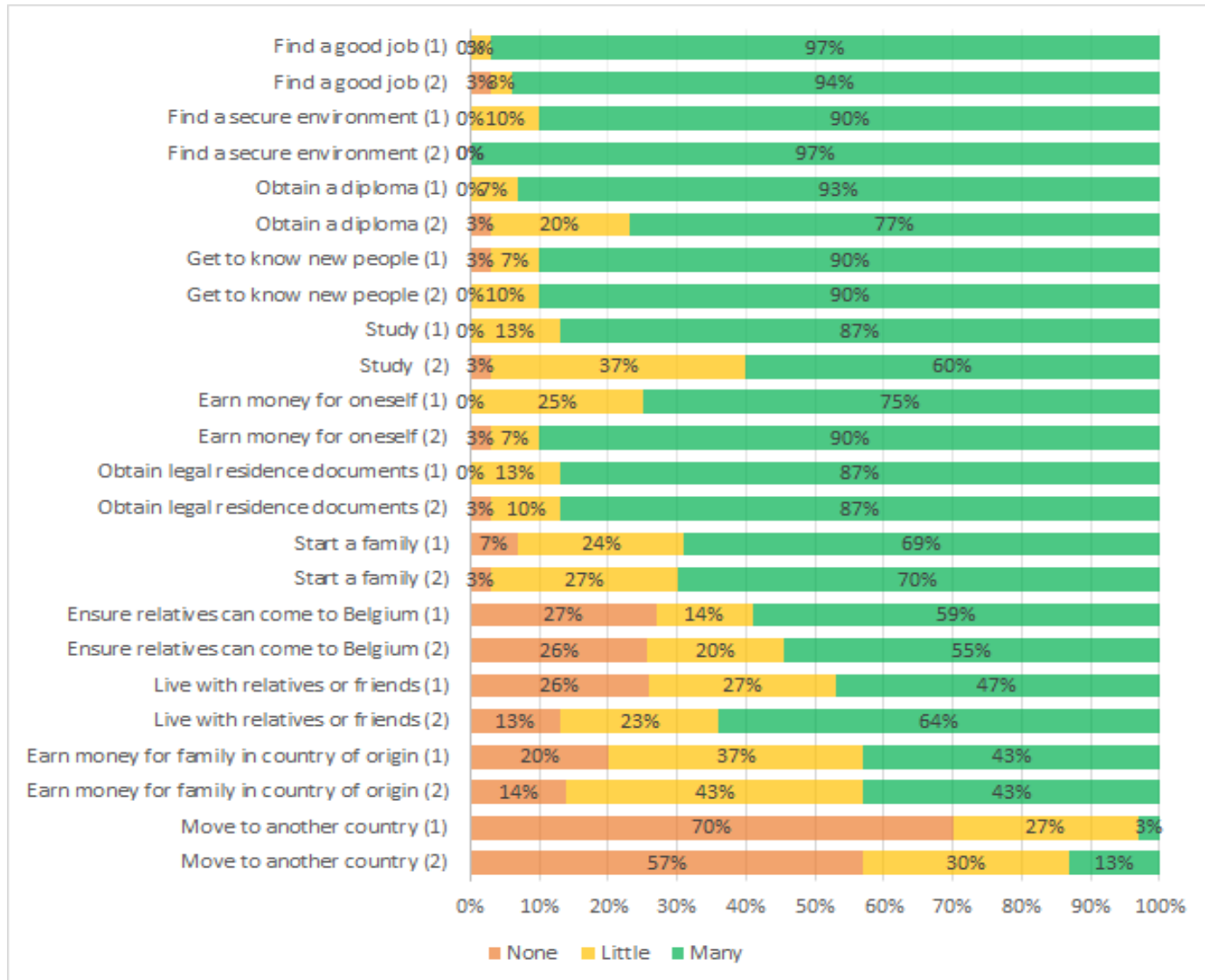
4.2.4. Developing future perspectives

Another aspect of CURANT relates to the development of a long-term future perspective in Belgium. In particular, CURANT project team is emphasising how the young newcomers need to develop realistic aspirations about education and employment in Belgium. The quotation below illustrates their viewpoint:

I: Do you think the youngsters have gained a more realistic future perspective? R1: Yes, we worked on that. We are very careful when asking, "What would you like to become?" We are emphasizing what is possible and what is impossible. Additionally, all organisations together [cf. OCMW, Atlas, JES and Solentra] aim to acknowledge the newcomers' talents. We inform them about what type of diploma they need. I believe it can be very confronting to them, to tell them 'In Belgium, this is what you get, you know... Because you are not from here'. (...) I believe that the 'real test' will only start after they leave CURANT. R2: I agree. Most will develop these 'realistic' future perspectives later, in the 'real' world. It is such a practical test. However, I also must note that certain youngster have lived independently before they entered in CURANT. They have already a 'realistic' future perspective. For those youngsters, CURANT is more likely to offer some 'breathing space' before diving into the 'harsh reality' a second time." (Focus group with project team members)

The figure below shows that the young newcomers had high employment-related, educational, and other expectations before entering in CURANT, and that these generally these remain high throughout their CURANT trajectories.

Figure 23: “Currently, I have following expectations for my future life” (at the beginning and end of refugees’ CURANT trajectories)



Source: Longitudinal data of the refugees (n=31), based on the Baseline (=1) and Final (=2) Surveys with refugees.

As shown in the descriptive table below, for two types of expectations, refugees’ expectations significantly diminished⁶⁴ throughout their participation in CURANT: first, their ‘expectations to study’ and second expectations ‘to obtain a diploma’. One expectation

⁶⁴ Refugees’ aspirations ‘to study’ diminish at a rate of $-.32[.53, .11]$, $t(28.33) = -3.16$, $p < .005$ upon leaving CURANT. Refugees’ aspirations ‘to obtain a diploma’ diminish at a rate of $-.20[.38, .02]$, $t(29.26) = -2.24$, $p < .05$ upon leaving CURANT. Refugees’ aspirations ‘to live with family or friends’ increase at a rate of $.31[.02, .60]$, $t(27.62) = 2.21$, $p < 0.05$ upon leaving CURANT.

increased significantly: the refugees' expectations 'to live with family or friends' significantly increased at the end of their trajectory.

Table 6: Refugees' expectations at the beginning and end of CURANT

Currently, I have the following expectations about my future:	Survey Timing	N Tot.	None N (%)	Little N (%)	Many N (%)	Intensity Mean (SD)	Mean Diff.
Study	Start	30	0	4 (13.3)	26 (86.7)	1.87 (.35)	
	End	30	1 (3.3)	11 (36.7)	18 (60)	1.55 (.57)	-.32**
Obtain a diploma	Start	30	0	2 (6.7)	28 (93.3)	1.93 (.25)	
	End	30	1 (3.3)	6 (20)	23 (76.7)	1.73 (.52)	-.20*
Find a good job	Start	29	0	1 (3.4)	28 (96.6)	1.97 (.19)	
	End	31	1 (3.2)	1 (3.2)	29 (93.5)	1.90 (.40)	-.07
Earn money for oneself	Start	28	0	7 (25)	21 (75)	1.75 (.44)	
	End	31	1 (3.2)	2 (6.5)	28 (90.3)	1.87 (.43)	.12
Earn money for family in country of origin	Start	30	6 (20)	11 (36.7)	13 (43.3)	1.23 (.77)	
	End	30	4 (13.3)	13 (43.3)	13 (43.3)	1.30 (.70)	.07
Find a secure environment	Start	30	0	3 (10)	27 (90)	1.90 (.31)	
	End	30	0	0	30 (96.8)	2.00 (.00)	.10
Live with relatives or friends	Start	30	8 (26.7)	8 (26.7)	14 (46.7)	1.20 (.85)	
	End	31	4 (13.3)	7 (23.3)	19 (63.3)	1.51 (.73)	.31*
Obtain legal residence documents	Start	30	0	4 (13.3)	26 (86.7)	1.87 (.35)	
	End	31	1 (3.2)	3 (9.7)	27 (87.1)	1.84 (.45)	.10
Ensure relatives can come to Belgium	Start	29	8 (27.6)	4 (13.8)	17 (58.6)	1.31 (.89)	
	End	31	8 (25.8)	6 (19.4)	17 (54.8)	1.29 (.86)	-.03
Start a family	Start	29	2 (6.9)	7 (24.1)	20 (69)	1.62 (.62)	

	End	30	1 (3.3)	8 (26.7)	21 (70)	1.67 (.55)	-.07
Get to know new people	Start	30	1 (3.3)	2 (6.7)	27 (90)	1.87 (.43)	
	End	30	0	3 (10)	27 (90)	1.90 (.31)	.03
Move to another country	Start	30	21 (70)	8 (26.7)	1 (3.3)	.33 (.55)	
	End	30	17 (56.7)	9 (30)	4 (13.3)	.57 (.73)	.24

This scale is based on the Aspirations Scale for Refugees and Migrants (ASRM) developed by Vervliet et al. (2015)

Source: Longitudinal data of the refugees (n=31)

SD: Standard Deviation

*Significant at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$ (2-tailed)*

Note 1: We reported valid percentages only (excluding missing data from the calculations)

Note 2: Bold indicates that the intensity is high (over 1.5 on a 3-point scale)

Note 3: Mean of a 3-point scale (none=0, little=1, many=2)

The fact that refugees' aspirations 'to study' and 'to obtain a diploma' diminished at the end of their CURANT trajectory is not inconceivable. At the beginning of the trajectory, refugees probably experienced some social and/or societal pressure (e.g., ideology of CURANT, family pressure) to study and gain a diploma. In addition, some also had high personal expectations, without knowing well how much effort it would require to achieve their educational aims. However, throughout their CURANT trajectory, most refugees realised that studying was harder and took more time than expected. Interview data show that especially Dutch language requirements constitute a serious barrier, and discourage refugees to continued their education or training. For instance, refugees report to drop out from (vocational) educational programmes because they failed to reach the required language competencies as described:

I: Why did you stop studying auto mechanics? R: Erm pfff, I like auto mechanics but it is very difficult for me. It is because of the language I had to stop. My practical skills were 'perfect', but the theory is too hard. (Iraqi refugee)

Moreover, those refugees having financial responsibilities (such as sending remittances to their families, funding family reunification, repaying their debt to human

traffickers) also face conflicting social pressures. Under such circumstances, educational aspirations are overruled by the pressure to earn money quickly.

Considering the above difficulties, it is thus not surprising to find that a large share of the educational and training trajectories the CURANT youngsters are enrolled in are vocationally oriented training programmes (also see Figure 24, in section 4.2.5) that aim at improving their access to the labour market in the nearby future.

It is important to note that in the surveys we enquired refugees' 'expectations' and not their 'aspirations'. Notwithstanding 'expectations' to study may have diminished, their aspiration towards studying and working in a specific profession may persist as a dream in the long term. When they have a strong aspiration about a particular profession, they often feel it is something to take up at a later stage, when they have acquired more advanced language skills. Our longitudinal qualitative data substantiate this contention. As follows, we present two quotations of an Afghan refugee. The first quote is extracted from an interview conducted after he was 6 months in CURANT:

I: Do you mean that many boys had already an idea of what they wanted to become because they saw an overview of different professions during OKAN [the reception class for non-native newcomers] and that it was because of participating in CURANT that the boys started doubting again? R: Yes, for instance, OKAN [reception classes for minor newcomers] facilitated a visit to a hospital and I was triggered and motivated to become a male nurse. Here in CURANT they tell me: 'to be honest, your Dutch is not good enough, you have to change your educational choice as it will be too difficult for you. / I: You did not agree on this advice? R: I don't know. Sometimes I worry about this, thinking that I should not have listened to them, that I should not have changed my educational choice. But, erm, if I would say: 'No, I do what I want, it does not matter if I will be able to succeed', I cannot tell if it would have worked out for me. It is a difficult matter. (Afghan refugee)

At 13 months in CURANT, we interviewed the same person again and he still aspires to become a male nurse as illustrated in the quotation below:

I: What are you studying now? R: Sanitary heating. I practice three days a week and I study for two days a week. It is my last year this year. I: Do you enjoy it? R: Yes, it is okay. I: Do you see yourself doing this job for the rest of your life? R: Erm, maybe until half of my life, and after that something else... After I graduate I want to start working in July and after a couple of

years, I want to start studying again. I: What would you like to study? R: Nursing. I: Why nursing? R: Erm, yes, I would like to take care of people. That is my passion. Yes, sanitary heating works out well, for now, I am handy. But I really want to support people, that's why I still aspire to become a male nurse. (Afghan refugee)

Another boy also reflects on the realisation that newcomers in Belgium cannot always practice the job they really aspire. He also emphasises the importance of earning money for himself:

I: First, I have to earn money. I am new to Belgium, I have very little clothes. I don't have any money. I need to earn money so that I can buy clothes. When I move out of CURANT, the rent will be much higher, it will be a problem. When I was living in Eritrea, yes, I wanted to study. But that was a different situation. If I in Belgium want to become a doctor or so, education will be too long. I am different from the people living in Belgium, I cannot speak your language very well...R: Has Belgium changed your dreams? I: Yes. R: Is that mostly due to the language problem? I: Yes, language is the first problem. If I can speak Dutch very well, maybe I can get a good job. But in case I am very clever and I don't speak Dutch, it will still be a problem. I: How do you feel about the fact that you had to change your dreams? R: Maybe a little, but in the end, it stays your dream, you can do what you want. But it all depends if you will get money out of it. Following your dream or not... Do you get it? I: Your dream should always target money? R: Yes, for instance, your dream is to become a doctor. If you are not able to do it, what shall you do? You cannot stop. Even though you cannot become something 'big' here. I should not be unemployed. I must find another job. (Eritrean refugee).

