Research and Documentation Centre

Cahier 2023-9

I have nothing to lose

Nomadic unaccompanied minors in Europe

Research and knowledge centre for
the Ministry of Justice and Security

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Nomadic unaccompanied minors in Europe

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Cahier
This series comprises overviews of studies carried out by or for the WODC Research and Documentation Centre. Inclusion in the series does not mean that the contents of the report reflect the viewpoint of the Minister of Justice.

Acknowledgements

This report describes the situation of North African unaccompanied minors (UMs) in the Netherlands who come from so-called 'safe' countries. They have little or no possibility of receiving a residence permit in the Netherlands where the admission policy for UMs is based on international protection.
This group of UMs has a negative image within Dutch society and is often seen as a group with behavioural problems who cause incidents in and outside their accommodation centres and seem to be involved in criminal networks. At the same time, they are still children, who need protection. They suffer from multiple problems such as drug abuse and mental health issues, and often disappear off the radar and lead a nomadic life in Europe. Although they are mostly 'invisible', their way of life has societal consequences for the Netherlands and for Europe as a whole. This report analyses the reasons for these behavioural problems and looks at how other countries in Europe deal with this group in order to learn from their experiences.

To be able to do this, we relied on the expertise and experiences of different professionals in the Netherlands, as well as researchers and professionals in other European countries (Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden) and in Morocco. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to them all for kindly taking the time to share their expertise with the WODC-researchers.

I would like to thank 'Mario' (his fictitious name), a nomadic minor, who shared his story open-heartedly with the researchers in detailing his experiences from many years of nomadic life in Europe. In Mario's interview and in the interviews with professionals and researchers, the one common thread is the lack of legal remedies and future prospects for nomadic UMs.

I also express my gratitude to the Dutch National Contact Point of the European Migration Network (EMN) (Julia Koopmans, Hanna van der Linden and Hans Lemmens) for their pleasant cooperation and readiness to collaborate concerning the EMN ad-hoc query that has been implemented by EMN. I appreciate the contributions of different experts in the Netherlands for their expertise in different phases of the research: Jessica Steenbergen-de Jong and Bas de Bock from The Centre of Expertise on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (EMM), Marcel van der Heijden from the International Knowledge Platform of the Dutch Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), dr. Mark Klassen from Leiden University, and different staff members of COA and Nidos Foundation.

I would also like to thank to dr. Mieke Maliepaard from the Dutch Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) for offering her help at critical moments when the researchers were pressed with time.

Last but not the least, I express my appreciation to the Supervisory Committee of the research for their invaluable advice and input: dr. Joris van Wijk (Chairman, UvA), drs. Eliane Smits van Waesberghe (Verwey-Jonker Institute), dr. Abdessamad Bouabid (Erasmus University), Catelijne Sillevis, MA. (Nidos Foundation), drs. Agmar Altena (COA, until March 2023); Joske Geraedts, Msc/MEd (COA, starting from 2023), Sacha van den Berg, Msc. (then Directorate of Migration Policy, until May 2022) and Remha Kiros (LL.M., Directorate of Migration Policy, starting from May 2022). The WODC bears final responsibility for the content of this report.

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Summary

Background

Unaccompanied minors (UM) coming to Europe form an especially vulnerable group of migrant children, traveling without their parents or other adults exercising authority over them. In many European countries, asking for international protection is the main way for them to receive accommodation and a residence permit. However, minors coming from so-called safe countries, where in general there is no (fear of) persecution (e.g. Morocco, and in the Netherlands until June 2021 Algeria) have little or no chance of receiving a residence permit. Some of these mostly North African youngsters travel from one European country to another, in search of opportunities to work and earn money. According to Dutch supervisors (legal guardians and mentors in the accommodation centres), this group of nomadic minors often face multiple problems, such as drug addiction and mental health problems. This is also the group that sometimes causes incidents at or outside the accommodation centres or is involved in criminal activities (see also Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2021). Studies in the Netherlands show that many of these youngsters go off the radar either before or during the asylum procedure and it is suspected that they stay in the Netherlands or move on to different European countries. In general, knowledge about this group is both limited and fragmented. The aim of this study was to learn more about the background of this group of minors, and gain knowledge about the experiences of other European countries with this specific group of minors.

Aims and research questions

The general aims of this study were:

- to paint a picture of the nomadic existence of UMs with (multiple) problems in Europe;
- to investigate the underlying reasons of their nomadic behaviour and the (multiple) problems they have; and
- to explore the type of (policy) measures that are taken regarding the supervision and care of this group in other European countries.

We defined the target group of the research as follows:

UMs who either have little or no chance of receiving a residence permit after an asylum application or who do not apply for asylum at all *and* who have (multiple) problems, such as mental health issues, substance use/addiction, and/or pose behavioural problems inside or outside of the accommodation facilities, and travel between EU-countries without a residence permit.

At the start of our research, we did not limit ourselves to a specific nationality regarding the target group.

The research questions were:

1 What is the size of this group of UMs and what are their background characteristics (for example, nationality, situation in their country of origin – including the nature of their (multiple) problems)?
2 What are their motives for leaving their countries (push-factors) and coming to Europe (pull factors)? What are their expectations?
3 What is the nature of and reasons for leading a nomadic life in Europe?
   - What information sources do they make use of during their nomadic existence and what information do they have?
   - Which factors play a role in choosing to move to and (temporarily) reside in a certain country?
   - Why do they apply for asylum or (not) and/or make use of accommodation centres?
4 What is the nature of (multiple) problems in Europe and what are the underlying reasons for these problems?
   - Are they involved in criminal networks? What is known about the possible exploitation of these UMs? Are there any other forms of victimization this group has been exposed to (for example situation in their country of origin, experiences during migration/nomadic life)?
5 What are the experiences of EU-countries, but he Netherlands, with nomadic UMs?
   - What does the accommodation and guidance of this group look like in these countries?
   - Which (policy) measures have these countries taken regarding the supervision and care of this group?
   - What is known about the results and effectiveness of these measures?
6 What are the ways forward and possible solutions for the group of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems in Europe?

Methods

This study is descriptive of nature and based on qualitative research methods. In order to answer the above mentioned explorative questions, we used a multi-method approach, and different sources of information.

Literature study

At the start of our research and during the course of implementation, we searched for literature in Google (scholar) by using certain keywords. Further, we made use of snowball method, by using literature cited in publications we found ourselves (citation chaining), and literature some of our respondents draw our attention to.

Personal communication with Dutch experts

In some cases we had questions about the Dutch practice or policy regarding UMs coming from safe countries or regarding UMs in general. When we could not find the answers to these questions in public sources or the information we encountered raised further questions, we contacted experts from the relevant organisations. In this report, we refer to the information we gathered in this way as 'personal communication' and report the name of the institution thereby.

Focus groups with Dutch supervisors

At the initial phase of our data collection, we conducted four focus groups with mentors working at the Dutch Central Agency for the Reception for Asylum seekers

(COA) and legal guardians, professionals who supervise, among others nomadic minors with multiple problems. In addition, PON-mentors, COA-behaviourists and Nidos behavioural scientists participated in these focus groups (see for the definition of PON, Box 1.1, and tasks of COA-behaviourists and Nidos behavioural scientists, section 1.3.5, footnote 6 and 7).

Interviews with professionals and researchers in different European countries
Within the context of this research, we had interviews with nine researchers from different countries. Most of them had conducted research among the North African nomadic UMs, mainly Moroccan minors. Their focus of interest varied from situation of the minors in the country of origin and its influence on the multiple problems, aspirations for migration to Europe, involvement in criminal networks and exploitation therein (in the country of origin and in Europe), nomadic behaviour and guidance of UMs outside the system.
In addition, we interviewed eighteen professionals who are involved in the guidance of children in the accommodation centres or on streets in different European countries, who are confronted with the target group in their work, or government officials. The selected countries were: Belgium, France, Italy, and Spain.

Interviews with professionals in Morocco
In order to get more insight on the background of the Moroccan UMs migrating to Europe, we interviewed in total four professionals from three organisations in Morocco.

Case study: interview with a nomadic UM
We conducted an interview with a nomadic minor in the Netherlands. In his story, different information which we gathered via interviews with professionals and researchers are reflected and his migration trajectory and nomadic life in Europe match the general picture of nomadic UMs in Europe. His nomadic life is a valuable illustration of our results.

Ad-hoc query among the national contact points of the European Migration Network (EMN)
We conducted, in cooperation with the Dutch National Contact Point of the European Migration Network (Immigration and Naturalisation Service, Research and Analysis Centre), an ad-hoc query among the EMN member states in order to be able to answer the research questions on the scope of the nomadic minors (with multiple problems), the nature of guidance the European countries provide to this group, and whether they have evaluations of their policies or measures.

Educated Guess 'light'

We applied a 'light' version of the so-called educated guess method to get an impression of the size of the group of Moroccan nomadic minors with multiple problems in the Netherlands.

Results

Size of the group and background characteristics

The results of the EMN ad-hoc query (2022.26) showed that it was difficult with this instrument to find out whether other EU-countries (in addition to the Netherlands)

recognize the specific target group of this research, as well as to gain insight into the size of the group. Consequently, the query yielded insufficient information for answers to other research questions we wanted to answer with the query.
According to the Dutch and Belgian supervisors, nomadic UMs with multiple problems who have little chance of receiving an asylum permit mainly come from North African countries, such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt.

In order to have at least some insight into the size of the target group in the Netherlands, we applied a 'light' version of the so-called educated guess method, where we requested Dutch supervisors who participated in our focus groups to estimate the size of the group in the Netherlands for the period 2019-2021. We limited this estimation to UMs coming from Morocco, as this was the country where most of the North African UMs came from in the above mentioned period. The average estimated numbers range between 400 and 800 – including those UMs who are outside the accommodation system (see Chapter 2). Due to the low-response rate and the caution with which the supervisors gave their estimates, these results should be treated with great carefulness, and only as 'guesstimates' (cf. Bos et al., 2016).
The overwhelming majority of nomadic minors are boys. Their age is subject to discussion among the Dutch and Belgian supervisors. Based on their experience, they had the impression that some of the minors they encounter are indeed of age. The age youngsters themselves claim to be in general ranges from 15 to 17 years old. However, there are also minors who are younger. As the Moroccan nationality is relatively more often mentioned as part of the target group, we mostly focused on this group of minors. Concerning the situation in the country of origin, we focused on Morocco, as this is the country from which most of the UMs from North-Africa come from in the Netherlands.

Motivations for migration

Nomadic Moroccan minors with multiple problems leave their country with a poor starting position: they mostly come from (very) socio-economically disadvantaged families, where violence, abuse and drugs abuse occurs. In combination with a lack of perspective in the country of origin due to (extreme) poverty for young people including instability in employment opportunities, low paying jobs and the lack of affordable public schooling opportunities, there are plenty of push factors leading youngsters to aspire to migrate.

The role of the family in the decision to leave is not always explicit and is diverse. It seems that the parents in general do not encourage the minors to migrate, but they do not stop them either, with the idea that their children can help them financially if they make it to Europe. The minors' desire to prove themselves to their parents, especially to their mothers, by earning money, is brought forward by several respondents as one of the push factors.

Regarding the pull factors at the macro level, a better socio-economic perspective in Europe is the main factor. However, micro-level factors, aspirations and expectations of the minors, and the way they visualise Europe (a 'paradise'; the 'El Dorado' - the mythical golden city, achieving the 'European' way of life) play a crucial role. Europe is perceived as a geographical setting, where they can realise their European dream, earn and send money to their families, and own things that are seen as status symbols.

Nomadic life

According to our Spanish respondents, the majority of the Moroccan UMs who arrive in Spain stay in Spain; it is only a minority that travels further in Europe. Dissatisfaction with the accommodation centres in Spain or not wanting to be in the accommodation system at all, recruitment by criminal networks, coming into contact with the police, and that they hear from their peers that there is possibility of earning money (quickly) somewhere else are reasons brought forward why these minors move to other European countries from Spain.

In European countries where the admission policy for UMs is based on asylum such as the Netherlands, minors coming from so-called safe countries have little chance of receiving a residence permit. As they do not consider returning home as an option, nomadic life becomes a solution. Such life is characterised by strongagency and high mobility within Europe, where minors are often involved in criminal activities, which they see as a strategy to earn money. In this regard, nomadic minors with multiple problems differ from regular UMs who have more chance of international protection within asylum systems – who settle in a specific country, and among others look for better study opportunities and often want to reunite with their families in Europe.

In the nomadic life of UMs social networks, feedback mechanisms from their nomadic peers in different countries, information shared on social media (WhatsApp and Facebook groups) play a crucial role. According to a researcher, this information is often based on constant rumours; they are uncontrolled and change fast. Subsequently, this information influences the perceptions of the nomadic UMs about different European countries, on which they act, and navigate between different countries according to their current needs.

Regarding the Netherlands, reasons mentioned by the respondents why the nomadic minors come to the Netherlands are:

- arrival in the Netherlands is an integral part of nomadic behaviour and it is not an intended destination before leaving the country of origin;
- benefits of the Dutch accommodation system (well organized and comfortable accommodation centres with good amenities, weekly-allowance;
- image of the Netherlands among the nomadic boys as a country where it is possible to stay in accommodation centres for UMs despite of being of age;
- Netherlands being a safe and quiet place for nomadic minors;
- a friendly Dutch police and less consequences for behavioural problems or criminal offences compared to other countries;
- image of the Netherlands as a country where it is possible to find undocumented work;
- availability of drugs and possibilities for earning money by selling drugs;
- presence of diaspora and family;
- lack of a return agreement between the Netherlands and Morocco, and
- influence of practices in other European countries (‘waterbed effect’).

Multiple problems

Our results confirm that nomadic minors suffer from mental health issues, often struggle with (severe) substance abuse and addiction (use of medicines Rivotril and Lyrica as drugs), and display behavioural problems that may lead to incidents within and outside of accommodation centres. These incidents, which differ in severity, may

include fights, verbal and non-verbal violence, and self-harming behaviour. Furthermore, they are often involved in criminal activities and networks and may be exploited within these networks. According to our findings, the existence of interrelated multiple problems among nomadic UMs, can be traced back to the adverse family situation in the country of origin. These problems are further developed in relation to experiences while in transit to Europe and nomadic existence in Europe and/or street life, and the relatively limited legal perspectives for these minors within the EU-borders.

Involvement in criminal networks, possible exploitation and other forms of victimization

Several respondents in the Netherlands as well as in other countries share the opinion that involvement in criminal networks is quite common among the target group, and that these networks are not necessarily big, organized networks, but can be of 'micro' nature. Our results also indicate that the border between involvement of UMs in criminal networks and being exploited by these networks is very thin.

The Dutch supervisors are of the opinion that the majority of North African youngsters are involved in some kind of an irregular activity within a network. They express their impression, but also hear concrete stories from the youngsters that they are involved in drug networks or networks that are busy with stealing. There are indications that there are movements between the Netherlands and France and sometimes Belgium for involvement in criminal activities. According to researchers with expertise on the topic whom we interviewed, getting involved with such networks happen through socialisation in a subtle way. Several Dutch supervisors point out that UMs are lured into criminal networks by adult (North African) men or influential minors in the group; there are also suspicions of exploitation. In cases when accommodation centres for UMs are located in the same territory as that for adult asylum-seekers or when UMs are placed at an adult asylum-seekers centre after reaching 17,5 for encouraging autonomy, the risks for 'recruitment' and criminal exploitation are considered by Dutch supervisors, to be higher.

According to our results, especially Paris emerges as a hub of criminal activities and networks in which both Moroccan and Algerian minors and adults are involved. Besides France, of criminal networks specialized in luxury clothing in Germany are mentioned, and there are indications or suspicions of criminal networks in Spain and Belgium. It is difficult to get insight into possible exploitation in these cases, and respondents differ in whether they suspect it takes place or not. Related to the thin line between involvement in criminal activities and exploitation is the dependency of minors on drugs in combination with their wish to make (quick) money and in that context their dependency on others, also to survive in street life. Concerning Moroccan minors in France, suspected exploitation seems to be more temporary than continuous, and minors' situations may change fast.

In addition to criminal exploitation, there are signals of sexual abuse and exploitation of this group of UMs, which also take place within the criminal networks.

Accommodation and supervision in other European countries

In order to gain insight into how this group of specific minors is accommodated and supervised in other European countries, we zoomed in on four countries, Belgium, France, Italy and Spain. The EMN ad-hoc query yielded insufficient information on this topic.

Belgium
Belgium is confronted with the same group of nomadic UMs as the Netherlands, also in terms of nationalities. Supervisors and professionals recognize the same multiple problems. Similar to the Netherlands, Belgium can be classified as a predominantly asylum-based system for UMs. All UMs are accommodated by Fedasil, the federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers. Legal options and perspectives for the group of nomadic UMs are relatively limited. Minors who do not ask for asylum are mostly those belonging to the group of nomadic UMs, and are accommodated in a separate centre. This is a so-called 'observation and orientation centre', which means that supervisors try to gain more information about these minors and their situation. This is the same approach as towards asylum-seeking minors. What is different is that supervisors try to make nomadic UMs aware of their situation and provide information about (disadvantages of) leading an irregular life after becoming 18 years old.

Often, nomadic UMs leave the accommodation centre and many of them are in the streets of Brussels. Professionals working with these minors in the streets and at a day shelter, strive for establishing and maintaining contact with them and supporting them in their needs. More specifically, concerning the day centre, the professionals try to develop a relationship of trust with the minors and try to channel them from the streets into the system again and by having only limited ground rules (no fights, no drugs) for entering the day shelter. They also collaborate with partner organizations, among others, on substance abuse. Creating this transition is experienced as challenging, given the multiple problems as described above.

France
The same group of nomadic UMs is also present in France, forming a small part of the total number of UMs in the country. These minors, termed *jeunes en errance*, are identified as being nomadic both within France and in Europe more broadly. The system of France concerning UMs could be considered as child-protection based. UMs fall under the responsibility of the child welfare services and are covered by the common law on child welfare until their 18th birthday. Because they are of minor age, UMs do not need to hold a residence permit; few UMs in France apply for asylum. It is possible for a minor to be issued either a temporary private and family life permit or an employee or temporary worker residence permit, depending on the age the minor entered the child welfare services. Minors who have been in the care of the child welfare services for at least three years may apply for citizenship during their minority. However, those belonging to the group of nomadic minors often do not enter the system; instead many can be found in the streets of, for example, Paris, being involved in criminal activities and networks.

Italy
In Italy, all minors receive a residence permit due to being a minor. They have the same rights as any Italian or European citizen minor. The residence permit is valid until they turn 18 years old. The permit for minor age is given with the purpose of inclusion in Italy and is valid only in Italy. According to the so-called Zampa legislation for minors (in effect since April 2017), identification papers are not necessary for the residence permit. UMs who are 16 years or older and who are still at school UMs who are 16 years or older and who are still at school can combine the curriculum with an internship for vocational training on the job, with no pay. UMs who are 16 and are out of school are allowed to work for 40 hours/week. It is then also possible to get a paid contract for three years to do an apprenticeship at an enterprise to gain qualifications.

After three years, this contract can be prolonged or changed; this is also possible after turning 18. A job contract for UMs must provide some hours of training.
UMs who are about to turn 18 and who were granted a residence permit due to minor age have the possibility to continue with their guidance and integration until they are 21, in order to complete the social inclusion path they have started. After 18, UMs can also apply for a permit for finding work. After the age of 21, ex-UMs who had a residence permit on the grounds of being a minor, can legally stay in Italy with the condition that they have a job.
The Italian reception system is financed by the central government, but it is organised at local level and is implemented by NGOs. In Italy, there are two levels of reception systems: the first level relates to the arrival of immigrants; and the second level is focused on the integration of minors. At the second level, accommodation centres, called 'educational communities' where maximum twelve minors can be supervised. They are usually found in small municipalities or in the centre of cities to promote a better inclusion of the minors in the local community.

Spain
UMs have the right to legally stay in Spain due to their minor age. They can neither be expelled from the country nor be detained for having an irregular status. Until they are 18 years old they are accommodated in so-called protection centres (*centros abiertos de proteccion)*. The accommodation and guidance of unaccompanied minors fall under the responsibility of the public child protection services, which are regionally organised by autonomous communities such as in Italy. In areas of arrival there are specific centres for UMs; in other places they are accommodated with Spanish and other foreign children who are under the protection of child protection services. In November 2021, Spain modified the Aliens Regulation which introduced more legal rights and possibilities for (ex-)UMs. The main aim of the modification was to promote the integration/inclusion of (ex-)UMs into the Spanish society and prevent that UMs end up in a situation of irregularity and social exclusion, after reaching the legal age of adulthood. Since the reform of November 2021, UMs who are 16 years or older and who were under the protection of the child-protection system are allowed to work 8 hours/day similar to all children in Spain between 16 and 18 years old. UMs who turn 18 and who received a residence permit as a minor, as well as those youngsters who were under the protection of child services as an unaccompanied minor but turned 18 before obtaining the residence permit, are granted a residence and work permit for two years, under certain conditions. In both cases, there are possibilities of extension. In addition, there is a transitory regulation for undocumented ex-UMs who were between 18-23 years old when the reforms were introduced, and who were under the protection of child protection services as a minor. The residence and work permit for (ex-)UMs is national and UMs who fall under this regime do not have the right to family reunion. Although the new regulations are still recent, and the longer term effects are not seen yet, according to the Spanish officials results of the modifications are positive, with big changes observed in the attitude of the youngsters, who are more willing to study and to integrate themselves and the majority of the (ex-)UMs are currently working.

Ways forward and possible solutions

Our respondents brought several possible solutions and ways forward regarding how to deal with the target group of this research. Regarding guidance, tackling substance abuse and addiction, investing in a personal trust relationship, providing multi-disciplinary and culturally sensitive guidance, working with the family in the country of origin,

and honest communication with minors about their legal possibilities were mentioned as important. In addition, making sure minors have possibilities for internships and vocational training would help them keep occupied, increase their self-esteem and skills that could be useful for their future. Small scale accommodation centres where specific attention is paid to group dynamics, are also seen as a possible solution. Further, suggestions are made for measures directed towards the countries of origin, and for collaboration between different EU-countries including on identification and protection to tackle the problem of involvement in criminal networks and possible exploitation. Lastly, providing legal perspective, including work opportunities in combination with vocational schooling, as well as legal opportunities into adulthood, would help in keeping nomadic UMs within the system and would provide them stability to work on their problems.

Discussion

Offering future perspectives

Our findings reveal differences in the admission policies for UMs: in the South European countries Italy and Spain, the admission policy is mainly based on child protection. UMs are first and foremost seen as children in need of protection, and have the same rights as native children. In these countries, applying for asylum is not necessary for a residence permit. In the Northern European countries, such as the Netherlands and Belgium, the admission policy for UMs is based asylum. Although UMs are also considered as children in need of protection in these countries, there is no possibility for a residence permit without applying for asylum. However, UMs coming from safe countries, such as those from Morocco, have little or no chances of receiving a residence permit on the basis of international protection. In Italy and Spain, policies aim at the integration of UMs in the society and at offering them legal opportunities during the minor age as well as after the age of legal adulthood for building a future, as opposed to the Netherlands and Belgium, where they are allowed to stay under certain conditions, but have no future perspectives. Supervisors in asylum systems struggle with what they can offer to these youngsters within this context of limited legal possibilities. Our results show that nomadic minors coming from safe countries who have little or no chances of receiving a residence permit on the basis of international protection are 'pushed' into the asylum system. This situation can be associated with two important bottlenecks: one at the individual level (feelings of frustration due to long procedures and the feeling of 'wasting time' because of not being able to earn money; and feelings of injustice and being repeatedly rejected compared to their peers who are more likely to receive international protection – factors which Dutch supervisors consider to be among the underlying reasons for behavioral problems and incidents in the accommodation centres) and the other at the governance level (the presence of nomadic UMs in the asylum system puts pressure on the asylum system in these countries, which is nowadays already under stress at the European level).

At the same time, negative images of these minors as 'troublemakers' and expectations of incidents to happen (again) exist among some supervisors. This seems to create further frictions at the accommodation centres. That a group of UMs who actually are considered as not belonging to the asylum-system as they come from safe countries, are accommodated and supervised together with UMs in need of international protection due to lack of alternatives to meet the specific needs of the nomadic UMs with multiple problems creates a dilemma.

Negative societal consequences and breaking vicious circles at different levels

The migration system of nomadic minors in Europe seems to keep on feeding itself: at macro level, because of socio-economic differences between countries of origin and Europe, at the micro level, because of continued aspirations of young potential migrants and their families, social networks and false feedback mechanisms from peers who already migrated. At the meso-level, according to researchers and professionals, there are there are 'actors' who (may) exploit some nomadic UMs in criminal networks in different European countries. Many respondents identified the lack of legal opportunities in North Europe as one of the important reasons why these UMs find themselves in such networks and in continued nomadic existence. An essential question is how to break this 'vicious circle' regarding the irregular existence of nomadic minors with multiple problems in Europe.

Nomadic youngsters, who go off the radar from Dutch accommodation centres, either lead an irregular existence in the Netherlands or move on to another European country – where they find themselves in vulnerable situations. Return to the country or origin among UMs is generally quite low. If these minors find themselves in street situations, use of substances becomes a coping strategy with such an existence. The longer they are in street situations and are outside of the system, the larger is the distance with society and institutions within the system. Conflict becomes a normal way of communication to survive in their world. The multiple problems that these youngsters suffer from feed each other, creating a vicious circle at the individual level. This vicious circle is hard to break, and there is no easy and one single solution for the issues. The most common bottleneck to break the circle that is named by professionals in this research, and in previous research is the lack of appropriate regular medical care for this group, especially for those who are severely drug addicted. Complementary solutions from different domains (such as tailor-made healthcare for the particular characteristics and needs of the group, individual, culturally sensitive guidance and possible interventions at the level of the juvenile system) to integrally approach these minors from the very beginning, may contribute to tackle the issue of multiple problems.

Channelling positive characteristics into positive behaviours

There are different narratives and ways to approach the group of nomadic minors with multiple problems. They can be seen as 'troublemakers' and perpetrators of crime. Their involvement in criminal networks does have societal consequences. Our findings provide the context and background of 'trouble making' behaviour and contribute to increase our understanding of why minors behave in certain ways. Importantly, they are not merely 'troublemakers' or perpetrators; they are at the same time children who had an unfortunate start in life, struggling to survive and vulnerable to criminal exploitation.

Notably, our data also indicates that nomadic UMs are also smart, resilient, competent and have a strong agency to survive the nomadic life and all the challenges that come with it. The recent policy changes in Spain concerning possibilities for legal work for minors and aiming at preventing they end up in a situation of irregularity and social exclusion show a different narrative/approach to minors coming, among others from Morocco. One of the underlying ideas behind the policy changes in Spain is that offering legal possibilities for the group of minors with economic motives, and regulating their transition to legal adulthood by law, is a way to offer alternatives to involvement in criminal activities, situations in which these youngsters use their positive characteristics in a negative way.

It is clear that the challenging issue of nomadic minors with multiple problems is not only a policy matter for the Netherlands but for Europe in general. Within this context, it is important that European countries actively and regularly exchange their experiences on the outcomes of different (good) practices and different immigration systems and the wanted and unwanted results of these policies.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the research and policy context in the Netherlands

Unaccompanied minors (UMs) constitute an especially vulnerable group of migrants coming from non-EU countries, as their migration journey to Europe occurs without their parents or other adults exercising any authority over them. In many European countries, including the Netherlands, asking for international protection is the primary way for UMs in order to be able to receive a residence permit. However, according to European asylum system minors coming from so-called safe countries, where 'in general there is no (fear of) persecution, for example because of race or religion, torture or inhumane treatment' (for example Morocco, and until June 2021 in the Netherlands also Algeria[1]) have little or no chance of receiving a residence permit on the grounds of international protection.

Studies in the Netherlands demonstrate that many of these youngsters disappear off the radar either prior or during the asylum procedure. For example, according to a study by the Dutch Research and Documentation Centre (WODC), the majority of the cohort of UMs who applied for international protection between 2014 and mid-2019 and subsequently received a negative decision in the first instance, left Dutch accommodation centres for an unknown destination. Among the Moroccan and Algerian minors this percentage was by far the highest: 86% of the Algerian and 77% of the Moroccan minors whose asylum application was rejected in the first instance, disappeared off the radar either prior or upon turning 18 years old (Noyon et al., 2020). In another Dutch study, the findings showed that in the period 2015-2020, among the group of UMs who went off the radar from accommodation centres at any time before they turned 18, the share of Moroccan and Algerian UMs was the highest (APM, 2021).[2] There are UMs who leave the Dutch accommodation centres, come back to these centres at a later point in time (personal information, COA, December 2021). Research also shows that, in the Netherlands, UMs who are less likely to receive international protection, do not want to return to their home countries (Kulu-Glasgow, et al., 2021) and only a small minority (8%) of all UMs whose asylum application is rejected return voluntarily (Noyon et al., 2020). There are indications that minors who disappear off the radar from the accommodation centres either stay in the Netherlands irregularly or lead a nomadic life in Europe by travelling between different countries with no residence permit.
According to the Dutch supervisors (legal guardians and mentors in accommodation centres) UMs coming from North African countries, often are nomadic, experience a multitude of problems, such as drug addiction, mental health problems and/or have behavioural problems, such as causing incidents at accommodation centres. Most incidents of UMs at the centres concern in general violations of house rules, aggression and violence against peers and/or supervisors – both of a verbal and physical nature, and verbal suicide threats (personal information via COA, March 2022); see also Staring & Bouabid, 2019). There are also suspicions regarding involvement in criminal

[1] House of Representatives of the Netherlands, TK 2020-2021, 19 637, no. 2743, dd. June 11, 2021 (in Dutch).
[2] In this study, the nationalities that had high incidents of disappearing from the radar were selected. Other selected nationalities in the study were: Afghan, Iraqi, Libyan, Nigerian and Tunisian. The study focused on asylum seekers who left accommodation centres of the Dutch Central Agency for the Reception for Asylum seekers (COA), which is the governmental organisation that is responsible for the accommodation of asylum seekers.

networks (see also Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2021). There are signals of similar problems also in other European countries regarding (multiple) problems among the North African youngsters who have less possibilities for international protection after an asylum application, and who lead a nomadic life (e.g. Byrne and Bech 2018; De Vegter et al., 2019; Ivert & Magnusson, 2020). Similar to the situation in the Netherlands, these young people leave the shelter for an unknown destination and some live on the streets as irregular migrants.

1.1.1 Policy context of the research

In the Netherlands, at the policy level, UMs coming from North-Africa are seen to be problematic, especially due to the incidents they cause in and outside the accommodation centres. A small proportion of asylum seekers, including UMs, cause nuisance during their stay in the Netherlands, such as repeated violations of COA house rules, fare-dodging on public transport, shoplifting and disruptive behaviour due to alcohol and/or drug use (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2021). This has a negative impact upon how asylum seekers who do not cause incidents are perceived as well as the level of public support in the society towards asylum seekers generally (TK 2020-2021, 19637, no. 2744). Tackling the incidents caused by asylum seekers has been one of the priorities of recent Dutch cabinets (see for example, House of Representatives of the Netherlands, TK 2018-2019, 19637, no. 2455; TK 2020-2021, 19637, no. 2671; Letter of the State Secretary of Justice and Security to the House of Representatives of the Netherlands, 29 June 2022). Already in 2020, the outgoing Dutch State Secretary stressed the importance of gaining insight into both the motives and characteristics of nomadic UMs in Europe, in order to be able to engage in more targeted preventative actions to reduce the potential problems related this group (TK 2020-2021, 19637, no. 2744. p. 10). Similarly, he promised the House of Representatives on 25 November 2020 during a budget debate for the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security to examine at the European level what more could be done to tackle the issue of asylum seekers causing incidents.

The issue of nomadic unaccompanied minors indeed receives attention at the European level, but from a different perspective. Protecting children in migration is included in the agenda of the European Commission. In 2017, the Commission issued policy recommendations, for example on the topics of reception and sustainable solutions for these minors. The implementation of these recommendations are being monitored (European Commission, 2017). During the various exploratory discussions in preparation for this research, it emerged that EU-countries differ in their policy perspectives on the issue of nomadic unaccompanied minors: an emphasis on immigration policy perspective versus an emphasis on the protection of the child perspective.

In the summer of 2021, the Dutch Migration Policy Department organised a so-called 'Knowledge Table', where different experts who are familiar with this group of minors were invited to discuss the topic of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands, showed that knowledge about this group is both limited and fragmented. Consequently, the same Department requested the Dutch Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) to conduct a research into this topic, specifically with the objective of learning more about the background of this group of minors, and looking at the experiences of *other* European countries with this group of minors. In the present report, we present the results of this research.

1.2 Aim and research questions

The general aims of this study were:
- to paint a picture of the nomadic existence of UMs with (multiple) problems in Europe;
- to investigate the underlying reasons of their nomadic behaviour and the (multiple) problems they have; and
- to explore the type of (policy) measures that are taken regarding the supervision and care of this group in *other* European countries.

We defined the target group of the research as follows.

UMs who either have little or no chance of receiving a residence permit after an asylum application or who do not apply for asylum at all *and* who have (multiple) problems, such as mental health issues, substance use/addiction, and/or pose behavioural problems inside or outside of the accommodation facilities, and travel between EU-countries without a residence permit.

It should be noted that at the start of our research we did not limit ourselves to a specific nationality regarding the target group.

While referring to the above defined target group, we use in this report briefly the terms 'nomadic minors' or 'nomadic minors with multiple problems', and use these interchangeably for readability purposes.

The research questions of this study were:
1 What is the size of this group of UMs and what are their background characteristics (for example, nationality, situation in their country of origin - including the nature of their (multiple) problems)?
2 What are their motives for leaving their countries (push-factors) and coming to Europe (pull factors)? What are their expectations?
3 What is the nature of and reasons for leading a nomadic life in Europe?
   - What information sources do they make use of during their nomadic existence and what information do they have?
   - Which factors play a role in choosing to move to and (temporarily) reside in a certain country?
   - Why do they apply for asylum or (not) and/or make use of accommodation centres?
4 What is the nature of (multiple) problems in Europe and what are the underlying reasons for these problems?
   - Are they involved in criminal networks? What is known about the possible exploitation of these UMs? Are there any other forms of victimization this group has been exposed to (for example situation in their country of origin, experiences during migration/nomadic life)?
5 What are the experiences of EU-countries, but the Netherlands, with nomadic UMs?
   - What does the accommodation and guidance of this group look like?
   - Which (policy) measures have these countries taken regarding the supervision and care of this group?
   - What is known about the results and effectiveness of these measures?

6 What are the ways forward and possible solutions for the group of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems in Europe?[3]

As mentioned before, in this research, we take the situation regarding the accommodation and supervision of the nomadic minors with multiple problems in the Netherlands as given (Box 1.1 presents a short overview of this situation). However, while answering some of the research questions we also put specific emphasis on the findings regarding the Netherlands for their possible policy implications (for example, involvement in criminal networks or possible exploitation (under research question 4), reasons for coming to the Netherlands or reasons for applying for asylum (under research question 3).