In contrast, there were also refugees who expected to start working immediately upon arrival in Belgium. These newcomers have now re-adjusted this expectation and see the importance of attending language training and educational programmes as shown in the two quotations below:

I: What did you expect upon arrival in Belgium? Did these expectation match with the ones you have now? R: Yes, when I was in Africa I had another Idea about Europe. When I entered, it was completely different compared to what I had imagined. I thought that you could come to Europe and could start working immediately, to earn money right away. But this is not the case at all. First I have to study, receive residence papers, and conduct many interviews. I didn't know that you could receive a "positive" or "negative" answer about your status. (Somali refugee)

I: What did you expect upon arrival in Belgium? Did these expectations match with the ones you have now? R: It was different, yes. When I arrived in Belgium I kind of felt in a 'hole'. It's [like] a hurricane you have to pass. After the hurricane passed you can start working, but first, you have to learn the language. I: You thought you could have started working directly? R: Yes. But it is important to obtain a diploma. Particularly if you think about your future. Without school, life will be difficult. (Eritrean refugee)

A key reason why the refugees' expectations to 'live with relatives or friends' has grown at the end of the project is that some of them have successfully applied for family reunification, meaning that their close family is coming to Belgium soon. Therefore, for some, the perspective of living soon together again is very concrete, while at the beginning of CURANT their application was still pending. In addition, some refugees may expect to rely on their friends/relatives in searching a home after CURANT, and think they will even be staying with them for a while.

Refugees who applied for family reunification (both those who were still in the application process, and those who had reunification granted and were awaiting actual reunification), usually had higher expectations to live with family/relatives or to bring the family to Belgium. Remarkable is that the variable "has applied for family reunification" is related to other important aspects that are influencing factors related to integration in the Flemish society (e.g. 'amount of friends in the same school as you', 'Dutch knowledge skills', 'knowledge of the Flemish/Belgian society', and 'finding my way through the Belgian/Flemish/local administration')⁶⁵. A hypothesis is that **the prospect to family reunification (or the hope that it will take place) boosts refugee integration of young unaccompanied minors**. This might be, for instance, because the process of family reunification itself is a lengthy and difficult procedure, in which the refugee for instance has to visit certain administrative services, collect money, search for housing etc. However, these are correlations before the actual reunification took place, changes in associations could arise after the reunification process. In order to make more causal assumptions, further research is needed.

For statistics, see Annex 2 "Data on the refugees".

Qualitative data also demonstrates how (the prospect of) family reunification impacts upon young refugees' short-term aspirations, as the responsibility to provide for the family may thus sideline educational ambitions. For instance, one Somali boy is now studying mechanics in regular secondary education. To complete his studies, he has to finish three more years of education, but he does not want to do this. Besides his full-time education, he was working for a while on Friday and Saturday evenings in a restaurant. In addition, he is following Dutch classes once a week. This happens on his own initiative because he wants to improve his Dutch language proficiency. He has a very full schedule. He says he is planning to quit the student job because it is too hard to combine this with his other activities. However, he is planning to stop his studies and look for a full-time job, in order to support his family, which is coming soon to Belgium. He did not tell his mother yet that he would quit his studies; when she calls and asks about his studies, he answers that he is studying well.

In contrast, the fact that family is far away and is likely to remain far away also influences refugees' aspirations and future vision. The separation from their family members is influencing their well-being negatively; leading to stress that prevents them from realising their full potential. One Somali refugee emphasises in the quotation below the importance of his family when asked about his future prospects and dreams:

I: What is your biggest dream now? How do you perceive a good life? R: Erm, to me a good life is to live with family, not alone, that's what I find most important. If I am with my family, I will make something of my future. But if you are not with your family, it is difficult. You have plenty of stress. I: Stress, because they are living in danger? R: Stress also because I have not seen them for three to four years, it is a bit different, I really miss them. (Somali refugee)

4.2.5. Orientation towards and participation in the labour market, education and society

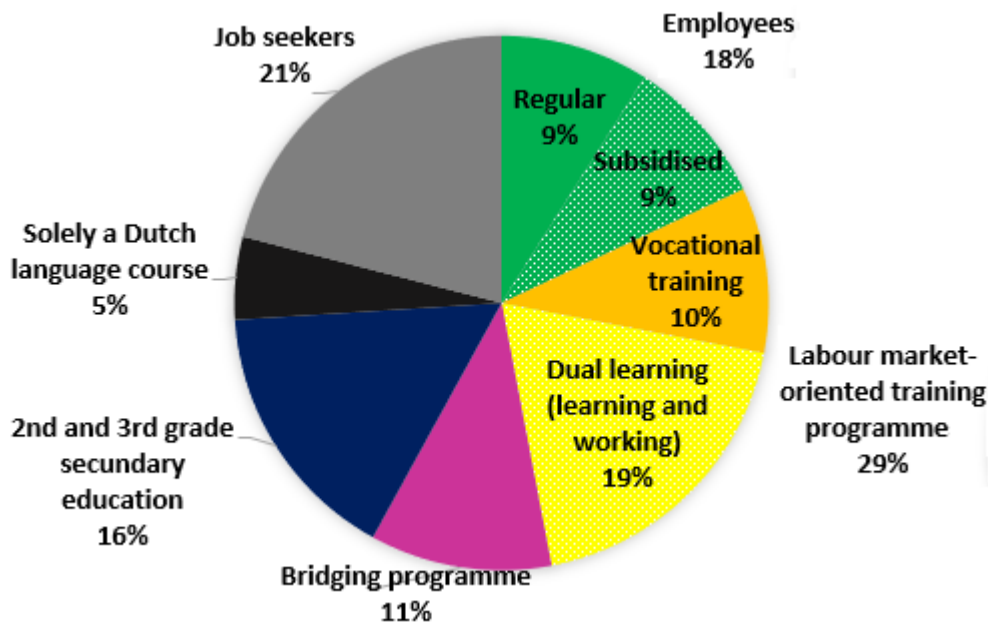
CURANT's individualised trajectories included a number of training and job orientation programmes that aimed at supporting the refugees' educational and/or labour-related aspirations and at taking first steps in achieving them (for an overview, see Figure 27 in Chapter

6). Many refugees could also acquire first labour market experiences as they entered in job internships or vocational trajectories combining part-time job internships with education. All refugees were also encouraged and guided to find a suitable student job over summer, or throughout the year.

With regard to the refugees' participation in the labour market, training and education at the end of their CURANT trajectory⁶⁶, quantitative data on all refugees in CURANT (n=81, see Figure 24) show that **18% of the young refugees are in regular (9%) or subsidised (9%) employment, whereas 61% are in diverse education trajectories or training programmes**. Of this group, 16% are in regular secondary education, 10% in vocational training, 19% in training combining learning and working (dual learning) and 11% in various bridging programmes. A small group is participating in a Dutch language programme, but not in any other form of education/training/employment. A final share of 21% is "unemployed" meaning that these are currently not enrolled in education, training or employment and looking for a job. However, of this last group many have participated in training or educational programmes during CURANT.

⁶⁶ An important remark here is that at the time of assessment (April 2019), only a share of all CURANT participants had finished their trajectories. For the others, their trajectory was still on-going, though in many cases in its final phase. An actual assessment of the final situation of all refugees can only be done in end of October 2019 (when CURANT ends).

Figure 24: Refugees' participation in the labour market, training and in different types of education



Source: Data from the Public Centre for Social Welfare on all refugees that participated in CURANT (Data acquired in April 2019)

To note just one example, one Afghan refugee who is participating in a vocational training programme entitled “Rising You”⁶⁷ explains how his current educational trajectory is likely to lead to a permanent contract:

*I: In October 2019 CURANT ends, do you already have an idea where to go?
 R: I do not know yet. But in October, I will probably be working under a permanent contract, then I will be able to rent a house... Now, this would be difficult. I: So, at the moment you are making an effort to gain a permanent contract? R: Yes, I am busy with that. I did a vocational training programme for shortage occupations. First, I have to do an internship, and after three months, I will normally receive a permanent contract. (Afghan refugee)*

In accordance with the CURANT’s aims, this boy’s employment perspectives have improved significantly over the course of CURANT. It is, again, important to emphasise that it were not necessarily CURANT team members or activities that triggered refugees’ decisions about education and training. In the case above, a friend referred the Afghan boy to the Rising You

⁶⁷ Rising You is a project implemented by the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB), IRIS and Rising You[th]. It provides a vocational training to young refugees, to prepare them to work as heights (e.g. as a painters of power pylons or a windmill technician). As this is a shortage occupation, the idea is that the training will lead the participants to a permanent job position.

programme, illustrating that refugees often have supportive (co-ethnic) networks that share information, thus improving their prospects for participation in Belgian society:

I: Who referred you to the Rising You programme? R: A friend attended this programme before and told me about it, he even showed me pictures about what the programme actually involved. I asked him how to apply and he told me to go to the VDAB [Flemish Public Employment Service] (Afghan refugee)

4.2.6. Housing

With regard to the refugees' housing needs, it is obvious how CURANT has provided a temporary solution. However, the durable effect on the refugees' housing situation is much less clear.

A first concern here relates to the fact that in CURANT refugees are stimulated to cohabit, but that this cohabitation actually required an exception to the legislation on integration allowances. If this group would continue communal living outside of the CURANT framework, their integration allowances would be reduced. As such, **unfavourable legislation makes it financially disadvantageous for most refugees** (at least, those dependent on an integration allowance) **to continue the practice of communal living**.

Second, structural societal inequalities remain persistent, such as discrimination on the private housing and labour markets, and risk to undermine some of CURANT's achievements. Even when having the right qualifications, refugees (and migrants at large) often fail to find a decent job (Vanden Bussche, Olbrechts & Maertens, 2018).

Field observations at one refugee's new accommodation, taking place briefly after he moved out of his CURANT accommodation (because of a successful family reunification procedure), demonstrate how one of the main problems that motivate the stakeholders to create CURANT - i.e. the lack of decent, affordable housing for young refugees - persists afterwards:

Field observation by the researcher: When I entered the terraced house, the door was open. Later, I found out that the door is always open as there is no key. There was a man standing in the hallway. I asked him if C. [the ex-CURANT participant] was home. He said he doesn't know C. After a while,

*C. came downstairs. He shows me his tiny apartment. There was no furniture yet. The apartment consisted of a tiny living room, a tiny bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen. He shares the terraced house with a family living downstairs and one family that lives above him. He doesn't know these people. He found the house through referrals by friends, as it was difficult to find accommodation the regular way because he has no employment contract. **I believe he has ended up in a situation of rack-renters. He pays a huge amount of money for a little overcrowded accommodation that is of bad quality, as the lack of isolation and damp patches on the walls show.** [emphasis added]*

When interviewed about his new house briefly after he left CURANT, the boy tells:

R: The house is too small. I don't know what to do when my family arrives. I am going to try to find a bigger house. I: How did you actually find this house? R: My friends told me about it. They live in Ghent now, they know the landlord. I have met them at the reception centre. I: So, was CURANT not able to assist you with finding a place? R: Yes CURANT also assisted me to find a house... One lady, I forgot her name, she went with me to three landlords and they always told us that they could not rent to me as I don't have an employment contract, it is very difficult.

Three months later, he is still living there. In the meanwhile, the family reunification took place so now he is living there with his family.

I: Can you make ends meet with your budget? Last time you told me you had to pay €700 rent, is that correct? R: I have to pay €850 each month with water and electricity included. I: That is very expensive actually for what you get. How are you managing? R: Yes, but really, it is so difficult. I keep on searching for another house. I really want to find another house. I: And how is it going? Three months ago, you were also busy looking for another house? R: Yes, but really...The landlord always tells me that I need a contract. It is so hard."

This distressing situation points out well how structural factors external to CURANT make it uncertain to what extent some of the achievements are durable. It is unlikely that in his current housing situation, this boy can invest much of his time in education, leisure, Dutch language learning etc. as he is again moved into a situation where a "survival mode" prevails.

CHAPTER 5: CURANT'S IMPACT ON THE BUDDIES' COMPETENCIES

Drawing on the understanding that newcomer integration is a two-way process, it is important to not just focus on the refugees' position, but also consider the local population's side - here represented by the buddies. As was clear from the interviews with buddies and observations of buddy meetings, the experience of communal living triggered many reflections and emotions among the buddies. While most buddies highlighted valuable or fun aspects of living together with young adult refugees, others mainly perceived it as challenging. However, what did they all learn from their CURANT experience? In this section, we address more in detail how CURANT affected buddies' multicultural competencies, knowledge and attitudes.

The baseline and final survey with the buddies consist of a Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ, Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven 2010). This questionnaire assesses five different personality traits that are considered important in social interaction with people with a different ethnocultural background: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility. This comparison of buddies' scores on the baseline and final survey allows us to assess whether buddies have become more competent to interact with people from other cultures during their CURANT participation.

Examining the scores of the five scales, we see a significant shift⁶⁸ related to one particular personality trait of the buddies. Over the course of CURANT, **buddies' cultural empathy has increased significantly** (see Table 7 below). This particular personality trait can be defined as follows:

A cultural empathetic person knows how to approximate very effectively what goes on in other people's minds. He/she will actively exhibit a real interest in the feelings and needs of others. He is quick to grasp which feelings,

⁶⁸ Buddies' mean score on cultural empathy increased at a rate of .22[.04, .40], $t(26.92) = 2.45$ $p < .05$ when exiting CURANT.

thoughts and behaviours play an important role in the “blueprint” of the cultures with which he is confronted (MPQ, Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

While our findings demonstrate only one significant change, this not precludes that for smaller groups of buddies there was growth on other personality traits. Likely, their increasing scores were neutralised by the decline of others who were having for instance a more negative communal living experience.

Table 7: Buddies' Multicultural Personality Traits at the beginning and end of CURANT

MPQ Scales	Survey Timing	N	Mean (SD)	Mean Difference
Cultural empathy	Start	29	3.63 (.60)	
	End	29	3.84 (.55)	.22*
Open-mindedness	Start	29	3.80 (.36)	
	End	29	3.87 (.26)	.07
Social initiative	Start	29	3.54 (.48)	
	End	29	3.47 (.45)	-.07
Emotional stability	Start	29	3.29 (.41)	
	End	29	3.30 (.48)	.03
Flexibility	Start	29	3.44 (.37)	
	End	29	3.51 (.34)	.08
Total MPQ	Start	29	3.54 (.29)	
	End	29	3.60 (.27)	.07

Source: Longitudinal data of the buddies (n=29)

SD: standard deviation

Note 1: Mean of a 5-point scale (no-greatly)

Note 2: Mean difference as computed by IBM SPSS

* Significant at $p < .05$; ** significant at $p < .005$; *** significant at $p < .001$ (2-tailed)

The following quote expresses one buddy's sense he has become more skilful in communicating with people with a different ethnocultural background:

It is almost impossible to not learn a lot after cohabiting with people from a completely different culture [emphasis by respondent]. My way of discussing sensitive topics with people that have another opinion and frame of reference has changed a lot. In the beginning, I would act in a moral high ground way (...) But now I do not have the intention to change their perception. I would rather interact with them in a Socratic way. I would explore why they think in such a way, accepting different opinions... (Buddy living in the student house).

Another buddy describes in the quotation below how the CURANT experience has sparked critical reflection on integration policies, but also on her own attitude towards newcomers. She argues that the voice and agency of newcomers are not always fully respected, which reveals her increased ability to recognize the disadvantaged position of newcomers:

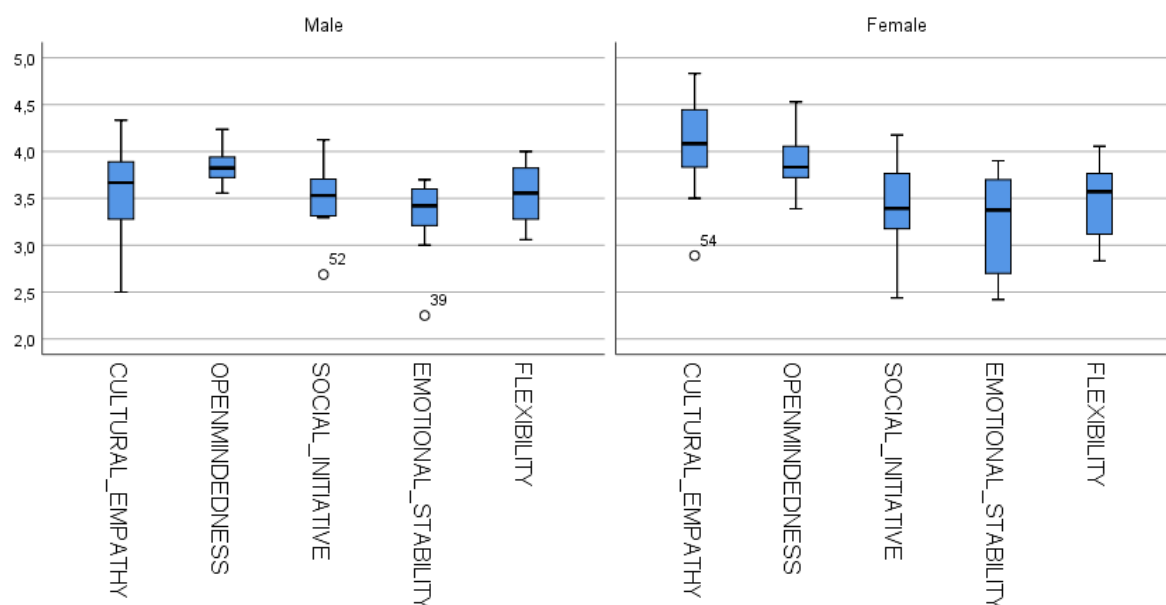
*R: Those training sessions for newcomers are set-up in a too one-directional way. It would be better if integration could be seen in a bi-directional way where two cultures meet each other in the middle. I: What exactly do you mean? R: I believe that newcomers should not only take over our values and norms, in particular in the context of intercultural communal living. I: Do you mean that the agency of refugees is not enough respected during the project implementation? R: Yes, that is often the case. I: How could the project have stimulated more empowering intercultural exchange? R: **For instance, when we have inhabitant meetings in our communal house, it is often the case that we don't listen enough to what the newcomers consider important.** If I remember it well, S. [one refugee housemate] emphasized during such a meeting that it was important to him to have breakfast together. He found it strange that everyone was having breakfast separately and that we cooked independently. During that meeting, his proposal was swept off the table immediately, which was partly my fault as I told him this is impossible due to the fact that everyone has different schedules. But when I contemplate about it again, I would say 'okay, you find this important, how can we make a plan to have breakfast together, perhaps one day a week?' (buddy living in a student house).*

Remarkably, female buddies' final score on the MPQ scale on cultural empathy is significantly higher⁶⁹ compared to male buddies. **While in the baseline scores, male and**

69 Independent Samples T-tests were conducted to compare differences in Means on the MPQ scales between female and male buddies. There was a significant difference in the scores for cultural empathy on the final survey between male buddies (M = 3.59, SD = .52) and female buddies (M = 4.06, SD = .51) conditions; $t(24.75) = 2.31$, $p < .05$.

female buddies' scores did not differ significantly on any of the five scales, the growth on cultural empathy is mainly present among the female buddies. The higher mean value for women in the final measurement is clearly visible in Figure 25.

Figure 25: Visual presentation of the distribution of MPQ scores as measured in the final survey by gender



Source: Final survey of the buddies (n=29),

Note 1: MPQ measurement on a 5-point Likert Scale (from “totally agree” to “totally don’t agree”)

Note 2: Explanation on how to interpret box plots can be found in Annex 1 of this report

One hypothesis for the explanation of this gender difference could be that for the female buddies, the gender-mixed nature of cohabitation strengthened their learning experience. As such, their cultural empathy not only increased due to living together with people from other ethnocultural backgrounds but at the same time with individuals with a different gender. As a result, we assume that at the end of CURANT, they do not only feel more competent in dealing with “people from another culture” but also with “young men”. The quote of one female buddy, after around one year of communal living, support the idea that the gender of the buddy matters in how the CURANT experience affects them.

I: Do you regard newcomers differently now, in general, because of your experience [of cohabiting with newcomer]? R: Yes, I do. Newcomers - I'm a bit ashamed to say this, but if I would meet Y. an A. on the street, I would not

feel at ease. Because they have a - they do not have the looks of a criminal, but ... [pauses to think] if they are wearing their leather jackets and all.... these are not men or boys I would feel at ease with, as a girl. But now, if I walk the streets, I meet many of these kind of boys, sometimes I even know them as friends of my housemates, sometimes I don't. I notice that I feel more at ease now with them because I got to know them. I know now that these are super nice boys, soft-hearted, very friendly. (...) I knew this before with my mind, but I didn't feel it. And now I really feel it [touches her heart] (Female buddy, living with refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan).

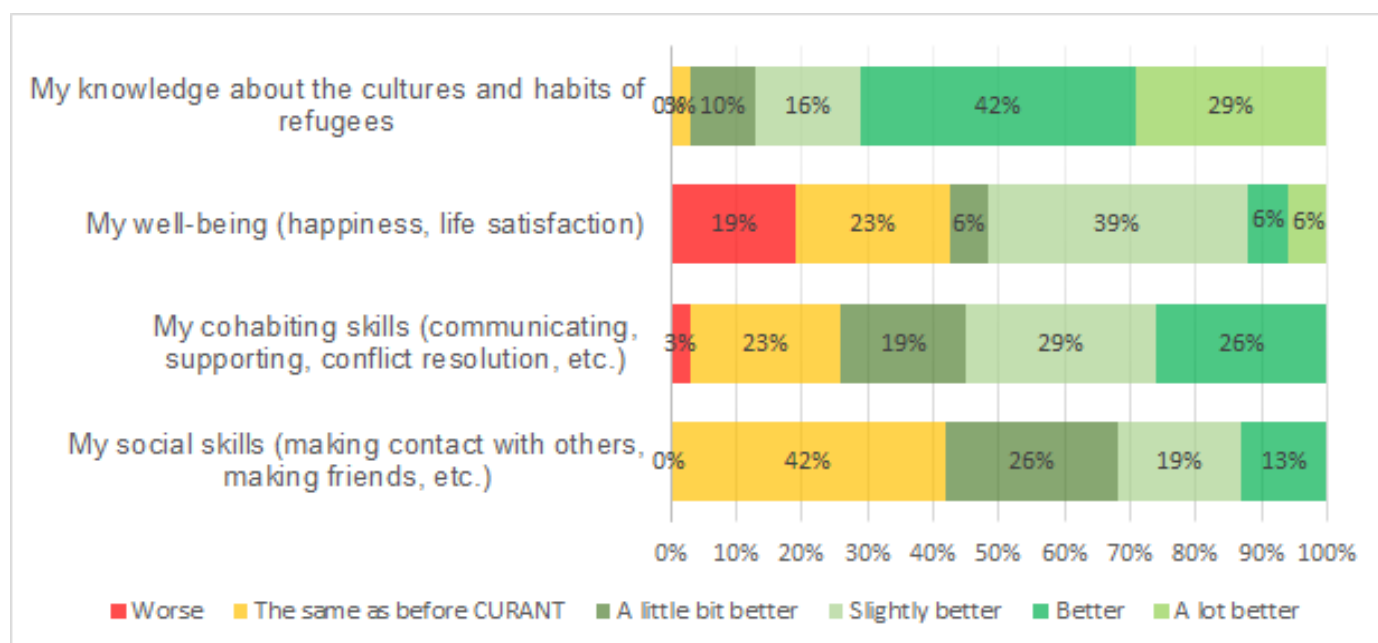
Differently to female buddies, male buddies generally do not mention feeling “more at ease” after CURANT when walking the streets alone.