Box 1.1 A short overview of the Dutch accommodation system for UMs and supervision of (nomadic) UMs with multiple problems

Accommodation system for UMs and right of residence, work and study
In the Netherlands, all unaccompanied minors, who are known to the Dutch government are placed under the guardianship of Nidos Foundation upon arrival in the Netherlands, regardless of their age. The Dutch admission policy for UMs is mainly based on asylum. So, in order to receive a residence permit, UMs in principle need to apply for asylum. In the accommodation of UMs a distinction is made according to age, and the outcome of the asylum decision. Children under the age of 15 are placed in a foster family by Nidos; UMs who are 15 years or older are initially taken care of by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) in so-called process reception locations for UMs (POA). In the POA locations about 50 to 80 UMs are accommodated and there is 24-hour supervision. UMs whose asylum application has been granted move to a small-scale living units under the responsibility of Nidos. UMs whose asylum application has been rejected are taken care of in a small-scale residential facilities (KWV) under the responsibility of the COA. UMs who do not apply for asylum or who are still waiting for the first decision on their application, also stay in KWVs. In other words, UMs coming from so-called safe countries who have less or no opportunities of receiving a residence permit on the basis of international protection, among which the group of nomadic UMs who often have (multiple) problems, also stay at the KWVs as long as they are known to the authorities. A maximum of sixteen to twenty UMs stay in a KWV, and there is 24-hour supervision. Furthermore, there is a distinction in the future-oriented guidance of the UMs according to the outcome of the asylum procedure. UMs who receive a residence permit, work on their integration in the small-scale accommodation centres of Nidos, while those who receive a negative outcome on their asylum application are in principle prepared for departure from the Netherlands. An important condition for the departure of UMs is that there has to be 'adequate accommodation' in the country of origin – which is in the first instance parents. If adequate accommodation is available but the UM does not cooperate with voluntary departure, the officials can decide on forced return. However, this form of return is implemented rarely due to a lack of conclusive evidence of adequate accommodation in the country of origin in many cases. Regardless of the outcome of their asylum-decision, UMs have the right to education and health care (see Chapter 3 regarding findings of this research on the specific situation of UMs who do not apply for asylum in the Netherlands). In principle, UMs follow an 'International Transition

[3] This research question was added after data collection, as the topic was often discussed during the interviews, which we considered important within the context of this research.

Class' (ISK) for up to two years after arrival in the Netherlands, where the curriculum is mainly based on learning the Dutch language. The ISK is intended for all newcomers aged 12-18 to facilitate the transition to the Dutch education system, with specific attention in the second year for outflow to regular education (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten & Platform Opnieuw Thuis, 2016).

UMs can only work under specific requirements, which are the same for adult asylum-seekers. In order to work, UMs need, for example, a valid Foreign Nationals Identity Document (a so-called W-document, which is given to asylum-seekers) and they must have submitted an asylum-application at least six-months before. In addition, asylum-seekers with an income must pay a personal contribution to the costs of care in the accommodation centres. They cannot work more than 24 weeks per year (During the report-writing, there was a higher-appeal in de court regarding this requirement – TK 2022-2023, 32824, no 387). UMs must follow compulsory (full-time) education until 16 years old, and there is a requirement of having a diploma at least at the basic level of the secondary vocational education (*MBO level 2*) until age of 18 (personal communication, COA, November 2022). This means that UMs can only work legally only after school hours for a limited number of hours.

UMs whose asylum application has been definitely rejected (after appeal) and those who do not submit an asylum application are not allowed to perform paid labour. Ex-UMs can complete the education they started as a minor until they receive their diploma. The government finances the education program provided that there is a right to accommodation (for example if the ex-UM continues to litigate in the asylum procedure). Following education does not in itself lead to a right to accommodation. Ex-UMs without a right of residence are not allowed to start a new education program (Kulu-Glasgow et al., 2021).

Guidance of UMs with multiple problems

Since 2019, a small proportion of UMs with (multiple) problems who are extra vulnerable and display serious behavioural problems at COA-accommodation centres receive intensive, culture sensitive guidance in small-scale accommodation centres of Nidos, the so-called PON (*Perspectief Opvang van Nidos*). There are only three locations, which are all small-scaled. These locations can accommodate in total sixteen UMs who receive an intensive guidance; four of these places are reserved for crisis situations (personal communication Nidos, May, 2023). UMs placed in PON are mostly from North-Africa, especially from Morocco and Algeria. The guidance is focused on making contact, involving family members and facilitating and stimulating future plans by gaining the minors' trust. There is evidence that UMs in the PON locations hardly cause any incidents and/or engage in criminal behaviour, even though this was the case prior to placement in the PON (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2021). Nevertheless, evaluations of PON show several bottlenecks (such as difficulty of connection with regular health care institutions for addiction problems, and difficulty in providing prospects for the future without solving the underlying multiple problems (Van Wijk, 2020, 2021).

In addition, COA has taken several measures to both prevent and deal with the behavioural problems of UMs in its accommodation centres.[a] These measures include, amongst other things, being present for the minors and staying in contact with them, evaluating prior incidents and learning from them, making use of cultural mediators, street coaches and experts on drug addiction. Recently, cultural mediators have been active for one year in the country, and currently, there are four COA-intercultural mediators who can be called upon by the COA-supervisors in different locations when necessary. The role of street coaches, who have diverse backgrounds, is somewhere between that of security guards and intercultural mediators. They can be present at the location, but also in the vicinity of the location, especially near shops. Recently, experts on drug addiction from the first-level health care located at the accommodation centres (Asylum-seeker Health Care, GZA), were deployed for UMs as well as for adult asylum-seekers, who did outreach work at accommodation centres by being present at the accommodation centres and giving them information (personal information COA, February 2023). In addition to PON, other alternative forms of accommodation and guidance is used. Minors with serious behavioural problems who are 16 years or older can be placed in the Enforcement and Supervision Location (HTL) of COA for a maximum period of 3 months, under strict conditions and with the consent of Nidos. This measure is applied rarely (personal communication, COA, February 2023). It is also possible to move the minor to another centre for a 'time-out' for up to seven days.

Furthermore, during the writing of this report, COA was about to start a pilot project 'Intensive Guidance Accommodation for UMs' (*intensief begeleidende opvang voor AMVs, IBA*). The project is meant to start in the summer of 2023 and will run for 1,5 years. The target group is extra vulnerable minors who are actually not the target group of PON or HTL, but whose behaviour worries their supervisors. The general aim is prevention: to prevent minors from slipping (further) in their behaviour and that they can stay in regular accommodation centres for minors. Pilot IBA will be implemented in one location with a capacity for 10 to 12 minors. The aim is to cooperate with youth services in the region for the guidance of these minors (personal communication, COA, February, 2023).

a The examples we present here are only some of the measures taken by COA. We do neither attempt nor claim to be providing an exhaustive account of the (preventive) measures, as this is not the aim of this research.

1.3 Research methods

This study is based on a variety of qualitative research methods and is descriptive of nature. In order to answer the above mentioned questions we have used different information sources and methods.

1.3.1 Literature study

At the start of our research and during the course of implementation we searched for literature in Google (Scholar) by using certain keywords. Further, we made use of snowballing, by using literature cited in publications we found ourselves (citation chaining), and literature some of our respondents draw our attention to.

1.3.2 *Personal communication with Dutch experts*

In some cases, we had factual questions about the Dutch practice or policy regarding UMs coming from safe countries or regarding UMs in general. When we could not find the answers to these questions in public sources or the information we encountered raised further questions, we contacted experts from the relevant organisations. In this report, we refer to the factual information we gathered in this way as 'personal communication' including the name of the institution and the date of the communication thereby.

1.3.3 *Ad-hoc query amongst the national contact points of the European Migration Network (EMN)*

In order to be able to answer the research questions, concerning the size of the target group of this research and their background characteristics in EU-countries (research question 1), and to have a general overview of the nature of the multiple problems (research question 4), the guidance and care the EU-countries provide to this group, and the results of these policies or measures (research question 5), we conducted, in cooperation with the Dutch National Contact Point (NCP) of the European Migration Network[4] (Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service, Research and Analysis Centre), an ad-hoc query amongst the EMN member states. To develop the questionnaire we worked together with the Dutch contact point. EMN ad-hoc queries are used by contact points and the European Commission to collect information from EMN member states on subjects related to asylum and migration.

The ad-hoc query (2022.26) comprised 13 questions. The Dutch NCP shared the ad-hoc query amongst 29 countries in total: all EU Member States (except for Denmark) and Norway and the EMN Observer Countries. In total, 23 countries contributed information to the query[5]; we provided the answers to the questions for the Netherlands. The Observer States, Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Portugal and Romania did not react to the query. Whilst Poland and Spain did react, they requested that their answers not be made public.

1.3.4 *Educated Guess 'light'*

In the light of the fact that it was not possible to get an impression of the size of our target group in Europe, via the EMN ad-hoc query, we opted to apply a 'light' version of the so-called educated guess method at the final phases of our data collection. The aim of this method was to give us an impression of the size of the group of Moroccan nomadic minors with multiple problems in the Netherlands – based on the fact that this appeared to be relatively the most common group brought up by the Dutch supervisors, and because this was also recognised by our international respondents. Our approach to this method is described in Chapter 2, together with the presentation of results.

1.3.5 *Interviews*

This research is mainly based on interviews with professionals and researchers from different countries. Below a description of these groups are given. Figure 1.1 gives a

[4] For more information on EMN, see their website: European Migration Network (EMN) (europa.eu).
[5] The compilation of the answers can be found at: EMN_AHQ_2022.26_guidance_and_well-being_of_UAMs_Compilation_WIDER.pdf (emnnetherlands.nl).

visual overview of all respondents in different countries. In Appendix 2, a list of all respondents are given.

i Focus groups with Dutch supervisors

In the initial phase of our data collection, we have conducted four focus groups with COA-mentors, COA-behaviourists who support mentors in different ways[6] and legal guardians of Nidos (Dutch guardianship institution for UMs in the Netherlands (see Box 1.1), PON-mentors (see Box 1.1 for the definition of PON), and Nidos behavioural scientists[7], who have experience in supervising nomadic minors with multiple problems.

For this purpose, we selected four accommodation centres among the locations where the Dutch Central Agency for the Reception for Asylum seekers (COA) accommodate and supervise UMs (see Box 1.1). According to the incident-registrations of COA, these locations were in the top five-locations with the highest number of incidents by UMs in general during the period 2019-2021 (personal communication with COA, March 2022). However, one of these locations was closed prior to the data collection. The locations with highest number of incidents were selected, with the assumption that the supervisors working in these locations would relatively come into contact with North African nomadic UMs with multiple problems more often than their colleagues who work at locations with lower number of incidents.

The selected locations were two process reception centres (POA) and two small-scale housing facilities (KWV) (see Box 1.1 for definitions). To start with, COA informed these locations about our research, after which we then approached the managers of these locations. We explained the aim of our research and requested the location-managers to suggest a mentor and (if possible) a behavioural expert with experience and insight into the background of our target group. A total of eight COA-supervisors (mentors and behaviourists) participated in two group discussions (four respondents per focus group). They had extensive experience in the supervision of nomadic minors with (multiple) problems (between two to seven years).

In addition, we made a similar request to Nidos, whose regional managers suggested legal guardians and behavioural scientists who were involved in supervising UMs from the aforementioned COA locations. One of the Nidos focus groups consisted of PON-mentors and legal guardians who supervise minors in these locations. A total of eight legal guardians, one behavioural scientist and one PON-supervisor took part in the two focus groups. We had an individual interview with another behavioural scientist from Nidos who could not attend the focus group meetings. The majority of the supervisors whom we interviewed had more than two years of experience (up to 13 years).
The focus group discussions were held either face-to-face or in a hybrid form. In these focus groups, the supervisors underscored that UMs coming from North Africa, especially from Morocco, and somewhat to a lesser extend from Algeria as the main group of nomadic minors with multiple problems, including causing incidents.

[6] Behaviorists work in every COA-accommodation centre for UMs and support the mentors in different ways. For example, they are present during conversations between the legal guardian of Nidos and the COA mentor, and they determine if any additional (youth) care is needed by the child and give advice regarding de guidance and support of UMs (EMN-Netherlands, 2021).

[7] Behavioural scientists work for different Nidos-regions. They are deployed by legal guardians when there is a vulnerable situation and look at the situation from a pedagogical point of view. They provide advice to the legal guardians and their advice is taken into account in decisions concerning the child's situation, including the child's protection and safety.

Information from the focus groups with Dutch supervisors are used in answering all research questions, except the specific questions on the experiences of other European countries (research question 5).

ii Interviews with researchers and professionals in different European countries

Within the context of this research, we carried out interviews with nine researchers from different countries. Most of them had conducted research on the North African nomadic UMs, and mainly Moroccan minors. Their expertise varied from the situation of the minors in their country of origin and how this influences the (multiple) problems, aspirations for migration to Europe, involvement in criminal networks and exploitation therein (both in their country of origin and in Europe), nomadic behaviour and guidance of UMs outside the system.
In addition, we interviewed a total of 18 professionals in different European countries, who are either involved in the guidance of children either in accommodation centres or on the street, or confronted with the target group in their work, or are government officials. The selected countries were: Belgium, France, Italy, and Spain (see for the reasons for the selection these countries, respective country descriptions in Chapter 4). During these interviews we specifically focused on research question 5 - to zoom in on the experiences of these four countries regarding the accommodation and guidance of the target group. However, the information from these interviews is also used in answering other research questions. Depending on the expertise of the respondents, some topics were discussed more in detail than the others during the interviews.

The respondents were approached specifically based on literature or via the snowball method via other respondents.

Interviews with professionals in Morocco
In order to gain more insight into the background of the Moroccan UMs migrating to Europe (research question 1), we interviewed in total four professionals from three organisations in Morocco: International Organisation for Migration and two NGO's which amongst other things, work with (street) children who are considering embarking upon the migration journey to Europe. One of these NGOs is involved in cross-border mediation between Spanish officials and families of UMs in Morocco regarding documentation for UMs in Spain and the communication between minors and their families in Morocco. These activities are described while answering the measures taken regarding the supervision and care of UMs in Spain in Chapter 4 (under research question 5).

Case-study: interview with a nomadic UM
We also conducted an interview with a nomadic minor in the Netherlands, with the approval of his legal guardian, who first approached the respondent with a letter we composed. The interview took place in his own language with the help of an inter-preter, who is also a cultural mediator.
The conversation focused on his nomadic behaviour in Europe and underlying reasons behind it. His story reflects information shared by professionals and researchers and his migration trajectory and nomadic life in Europe matches the general picture of nomadic UMs in Europe. In this sense, his story is a valuable illustration of our results.

Analyses

For the analyses, we used the qualitative analysis software package of MAXQDA.
All the interview transcripts were thematically coded on the basis of the research

questions and underlying topics, by the aid of a code system which we constructed prior to the analyses. Where necessary during the coding process, the code system was supplemented with additional codes regarding relevant information which appeared from the data or existing codes were adapted. The researchers regularly consulted each other to reach a common understanding regarding the content of the codes and the way of coding.

1.4 Cautioning remarks about the research design

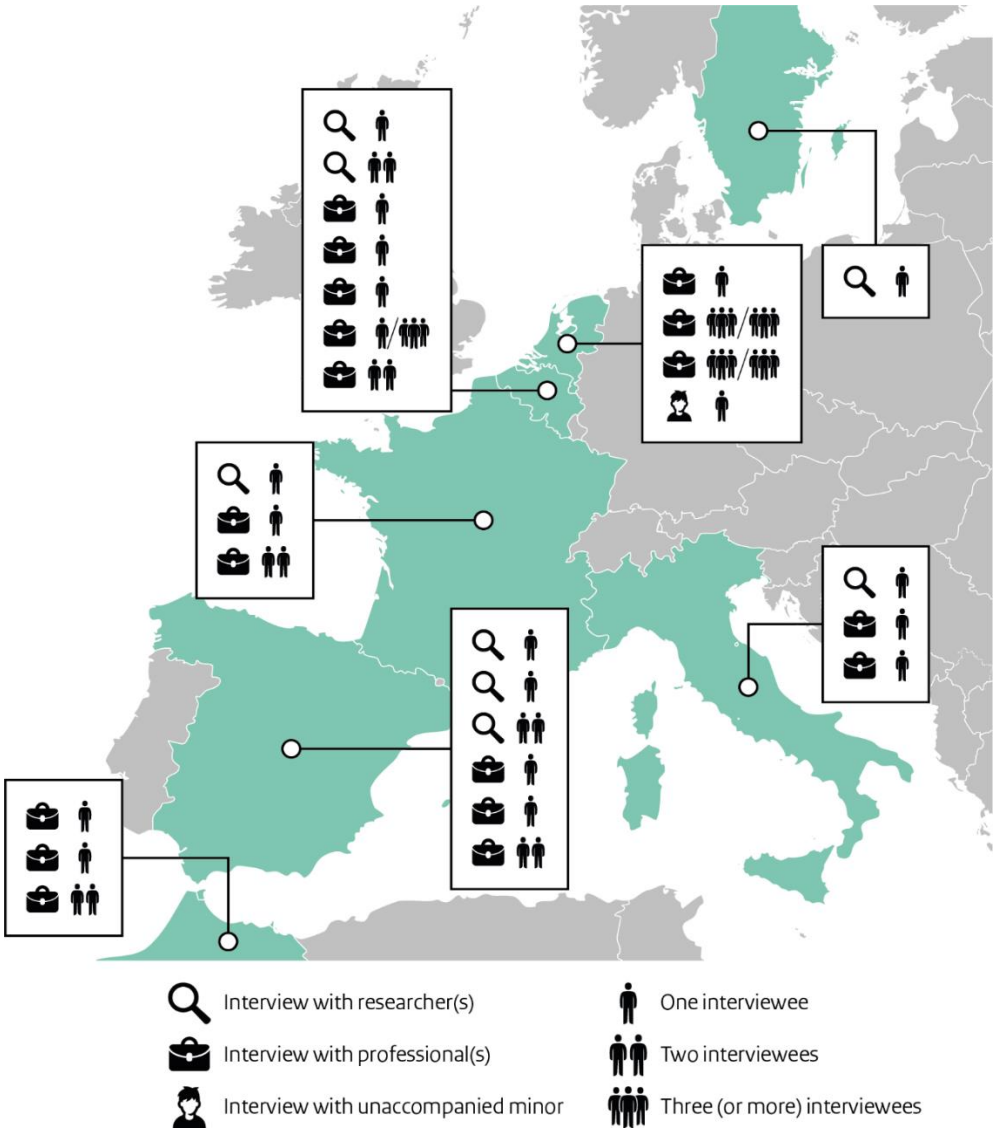
The current research is based on interviews with researchers from different countries, supervisors of nomadic UMs and other professionals who either work or have experience with the group. The findings reflect their experiences with and viewpoints on these UMs. During the current research, we did have the opportunity to interview a nomadic minor in the Netherlands, whose story is reflective of many of the findings discussed in the report. However, it is possible that there are aspects of the stories of nomadic minors our results do not reflect. Although we speak of the 'group' of nomadic UMs and paint a more general picture of this group, it is important to emphasize that this general picture may not reflect the many individual trajectories and diversity among this group of minors.

1.5 Reading guide

In Chapters 2 through 4 we present the results from our research.

In Chapter 2 we first go into findings regarding the research question 1, relating to the scale of the nomadic UMs with multiple problems in Europe (based on the results of the EMN ad-hoc query) and the size of the group in the Netherlands (based on the educated-guess 'light' method). Second, we present our results on the background characteristics of the nomadic UMs with multiple problems, situation in their country of origin (where we pay specific attention to the family context) and the existence and the nature of their (multiple) problems before migration.
Chapter 3 starts with the case of Mario, who is a nomadic UM and left Morocco when he was 13 years old. At the time of the interview, he was 17 and living in the Netherlands. As stated above, his story is illustrative for many of the findings which we present later based on the interviews with professionals and researchers. Subsequently, we briefly discuss our theoretical framework, which guided our analyses. Subsequently, Chapter 3 addresses research questions 3 and 4 (among others push and pull factors for the migration of nomadic UMs, nature and reasons of their nomadic life in Europe, role of information in migration from the country of origin and nomadic life in Europe, and nature and underlying reasons of multiple problems in Europe, and involvement in criminal networks). In this Chapter, we also present some findings that are specific to the Netherlands (such as involvement in criminal activities and possible exploitation therein and signals of irregular existence) due to their policy relevance.
Chapter 4 describes the accommodation and guidance of the (nomadic) minors with multiple problems in the four European countries we zoomed in and other relevant policy measures (research question 5). We close this Chapter by presenting possible ways forward and possible solutions suggested by our respondents (research question 6).
In Chapter 5, we present the main conclusions of our research and end with some discussion points where we reflect on these main findings.

Figure 1.1 Overview of all the respondents across the different countries*



* The map is adapted from work by Maix under CC BY-SA 3.0 license.

2 Size and background of the nomadic unaccompanied minors with multiple problems

In this Chapter we present the results regarding research question 1, size and background of the target group as defined in Chapter 1. In addition to the nationality, age, and sex of the group, we present a discussion of their family context and nature of the multiple problems they face in the country of origin.

2.1 Size of the target group in Europe

One of the aims of the EMN ad-hoc query was to have an overall view of the size of the target group of our research in EU-countries (in addition to the topics such as the nationalities of the target group, nature of the multiple problems this group faces, reasons for nomadic life, and the experiences of these countries regarding this group). However, it proved to be difficult to gain insight into these topics via the ad-hoc query, which, arguably, relates, at least in part, to the complexity of the topic.
Out of the 23 countries that responded, six countries including the Netherlands reported being confronted with minors who either have little chance of receiving an asylum permit or who do not ask for asylum at all: Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Sweden. A general finding is that countries do not seem to have registrations of the group of nomadic minors and NCPs have difficulty in giving information on nomadic behaviour because of this lack of data. Several countries instead provided statistics for all the UMs who have left accommodation centres.
Other countries stated that they were not confronted with the target group.[8]

Out of those countries that reported being confronted with the group of minors as defined above, the majority provided more general information about all UMs. Therefore, it was not always entirely clear based on their answers whether they are confronted with the same specific group of nomadic UMs as the Netherlands. However, it does appear that Bulgaria is not confronted with the same group of UMs: the Bulgarian NCP highlighted that Bulgaria is rather a transit country for destination countries elsewhere in Europe, and mentioned that Afghanistan and Syria were the UMs' main countries of origin (minors from these countries have a higher chance of receiving international protection than the group of nomadic UMs). The Italian and Greek NCPs, although they both shared more general information about all UMs in their contributions, did mention the nationalities of North African countries in the statistics they provided concerning both the number of minors who left and those who were registered and received a negative decision on their asylum application, respectively. The Swedish NCP also mostly provided information on UMs in general. However, from the interviews with researchers and professionals we have indications that the target group of our research is also present in Sweden. Belgium seems to be confronted with the same group of nomadic UMs as the Netherlands (see Chapter 4). The main nationalities of the group in Belgium are Moroccan and Algerian. The Belgian NCP provided numbers on the amount of UMs who did not ask for asylum who subsequently disappeared from the accommodation centre (from 2018 until May 2022) (EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26, p. 6). The highest number reported was in 2019: in that

[8] These countries proceeded to give more general information about UMs in their country in response to the other questions. The compilation of the answers can be found at: EMN_AHQ_2022.26_guidance_and_well-being_of_UAMs_Compilation_WIDER.pdf (emnnetherlands.nl)

year, 1.072 UMs disappeared. Furthermore, the Belgian NCP states that the group of nomadic UMs with little to no chance of receiving an asylum permit 'seems to be rising' (EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26, p. 8).
Finally, the French NCP indicated that they did not encounter the group as defined above, because UMs fall under the general child protection law and in the majority of cases they do not apply for asylum. However, the other answers provided by the French NCP clearly do indicate that they have experience with the same group of nomadic minors as the Netherlands, regardless of the issue of applying for asylum. This group of nomadic minors, which the French NCP refers to as *jeunes en errance*, constitutes a 'small proportion' of the UMs in France (EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26, p. 21). We refer to other information gathered from specific answers of the NCPs from both France and Belgium later in the report when describing the overall results of the research.

2.2 Background characteristics of the target group: nationality, age, sex

During the interviews we tried to gain more insight into the background characteristics of the target group of our research. In the Netherlands, the target group of our research, that is, nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems who have little chance of receiving a residence permit, primarily comprises minors who come from the region of North Africa. Morocco and Algeria were the most frequently cited country of origins by the supervisors, with Morocco relatively more often cited. During the Dutch focus groups, Moroccan minors were the main topic of discussion, although minors also come from Tunisia, and to a lesser extent from Libya.

The aforementioned countries were also frequently cited by professionals in other European countries when talking about the target group. For example, Belgian professionals spoke of minors coming from the Maghreb, which includes the aforementioned countries. Belgian supervisors from accommodation centres mainly see Moroccan minors, they also referred to countries such as Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt. In France, the group of *jeunes en errance* (nomadic youth), which is how the target group is referred to there, also mainly comes from the Maghreb region, with the predominant nationality being Algerian (EMN ad-hoc query, 2022.26). Minors also come from Morocco; for instance, the NGO Hors la rue in Paris that works with the target group of our research in the streets mainly encounters Moroccan minors. The overwhelming majority of the target group in this research are boys.[9]

With regards to age, there are certainly youngsters belonging to the target group who are of minor age, who can be quite young, such as, for example, 13 or 14 years old. However, the age of those minors that are considered to be nomadic with (multiple) problems was the subject of discussion:

> *We have been confronted with very young boys who really were 14, 15, 16 of whom we thought: 'oh, they are really young and vulnerable'. And that was the case. And [we have also been confronted with] boys who say they are 16, 17, 18, of whom we thought: well, ten years more could also be a possibility.*
> (Dutch supervisor)

Dutch supervisors raised the issue that it is sometimes difficult to have an idea about the true age of the youngsters they encounter. Indeed, in all the group discussions,

[9] With regards to the Netherlands, statistics show that the numbers of female UMs from Morocco are negligible, which is similar to other nationalities. See StatLine - Alleenstaande minderjarige vreemdeling; nationaliteit, geslacht en leeftijd (cbs.nl).

the participants noted the disparity between how old minors themselves claim to be and how old they appear to be based on their physical appearance and/or behaviour, albeit, of course, this is not always so straightforward to ascertain. Based on their experience, they had the impression that some of the minors they encounter are indeed of age. Several researchers and professionals from Belgium and France also noted that there are youngsters who claim to be younger than their true age. The age that youngsters claim to be, according to respondents, ranges from 15 to 17 years old. Looking at how old supervisors judge youngsters to truly be, it appears that they are generally thought to be young adults aged between 18 to around 20 years of age. Nevertheless, some supervisors also reported having experiences with youngsters of around 25 years of age. In their response to the EMN ad-hoc query, France reported that after they are subsequently identified, a large proportion of minors turn out to be young adults.[10]

Finally, several respondents pointed out that it may take a few years for minors to arrive in the Netherlands and Northern European countries after having migrated from their country of origin at a very young age – this could be as young as 10 years old.

2.3 Size of the target group in the Netherlands

As aforementioned, we were unable to answer the question concerning the scale of nomadic UMs in the EU-countries, or at least get an indication of it, via the EMN ad-hoc query (2022.26). However, answering this question in relation to the Dutch context remained a pressing issue, insofar as there are no registrations of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands either. In order to get an indication of the size of this group in the Netherlands, we decided to apply a 'light' version of the so-called educated-guess method, during the final stages of our data collection.

The classical educated guess method, which requires quantitative data, sets out to arrive at an estimate of the lower and upper limit of a population in 'dark numbers'. The estimates are performed by a large group of experts who know the group well and have an overview of the group. The method aims at the triangulation of estimates by different groups of experts, where the experts state the degree of certainty with which they make their estimates (see, e.g., Smits van Waesberghe et al. 2014, who apply the educated guess method to estimate the upper and lower limit of, amongst other things, forced marriages in the Netherlands). Such an approach was not possible to implement in the final stages of the current research due to time limitations.

We approached the Dutch professionals who participated in the focus groups in the Netherlands (supervisors from COA and Nidos coming from different locations/regions; see Chapter 1) to provide with an estimate of the minimum and maximum number of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands during the period 2019-2021 (see below for the exact definition we used). We chose this period as it is the same reference period we used in the EMN ad-hoc query. These supervisors were regularly confronted during their work with our target group and had considerable years of experience in terms of providing guidance to them – see Chapter 1, Research Methods). For this part of the research, we limited ourselves solely to the Moroccan UMs. There were different reasons for this: they were the group of minors which was relatively more often named by the Dutch supervisors as being nomadic with

[10] Being identified as a minor or adult has profound consequences in terms of one's legal position. Within the EU, age determination procedures are not harmonised and there is ongoing discussion about both their application and validity (e.g., see Wenke, 2017; ECRE, 2022; Wijnkoop & Brouwer, 2021).

(multiple) problems among the North African group and were also recognized as such by professionals from other countries who participated in our research. In addition, they constitute the most common nationality of UMs (with an asylum application) coming from North Africa in the Netherlands, during the above mentioned period (see below for the numbers). Finally, we assumed that it would be more difficult for the supervisors to give an estimate of the total group of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems from North Africa.

It is important to stress here that this exercise must be considered as a preliminary step in getting an impression of the scale of nomadic Moroccan UMs with (multiple) problems and, as such, the findings should be viewed with a great degree of caution. For the respondents, it proved difficult to come up with estimations. For this reason, the numbers that are presented here should be considered as 'guesstimates' (cf. Bos et al., 2016). To be able to gain a truly accurate estimation of the size of the group, further research is required.

Approach

We approached the Dutch supervisors via a two-step process, in order to conduct a triangulation of the guesstimates we received during the first step. In this 'light' version of the educated guess method, we did not perform a triangulation of the respondents (by presenting the results to another group of experts other than COA-mentors or legal-guardians).

In the initial step, we approached all the COA-supervisors and legal guardians who participated in our focus group meetings by email. Hereby, we used a questionnaire in which we provided a definition of the group and requested that the supervisors provide us with a realistic 'guesstimate' of both the minimum and maximum *total* number of *nomadic Moroccan UMs with (multiple) problems* in the Netherlands during the period 2019-2021. The definition of the group used in this questionnaire was:

> Moroccan UMs who have little or no perspective of receiving a residence permit after an asylum application or who do not apply for asylum at all and who have multiple problems such as mental health issues, substance use or addiction, and/or cause incidents in or outside the accommodation centres, and who travel within Europe without a residence permit.

The supervisors were requested to consider the following points whilst formulating their estimates:

- the estimates had to be based on their own experience or the experience of direct colleagues that the supervisors themselves also witnessed, and not on 'hear-say;'
- in the event that supervisors had experience for less than the three-year period under consideration (2019-2021), they should state the period their estimate referred to;
- to consider the group of youngsters whom the supervisors suspected of being older than 18 years of age, although they were considered to be an unaccompanied 'minor';
- to consider those youngsters who although their nationality was not registered as Moroccan, they knew them to in fact be Moroccan;
- to consider the group of youngsters who did not apply for asylum.

In order to support the supervisors' attempts to formulate their estimations, we reported the annual number of Moroccan UMs who applied for asylum in the

Netherlands during the period 2019-2021 (165, 145 and 120, respectively (in total 430).[11]

In addition, we requested that the supervisors should estimate whether the number of youngsters they had encountered was *higher* or *lower* than the number of UMs which they probably did not encounter during the same period, as a result of them being out of sight of the officials (due to irregular stay). Alongside this, we requested that the supervisors estimate whether the *total* number of nomadic Moroccan UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands (including those who stay in the Netherlands irregularly) has decreased, increased, or stayed constant in the Netherlands. Finally, we requested all the respondents to specify the assumptions and considerations they made whilst coming up with their guesstimates.

During the first step, we approached a total of 20 supervisors (eight COA-supervisors and twelve legal guardians). We found out that three of these 20 supervisors were no longer working as supervisors. Of the seventeen supervisors, twelve responded to our request, some after a round of reminders. Six supervisors stated that they were not able to formulate such an estimate, because either this was a difficult task for them or they did not have a sufficient impression of the situation in the Netherlands as a whole, as they worked in a certain location or region.

The other six supervisors (two legal guardians and four COA-mentors) did formulate an estimate of both the minimum and maximum number of nomadic Moroccan UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands (a response rate of 50%). One of these supervisors explicitly noted that this was a very difficult task. These six supervisors had an average of 5.6 years of experience with supervising the target group (ranging from three to ten years). In addition, a legal guardian, who stated that she was not able to make an estimate, did give her opinion on other questions.

During the second step, we again approached all 17 supervisors whom we approached in the first step. We presented them with the average estimations for both the minimum and maximum numbers (together with the corresponding ranges), along with the assumptions the respondents made, and any other comments provided by the respondents. We asked all of the supervisors we approached whether they agreed with the estimated minimum and maximum averages. If they did *not* agree with the numbers, then we requested them to formulate their own estimates.

Six supervisors responded to the second step (three COA-supervisors and three legal guardians); this was more or less the same group of supervisors who formulated the 'guestimates' during the first step – a legal guardian who responded in the first step did not react; the legal guardian who, in the first step responded that she was not able to formulate an estimate did respond to the presented numbers.

Results

1 Results of the first step

According to the estimates of six supervisors who formulated an estimate, the estimated average minimum number of nomadic Moroccan UMs with multiple problems

[11] StatLine - Alleenstaande minderjarige vreemdeling; nationaliteit, geslacht en leeftijd (cbs.nl); at the time of data collection, we only had the provisional figures for Moroccan UMs who applied for asylum in 2021. The official number of Moroccan UMs who applied for asylum in 2021 was just slightly larger at 136 (IND, December 2022), which presents a total of 446 Moroccan UMs during the period 2019-2021.

during the period 2019-2021 was 400 and the estimated average maximum number was 800 (including UMs who were outside the accommodation system). The ranges for the estimated average minimum and maximum numbers is quite wide (between 120 and 700 for the minimum number, and between 200 and 1500 for the maximum number).[12]

Assumptions underlying the 'guesstimates'

i Proportion of youngsters in the system vs. outside the system.
According to four supervisors, the number of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems who they either supervised or 'witnessed' themselves was *lower* than the total number from the same group that they may *not* have seen because they remained outside the reception system in the Netherlands. This group of young people is noted to be 'travellers' who are outside the system who lead an irregular residence, also in the Netherlands, with a large network of peers – a characteristic of the nomadic life of UMs that was frequently reported by many of the professionals and researchers in our research (see Chapter 3). According to a respondent, until recently it was not possible to send youngsters back to Morocco and they were not put into detention. Therefore, boys could stay out of the system. Given that since the end of 2022, it is possible to return the youngsters to Morocco (see also Chapter 3), a rise in the number of UMs who will ask for asylum and stay in the accommodation centres until they are 18 can be expected to increase, so to avoid detention.

ii Trends in the total number of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands during the period 2019-2021.
Four supervisors reported that, in their estimation, the total number of nomadic Moroccan UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands *decreased* during the period 2019 to 2021. According to one supervisor, the young people who were planning to come to the Netherlands had a negative image of the Netherlands (difficult to obtain a status for those from safe countries, not allowed to work, and being placed in an enforcement and supervision centre (HTL) with few opportunities for movement). According to another supervisor, the decrease was caused by the minors often going off the radar. On the other hand, one supervisor estimated that the total number of nomadic Moroccan UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands *increased* during the period 2019 to 2020, but *decreased* in 2021. This assumption was based on the experience that in previous years there were many young people at a location, and from 2021 onwards, the number of accommodation centres for UMs has grown. Another supervisor found it difficult to say anything about the trend because of this growth.

Other results

Some supervisors stated that a majority of all Moroccan UMs who end up in the reception experience (multiple) problems.

A supervisor remarked that youngsters who did not ask for asylum did not get an age-screening before, and that was the reason why they did not ask for asylum, when staying at the accommodation centres. This is not the case anymore.[13] The number of UMs from Morocco can be expected to decrease in the future because of this development, in conjunction with the fact that it may be easier to send the UMs back to Morocco if there is adequate shelter.

[12] One supervisor provided us with an estimation for the period 2019-2022, but these numbers were not included in the calculation of the estimations.

[13] This group receives an age-screening since October 2020. https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stcrt-2020-48461.html.

2 Results of the second step

- Of the 17 supervisors we approached, six reacted to the second round (response rate of 35%). Of these six respondents, two stated that it was not possible for them to make an estimate. The other four gave an estimate in the previous round. Of these six supervisors, all but one stated that they could relate to the estimated average minimum and maximum total number of Moroccan UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands during the period 2019-2021 (400 and 800 respectively).[14] The supervisor who did not agree with the estimated numbers stated that the minimum and maximum average numbers should be much higher than the estimated averages and stated the following numbers: 500 and 1200, respectively. The reason for a higher estimate was that many locations had regularly taken care of these youngsters with a high level of turnover and that many youngsters were also outside the purview of the authorities.
- One supervisor (who was not able to give an estimate during the first round) stated that (s)he agreed with those supervisors who remarked in the first round that there was a decrease in the numbers during the period 2019-2021. This was most likely because the image of the Netherlands amongst the young people had changed. According to this supervisor, much less is possible today in the Netherlands than youngsters hope or think there will be in advance. Ultimately, according to experience, all the youngsters go off the radar because they do not get a permit and do not cooperate with the return process. The consequence of this is that they either illegally stay in the Netherlands or leave for another country. Another supervisor also pointed out the decreasing trend in the numbers, but gave an alternative explanation for it: the youngsters who come to the Netherlands ordinarily do not wait until the end of their procedure, but rather move on to another country. According to him/her, it is clear that this group of youngsters do not wish to settle in the Netherlands, but rather constitute a segment of a larger group of nomadic youngsters in Europe.

We can thus conclude that it was difficult to task formulate an estimation of the size of the group of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems in the Netherlands – despite limiting our focus to a single nationality. The group who stays outside the Dutch accommodation system is made up of 'dark numbers.' In order to gain good insight into the size of the total group, further research is required. However, the responses from several supervisors indicate that the size of the group who stay in the Netherlands is not only limited to those UMs who stay in accommodation centres. Rather, there is most likely a sizeable group who stay outside the purview of the authorities (see Chapter 3 for our findings regarding the opinions of professionals on the irregular existence of UMs in the Netherlands).

2.4 Situation in the country of origin

In discussion the situation in country of origin, we mostly focus on Morocco, as at the start of the research we had chosen one specific country to study as a country of origin; and that was Morocco. This was the origin country most often studied in the literature we came across where the North African nomadic UMs came from; most of

[14] Some supervisors who stated that they could relate to the average minimum and maximum estimates gave new estimates of the numbers, with some providing ranges for their estimates. We suspect that this was due to a design fault in our questionnaire (respondents were meant to be asked to give an estimate if they did not agree with the provided averages). These estimates were not taken into account.

the researchers we spoke to were familiar with this country in particular. In addition, Morocco is the origin country where the majority of UMs from North Africa come from.

2.4.1 Family context

The evidence deriving from our interviews and extant literature shows that the family background of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems from North Africa is diverse. Notwithstanding this heterogeneity, the findings also reveal some general patterns. The majority of the results we present pertain to Moroccan UMs in particular, as this is the group that was most frequently brought up during the interviews.
Jimenez-Alvarez (2015) talks about four types of family situations in their country of origin where Moroccan UMs migrating to Europe typically fall into, albeit concedes that this typology is fluent and does not necessarily wholly reflect the complexity of the situation. The two main groups are:

1 Minors living with families that provide emotional stability, although they live in a (very) socio-economically disadvantaged position, where the parents are not able to meet their basic needs. Minors in this context experience problems with schooling and may be 'forced' to work under precarious conditions. They spend most of their time on the streets where socialisation takes place, but the street is not a way of life. These minors feel safe in their families.
2 Minors living with families in a (very) socio-economically disadvantaged position, where violence within the family and family breakdown and drug abuse occurs. Minors experience violence/abuse.

On the other hand, family situations:

3 in a normalised context with sufficient economic means and in which the minors attend school;[15] or
4 minors living on the streets without any regular relationship with their family, who experience various types of abuse and mistreatment, apply to only a minority of migrant children.

Previous studies have shown that UMs from North Africa who cause incidents or suffer from (multiple) problems often come from unfavourable family backgrounds in their country of origin (e.g., Inspectie Justite en Veiligheid, 2021; Ghazinour et al., 2021; Van Wijk, 2020, 2021). Our results also reveal that, generally speaking, the group of nomadic UMs from Morocco with multiple problems fall into the second main group of families as defined by Jimenez-Alvarez, albeit there are exceptions of course, which have been brought forward during the interviews. What we see is that ordinarily the protective function of the family was either undermined by serious 'fractures' (cf. Jimenez-Alvarez, 2015) or had fallen apart prior to the migration of these UMs. This disadvantaged family context was regarded by our respondents as an important root factor for the development or deterioration of co-existing problems in Europe. In the words of one supervisor from the Netherlands, 'they [minors] were already damaged in their country of origin.'

Socio-economic situation of the family
According to several of the professionals and researchers we interviewed, this group of minors often come from families with very limited means for economic subsistence compared to other families in their country of origin. Lack of perspective for children appears to be the common denominator. Often the minors lived in disadvantaged areas located around larger cities, such as, for example, Casablanca. This is related to

[15] This group mostly travels with visa to Spain, for example to study.

the migration of young families from rural areas to the outskirts of large cities in Morocco, where big industries such as the textile industry are located (Trajectoires, 2018).
Some supervisors in the Netherlands pointed out that these minors have a harsh life from a very young age. Feeling obliged to contribute to the family income, or being 'encouraged' by their parents, some work at young ages (sometimes as young as 11). Others might provide goods in kind for the family, by, for example, stealing from the marketplace, or may be forced by their families to beg on the streets. According to one researcher, some minors arrive in Spain with a delinquent past. Both a lack of opportunity and a lack of investment from the family to go to (a good) school or dropping-out from school is not uncommon. According to Vacchiano (2010, p. 116) 'school drop-out is directly connected to the involvement in child labour [in Morocco], on insecure and underpaid conditions, where minors are often exposed to abuse and exploitation'.

Relationships within the family and family as a protective system
Our results indicate that many of the UMs experienced an unstable or dysfunctional family life. Their parents were often divorced and re-married, after which the child was shut out of the family or the relationships between the family members became seriously disturbed. Some researchers and professionals from other European countries pointed out that this is particularly the case when mothers re-marry after a divorce or when a single mother is forced to marry due to social control. Two respondents, a researcher, and the representative from an NGO in Morocco that works with (migrant) children pointed out that there are cases of mothers who end up going into prostitution.

According to the representative of a Moroccan NGO, there are extended families with grandparents, but often these have also fallen apart. Within this context, violence, and physical abuse (including sexual abuse) in the family and the resulting childhood trauma is common. According to a researcher/professional, this is one of the biggest issues amongst nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems: almost all of them have experienced violence in the family as a child, albeit the extent of the abuse might differ.
Several supervisors in the Netherlands commented that biological fathers do not have a good role in the family and, in fact, are often out of the picture altogether. They are mostly absent in the lives of their children, either physically (for example, because they left the family or are in prison) or morally (due to being a drug addict or alcoholic, or, as one researcher noted, simply because the role they assign themselves in the family is solely that of the breadwinner). The relationship between the UMs and their fathers is often troublesome. A Dutch supervisor spoke of a boy who absolutely refuses to talk about his father and that it is a 'forbidden' topic between them.
Some of the Dutch supervisors remarked that this family context hints towards a lack of parental upbringing, that is, the lack of any stable ground during the critical years of development. In addition, they pointed out that, generally speaking, within North African families there is more attention paid to 'protecting' women or girls, whilst boys are typically left alone to do what they want. The result of this is that boys actually grow up on the street and live from day-to-day. A respondent from an NGO in Morocco cited the example of a youngster who considers the street to be the only place in which they were accepted and felt at home. A researcher points out that, there is evidence from research among street children in other countries showing that factors related to the family are 'the most important factors leading up to children joining the streets'.

However, according to several of the researchers we spoke to, this does not mean that they can be considered as 'real' *street children*. Rather, they argued, this latter group is generally not able to migrate because of their bad physical and psychological health. Conversely, the representative of a Moroccan NGO, who works with street children, argued that their health situation does 'not prevent them from continuing their emigration project.'
Considering the UMs who cause incidents at the accommodation centres, some Dutch supervisors suspected that the boys who come from this family background have never really been the subject of any restrictions, or at least not for a long time due to their nomadic existence. As a result, they have difficulty in differentiating between what is normal behaviour and what is not (see also section X on the underlying reasons for (multiple) problems).

A Dutch supervisor stated the following:

> *If you build up a relation of confidence, then about nine out of ten boys from Morocco or Algeria tell you that their father was an alcoholic or was remarried, was on drugs, the mother was not in a situation to pay the school fees and their daily lives were on the street. These are a lot of the 'characteristics'.*

Notwithstanding the general picture outlined above, the diversity of the family backgrounds of UMs was also brought up during the interviews in the Netherlands: there are also minors who come from a loving and stable family context.
Several Dutch supervisors mentioned that the family situation in the country of origin is a sensitive topic of conversation between themselves and these minors. According to one supervisor, this is an important difference with UMs from other nationalities who are more open to talking about their past and families. These UMs instead tend to give information only in pieces, which requires supervisors to put the puzzle pieces together if they wish to reconstruct a complete picture of the past. This is also why it is difficult for them to know what exactly happened to the minors before they started supervising them, as well as what problems they already struggled with in their country of origin. Several supervisors stressed that it is essential to build up a relationship of confidence before the family can be brought up as a topic of conversation – an observation that was also made in a previous study with UMs with (multiple) problems (Van Wijk, 2020). As formulated by a couple of the supervisors, 'talking or thinking about the family is exposing yourself and it causes pain, and that is what these boys literally and figuratively walked away from'.

Substance use amongst minors in the country of origin
Our results indicate that substance use is already present in their country of origin (Morocco was the main country referred to). Supervisors in the Netherlands spoke of minors who started using drugs in their country of origin, including some who were already addicted before they left. Van Wijk (2020) reports a similar finding: some of the North African UMs residing in the PON-facility in the Netherlands were already using drugs in their country of origin. Although the general impression is that substance use already began in the country of origin, our respondents found it difficult to draw conclusions about the proportion of youngsters that this pertained to. Some Dutch supervisors pointed out that the question of whether minors began their drug use in their country of origin differs on a case-by-case basis, and that they also see a relatively small group of minors who start using substances only after their arrival in the Netherlands. The substances that are used in the country of origin are not only

alcohol and hashish, but also solvents ('glue sniffing'), anxiolytics, and sometimes neuroleptics (Vacchiano, 2010; cf. Van Wijk, 2020).
Our respondents also cited reasons for substance use which are related to the family context: poverty, having had either no or little schooling, a feeling of responsibility for their parents, and coping with a situation that they experienced as not offering them any perspective by sedating themselves (cf. Vacchiano, 2010). As a form of coping, substance use is also connected to life on the streets, which is a tough life. According to a researcher, some minors who are trying to cross over into Europe and find themselves on the street start using drugs which are offered to them by others: 'If you don't feel well or if you are in pain, sniff some glue, or drink some alcohol'. This point was also made by a Dutch supervisor.

3 Motives for migration, nomadic life and multiple problems in Europe

In this Chapter, we present results regarding the motives for leaving the country of origin (push factors) and reasons for coming to Europe (pull factors), the role of aspirations, influence of social networks and information mechanisms therein, what the nomadic life of UMs from North Africa in Europe looks like, and the nature and underlying reasons of multiple problems during their nomadic life, including their involvement in criminal networks and possible exploitation thereby. Where relevant, we focus on the specific situation in the Netherlands (e.g. involvement in criminal networks and reasons for coming to the Netherlands). However, before we zoom into these results, we start this Chapter with a case-study, the story of a nomadic North African UM whom we spoke to in the Netherlands within the context of this study. Then we present a brief theoretical framework and finally we present the results of this Chapter.

3.1 Case study: story of Mario, a nomadic unaccompanied minor

The story and experiences of Mario (a fictitious name) in Europe contain many elements of our findings we gathered with interviews with researchers and professionals from different countries, which we discuss in the following sections. His story gives a good picture of the life of nomadic UMs in Europe and is an example of the strong agency this group has.

Mario left Morocco in 2017. He was then 13 years old. Before he ended up in the Netherlands, he led a nomadic life for four years in Europe. At the time of the interview, he had been living in the Netherlands for one year. Some parts in this story have been left out to protect his privacy.[16]

Box 3.1 Story of a nomadic minor

Leaving Morocco
Mario was living with his parents in Morocco. He witnessed many boys leaving for Europe, or heard stories about them leaving. At one point, he thought he wanted to do the same. *When I mentioned this to my mother, she said 'no'; she was always against it. She said, 'you are not going anywhere, you will stay here and go to school.'* One random day, without mentioning it to anyone, Mario left for Ceuta anyway, with a friend who was 16 years old. When they arrived at the north of Morocco, they realised that the only way to reach Ceuta was by swimming. As his friend could not swim, Mario swam alone to Ceuta, whilst his friend went back home. Mario had many family members in France. Hiding under a truck, he took the ferry from Ceuta to Marseille. After climbing into and hiding in a bus full of goods, he subsequently fell asleep.

[16] Considering the sensitivity of the topic, we did not address the issue of situation in the country of origin during our conversation.

Nomadic existence in Europe
After arriving in Marseille, Mario stayed there for a couple of weeks before leaving for Paris. He spent the longest period of his nomadic life mainly in France, for around 3,5 years, with various intervals. *I did not stay at a fixed place you know; I was traveling back and forth. For example, from Paris to Bordeaux and from Bordeaux to Toulouse, or from France to Spain. At one point, I stopped going to Spain, as there was nothing to do anymore. I left for Europe to find stability. Nevertheless, there was no place for me to find stability…*

When Mario arrived in Paris, he called his family to tell them that he was in Paris. *They didn't believe me; they said, 'why are you lying?' I showed them on my phone where I was; my mother was shocked. They all thought that I went to the city [in Morocco] to watch football.*

Mario noticed in Paris that 'boys like him' were selling cigarettes on the streets. He met a boy from Algeria on the street, who helped him. He started to do the same, selling around 60 packets a day. One day they were taken to the police station, as the boy who he was with also had mobile phones with him, which Mario was not aware of. He was released whilst his comrade was detained. He took the place of the Algerian boy, and continued selling cigarettes, also travelling in between to Toulouse to do the same there. According to Mario, the cigarettes were transported from Romania in an illegal manner.

In between, he went back and forth to Spain, for no more than a couple of days at a time, to get some cigarettes, and 'now and then' some hash – which was not easy to get, and sometimes 'medication'. *At one point they were very popular. I didn't really trade in pills, but, for example, when there were 300 pills needed, I did it on wholesale. Sometimes, people would also receive these pills from their doctor and then call me to sell them to me, and I would go and collect them. Medication is used very often, also by women. They called me to ask for pills. You usually have your own neighbourhood to sell to. People know you. Either they come to you, or you go to them. You sell them to different people, from Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Romania, Albania, etc.*

At one point, he was detained by the police and 'ran into problems with the authorities'.

Living situation in France
Being a minor of only 13 years of age, Mario stayed initially at an accommodation centre in Paris. After a few years, he found a room to rent – it was possible to do that in Paris for around 100-150 euros per month. He reported to the accommodation centre with certain intervals. According to him, the fact that he was officially registered there also proved 'handy': *if I was stopped by the police, I reported the address of the centre, and they would let me go.* He preferred to stay in his own place: *I slept whenever I wanted, and I woke up whenever I wanted; at the accommodation centre you needed to obey the rules.* When he was travelling between different cities in France, he sometimes stayed with a friend, whilst in other places he wandered around on the streets.

Reasons for moving between different cities/countries
Mario wanted to change his situation, because selling 'cigarettes' was not what he was looking for at all. *I wanted to change that.* So, he left in between his stay in France for Barcelona, where he lived for 6 months and stayed at a protection centre for minors. His aim was to go to school, to follow a course or training, and arrange his papers for a residence permit. He was able to follow a training course for one and a half months to learn how to paint cars. But later he got the impression that he could not go any further. *I wanted a lot of things, but I didn't get any help there. That's why I left to go back to Paris.*

Arrival in the Netherlands
Mario ended up in the Netherlands by chance in 2021. He had never had the intention of coming to the Netherlands, although he had some family members and neighbours living here. *I have many family members also in France and Barcelona, too. However, nobody wants to have contact with me. So, I don't get into touch with them either.*

After he came back to Paris from Spain, he received phone calls from a family member living in Frankfurt, who invited Mario to come and visit him. Once he arrived in Frankfurt, he did not answer Mario's calls, which Mario could not figure out why this was the case. After a few days, he was on his way to Brussels to visit a friend, where he actually wanted to stay for a while. And after that he was planning to go back to Paris and ultimately back to Spain. On the train from Frankfurt to Belgium, he was stopped during a ticket control in Amsterdam, and taken out of the train as he did not have a ticket.

Desired destination before leaving Morocco
When Mario left Morocco, he originally thought of living in Spain. *But when I arrived there at a certain point, I saw that it was a totally different place than what I had pictured. There was nothing to do. That is why I left and that was the reason why I travelled back and forth to Spain instead of settling there. But now, things have changed in Spain; you still have more hope that you can arrange your papers. In France, that is not the case. I lived there for many years, but in the end, I ended up with nothing.*

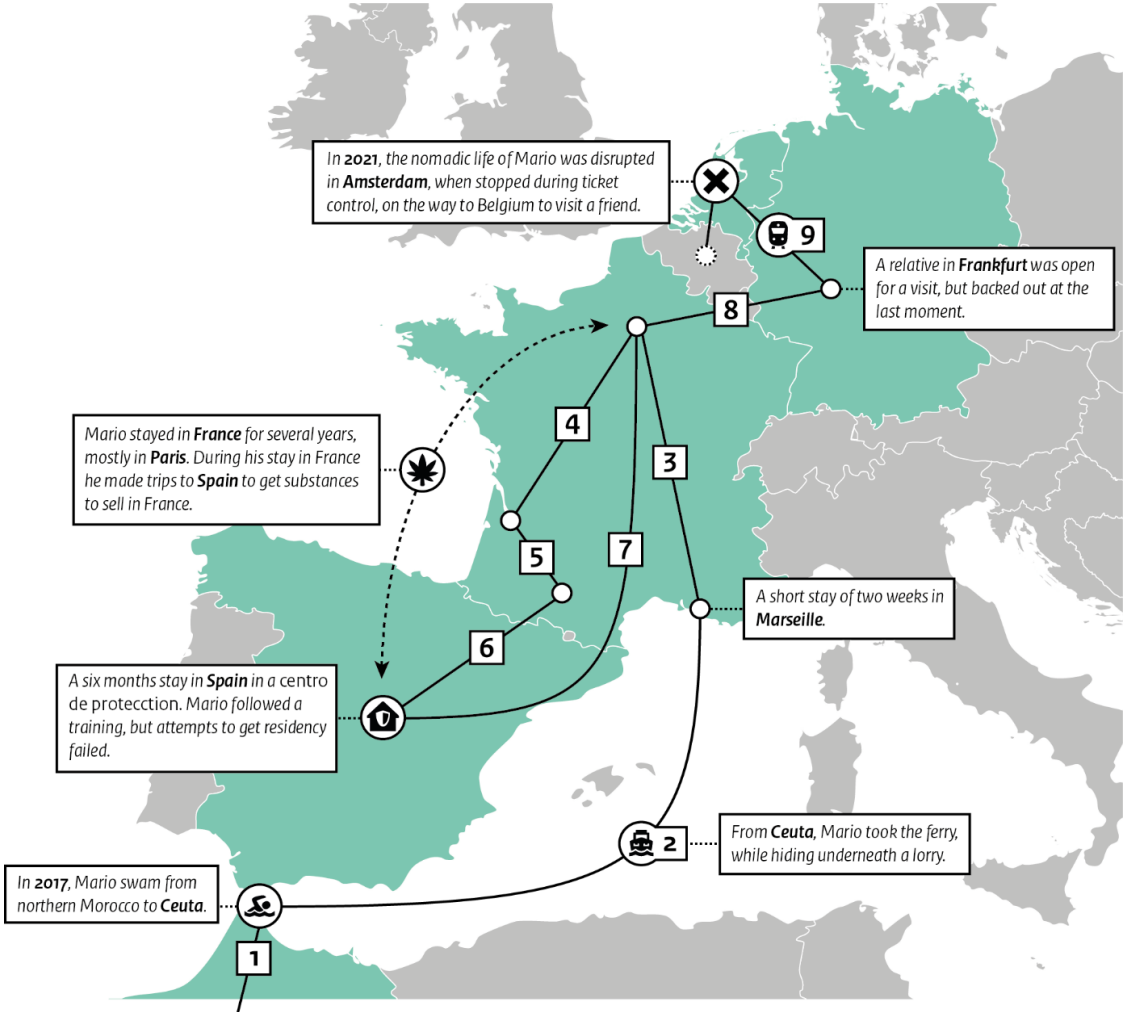
Contact with the family
Mario has daily contact with his mother. From the money he earned in France he sent money back to his family. *Why do you think I left [Morocco]? That is why I did it. If it were up to me, I would have stayed there. But I did it for my parents.*

Dreams for the future
Mario dreams of going to school, to be a car mechanic. At the time of the interview, he was not attending the school regularly where he mainly had to learn Dutch. *I can barely understand Dutch; this school is actually not meant for us. I wanted to continue with my education to learn how to paint cars, to be a mechanic. But they said 'no; you have to learn the language first; you can't follow any other education.' I wanted to do both; learn the language but at the same time also follow an educational course to be a mechanic. That is possible in Spain. For example, you can go to school for two hours in the morning and afterwards you can follow the education you want to follow. The combination is possible there. But here they didn't allowed me to do that. I do nothing here; I just sit and do nothing.*

Mario had for a short while been engaging in some 'black work' in the Netherlands. However, despite working some hours, he never received any money. *In the Netherlands, there is very little work. Nobody wants to hire you if you don't have your papers. There is a lot of control. That's what people say.*

Mario dreams of the day when he will have papers for a legal stay in a European country that will bring his irregular, nomadic existence in Europe to an end and give him the stability he has been looking for all this time. He knows about the conditions for getting a residence permit in some countries. *Everything is dependent on it [residence permit]. If there were a possibility, nobody would cause problems, or travel back and forth and between different countries; no one would do that.*

Figure 3.1 Migration trajectory of Mario*



* The map is adapted from work by Maix under CC BY-SA 3.0 licence.

3.2 A brief theoretical framework

Classical push-pull theories usually fail in explaining the multifaceted process why migrants, in this case UMs, leave their country of origin and head for a destination

elsewhere, in this case Europe. Rather, miscellaneous, interrelated factors play a role in the movement of these minors, both prior to their migration and during later trajectories of their nomadic life in Europe (see further). During the presentation of results from this research, we use the elements of the systems approach to migration (Mabogunje, 1970; Fawcett & Arnold, 1987; Zlotnik, 1992; De Haas, 2014). According to these scholars, the country of origin and destination (either a country or a region) are connected by different types of relations and linkages, such as, movements of people and information flows through feedback mechanisms. These, in turn, affect both the perceptions and aspirations of (potential) migrants. In this dynamics, social networks play a critically important role. These different linkages and relations create a 'system' between different regions that facilitate (further) migration (cf. De Haas, 2014). Within this context, migration becomes a dynamic social process in which consecutive events take place across time, and where several mechanisms are incorporated at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels:

At the *macro* level, economic, social, cultural, and political differences between different places ultimately establish the context of migration. At the *micro* level, perceptions, aspirations, expectations, and motivations, not only of the potential migrants but also of their family members play an important role. Hereby, the role of social networks that create feedback mechanisms and, in so doing, are responsible for the transmission of information play a crucial role in determining whether others opt to migrate to the same place. Although diaspora and social networks also provide various kinds of help to 'newcomers' and in that sense are among the factors that influence the choice of destination (e.g. Brekke & Aarset, 2009) there is evidence that in the case of irregular migration, this might not be the case. A study among irregular Algerian migrants showed that the supporting function of social networks weakened with the increase of border controls and emergence of issue of security in migration management within the EU (Collyer, 2006). According to Collyer, the 'cost' of a family to support an irregular migrant is greater than it used to be, which makes families less willing to do so (cited in Kushminder et al., 2015, p. 58).
These flows and exchange of information, ideas, and aspirations ultimately create a 'culture of migration', where migration becomes a social norm (Massey et al., 1993, cited in De Haas, 2014, p. 33). Actors at the *meso*-level, namely, individuals, groups or organisations in the 'migratory industry', that mediate between migrants and 'institutions' of different places by providing information and/or services and who earn money by doing so operate within this system (e.g., human smugglers and human traffickers) (cf. Castles & Miller, 2009). In this framework, migrants (in this case nomadic UMs) have a strong agency who make decisions and react to information, feedback mechanisms and changing circumstances in dynamic migration processes instead of being passive actors just acting on macro-level differences.

3.3 Motivations for leaving their country of origin and reasons for moving to Europe: *I have nothing to lose:*

3.3.1 Reasons for leaving the country of origin (push factors)

Our results indicate that the migration of the group of North African UMs who lead a nomadic life in Europe is determined by the interaction between several macro- and micro-level factors. However, according to our respondents*, lack of perspective in the country of origin* and *adverse family structure*, two recurring factors in existing

literature, appear to be the common thread when it comes to setting the context for the emigration of these minors.

Macro-level factors

Lack of perspective, which was defined by one of the researchers whom we interviewed as the 'root of the problem,' is created in different settings in the country of origin, according to our respondents:

- *Economic situation and (extreme) poverty in general*, including serious instability in employment opportunities for young people, low wages, and lack of social security. According to one of our Spanish respondents, job opportunities for young people are incredibly scarce considering the surplus of workers of this age within the population – including within relatively low-skilled jobs. Indeed, one of our Belgian respondents suggested that people increasingly need family members or other connections who are in a good position to be able to find a job. Furthermore, the economic crisis in the region, which worsened considerably after COVID-19 and the attendant collapse of the tourism sector, are considered to be amongst the key drivers of migration (see also Jimenez-Alvarez & Bouchammir, 2021).
- *Lack of opportunities for schooling*: according to several researchers with experience in the region, most of the youngsters in Morocco do not have a perspective in terms of schooling, as the public school system in the country is in a state of collapse. Families cannot afford to send their children to private schools due to (extreme) poverty. Even in cases where minors have the opportunity to go to school, it is difficult to find a job afterwards. Several Dutch supervisors stated that they often hear youngsters saying, 'I have no future in my country.' According to one of our Spanish researcher-respondents, minors believe that emigrating is the only way to get ahead in life: 'it is, as it were, tattooed on their foreheads: *Hay que emigrar para progressar* [You have to emigrate to get ahead].'

Micro-level factors:

- *Adverse family structure:* according to several respondents with experience in the region (as described in Chapter 2 in greater detail), a disrupted family context including the lack of an emotional bond with one's parents or being rejected, not to mention the domestic violence minors are subjected to, force them to leave (see also, for example, Garcia-Fernandez & Martinez-Lopez, 2021). According to the representative of one of the NGOs in Morocco, family is a very important factor in leaving the country, either because the children want to get away from their family or because there is pressure from the family to do so. Especially in the case of the former, minors will not change their minds even if the organisation informs them about the dangers of the journey. One researcher stressed the importance of this context as follows:

  > *If they have a good family structure, they will not just leave like this. In Moroccan Arabic it is called the 'harrâga'*[17]*, the 'burning', that they just leave like this, in an irregular manner. Those from a good family structure, they won't do this, because it is too dangerous.*

- *(Extreme) poverty of the family:* several respondents underlinedthat another factor related to the family situation is the (extreme) poverty of the family-members. Children, some of whom already started working at very young ages, feel obliged to

[17] The term *harrâga* in Moroccan Arabic refers to the act of illegally crossing borders, as well as the position of someone being 'burned' (Rossi, 2017).

contribute to the family income by leaving for Europe, due to the lack of well-paid jobs in Morocco.
In his research carried out in Morocco and Italy among young Moroccan migrants, Vacchiano (2010) points out that in Morocco there is intergenerational loyalty from children towards their parents, in the sense that many youngsters express their drive for their migration in the following terms: 'to save my parents'. Similarly, Dumann (2021) argues that these children leave Morocco 'in the most dangerous conditions with the utopia that they will better their and their parents' lives by becoming providers regardless of their age'.[18]
One Dutch supervisor summarised the results of the adverse family structure and poverty as follows:

> *Poverty from a very young age has an effect on these children; if you never had chances; if you had parents who constantly fought. We all walk away from it; we all do. Our teenagers in puberty also do that. But they have the 'European dream.'*

Different respondents pointed out that migrating nomadic children are also those who, in their country of origin, had less socio-economic opportunities in comparison to their peers. Both the Dutch and Belgian supervisors expressed that because of a lack of perspective in both their country generally and the family-context, many children say *'I have nothing to lose'* and decide to try their luck in Europe. According to Vacchiano (2010), many potential migrants use the term *'qnat'* (despair) to express why they leave Morocco and state that 'there is nothing to do there', with all its potential connotations. He also stresses that migration is regarded as either an act to compensate for 'standing still' in their country of origin (Vacciano, 2014) or a form of social redemption (Vacchiano, 2018).

- *Coexistence of (multiple) problems:* some Dutch supervisors reported that the coexistence of (multiple) problems in their country of origin is one of the main reasons for minors to leave. Several mentioned that they had supervised some boys who were juvenile delinquents and had been imprisoned, after which the parents encouraged them to leave for Europe with the idea that the situation of their children would improve. In addition, escaping from a life on the streets and drug abuse was also noted by several of the respondents. One supervisor reported that she is now and then confronted with boys who left in order to run away from the drugs circuit they were in.

- *Adventure:* Some Dutch supervisors pointed out that some of the boys see leaving their country of origin for Europe as an adventure or hype it as a form of travel. That is to say, leaving for Europe whilst you are a teenager is considered to be 'cool,' without thinking about the consequences and without having a realistic picture of what the migration-process may involve (see also Jimenez-Alvarez, 2015). Similarly, a Spanish researcher who works with youngsters in the street in Ceuta remarked that they had met many kids who had not really thought about their plan to leave for Europe:

> *In the Moroccan culture, emigration is a way to move up the social ladder. It's like a fantasy, like a dream. Emigrating is triumphing. The young people are very aware of this. Sometimes they see it as a game, and they just try. They*

[18] Navigating between Structure and Agency: Moroccan Independent Youth Migration - Kent Academic Repository.

think it's easy to cross. They don't know that there are police and customs trying to stop them. They don't see the dangers. They are just adolescents, and they are often very confused when they realise how difficult it all is.

- *Role of the family:* the analysis of the parents' role in the migration decision of minors that belong to our target group shows that this role is not necessarily always explicit, and it is also often diverse. In any case, it seems that there is a strong sense of agency amongst the minors.
  According to our respondents, generally speaking, although the parents do not necessarily encourage their children to migrate, they do not necessarily try to stop them either. Indeed, several respondents noted that parents sometimes say, 'well, if he could only make it across, then he could help us.'

In Chapter 2, we discussed how youngsters who become nomadic later in Europe with (multiple) problems generally come from the outskirts of urban areas in Morocco, where family structures are relatively vulnerable. According to one of the Spanish respondents who is involved with the target group of our research in her daily work and who also carried out field work in Morocco, youngsters from outskirts of urban areas usually migrate on their own. According to her, these youngsters often state that their parents do not expect anything from them and, in a way, have already given up on them, but the youngsters express a strong agency in order to change this image:

They think I am already a failure, that I'm not good. So, I'm going to migrate, and I'm going to show them: 'Look, you were not expecting anything from me, and now I arrived in Spain, and I will find a job and will return with this big car, and I will buy you this big house. And then you will have to change the opinion that you have about me.'

The same respondent, along with some other researchers pointed out that the emotional attachment of these boys to their parents, especially to their mother, and the desire to prove themselves to her, even if they might be exploited by them, is remarkable:

If these boys come to Europe, it is not because they have a very clear migration project in their mind, but rather it is much more like they try to reinforce an affective link to change the image their mothers have of them. They feel like they are considered as a loser in their country, because they are not attending school, they consume drugs, etc. And to try to change their image they decide to go to Europe […]. So, where is the root of the problem? It is because, they are rejected by their family and through migration they try to change their image by making a lot of money.
(Spanish researcher and professional)

Two of these researchers were of the opinion that this group of youngsters who try to change their parents' image of them are at greater risk of becoming nomadic in Europe with multiple problems (see further in this Chapter for additional underlying reasons for multiple problems).
A Spanish researcher stated that in the case of minors coming from rural areas, migration is typically a family project in which the parents are actively involved in both migration decision-making and who exactly to 'send' to Europe. According to her, even if these youngsters are relatively less prone to developing (multiple) problems as a result of a stronger family structure, this expectation also puts a lot of pressure on them. Some Dutch supervisors confirmed that they see youngsters who are sent by

their families to Europe and experience great pressure to send money back home to their families.
Within this context, Dutch and Belgian supervisors were in agreement over the fact that the migration of these youngsters is in any case not considered to be a strategy of parents to engineer a family reunion in Europe. To illustrate this point, they drew a comparison with UMs from other countries, especially from Syria, where parents are ordinarily actively involved in the migration decision-making process with the express aim of reuniting with their children later in Europe.
In our research, we did not come across any evidence that human smugglers play a prominent role in the migration of our target group from their country of origin. One researcher stressed that the group who are more prone to become nomadic in Europe with (multiple) problems primarily come to Europe hiding in a boat, a car or alike, as their families cannot afford human-smugglers. However, our results indicate that once these minors reach Europe and are confronted with situations they did not anticipate, then people who prey upon the vulnerability of these minors subsequently play a role in maintaining the nomadic existence of these youngsters in Europe (see further in this Chapter).

3.3.2 Reasons for leaving for Europe (pull factors), aspirations, (false) feedback mechanisms and information flows via social networks

Our analysis shows that macro-level socio-economic differences between North African and European countries that act as 'pull' factors for the immigration of our target group to Europe are mostly limited to 'a better socio-economic perspective' (see also, for example, Jimenez-Alvarez, 2015; Inspectie Justitie en Veilgheid, 2021; Van Wijk, 2020). Instead, the aspirations and expectations of the minors, as well as how they visualise 'Europe' within the concept of perceived opportunity structures[19], play a crucial role (cf. De Haas, 2021).

Regarding the pull factors, several of our respondents, both in the Netherlands and other countries, remarked that these minors perceive Europe as a 'paradise'. Europe is considered to be 'El Dorado', the mythical hidden golden city, where they can realise their 'European dream.' It is conceived as a geographic haven in which they will have better opportunities, earn money and be able to send some of it back to their families. According to one researcher, the boys in the target group of our research see migration to Europe as a 'short-cut' to the future. Their aspirations for living a middle class-life, which is a benchmark everywhere in the world, is the key factor. The idea that they cannot realise this in their own country as a result of the lack of means associated with their socio-economic position, serves to frame migration to Europe as a way forward, where life and success will 'easily' be possible for them. In addition, several respondents also stated that these minors' aspirations are simply related to being a teenager: having material things that are seen as status symbols: nice (brand) clothes and shoes, iPhones, and cars.

These aspirations, expectations and dreams are often fuelled and reinforced by feedback mechanisms. The influence of social networks and the information they provide, including the false ones, was considered by many of our respondents as an essential factor in feeding the aspirations of these boys with respect to Europe and what it represents. A French respondent pointed out that, as we will also see in the coming pages, the nomadic boys in Europe are well connected with their country of origin, as well as with each other. This respondent She spoke of the 'power of influence' of social

[19] De Haas (2021) defines a structure as patterns of social relations, beliefs, and behaviours.

media, a fact which was also confirmed by many other respondents: boys keep in close contact with each other via Facebook, WhatsApp and the like, where they pretend to 'have made it' in Europe. Our respondents often referred to films and photos that are shared on social media featuring expensive cars, clothing and also cash, where a false image of a 'good European life' is created and subsequently proliferated to peers in the country of origin. One reason for this is that many boys do not dare to admit that they have 'failed.' A researcher put is as follows:

> *'I am having a really hard time here, and I am sleeping in the streets, and I am stealing, and I am selling drugs, etc.' Instead, they will say, 'Yeah, everything is fine here; look, I have a car.' And they will send a photo with a car, and everybody will think that it's his car. So, other younger peers will think, 'So, what do I do then, so you see, he didn't go to school, but he is well-off, so I can go too.' So, the networks are very important in this case.*

Contrary to the picture painted via the false feedback mechanisms, the real 'success stories' of those in social networks also feed aspirations. According to one researcher, these boys have witnessed the migration of their adult family members or acquaintances, who have settled in various European countries. According to several of the respondents, family members or fellow countrymen returning for the holidays with nice clothes, cars, gifts and money create the impression that it is easy to find a job, earn money and be successful in Europe. One the researchers summarised the stories of boys he had talked to:

> *I was seeing my neighbours coming back from Belgium, from Italy, from Spain, etcetera, and I said, 'I want to become like that. I talked, for example on Facebook, with my cousin, who had already left, I talked with a former neighbour who lives in Holland, in the Netherlands, I talked with someone who has reached … ; I talked to the son of my …, the brother of my friend who has reached Sweden.' And they say, 'it's good here, we have a good life, we can make our future here.' So, I decided that I wanted that too.*

3.4 A nomadic life in Europe: ending up in a spider web

In this section, we focus on the nature of and reasons for the nomadic life of North African youngsters, especially those from Morocco, who have little or no chance of receiving a residence permit in Europe. Thereby we also look at the information they have about different European countries, and the influence of social networks. During this section, we also specifically focus on the specific Dutch context, regarding the reasons why they choose to come to the Netherlands during their nomadic existence, as well as why they flow into the Dutch asylum system.