The general finding based on MPQ data that buddies’ cultural empathy has increased. corresponds with the finding that **most buddies (97%) say their knowledge about the cultures and habits of refugees has improved** (see Figure 26 below). In addition, it is also widely confirmed in in-depth interviews with buddies, who say they understand better the particular cultures (e.g. Afghan, Syrian, Eritrean, etc.) of their refugee housemate(s) as well as the central concerns in their lives (e.g. bringing family over to Belgium). Buddies also report a larger awareness about the particular issues newcomers and refugees in Belgium need to handle, such as their administrative and financial struggles, but also the prejudices and daily racism newcomers encounter. In particular, buddies say they understand better the impact of receiving welfare allowance on people’s lives, and the extent of top-down administrative control and dependency this entails (by the Public Centre for Social Welfare). However, it should be noted that a better understanding does not necessarily lead to a more paternalistic approach towards the refugees. For instance, many buddies note how - given the difficult circumstances - their housemate actually copes quite well. In a few cases, buddies say that due to CURANT experience (usually referring to “unsuccessful” trajectories), their personal conviction grew that newcomers should be more active in seizing opportunities.

However, buddies usually think the experience of mixed communal living has not altered their viewpoint on refugees or newcomers fundamentally. This is not surprising, as being open-minded towards newcomers was a prerequisite to enter the project. Rather,

buddies feel how their view now has become much more informed or even embodied (as the above interview quote illustrated), as it is now based on their own first-hand experience.

Figure 26: “My participation in CURANT caused the following changes in myself...”



Source: Final survey of the buddies (n=29)

Note 1: For descriptive statistics, see Table 18 in Annex 2.

As the table above indicates, **many buddies also indicate to have gained cohabiting skills** (e.g., communication with housemates and conflict resolution). Here, it should be noted that quite some buddies cohabited before; likely they represent a part of the group that has learned little or nothing. Indeed, they are the ones that reported in interviews that in the communal living in CURANT, similar issues arose as in “mainstream” communal living. In addition, in *negative* communal living situations, buddies may also have the feeling that they did not learn anything.

With regard to their **general social skills**, it is interesting to note that about half of the buddies reports that CURANT also feels these have improved. This is important for several reasons. First, it highlights how just as the refugees, many buddies are also young adolescents, who are still developing their social and other skills. Second, it also indicates how buddies

should not be perceived as the ones who socialise easily and have large networks and the refugees as those who need to learn how to expand their network. Indeed, some buddies say to be inspired by the social attitudes of their refugee housemates, who were often more generous and hospitable.

Finally, the **emotional well-being** of buddies was questioned. Remarkably, while more than half saw a positive impact on their well-being, an important share says that their emotional well-being was affected negatively by CURANT (19%), which probably represents those cases where communal living was rather problematic (e.g., little contact, dirty or unsafe environment). This indicates a downside of communal living, namely how it can be emotionally burdening and stressful.

CHAPTER 6: CURANT'S CASE MANAGEMENT AS AN INSTRUMENT TO CREATE CUSTOMISED, INTEGRATED TRAJECTORIES FOR REFUGEES

One of the central innovations in the CURANT design regards the implementation of multidisciplinary case management. This innovation is rooted in a holistic approach to care. The holistic approach to care is reflected in CURANT's comprehensive programme design, which attends to young refugees' needs with regard to housing, administration, well-being, education, employment, leisure and social relations. The innovative quality of CURANTs service delivery model is to provide different types services, support and training in a coordinated, customised manner through the case management, thus delivering to each individual the support that he/she needs.

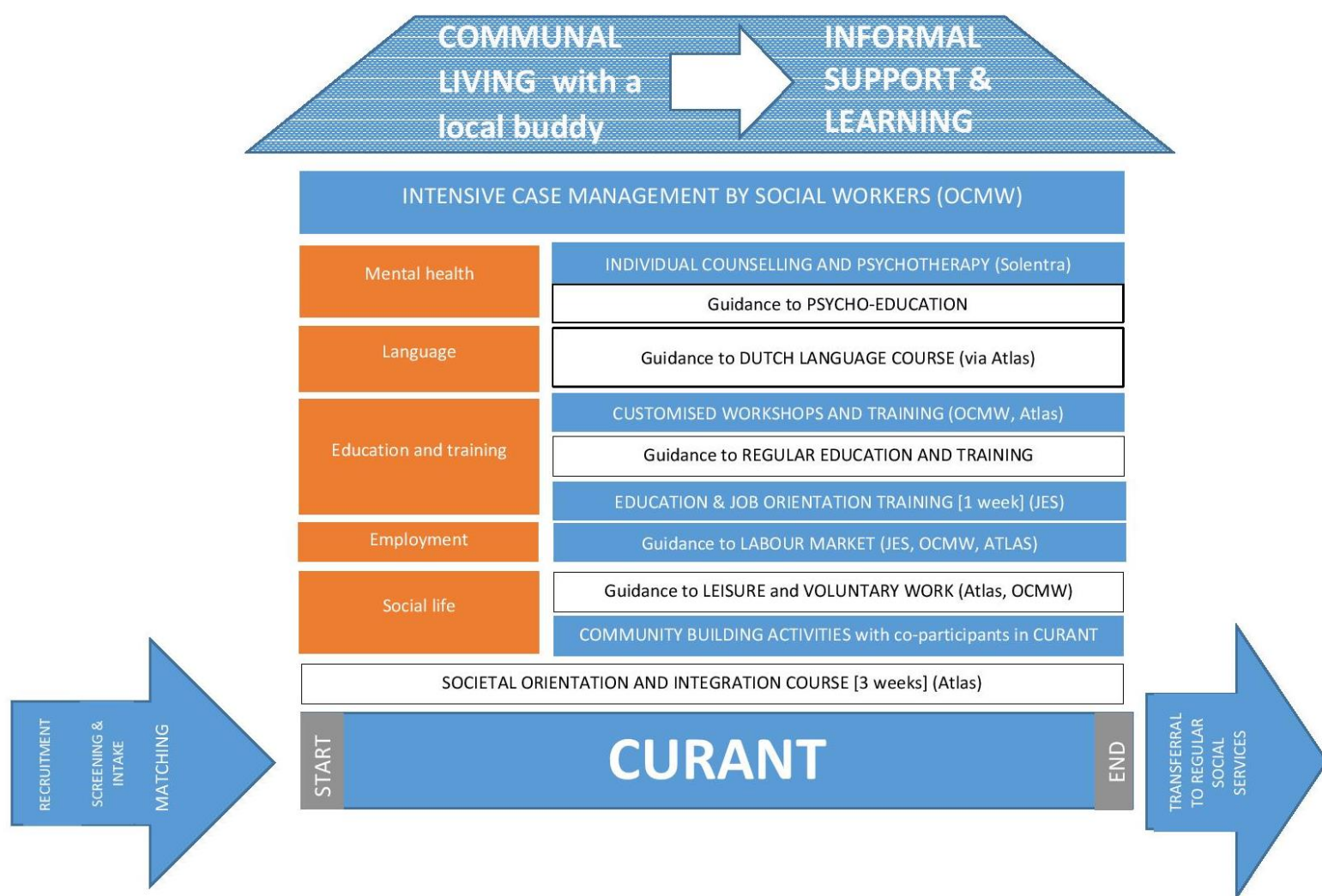
The schedule below offers a simplified overview of the main types of professional support services and formal activities and trainings available to the refugees participating in CURANT. Altogether, these different types of services, activities and trainings constitute the components of which refugees' integrated customised trajectories are built⁷⁰. In this schedule, we list the services and activities delivered directly by CURANT's partner institutions (JES, Solentra, OCMW and Atlas)⁷¹, while also indicating how refugees participating in CURANT are guided to activities and services *external* to CURANT. For instance, case managers refer refugees to regular education and training trajectories provided by educational (e.g. secondary schools, adult education) and employment institutions (e.g. Flemish employment services),

⁷⁰ Importantly, the overview presents the available offer of services and support to participating refugees. As such, it represents the possible "ingredients" of individual trajectories and not how an individual trajectory looks like. In accordance with the idea of providing customised trajectories, individual trajectories differ for each refugee.

⁷¹ As the activities and services provided by Vormingplus only target the buddies, they are not included in this schedule. However, they have been discussed elsewhere in this report (see 2.4.2).

and make referrals to psycho-educational sessions (Mind-Spring⁷²). Indeed, the central idea is that customised trajectories are realised not only by providing a range of activities and services within CURANT, but also by improving the access of refugees to attend the appropriate offer of relevant external institutions. The rationale of CURANT's model, and the different types of professional support provided by the CURANT consortium, have been discussed earlier in the evaluation study's Groundwork for Evaluation and Literature Study (2017).

Figure 27: CURANT's holistic service delivery model for refugees



⁷² For more information, see <http://www.mind-spring.org/>

Due to the evaluation study's focus on assessing the innovative aspects of CURANT, we will not discuss each activity, training or service provided in CURANT separately in our analysis. Rather, in the present chapter we focus on the implementation of the major innovative components of CURANT's case management approach: the multidisciplinary consultation mechanism established within the CURANT project team, on the one hand, and the position of the case manager as a personal coach, on the other. We discuss the merits and demerits of each component, based on the project team's and participants' experiences.

6.1. INTENSE, MULTIDISCIPLINARY CONSULTATION AND COOPERATION

The core feature of the individualised case management approach in CURANT was regular **multidisciplinary consultation** by the team members on individual cases. This aspect was praised by all team members as it allowed them to grasp each refugees' individual situation better, discuss the appropriate steps to be taken in terms of further guidance, and divide tasks among the team. Especially the input of the psychotherapist team (Solentra) was highly valued, as it allowed other team members to understand the refugees' behaviour better, and particularly how this was influenced both by past experiences (e.g., traumas, flight story) and current stressors (e.g. acculturative stress, difficult situation of family in origin country, developmental issues).

The central moments in terms of mutual consultation among the project team members were the "**case management meetings**", regular meetings headed by social workers (the case managers). Here, a group of CURANT team members discussed individual cases and decided upon the type and extent of care each refugee needed, thus defining their individualised trajectories in CURANT. However, notwithstanding the importance of these meetings, an important share of the communication happened outside of those formal meetings, through **informal face-to-face** or other types of contact (via email and telephone). In addition, sometimes "crisis meetings" took place in case issues that are more urgently

needed to be discussed (e.g., the conflict between housemates). Throughout CURANT, basic information on the participants and their CURANT trajectories were also shared via an online database accessible to all project team members. However, all project team members stress how regular face-to-face meetings are often the most efficient way to communicate about individual cases. Especially the practice of sharing a co-working space with project team members of different stakeholders (which happened during a part of the project) was praised highly as a means for efficient communication.

While the multidisciplinary background of the team was seen as an asset in all trajectories, this was, even more, the case when problems emerged, (e.g., school dropout of a youngster, gender-related issues, non-compliance with house rules, etc.). Here, **the availability of a range of professionals with different disciplinary backgrounds was essential to cope with these issues in an appropriate manner**. In addition, it helped all project team members to look at issues from multiple angles, leading to a nuanced viewpoint grounded in different types of expertise. For instance, due to the presence of several partners who have youth and young adults as their primary target group (Atlas, JES vzw), other team members started to see how the CURANT participants are in fact *youngsters* in the first place, who are however in a situation where they are carrying a lot of “adult” responsibilities.

For instance, the OCMW [Public Centre for Social Welfare] has certain [standard] procedures regarding integration allowance, and [if their clients don't comply with the rules] then the integration allowance is withdrawn. And then I think “but these are youngsters [emphasis by the respondent], of course they cannot handle money, [off course] they are occupied by other things, [of course] they do not fulfil all commitments!” (...) [however, in CURANT] OCMW tries to not look at them as adults, for whom taking away the integration allowance is considered as an [effective] mean to reach your goals. [Instead] I notice how now [in CURANT], they question more “Is it useful to take away the integration allowance? Or is there another way to reach our goals?” Because [if you take away the integration allowance], the youngster will be like “ok, now I have less money, maybe I borrow some of the friends” and maybe nothing changes in terms of his or her attitude. (Project team member of Atlas)

As a result, the project team adopted a somewhat more reflective attitude regarding the implementation of sanctioning policies. The pedagogical impact of hard sanctions was

contested as effective in the long run. The risk of external sanctioning (by the OCMW's Council) was also reduced due to the project team's active support to the CURANT participants. In one particular case, the project team's argument was that given the difficult situation (including domestic abuse) it would have been unfair to not give this youngster another chance. Resultantly, the refugee was not sanctioned. Again, this example shows how a deeper understanding of individual situations leads to a more nuanced, empathetic approach.