3.4.1 Arrival in Spain, disappointments and starting a nomadic life

For the Moroccan UMs, the gateway to Europe is mostly Spain. According to both Spanish professionals and some of the researchers we spoke to, the majority of the boys arriving in Spain from Morocco stay there and become integrated into the society, and, hence, that it is only a small percentage of minors who actually go on to leave Spain and probably become nomadic. Jimenez & Bouchammir (2021) state that there are no official figures on the number of foreign minors who are 'on the move' outside the protection system in Spain. A professional from Catalonia, the region where many

Moroccan minors end up after entering into Spain, stated that due to recent changes in the immigration law, today the vast majority of UMs want to stay in Catalonia, and that it is only a minority who intend to move further into Europe (see Chapter 4 for information on the recent changes regarding UMs in Spanish immigration law).

There is some indication that a large proportion of the minors who become nomadic in Europe originate from the two main groups of Moroccan UMs migrating to Europe, as defined by Jimenez-Alvarez (2015): 1) minors from families that provide emotional stability, but are (very) socio-economically disadvantaged, and 2) those who come from families who are (very) socio-economically disadvantaged, where there is violence and drug abuse, and whose parents are mostly separated (see Chapter 2 for the four categories of UM migrants from Spain according to Jimenez-Alvarez, 2015). According to the research of Trajectories (2018) amongst Moroccan UMs with (multiple) problems who were mostly living on the streets in Paris, these were the two most common profiles of Moroccan UMs who passed through Paris (40% respectively). In addition, 10% of the UMs had a background of long periods of being nomadic in Morocco (i.e. with behaviour of street children), whilst another 10% were from middle-class families in Morocco.

According to both our Spanish respondents and other respondents who are familiar with the conditions in the country, there are several reasons why Moroccan UMs travel further into Europe after arriving in Spain:

- There is a large degree of heterogeneity in terms of both the scale and quality of the Spanish child protection system. Minors leave the protection system depending on the circumstances of the accommodation centres *(centro de proteccion)* where they stay. In some centres there is overcrowding, a lack of individual attention, continual change of social workers, which serve to make minors feel abandoned. Others might not have a good relationship with their educators or be confronted with bullying behaviour from their peers (see also Jimenez & Bouchammir, 2021).
- The Spanish system is regularly confronted with contingency situations – that is during times of high inflow when the accommodation system is under pressure. During such moments when the child protection system either does not or cannot take care of the needs of these minors, they leave (e.g., due to a lack of capacity to offer all children educational courses so that they are able to work – for the situation in Spain see Chapter 4). This, in turn, creates a great deal of frustration for children who know that their families are waiting for money. This then leads to the following reaction: 'no, I cannot stay here anymore because I am not doing anything' (see also Jimenez & Bouchammir, 2021).
  Connected with their peers in other parts of Europe, they thus opt to move onto countries where they see greater opportunities for themselves (see below).
- In order for a minor to be placed from a protection centre in Ceuta or Melilla to a centre in mainland Spain, the voluntary acceptance of the autonomous communities/regions is necessary, as there is no compulsory transfer mechanism between autonomous communities. Transferring a minor to mainland Spain might take a long time, which, in turn, might lead some minors to go off the radar and probably also travel further in Europe.
- Some minors do not want to be in the protection system at all. Once they arrive in Ceuta or Melilla, they think that 'Ceuta is not Spain, that Ceuta is still African, Moroccan in a sense'. In these cases, they are in a tremendous hurry to go to the peninsula/mainland Spain, to go to 'Europe'. Others think that 'the further you move to the North of Europe, only then are you in Europe'.

- Some minors get into trouble with the police in Spain and move further.
- Some UMs hear from their peers that there is a possibility of earning quick money in other parts of Europe.
- Some of the minors who move on to other parts of Europe have family in other parts of the continent.

According to several of our respondents, going off the radar from the Spanish system is sometimes temporary and, in some instances, UMs return to Spain. According to them, up until the recent changes in the Spanish immigration regulations for UMs (see Chapter 4 for further details), Spanish authorities had a maximum period of nine months to identify and document the UMs. Some UMs used this period to 'travel' and work in other parts of Europe after registering themselves in Spain.

3.4.2 Reasons for and nature of nomadic life in Europe

According to our respondents, the nomadic life of UMs in Europe is characterised by incredibly high and complex mobility, with quick movements, due to different reasons. These movements are also characterised by the strong agency of these minors, where they are often connected with each other.

As aforementioned, many minors leave their country of origin for the 'European dream'. Once confronted with the aforementioned situations in Spain, they soon realise that the reality is far more complex than they had expected and, in this sense, the utopia lasts for only a little while (cf. Vacchiano, 2018). Once they move further into Europe, they come to an understanding that in many of the countries they navigate between (mostly France, Belgium, Scandinavian countries, Germany, Italy and also the Netherlands), there is scarce opportunity to achieve their goal within the system: earning money and supporting their families, or proving themselves to their parents, especially to their mothers. In some of these countries, applying for asylum is practically the only way for them to obtain a residence permit, even though they do not have much chance of being granted residence status, coming from a so-called safe country. According to a Swedish researcher/professional, nomadic minors from Morocco are 'pushed' by the Swedish system to ask for asylum once they are in the country. This respondent underlined that these boys do not apply for asylum until they come into contact with the authorities and, in fact, can live for some time without anyone even knowing that they are in Sweden. Similarly, in the Netherlands asking for asylum is practically the only way to gain legal residence for UMs[20], whilst in Belgium it is the main way to do so.

A researcher notes that long procedures in general is a reason why youngsters become frustrated and move to other countries in an attempt to try again to find a place where they can settle and work. Although they are aware of their lack of legal possibilities, they still stay on the move. According to one researcher, this constitutes a complex form of mobility. The desire to help the family is often present and delaying both that goal and their own dreams as a consequence of the long asylum procedures thus forces them to move into the marginal space of nomadic existence in Europe (cf. Vacchiano, 2018). Von Bredow (2019) underscores that in general, North African boys have been on the streets of Europe since 2011.

[20] A small minority of *all* UMs receive a residence permit as a presumed victim of trafficking in human beings. In 2021, less than 5% of *all* the UMs received a residence permit on these grounds (EMN, 2023.5).

An aspect of the nomadic life of these youngsters is involvement in criminal networks, which we specifically discuss further in this Chapter. Our results imply that such involvement to make 'quick money', but for some boys, running away from these criminal networks are also reasons for mobility. Another reason cited by our respondents for the nomadic behaviour of the UMs is the pressure minors experience from their families. In addition to the (sometimes subtle) expectations of financial support, some parents interfere remotely with the migration route. 'Things are not going well in Belgium? Then I will see if you can go to Germany.' Some parents think that their children are better off in Europe than in Morocco or Algeria, even if their children often do not find themselves in ideal situations. A researcher who conducted research in Morocco stated that some parents do not care how their children earn money:

> *One social worker in Morocco told me: 'I told them that their sons are probably selling drugs, stealing or something' and they said, 'He told me he is doing well, and I don't want to hear this; I need a washing machine.'*

Several respondents explained that the high mobility has to do with the fact that when minors are in trouble in one city, for example with the police or when they are on the run in order to escape penalties imposed by the juridical system, they simply move to another city or country. Youngsters adopt almost a 'day-to-day' survival strategy whilst navigating between different European countries. In so doing, they switch between different identities by reporting various names and ages. A Dutch supervisor remarked that although some boys come back more than once to the Netherlands, they do so each time under a different name. Such nomadic life shows their strong agency, but it has at the same time high costs for the youngsters. Vacchiano (2018, p. 94) states that 'while moving between different countries, youngsters eventually accept violence, (self-) exploitation and other conditions that lead to exclusion and 'social stuckness', where the same reasons to leave the country of origin are reproduced in Europe'. Within this context, the (multiple) problems they experienced in their country of origin are aggravated further. A Belgian professional stated that in the event of no other solution, and if the youngsters want to survive in this kind of manner, they have to rely on drugs (see further in this Chapter for a discussion of both the nature of (multiple) problems in Europe and the underlying reasons for them). The goal of earning money in turn leads them towards ways of life that they may have never imagined previously. In the words of a Dutch supervisor:

> *Boys leave with a European dream, but they end up in a spider web. They end up in places they don't have enough knowledge about and end up in criminal networks to survive.*

A Spanish professional who works with mostly Moroccan (ex-)UMs in her work, commented that even during the COVID-19 pandemic the youngsters remained highly nomadic:

> *I was really impressed. I was under lock-down at home and kids were saying on Facebook that they were today in Germany, tomorrow in Belgium, and then in Paris. I was really surprised. I was like how do you do that without any money? They have a very strong sense of agency, very strong abilities, but they also put themselves as well as others in very dangerous situations. When they get high, they can do anything, without any moral consideration.*

Regarding the nomadic life of the North African UMs, one Dutch supervisor argued that there is a lack of supportive function of the family and social networks, which serves as a preventive factor in comparison to other UMs. This determines why they end up in a nomadic life:

> *[The] desire to help family is not specific to this group. Afghan minors also help their families. But they have a big support network they can rely on, everywhere. Those are the boys I think who will never end up on the street. I think this is true only for a negligible percentage of the North African group.*

This observation may be in line with the in this Chapter previously mentioned findings of Collyer (2006) who states that willingness of social networks to help irregular migrants is decreasing, considering that UMs coming from Afghanistan relatively have more chances of having a residence permit after an asylum application.

Similarly, Peyroux (2021) draws attention to the absence of reliable family connections for North African UMs in destination countries as a risk factor for exploitation in criminal networks (see further on involvement in criminal networks).

Social networks of peers, role of information, and reasons for navigating between different countries

As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, according to the systems theory network, the country of origin (where we mostly talk about Morocco) and Europe, but also different European countries are connected by, among others, information flows and feedback mechanisms that affect perceptions of migrants and facilitate movements between different countries. In this section, we discuss the specific role of these information flows in the nomadic life of UMs.

Both professionals and researchers stated that youngsters usually move in groups. The decision over where exactly to move is ordinarily taken together: 'Hey, there are job opportunities in [….] you can make a lot of money there' and, based on this, many youngsters move to that country. Consequently, several respondents noted that moving to a certain country is not always an explicit decision of the boys themselves, but rather stems from the fact that they follow each other and move with the group – a phenomenon which is seen amongst UMs who come from other countries than North Africa (see Kulu-Glasgow, et al., 2018). However, it was also reported that there are also youngsters who are more autonomous and move alone depending on their social networks. Regardless of the type of movement, social networks with peers play an essential role in the nomadic life of youngsters via their function of providing (sometimes false) information.

A researcher stressed that the movement of nomadic UMs from one country to another takes place in waves. This explains why from time to time there are not so many UMs in one country, whilst there are a lot somewhere else. She explained this via the 'magnet effect of migration lies':

> *I.e., someone who gets to a country and says: 'hey, come here, here it's really good'. This is something that has been happening for eternity; the fact that migrants lie to themselves, and say that they are better off than they really are. So, people go there thinking they will have the support. 'They tell me that if I go there, they will support me, and there will be papers and a job. However, when*

they go there, sometimes they don't even answer the telephone. This is something that happens often.

A Dutch supervisor cited the following example:

Once I saw a film on a Facebook-group. There was a nomadic boy in Barcelona, who was wandering around and screaming: 'Come here, it is just fantastic!' I think social media has a big impact on how this group moves.

According to many of the respondents, nomadic youngsters have information about the rules and regulations in different European countries and move between countries according to their needs. A Belgian professional stated that nomadic minors in this sense 'play with supply at the European level.' Social networks and feedback mechanisms from their nomadic peers in different countries, which sometimes can be false, play a crucial role in this respect. They hear from each other as well as also share information on social media (via WhatsApp and Facebook) about different cities in Europe. A researcher pointed out that such information on social media is often based on constantly changing rumours, which are uncontrolled and changing fastly. In this manner, they influence the perceptions and subsequent decisions of nomadic youngsters about moving to different countries. Some researchers referred, in this context, to the 'mental map' that UMs possess. In the words of one researcher:

They hear trough their friends and social networks about different cities in Europe, and each city has a good part. In some cities like Paris you can make some money. Hamburg, Germany is good if you have some health problems, teeth problems, because it is a good place to cure these health problems, And, when they have some health problems or if they are in danger, they will go to Stockholm; they know that they will be better protected there compared to Paris or Amsterdam.

The same researcher explained that Sweden is well-known amongst the boys as a country where they can get placed in a foster family to take a rest, either to escape from criminal networks or to take a break from the life on the streets:

I saw some boys in France who were in debt, and they had to pay this debt back [to criminal networks], so they decided to escape and go to Sweden, because it was too dangerous for them to stay in Paris. But, they knew that only in Stockholm, not in Malmö, they will be well protected in foster families. They said, 'if we move to another city, we are still in danger'. 'If we move to Montpellier, it is too dangerous for us, because the network can find us.' If they are involved in some criminal networks and they have to escape from that, they will move to other cities. If they are not in a criminal network but they want to make money, then will they try in different cities.

Ironically, inability to cope with the rules in a family is also a key reason why these youngsters eventually move to another country from Sweden after a couple of months. A Dutch supervisor cited the example of a boy who called Sweden 'a house of prison' due to the strict rules that needed to be obeyed in a family.

According to a Belgian professional and some Dutch supervisors, Brussels is renowned among this group of minors for the availability of certain medications used as drugs, namely Lyrica and Rivotril (see further the section on the nature of multiple problems in this Chapter). Furthermore, some respondents opined that the youngsters know

that Belgium and Sweden are places where they can receive pocket money – once they are in the system and ask for asylum (this is also the case in the Netherlands, as we discuss below). A researcher stated that once the youngsters realise that the amount is not as much as they thought, they decide to move on to another country. One of the Dutch supervisors remarks that a while ago, information was circulating amongst this group of boys that it was very easy to find a job in Italy; a few youngsters had gone to Italy, but they had failed.

The respondents further report that the duration of nomadic life differs for each youngster is related to their age at the point of migration. For instance, there are children who have been wandering around Europe since they were 13 or 14, whilst in other cases they are even younger. The Dutch supervisors reported that some children come to the accommodation centres 'clean', which is to say that they are neither using drugs nor involved in criminal activities, which gave them the impression that they have been leading the nomadic life only for a short while. Our respondents also stated that they do not have any insight into how long the youngsters stay in different countries. However, some had the impression that the duration of stay in Spain is longer than in other countries, as some youngsters speak Spanish quite well.

Several respondents were of the opinion that many of the UMs from Morocco ultimately want to end up in Spain. This is due to the fact that they have family or other networks there, because they are able to more easily visit their parents in Morocco, or as a result of the recent changes in Spanish immigration law which affords more rights to minors to secure legal work (see Chapter 4).

Reasons for coming to the Netherlands

While discussing the topic of nomadic life in Europe and reasons for navigating between different countries, the reasons why the target group of this research prefers the Netherlands was also a topic of discussion, regarding the Dutch context.[21] This was an issue which was primarily raised in the group discussions with the Dutch supervisors. However, in discussing these reasons we also drew upon the reactions of our respondents from other countries, where relevant. It is important to stress here that these reasons are based on the opinions of our respondents and/or depend on their experiences and may not necessarily reflect the actual reasons UMs would cite themselves.

Our analyses show that social networks play a crucial role with respect to the information flow amongst their peers about the Netherlands.

The Netherlands as an integral part of nomadic life

- According to many of the respondents, the reasons why youngsters who belong to our target group arrive in the Netherlands is, to a great extent, related to their nomadic existence in Europe, and not necessarily because they leave Morocco with the idea of heading to the Netherlands as their first intended destination. According to the Dutch supervisors, although each youngster is unique, many of them have been to other countries prior to arriving in the Netherlands, including Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, or Italy. As mentioned above, when the youngsters do not find what they were looking for, are not happy there or get into (serious) problems they decide to move on. In coming to the Netherlands, information shared about the Netherlands on social media, which is not necessarily true, plays a role in coming to the Netherlands. A Dutch supervisor gave an example

[21] We present here all the reasons that were raised by the respondents. It is not possible to rank these reasons according their level of importance, due to the nature of our data collection.

from a few years ago of how all the boys came to the Netherlands, especially from France, because every one of them thought that they could get free braces for their teeth in the Netherlands: 'I am here for my teeth and then I will move on again'. According to a Dutch supervisor, information on the social media also leads to random movements:

> *'Hey, I would like to come to the Netherlands, do you have a place for me to stay?' The response is often 'you are welcome' and 'if you come, you can stay with me'.*

- Another supervisor noted within this context that they indeed now and then find a youngster who is staying in the accommodation centre without any authorisation. Several supervisors point out to the previously mentioned connectedness between the youngsters who come to the Netherlands, as they hear the UMs say 'hey, I know you from Spain, this one I know from Sweden, and that one from France'.
- Another aspect of nomadic behaviour noted by some of the Dutch supervisors is that youngsters come to the Netherlands as 'winter guests'– a phenomenon which has also been reported in previous studies, also in the case of adult asylum-seekers (e.g., Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2021) after which they go off the radar. Conversely, others argued that the phenomenon of just staying for the winter had happened less often in recent years. According to these supervisors, these nomadic UMs today stay in the accommodation centres until they reach the legal adult age, for example, because they find 'something' to stay for in the Netherlands, such as (undocumented) work. The supervisors underscored however, that such 'seasonal' stays depend on the individual circumstances of the youngsters as well as developments in other countries.

Benefits of the Dutch accommodation system

Some Dutch supervisors expressed the opinion that the Netherlands is an attractive country for this group of minors because of the type of accommodation for UMs and the country is seen as an 'accommodation paradise' among this group. According to one supervisor, accommodation centres are well-organised and luxurious with minors usually having their own rooms with various amenities (a refrigerator, a wardrobe, ventilation, etc.). As a result, the Netherlands has a 'higher status' amongst the North African UMs in comparison to staying in other countries such as Spain or Italy.
A Belgian professional also shared this opinion and remarked that in the Netherlands the accommodation system for UMs is well-organised compared to many other countries, and, most importantly, the minors do not end up on the streets.

Another feature of the Dutch system that attracts the group to the Netherlands is the 'money-card' – the weekly allowance that all UMs receive[22], according to some supervisors. According to them, this is not the case in other countries. One supervisor referred to Dutch accommodation centres as 'a type of a hostel where the tenants get paid.' These supervisors believed that youngsters are well-informed through their peers about their rights at the Dutch accommodation centres and that some boys ask for their allowance on day one.

[22] UMs receive a weekly allowance for food and living costs. In 2021, this amount was 62,58 euros per week; as of January 1, 2023 this allowance is 65,24 euros per week. The amount of weekly allowance may differ if the accommodation centres offer meals. COA - The right to reception | www.coa.nl; COA - Het recht op opvang | www.coa.nl

A supervisor:

> *We have of course boys who have been wandering around for a long while in Europe. They say: 'I am here; yes, I am not always happy with the supervision, but I have for the moment shelter above my head and a bit of income. When I am fed up, I will move on.'*

Another supervisor:

> *They take photos here next to an expensive car or motorcycle and place it on social media: 'look, this is my car, this is my money, and this is my room in the Netherlands. I receive a lot of money every week. You get a telephone, and you get clothing.' I have both witnessed all of this and heard it from other children.*

Alongside the above, one supervisor shared her communication with a French social worker, with whom (s)he had been in contact in the past. According to this social worker, the Netherlands is a quieter and safer place for these boys as youngsters look healthier and more peaceful and are in a better condition when they arrive from the Netherlands to France in comparison to when they arrive from Brussels. Within this context, several supervisors also noted that minors come back to the Netherlands after going off the radar for a while, which sometimes happens repeatedly. It was their impression that this happens after these UMs experienced a challenging life on the streets elsewhere.

Image of the Netherlands for the possibility of staying in the accommodation centres for UMs for those who are of age
As already mentioned in Chapter 2, some supervisors raised their suspicions over whether some of the youngsters in the accommodation centres are of age. They noted that this is a possible reason why they come to the Netherlands. One supervisor was critical about the age determination procedure used in the Netherlands, stating that 'it does not mean anything at all.' Another supervisor was of the opinion that once the youngsters who are of age arrive in Spain, they already hear from their peers the following: 'if you are there, you get this and that; the only thing you have to do is to say, 'I am 16 or 17, and you have in any case for a year or two to stay there'.

Friendly Dutch police and less consequences for behavioural problems and criminal offences compared to other countries
Several supervisors pointed out that the Dutch police is friendlier than, for example, their French or Spanish counterparts, and that in the Netherlands the consequences of behavioural problems or criminal offences are milder compared to in other countries. According to them, this is why the Netherlands is attractive for this group of minors. A supervisor remarked that due to being underage, there are no hard consequences after being held by the police and that these boys only get some advice from the police about not behaving in this way again, before then being set free:

> *They know how they can behave [badly] in the accommodation centres and such behaviour has little consequences. They know better than us what their rights are. They hear from the older boys who have been to the Netherlands before exactly how and what to do.* (Dutch supervisor)

On the other hand, one supervisor pointed out that the police treat youngsters from this target group disproportionally harshly, by, amongst other things, putting minors in a police cell for a night for throwing a trashcan around the room.

Some supervisors remarked that penalties for criminal offences are higher in other countries, citing Germany as an example where minors stay in youth-detention for several months, compared to the Netherlands where they do so only for a few weeks. Another supervisor stated that the consequences of criminal offences for minors are higher in Belgium than in the Netherlands. To illustrate this difference, a supervisor cited examples of boys from the past who had committed thefts with their electronic ankle monitoring bracelets on. According to this supervisor, this is due to the fact that there are not enough juvenile probation officers, which, in turn, means that the controls fail, and the files of the boys are not kept up to date.

Image of the Netherlands regarding possibility of engaging in undocumented work
There are some indications from the data that the image of the Netherlands that the nomadic youngsters have regarding the possibility of finding undocumented work is also a motivating factor for them to come to the Netherlands. A supervisor argued that the Bazaar (known as the Black Market) has a reputation amongst the youngsters in Spain that it is possible to work there and earn some money:

> *Working undocumented is very common amongst this group. You come here with the goal to earn money. […] I know for sure that the youngsters I supervise have a job at a carpet laying business in Amsterdam or at a greengrocer.*

Availability of drugs
A supervisor pointed out that the Netherlands is number one in Europe regarding the presence of coffee shops, and buying and selling drugs, which acts as a 'magnet' for this group of minors. A researcher stated that the Netherlands is a rich country where this group of minors can earn some money, and spoke about the possibility of them being offered 'jobs' drug dealing. Similarly, two professionals from Belgium spoke about their experiences of being suspicious of boys traveling from Belgium to the Netherlands for drug trafficking and coming back.

Lack of return agreement between the Netherlands and Morocco
The lack of a return agreement between the Dutch and Moroccan governments concerning asylum-seekers who received a negative result on their application was also cited as a reason why the UMs from Morocco come to the Netherlands. A supervisor drew the comparison with Germany, noting that in Germany minors are returned to their home country – albeit not on a large scale. According this supervisor, this is why boys do not want to go to Germany in general, and instead say 'I am staying here, they can't send me back.' It should be pointed out however, that at the beginning of 2023, the Dutch government started negotiations to improve the cooperation with the Moroccan government about the return of asylum-seekers who have no possibility of receiving a residence permit in the Netherlands. For UMs, the condition of adequate accommodation remains valid.

Presence of diaspora or family
According to some researchers, the Netherlands is attractive for this group of minors due to the large networks that already exist there, including family members, but also those with similar backgrounds, languages, nationalities. This point remains controversial, however; as mentioned above, there is also evidence that among irregular

North African migrants in general and among North African UMs in particular the supportive role of these networks may be lacking (Collyer, 2006, Peyroux, 2021 respectively).

Influence of practices in other countries
According to one researcher, the nomadic youngsters are relatively aware of the potential changes in the practices of different countries, as a result of their networks. Dutch supervisors cited the example of this 'waterbed' effect, noting that at moments when there are signals in France that some (less official) accommodation centres would be closed, or that some of the Belgium buildings where youngsters squat would be 'cleaned up', they had noticed that more groups of North African youngsters come to the Netherlands.

Reasons for applying for asylum in the Netherlands
In the Netherlands, as aforementioned in Chapter 1, the admission policy for UMs is based on asylum. In order to receive a residence permit, they must apply for asylum. According to regulations, UMs who do *no*t apply for asylum, have in several aspects the same rights as those UMs who do apply for asylum: for example, they have access to accommodation, schooling, and health care, and they are appointed a legal guardian. However, as stated in Box 1.1 in Chapter 1, UMs who do not apply for asylum are not allowed to work. In addition, for this group of UMs, return to their home countries remains the only option in the Dutch policy context (TK 2010-2011, 27062, no. 68).

Although in principle it is possible for UMs not to apply for asylum, a recent EMN-ad-hoc query, held at the beginning of 2023 (2023.5), states that in the Netherlands, the numbers of UMs in the accommodation centres who do not apply for asylum are 'non-existent' in practice. Considering that UMs coming from safe countries are less likely to fall under international protection, the question why they still apply for this, knowing they have very little chance, is interesting and was also a topic of discussion during the focus-groups, especially with legal-guardians.
There are indications from the focus groups that UMs from our target group are more or less 'pushed' to apply for asylum by the authorities and by the system.

To start with, some legal guardians explained that according to their experience, applying for asylum at the Application Centre of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) in Ter Apel is a precondition for UMs to be placed within an accommodation centre of COA. In addition, one legal guardian argued that, in cases where these UMs come into contact with the juvenile justice system, juvenile court judges enforce that the youngsters request asylum:

> *During the court process, it is literally imposed upon youngsters that they must request asylum. 'You have to apply for asylum, otherwise you have no accommodation.' Then, I address the judge 'this is not the target group [for international protection]. He has no understanding of what asylum is, he has no understanding of 'I have to go to Ter Apel'. But no, 'you have to ask for asylum to be helped.'*

Furthermore, according to the experience of legal guardians applying for asylum is the only way for nomadic UMs to be in the system, a fact that many youngsters themselves are also aware of. Legal guardians stated that by applying for asylum, these minors have more legal rights in practice and their life in the Netherlands is 'easier' as a result. One legal guardian noted that 'everywhere they go,' the youngsters need

to carry a document showing that they legally reside in the Netherlands – such as, for example, when attending school or going to an orthodontist, or opening a bank-account, and this is not the case for non-asylum seeking UMs. Another legal guardian stated that they discuss with the youngsters of the advantages of applying for asylum, in other words, that they need a legal document in order to 'be someone' in the Netherlands, as without that 'they will have nothing'. Consequently, when these UMs are offered the option of starting the asylum procedure, the youngsters accept that.
It is noteworthy to report in this context that, until recently UMs who did not apply for asylum did not have a legal right to stay in the Netherlands. However, resulting from the judgement of the Administrative Jurisdiction Division of the Dutch Council of State on June 8, 2022, this is not the case anymore. As long as there is no return-decision taken by the authorities because no adequate shelter in the country of origin can be identified, they have a legal right to stay in the country (TK 2021-2022, 29 344, no 152; personal communication Department of Migration Policy, Ministry of Justice and Security, May 2023).[23] Regarding the fact that the focus-groups with supervisors took place mid-2022, the situation we described above may be different at the moment. We do not have an insight into this while writing this report.

As our target group has little or no chance of receiving a residence permit in the Netherlands, after applying for international protection at some point some of the youngsters continue with their nomadic life by moving on to other European countries, whilst others disappear off the radar but stay in the Netherlands. According to a study (APM, 2019) which analysed all cases of UMs who disappeared off the radar from all the accommodation centres[24] between 2015 and 2018, one out of two UMs did that before the first decision on their asylum application was taken; the majority of those who left the accommodation centres did that within six months after registration (considering only COA-accommodation centres, this percentage was 81%) (the share of UMs who disappeared off the radar within the total number of UMs staying in the COA-accommodation centres was not reported in the study). Moroccan UMs were among the nationalities who went off the rather most often (APM, 2019). Another study showed that, 57% of UMs whose asylum application (during 2014-mid 2019) was rejected, disappeared off the radar. Similarly, Moroccan (and Algerian) UMs were the most common nationalities (Noyon et al., 2020).

According to supervisors, these North African UMs do not want to return to their country of origin – an issue which is common for all UMs who do not receive a residence permit in the Netherlands (see, for example, Kulu-Glasgow et al. 2021). In addition, lack of legal possibilities in the Netherlands play a role in why these minors leave the accommodation centres with an unknown destination. As mentioned before, some Dutch supervisors however, have the impression that nomadic minors stay, in comparison to few years before, longer in the accommodation centres (for example instead of staying as a 'winter guest'), sometimes until they are 18, and then leave without an unknown destination.

Nomadic life after staying in the Netherlands
Some of the Dutch supervisors noted that at a certain point they see youngsters leave for other countries. According to these respondents, this is mainly due to the lack of

[23] In 2021, the European Court of Justice concluded that the Dutch policy practice, where an UM was given a return decision before an adequate shelter is identified in the country of origin was in conflict with the EU-law (TK 2021-2022, 29344, no. 152).
[24] Accommodation centres of both Nidos and COA.

perspective, because they cannot find what they are looking for in the Netherlands, because spontaneous opportunities arise in other countries, or they get themselves into trouble with the police. In other cases, the supervisors simply do not know why the boys go off the radar. Regarding this point, they mentioned of a bottleneck, namely the fact that they invest in these youngsters, are busy intensively supervising them, and just when they have the idea that they are about to achieve something together, the youngsters leave: 'I always lose them. Ultimately, they leave, with or without saying 'goodbye''. Another supervisor stated: 'One of 'my boys' told me that he was going to go off the radar one day. He said 'I will not say goodbye to you, because I find it too difficult. So, one day I am gone'. According to the supervisors, the youngsters then surface in other countries like France, probably due to the potential existence of 'illegal' circuits and the possibilities they offer, before then continuing their nomadic life from one country to another. In addition, supervisors cited Belgium and Spain as two countries that youngsters often move (back) to in search of job opportunities. As aforementioned, some Dutch supervisors also believed that Spain is often the youngsters' final intended destination, whilst other supervisors expressed the opinion that these nomadic boys do not have any final destination in mind, but simply wander between different European countries without any vision of the future.

Irregular existence in the Netherlands

Several Dutch supervisors had the impression that it is now easier for UMs and ex-UMs to lead an irregular existence in the Netherlands than it was some years before, when they stayed irregularly often in Antwerp, Brussels, and Paris. Some supervisors thought that because according to them it is now easier to stay irregularly in the Netherlands, the point in time at which youngsters go off the radar from accommodation centres has changed. A few years ago, minors went off the radar soon before their asylum procedure started, whilst these days they have the impression that they are more likely to stay in the accommodation centres until they are 18 and then go off the radar. Some of these boys stay in the Netherlands irregularly.

Another group of irregular minors are those who do not want to ask for asylum and do not come into contact with the Dutch officials at all. Whilst some supervisors reported that they do not have any insight into how large this group is, according to others there is a significant group who is living outside the system in the Netherlands. One legal guardian thought that there is a relationship with the lack of possibility of detention for those coming from Morocco: until recently, the youngsters stayed irregularly in the Netherlands due to the lack of legal possibility of sending minors back to Morocco.[25] According to the Dutch Council of State, now that such a prospect has recently become possible[26], this legal guardian expected that those minors outside the system will apply for asylum to avoid detention and being sent back.

There were contrasting opinions from the supervisors concerning the manner in which the youngsters lead an irregular existence in the Netherlands. Some spoke about their impressions that they lead a life based on either 'black' work or criminal activities (such as theft and drug trafficking). Others were of the opinion that those who do not come into contact with the system at all, or those who went off the radar from the accommodation centres, are actually doing quite well. In this respect they gave several examples:

[25] Nu geen zicht op uitzetting naar Marokko binnen redelijke termijn - Raad van State.
[26] Uitzetting van vreemdelingen naar Marokko weer mogelijk binnen redelijke termijn - Raad van State.

We know very well what these boys need, but we can't put it into practice. I had supervised a nomadic boy with (multiple) problems; his solution to everything was fighting. With a lot of difficulty. He learned that he had to learn how to 'talk.' Only then we found out that he wanted to work at a […]. That was something for us to work with. We did our best to arrange that, but we failed. Problems started. I had to go to the court every month with him; I didn't know what to do any more. Then he decided to go off the radar. I thought he will not end up OK. But he is now working two jobs and rents a place. He arranged everything for himself that I couldn't do for him. He is doing well, but not thanks to my supervision.
(Dutch supervisor)

Another supervisor cited the example of a youngster who went off the radar soon before turning 18, and stated that the youngster is doing much better in irregular existence than he was in the accommodation centre, insofar as they had a regular job and an apartment of his own. Likewise, another supervisor talked about a youngster who has never been in touch with the Dutch system:

There is a group of irregular youngsters, more than we think, who live here and function very well. Recently, I heard from a colleague that one of her friends was dating a guy who was living in the Netherlands for around ten years. At one point, he said to her 'I have to confess something, I am here without a residence permit.' He had a regular job, he never showed up on the radar. If they know how to play it well, we never notice them.

3.4.3 Nature of multiple problems experienced by nomadic minors in Europe and their underlying reasons

The general image that comes forward from our analyses is that nomadic minors with little chance of receiving a residence permit, struggle with multiple problems and are 'severely damaged boys,' in the words of one Dutch supervisor. These problems exist in different domains of life and include issues with mental and physical health, substance abuse and addiction, behavioural problems, and involvement in both incidents at accommodation centres and in criminality (cf. Van Wijk, 2020, 2021; Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2021). Both a Dutch supervisor and a researcher mentioned how either a lack of education or the complete lack of any schooling whatsoever contribute to these multiple problems. Although UMs generally struggle with mental health issues (see, for example, Ivert & Magnusson, 2020; Maioli et al., 2021; Pfeiffer et al., 2022) and may also use substances and get involved in incidents (see, for example, Staring & Bouabid, 2019), what seems to be specific to the group of nomadic minors is their more severe substance abuse and involvement in criminality and criminal networks with indications of exploitation. We discuss the topics of criminal networks and potential exploitation separately in further pages.

Although we neither intended to nor are we able to describe the cause and effect relations, the (multiple) problems referred to by the professionals and researchers we spoke to do most certainly influence each other and are exacerbated by the nomadic life the minors lead. This section describes the nature of these (multiple) problems amongst nomadic minors and delves into their backgrounds and interrelations.

Nature of the multiple problems
Several of the respondents noted that mental and physical health problems may pertain to depression and attachment issues. Although we did not focus on physical

health in this research, some respondents did indeed mention these. According to some Dutch supervisors, the minors do not have healthy sleeping and eating patterns, whilst Belgian supervisors made note of dental problems and a more general inability amongst some minors to maintain a certain standard of personal hygiene. Substance abuse and addiction were considered by the respondents to be a major issue amongst this group of minors; although the examples that were given concern heavily addicted minors, it is important to note that not all of them are addicted. Substance addiction was also cited in both the Belgian and French contributions to the EMN ad-hoc query (EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26). In addition to consuming alcohol and using drugs such as hashish, which UMs from other nationalities also use, several respondents highlighted the specific use of Rivotril and Lyrica by these youngsters. Both of these medicines are prescribed for epilepsy and have a calming effect on the nervous system. Respondents working with minors in street situations in Brussels also mentioned the use of solvents, crack and ecstasy. Some Dutch supervisors noted how minors may mix different kinds of drugs or make 'cocktails'. They observed how minors become increasingly addicted over time. Related to this, the French EMN NCP answered in their contribution to the EMN ad-hoc query that this group of minors are poly-addicts (EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26).

In the Dutch focus groups, behavioural problems were primarily discussed within the context of incidents, both within and outside of accommodation centres. Generally speaking, many incidents occur, but they differ in terms of their severity. Supervisors spoke of aggressiveness amongst minors, which may either manifest in self-harming behaviour (auto mutilation or suicide attempts) or by behaving aggressively towards other resident minors or supervisors, or by damaging materials(see also Staring & Bouabid, 2019). These expressions can be both verbal and non-verbal. Other incidents reported are fights amongst the minors themselves or with other groups of minors (e.g., minors from Syria), threats and forms of intimidation. The following was an example cited by a Dutch supervisor:

> *Recently, one youngster asked if he could borrow a bike, and the answer was no. Immediately, it turned into an incident. He started to intimidate five other boys, intimidated us, because he could not take the bike.*

Behaviours outside of accommodation centres include the stealing of, amongst other things, food and brand clothing, pickpocketing as well as drug dealing. There were also some indications that minors are involved in criminal networks and are potentially being exploited (see further). Incidents of expressing aggressive behaviour towards the police were also raised. One of the more severe examples that was given was a serious assault against a local resident.

The experiences of supervisors in Belgium, as well as one researcher who had conducted research in the Belgian context, were similar to those discussed by the supervisors in the Netherlands. The same types of incidents within accommodation centres were mentioned: fighting within the group but also with other asylum-seeking UMs, the damaging of materials, stealing and drug dealing. In France, a professional working for an organisation that supports children in the streets, including, amongst others, (nomadic) North African minors, spoke of a few extraordinarily severe and violent incidents, most notably, the strangling of one of their employees. Violent behaviour, self-harming behaviour, burglary, and theft were also highlighted by the French NCP in their contribution to the EMN ad-hoc query (EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26).

Importantly, as will be elaborated on further below, without legitimising them, both supervisors from the Netherlands and other respondents placed these behaviours and incidents, both those inside and outside of accommodation centres, within the context of a longer-term nomadic existence within Europe and the lack of (legal) opportunities available to them. Moreover, multiple respondents expressed that they did not wish to generalise about the group of nomadic minors. For instance, some of those considered to be part of the group of nomadic minors may not experience all of these (multiple) problems, as the following description shows:

> *(…) from Egypt, who stayed here for a longer time, because he actually spoke Dutch very well, but who we knew was being used as a drug courier by adults. (…) He was very pleasant and everything, and respectful towards the supervisors. You didn't actually see... he did not cause any incidents. But we knew that he was engaged in dealing drugs for the adults.* (Belgian supervisor)

Another example which was cited in the Dutch focus groups concerned the fact that although the nature of the (multiple) problems is similar amongst the minors, the minors differ markedly with respect to their character traits, personality and sometimes IQ.

Background and interrelations between multiple problems

As stated in Chapter 2 in the section on the family situation in the country of origin, there were some indications that many minors who end up being nomadic in Europe often come from an unstable and problematic family context. The circumstances in their country of origin already increase the chance of developing a mental illness or depression later in life, as one researcher noted. However, as this researcher also posited, it is hard to establish whether minors' mental issues are caused by their early life experiences or by their subsequent substance abuse or addiction, which, as two researchers noted, also negatively impacts upon both their mental and physical health (see also Ivert & Magnusson, 2020). Conversely, substances are sometimes used to cope with psychological issues (ibid.), thereby creating a vicious circle.

Substance abuse as a response to trauma

In addition to the potential trauma they incurred during their childhood, nomadic minors often endure further hardship and encounter dangerous situations, both whilst in transit to Europe and during their subsequent nomadic life within Europe. Although not all minors start using substances in their country of origin or in transit, what was raised by many of the respondents is that many nomadic minors, similar to UMs in general (see Ivert & Magnusson, 2020; Maioli et al., 2021), do use them to cope with the trauma they experienced both in the past and during the migration process, including their mobility in Europe.

> *I think that in the end those drugs are all used to soften or sedate underlying grief, pain, and trauma (…) to forget the problems they all have, both in their country of origin and here, and that are also related to passing through other countries.* (Dutch supervisor)

The Dutch supervisors, professionals from Belgium as well as several researchers spoke about how minors, whilst in transit, may come into contact with others who offer them substances. Minors from Morocco who migrate through the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla often spend some time there in the streets where they

use substances to endure their difficult life. According to two researchers, the longer they stay there, the higher the substance abuse, which, in turn, damages their health.

Substance abuse as a response to nomadic existence and life on the streets
As aforementioned, both the lack of (legal) opportunities in Europe and minors' nomadic existence within Europe constitute an important context for understanding the (multiple) problems these minors experience. Leading a nomadic life, which can be characterised by not settling down and moving between different EU-countries (see above in this Chapter the section on nomadic life), entails being socialised in street situations and needing to 'toughen up' in order to survive. Minors are 'living off of scratches and micro-criminality', as one researcher described. They find themselves in vulnerable situations, dependent on others for their survival, and thereby vulnerable to exploitation (see further in this Chapter sections on criminal networks). According to several Dutch supervisors, (multiple) problems are exacerbated within the peer groups, which one researcher identified as 'destructive'. Supervisors observed that minors who newly arrive in accommodation centres enter into the existing group there and may be easily dragged into criminality and drugs. Similarly, a researcher noted how easy it can be to switch from 'good' to 'bad,' which (s)he also related to both the pressure from families to send money back and the teenage desire to consume and wear branded clothes.

According to the respondents, living on the streets in Brussels and Paris, for example, is incredibly tough. In this respect, substance abuse thus constitutes a way of coping with (the difficulties of) their nomadic life and surviving on the streets. In one Dutch focus group discussion, a supervisor connected this way of coping with the young age at which minors leave their country of origin, which means they had to grow up fast and see substance abuse as a quick way of dealing with stress, because they have not learned other ways of coping. According to many of the respondents, minors also use substances, specifically Lyrica and Rivotril, to soothe their conscience and eliminate feelings of fear, so they are able to perform criminal activities. In turn, criminal activities are used to finance their substance use.

Substance abuse as a response to a lack of perspective
The frustrations and stress minors experience with respect to the lack of (legal) opportunities available to them in European countries, also contributes to their substance use (see Maioli et al., 2021). As mentioned before, according to the Dutch supervisors and Belgian professionals, these minors know that they do not have a chance of obtaining a residence permit based on asylum.[27] Underlying their frustration is the feeling of not being welcome anywhere, of being repeatedly rejected. Minors are not able to fulfil their goal of leading a good life in Europe and earning money to send back home, which were important reasons for them to migrate to Europe in the first place, as discussed earlier in this Chapter. Instead, they lead a marginal life in Europe, experiencing (sometimes implicit) pressure from their families in their country of origin to send money back and feeling like they are a failure for not being able to do so.

Lack of perspective and behavioural problems
Related to the lack of (legal) opportunities, different respondents mentioned multiple times that minors state that they have nothing to lose. That is to say, they will do anything they need to in order to survive. Several respondents made a connection

[27] As described in Chapter 1 in Box 1.1. and in Chapter 4, Box 4.1, in the Netherlands and Belgium the asylum procedure is in practice the only way or the primary way respectively, for UMs to obtain a residence permit.

between the lack of perspective and frustrations this induced among these minors and their subsequent behavioural problems. Examples below capture this perspective:

> *[explaining the reasoning of a minor]: Why would I behave myself if no one cares, if I have no future, if nobody wants me, if I am living on the streets like a dog?*
> (Belgian professional of the day shelter of Macadam in Brussels)

> *What often happens when a young person is in a reception centre and gets stuck in his migration project, if he cannot work, does not receive training and does not succeed in securing their identity papers? Out of frustration, he then starts engaging in misbehaviour in the centre, as a way to get attention.*
> (Professional from an NGO in Morocco)

> *R1: (..) I am not surprised that they come into contact with the police and the justice system. That it is not going well in the group, because what do you have to lose?*
> *R2: Nothing. And concerning behavioural problems, this is it.*
> *R1: For me, that is really the lack of perspective, the lack of a view of the future.*
> *R2: The street life, not being welcome anywhere, nobody welcoming you. Only being spit out.*
> (Two Dutch supervisors)

What is interesting is that the respondents regard the lack of opportunities the minors experience as being key to understanding their behavioural problems. Several respondents make at this point comparisons with other groups of UMs. For example, some Dutch supervisors talked about Eritrean minors who increasingly showed rebellious behaviour out of desperation, frustration and a lack of perspective on the future, whilst, simultaneously, seeing other Eritrean minors in the accommodation centre advancing with their asylum-procedures (while they themselves were not) (see also Staring & Bouabid, 2019).
Similarly, according to one of the researchers, who referred to the life of nomadic minors on the streets (see further in this section):

> *So, that particular behaviour of aggression and drug use is something that you, in all populations of mainly street children, see, across the world. As a way of coping with the many challenges they have, as a way of surviving. And that is I think the difference, or that leads for me to the difference between other groups. If you would put an Afghan unaccompanied minor for years in the street, wandering around without any intermediate period of at least hoping for documents, at least being in the process of applying for documents, I think you would see a very similar outcome [as in the case of North African minors].*

Nevertheless, minors coming from other countries with a higher likelihood of international protection do have more to lose than nomadic North African minors, namely due to the fact that there is a greater possibility for them of receiving a residence permit. This, arguably, might explain why nomadic minors appear to be more involved in incidents resulting in contact with the police. As a Dutch supervisor pointed out:

> *Look, an Afghan minor knows: 'I came here to ask for asylum. If I come into contact with the police, it impacts upon my asylum procedure. Whether or not I have exhausted all legal possibilities, maybe I will go to a different country. Then*

they can trace me' Look, North African minors have nothing to lose, and they know: 'I don't have a chance in the Netherlands.'

Negative treatment and behavioural problems

Related to this idea of not being welcome or wanted anywhere, some Dutch supervisors, especially legal guardians, experienced that nomadic minors from North Africa are treated and approached differently than other minors, which, in turn, impacts upon the behaviour of the minors. They spoke of excessive police violence in relation to this group for relatively minor offences, such as not having a valid train ticket. Another example cited is that of a minor having to stay in prison for stealing a packet of chewing gum. According to the supervisors, this approach has the opposite effect of creating more resistance amongst minors. They also observed how negative images of minors among supervisors, which are based on past incidents and experiences, may influence how newly arriving minors are approached – with caution and already expecting that incidents will occur. According to one legal guardian, this again may result in resistance on the part of minors, who can feel they are approached differently. This legal guardian relates this dynamic to the context of these UMs residing in the accommodation centre with other minors who, in contrast to them, have a high chance of receiving a residence permit and have a future in the Netherlands.
Multiple respondents from other countries, both researchers and professionals, also speak of a general negative image of and approach (also mentioning for example, the police and other UMs in the accommodation centre) towards nomadic UMs from North Africa as 'troublemakers'.

Influence of life on the streets, culture and activated survival mechanisms on behavioural problems

As aforementioned, as part of their nomadic life minors learn how to survive on the streets. As one researcher explained, 'conflict is the normal way of relating to others' for this group. Leading a nomadic life and being in street situations means that minors have to show that they are stronger than their peers, in order to defend their ground. A Dutch supervisor spoke about one minor who was always angry and intimidated everyone around them, which led some supervisors to be afraid of engaging in conversations with him:

He said: 'You are not afraid of me, why?' I said: 'Why would I be afraid of you?' I talked to him about this. And then I asked why he was always so angry. And then he also said: 'Everything that is kind, will be eaten by the wolves. So, if I am angry, they won't come to get me.'

Extreme behaviours, such as physical violence and intimidation, are thus needed to survive on the streets, and minors also engage in such behaviour whilst staying in accommodation centres. The aforesaid example of the minor who, after not being allowed to borrow a bike, began to intimidate others, is illustrative of minors' inability to function within an institutional context characterised by certain rules and boundaries (cf. Ghazinour et al., 2021). Indeed, some of them have been out of – in the words of one of the researchers – an 'institutional context, including the family,' for so long that they are simply not used to following rules and do not know how to behave anymore. As a Dutch supervisor said:

I once had a youngster who said: 'I know that how I react is not good.' He always immediately started fighting. But he said: 'I've been doing this for such a long time, I really don't know how I have to behave.'

Similarly, some Dutch supervisors cited examples that show how certain behaviours, such as stealing, are such a recurring feature of minors' normal ways of behaving that they appear to engage in them as if they are some kind of automatic reflex. One supervisor gave the example of a minor who newly arrived in the accommodation centre and immediately started to 'collect' all kinds of things: breakfast, laptops, necklaces – anything that was shining – whilst another told us the following:

> *A while back, we had two boys who were caught for burglary. And [when they were caught,] they were just reading books they had taken from the bookcase. They had completely lost their way. 'We will attempt a burglary, because we do that every night,' and simply do not know anymore what they are meant to be doing.*

Another feature of their nomadic existence is that minors are street smart, that is, they know how the rules work and have learned how to manipulate them. For example, some supervisors mentioned that some minors cause incidents on purpose because they know from others that they will then be transferred to the PON-facility, a smaller-scale location with less people.
According to some Dutch supervisors, some extreme behaviours do not have to be perceived as an actual threat, but rather should be viewed as a sign of an activated survival mechanism. Underlying this behaviour is actually a cry for attention and safety, and to feel heard. It was also reported that some minors cause incidents on purpose because they want to be detained by the police or spend a night or longer in a cell. One reason for this is that they feel unsafe and want to escape from outside pressures or from drugs in some cases (see also further, section on involvement in criminal networks).

Substance abuse and behavioural problems
Finally, substance use was considered to negatively impact upon minors' behaviours: 'it may completely change as a result'. Although one Dutch supervisor stated they do not like to use this word, she noted how minors can turn into 'monsters' because they become very aggressive. Another supervisor shared the following with us:

> *Because of the medication they use, we also see a lot of unpredictable and aggressive behaviour, it often comes from that. And often legal guardians say: 'He is a very good youngster. If he is not under the influence [of substances], I can have a conversation with him. But as soon as he has taken some pills, he simply is very different, yes, then you will have an entirely different boy in front of you.'*

As noted earlier, as a form of coping, substance abuse can also work the other way around: a Belgian professional explained that minors may use drugs to actually regulate their feelings of anger and frustration.

3.4.4 Involvement in criminal activities and networks and potential exploitation: 'I have nothing to lose'

In the following sections, we highlight the involvement of nomadic UMs in criminal networks as well as their potential exploitation within these networks, which can be considered as an important part of their multiple problems. A wide range of respondents in both the Netherlands and from other countries shared the opinion that involvement in criminal networks is very common amongst the target group of our research, and that these are not necessarily large, organised networks (see also

Peyroux, 2021). According to some supervisors and researchers we spoke to, involvement in criminal activities can be related to the survival of this group of minors with regards to their being nomadic in Europe and can be regarded as a necessity for survival where they enjoy a strong agency, but at the same time it makes them vulnerable to exploitation by criminal networks (see also Peyroux, 2021). Converning this point, our results indicate that the line between involvement of minors in criminal networks and their being victimised or exploited by these networks seems to be quite thin; in other words, we can speak of a victim-offender overlap (see e.g. De Long & Reichert, 2019).

In the following section, we explore the situation in the Netherlands as well as in other countries, especially in France – a country which was routinely mentioned in our interviews as a European centre/hub for the criminal activities of these minors.

UMs in the Netherlands

Nature of criminal activities in networks
According to the Dutch supervisors the majority of North African UMs are involved in some kind of activity within a network. One supervisor remarked that 'even if the boys come 'blanco' to the accommodation shelters, they will slip away within a few months and get involved in such activities, and that the group pressure, which minors cannot resist, is a reason for this. These supervisors expressed that they had a strong impression, which was reinforced by the concrete stories they had heard from youngsters themselves based on the trust they had built up with them, that they are involved in some kind of networks that are busy with stealing or drug networks. Regarding drugs, they referred to movements between the Netherlands and France and Belgium and cited several examples: for example, boys now and then going to Brussels to pick up 'pills' and then selling them at accommodation centres.
Within this context, a Dutch professional noted that boys with (multiple) problems ordinarily get involved in small drug networks and commented that dealers are to be found also at the street level and not necessarily only in bigger networks. Given that these boys have little money and are in a vulnerable position, plus due to the existence of dependency relations, they can easily 'roll into' these networks:

> *You get yourself a little, and then you sell a little, at the bottom of the ladder. And once you are in it, you sell a bit more, and you have some money left over. They are easy victims, who also don't dare go to the police to ask for help and are prone to fall prey to the wrong guys, who put them under pressure. So, that relationship interlocks on all sides. And the network maintains itself.*

A French researcher spoke on the other hand about the movements between France and the Netherlands, especially of Algerian children, who actually live in the Netherlands and are being used as mules for carrying drugs. In addition, the answers of the EMN-French Contact Point to the EMN ad-hoc query (2022.26) also made mention of such movements between France and the Netherlands (and also Belgium) of youngsters who are involved in drug trafficking as mules in France.

Concerning networks that are busy with stealing, supervisors express their suspicions on the basis of boys frequently travelling back and forth to Paris and coming back with nice clothes, which led them to suspect that they are involved in criminal activities there. One supervisor talked about her suspicions of a boy involved in kind of a network busy with stealing.

There are boys who steal on assignment. I have a boy, who is always picked up by the police for stealing women's shoes. They are always expensive shoes with hills. And I have never, even once, came across anything that looks like that in his room; he must have given them away. He must be doing that for someone and not for himself.

'Recruitment' of minors and exploitation within networks

Our results indicate that UMs may get involved in criminal networks in different ways: some supervisors suspected that youngsters who are in the 'higher ranks' of existing networks recruit minors from Morocco to use them as 'errand boys.' One of these supervisors gave an example of a boy who fetched boys from Brussels, who had just arrived from Morocco and brought them to the Netherlands. Another supervisor remarked on the other hand that, boys do not come to the Netherlands with the intention of getting involved in criminal activities, but rather just 'roll' into it. Similarly, researchers with expertise on the topic whom we interviewed pointed out that recruitment into such networks does not happen in the sense that it does with a 'recruitment into a criminal gang,' but rather it takes place through socialisation in an altogether more subtle way. In this respect, they also drew attention to the pivotal role of information flows via social networks and social media in this socialisation process. In this manner, UMs get information where they can 'earn money'; in this way, these types of activities are considered 'normal' within their own networks.

Several supervisors talked about how the boys are lured either by adult men or by influential minors in the group. Hereby, they expressed strong suspicions of exploitation, and stated that exploitation in criminal networks probably occurs more frequently than they imagine. One example that was pointed out several times concerns the locations of accommodation centres for UMs in the Netherlands. In cases where they are located in the same territory as the centre for adult asylum seekers (such as Process Reception Centres, POAs[28]) or when a minor is placed in an adult asylum seekers centre after becoming seventeen and a half, that is, six months prior reaching the official adulthood age (this is to encourage autonomy and for UMs to get used to live in an adult asylum seekers centre if they are still in the procedure), the risks for 'recruitment' and exploitation are considered to be higher. According to several supervisors, in such settings adult asylum seekers from North Africa deploy youngsters to steal in different cities. Some supervisors pointed out that minors who are quite young and do not have a long history of living on the streets in Europe are especially prone to this kind of 'recruiting'. Those who are higher up the hierarchy pick out the boys who are 'super naïve' and the boys subsequently easily fall victim to them. It was also noted that the affection, connection and affiliation with the group that is offered by these kinds of men is also a key risk factor for the minors – some of whom are in search of a sense of identity provided by such groups.

Some supervisors also pointed out that minors fall prey to other youngsters whom none of the minors dare to say no to, namely those who display 'macho behaviour' (*haantjesgedrag*). According to one supervisor, these are also the boys who are not open to supervision, as they already made their choice: to 'recruit' (other) minors. She commented that these boys are not necessarily over age and noted that she believed that this kind of behaviour is not necessarily related to age, but rather to a prior history of delinquency.

[28] See Box 1.1. for the definition of POAs.

They also tell me sometimes how they do things. A youngster apparently stole my telephone and brought it to me two hours later. He told me how he did it, what their tactics were and that I shouldn't be so naïve. And these are the boys who do not need me as a supervisor or want something in the Netherlands. They are here with a certain goal – to earn money in different ways – and they usually find it here and in Europe. They are very intelligent boys, but they choose to use their intelligence in this manner.
(Dutch supervisor)

According to another supervisor accommodation centres for UMs which are located in the vicinity of those for adult asylum seekers is 'as one of the biggest shortcomings of the Dutch accommodation system':

[..], that there are locations were adults and minors from this target group meet each other. Those are also often the locations where there are problems. Once they are at a location together, the risks are much bigger.

According to a supervisor, youngsters also feel unsafe in these settings:

The minors cannot actually stand up to these kinds of men. At our accommodation centre, there is a door leading up to the regular asylum-seekers centre. These men come and literally stand at the door: 'we need this and that boy'. And the boys say, 'please tell them that I have an appointment'. Another supervisor stated: 'That's really sad.'

In addition to the adult men living in the asylum seekers centres, supervisors cite fellow adult citizens or adult Dutch men who live in the neighbourhood who lure minors. One supervisor gave a concrete example from a large asylum centre: she noticed that adult men whom (s)he knew were involved in a 'certain' network were hanging around the asylum centre and around the station. She noticed that they were talking to the boys (s)he was supervising:

I decided to talk with 'my boys'. 'Who were they?' 'He approached me whether I could help with ….' At a certain point, a network was created where these boys went […] to steal brand goods, such as Lacoste, Gucci, and Prada. They got some money for this, and the 'bosses' would resell them to others. This was a way of earning money for these boys. Or sometimes they got drugs in return. And these 'bosses' are their fellow countrymen who know that these boys are very vulnerable as they don't have a chance [for a residence permit].

In a previous study, similar suspicions of North African boys being involved in criminal activities were expressed by Dutch supervisors (EMM, 2022). It was reported that UMs were taken by adults from the COA-accommodation centre and returned after a certain period of time with goods. It was suspected that they could not afford these goods themselves on the basis of their living allowance. These adults would teach the minors how to steal. The respondents felt that the adults were instructing them to do so. EMM states that in such cases there are signs of criminal exploitation, since in the case of minors it is not necessary that coercion (such as violence, deception, abuse of vulnerable position etc.) is used to talk about exploitation (as a minor is already vulnerable) and that it is sufficient if it can be demonstrated that there is evidently a relationship

of authority when the offense was committed in order to be regarded as a victim of human trafficking[29] (EMM, 2022, p. 11).

According to one supervisor, adults use minors in criminal networks as they know that minors are not punished in the same way as an adult for criminal activities, a point which is also raised by Peyroux (2021).

Besides suspicions of criminal exploitation, some supervisors also expressed their suspicions that fellow adult country men abuse minors in other ways as a consequence of the hierarchy in the group (see also further the topic on Other forms of victimization in this Chapter):

> *If you are somewhat less intelligent and less resilient, then you are on the hook quickly. That's what I see. Whether a boy is an errand boy for another boy in the group who understands better how the group dynamics work. We often had boys who laid in their beds and were served breakfast by their roommates. And they would say 'go and bring me another sandwich'. And, he would bring it too. The same country of origin, but a total difference in the position within the group.* (Dutch supervisor)

Another supervisor stated that boys who fall prey to other boys or adult men are actually not capable of stealing, and 'that's why they often find solace in medication, Rivotril, which provides them with self-confidence, eases their conscience, and numbs them so that they can steal, steal, and steal' (as was also mentioned previously in this Chapter on the section on the nature of multiple problems in Europe). Another supervisor stressed the role of dependency relations in this context: youngsters sometimes receive drugs from an adult man, and once they are addicted to it, they have to sell drugs for that person in order to be able to buy drugs for themselves again.

In her study of a similar group, Von Bredow (2021) states that it is difficult for minors to get out of criminal networks due to threats from the leaders, in addition to the appeal of money. A few supervisors noted that they had supervised children who had purposefully engaged in activities so that they could be taken away by the police, in order to feel secure and not experience the pressure from the networks that they were involved in.

UMs in other EU-countries

Involvement in criminal networks and exploitation: from Goutte d'Or to Germany
As discussed previously on the section on nomadic life, nomadic minors go to different EU-countries in relation to their involvement in criminal activities and networks. In our our research, France seems to emerge as an important country in this regard, with Paris specifically mentioned as a place where minors go to earn money. A Dutch

[29] In case of human trafficking the intention of exploitation is enough and the actual exploitation does not necessarily need to take place. According to Palermo Protocol the definition is: 'Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation' (Article 3a). The same protocol also states that in the case of minors, the presence of coercive measures is not a must: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in persons' even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article (Article 3c)

supervisor shared his/her suspicions regarding the existence of a 'big illegal circuit in which boys can easily get 'medication' or drugs'. In their contribution to the EMN ad-hoc query (2022.26), the French NCP described that minors are very mobile within France and are observed in different cities (see also Trajectoires, 2018; Peyroux, 2021). Both Moroccan and Algerian youngsters are present in France, although the large majority of them are Algerians, according to one researcher. Whereas minors have been observed in other parts of France for as long as two decades in some areas, they have been in Paris for only around ten years (ibid). They are involved in criminal networks and perform activities such as burglary, theft, and the trafficking of contraband cigarettes and drugs. Both a Dutch supervisor and a researcher raised the point that Paris is the place where minors learn 'all the tricks.'

The research conducted by Trajectoires (2018; also Peyroux, 2021) gives some insight into the situation in France, and specifically in Paris. This research shows that there are two groups of young Moroccans involved in small local criminal networks in the district of Goutte d'Or. There are those who have been there for over a year and are more settled or established, who appear to be mainly adults, and the so-called 'newcomers' who may also travel back and forth from Paris and who are often young (Trajectoires, 2018, p. 44; also EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26). 'Moroccan minors are used in a much more opportunistic way' for committing theft as opposed to reselling drugs and contraband cigarettes, as a result of their bad mental and physical state (Trajectoires, 2018, p. 46). Their dependency on multiple drugs keeps them in the web of the criminal network. In the neighbourhood of Barbès, which is part of Goutte d'Or, it is mostly Algerian networks that are active, a fact which was also noted by one of the researchers. A professional from France from the NGO Hors la rue, that works with youngsters in street situation shared his observations:

> *We see that young Moroccan kids are used by older Algerian people. And the Algerian people who do this are also exploited by other Algerians. Young Algerians have access to people who rent them an apartment for a very high price in the suburbs. From there, they take transportation every day to go to Paris. To give them an apartment is another way to exploit these young Algerians. They tell them to steal in order to pay the rent.*

In Bordeaux, a criminal network was revealed: a Belgian professional working on the streets of Brussels explained that it was an Algerian network that used Algerian boys to steal mobile phones and provided them with Rivotril and Lyrica in return.

Some other countries were also mentioned by the respondents in relation to criminal activities, networks, and exploitation, albeit to a lesser extent than France. One researcher spoke of criminal networks in Germany, which specialise in luxury clothing: Moroccan boys (along with German girls) are offered money to steal clothes that are then re-sold in other countries, including Belgium. Several respondents also discussed involvement in criminal activities in Spain. For example, one Dutch supervisor shared that all of the minors she supervises have a background in drug trafficking in Spain. One of the researchers noted that there are minors involved in criminal activities in Barcelona. Much like in the Netherlands (see the previous section), minors may also be introduced to criminality in accommodation centres in Spain, according to several respondents from Spain, who also stated that there were indications of criminal networks. As also mentioned in the previous section, older people or adults appear to be involved in these networks, two of these respondents noted. With respect to Belgium, the aforementioned Belgian professional suspected that there was some organisation

behind the criminal activities that were carried out, which could be driven by networks that are created and ran by boys themselves or networks of local criminal groups who use minors as errand boys, although the scale of this enterprise is unclear.

Exploitation?
Several respondents stated that they had a (strong) impression that nomadic minors are being criminally exploited. Two of the researchers spoke of the 'mafia,' with one of them specifically noting that they control the hashish and Tramadol markets. However, it was hard to get more information about this from the youngsters who are involved. One of the researchers heard stories from boys, which they only shared when they were outside of the networks. Moreover, based on the descriptions given, it is very difficult to find those responsible for the exploitation. The French NCP of EMN also spoke of the (likely) exploitation of nomadic minors by criminal networks (EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26). One Belgian supervisor said that they did not think that minors are being forced; rather, they believed that they are 'creating their own criminal network', and sometimes integrating local people themselves. Similarly, one researcher, who thought it was difficult to get information about this, said that they did not see trafficking or met anyone whom she suspected of being trafficked during the fieldwork. This researcher told us about a young boy who was involved in drug smuggling, showing the strong agency these boys exercise: 'Nobody told me to do it, I do it because I want to do it, because I make money through it, and then send it to my family'. However, the same researcher explained that this does not mean that involvement in criminal networks is not dangerous: one young adult she met in Sweden who was involved in dealing drugs said he had to leave the country because he was afraid of being killed as he had not paid back a certain amount of money. Related to this, Byrne & Bech Hansen (2018, p. 70) state that Moroccan boys in the Nordic states are 'at extreme risk of trafficking or re-trafficking'.

Some other respondents expressed that they found it hard to say with certainty whether exploitation takes place or not. The professional working on the streets of Brussels said that she suspects that exploitation takes place there, since 'life in the streets is not for free.' Although she did not think it is systematic, she did see indications of exploitation. For example, she said she often sees boys who clearly appear to be waiting at the train station for a long time for others to pick them up.

As aforesaid, considering the victim-offender overlap, the line between involvement in criminal networks and exploitation can be a very thin one, and, as discussed previously, youngsters can be easily influenced. In relation to this, the previously quoted professional from Hors la rue stated the following, thereby highlighting how dependency relations and drugs are related to possible exploitation in the context of life on the streets:

> *In my view, there are strong dependency links within these groups. (…) Even if you want to find a job and don't use drugs, you need to find a place to sleep. That is easier if you're part of a group. But to be admitted to a group, they will ask you for instance to find drugs for them. How do you do that? By stealing a mobile phone or a bracelet, or something else. Then sell it and with the money you can buy the drugs. The links of dependency between children are very strong, because you cannot be on the streets without help. It doesn't have to be exploitation. These dependency relationships can however evolve into exploitation.*

In particular, the dependency on drugs, combined with the desire to make (fast) money, is what keeps the boys in the criminal network (see also Maioli et al., 2021).

> *(…) we don't know really precisely how they [intermediaries who buy stolen goods] pressure them. But we think that there is the drug use. I give you drugs, and you can steal with these drugs and after that I will give you another drug to help you be quiet [calm] about it (…) And after that they want more drugs, so they steal to get the drugs. And they need the drugs to steal, so this is (…) a vicious circle.*
> (Professional from Hors la rue)

A comparison between the Algerian and Moroccan groups in France in relation to exploitation

Delving deeper into the French context, specifically in relation to the 'more opportunistic way' of using young Moroccans, Trajectoires (2018) observe that exploitation appears to be more temporary than ongoing. In our interview, the researcher explained this by using the term 'uberization':[30]

> *It is much more, for me, like an 'uberization of trafficking.' Because the network is not working to recruit you from your country, and after [that] you are in another country and you work for them, you know. No. Just for the moment you have information, you have to go there; sometimes you can make money; sometimes you will be trafficked. You never know. But this is how these little networks work.*

According to this researcher, whereas Algerian youngsters can be involved in a criminal network for several months or a year at a time, the situation of especially Moroccan youngsters 'changes very, very fast': sometimes they are exploited, whilst at other times they are 'stealing for themselves' and may move from city to city within Europe when they get into trouble. This highlights another crucial difference between the Algerian and Moroccan groups, which is that whereas the Algerian criminal network is focused on France, and Algerian boys are moving between different French cities, Moroccan youngsters 'are much more mobile between countries [in Europe]'. Similarly, the above-quoted French professional characterised Algerian networks as being 'very organised', which he related to the historical attachment of Algerian people to France. By contrast, both the degree and structure of organisation do not exist when it comes to the involvement of Moroccan youngsters, which is characterised more by fluidity:

> *What we see is that a Moroccan boy one day works for someone who promises him that he'll have drugs at the end of the day. And the other day he doesn't have money anymore and works for somebody else. (…) Still, children can be under a lot of pressure, sometimes they are the victim of violence, they are exploited.*

As mentioned previously, the mobility of youngsters, as well as the use of different aliases and ages are identified by Peyroux (2021) as strategies that are employed by criminal groups to continue their activities, which he mentions in relation to Roma children (see also De Witte, 2018). The above discussion serves to illustrate both the complexity of agency when it comes to criminal exploitation and the simultaneity of carrying out criminal activities and being a victim.

[30] 'Uberization' refers to a change in the market in terms of the way services are bought or used: they are offered more on-demand with direct contact between seller and buyer, via the use of mobile technology (sources: UBERIZE | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary; Uberize definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary (collinsdictionary.com); Uberization - definition, meaning and examples - Glossary - Lectera educational platform.

3.4.5 Other forms of victimisation in Europe

Our analyses demonstrate that nomadic minors with (multiple) problems are (also) subject to other forms of victimisation, most notably, according to our respondents, sexual exploitation and abuse which occur in different contexts.

In Chapter 2, while discussing the family context in the country of origin, we observed that domestic violence, including physical abuse, is not uncommon amongst the target group. It appears that criminal and sexual exploitation co-occur (a finding also reported with respect to criminal exploitation amongst Dutch youngsters, see Leito et al., 2022). Two researchers we talked to cited some concrete examples of cases of sexual exploitation that took place in criminal networks, where dependency relations existed between the members and the 'bosses.' One researcher gives an example from a police investigation into a criminal network in 2019, a network which was involved in stealing goods such as mobiles phones and jewellery. A Moroccan man led the network, which comprised mainly boys from the same neighbourhood, or sometimes even from the same street in Morocco. The group lived in a squat. All the boys had to steal a number of items, and when this did not happen they were sexually exploited (raped) by the leader. 'It was very violent.' The same researcher also referred to cases in which very young children were victims of pedo-pornographic networks, which made them prostitute themselves to earn money in Spain; there were also cases like this in Morocco. He underscored that such situations were a result of 'violence, humiliation, threats or punishment', such as when, for example, children failed to steal enough goods.'

Another researcher refers to another example of sexual exploitation of Moroccan boys within a criminal network:

> *The boys talk about these networks. They force them to do things; many of the boys have been raped and they have been filmed when they are being raped. They are threatened by saying 'we will send this film to your mother and say you are gay'. I have talked to the police and saw some of the files.*

Both supervisors in the Dutch accommodation centres and their Belgian counterparts also reported their suspicions that youngsters have been subject to sexual exploitation or abuse in Europe. They noted that it is taboo to raise this topic with the youngsters as they consider it shameful. It is for this reason that it is difficult to find out that minors have been subjected to these kinds of acts. Notwithstanding the general lack of disclosure, some boys did reveal their stories to their supervisors, either once a strong sense of trust had been established between the supervisor and the minor, or when supervisors kept on probing when they realised that there was something wrong. One Dutch supervisor commented about having observed signals of sexual exploitation by adults who exploit the vulnerability of the group. This supervisor also talked about his/her suspicions that this also occurs in accommodation centres in exchange for protection. The same respondent points out that although this group is predominantly referred to as being troublemakers *(overlastgevers)*, there is no other group as vulnerable as this specific group.

In addition, there are signals that minors are also sexually abused in other contexts. A Dutch supervisor cited the example of a boy, who was offered a lift by a Dutch man from the centre of the town to the accommodation centre that is quite far away from the centre. Meanwhile he was abused by this man. The minor did report the incident to

his supervisors and the man was subsequently detained by the police – as the minor had memorised the licence plate of the car. Similarly, another researcher, who worked in Ceuta with (ex-)UMs living in street situation shared her experience where people in a car driving around the harbour let boys in to perform sexual acts on them for money. According to another researcher, some minors sell their bodies to earn money quickly and 'easily'.