In general, refugees valued CURANT's holistic approach. While it was sometimes difficult for the young refugees to understand the task division among project team members, the availability of a large team of professionals with different types of expertise, in combination with the communal living with a buddy, was seen as helpful. For instance, this boy testifies:

CURANT helps us well because it takes care of different things in our lives. It helps to get a good student job and to get to know Belgian people. It provides activities to bring people together. So I would say CURANT is really good to get to know a lot of people. Also, to show how the lives of Belgians look like, what they do in their free time. They also give us advice about living independently after CURANT. (Syrian refugee)

Nevertheless, others were more critical about the individualised case management, especially during the first year of the project (see First Evaluation Report, Ravn & al. 2018). At that time, many activities and training were obligated for all participants, who as a result felt overburdened as stated in the quotation below. In addition, they did not always understand the use of particular training or activities for them.

In CURANT I have to consider so many things. The people of CURANT are calling me every day for activities. I have more important things to do. It is not okay to oblige me for such things. If I tell them I don't want to go, they have to respect me. I actually want to leave CURANT, I don't want them (CURANT) to call me every day, I want to be free (Iraqi refugee)

Not just the amount of activities, also particular methods used in some 'obliged' activities were sometimes the target of criticism:

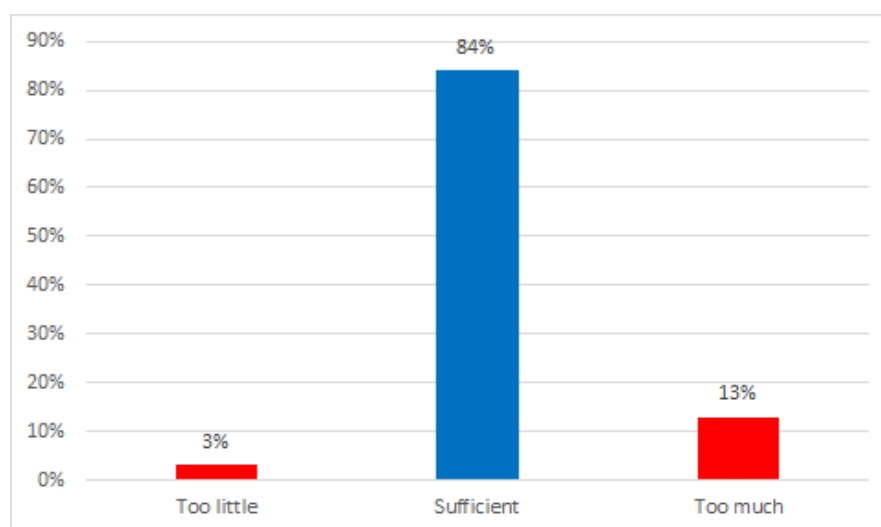
R: Activities, yes. I don't really like that myself. Because I am 19 years old and they want me to play like a child. Do you understand? / I: The activities were too childish and you don't like that? / R: No. / I: Did you attend a lot of activities? / R: Yes, one week. / I: What would you prefer to do instead? / R: Sports. Perhaps one day or two days we could play soccer or so... (Afghan refugee)

However, other young refugees reported to enjoy these more playful methods (such as group games, role-plays), while the project team also stress their pedagogical value and positive impact on group dynamics.

Acknowledging that a too large offer of activities was overburdening the participants, the project team decided to alter its approach after a few months of implementation, moving towards a more **client-centred** approach, where still certain trainings were obliged but where individual needs were taken into consideration more than before.

This shift probably (partly) explains the results with regard to this topic in our quantitative data. Figure 27 shows that around 4 out of 31 (13%) refugees reported that there were too many compulsory activities. While this is a limited number, the relatively low amount indicates two things: first, it shows how in the mature phase of implementation of CURANT, refugees have no longer the feeling that they have to attend many compulsory activities as the overall CURANT approach became more customised. Second, in the final survey sample of refugees, project dropouts are underrepresented, while for this group the high number of compulsory activities was one of the motivations to leave CURANT early.

Figure 28: “What did you think about the amount of obligatory activities?”



Source: Final survey of the refugees (n=31)

In fact, **the initial approach of the project shows one potential danger of holistic support programmes: the risk of being overambitious by aiming at individual progress in various domains at once, thereby underestimating how much effort and energy it all takes from the individuals involved.** This is especially a concern in programmes for vulnerable youth struggling with many difficulties at once and who, above all, yearn for stability and rest. Reflecting on this issue, one of the psychotherapists stresses that CURANT’s aims should be realistic in terms of the progress they expect:

For some of the youngsters, you could say that I could work with them because there is room for improvement in their [psychological state], however, humans only have a limited amount of psychic energy. If you have to invest it in one thing, you cannot invest in something else – [your energy] is not endless. So I think, you ask them to integrate, to work on their housing situation, education, work, ... if you already realize this [positive effects in those domains], I think this means already a lot to these youngsters. (Psychotherapist)

In accordance with this realisation, the project team also learned that the expectations about the individual progress that can be accomplished in a period of 1 to 2 years were in many cases too optimistic. In reality, individual progress is rather slow, and individual trajectories were marked by difficulties.

Buddies, on their side, valued the multi-disciplinary supportive project team for different reasons. For them, its presence reassured them that in case of questions or troubles in the communal living, someone would be able to provide help. **Indeed, the broader supportive framework to the refugees was seen by various buddies as a prerequisite to enter into communal living with a young unaccompanied refugee.** In addition, it reduced their own responsibility to help their refugee housemates and allowed them to refer them quickly to appropriate professional help if needed. For instance, if refugees were struggling with administrative and financial matters, they could be referred to their social worker; if serious psychological issues raised, the projects' psychotherapist team was informed about this, etc. In addition, the supportive framework (especially the buddy sessions, see 2.4.2) helped them to reflect on and understand better the behaviour of their refugee housemates.

However, buddies too sometimes expressed how according to them the project was "overambitious" in its approach. While buddies usually said to "believe in the project's concept" at the end of the project, some found the overall project design too complicated to be effective:

On paper, it probably sounds very well but in reality, the project is just too ambitious. They want people to cohouse, people to integrate, to provide social housing, to provide different trajectories across various organisations: Jes, ATLAS, and OCMW. This all makes it just too complicated. It is not the core of what the project should be: a place for intercultural interaction and aiming for better integration outcomes for the newcomer. (Buddy).

Having multi-disciplinary expertise is not always sufficient, sometimes other features of project team members are more important to provide effective support. The availability of a number of **experienced practitioners** within the project team, i.e. former refugees sharing the same background with some of the CURANT participants (e.g., Afghan, Syrian, Iraqi), has proved to be indispensable in a number of occasions. This has been especially the case when refugees struggled with sensitive, culture-related matters or when communication in Dutch failed. For instance, when some Afghan boys felt insecure about what kind of behaviour is acceptable towards girls, this topic was picked-up by some co-ethnic caregivers. These were able to base their counselling on their insider understanding of gender norms in the origin

country and/or their former experience as a newcomer in Belgian society. Also for buddies, the presence of “experienced practitioners”, both within the project team as among the buddies (4 buddies had a refugee background) was valuable; as it improved the buddies’ access to insider perspectives with regard to e.g. refugees’ flight experiences and newcomer perspectives on Belgian society.

Finally, **multidisciplinary case management brings ethical challenges**. A central aspect of case management is sharing personal information on individual project participants among the project team members, which has clearly ethical implications. All project participants were informed about the sharing of personal data and were asked to give their consent at the beginning of the project. Still, formal consent does not “solve” this ethical issue, because we can doubt whether group vulnerable as the CURANT participants fully grasps the meaning of this consent, on the one hand, and because the only alternative option was to participate in CURANT.

However, in general, the team was carefully sticking to the “need to know” principle; i.e. to only share private information selectively, if this was necessary to know (rather than “nice to know”). Still, as the project evolved in a number of cases, refugees felt ‘betrayed’ by buddies or others who shared information about them with or within the project team (as they felt this to be like gossiping). Buddies, on their side, were often wary to report problems to OCMW employees because they were afraid of the far-reaching consequences this may have for their housemates (who could be sanctioned - also financially - if they did not comply with CURANT’s rules). Rather, they preferred reporting issues to the team members of Vormingplus, in order to keep things more confidential. These type of issues highlights how the careful treatment of confidential information about individuals is an important issue in individual case management.

6.2. THE INDIVIDUAL CASE MANAGER AS AN OUTREACHING COACH

In CURANT, the case managers were able to spend more time with their clients, compared to regular social workers at OCMW. On average in CURANT the case managers

followed up around 16 individual cases while in the regular social workers in OCMW Antwerpen handle around 60 cases. Due to this higher availability, case managers can observe their clients' evolution more closely and act more rapidly if needed. For instance, the case managers know the agenda of their clients and have far more contact with the youngsters' school. As such, case managers become active, involved, outreaching coaches. As illustrated by the following excerpt, the social workers find that **more close guidance of their clients improves the quality and effectiveness of their work significantly**:

You can really follow up closely, follow up commitments, give small assignments, and check if they succeeded. Also, you can follow up more closely if they go to school, much more closely than what a regular social worker in a mainstream social centre could do [...] Also, the fact that they live together with a buddy [is positive], I try to meet the buddy from time to time too, or mail or call them to hear how everything is going. (Case manager)

The project team agrees that this extra time for guidance is beneficial because of the particular age group the CURANT participants are in. Different from (older) adults, young adults are generally more satisfied with a more outreaching, committed approach, where social workers take a more active role in checking on them whether the commitments made are realised, and by motivating them. If this extra time is missing, the chance is higher that they will drop out. A direct implication of the "extra time" for social workers is that appropriate care and information was more accessible: the threshold to ask for help is much lower when you do not have to make a formal appointment every time you need help. Moreover, social workers were accessible not only via phone call or face-to-face meetings but also via for instance via WhatsApp, which is a more informal, low-threshold communication medium that young refugees – and youth in general - are familiar with.

Importantly, social workers stress the variation in the amount spent with each client: this ultimately depends on individual refugees needs, because some need much more guidance compared to others. Therefore, rather than fixing a predefined amount of time per month for each client, it is more efficient to adopt a more flexible approach. In addition, often the intensity of guidance shifts across time: it usually decreased after youngsters were a few months in CURANT, once youngsters were "on track" or became more self-reliant (e.g.

because their Dutch language proficiency has improved, because they know how to handle certain administrative tasks), meetings with the social worker happen usually on a less frequent basis.

A central feature of CURANT's outreaching approach are **regular house visits to all participants**; therefore, an important share of the meetings between refugees and their social workers took place in the living rooms of CURANT's accommodations. In addition, in the larger houses (Klapdorp and BREM16) communal rooms were also considered as polyvalent rooms useful for other purposes, such as workshops organised by project team members, weekly consultation hours (where refugees can come by to ask questions, e.g. on student jobs (JES)), or individual therapy sessions (Solentra).

Project team members usually consider regular house visits as valuable, as it allows them to meet their clients in a more informal context. In addition, it is sometimes more efficient, e.g., in BREM16, where the case manager can meet several refugees at once. In addition, during their visits, social workers often interact with the buddies and receive valuable additional information on the refugee and communal living situation.

However, house visits as a method also pose a number of practical challenges; for instance, sometimes internet connection was missing, hindering the possibility to look up information together. In addition, a copy machine is not available. Moreover, the city's client registration system (eVITA), which is often needed during meetings between social workers and their clients, is not accessible via mobile appliances. In addition, as CURANT housing is dispersed all over the city of Antwerp, it is time-consuming for case managers to visit their clients. Therefore, while it was anticipated that nearly all refugee - case manager meetings would take place on site, in reality, this was realised for around half of the contacts; others take place in the building where the Public Centre for Social Welfare is located⁷³.

⁷³ Until end of December 2018, CURANT project team was located in a separate building. Afterwards, the project team relocated to the central building of the Public Centre for Social Welfare social services in Antwerp.

One refugee who left CURANT reflects on the case management and house visits he had during CURANT:

I: You left CURANT two months ago. Are there certain things that you miss at the moment? R: Yes, definitely. My social assistant usually came over every week to check on me. Now she never visits anymore. I: How did she assist you? R: She assisted me with the paperwork, posting something, making an appointment with the doctor or assisting me to get a job, all such things... (...) I: Can you give one example about what you found good about the CURANT project? R: To me, it was my social assistant. The weekly meetings were very beneficial to me, it was better. (Afghan refugee)

Buddies too were generally having no issues with house visits, on the contrary, they were generally happy when the social worker visited and also showed concern about them.