4 Accommodation and guidance of UMs with multiple problems in four countries

One of our research questions (research question 5) was related to the experiences of other European countries, regarding the accommodation and guidance of nomadic UMs with multiple problems, the (policy) measures these countries take, and the results of these measures or policies. As mentioned in Chapter 1, we attempted to do this via two different methods. Firstly, we tried to get a general picture of the situation in Europe via an EMN-adhoc query (2022.26). Secondly, we focused on four countries, namely Belgium, France, Italy and Spain to study their approach to the topics mentioned above, by conducting interviews with professionals in these countries. In this Chapter we present our results from these interviews. While presenting results on Belgium and France, we also include the answers of the Belgian and French EMN-NCPs to the above mentioned ad-hoc query.
During these interviews, in addition to the specific situation in these four countries, we also raised the topic of ways forward and possible solutions on how to deal with the target group of this research (research question 6). At the end of this Chapter we present the results regarding this research question. While doing so, we also include the reactions of our other respondents on the topic (researchers and Dutch supervisors) to be able to present a complete picture of our results.

4.1 Belgium

What became evident from both the Belgian contribution to the EMN ad-hoc query and the interview data, was that the target group of nomadic minors is also present within Belgium, both inside and outside the accommodation system of Fedasil, the federal agency responsible for accommodating asylum seekers. Minors belonging to the group were identified as those who do not ask for asylum in Belgium and who mainly come from North African countries. In Belgium, similar to the Netherlands, the main way of receiving a residence permit is via the asylum-procedure, although there are some other options available (see Box.4.1). In contrast to the situation in Netherlands, UMs who do not apply for asylum are accommodated at one of the locations of Fedasil which is specifically designated to accommodate these minors (for further information on the Belgian accommodation system, see Box 4.1).

Professionals from Belgium as well as one of the researchers put forward reasons why minors do not ask for asylum. One explanation is that minors do not want to be part of the system: the professionals explained that minors may have got into problems with the police in France or Spain and do not want to give their fingerprints. It is possible for them in Belgium to be registered at the Guardian service and to receive accommodation without having to be registered with biometric data (personal communication Fedasil, April 2023). Another reason cited by the researcher is that minors do not want to go to school, which they have to if they ask for asylum. Moreover, they know they do not have a chance of obtaining a residence permit based on asylum. According to the researcher, minors see Belgium as a transit country as opposed to a country they will stay longer in; therefore, not being in the asylum system means that they can easily move to another place if they do not find what they are looking for there. Other reasons put forward by the researcher are that the reception centres are regarded as

'not very nice', and minors do not have to be burdened by all the paper work involved in the asylum procedure if they do not request asylum.

Box 4.1 The accommodation system and legal possibilities for UMs in Belgium

The accommodation system

- The accommodation system for UMs is divided into three phases.[a] The first phase is the observation and orientation phase, which ordinarily lasts approximately two to four weeks and is aimed at both getting to know the minors better and gaining more information related to their psychological, medical and social situation and needs. This information is then used to decide what kind of accommodation is best suited for the minors. During this phase, minors do not yet go to school.
  The second phase is called stabilisation and consists of collective accommodation with mostly 60-100 UMs living in one location. UMs younger than 15 years old or those who are particularly vulnerable are placed in separate reception centres (partly operated by partner organisations), which are more small-scale. During the second phase, UMs go to school and are supervised in their trajectories and future projects. This could consist of requesting asylum, for example. Only those UMs who have received a residence permit, and who have been assessed as being sufficiently self-reliant, move onto the third phase. During this phase, UMs are guided towards leading an independent life.

Non-asylum-seeking minors

- The accommodation centre in Sugny is one of the observation and orientation centres that also accommodates minors who are not requesting asylum, alongside asylum-seeking adults and minors. Minors not asking for asylum may arrive by themselves to Fedasil, which might be for multiple reasons, such as, for example, being fed up with their life on the streets, rainy weather, or wanting a real bed to sleep in, according to one professional working at Sugny. In other cases, minors may be stopped by the police, not always necessarily for breaking the law (it could also be because they cannot show a valid ID card) and are brought to the Fedasil dispatch in Brussels, which then sends them to Sugny most of the time.
- Non-asylum-seeking minors may also enter into the accommodation system directly within the second phase from the closed youth (detention) centre. According to one of the Belgian supervisors, this is commonly the case for minors from North Africa. Another professional explained to us that this pertains to minors who have already had an observation report written about them during their stay in the closed centre – then they do not have to be observed at Sugny and have the possibility of going to school or starting a trajectory.
  Although minors who do not ask for asylum have the same rights as those who do ask for asylum, it may be harder to enjoy those rights in practice because non-asylum-seeking minors do not receive a provisional residence card when they are not registered via any procedure. Furthermore, minors residing in Flanders may only get child benefits when they are registered in a procedure and go to school, in addition to having a legal guardian (personal communication Fedasil, April 2023).

a See the website (available in Dutch and French) of Fedasil: Niet-begeleide minderjarige vreemdelingen (NBMV) | Fedasil.

Right of residence

Best interest procedure

- Similar to the Netherlands, Belgium does not grant UMs a residence permit linked to their minority. A difference with the Netherlands however, is that next to the asylum procedure an additional procedure exists specifically for UMs: the best interest procedure.[b] Although initially this procedure was designed for minors not applying for asylum, the immigration office also receives applications from minors who have exhausted the legal possibilities of the asylum procedure (personal communication DVZ Belgium, April/May 2023). The best interest procedure aims at finding a durable solution for minors, which may be family reunification with the parents of the minor in the country where the parents have legal residence, a return to either their country of origin or a country where a minor is authorised to stay with the guarantee of adequate care and accommodation, or legal residence in Belgium. During this procedure, which also consists of an interview with the UM, all kinds of information is collected, such as, for example, reasons for migrating, the family situation of the UM, life in Belgium and their country of origin, thereby also looking at socio-economic circumstances, the school trajectory, integration within Belgian society, and UMs' social network. UMs are asked about their life ambitions and wishes and vision for the future. Several other factors are also taken into account, such as age, maturity, gender, educational level, sexual orientation, and physical and mental health. An assessment of the best interest of the UM is then made based on all the information collected (personal communication DVZ Belgium, April/May 2023). In the event that the durable solution is decided to be in Belgium, the minor then receives a temporary residence permit for one year which can subsequently be extended.[c] In the event that the durable solution is determined to be return, then the minor is issued a return decision. Importantly, return is only possible on a voluntary basis and with consent of the legal guardian. Around 150-200 applications are assessed every year, of which more than half result in a residence permit. In around one-third of cases, return is seen as the durable solution. There are no statistics available for applications of minors coming from countries in North Africa (personal communication DVZ Belgium, April/May 2023).

Possibilities after legal adulthood

- After turning 18 years old, minors with a temporary residence permit via the best interest procedure can extend their permit if and when they fulfil certain conditions.[d]
- Those minors who neither applied for the best interest procedure nor for asylum have to leave the accommodation centre as they are no longer legally residing in Belgium. The same holds for minors whose asylum application was rejected and who do not have a pending procedure (EMN ad-hoc query 2021.76).
- Interestingly, in relation to education, it is possible for minors without legal residency in Belgium to legally go to school part time and work part time until the age of 25, a fact which was raised by two supervisors.

b See the website of the Belgian immigration office: Determining a durable solution | IBZ.

c To be issued a temporary residence permit the original national passport must be presented, or proof should be provided of the steps taken to establish the identity of the minor. This is assessed on a case-by-case basis. For more information, also on conditions for a permanent residence permit and all situations that may occur when a minor becomes of age, see Determining a durable solution | IBZ.

d Determining a durable solution | IBZ.

4.1.1 Guidance within the accommodation centres

Sugny

As stated in Box 4.1, the accommodation centre in Sugny accommodates minors who have not asked for asylum. The purpose of accommodating minors in Sugny is to create distance from Brussels; the village of Sugny is remotely located in the South of Belgium. A professional from Sugny explained this rationale:

> *The purpose is to put some distance between Brussels, the big town, and the centre, to try to push them to really concentrate and focus on their project, far away from all the problems that they can have in the town, which means drugs and this kind of stuff.*

However, in reality minors often do not stay in Sugny: both professionals from Sugny and one from Brussels told us that minors leave and come back several times and may stay for only two or three days at a time. The reasons for this could be that they have no other place to go or that they want to rest a little. One Belgian professional explained the difficulty related to the lack of a solution for these minors as well as how they try to deal with this:

> *We try to make them focus on themselves, and to say 'OK, the way of life that you have for the moment, you only know this one in Belgium, but there may be other solutions, even if you don't have a solution' – but this is the problem actually [that there is no solution], so it is very difficult. To try to push them step by step to realise, 'Imagine yourself in five years, do you think it will still be a good idea to live on the streets of Brussels?' But it is very difficult, they are teenagers. And so they don't believe, in a way, they have to see it for themselves. And, so, actually the only way is that according to us, what we do is give them maximum information, even also about other countries. For example, if they say, 'I want to go to Germany', we will explain that in Germany it will be like this or like that, not better actually. It is very difficult.*

The fact that the centre in Sugny is an observation and orientation centre means that supervisors try to gain information about the minors and talk to them about what they would like to do with their lives – as one professional mentioned, the general objective does not differ between asylum-seeking and non-asylum-seeking minors. One supervisor cited the example of looking at possibilities to continue education in hairdressing or mechanics, as some minors had undergone some education in the past. What is different compared to asylum seeking minors is that supervisors also aim to make non-asylum-seeking minors aware of their situation and provide them with information on leading an irregular life after becoming 18 years old. Even if they do not use the information immediately, the supervisors hope that some information may stick and will prove useful in the future. Nevertheless, the specific objective may differ for each minor, as it depends on the situation and the specific needs of minors. Whilst, in some instances, there is more space to talk about drug use, in other instances:

> *(…) often enough we are satisfied if a young person can recover a bit here. That he eats well and sleeps well here for two weeks. Then we are glad that he is in better health.*
> (Supervisor at Sugny)

Supervisors explained that they never force a youngster to talk. Rather, they use an informal approach, which entails not speaking to a minor whilst holding a notebook but instead smoking a cigarette with them and talking about football.

More generally, they are 'not too demanding' towards the minors, even though incidents and fights occur and tensions arise with the group of asylum seekers. One of the supervisors made mention of the fact that they do not apply many sanctions besides withholding pocket money or denying participation in excursions. In the event of a big fight or an extremely violent incident, the police are called. Depending on the situation they request a time-out, which means that the minor is temporarily placed at a different centre.

My Future project

Two accommodation centres in the second phase are involved in the project called 'My Future'. As can be read in the Belgian contribution to the EMN ad-hoc query, this was 'developed to check with UMs which possibilities they had left and what would be the most sustainable solution for them' (EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26, p. 8). In the beginning of the project, a collaboration was established with a school to provide tailor-made vocational training trajectories, for which the school received a subsidy, but this initiative eventually 'died silently.' Although mostly UMs whose asylum application was rejected participated in the project, according to the Belgian contact point, several other UMs belonging to the target group of this research also participated. The two supervisors explained that although My Future project consist of a four-day trajectory, they integrate the elements of the project into their daily guidance of minors who stay in the accommodation centre.

According to the two supervisors, the aim of My Future project is to help youngsters make a future plan and identify all the possibilities available to them, which are return to their country of origin, irregular stay in Belgium or move on to another country. Above all, what they stress is the importance of eliminating the taboo surrounding the future and rather to make it a topic that can be discussed. Moreover, the supervisors set out to provide the minors with all of the information they need to make decisions about their life and future. Given that, according to the supervisors, the majority of youngsters end up in an irregular situation in Belgium, they find it important that they give them the right information and prepare them for their life – what is possible and what is not possible anymore. In addition, they also talk about the dangers of exploitation with the youngsters.

> *(…) There are youngsters who already have a clear plan of, 'No, I'm going back to France', or 'I'm going to Italy'. Then, we point them to the fingerprints they left there. Even if you go to France, and you come back, you may want help to return to your country of origin. Those things are discussed. In another case, it may be: 'No, I really don't want to go back. I also don't want to go to another country.' Then you have to discuss, 'What network do you have? Do you have friends? Do you have family whom you can stay with? How do you think you will survive?'*
> (Supervisor in My Future project)

With regards to North African minors, the supervisors explained that they try to go deeper with their topics of conversation, such as, for example, including the issue of voluntary return. They work together with someone from International Organisation for Migration (IOM), who 'is able to reach the youngsters in a respectful, professional way.' Similar to the supervisors at Sugny, they emphasised that youngsters should not

be forced in any way to talk. Rather, they should be given space to think and follow their tempo, as well as being included in everything and communicated with openly and honestly. 'You cannot go behind their backs.' Building a relationship of trust is important but far from straightforward, which is, in part, related to the fact that youngsters from North Africa often relatively quickly leave the centre again. Some may stay a bit longer and, like the supervisor in Sugny also mentioned, they are at least 'able to find some kind of connection here and gain some rest and strength.' One of the supervisors told us about one youngster:

> *Last summer, I closed a trajectory of a youngster coming from a closed detention centre. As a condition for being released he had to follow the My Future trajectory. So, that was really tailor-made. That youngster was not in the centre all the time; at maximum, he came one or two days here, or one night. And then he had to talk to me in the afternoon about his future. Yes, despite everything we persevered, one and a half to two months in the end. But exactly when he turned 18, he was gone. He didn't stay for a minute longer. (…) He had clearly already a plan. He was a guy who actually wasn't a minor. He had his network; he knew very well what he was going to do. Out of respect and knowing it was my job, he listened to me and co-operated. (…) I don't think a lot stuck with him.*

In summary, what both the supervisors from Sugny and the accommodation centre in the second phase try to achieve is to provide youngsters with as much correct information as possible, and to make them aware of their present situation, situations they may face in the future, and what possibilities they have – even though the (legal) options for this group of youngsters are limited.

4.1.2 Guidance outside of the accommodation system in Brussels

In addition to supervisors working in accommodation centres, we also talked to two professionals who both work in Brussels with nomadic youngsters: one who does outreach work on the streets and another of the NGO Macadam running a day shelter. The work of both of them is aimed at getting youngsters off the streets and getting them 'into the system.' The professional running the day shelter received training at the NGO Hors la rue in Paris (for more information on the work of Hors la rue see further section on France).
Concerning the day shelter, around 360 youngsters visited the shelter over the course of an eleven-month period. Around half of them only came once, whilst the other half came more than once. Some of them came every day. The youngsters were almost all boys, with the majority of them coming from Morocco or other countries in North Africa. The shelter, which comprises a team of four to five social workers, is small-scale and provides space for a maximum of ten youngsters. The goal of the day centre is for youngsters to learn to trust the system more, and to 'recreate links with adults and institutions.' The small-scale nature of the centre is seen as important in this respect. Another goal is to create a network of professionals specialising in the group of nomadic youth. They mainly work together with the organisation SOS Jeune, which specialises in drug abuse, as well as with legal guardians.

The professional from Macadam explained that the shelter is a way to get into contact with youngsters. They try to provide a welcoming and caring space and relate to them as humans. 'They [youngsters] are really stigmatised.' The shelter provides showers, meals, and attention, as well as computers and Wi-Fi access. Additionally, they organise (artistic) activities, play board games, and cook together. Activities organised

outside of the centre include visiting a museum, going to the beach, or going kayaking. In this way, they can slowly get to know the youngsters and step by step build trust in the system and create links with it. Social workers accompany youngsters to doctor's appointments, for example, whilst visits are also made to the registration centre of Fedasil to provide them with more information on the accommodation system.

Elements of their approach and the guidance they provide are similar to those of the professionals working in the accommodation system: giving youngsters time and space, providing them with information on the possibilities ahead of them and trying to show them that street life is not the only way of life, even though 'there is no legal opportunities'.

> *[we are] trying to get them to do things that they don't do anymore. Also trying to show them that there are other things that give them joy. And also that's a way to work on the drug abuse, saying 'you have other possibilities to experience joy, to find peace'. To show them another way. For us, it's a way to help them. To get them off the street.*

The aforementioned activities are also seen as a way to give youngsters a break from their street life and show them how life could be different.

Importantly, the shelter has a 'high rate of tolerance', which pertains to the 'philosophy of not having many rules so that everybody can enter the centre'. The only rules are 'no fights and no drugs'. They give second chances, and in the event of a fight ask about why it happened. 'We never stop being in contact with them.'

Both getting into and maintaining contact with youngsters in the streets of Brussels is also a core element of the outreach work that the other professional we spoke to is involved in. This respondent explained that they also collect information about the youngsters and monitor their situation with the aim of informing the local government, so they can take more targeted actions. They ensure that the youngsters they encounter get a legal guardian. They mainly provide humanitarian aid on the spot and provide food and medical help. Given the mobility of the youngsters, they try to give support in the moment as much as possible.[31] An outreach psychologist also accompanies them in the streets and answers the youngsters' questions.
This professional stated that the main challenge for them is to move away from providing purely humanitarian help towards more educational work, which means to 'not only be at service to the youngsters but also to try to get them to do what is in their best interest.' In this regard, she also referred to the work of Hors la rue, which we present below.

4.2 France

As stated previously in Chapter 3, Paris was frequently mentioned by our respondents in relation to both the mobility of nomadic minors and their involvement in criminal networks. In its contribution to the EMN ad-hoc query (2022.26, p. 20), the French contact point described how nomadic minors (*in errance*) 'refuse any form of protection' and are often not part of the child welfare services which are responsible for the

[31] As shared during a meeting organised by the International Knowledge Platform of COA on the support of UMs with little to no chance of obtaining asylum on 4 October 2022.

protection and care of UMs in France (see Box 4.2). According to the French national contact point, these UMs 'represent a small proportion [of all UMs in France], because most of the UMs are willing to integrate' (p. 21).
In France, only a few minors apply for asylum. On the other hand, according to a French professional, there is a lack of knowledge among departmental councils on the subject, while there are minors who would be eligible for receiving international protection. In addition, the administrative steps to be taken are cumbersome and do not constitute a priority for young people, who are effectively protected by the Child Welfare Services as an UM (French NCP-EMN).

With regards to the measures taken in relation to the group of nomadic minors with (multiple) problems, the French NCP-point listed several initiatives in its contribution to the EMN ad-hoc query (2022.26, p. 22-23). These pertained to 'innovative and multi-partnership schemes,' thereby referring to mobile teams of youth and health workers, and 'joint experimental monitoring' between the domains of childcare and justice, which includes 'low-threshold reception areas.' Furthermore, since 2019, the French and Moroccan ministries of Justice and Interior have cooperated on both the identification of minors and establishing contact with their families in Morocco. A legal document was drafted to organise 'returns and placements in families or institutions' in line with the best interests of the child. Concerning measures tackling the issue of involvement in criminal networks and potential exploitation, the French NCP reported in the ad-hoc query (2022.26) that investigations in the city of Bordeaux revealed indications of recruitment of minors by 'more experienced offenders' (p. 23). Other initiatives cited in this regard are the tailored accommodation and guidance of minors 'subject to criminal proceedings', an 'open local educational service' for minors in Paris, and an 'experimental project for UMs in conflict with the law' in Lille (which was expected to start at the time of writing the contribution to the ad-hoc query). The initiatives were not elaborated on any further, and evaluations do not appear to be available.

Box 4.2 The accommodation system and legal possibilities for UMs in France

Accommodation system

- UMs who come to France and announce themselves to the authorities fall under the responsibility of the child welfare services (*Aide sociale à l'enfance*, ASE) and receive social, educational and legal protection and care under the common law for child welfare until they turn 18 years old. They do not need to apply for asylum, which is uncommon among the minors.
- Minors who apply for asylum are accommodated in the same facilities as those who do not. These facilities may include 'children's homes, foster families, social 'hostels'[a], specialised structures such as social children's homes, or semi-independent facilities for the oldest minors. Accomodation differs according to each département,[b] since the child welfare services fall under the authority of the council of each département.
- Nomadic minors (jeunes en errance) may enter the child protection system via the police and justice system. However, these minors often do not stay in the child protection system, and leave; they predominantly live on the streets. This group stands in contrast with other UMs who announce themselves to the child protection services and want to go to school and 'make it' in France.

Right of residence

- Because they are of minor age, UMs do not need to hold a residence permit. Few minors apply for asylum.

Transition into 18+

- UMs need to apply for a residence permit if they want to continue to stay in France after the age of 18. The age at which a minor enters the child protection system as well as their personal situation (e.g. studies, training) has an impact on their legal possibilities. UMs have to apply for a residence permit before 18th birthday.
- Minors who has been in the care of the child welfare services for at least three years may apply for citizenship during their minority. It means therefore that they must have been taken into care by the ASE prior to their 15th birthday.
- When minors entered the child welfare services or are under the care of a trusted person[c] prior to the age of 16, they can apply for a so-called private and family life temporary residence permit in the year following their 18th birthday. This permit enables them to study or engage in a professional activity. The conditions looked at are integration into French society and whether the minor goes to school and follows training.
- Minors who entered the child welfare services or in the care of a trusted person between 16 and 18 years old can apply for a so-called employee or temporary worker residence permit, which is exceptionally issued. In order to qualify for this permit, in addition to the conditions as mentioned in for previous bullet point, minors have to prove that they followed a vocational training course for at least six months. They can apply before their 18th birthday. The head of the department, the Prefect, decides on the residence permit for those minors.[d] Minors who have come into contact with the justice system are not able to receive a residence permit.
- A residence permit may also be issued when a foreign national bears witness or presses charges against a person that they accuse of having committed a crime against them relating to trafficking in human beings or procurement. This residence permit is issued for one year and can be renewed for the entire length of the judicial process. It also opens the right to exercise a professional activity. In the event that the accused person is convicted, a 10-year residence permit shall be issued to the foreign national who bore witness or pressed charges.
- Minors placed within the child welfare services are able to get support until the age of 21. For example, this may be financial, legal or educational support.

a Article 7 of law no.2022-140 of 7 February 2022 prohibits the reception of minors and protected young adults in hotels by 2024. Until this prohibition enters into force, no child may be accommodated for over two months in a hotel, and this accommodation must take place with reinforced physical safety and educational conditions.

b The département is the third level of government in France after the national level and the higher level of the regions (régions). Departments are in turn subdivided into arrondissements and cantons, which in turn consist of the municipalities (communes).

c Law no.2022-140 of 7 February 2022 broadens the possibility of admission to residence of people placed with a trusted third party.

d Instruction relative à l'examen anticipé des demandes de titres de séjour des mineurs étrangers confiés au service départemental de l'aide sociale à l'enfance - Légifrance (legifrance.gouv.fr).

Sources: EMN ad-hoc query 2021.76; EMN ad-hoc query 2022.26; French contribution to EMN Children in Migration 2020; interviews with 2 professionals from France; interview with a researcher; EMN-French NCP.

4.2.1 Guidance on the streets of Paris

Because of the presence of nomadic minors on the streets of Paris, we interviewed a professional running an NGO (Hors la rue) that works with this group. Their team consists of five educators as well as an art-therapist. The professional told us that they have worked a lot with Roma children and for the last seven years also with children from Morocco and 'young men' from Algeria. Alongside their outreach work on the streets, they also have a shelter, which is jointly operated with another NGO.
The main goal of their work is to get youngsters off the streets and into long-term protection in the system. Their shelter is a transitional point or a so-called *trait d'union* (hyphen) between the streets and institutions. The professional described why this transitional space is needed:

> *We got this idea seven years ago when a lot of Moroccan children came to Paris who lived on the streets and who couldn't comply with the rules of the classic shelters. We thought, we need something else. They can't live on the streets but putting them in institutional structures is not a solution either. They are not able to respect the rules and cannot accept that they are in danger. We should work on their drug problems first. Because the drug problem and dependency are the first obstacles for staying in a classical shelter. We try to offer this in-between structure to help the children, first. But also to help the institutions to take care of them.*

The transitional shelter is used to create a bond of trust, as 'they trust no one,' and to reinforce 'the educational' link with the youngsters. The aim is to create awareness regarding their situation as well as reinforcing their capacity to take care of themselves. In this way, they try to move beyond offering humanitarian help and answering youngsters' basic needs.

According to the professional, they do not adopt a 'revolutionary methodology': simply put, they look for the youngsters on the streets, greet them, and talk to them. This can be difficult as youngsters may be under the influence of drugs, for example. They try to make them understand that they are there for them and that they can ask for help if they need it. Besides such conversations, the NGO also provides the youngsters with access to medical help. The professional explained that being there for the youngsters and accompanying them in different situations is important for building trust:

> *So, we are 'le fil rouge' (common thread), we know the children in various situations: we can help them with a doctor, when they have problems with the police, when they have to appear before a judge, when they have problems in their shelter. Our message is: 'we are here to help you'.*

Furthermore, it affords the opportunity to explain to youngsters what different public services, such as a doctor, are able to do for them so that they can seek medical help themselves as well. Another element of their educational approach is that they talk about exploitation with the youngsters, thereby explaining their rights and trying to make them aware that 'stealing is not a free choice.' Similar to the supervisors and professionals in Belgium, they want to provide them with a different perspective and try to make them cognisant of the alternative possibilities to their nomadic life on the streets.

Another important element of their work is that they try to 'humanise' the youngsters and give them an identity, in order to make sure that there are 'no anonymous children', which they achieve by accompanying them in different situations and institutional contexts. They share information with different stakeholders to try to ensure they are both speaking about the same children. In relation to this, the NGO also aims to educate and raise awareness amongst different public services, including the police, about exploitation, and to make them work together in order to protect this group. The fact that the children are mobile and may leave Paris for another city or country can make it hard to always be there for them and know about their situation. In order not to lose track, they use online social media to stay in contact with them and stay informed about where they are and their situation.

As aforementioned, the shelter is positioned as a transition between the streets and institutions. Our respondent provided some insight into the number of youngsters the shelter has supported: six months after opening, the NGO encountered 90 youngsters, of whom 50 went to the shelter. Almost 40 stayed for several nights. The rules of the shelter are not fixed but instead develop in accordance with the group of youngsters present in the shelter and by observing how the group works. After a period of time, some ground rules are set, but youngsters are given second and third chances and the rules are approached with flexibility. For example, youngsters are allowed to smoke cannabis, which is not the case in classical shelters. This makes it important to tackle drug abuse and addiction first, according to the respondent. They do so by working together with professionals working for the partner NGO that co-runs the shelter, who have experience with working on drug addiction. They also have a partnership with a specialised health service in two hospitals in Paris, with whom they organise meetings in which youngsters can speak about their drug use and addiction.

The flexibility with the rules and offering the group on the streets multiple chances can give rise to challenging situations and dilemmas. For example, being flexible regarding youngsters entering and leaving the shelter can mean that those who want to leave will be involved in criminal activities. On the other hand, stopping youngsters from leaving against their will may result in violence inside the shelter. In the event of violent events or incidents, they try to continue working with the youngsters involved, but this has also proved challenging at times. Our respondent referred to a violent incident in which a colleague was involved:

> *(…) my colleague, who is very experienced, she didn't want to stop working. She refused to stop working, because she told me 'I don't want him to think that he makes me quit'. So I want him to see me again, the day after, to tell him, 'I am OK, you did something wrong, but I am still here.'. For me that's very important, because he understood the message. He understood that he did something wrong, because we had several conversations with him after that, but 'OK, you are not evicted. You still have your place.' And, it is not easy because there is a thin line between giving him the feeling that he is powerful and he can do anything without any consequences, but in another way, we told him 'OK, it's not acceptable what you did, but you can do something else, and you can behave in other ways. You can understand what you did and we can work on it.'*

Concerning the results of their work in terms of transition into the system, the professional shared that there have only been a few youngsters who wanted to work on their problems and accepted help. This underscores the challenging nature of working with the group of nomadic minors present on the streets of Paris.

4.3 Italy

Italy is an important entry point into the Mediterranean for many migrants from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Up until the end of the first decade of the year 2000, it was also an important destination for Moroccan migrants, including UMs. The group was considered to be highly confrontational, in the words of one researcher. Although today the itineraries have changed and Spain is now a more common entry point to Europe for this group, there are still Moroccan minors arriving in Italy. Currently, the majority of UMs from North Africa are Tunisian. Italy has developed experience in working with cultural mediation and an ethno-psychological approach (see below), in order to guide UMs in small-scale so-called educational communities (*comunitá educativa)* (see Box 4.3).

Within the context of this research, we approached two professionals from NGOs currently utilising these approaches: one professional was from an NGO in the east of Italy, which is responsible for running one of the small-scale educational centres; and another professional (who is also a legal guardian) from an NGO that, amongst other things, cooperates with educational centres in Sicily to include UMs in the community.

Box 4.3 The accommodation system and legal possibilities for UMs in Italy

The accommodation system

- Although the Italian reception system is financed by the Ministry of Interior, it is organised at the local level; every so-called 'reception project' at the municipal level has a local ownership and is implemented by NGOs.
- There are two levels of reception systems: the first level relates to the arrival of the immigrants; accommodation centres are to be found at the arrival points (such as Sicily). The first level reception system is organised under the responsibility of the state (Ministry of Interior). First level accommodation centres are ordinarily medium and large-scaled centres, where minors by law should stay for 30 days. However, in practice this can be a period of some months.
- The second level reception system, Integration and Reception System (SAI), which is also financed by the Ministry of Interior, is under the institutional responsibility of the municipalities, but is based on national laws and rules. The SAI is a voluntary system, which means that a municipality can apply to get funds to open a reception project, if it so wishes. Consequently, not every municipality has a 'reception project'. Every local project can have its own characteristics but must follow an institutional mandate. The differences between single local accommodation projects are due to differences between NGOs that manage the projects as well as local and regional rules and practices.
- Accommodation centres at the second level are small-scaled; every centre is able to receive a maximum twelve minors, but usually hosts ten minors. They are called 'educational communities' (comunitá educativa), with every centre having its own educational team. Every NGO can determine how to design their own educational community; they can be gender-specific or mixed for boys and girls.
- The educational communities at the second level are ordinarily located in small municipalities or in the centre of the cities; this to facilitate a better inclusion of the minors within the local community.

Right of residence

- UMs do not have to ask for asylum to regularize their stay in Italy. All minors have the right to a residence permit due to being a minor. They have the same rights as any Italian or European citizen minor. The duration when the minor receives this permit can vary due to different implementation practices of the local office of the Ministry of Interior (the police office).
- The residence permit for minors is valid until they reach the age of eighteen, with a possibility to extend it until 21 (see below).
- According to the legislation (the so-called Zampa framework law regarding minors – which has been in effect since April 2017), identification papers are not necessary for the residence permit.
- The residence permit for minor age is given with the purpose of inclusion in Italy and is valid only in Italy. The integration path of the minor has to be approved by the juvenile court – that it is in the best interest of the minor. Sometimes this is a bureaucratic procedure.
- UMs may apply for asylum if they are in need of international protection. Those who apply for a residence permit for minor age may apply simultaneously for international protection. UMs who are granted a refugee status receive a five-year renewable residence permit. Minors from North Africa, are considered to be coming from safe countries.
- Minors coming from safe countries or who do not qualify for refugee status or subsidiary protection but who are nevertheless in need of protection (e.g. those from Tunisia, Senegal, Gambia, Bangladesh) can be granted a 'special case protection' permit (permesso per protezione speciale). This is a permit given for humanitarian reasons (e.g. for victims of domestic violence or serious work exploitation, persons in urgent need of medical care, persons coming from a country that is in a temporary situation of natural disaster)a and is valid for two years, and is renewable for one year. After the expiration of this period, this permit must be converted into a permit of stay for job or study reasons. The recent decrete-law no. 20/2023 has strongly restricted the conditions to get a permit for special case protection. Only a few minors apply for the special case protection; instead they apply for residence permit for minor age.

Internship and work possibilities

- The minimum age of admission to work is set at the time when the minor has completed the period of compulsory education and in any case cannot be less than 16.
- UMs who are 16 years or older and who are still at school can combine the curriculum with an internship for practical training on the job, which is not paid.
- Those who finish the first level of secondary school (La Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado) can do paid internship in different kinds of enterprises for six months (UMs are then ordinarily 17 or 18 years old). There are different kinds of internship: paid by the SAI funds (Ministry of Interior), paid by the enterprises, paid by local municipalities, or paid by other projects.
- Starting from 16 years old, UMs are allowed to work for 40 hours/week. It is then also possible to get a paid contract for three years to do apprenticeship at an enterprise to gain qualifications (contratto di apprendistado). After three years, this contract can be prolonged or changed (this is also possible after becoming 18). In case they are still at school, they may not work more than 20 hours/week.
- It is a condition that a job-contract before 18 years old must provide some hours of training.

Transition to 18+

- UMs can receive guidance in the educational centres of SAI for another six months after they turn 18.
- UMs who are about to turn 18 and who were granted a residence permit due to being a minor, have the possibility to continue with their guidance and integration until they are 21, in order to complete the social-inclusion path they have started (education or work) – the so-called 'administrative continuation'. The request for administrative continuation must be submitted to the juvenile court before the minor turns 18, by social services or the legal guardian.
- After turning 18, UMs can also apply for a permit for finding work (the so-called attesa occupazione). In this case, having a passport from the country of origin is compulsory.
- After the age of 21, ex-UMs who had a residence permit on the grounds of being a minor can legally stay in Italy wi the condition that they have a job. Having a passport from the country of origin is compulsory.

a Uzureau (2022).

Sources: interviews with two Italian professionals from different regions.

4.3.1 *Guidance of UMs within a small-scale educational community and inclusion in the community*

Organisation of the reception project

The educational community which we gathered information on forms part of a 'reception project' in a municipality in the east of Italy. The project consists of five educational communities and is run by four different NGOs that put their resources together. These communities accommodate different numbers of minors: one 12 minors, two communities four minors, and two communities five minors (altogether they can accommodate a maximum of 30 minors). The educational community that we approached can accommodate 12 minors, all boys. In every educational community there is always one educator present, and for half of the day usually two educators. In addition, every project has a social worker, who decides together with the project team where the newly arriving minor is to be placed. The decision over which region the minor will be placed in is determined by a governmental institution *(Servicia Centrale*) in Rome, depending on the level of capacity in the regions.

In the project, generally speaking, around half of the minors are from Bangladesh, whilst the remaining half comes from countries like Egypt, Albania, Pakistan, Morocco and Tunisia, or countries in West Africa such as Guinea and Senegal. This population is considered to be more or less representative for UMs in Italy.

In terms of the guidance that is provided, the needs and wishes of the minors are considered to be central. The goal of the minors is usually to get a job, rather than studying, in order to pay their debts to smugglers and/or to send money back to their families. The guidance in these cases is focused on how to help the minors find a job through an internship.

Guidance of minors

The teams in the centres collaborate with different multidisciplinary and cross-organisational professionals to promote the integration path of the minor, such as, for

example, cultural mediators and psychologists. The psychologists who collaborate with the centre are not part of the educational team, but rather are part of the public health services. According to our respondent, this is important because it encourages the minor to see the psychologist as a 'safe person' who is outside of the team. The costs of visiting the psychologists are covered by the 'projects.' The psychologists who work with the minors specialise in an ethno-psychological approach (see below). The educational communities also apply a 'territorial approach' with the express goal of including the minors in the local community. To this end, educational centres try to work with third-party actors (such as other NGOs). Another objective is to try to engender changes in the attitude of the local community by organising events with these third-party actors (such as organising lunches in families).

According to our respondent from the project, they have encountered cases of boys with multiple problems, although not often. In these instances, it ordinarily concerns boys from North Africa. She underscored that the starting point of dealing with UMs with multiple problems is prevention. When the educators observe that a boy is 'not feeling well,' then measures are taken to send him to a psychologist. The team works preferably with psychologists who work with cultural mediators and who apply an ethno-psychological approach. According to our other respondent in Sicily, these psychologists are trained in psychology as well as in anthropology. She pointed out that the ability of these minors to talk to a psychologist or to have follow-up sessions are limited. There is a high level of stigma associated with psychologists and at the same time, the psychological approach is medical and Eurocentric. Conversely, in the ethno-psychological approach, the psychologists try to combine the classical medical, Eurocentric approach with spiritual, mystic resources (i.e. directed to those minors for example, who believe in evil eye or black magic) and cultural elements which are tailored according to the individual needs of the minors.

According to both of our respondents, working with cultural mediators is essential for providing guidance to minors. Our respondent who works at the reception project underscored that in the Italian reception system, there are no centres working without cultural mediators. Cultural mediators are external consultants who always have a migration background and are from the same ethnic background as the minor. Their role is miscellaneous: they act as linguistic facilitators during the important moments (e.g., when they have an interview, giving legal advice). In addition, they play an essential role in terms of engaging in continuous communication with a minor's family in their country of origin, especially in terms of helping the parents understand that their son cannot send money immediately, but rather must first learn the language, go to school and then find a job:

> *Negotiating with the family is very important; talk, talk, and talk. All the time there are the project's goals, the minor's goals, and the family's goals. We have to find a way to negotiate and find a goal which is good for all these actors. For example, there was a minor from one of the North African countries, who was 15 years old and really intelligent. For him, sending home money was really, really important. So, we had to speak digitally a lot of times with the parents. The cultural mediator was then fundamental, as he explained to the parents how the system in Italy works and that we were not against him having a job. We would help him to find a job, but we needed more time than what they thought. So, we just tried to give a temporal perspective to their needs, dreams, and ideas. And we managed. But when you manage, it is not the end of the talks. Maybe later the parents change their mind, which you can observe because you see that the guy starts to feel*

nervous; he starts to say, 'I want to find a job'. It is continuous work. Over the course of many talks, we eventually make them agree with the choice to first go to school and then find a job. (Manager of a small scale reception project)

In addition, the cultural mediators play a role in terms of both helping minors understand concepts that are culturally oriented and creating a bridge between UMs and the Italians in the community.
Our respondent from the reception project also referenced that efforts to guide boys with multiple problems do not always work. In some cases, via psychological therapy, the team is successful in reducing the problems and helping the youngster find their way, whilst in other cases they are less successful:

Sometimes it is hard, because even if the reception centre is a small-scale centre and this permits us to stay very close to the guy, to control him and to support him, when the behavioural problems start, sometimes it is difficult to find tools, because they do not respect the rules of the centre. So, it is complicated, really complicated. But what I think and what I saw is that what really works is the small scale. The fact that there are a few minors means that we can provide really close support and stay with them step by step. That is really important. If these guys are in a centre with 20 or 30 places, I think they get lost.

Although this system in general works well, the respondent stated that there are also bottlenecks, including amongst other things, access to regular public mental healthcare: psychologists are unwilling to accept these boys due to capacity problems, inexperience with the specific problems of the group, or out of reluctance to work with them. To solve the problem, the reception projects pay the psychologists from the private sector by using the finances of the project. However, in this way a 'parallel' private-social system' is created, which is not desirable. For more serious mental health issues, public sector psychiatrists are consulted, but in combination with the project psychologist (the psychiatrists from the public sector are also unwilling to work with the group due to inexperience with the group, but when they are with the psychologists who also work with the project, they are more willing to accept the minors). In all of these cases, the cultural mediator is involved.

Experiences with internships
The professional from an NGO in Sicily talked about the positive effects of internship system (see Box 4.3). According to her, in the past, minors were sleeping all day, were unmotivated and depressed due to the long procedures (including those involved in asylum procedures). She remarked that it was important to 'push' the minors, together with all the parties, by entering the communities and organise campaigns, so that the boys who were really depressed would be motivated to follow internships instead of lying in bed all day. From her experience, combining school with internships had a positive influence on the day and night rhythm of the UMs:

Before they felt depressed because the procedures sometimes took long, and without the permit they felt like they didn't exist. Being engaged in an internship helped them a lot. Because they were acquiring skills on the job and they were also earning some money to transfer to their families, or to buy something [for themselves]. This supported them in being more in balance psychologically.

Our respondent from the reception project in the east of Italy stated that around 50% of the minors in her project find a job, after following an internship.

4.4 Spain

Spain is the main point of entry for Moroccan UMs into Europe. As discussed in section on nomadic life in Chapter 3, according to our Spanish respondents the majority of UMs stay in Spain, whilst a minority of them move onto other European countries. UMs can legally reside in the country by virtue of being of minor age. According to the Spanish Aliens Act, they can neither be expelled from Spain nor can they be detained for having an irregular status (see Box 4.4). In this section, we describe the recent reforms that came into force in November 2021 targeting (ex-)UMs and the organisation of accommodation centres for UMs with (multiple) problems in Catalonia, transnational mediation activities between Morocco and Spain, and the guidance of children who are living on the streets in Ceuta (an enclave of Spain in North Africa).

Box 4.4 The accommodation system and legal possibilities for UMs in Spain

Accommodation

- In Spain, both the accommodation and guidance of UMs are under the responsibility of the public child protection services, which are regionally organised by autonomous communities.
- Until UMs are 18 years old, they are accommodated in *centros abiertos de proteccion* (open centres of protection).
- In 2018, a high inflow of immigrants and especially minors started and specific centres have been created for UMs in those areas of arrival. In other places, the UMs stay with other Spanish and foreign children who are in a neglected situation and are under the protection of child protection services.
- Scale of centre of protection differs per children's age, region and even per city.

Right of residence and work

UMs

- The Alien's Law, which is national, determines the right of residence for migrants, including UMs. According to this law:
  - UMs have the right to legally reside in the country due to being a minor.
  - UMs are neither expelled from Spain nor they are detained for having an irregular status.
  - UMs must always be under the protection of child services; unless they enter the child protection system they cannot be documented as unaccompanied minor.
  - In cases where there are doubts about the age, actions are taken to determine the age for the purpose of agreeing on measures for their protection as a minor or adult.
- It is important that the autonomous communities and NGOs offer ex-UMs training in sectors where there is a need for workers.
- Before UMs are given authorisation to stay (residence permit), officials work on identifying the minors and contacting their parents (see further section on transnational mediation) and/or the embassy to make sure that it is in the best interest of the child to stay in Spain. With the 2021-modification, the identification period and the process to accredit impossibility of return has been decreased from nine months to three months. The residence permit has to be issued within one month after this period of maximum three months.

- If at any point it becomes clear to the administration that it is in the best interest of the minor to return to his country, a repatriation file (not expulsion) is opened. This is a procedure that is always carried out by listening to the child and with the authorization of the Public Prosecutor's Office for Minors. As this repatriation file is an administrative procedure, it can be appealed by the minor or his legal representative.The law for the legal protection of minors, LO 4/1996, establishes that all public and private institutions must ensure the principle of the best interests of the child. In this process different institutions participate that must be coordinated, such as the prosecutor's office for minors and foreigners, the Ministry of the Interior, the autonomous communities, the Secretary of State for Migration, the General Directorate for Children and the Family, and the diplomatic representation.
- If the minor has no passport and no possibilities of processing one with the authorities of the country of origin, an identity card (cédula de inscripción) will be processed and then the residence permit.
- Since this reform, UMs who are 16 years or older and who are under the protection of the child-protection system are allowed to work similar to all children in Spain between 16 and 18 years old (maximum 8 hours/day). The work permit is valid for two years.
- UMs who stayed in the protection centres as a minor leave the centre with a residence permit (autorización de residencia y trabajo), maintaining the possibility of working throughout the year.
- In Spain, school is compulsory until 16 years of age; but there is no obligation to obtain a diploma. Generally, UMs from the age of 16 continue studying, do some vocational training, and/or learn Spanish. They can combine work with vocational training – or other studies if they want to.
- UMs with a family member in Spain are not considered as UMs and are not given a work permit. An exception in this regard is when it is proven that these family members are either putting the minor at risk or the minor is being neglected.
- The residence and work permit for UMs is strictly national and is not valid in other EU-countries. UMs who fall under this regime do not have the right to family reunion, during the validity of this type of residence permit.

Ex-UMs (ex-tutelados)
Under the new regulations, a new system is established for minors who reach adulthood to prevent them from staying in an irregular situation and being socially excluded. The requirements depend on whether they obtained a residence permit when they were a minor or not:

i Ex-UMs who were under the protection of child services as an UM and have the residence permit before turning 18
They are granted a residence and work permit for two years – on the condition that they have economic resources, for example:
  - economic means from employment, any social system, or also be met
  - by NGOs – the latter of which was previously not possible, or
  - having a minimum 'vital income' (Ingreso Mínimo Vital) (469 euro's per month for a single adult; the amount was previously higher).
- After two years, as long as they have a job or unemployment subsidy, the residence and work permit is extended for another two years. After five years they can receive a permanent residence permit.

- For the initial permit, ex-UMs must not have a criminal record. Once they have been living in Spain for a while, small criminal records such as traffic offences may not be valued or taken into account. If the offence was in the past, then one has to ask for the cancellation of the criminal record to be able to receive a permit in Spain. In cases where one was only a suspect, decision is made depending on the individual case.
  Criminal records originating from the period of minority are never taken into account. In Spain, the records of minors are not computable.
- For ex-UMs with a residence permit, family reunion with parents is only possible when ex-UMs can prove that the parents are economically dependent on them – a rule that applies for any other adult migrant living in Spain.

ii Ex-UMs who were under the protection of child services as UM but turn 18 before obtaining the residence permit

- They must apply at the Immigration Office within 60 days prior or 90 days after reaching the age of majority.
- They are granted access to an authorization to reside and work with the same requirements regarding income as the ex-UMs who were under the protection of child services as a minor.
- They cannot have any criminal records.
- The duration of the permit is also for two years.
- Their participation in programs developed by public or private institutions to promote their inclusion in the society are taken into account.

iii Transitory agreement: Undocumented ex-UMs who were between 18 and 23 years of age at the time when the new regulation entered into force, who had been under the protection of child services, but are in a situation of irregularity:

- For ex-minors between 18-23 years old and who are undocumented and in a situation of irregularity there is a transitory arrangement. This group consists of: those who arrive undocumented at the age of majority, or those who arrived as minors but who turned 18 before having the opportunity to receive a residence permit as minors due to the duration of the identification and evaluation process (it is possible that during the identification process a minor reaches the age of adulthood) or those who could not meet the requirements of the previous regulation – as it was difficult to meet the economic requirements.
- Before the modification of the Aliens Act, ex-UMs had to have one year full time employment contract to be able to stay in Spain legally. This transitory arrangement allows them to obtain a residence and work permit under the new regulation, provided that they do not have a criminal record, and meet the requirements established in the new regulation. Also, their participation in programs developed by public or private institutions to promote their inclusion in the society are taken into account.

Sources: Interview with the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration; answers of the Spanish NCP to the EMN Ad-hoc Query on Transition to Adulthood (2021.76); Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes & Fundación San Juan del Castillo Pueblos Unidos (2022).

4.4.1 Legal possibilities for (ex-)UMs

The Spanish legal system for (ex-)UMs underwent an important change in November 2021. The main aim of the modification was to both promote the integration/inclusion

of (ex-)UMs into Spanish society and prevent UMs from ending up in a situation of irregularity and social exclusion, after they reached the age of adulthood. From that point onwards, UMs have been allowed to work once they are 16 (8 hours per day and only during the day), and there are possibilities for undocumented ex-UMs to regularise their stay in Spain (see for details and requirements Box 4.4). As stated by a Spanish official:

> *There are young Spanish people who do not want to work but these boys do, and they can contribute to our country by working, instead of collecting social services or staying in prison.*
> *During the pandemic there was nobody to pick vegetables, fruit, etc., as nobody wanted to go out of the house. But these boys were ready to do that. If they didn't do that, we couldn't simply eat tomatoes. Also during the pandemic, they went to charities to distribute food, vegetables, because nobody else wanted to do that. These boys showed us that they can contribute. They are ready to help and show I am a good person, recognise me'.*

Another Spanish official pointed out that these reforms should be viewed within the context of the obligation to protect children, whilst the government also takes measures to control immigration:

> *You cannot have measures to attract minors; but once you have them in Spain, I don't think it makes sense to punish them; you have to protect them. I don't think that it makes sense to punish those minors just to make sure that others don't come.*

According to a Spanish official, the results regarding the modification of the Aliens Act in 2021 are quite positive. NGOs have seen a big change in the attitude of youngsters, who are more willing to study and to integrate themselves.

Initially, it was estimated that through the new legislation 8,000 UMs and 7,000 ex-UMs would be integrated into the society and labour market. An initial evaluation in March 2022 showed that since November 2022, a total of more than 9,300 people from these two categories have been granted a residence permit, mostly as a result of the recent reform (77% of requests)[32]. It concerned 3,504 UMs and 5,817 ex-UMs. In the latter group, there were 3,300 youngsters who had ended up living illegally because of losing their right of residence upon reaching adulthood. At the time of the evaluation, 1200 applications for residence permits were still pending. The evaluation also showed that the number of those who are working in the total group (UMs and ex-UMs) doubled since the amendment of the law came into effect: from 2,727 workers in November 2021 to 4,599 in March 2022. According to more recent numbers from the Ministry,[33] more than the expected initial number of (ex-)UMs applied to benefit from the new regulation: files of a total of almost 17,000 (ex-)UMs have been processed within a year, since November 2021.

According to the government official we talked to, over 65% of UMs and ex-UMs are working. By June 2022, there were 12,083 minors and ex-minors of working age registered (16 to 23 years old); the majority of these are Moroccan UMs (around

[32] https://www.inclusion.gob.es/documents/20121/1338501/Diapositivas+de+balance+del+Reglamento_4277-4664.pdf/c4371c32-6d49-9d91-c71e-e7575f80a93a?version=1.0&t=1654266245000&download=false.
[33] https://www.inclusion.gob.es/en/web/guest/w/inclusion-registra-casi-17.000-expedientes-de-jovenes-tutelados-y-extutelados-que-facilitan-su-insercion-social-y-laboral.

75%). Initially, most of the minors were working in the agricultural and hospitality sectors, which are still the most important sectors (the hospitality sector is the number one sector instead of agriculture). Since the 2021 reform, the range of occupations has expanded to include commerce, the manufacturing and construction industries, and administrative work.
The Spanish official remarked that youngsters are now getting older with the necessary permits as a result of the new regulation, and it gives them an incentive to stay in Spain, insofar as they can now see that they can comply with their migration ideals. She stated that recently there has been another change in Spanish migration legislation that introduces the possibility for adults who have an irregular existence in Spain to be regularised if they express a willingness to follow training on the job, namely in sectors that lack workers in Spain. According to this professional, this reform will also benefit (ex)-UMs.

Another Spanish respondent stated that although there is structural unemployment in Spain, there are some sectors where the labour-shortage was quite high due the unattractiveness of the available jobs to Spanish people, their reluctance to move geographically within the country to areas where the labour demand is, and the changing demographic structure of the country (aging). According to this respondent, UMs do not mind moving geographically, which is also a general trait amongst foreign people in Spain.

Notwithstanding these initial positive experiences, one Spanish professional working with (ex-)UMs drew attention to the following situation: ex-UMs who left Spain because they were either irregularly living outside the system or had left the system are currently coming back to Spain to arrange papers. She remarked that for this group it remains difficult to get a residence permit due to the requirement of not having a criminal record. When they were living on the streets, they often committed (petty) crimes, although they subsequently gave up a life of delinquency and are now studying or working. Another Spanish professional also highlighted the importance of social integration in addition to economic integration.

4.4.2 Protection centres (centro de proteccion) in Catalonia

In Spain, both the organisation of protection centres *(centro de proteccion)* and the guidance provided to UMs fall under the responsibility of seventeen different autonomous communities. Consequently, according to our Spanish respondents, there are notable differences in the way the protection centres are organised, and the scale of them (see Box 4.1), the nature of the guidance provided within each community and how saturated (i.e. the extent of their full capacity) the protection centres are.
During the data collection process, it was not possible to talk to supervisors from a protection centre in Spain. Instead, we were able to talk with professionals from the Directorate General for Minors and Adolescents in Catalonia, the body that is in charge of the organisation of child protection services.
According to our Spanish respondents, Catalonia, predominantly Barcelona, is the destination for many Moroccan UMs who enter the country from the south, or the point they pass through if they move onto other European countries. They also stated that the region of Catalonia is a good example in terms of providing guidance to children with (multiple) problems. As aforementioned, the Spanish respondents stressed that minors with (multiple) problems are a minority in Spain. One professional stated that this usually pertains to children who are living on the streets, mostly in Melilla and Ceuta, and also in Catalonia, where specific programs are developed to give young-

sters social-psychological support (see below). Regarding the supervision of minors with (multiple) problems, another Spanish respondent remarked that, in Spain, generally speaking, the treatment of drug addiction and the ensuing mental health problems constitutes a bottleneck. Drug addiction treatment centres are not always able to take care of the needs of UMs or recognise their problems.

In 2018 and 2019, more than 7,000 unaccompanied young migrants arrived in Catalonia, which created a challenge for the protection system. During that period, different projects were started, such as, for example, projects trying to teach the youngsters skills to help them get a job, so that they can become good professionals in a few years, and projects working with boys who had lived on the streets in their country of origin, who have mental health problems, addiction and other issues. During the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, more than 2,000 unaccompanied young migrants arrived in Catalonia, a number that was higher than the number of arrivals between 2011 and 2015. In 2022, this number rose to 2,300. At the time of our interview, there were more than 5,400 youngsters under child protection services from different nationalities; the majority of them where from Morocco. Sixty percent of unaccompanied young migrants in the system are 18+. Every month, around 200 more minors arrive to the region.

In Catalonia, there are many different types of protection centres, where UMs are accommodated within the general child protection system, including Spanish children.

UMs arriving in Catalonia first arrive in a 'welcome/emergency' centre for UMs (*Dispositiu de Atenció Immediata, DAI)*. This is considered to be a large centre with a capacity for 30 UMs, where the minors stay, on average, between 24 to 72 hours. The centre provides basic assistance (food, clothing, hygiene, medical assistance). There is also assistance for identification. The staff at the SPE consist of psychologists, nurses, social workers, educators, and interpreters. Psychologists and educators hear about the future 'life-plans' of the minors (stay in Catalonia or move on further). After DAI, minors are then referred to an Emergency and protection centre (*Servei de protecció d'emergència – SPE),* which also has a maximum limit of 30 UMs. There, they can stay for a period of 15 days to two to three months maximum. In SPE, the professionals collect information about the family of the minor, whilst in the event that the minors have family in Catalonia, they meet them; receive information about documentation; and investigate the personality and needs of the minor. Consequently, a decision is then made regarding which type of centre the minor should be placed in: a centre with more educational assistance (*Servei de primera acollida i atenció integral*- for minors until the age of 18*)* or centres where they have more autonomy (flats – *pisos*), for minors aged between 16 to 18 years old. In both these types of centres, youngsters can be protected until the age of 21 if they need additional guidance. Children under 15 years old are, in principle, placed in foster families.

4.4.3 Protection centres and guidance for youngsters with (multiple) problems in Catalonia

Most of the boys with (multiple) problems (such as substance abuse and mental health problems) are referred to two different types of centres in the protection system after *Servei de protecció d'emergència, SPE*. These youngsters mostly leave SPE after the maximum duration of stay (two to three months), where the professionals choose which path the boy needs to take. Within child protection services, there are two options for boys with (multiple) problems (e.g. addiction problems, mental health issues), i.e. centres with more educators, psychologists, therapists who arrange group

therapy, where there is more individual/intensive attention and supervision). These are discussed below.

> *If they stay in 'regular' centro de proteccion, they can harm themselves, other boys, or the educators. It is thus important to stay in a centre that is looking out for them and meets with them, where there are more educators, as this is necessary to help them.*

CREI (centres residencials d'educació intensiva; residential care centre with intensive education):
Centres for intensive education units apply a combination of schooling, socio-educational and therapeutic approaches to deal with behavioural disorders and protection of the target group. The interdisciplinary teams are specialized in dealing with conflict situations (such as teachers, social educators, psychologists, nurses).

The main aims are, amongst other things, i) to reintegrate the minors in a more normalising context in the quickest time possible, through the application of socio-educational and therapeutic techniques that promote the reduction of psychological problems and an improvement of their emotional situation and personal well-being, ii) to provide the minor with a daily environment that facilitates positive experiences of bonding, support and affection, and allows him to acquire new communication and social relationship guidelines (Direcció General d'Atenció a la Infància i l'Adolescència, 2017).

A minor can be placed in CREI when intervention through other protective measures is not possible (such as placement in a foster family). To place a boy in these kinds of centres, an approval from a judge is required, despite the fact that the centre is under the responsibility of the Directorate General for Minors and Young Adults, because there is a restriction of the basic rights of the child (deprivation of freedom) due to security reasons, when there is a risk of harming themselves or others. The judge must confirm that this is in the best interest of the child, that is, that it is necessary for the boy, for their mental health or other issues such as substance abuse (e.g. pills but also tobacco or alcohol) to be placed in CREI.
It could be that at first the boy studies within the centre, whilst also being allowed to go out. It is also possible that in the second month he is able to attend a school outside the centre. Protection services need the approval of the judge every month depending on the boy's situation and take decisions based on he is evolving.

Minors with (multiple) problems who are at least 12 years old can stay in CREI for six months up until one year (if necessary, they can stay for two years, but this seldomly happens) or until they are 18 years old. After they turn 18, the youngsters are free to go wherever they want, but sometimes they ask for the continuation of the protection; for example, when a minor of seventeen and a half years old comes to this centre and asks to stay longer after he turns 18, he can in order to finish their treatment and studies.

CREIs ordinarily accommodate around 20 children, including Spanish children who are in the majority in these centres. There is one CREI with 40 children, where there are four groups. There are separate spaces and educators for each group.

Therapeutic centres:
These are meant for much more serious mental health and drug addiction issues. Highly specialised teams (on health or socio-health) develop a specific program of therapeutic intervention, in order to attend to children or adolescents affected by mental disorders, who need to follow treatment under medical supervision under conditions of continuous care. Currently, there is only one therapeutic centre with 42 children. They share the space and the educators.

In addition, to the above mentioned two specialized protection centres, there is a *Transcultural medical unit for mental health,* which is considered to be unique to Catalonia, probably also in the whole of Spain. The medical unit is part of an international consortium and aims to work on improving the mental healthcare provided to immigrant populations, including UMs. Mental disorders associated with migration, such as anxiety disorders or post-traumatic stress disorders, are part of what they focus on there.[34]

Training for educators in protection centres to avoid substance abuse
Although there is currently no data on substance abuse in Catalonia, it is known that there is substance abuse in protection centres. It is suspected that minors with (multiple) problems constitute a small minority and that those who are using drugs and alcohol, or causing incidents, also outside the protection centres, tend to be the same youngsters.

> *They are small in number but they 'make noise'; that's why it seems to be a larger number, but it is not. We have them, but we don't count them.*
> (Professional, Directorate General for Minors and Adolescents in Catalonia)

The Directorate General for Minors and Young Adults established in cooperation with an NGO yearly, compulsory training for both educators and the directors of the protection centres about how to prevent drug use. More specifically, they are trained in how to prevent the use of drugs, types of drugs, how to deal with the boys when they are on drugs or drinking, in addition to which educational strategies to apply in these cases.

> *For example, you notice or smell that someone is drinking; first day, second day, OK, and the third day 'you have to do this and this'. When you have thousands of UMs it is difficult to attend to everyone. It is important that the educators learn how to react in these situations, then you can help the boys better. It is obligatory for the educators and directors to take this training – this is also the case for mental health issues, etc. It is obligatory for the trainers to make a plan with the goals of the boys this year, for the coming year, etc., until they turn 18. We are very forceful! The goal of the General Directorate is that every centre works in the same way. This is not 100% possible, but we try.*
> (Professional, Directorate General for Minors and Adolescents in Catalonia)

4.4.4 Transnational social mediation between Spain and Morocco

During the interviews with some Spanish respondents, our attention was drawn to the importance of cross-border mediation activities between Spain and families in Morocco. The transnational mediation approach is based on meeting the needs of UMs, other

[34] El proyecto europeo MyHealth, liderado por Vall d'Hebron, mejorarà el acceso a la sanidad de los inmigrantes | VHIR - Vall d'Hebron Institut de Recerca (vallhebron.com).

young migrants and their families and protecting the rights of the migrants. With respect to UMs, it focuses mainly on helping them to obtain two necessary documents from Morocco in relation to the legal stay of the minors in Spain as well as communication with the family. Wasata (which literally means 'mediation') Sans Frontiers is the NGO in Morocco that is responsible for this issue. The organisation is part of a network in France, Spain, Italy and Sweden, Malmö, which developed the approach of transnational mediation. It is also involved in transnational mediation between Morocco and Belgium. Transnational mediation concerns the following issues:

- *D*ocumentation: when a minor is referred to the protection centre and his identity needs to be established, the centre then gets into touch with Wasata in order to mediate the process of obtaining the necessary documents. With the explicit approval of the minor, Wasata attempts to contact the family in order to get them to look for the documents or request them from the authorities in Morocco. It is possible that the family cannot deliver the papers (for example, because, according to a Spanish professional, the parents are split up and the father has the so-called 'family-book' as it belongs to him). It is also possible that the Moroccan authorities do not want to cooperate in providing proof of identity, or that the youngster has completely lost contact with their family. In such cases, Wasata tries to find the family, which they are mostly successful at. Once the family has been traced, Wasata tries to make it clear to the parents that they have to take responsibility for their son, who is in Spain, and that it is their responsibility to cooperate with them to obtain the identity papers for him. In the majority of cases, this concerns poor families, who also do not have the necessary information that they need to apply for government ID papers. Another Spanish professional pointed out to us the importance of having someone in Morocco who knows the regulations in both Spain and Morocco.
- Mediating between the minor and the family socially: Mediation between the minor and their family also has a social aspect. The professional from Wasata described this as follows:

  > *For example, a boy is in a shelter and behaves very badly. He doesn't follow the rules, he stays in bed, he doesn't go to school, he is not respectful towards fellow residents, he does not carry out his duties within the centre, etc. If we tell him that we are going to contact his family and say: 'your family wants to know how you are. Do you want to tell your family that you are behaving badly?' The youngster must feel that there are people who care about him. It's a way to motivate him. He has no one, he has no family to call him, he feels alone, and he withdraws, smokes pot, and misbehaves.*

The professional from Wasata also remarked that boys in Spain or elsewhere in Europe also lose sight of the original goals of their migration project:

> *It is very important to maintain that connection with their family because it continues to make them aware of the reasons why they went to Europe in the first place: 'to work, to study, to help my family'. Many young people forget those goals after a while, especially when they encounter problems regarding their migration project, if they cannot work, don't receive training, do not succeed with their identity papers, and go down the wrong path. They flee the shelter; they commit petty theft or more serious crimes. The aim of our mediation is also to focus on the youngster and ensure that they feel supported, not only by us, but also by their family. The boy must feel that his father and mother are close, figuratively speaking.*

Another Spanish professional underscored the importance of transnational social mediation for relieving the pressure and stress that is on the minors:

> *If a boy's mother is sick in Morocco and if there is someone over there who can visit her and pass the message to the kid that she is OK, then that is very good. Also, it is important to have the parents understand that their kid can't send them money, because he doesn't have the papers yet, and is not earning any money. And, for the kids, it is important to have someone to talk to their parents and explain to them what's going on.*

The majority of the boys that Wasata mediates for across borders are between 12 and 19 years old. On some rare occasions, boys younger than 12 years old are also encountered. The NGO handles around 50 cases each year, based on voluntary work. In the majority of cases, obtaining the identity documentation and restoring or improving the contact between the youngster and their family is successful.

4.4.5 Guidance of UMs who are outside of the protection system: intervention program in Ceuta

Two enclaves of Spain in North Africa, Ceuta, and Melilla, are entry points where UMs from sub-Saharan Africa and Morocco pass through to access mainland Spain. From December 2017 to December 2019, the University of Málaga implemented a juvenile delinquency prevention program (PREMECE) together with the City of Ceuta[35], one of the two enclaves of Spain in North Africa, targeting UMs who were living on the streets. According to the project leader of this intervention programme whom we interviewed, the continuation of the program was not officially approved yet.
In Ceuta, although the majority of the minors stay in protection centres, a minority of UMs are on the streets around the port waiting to cross to the Spanish peninsula in an irregular way. Many of these youngsters are from Morocco, as the UMs from sub-Saharan Africa ask for international protection and stay in protection centres. In 2019, there were around 300 unaccompanied foreign minors in the protection centres and around 50 Moroccan UMs on the streets (García-España & Carvalho da Silva, 2019).
According to our respondent, the project leader, there are several reasons why a small group of minors chooses to remain on the streets, with overpopulated protection centres in Ceuta and the aspiration to cross to Europe being the main ones. Most of the Moroccan minors on the streets are 16-17 years old, but minors as young as 9-10 years old were also encountered. According to the project leader, children on the streets are unprotected, are exposed to criminal activities, and are at a serious risk of becoming victims of crime. At the same time, they also create feelings of public insecurity. The most common offenses committed by the group are mutual assault, theft, shoplifting, and more serious crimes, such as armed robbery. In one case, minors stole a police boat to cross to the Spanish mainland. Furthermore, forgery of documents is also common, which is a serious offense in Spanish criminal law. Conversely, criminal activities amongst minors staying in the protection centres are relatively uncommon.
The overall objective of the intervention programme was to both reduce the risk of UMs on the street becoming involved in criminal activities and preventing them from

[35] Due to its proximity to Morocco, the residents of the adjacent Moroccan province Tetouan are exempt from visa requirements and are permitted to enter Ceuta on a daily basis, but they must leave the city by nightfall. This is not the case for Moroccans from other parts of the country (García-España & Carvalho da Silva, 2019).

falling victim to criminal activities themselves. A bilingual team of socio-educational counsellors first aimed to generate a climate of confidence and trust, before subsequently trying to assist the minors with basic needs and legal aid (see also García-España & Carvalho da Silva, 2019). Furthermore, the aim was to put the minors in the safest possible situation regarding migration, such as, for example, trying to convince them to enter the protection centre in Ceuta, rather than opting for an irregular migration pathway, or to return to Morocco.

> *We try to avoid that the children get into risky situations, such as taking a boat across to Spain, or taking a ride via a truck or a bus. It's not just about the dangerous journey. We try to avoid that those children go alone to Andalucía and further into Europe, where there are no adults to take care of them.*
> (Projectleader intervention program in Ceuta)

If the minors wish, then the team gets in touch with their parents. On several occasions, the parents were shocked to hear that their child was living on the streets in Ceuta and came to pick them up. At the end of the intervention period, the majority of the minors took the passage to Spain. On the other hand, 30% of the minors went back to Morocco or to a protection centre in Ceuta. Considering the situation in Morocco (high unemployment rate and surplus of young people, limited career opportunities and expensive schooling and vocational training, aspirations for migration to Europe), this percentage is considered to be a very high figure.[36]

4.5 Ways forward and possible solutions for the group of nomadic minors with multiple problems in Europe

In the previous Chapters we have described the backgrounds of nomadic UMs, their nomadic behaviour within Europe and the nature and background of the (multiple) problems they experience, as well as their involvement in criminal networks and vulnerability to exploitation. The general picture that emerges is that of a group that 'questions existing frameworks,' as one of the Belgian respondents observed. Supervisors and professionals from both the Netherlands and abroad expressed that it is challenging to work with these nomadic youngsters who suffer from complex interrelated (multiple) problems and who continue their highly mobile lives within Europe in the absence of (legal) opportunities, thereby also expressing their agency.

As one Dutch supervisor stated, there is no ready-made solution for addressing the issues pertaining to the group of nomadic UMs with (multiple) problems. Nevertheless, the respondents did share some possible solutions and ways forward, which are discussed in turn below. These relate to the guidance of the target group, the design of accommodation centres, the system-level, collaboration at the EU-level, country of origin, and to providing greater legal opportunities. Some of the possible solutions and ways forward already emerged in those sections looking at the good guidance practices in other countries.

[36] We do not have any knowledge about exact percentages of minors who returned to Morocco. Howver, at the end of the first seven months of the intervention, this figure was 14% (García-España & Carvalho da Silva, 2019).

4.5.1 Guidance

- *Tackling substance abuse and addiction first.* Multiple respondents highlighted the importance of first working on the substance abuse and addiction of youngsters. As discussed in Chapter 3, the dependency on substances keeps youngsters in criminal networks. Furthermore, it is difficult to make contact and work with a youngster when they are under the influence of substances. Finally, as was already pointed out by French professional from the NGO Hors la rue that works with youngsters on the streets of Paris, substance abuse and addiction represent obstacles for staying in a classical accommodation centre. Access to regular medical healthcare is essential to address substance abuse and addiction; however, this is experienced as a major bottleneck for the group of nomadic UMs (see also further on 'Multi-disciplinary guidance and collaboration'). According to a researcher, this investment is important not only within accommodation centres, but also within youth detention centres and at the street-level. The relatively easy availability of medicines used as drugs also needs to be tackled, according to some Dutch supervisors.

- *Investing in personal relationships.* According to one Dutch supervisor, the relationship with youngsters is the 'most effective factor.' Respondents from both the Netherlands and other countries stressed the importance of investing in personal relationships with the youngsters, which, in turn, helps to establish trust (cf. Van Wijk, 2020). Nomadic UMs are generally experienced as distrustful and more at distance than other UMs. Dutch supervisors mention that in general nomadic UMs share little information about themselves with them, unless they are able to build up a trust relationship. Consequently, they are able to unwind, feel safe and share personal information.

  > *(…) We look at the person; we've had many conversations with these youngsters. After a while you notice that you 'click', the youngster trusts you, he starts to talk and talk. That is how you get to know the person; each and every one of them are awesome boys with a great sense of humour (…) Finally, they can unwind, because they have someone they can trust. You see them become a child again, even though they may be 22 years or older. They feel safe and the child can resurface again.*
  > (Dutch supervisor)

  Investing in personal relationships leads youngsters to 'feel seen, loved and heard', as one supervisor said. Supervisors should focus on making contact with them, seeing them as human beings (instead of as, for example, 'troublemakers') and give them personal attention. Speaking the same language is not seen as a requirement; simply drinking a cup of coffee together 'can do miracles', in the words of one Dutch supervisor.
  Developing a personal relationship and trust takes time and continuous investment from the supervisor. It is important to be more flexible with the group of nomadic UMs, by, for example, focusing less on having to go to school – which these youngsters ordinarily do not want to do – and trying to match the needs or goals that they have. Being flexible may also include giving youngsters the space to 'test out' whether they are able to trust others. This approach is similar to that of professionals doing outreach work and trying to provide a transitional space between the streets and accommodation system (as described in previous sections on Belgium and France).

Nevertheless, what should be kept in mind is that in practice, supervisors face workload pressure and are not always able to invest in personal relationships (see, for example, Kulu-Glasgow, et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to one Dutch supervisor, youngsters with more behavioural problems are transferred a lot between locations (and thereby are arguably 'uprooted' in the Dutch system as well), which means youngsters may switch between legal guardians multiple times, a situation that is clearly not conducive to developing a personal relationship built on trust.

- *Multi-disciplinary guidance and collaboration.* As became clear in Chapter 3, nomadic UMs suffer from (multiple) problems that span across different domains. This makes collaboration between these different domains vitally important, such as, for example, between the accommodation system and (youth) health care. Supervisors from both the Netherlands and Belgium expressed that they are not equipped to deal with these youngsters' complex (multiple) problems. With regards to addressing the mental health issues that many youngsters face, some respondents stressed the importance of offering psychological help and psychosocial art therapy. In Italy, the above described small-scale accommodation centre collaborates with psychologists who try to work from an ethno-psychological approach.
  One researcher suggested creating mixed accommodation centres that include a health ward. In the Netherlands, within the PON-facility[37] youngsters can receive guidance from an expert in addiction care. Moreover, in collaboration with an expertise centre on trauma, a treatment trajectory was developed for youngsters. In addition to the PON-facility, a new type of accommodation centre is being developed by COA in collaboration with youth care (Personal communication COA, February 2023; see also Box 1.1). However, generally speaking, access to regular health and addiction care is experienced as a major bottleneck (see Van Wijk, 2020, 2021). Related to this, a Dutch supervisor stresses the importance of diagnosing the mental health issues of UMs, as in her view there is often not a clear image of what is going on with a minor.
  The transition between accommodation and the justice systems could also be improved. Our Belgian respondents in particular explained that youngsters are not able to cope with the sudden freedom of an open accommodation centre after having stayed in a closed youth detention centre for a period of time, which, in turn, results in them leaving the centre again. In the Dutch context, in a recent advice report the Dutch Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Protection of Juveniles (*Raad voor Strafrechtstoepassing en Jeugdbescherming,* RSJ) (2022) similarly expressed concern over the transition and noted that youngsters released from youth detention centres may not be able to return to the accommodation centres where they used to stay. Above all, they identified a lack of continuity in the guidance, which underpins the information transfer between the different organisations involved. In this regard, one of the researchers also emphasized the importance of working intensively with UMs entering the juvenile justice system.