However, the outreaching guidance by case managers has also pitfalls. One potential pitfall is that this more close guidance is perceived as “extra control” or even “paternalistic” by refugees. As clients are followed up closely, certain behaviour or issues that would remain invisible to regular social workers, risk being targeted now. In several cases, refugees reported feeling suppressed in their agency and ability to cope with their life. The quotation below illustrate how the dependency on an integration allowance of the Public Centre for Social Welfare, and compliance to the rules that accompany them, restricts their freedom seriously.

My social assistant forbids me to visit my family in Turkey during the summer. But it's my holiday, it's my life, why can't I go visit my family? She obliges me to do a student job during summer because they [the OCMW] will otherwise restrain my social benefits over summer. But actually, I don't care if they take my money. I really want to start working so that the OCMW cannot control me anymore. (Iraqi refugee)

As young unaccompanied newcomers have gained coping skills on their journey and first months/years in Belgium, and many also have adult responsibilities towards family abroad (e.g. providing an income for their family as the eldest son), they find it difficult to be positioned in a dependent position where their comings and goings are monitored. In addition, refugees are usually unhappy about their situation of financial dependency (on a welfare

allowance), and as the quote below shows, feel deeply hurt when the involuntary nature of this situation is not recognized:

I had a quarrel with my social worker once. She told me: 'It's about time to quit OCMW [i.e. give up your integration allowance], you have to start working'. Yes, [but] I also don't want to rely on social benefits. But it is impossible, I need to study, I need to graduate, and after that, I can start working. Why did she tell me that? I felt so bad and angry. (Afghan refugee)

In addition, the shift to coaching, outreaching approach also creates a number of particular challenges for the social workers who become “case managers” now. First, case managers are confronted with much more diverse issues compared to their fellow social workers in regular social services, which **requires additional skills, knowledge and competencies**. For instance, now they have to deal with issues ranging from family reunification and transnational contact with the families in the origin country, on the one hand, to finding a student job, on the other hand while in regular social services, social workers’ task is primarily administrative and referral. Second, case managers usually invested much more in **building up a relationship of trust** with the young refugee, which was also emotionally demanding and took time. To cope with this point, exchanges between the Solentra team and the case managers were considered helpful by the social workers. Third, the social workers often experienced a **tension between their supportive role** (as personal coach), on the one hand, **and their controlling and sanctioning role** (as a representative of the social welfare agency). Exactly because they are much closer to their clients (compared to regular social workers in social services), and have a more complete, nuanced picture of them, they find it more difficult to impose harsh sanctions (for instance, to lower the integration allowance when certain rules are not respected with regard to social welfare legislation) and prefer a more compassionate attitude. In the larger residential settings (Klapdorp and BREM16), the social workers also facilitate the resident group dynamics among inhabitants by organising e.g. regular resident meetings and helping them to make household tasks. However, this additional role further complicates their position, as in case of troubles they also take the role as “bogeyman” towards their own clients and have to impose sanctions. It should be noted that apart from the case managers, other project partners too struggled with the

powerful position of the OCMW (as the institution that has the power to allocate, reduce and withdraw the integration allowance), and feel this position conflicts with their own approach that aims at changing youngsters' behaviour through building a relationship of trust.

Finally, the project team fears that **many refugees will get a harsh “reality check” after leaving CURANT, because they have gotten used to the intense, individualised case management**, where the case manager is easily available, approachable and flexible. In contrast, in regular welfare services, contacts are much more formal and strongly restricted in time. Notwithstanding their attention to a “warm transfer” to regular services, team members are still afraid that refugees will have troubles in adapting to mainstream services, and will not find the care they need.

Today someone was half an hour late on an appointment with me. Well, [in a regular welfare centre] you are no longer allowed to enter... They will give you another appointment, next month. For those who only entered CURANT recently, I am not that strict, but for those who have been around for a while, I try to learn them that it is important to honour your commitments, not only at OCMW but everywhere (Case manager)

There is the fear that some refugees have not become not self-reliant enough to be able to cope with this reality, and will get in trouble.

Did we have an effect on the self-reliance of this group? Surely, we did, but are they really independent enough [when they leave CURANT]? No, I don't think so. Some youngsters will get in trouble. Some really will [get in trouble], that's for sure (Project team member)

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Did the CURANT experiment live up to the stakeholders' expectations about communal living and individualised case management, as formulated at the outset of this project (see Groundwork for Evaluation and Literature Study, 2017)? In this conclusive chapter, we aim at providing answers to six major questions about CURANT:

1. Did the CURANT setup of communal living facilitate regular, informal, meaningful, spontaneous contact between refugees and Dutch-speaking locals?
2. Did CURANT engender diversification in the social networks of refugees and Dutch-speaking locals?
3. How did CURANT's setup of communal living contribute to refugee integration?
4. What are the major strengths and pitfalls of CURANT's case management approach?
5. What was CURANT's outcome in terms of refugees' participation in education and on the labour market?
6. What are the major limitations to CURANT's approach?

Looking at the global picture, that is, the experiences of 77 Dutch-speaking buddies living together with 81 unaccompanied young adult refugees over the last two years, we find that the answer is nuanced and multi-layered. Ultimately, as participants generally reported more positive than negative outcomes about living together in communal housing, we find the overall balance to be positive. Similarly, while there is room for improvement, the customised individual case management can be considered a good practice.

7.1. Did the CURANT setup of communal living facilitate regular, informal, meaningful, spontaneous contact between refugees and Dutch-speaking locals?

Different from expected, living under one roof turns out to offer no guarantee for close or extensive social contact between refugees and their buddies. As this evaluation report argues, a range of individual, social and structural features explain why social contact between matched refugee-buddy duos were often limited in frequency and depth. Among other things, housemates' differing social lives, diverging daily schedules, different views on gender

relations, communication issues and unequal financial situations may explain variations in frequency and nature of the social contact between housemates in their CURANT accommodations.

One important factor in explaining variation in participants' experiences, relates to refugees' and buddies' differential starting positions in CURANT. These are reflected in different expectations about mutual social contact in CURANT. Buddies' expectations of social contact were usually high. Indeed, the prospect of contact with and support to a refugee was a primary motivation and criterion for buddies to participate. For refugees, their primary motivations were more practical (finding a decent, affordable house and learning Dutch), and variation was larger in terms of their interest in the concept of communal living. Positive communal living experiences were usually marked by a similarly high interest in social contact on both sides.

With regard to the four different types of accommodation in CURANT (two-bedroom apartments, four-bedroom houses, 12-bedroom student house and a cohousing site with 16 two-bedroom units), it is remarkable how four-bedroom houses in particular appeared to facilitate positive experiences. This is probably because they combine the "best of two worlds" of smaller and larger types of communal living accommodation. In addition to the amount of inhabitants, the collective housing's physical design is important in understanding social dynamics between housemates.

Finally, the project's specific interventions with regard to the social interaction between refugees and their buddies also influence this interaction. The project team not only defines the participation criteria (screening), but also who will live together (matching) and develops scenarios in case of problems (mediation). Arguably, these interventions have prevented potential communal living problems and mitigated (some) actual problems. However, they have also contributed to participants' sense of living in a regulated, somewhat artificial social environment, rather than a spontaneous social community.

7.2. Did CURANT engender diversification in the social networks of refugees and Dutch-speaking locals?

An important assumption informing the project design of CURANT is that cohabiting with a Dutch-speaking buddy would help refugees to diversify their social network, and in particular, to include more Dutch speaking, native peers as friends in their network.

When looking more closely at the development of interpersonal relationships between refugees and buddies, we found that CURANT's format of communal living did not necessarily lead to close, durable relationships. While in some cases tight friendships emerged, in most cases, this did not happen and relationships remained more superficial. It is therefore uncertain whether social contact between refugees and their buddies during CURANT will be continued afterwards. In addition, while buddies provide various types of support to their housemates during CURANT, it is unlikely that they will constitute a major source of support after CURANT. As such, CURANT seems to represent a temporary phase in the lives of both buddies and refugees, matching the transition phases they are in.

However, irrespective of the durability of the newly created bonds between refugees and their buddies, the experience of communal living seems to have affected both groups' mutual perceptions and (intercultural) social competencies positively. Therefore, we can state that the CURANT experience has lowered the threshold somewhat to (future) contacts with people with different backgrounds. Looking at the refugees' peer group composition, these seem to have diversified somewhat yet in terms of their ethnocultural composition during CURANT: at the end of CURANT, refugees report having fewer friends with the same mother tongue, and more friends born in Belgium. Arguably, some buddies are included here, but also other newcomers with differing backgrounds they met in the context of CURANT's activities. Contrarily, for buddies, their peer groups did not diversify significantly throughout CURANT, which may be because quite some buddies had diverse networks yet before entering CURANT.

While CURANT focussed on the creation of "bridging social capital" (networks across cultures), our analysis also affirms the importance of "bonding social capital" for unaccompanied refugees. Co-ethnics in Belgium and across borders continue to take an important position in their social networks, and relationships with co-ethnics are marked by

the exchange of various types of support (e.g., financial support through informal saving schemes, access to jobs and housing, information about life in Belgium, companionship).

7.3. How did CURANT's setup of communal living contribute to refugee integration?

While overall the social contact was more limited than expected by the stakeholders, we argue that when regular, positive social interaction took place among the housemates, multiple dynamics benefiting refugees' participation in broader society emerged. This seemed the case in a good half of all matched duos, while in an additional quarter of all cases outcomes were mixed but not unanimously negative. We distinguish between two different but intertwined dynamics: informal support and informal learning.

First, CURANT has demonstrated how communal living can constitute an environment facilitating the accessibility of various types of informal support. Many buddies were involved in providing different types of social support – often small gestures – to their refugee housemates. Support can be classified into five categories: (1) tangible support (e.g., usage of housemate's equipment, assistance with making an appointment in Dutch, assistance with homework), (2) informational support (e.g., explaining where to find a hospital, explaining how things work in Belgium), (3) companionship (e.g., doing sports and watching TV together), (4) emotional support (e.g., offering a listening ear) (5) esteem support (e.g., wishing each other luck for important exams, praising accomplishments). What types of support emerge ultimately depend on individual refugees' needs, on the one hand, and buddy's availability and capacities, on the other, but in general, having someone around on a daily basis improves access to support. Finally, it should be noted how living together not only lowers the threshold to *ask for* support to refugees, but it also lowers the threshold to *offer* support for locals who "want to do something" for this group.

Second, CURANT's communal living offered plenty of opportunities for informal mutual learning. This observation underpins how integration is essentially a two-way process, involving newcomers and the receiving population. For the refugees, the communal living with a local constituted a safe space to practice Dutch on a daily basis. This is reflected in the overall

improvement of the refugees' Dutch oral language skills as well as an increased self-confidence with regard to the usage of Dutch. In addition, refugees report how their social skills have developed and how their understanding of Belgian society, habits and institutions have improved. While all of these aspects were also influenced by other elements inside or outside of CURANT, the analysis points out that living together with a local has contributed to them.

Importantly, buddies too have learned from this experience. Buddies generally feel they have gained knowledge about cultural diversity, and have improved their cohabiting skills with other people. We saw how most buddies felt that at the end of CURANT, they had a more informed, nuanced view on issues related to the position of newcomers. Buddies' cultural empathy has also increased, meaning that, they are now able to more quickly to grasp which feelings, thoughts and behaviours are important to people with other cultural backgrounds. Remarkably, our findings show how especially female buddies have a significantly higher cultural empathy score at the end of the CURANT trajectory. One hypothetical explanation of this gender difference could relate to the fact that almost all female buddies were living in gender-mixed settings. This may have increased their learning experience, as after CURANT, they do not only feel more competent in dealing with people from another ethnic culture but also with young men more generally.

While support is usually characterised by small gestures and learning processes are often subtle, their impact on the young refugees' lives should not be underestimated. They help to reduce the daily stress newcomers experience while finding their way through and their place in their new society of residence. Likely, these benefits of communal living contribute to refugees self-reported higher level of well-being at the end of CURANT. In addition, it should be noted that CURANT's communal living concept is based on the principle of decent, affordable housing, and that the mere fact of not having to worry about shelter (at least for a while) contributes to this higher sense of well-being.

7.4. What are the major strengths and pitfalls of CURANT's case management approach?

Next to the employment of communal living as an instrument to boost refugee's social integration, a second major innovation in CURANT concerns the customised individual case management. In general, CURANT's approach here can be considered as a good practice. The intense, multidisciplinary consultation resulted in a more in-depth insight into the individual needs of young refugees and therefore improved the ability to provide adequate support. The project approach also facilitated cooperation between different institutions with relevant expertise. In addition, it was demonstrated how an outreaching, committed approach is needed to ensure the quality and effectiveness of guidance for young refugees. For case managers, it allowed them to spend a sufficient amount of time with their clients, to build a good rapport with them and to offer the support needed in a flexible manner. The combination of house visits and consultations at the social centre were considered a beneficial strategy. Refugees generally valued how CURANT helped them in different domains. In addition, the multidisciplinary supportive framework for the refugees was seen by buddies as a prerequisite to enter into the project.

However, the CURANT experience learned how in the implementation of this approach, some pitfalls or challenges might be encountered. First, as intensive professional support in various domains (training, language learning, psychotherapy, etc.) is readily available, this approach risks becoming overambitious. As a result, some young refugees feel overburdened by the high number of activities they are expected to attend. To tackle this problem, expectations and activities should take into account the time and energy it requires for young refugees to find peace with the course their lives is taking in Belgium and to develop new skills. Second, an individual case management approach requires more competencies and commitment of the case managers compared to the individual support available to adult refugees by social workers in mainstream social services. Third, if young refugees feel their agency is not recognized, an outreaching approach may be quickly perceived as controlling rather than supportive.

7.5. What was CURANT's outcome in terms of refugees' participation in education and on the labour market?

Overall, the young refugees participating in CURANT demonstrated a strong motivation to not be dependent on a living allowance. This was reflected in their strong desire to participate in the labour market. Specific activities in CURANT that enhanced their self-reliance with regard to participation in the labour market were usually well-appreciated by the participants, such as help in finding student jobs and internships, orientation towards suitable educational and vocational programmes, making a CV, transfer of knowledge about the labour market and related institutions, and financial and administrative skills.

Statistics on all participating refugees show that at the end of their CURANT trajectories, the majority (79%) are active either on the labour market (18% in employment) or in different types of education and training (61%). Only 21% fall under the NEET group (Not in Education, Employment, and Training). Notably, certain refugees from this NEET group obtained a certificate throughout their CURANT trajectory, and have strengthened their labour market position compared to their situation before CURANT.

While most refugees were oriented towards appropriate education or training, and endorse its value, it is clear how many are struggling with conflicting aspirations. Due to their limited Dutch language skills and limited previous education, their options are limited and educational trajectories tend to take long. This conflicts with unaccompanied refugees' aspirations to have a source of income in order to be independent of welfare services, to support family members left behind in their origin country and/or to realise family reunification. Tensions between diverging aspirations and pressures cause stress and frustration and increase the risk that their participation in training/education will not be completed. Resultantly, for those in education and training at the end of CURANT, there is a permanent risk that they will not be able to complete their training/educational trajectories, leaving unqualified. This highlights the need to adopt a long-term perspective on support to unaccompanied young refugees, not for 1 to 2 years, but for a longer period.

7.6. What are the major limitations to CURANT's approach?

CURANTs project design focuses strongly on strengthening individual self-reliance, skills and knowledge. Notwithstanding the relevance of individual empowerment, it should be noted that if structural barriers remain unchanged, some of the achievements of this project risk to be undermined. For example, restrictive (co)housing legislation in Belgium hinders the continuation of cohousing by refugees, and persistent discrimination of ethnic minorities and welfare recipients on the private housing market increases the risk of ending up in precarious housing (again) after CURANT. The effectivity of particular support programmes for refugees such as CURANT remains ultimately dependent on the wider context in which they are embedded.

In addition, there is a concern that due to the intensive, temporary support CURANT has offered in terms of professional and informal support and housing, refugees leaving the project may have adopted (unrealistic) standards that will lead to disappointments or adjustment problems afterwards when returning to mainstream social services and the private housing market. This indicates how short-term intensive support should consider more strongly its long-term implications. If this does not happen sufficiently; care leavers risk to leave intensive support projects less self-reliant, rather than more.

Finally, while the CURANT communal living approach has demonstrated its value for many participants in CURANT, it is also clear that this approach is not a “one size fits all” solution for the social integration of young unaccompanied refugee. It is for example not a suitable approach in the case of very vulnerable refugees or buddies, because living with someone who is very vulnerable puts an excessive burden on the other housemate and potentially jeopardizes social interaction between them. In addition, individuals’ preferences should be respected, because if (one or more) housemates do not endorse the basic principles of communal living it will not yield results as an instrument for social integration. However, intercultural supportive communal living remains a valuable concept for those who do.

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ANNEX 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STATISTICS

All statistical analyses for this report were conducted by researcher Laura Van Raemdonck. Under each figure or table used throughout the report, footnotes indicate the data source. In this Annex, more information is provided about the survey population and quantitative methodology. Additional information on the methodology can be found in the First Evaluation Report (2018).

SURVEY POPULATIONS

All of the participants (refugees and buddies) that have entered CURANT before 2019 were asked to participate in the quantitative research. Only the very first two participating duos (who started in CURANT in February 2017) were excluded from the quantitative research sample because they entered the project a lot earlier than the first group of participants, had not gone through the usual procedures employed by the project, and were therefore considered not representative to include in the sample. The small group of participants that entered in 2019 were also excluded as they would be unable to reach the minimum length of a trajectory (1 year) as the project ends in October 2019.

The quantitative research methodology consists of two consecutive surveys for refugees and buddies: a baseline survey and a final survey. The baseline survey is conducted as soon as possible after the participants enter the project (during the first month in case of the refugees, and generally in month 1 or 2 in case of the buddies). Ideally, the baseline measurement would take place before participants enter in CURANT, but due to the fact that buddies and refugees need to be recruited, and go through a screening and matching procedure before entering the project, the earliest possible moment for the first measurement was after their start in CURANT. For similar practical reasons, the final survey is conducted shortly before the participants leave the project, because at a later stage it would be very hard to reach them. Importantly, because CURANT was still on going at the time of data collection for this report (January 2019), for a number of participants the final survey was conducted at an earlier stage (i.e. not just before they left the project). Because the number of respondents

with completed trajectories was too low for statistical analysis, it was necessary to include this group. However, for still enrolled participants the final survey was only conducted in case the refugee or buddy entered CURANT at least 6 months ago.

STATISTICAL METHODS

To examine how refugees and buddies have evolved throughout the project, we employed **Linear Mixed Models** in the statistical software program IBM SPSS to identify significant differences in means between the longitudinal data. In this analysis, the “anonymised refugee or buddy ID” was set as the subject and the “indication of baseline and final survey” as the repeated variable. Importantly, because project participants’ length of participation in CURANT was not fixed (cfr. the notion of customised trajectories, tailored to individual needs), the period between the baseline and final survey measurement varied between 6 months up to 20 months. We considered this variation in the outcome correlations. We chose an unstructured repeated covariance type. The independent variables in these models are the variables tested. The ‘indication of pre- and post-survey’ was set as a fixed effect variable.

A **Paired Samples T-test** was conducted for the comparison of means between newcomers’ “ability to manage their finances” in (a) their country of origin, (b) during CURANT, and (c) after CURANT.

Independent Samples T-tests were conducted for the comparison of means between buddies MPQ scores and their sex. These tests were conducted for both MPQ scores, at the beginning and end of their CURANT trajectories.

Correlations between interval, ordinal and nominal variables were extracted from the data using conform tests (i.e. Pearson, Spearman, ANOVA), which indicate relevant tendencies for further examination. We only reported significant correlations. The table underneath can be utilised to identify the strength of each reported association. Most significant relationships were of moderate strength.

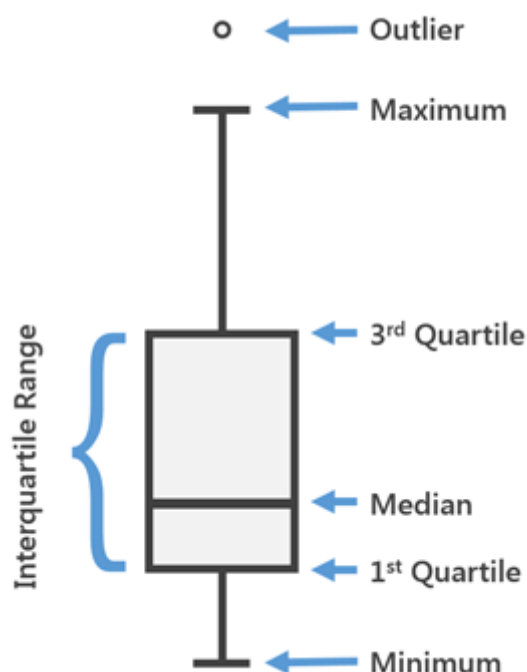
Correlation Coefficient (r)	Strength of relationship
$r \leq .29$ $.30 < r \leq .69$ $r > .70$	The relationship is weak The relationship is moderate The relationship is strong

Regarding nominal - interval relationships, we conducted univariate “Analyses Of Variance” (ANOVA) and investigated if the Eta square or effect size between two variables is significant. The table underneath can be utilised to identify the strength of each reported effect size. Most significant effect sizes were of moderate strength.

Eta Square (η^2)	Strength of effect size
$ES \leq 0.04$ $0.04 < ES \leq 0.36$ $ES > 0.36$	The effect is weak The effect is moderate The effect is strong

Certain visual presentations in this report consider **boxplots** (see picture below). A boxplot is a visual presentation of the distribution of the quantitative data into four quartiles. Each percentile includes 25% of the respondents’ score. Boxplots shows you certain important elements of the data such as (a) the Median which represents the central tendency and middle score of your data (= the thick line in the box); and (b) the data range (top and bottom line of the figure). The box shows where the majority of values seem to fall. Outliers refer to all values that are more than 1.5 interquartile range away from the 25th or 75th percentiles (the 1st and 3rd quartile).

Figure 29: Boxplot



Source: <https://pro.arcgis.com/en/pro-app/help/analysis/geoprocessing/charts/box-plot.htm>

In the exceptional case that there is no variance at all (see e.g. Figure 5, “Eritrea”), the boxplot consists of a single line, representing all values (with the exception of outliers).

COMPARISON OF SURVEY POPULATION WITH THE PROJECT PARTICIPANT POPULATION

As the final survey respondent group (n=33) is smaller than the total group of project participants (n=81), we need to assess to what extent the survey group is representative for the wider group. We do this based on descriptive data of both groups.

Regarding **the refugees**, we can observe there is a fit between the final survey group’s countries of birth (55% Afghanistan, 23% Eritrea, 7% Syria, 10% Somalia and 3% Iraq, 3% Iran) and total group of project participants (62% Afghanistan, 19% Eritrea, 9% Syria, 6% Somalia; 1% Iraq, 1% Iran, 1% Mauritania).

With regard to gender, in both the final survey population as the total group of participants women were equally underrepresented. This is not surprising as there were only four women in the sample of 81 refugee participants. Therefore, we decided to not consider sex in any of our statistical analyses for the refugee group.

With regard to the numbers of years of schooling in country of origin, we do not have information for all participants, but we can compare the final survey (n=33) with the baseline survey (n=65), where the group of respondents is larger. Here, we see that the difference between the final survey group (Mean=4.97, Interval 0-12) and the baseline survey (Mean=5.37, Interval 0-12) is rather small, thus indicating that the final survey group does not present a biased image.

Regarding **the buddies**, we see that there variation in nationalities and backgrounds is slightly smaller in the final survey group (90% Belgian with Belgian parents) compared to all project participants (83% Belgium, 9% the Netherlands, 1% Switzerland, 1% Rwanda, 3% Afghanistan, and 3% Syria).

Regarding buddies' sex, there is an exact fit between the final survey group (52% male, 48% female) and all project participants (52% male, 48% female).

Looking into socio-economic status, we see that the variable "ability to make ends meet with your current budget" at the beginning of CURANT does not significantly differ between the final survey group (Mean is 4.69 of a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from "difficult" to "very easy") and all participants (Mean is 4.54 of a 5-point Likert Scale "difficult" to "very easy").

Important to note in terms of representativity, is that none of the final survey group respondents was living in BREM 16, the modular living arrangement of 16 two-bedroom flats. This was because BREM 16 was opened very late in the project timing (November 2018), and therefore none of the participants was living there for 6 months at the time of the final survey data collection.

ANNEX 2: STATISTICS

This annex contains cross tabulations and descriptive tables that can be used to interpret the figures and box plots used throughout the report. They provide additional information on frequencies. In addition, statistical associations between variables are described more in detail.

DATA ON THE REFUGEES

Table 8: Cross tabulation related to “Figure 3: Visual presentation of the distribution of communal living assessment by the newcomers’ residence before entering in CURANT”

		Communal Living Assessment			Total
		Bad	Mixed	Good	
Residence before entering in CURANT	LOI	8	10	19	37
	Reception centre	0	0	1	1
	Integrated Youth Care	1	1	0	2
	Private Housing Market	3	2	11	16
	Homeless	2	1	1	4
Total		14	14	32	60

Table 9: Cross tabulation related to Figure 6. Number of years the refugees left their country of origin by country of birth

Country of Birth	2011 N	2012 N	2013 N	2014 N	2015 N	2016 N	N Total
Afghanistan	0	1	1	2	36	2	42
Eritrea	1	0	0	1	3	5	10
Syria	0	1	1	2	1	0	5

Somalia	0	0	0	0	5	0	5
Iraq	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Mauritania	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	1	2	3	5	47	7	65

Source: Baseline survey of the refugees (n=65)

Note 1: The person born in Iran is considered Afghan in these statistics as he is of Afghan origin.

Table 10: Cross tabulation related to “Figure 5: Visual presentation of the distribution of the newcomers’ years of schooling in country of residence by country of birth”

		Country of origin						
		Afghanistan	Eritrea	Syria	Somalia	Iraq	Mauritania	Total
Years of schooling in country of origin	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	13
	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
	3	2	0	0	2	0	0	4
	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	5
	5	4	1	0	1	0	0	6
	6	4	1	0	0	0	0	5
	7	6	0	1	0	0	1	8
	8	1	7	0	0	0	0	8
	9	2	1	2	1	1	0	7
	10	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	11	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	12	2	0	2	0	0	0	4
Total		41	10	5	5	2	1	65

Table 11: Associations between years of schooling in the country of origin and other variables of the survey

Baseline survey variables (n=65):

- Birth order ($r=.30^*$)
- Expectations/aspirations to obtain a diploma, 1st measurement ($r=.34^*$)

Final survey variables (n=31):

- Self-reported evaluation if CURANT contributed to feeling more confident to speak Dutch ($r=.36^*$)

Source: Baseline survey of the refugees (n=65) and final survey of the refugees (n=31)

* Significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

Table 12: Associations between communal living assessment and variables of the refugees' final survey, described under "2.1. Global picture of communal living in CURANT"

- Amount of contact with your buddy during CURANT ($r = .38^*$)
- Amount of friends born in Belgium ($r = .40^*$)
- Feeling confident to use Dutch ($r = .36^*$)
- How often I use Dutch ($r = .45^*$)
- Understanding Dutch ($r = .50^{**}$)
- Understanding Flemish/Belgian habits ($r = .36^*$)

Source: Communal living assessment by the stakeholders and final survey of the refugees ($n=31$)

* Significant at $p < .05$; ** significant at $p < .005$ (2-tailed)

Table 13: Associations between communal living assessment and newcomers' expectations as indicated on the Aspirations Scale for Refugees and Migrants (ASRM), described in 3.1. Motivation to enter and stay into communal living.

- Earn money for family in country of origin ($r = -.26^*$)
- Get to know new people ($r = .26^*$)
- Start a family: ($r = .27^*$)

Source: Communal living assessment by the project stakeholders and final survey of the refugees ($n=65$)

*Significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

Table 14: Cross tabulation related to "Figure 14: Visual presentation of the distribution of communal living assessment by types of residence"

		Communal Living Assessment			Total
		Negative	Mixed	Positive	
Type Of Residence	A two-bedroom apartment	13	5	22	40
	A four-bedroom house	3	2	12	17
	A student house with 12 studios	2	4	1	7

A cohousing site with 16 two-bedroom flats	3	2	5	10
Total	21	13	40	74

Table 15: Frequency table related to Figure 21 (4.2) “Due to my participation in CURANT, I notice the following changes in myself...”

	N Total	Worse N (%)	Same as before CURANT N (%)	A little better N (%)	Better N (%)	A lot better N (%)	Intensity Mean (SD)
(1) Dutch language skills	33	0	3 (9.1)	5 (15.2)	9 (27.3)	16 (48.5)	4.15 (1.01)
(2) Feeling confident to speak Dutch	33	0	0	6 (18.2)	12 (36.4)	15 (45.5)	4.27 (.76)
(3) How often I use Dutch	33	1 (3)	2 (6.1)	2 (6.1)	20 (60.6)	8 (24.2)	3.97 (.92)
(4) Understanding Dutch	33	0	1 (3)	7 (21.2)	13 (39.4)	12 (36.4)	4.09 (.84)
(5) My social skills (talking to people, making friends, ...)	33	0	1 (3)	10 (30.3)	15 (45.5)	7 (21.2)	3.85 (.79)
(6) My knowledge of Flanders/Belgium and the Flemish/Belgian society	33	0	0	11 (33.3)	18 (54.5)	4 (12.1)	3.79 (.65)
(7) Understanding Flemish/Belgian habits (e.g. how Flemings/Belgians deal with each other and talk to each other, their eating habits, ...)	33	1 (3)	1 (3)	9 (27.3)	16 (48.5)	6 (18.2)	3.76 (.90)

(8) Finding my way through the Belgian/Flemish/local administration (knowing where I have to go with questions, knowing what organisation can help me,...)	33	1 (3)	1 (3)	4 (12.1)	16 (48.5)	11 (33.3)	4.06 (.93)
(9) Managing my finances (handling money)	33	0	5 (15.2)	11 (33.3)	14 (42.4)	3 (9.1)	3.45 (.87)
(10) My well-being (my happiness, satisfaction with my life)	31	0	0	5 (16.1)	17 (54.8)	9 (29)	4.13 (.67)

Table 16: Associations between 'being in the process of family reunification' and expectations as indicated on the Aspirations Scale for Refugees and Migrants (ASRM), friend group variables and integrative variables

- Expectation/aspiration to live with family/relatives (baseline survey: $r = .54^{**}$, final survey: $r = .45^{*}$)
- Expectation/aspiration to bring family to Belgium (baseline survey: $r = .56^{**}$, final survey: $r = .55^{**}$)
- Amount of friends in the same school as you ($r = .37^{*}$)
- Dutch knowledge skills ($r = .37^{*}$)
- Knowledge of the Flemish/Belgian society ($r = .40^{*}$)
- Finding my way through the Belgian/Flemish/local administration ($r = .39^{*}$)

Source: Baseline and final survey of the refugees (n=31)

Note 1: Family reunification measured on a 3-point Likert Scale (no application - application submitted - positive answer)

* significant at $p < .05$; ** significant at $p < .005$; *** significant at $p < .001$ (2-tailed)

DATA ON THE BUDDIES

Table 17: Associations between communal living assessment and variables of the buddies' final survey, described under "2.1. Global picture of communal living in CURANT"

Variables referring to the relationship with their housemates:

- I felt closely connected to the housemate(s) that are important to me ($r = .46^{*}$)
- I had the impression that my housemate(s) whom I spent my time with did not like me at all ($r = -.55^{**}$)
- I had the impression that the housemate(s) whom I cared for, also cared for me ($r = .43^{*}$)
- The relationships I had with my housemates were rather superficial ($r = -.51^{*}$)
- I felt connected to the housemate(s) I cared for and who also cared for me ($r = .63^{***}$)

- I had the impression that the housemate(s) that were important to me were cold and detached to me ($r = -.52^*$)
- I had a warm feeling about my housemate(s) whom I spent my time with ($r = .45^*$)
- Amount of contact you had with your housemate during CURANT ($r = .40^*$)

Variables referring to the evaluation of their agency related to the project activities

- Did you have the freedom to make your own choices during the project? ($r = .56^{**}$)
- Did the stakeholders of CURANT listen to you? Did they take your wishes into account? ($r = .69^{***}$)
- Did you feel you had the freedom and choice over the things you did? ($r = .55^{**}$)
- Evaluation of the training you received before entering in CURANT ($r = .79^{***}$)
- The way activities were offered was relevant to me ($r = .47^*$)
- I felt under pressure to do certain things ($r = -.52^*$)
- Most of the activities I had to do were obliged ($r = -.42^*$)

Variables referring to their perception of being effectively supportive towards their housemate

- I believe that I was able to support my housemate ($r = .74^{***}$)
- I believe that my assistance/cohousing contributed to the improvement of the language skills of my housemate ($r = .58^{**}$)
- I believe that my assistance/cohousing contributed to the well-being of my housemate ($r = .67^{**}$)

Variables related to their personal changes:

- Cohousing contributed to positive change in myself: knowledge of refugees' cultures and habits ($r = .52^*$)
- Cohousing contributed to positive change in myself: my well-being has improved ($r = .66^{***}$)

Source: Communal living assessment by the stakeholders and final survey of the buddies ($n=29$)

* Significant at $p < .05$; ** significant at $p < .005$; *** significant at $p < .001$ (2-tailed)

Table 18: Frequency table related to figure "My participation in CURANT caused the following changes in myself..."

	N Total	Worse	The same as before CURANT	A little bit better	Slightly better	Better	A lot better	Intensity
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	Mean (SD)
My social skills (making contact with others, making friends, etc.)	31	0	30 (41.9)	8 (25.8)	6 (19.4)	4 (12.9)	0	3.03 (1.08)

My knowledge about the cultures and habits of refugees	31	0	1 (3.2)	3 (9.7)	5 (16.1)	13 (41.9)	9 (29)	4.84 (1.07)
My cohabiting skills (communicating, supporting, conflict resolution, etc.)	31	1 (3.2)	7 (22.6)	6 (19.4)	9 (29)	8 (25.8)	0	3.52 (1.21)
My well-being (happiness, satisfaction with life)	31	6 (19.4)	7 (22.6)	2 (6.5)	12 (38.7)	2 (6.5)	2 (6.5)	3.10 (1.51)

Table 19: Frequency table "Evaluation of the relationship with your housemate"

	N Total	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Intensity
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	Mean (SD)
1. I felt excluded from the people I wanted to be connected to.	29	3 (10.3)	12 (41.4)	10 (34.5)	1 (3.4)	2 (6.9)	1 (3.4)	0	2.66 (1.17)
2. I felt closely connected to the housemate(s) that are important to me.	29	1 (3.4)	2 (6.9)	5 (17.2)	4 (13.8)	9 (31.0)	5 (17.2)	3 (10.3)	4,55 (1,57)
3. I had the impression that my housemate(s) whom I spent my time with did not like me at all.	29	2 (6.9)	16 (55.2)	7 (24.1)	2 (6.9)	1 (3.4)	1 (3.4)	0	2,55 (1,09)

4. I felt connected to the housemate(s) I cared for and who cared for me.	29	0	1 (3.4)	2 (6.9)	2 (6.9)	9 (31)	11 (37.9)	4 (13.8)	5,34 (1,23)
5. The relationships I had with my housemates were rather superficial.	29	0	1 (3.4)	5 (17.2)	7 (24.1)	8 (27.6)	6 (20.7)	2 (6.9)	4,66 (1,29)
6. I had the impression that the housemate(s) that were important to me were cold and detached to me.	29	1 (3.4)	9 (31)	11 (37.9)	4 (13.8)	1 (3.4)	3 (10.3)	0	3,14 (1,30)
7. I had a warm feeling towards the housemates I spent time with.	29	0	1 (3.4)	1 (3.4)	3 (10.3)	7 (24.1)	12 (41.4)	5 (17.2)	5,48 (1,21)

Table 20: Frequency table "Evaluation of project activities"

	N Total	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Intensity
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	Mean (SD)
1. Did you feel you had freedom and choice over the things you did?	29	0	1 (3.4)	3 (10.3)	3 (10.3)	5 (17.2)	13 (44.8)	4 (13.8)	5.31 (1.34)

2. I felt pressured to do activities I would otherwise not do.	29	1 (3.4)	2 (6.9)	14 (48.3)	4 (13.8)	6 (20.7)	2 (6.9)	0	3,62 (1,21)
3. The activities were relevant to me.	29	0	2 (6.9)	5 (17.2)	7 (24.1)	9 (31)	6 (20.7)	0	4,41 (1,21)
4. I felt obliged to do too many activities.	27	1 (3.7)	5 (18.5)	8 (29.6)	6 (22.2)	5 (18.5)	2 (7.4)	0	3,52 (1,30)
5. The way activities were offered was relevant to me.	29	0	2 (6.9)	6 (20.7)	5 (17.2)	11 (37.9)	5 (17.2)	0	4,38 (1,21)
6. I felt pressured to do certain things.	29	2 (6.9)	6 (20.7)	8 (27.6)	4 (13.8)	5 (17.2)	4 (13.3)	0	3,55 (1,53)
7. Most of the activities I had to do were obliged.	29	1 (3.4)	5 (17.2)	7 (24.1)	8 (27.6)	6 (20.7)	2 (6.9)	0	3,66 (1,29)
8. I was sincerely interested in the activities we did.	29	0	1 (3.4)	3 (10.3)	5 (17.2)	11 (37.9)	9 (31)	0	4,83 (1,10)