- *Culturally sensitive guidance.* The use of cultural mediators, who share the background and norms and values of the youngsters helps them to feel seen and recognised. Cultural mediators are able to support other professionals in their work with youngsters by acting as mediators between them. Furthermore, one of the

[37] See Chapter 1, Box 1.1. for the description of the PON-facility.

researchers explained that they are a 'key figure' as they serve as a role model for youngsters by 'representing an alternative pathway'. In this way, they are respected by the youngsters. As described previously in this Chapter in the section on Italy, the professionals in Italy make intensive use of cultural mediators. In the Netherlands, virtually all supervisors working in the PON-facility in the Netherlands have a migration background and speak Arabic (Van Wijk, 2020). As decribed in Chapter 1, the Dutch Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum seekers (COA) works with four cultural mediators who can be called upon by the supervisors when there is a need.

- *Working with the family.* Supervisors and professionals from both the Netherlands and other countries attempt to establish contact with families in the country of origin. Even though youngsters are unaccompanied in Europe, their families nevertheless remain part of the youngsters' migration project, due to the fact they often feel pressure to send money. It is important to manage expectations by explaining to the parents the situation of their child, how the system works, and what legal possibilities exist. As described previously in this Chapter, the Moroccan NGO Wasata specialises in transnational social mediation, where obtaining identity documents from the country of origin for residence procedures, and social mediation between the youngsters and their families back home constitute an important part of their activities.
  Similarly, one of the Dutch respondents raised the idea of educating people in the country of origin to facilitate the contact with youngsters' parents, also in the framework of return, for which the support of the family is seen as essential (see further).

- *Honest communication with youngsters about their possibilities within the asylum system.* In the Netherlands and Belgium, nomadic youngsters find themselves either in the asylum system or in the accommodation centres of the asylum system, respectively. Because they have little chance of receiving a residence permit based on asylum, supervisors from both countries emphasised the importance of honest communication with them from the start regarding their chances of receiving a residence permit. Even though Dutch supervisors stated that they place value on being honest with youngsters from the outset regarding their chances of receiving an asylum permit, which are virtually non-existent, some do struggle with communicating this message before the decision is taken in the procedure. Moreover, it could also immediately set a negative tone, whereas the conversation could instead also focus on what youngsters are entitled to in the Netherlands and what could still be organised for them.
  In the framework of the My Future project in Belgium (see above in this Chapter), youngsters are correctly informed as soon as possible about the other possibilities they have once they reach adulthood, which are returning to their country of origin, moving on to another EU-country, or living an irregular life in Belgium. What is important here is that youngsters are informed as early as possible, so that they know what they can expect and are able to make an informed decision themselves. Similarly, in the Netherlands supervisors expressed that they are now putting more conscious effort into having conversations with youngsters about their future possibilities. Earlier research on the future-oriented guidance of UMs whose asylum application was rejected in the Netherlands (see Kulu-Glasgow et al., 2021) had shown that future-oriented conversations were either held relatively late in the process or not at all.

- *Daytime activities: internship and vocational training possibilities.* Organising daytime activities keeps the youngsters occupied, offers them distraction, and gives meaning to their life. Conversely, a lack of fulfilling ways to spend their days – not being allowed to work and having to go to school – may lead to feelings of frustration and anger. Internships and vocational training were mentioned as possible solutions in this regard (see also RSJ, 2022). When youngsters do something they are good at, this in turn enhances their self-worth and self-confidence and they are less vulnerable to the (negative) influence of others. Furthermore, youngsters may learn skills that could be useful in the framework of returning to their country of origin, insofar as they may provide them with some perspective and make it possible not to return empty-handed.
  One example worthy of mentioning here is that of a youngster working at an employer from the same cultural background, who served as a positive role model and encouraged the youngster to go to school again. Although several supervisors were successful in organising internships or side jobs which gave the youngsters positive experiences, these were purely bottom-up initiatives that were almost entirely attributable to their personal efforts and commitment. In the Netherlands, internships and vocational training possibilities are difficult to organise given the compulsory nature of education. Moreover, employers have to be willing to take in these youngsters, which is not always the case.

4.5.2 Design of accommodation centres

- *Small-scale accommodation centres.* Concerning the scale of accommodation centres, small-scale centres were considered by many of the respondents to be essential for providing personal attention and support. As mentioned previously in this Chapter in the section on Italy, an Italian professional managing a reception project noted that 20-30 places in one centre is already too large to be able to do that. In their centre, 10-12 UMs are accommodated. According to one of the researchers, 7 or 8 UMs should be the maximum number. Nevertheless, as one respondent pointed out, having small-scale centres requires resources and capacity, which is not an irrelevant consideration given the immense pressure accommodation systems in Europe are currently under.

- *Group composition and dynamics.* According to several respondents, the way the group within an accommodation centre is composed in terms of the share of youngsters with behavioural problems greatly impacts upon both the group dynamics and number of incidents. One possible solution to decrease incidents within accommodation centres might be to reduce the number of youngsters with behavioural problems accommodated in one centre. Indeed, some Dutch supervisors reported that they had (at one point) 15 youngsters with behavioural problems placed in their centre, which, in turn, resulted in many incidents. On the other hand, when they had two or three in a group of 20, it was very manageable. According to one of the supervisors, when minors like these are all put together in such an environment, the youngsters all have a hard time. One supervisor was not in favour of placing youngsters without any chance of receiving an asylum permit together with those that do have a chance. Similarly, some of the Belgian respondents mentioned fights between non-asylum-seeking minors and those seeking asylum.

- *Location of accommodation centres.* The way forward concerning the location of accommodation centres was mainly discussed among Belgian respondents, and

is not that straightforward: opinions differed amongst respondents on the accommodation centre in Sugny, which is located remotely in Belgium. Supervisors working at Sugny expected the problems of youngsters to increase if the centre were to be located in Brussels instead, because of the networks of youngsters present there. They stressed that the centre would be used even more merely to have a bed to sleep in. Because of its remote location, youngsters are taken away from these networks, their street life, and the attendant problems. In contrast, the fact that many youngsters leave the centre in Sugny again after a short period of time – sometimes after only a few days – led other respondents to conclude that the centre is not functioning as it should. Rather, what appears to be yielding positive results, according to respondents, is providing an in-between shelter in the city, such as the one co-run by the NGO Hors la rue in Paris that provides a transition point between the street and the accommodation system. Turning our attention to the Italian context, the small-scale accommodation centre is located within the centre of the town in order to facilitate youngsters' integration within the community. However, the Belgian and Italian contexts are not directly comparable, in that in Italy UMs can receive a residence permit by virtue of being a minor, which means that youngsters are able to work more on their integration.

4.5.3 Criminal exploitation

A few respondents specifically identified some ways forward related to addressing criminal exploitation.

- *More police investigations into criminal networks.* In order to address criminal exploitation, the police should conduct more investigations into especially the smaller networks that Moroccan youngsters are involved in. These investigations should be coordinated at the EU-level.
- *More lobbying and advocacy work on criminal exploitation.* Raising awareness about the issue of UMs being victims of criminal exploitation, rather than the prevailing framing of them as perpetrators, is needed to be able to tackle the criminal networks that are exploiting these nomadic minors.

4.5.4 System

- *Discourse around nomadic UMs.* One way forward expressed by some of the respondents concerns challenging the way in which nomadic UMs are portrayed, labelled, and approached within the prevailing discourse. One of the researchers stated the following:

  > *We always say: 'when do these kids turn from being kids who are in danger into dangerous kids?' The conversation changes from one to the other really fast. They are kids in 'danger. But we say they are dangerous. And, of course, they become dangerous. But they become dangerous because they are in danger.*

  A French professional also speaks of the 'political dimension' and also cites the existing image of nomadic UMs as dangerous:

  > *There is the political dimension that is an obstacle too. The mainstream ideology depicts these children as a danger and as thieves who shouldn't be here. There is a strong ideology that considers them a problem: they should go back to Morocco or put in jail. But working to protect them is not a strategy that many people support. But only using repression will feed the exploitation system.*

According to a Dutch supervisor, moving away from labelling these youngsters as 'troublemakers' to instead framing them as youngsters with behavioural problems creates a space for looking at alternative solutions to deal with their behaviour, rather than solely from the perspective of the justice system. Similarly, one of the researchers suggested that it would be helpful to view the youngsters from the perspective of children living on the streets, as this would allow for possible solutions related to outreach work and lead to the adoption of a more flexible approach.

- *Better age assessment methods.* Multiple respondents expressed the need for better age assessment methods, which in the eyes of the respondents are currently inadequate for accurately assessing someone's true age. The results of these tests give an age range that is too broad, whilst some respondents also noted that nomadic youngsters have been socialised on the streets and, as such, know how to manipulate in order to survive. Consequently, youngsters whom supervisors strongly suspect to be adults, are placed together with actual minors. Furthermore, this can also lead to difficulties in the guidance provided:

  Quite regularly we have someone of 25 years old together in a room with someone who is 15. And then I think: 'this is not how it should be'. And of course someone of 25 years will not let themselves be supervised by someone of around the same age, who says: you have to go to school; you have to eat breakfast. Of course that doesn't work. So, I think that there is still a lot to be done there. (Dutch supervisor)

- *Providing legal opportunities.* One Dutch supervisor pointed out that without any future perspective, other possible solutions, such as setting up small-scale accommodation centres such as the PON, cannot really be considered solutions. The lack of legal possibilites in Northern Europe was identified by many respondents as an important reason why youngsters exit the system and find themselves in the 'spider web' of criminal networks and a continued nomadic existence. One professional from Spain explained that it is important that the system takes care of the child's migration project and that 'the problem is that if the system does not help you with your migration project, you leave'. Moreover, in light of both limited returns and the complexity of returning as a possible solution, providing legal opportunities to the group of nomadic youngsters, especially opportunities to engage in legal work into adulthood, was seen by the respondents as an important way forward. Countries such as Italy, France, and especially Spain provide much more legal opportunities compared to the Netherlands and Belgium, also after reaching the legal adulthood age – with the condition that minors need to fulfil certain requirements. To do so, it is important to be able to establish the real identity of a minor, as mentioned by one Belgian professional.
  The respondents explained that youngsters need opportunities and something to work towards, a 'horizon', as one researcher put. According to this researcher, opportunities support the work of supervisors insofar as it provides the possibility to enter into a dialogue with the youngsters about what is expected of them when they want to achieve something, such as having a job. Offering possibilities requires something in return. It helps to motivate the minors to follow the rules of accommodation centres and to do their best. As the professional from the day shelter of Macadam in Brussels explained:

It is really difficult from a social worker point of view to say: 'Yeah you can go to training, go to school, stop with the drug abuse, stop with everything, go to the centre, seeing your friends less,' and then they go to the lawyer, and the lawyer says: 'There is no option to get a residence permit, even if you were to be first in your class, and do you everything right; you won't get a residence permit.'

The same respondent further explains that providing greater legal opportunities for the future would provide stability, and in turn, more possibilities to work on youngsters' mental health issues:

I think what is difficult with working on mental health issues, is that if you don't have stability, they are in a survival mode. But if you destroy their survival mechanism it can be really dangerous for them, because they don't have that stability and they are still on the street, and so you can put the finger on what is really painful and say this has to change. But they are doing that because they have to get up every morning and they have to survive, so that is also sometimes difficult. (…) so they have mechanisms to keep on surviving, but it is difficult to break them, to break the mechanism without breaking them.

4.5.5 Country of origin

- *Awareness-raising campaigns.* As discussed in Chapter 3, an important factor influencing children's decision to migrate is the information they receive about life in Europe that often not bare any resemblance to the actual reality. In this respect, multiple respondents stressed the need for awareness-raising campaigns directed towards children and teenagers that aim to prevent them from migrating irregularly. Some respondents raised the idea of having youngsters who experienced a nomadic existence in Europe as a minor before subsequently turning their lives around, go back to their country of origin to tell the real story to youngsters there.
- *Work with the parents.* Also related to prevention, some Dutch supervisors are of the opinion that work needs to be done with the parents of nomadic youngsters in the country of origin, using Morocco as an example. This can be related to the often adverse family context, as also discussed in Chapter 2. The work with the parents needs to be focused on making sure they are better able to support their children.
- *Improve conditions in the country of origin.* One important potential solution that was put forward by the respondents was to make it more attractive for youngsters to stay in their country of origin rather than migrating, by providing them with more educational and employment opportunities. In conjunction with this, one of the aims of Bayti, a Moroccan NGO working with children on the streets, is to support children who are willing to leave the streets and help them with their 'life project' in Morocco. This help includes trying to get children to go back to school and helping them get enrolled in training opportunities.
  More generally, one key bottleneck is that programs and initiatives related to both providing opportunities for youngsters and preventing irregular migration are often funded externally (such as, for example, by the European Union or The United States Agency for International Development, USAID) and when this funding ends, so do the programs.
- *Return.* Although supervisors addressed the possibility of returning to their country of origin in conversations with youngsters, and found it important to also provide information about this option, the respondents also noted that this is a solution that is hard to achieve in practice. In fact, the supervisors and professionals reported that they have virtually never experienced a youngster returning, whilst some

respondents pointed out the likelihood of re-migration after their return. Returning means that youngsters 'have failed' to meet the high (or implicit) expectations of their family and are forced to suffer a loss of face, as often they have not told their family the real circumstances of their life in Europe. Furthermore, there is a loss of honour and pride (also of the family within the community), and it takes a lot of time and investment in the relationship with the family to attempt to restore that. In many cases, even if the family knows about their child's real situation in Europe, they do not want them to come back and, in fact, prefer that they continue to lead an irregular life in Europe so they can send back money. As forementioned, according to the respondents, following vocational training in Europe may help the youngsters not to return empty-handed – albeit putting their acquired skills to use also depends on the economic circumstances in their country of origin.
Although sometimes youngsters give out signals that they want to return or miss their family, generally they do not express a wish to return (cf. Kulu-Glasgow et al., 2021) even if they might be tired of their nomadic life. If they do, then they want to return as quickly as possible. However, even voluntary return can take some time to organise, as a respondent pointed out. One reason for this it that documentation is needed for identification purposes, which is not always readily available and needs to be obtained via the family or authorities in the country of origin. Related to this, countries of origin may be reluctant to cooperate with returns, although the relationship between the Dutch and Moroccan governments has recently improved and there is now ongoing dialogue on the possibility of (forced) return. Furthermore, as previously mentioned in this Chapter in the section on France, France and Morocco collaborate on the identification of UMs and establishing contact with their families and to organize return.
Finally, the respondents drew attention to the bad or unsafe circumstances in countries of origin, such as Morocco, and the inability of parents to take care of the needs of their children. The latter is often one of the findings of the family assessments the International Organisaton for Migration (IOM) in Morocco undertakes for social services in different EU-countries in the framework of voluntary returns. Related to this, one of the Dutch supervisors also stressed the importance of providing opportunities to receive addiction care in countries of origin.

4.5.6 Collaboration at the EU-level

One Dutch supervisor shared an idea of using an integrated framework to look at the youngster's entire migration journey, and to see at what moments interventions could occur to help youngsters to return to their country of origin, rather than ending up living an irregular existence. Alongside the aforementioned aspects of re-establishing contact with the youngster's family, providing internships and possibilities for vocational training, and developing awareness-raising campaigns, the information exchange between EU-countries was also regarded as a form of intervention. Indeed, according to many respondents, because of the mobility of the group of nomadic youngsters within Europe and their use of multiple aliases, EU-countries should collaborate more on the identification of youngsters in Europe to both be able to track them, in terms of information exchange, and provide youngsters with adequate care and protection (see also Von Bredow, 2019). One respondent elaborated on this:

> *I think that European collaboration is key and that we have to unite forces within Europe, so that we have a good level of information exchange, that there is identification, that we can exchange information operationally on specific cases,*

that there is a primary network in Europe, that there is research being done at EU-level, that [nomadic youngsters'] trajectories are increasingly mapped, that their experiences in different cities – city to city migration is a key issue in this discussion – are exchanged. (…) And that we can formulate best practices that are uniformed within Europe. Then there will also be no reason anymore [for youngsters] to hop so much [between countries and cities] (…) I think that this is really a European theme.

Information exchange on the identification and tracking of youngsters does already informally occur on a voluntary basis by some of the respondents. Furthermore, one of the Dutch supervisors shared an example of a collaboration between the guardianship organisations in the Netherlands and Spain, which involved staying in contact with a minor who wanted to go to Spain again and following her on her travels there to make sure she arrived safely. According to the supervisor, it is important to think about what can be done to protect minors also when they leave the Netherlands to go to other countries in Europe.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

The starting point of this research was the context in the Netherlands. The Netherlands hosts a group of North African minors, coming from so-called safe countries who have little or no chance of receiving a residence permit in the Netherlands, where the admission policy for UMs is basically based on the asylum-system. According to the Dutch supervisors (legal guardians and mentors in accommodation centres) UMs coming from North African countries, often are nomadic, experience a multitude of problems, such as drug addiction, mental health problems and/or have behavioural problems, such as causing incidents at accommodation centres. Most incidents of UMs at the centres concern in general violations of the house rules, aggression and violence against peers and/or supervisors – both of a verbal and physical nature, and verbal suicide threats. There are also suspicions regarding involvement in criminal networks. In other European countries, there are also signals of similar problems.

The Netherlands struggles how to deal with this group and with their supervision. This study aimed to provide insight into the experiences of other EU-countries regarding the reception and supervision of this specific group of UMs. By means of focus groups and interviews with professionals and researchers from both the Netherlands and several other EU-countries, complemented by literature, we painted a broad picture of the group of nomadic UMs. We looked at the background of these minors, including in the country of origin and at different aspects of their nomadic life in Europe.

The target group of the research was defined as follows:

> UMs who either have little or no chance of receiving a residence permit after an asylum application or who do not apply for asylum at all *and* who have multiple problems, such as mental health issues, substance use/addiction, and/or pose behavioural problems inside or outside of the accommodation facilities, and travel between EU-countries without a residence permit.

At the beginning of our research, we did not limit ourselves to a specific nationality regarding the target group.

In this concluding Chapter, we first make some cautioning remarks about our research design, and then answer the research questions, sometimes by putting extra emphasis on the context of the Netherlands, and place the findings in a broader context by means of several points of discussion. We end up with some suggestions for further research.

5.1 Cautioning remarks about the research design

The current research was based on interviews with researchers from different countries, supervisors of nomadic UMs and other professionals who either work or have experience with the group. The findings reflect their experiences with and viewpoints on these UMs. During the current research, we did have the opportunity to interview a nomadic minor in the Netherlands, whose story is reflective of many of the findings discussed in the report. However, it is possible that there are aspects of the stories of nomadic minors our results do not reflect. Although we speak of the 'group' of nomadic

UMs and paint a more general picture of this group, it is important to emphasize that this general picture may not reflect the many individual trajectories and diversity among this group of minors.

5.2 Results

What is the size of this group of UMs and what are their background characteristics (for example, nationality, situation in their country of origin – including the nature of their (multiple) problems?
An ad-hoc query (2022.26) was conducted in cooperation with the Dutch National Contact Point of the European Migration Network (EMN) to answer the research question among others regarding the scope of the issue of nomadic minors in EU-countries. However, it proved to be difficult to find out with this instrument whether other EU-countries (in addition to the Netherlands) recognize the specific target group of this research, as well as to gain insight into the size of the group. The answers of some of the EMN member states do point to the existence of the group in those countries, especially in Belgium and France.

According to information from the interviews, nomadic UMs with multiple problems who have little chance of receiving an asylum permit in European countries mainly come from North African countries, such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt. As i) the Moroccan UMs is also the most common nationality among the North African UMs in the Netherlands, ii) have been brought forward relatively more often as belonging to the target group in the Dutch focus groups and iii) also have been recognised by respondents abroad, we mostly focused on this group of minors and the background context in Morocco.

In order to have at least some insight into the size of the target group in the Netherlands, in the final stages of our data collection, we applied a 'light' version of the so-called educated guess method, where we requested Dutch supervisors to estimate the size of the group in the Netherlands for the period 2019-2021. We limited this estimation to UMs coming from Morocco, as Moroccan UMs were the most common nationality among North African UMs in this period. In addition, we assumed that limiting ourselves to a single nationality would make it easier for the supervisors to make their estimates. The average estimated numbers range between 400 and 800 – including those UMs who are outside the accommodation system (see Chapter 2). Due to the low-response rate and the caution with which the supervisors who gave their estimates regarding the size of the group, these results should be treated with great carefulness, and as only 'guesstimates' (cf. Bos et al.,2016).

The overwhelming majority of nomadic minors are boys. Their age is subject to discussion among the Dutch and Belgian supervisors in accommodation centres whom we spoke (in other countries we did not interview supervisors themselves): though some are very young, there are suspicions that part of the group is of age while they claim to be a minor. The age youngsters themselves claim to be in general ranges from 15 to 17 years old. However, there are also minors who are younger.

Our respondents as well as evidence from literature suggest that nomadic Moroccan minors with multiple problems leave their country of origin with a poor starting position: they mostly come from (very) socio-economically disadvantaged families, where violence, abuse and drugs abuse occurs. The families fall apart and the

protective function of the family suffers from serious 'fractures' (cf. Jimenez-Alvarez, 2015), although there may be exceptions. This disadvantaged family background is seen as an important root factor for the exacerbation of their problems in Europe. Dropping out from school is not uncommon and is directly connected to child labour (Vacchiano, 2010).
Although its scope is unclear and it may differ on a case-by-case basis, substance use is generally identified by respondents as a problem that is already present in the country of origin. Substances used concern alcohol, hashish, solvents, and different types of medicines (Vacchiano, 2010).

What are their motives for leaving their countries (push-factors) and coming to Europe (pull factors)? What are their expectations?
Our results show that a combination of macro and micro level factors play a role in why the nomadic minors leave their country of origin (mainly Morocco). However, lack of perspective in the country of origin and adverse family structure appear to be the common thread in push factors. There is lack of perspective due to (extreme) poverty for young people including instability in employment opportunities, and low paying jobs. The economic crisis in the countries of North-Africa which worsened after Covid-19 and the collapse of the touristic sector as a result, are considered to be among the push factors. In addition, in Morocco public schooling opportunities are limited and private schooling is unaffordable for many parents. Different respondents point out that migrating children who become nomadic in Europe and experience multiple problems are the ones who have less socio-economic opportunities personally than their peers. Regarding the family context, a disrupted family context where fathers are usually absent in physical and/or emotional sense, domestic violence, lack of emotional attachment, or being rejected or pressured by the family force the minors to leave. Furthermore, existence of multiple problems (e.g. having a delinquent background, escaping from street life and drugs), and that some youngsters see migration as an adventure or hype are stated as push-factors. The role of the family in the decision to leave is not always explicit and is diverse. It seems that the parents in general do not encourage the minors to migrate, but they do not stop them either, with the idea that their children can help them financially if they make it to Europe. The minors' desire to prove themselves to their parents, especially to their mothers, by earning money, is brought forward by several respondents as one of the push factors.
Regarding the pull factors at the macro level, mirroring the unfavourable socio-economic situation in the country of origin, a better socio-economic perspective in Europe is the main factor. However, micro-level factors, aspirations and expectations of the minors and their families, and the way they visualise Europe (a 'paradise'; the 'El Dorado' – the mythical golden city, achieving the 'European' way of life) play a more important role for these minors. Europe is perceived as a geographical setting, where they can realise their European dream, earn and send money to their families, and own things that are seen as status symbols. Migration to Europe is seen as a 'short-cut to the future'. In this process, social networks and feedback mechanisms, among others, (mostly false) information from their peers who are already in Europe, play an essential role in creating a fabricated image of the 'paradise Europe'.

What is the nature of and reasons for leading a nomadic life in Europe?
- What information sources do they make use of during their nomadic existence and what information do they have?

- Which factors play a role in choosing to move to and (temporarily reside in a certain country?
- Why do they apply for asylum or (not) and/or make use of accommodation centres?

In European countries where UMs can only receive a residence permit if they apply for asylum, minors coming from so-called safe countries, have little chances of receiving a residence permit. As they do not consider returning home as an option, nomadic life becomes a solution. Such life is characterised by strong agency and high mobility within Europe, where minors are often involved in criminal activities, which they see as a strategy to earn money. In this regard, nomadic minors differ from UMs who have more chances of international protection within asylum systems – who settle in a specific country, and among others look for better study opportunities and often want to reunite with their families in Europe. According to our Spanish respondents, the majority of the Moroccan UMs stay in Spain and it is a minority who travels further in Europe. Dissatisfaction with the accommodation centres in Spain or not wanting to be in the accommodation system at all, recruitment by criminal networks, coming into contact with the police, and that they hear from their peers that there is possibility of earning money (quickly) somewhere else are reasons brought forward why these minors move to other European countries from Spain.

In the nomadic life of UMs social networks play a crucial role, through feedback mechanisms from their nomadic peers in different countries, and information shared on social media (WhatsApp and Facebook groups). In this sense, they are connected through a web of information in time and space. According to a researcher, this information is often based on rumours which are unverified and ever changing. This information influences the perceptions of the nomadic UMs about different European countries, on which they act and navigate between different countries according to their needs. Consequently, according to the nomadic UMs each country or city has a good part. In the words of a researcher, Paris is seen as a place to make money, Hamburg is a place to go if one has health problems, and Stockholm is a city to feel safe within the context of protection of a foster family in case they are in danger or want to take a break from the street life. Countries where the admission policy for UMs is based on asylum, such as Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands are known for the weekly allowance they offer to minors in accommodation centres. According to a Belgian professional, Brussels is known among the minors for the availability of certain medicines that are used as drugs (Lyrica and Rivotril). Although existence of family or diaspora is named by some respondents for minors traveling to certain countries, including the Netherlands (see below), it is also argued that the support function of such social networks for this group of minors is limited, in comparison to minors from other countries such as Afghanistan, who have a big support network. There is evidence from research among Algerian irregular migrants that the supporting function of social networks for irregular migrants weakened with the increase of border controls and emergency of issue of security in migration management in the EU. Subsequently, the 'cost' of a family to support an irregular migrant is greater than it used to be, which makes families less willing to do so (Collyer, 2006; cited in Kushminder et al., 2015: 58). Similarly, Peyroux (2021) draws attention to the absence of reliable family connections in destination countries as a risk factor for involvement and exploitation in criminal networks.

Regarding the Netherlands, the respondents named the following reasons why the nomadic minors come to the Netherlands:

- arrival in the Netherlands is an integral part of nomadic behaviour and the Netherlands is as such not an intended destination before leaving the country of origin;
- benefits of the Dutch accommodation system (well organized and comfortable accommodation centres with good amenities, weekly-allowance;
- image of the Netherlands among the nomadic boys as a country where it is possible to stay in accommodation centres for UMs despite of being of age;
- Netherlands being a safe and quiet place for nomadic minors;
- a friendly Dutch police and less consequences for behavioural problems or criminal offences compared to other countries;
- image of the Netherlands for possibility of finding undocumented work;
- availability of drugs and possibilities for earning money by selling drugs;
- presence of diaspora and family;
- lack of return agreement between the Netherlands and Morocco; and
- influence of practices in other European countries (waterbed effect).

In countries where the admission policies for UMs are based on asylum, applying for international protection appears to be the only way to get into the system. This is the case anyway for the Netherlands. According to the results of an ad-hoc query held by the European Migration Network (no. 2023.5), there are no UMs in the accommodation centres in the Netherlands who do not apply for asylum. There are signals from Dutch supervisors that nomadic minors coming from so-called safe countries are more or less 'pushed' by the system to ask for asylum due to the lack of alternatives for obtaining a legal residence permit. Although in theory UMs who do not apply for asylum are also protected by the system (e.g. they are appointed a legal guardian, have access to accommodation, education and health care), there are signals from supervisors that this access in practice cannot be always realised if UMs do not apply for asylum.

There are indications from our research that a group of nomadic North African (ex-)UMs who as a minor disappear off the radar from the accommodation centres, or who do not come into touch with the asylum system at all, lead an irregular existence in the Netherlands. While some Dutch supervisors have the impression that these (ex-)UMs are involved in criminal activities, others are of the opinion that some of these youngsters actually function well in the Dutch society.

What is the nature of (multiple) problems in Europe and what are the underlying factors of these problems? Are they involved in criminal networks? What is known about the possible exploitation of these UMs? Are there any other forms of victimization this group has been exposed to (for example in their country of origin, experiences during migration/nomadic life)?

Via the EMN ad-hoc query (2022.26), it was not possible to get a clear idea of the nature of the multiple problems of nomadic minors as it proved to be difficult to find out whether other EU-countries recognized this group. However, our other results confirm that nomadic minors suffer from mental health issues, often struggle with (severe) substance abuse and addiction, and display behavioural problems that may lead to incidents within and outside of accommodation centres. These incidents, which differ in severity, may include fights, verbal and non-verbal violence, and self-harming behaviour. Furthermore, nomadic UMs are often involved in criminal activities and networks and meanwhile may be exploited. What distinguishes the group of nomadic minors from other UMs, who might also be using some substances, is the use of Rivotril and Lyrica. Taking these medicines allows minors to perform criminal activities,

such as burglary or stealing, by removing feelings of fear, and afterwards quieting the conscience.

According to our findings, the existence of interrelated multiple problems among nomadic UMs, can be traced back to the adverse family situation in the country of origin. These problems are exacerbated by experiences while in transit to Europe and minors' nomadic existence in Europe and/or street life, and the relatively limited legal perspectives for these minors within the EU. Substance abuse is a way of coping with the mental burden and feelings of stress and frustrations related to these underlying factors. It may also lead to behavioural problems and incidents by making minors more aggressive and unpredictable in their behaviour. Furthermore, having been socialized into street life and having learned survival mechanisms there, displaying violent and conflictual behaviour is seen as a 'normal' way of behaviour. Nomadic minors are not used to follow institutional rules anymore, and may display certain behaviour in order to get what they want. Lastly, specifically mentioned in the Dutch context, behavioural problems are considered to be related to differential treatment based on negative images and experiences with previous incidents, creating a dynamic of resistance onto resistance.

Several respondents share the opinion that involvement in criminal networks is quite common among the target group, and that these networks are not necessarily big, organized networks, but can be of 'micro' nature. Our results also indicate that the borderline between agency in involvement of UMs in criminal networks and being exploited by these networks is very thin.
According to the Dutch supervisors, the majority of North African youngsters are involved in some kind of irregular activity within a network. Based on their impression, and on stories that they heard from the youngsters themselves, they strongly suspect that UMs are involved in drug selling networks or networks selling stolen goods. Within this context, supervisors give several examples, such as boys now and then going to Brussels to pick up pills and selling them at the accommodation centres. Some supervisors also noticed that boys often travel back and forth to Paris coming back with nice clothes – which leads to their suspicion that they are involved there in criminal activities. A French researcher also speaks about the movements between France and the Netherlands, especially of Algerian children, who actually live in the Netherlands and are being used as mules for carrying drugs. Criminal networks specialized in luxury clothing in Germany are also mentioned, and there are indications or suspicions of criminal networks in Spain and Belgium. Some supervisors suspect that some minors are already being 'recruited' when they are still in Morocco by youngsters who are higher in rank in these criminal networks. However, researchers with expertise on the topic point out that recruitment does not happen in the sense of a 'recruitment into a criminal gang', but that it takes place through socialisation in a subtle way. They underline the essential role of information flows via social networks. In this manner, youngsters get information where they can make money and that these type of activities are considered 'normal' within their own networks. Some Dutch supervisors point out that UMs are lured into criminal networks by adult (North African) men or influential minors in the group, and suspect that they are being exploited. In cases when accommodation centres for UMs are located in the same territory as that for adult asylum-seekers or when UMs are placed at an adult asylum-seekers centre after reaching 17,5 for encouraging autonomy, the risks for 'recruitment' and criminal exploitation are considered to be higher by Dutch supervisors. In the words of a supervisor, it is one of the biggest shortcomings of the Dutch accommodation system,

that there are locations where adult asylum-seekers and minors from this target group meet each other.

According to Von Bredow (2019), it is difficult for minors to get out of criminal networks due to threats from the leaders, in addition to the attraction of earning money. According to several respondents, involvement in criminal networks can be one of the underlying reasons for why these UMs use Rivotril and Lyrica. In this context, the existence of dependency relations is also underscored: youngsters sometimes receive drugs from adults who are involved in criminal networks, and once they have become addicted to it, they have to sell drugs for that person in order to be able to buy drugs for themselves. Many of our respondents point out that involvement in criminal networks is a survival mechanism, used to earn money to send to family and to survive living on the streets.
There are some indications that criminal and sexual exploitation co-occur – a finding that is also reported among Dutch youngsters (see Leito et al., 2022). There are signals of minors being abused by adult traffickers, and there are suspicions that this also happens in the Dutch accommodation centres in exchange for protection. Similarly, there are signals of sexual exploitation of minors within criminal networks in France, within the context of dependency relations, and minors being involved pedo-pornographic networks in Spain and in Morocco.

What are the experiences of other EU-countries with nomadic UMs?
- How do the accommodation and supervision of the group look like?
- Which (policy) measures do these countries take regarding supervision and care?
- Is there anything known about the results and effectiveness of these measures?

In order to gain insight into how this group of minors is accommodated and supervised, and related policy measures in other European countries than the Netherlands, we zoomed in on four European-countries, Belgium, France, Italy and Spain. Italy is an important country of entry in the Mediterranean for many migrants, among others from North Africa, and was until, about the end of the 2010 an important destination for Moroccan migrants, including UMs. Spain is currently the main point of entry to Europe for Moroccan UMs (for the situation on accommodation and supervision in the Netherlands, see Chapter 1).

Belgium
Belgium is confronted with the same group of nomadic UMs as the Netherlands, also in terms of nationalities. Supervisors and professionals recognize the problems this group causes and the multiple problems they face. Similar to the Netherlands, Belgium can be classified as a predominantly asylum-based system: although the so-called 'best interest procedure' exists for minors who do not want to apply for asylum or are less eligible for international protection, asylum is the main route to a residence permit. All UMs are accommodated by Fedasil, the federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers. Legal options and perspective for the group of nomadic UMs are relatively limited. Minors who do not apply for asylum are mostly those belonging to the group of nomadic UMs, and are accommodated in a separate centre. This is a so-called observation and orientation centre, which means that supervisors try to gain more information about these minors and their situation. This is the same approach as towards asylum-seeking minors. What is different is that supervisors try to make nomadic UMs aware of their situation and provide information about (disadvantages of) leading an irregular life after becoming 18 years old.

In Belgium, there is also the so-called My Future project, mainly intended for minors who receive a negative decision on their asylum application. However, the project is also open to nomadic UMs who do not apply for asylum. The project aims to inform the minors about the different possibilities they have and have them make a plan for their future. Supervisors try to prepare nomadic UMs as much as possible for either staying irregularly in Belgium after 18, return to country of origin, or moving on to another country.
Often, nomadic UMs leave the accommodation centre and many of them are in the streets of Brussels. Professionals working with these minors in the streets and at a day shelter, strive for establishing and maintaining contact with them and supporting them in their needs. More specifically, concerning the day centre, the professionals try to develop a relationship of trust with the minors and try to channel them from the streets into the system again and by having only limited ground rules (no fights, no drugs) for entering the day shelter. They also collaborate with partner organizations, among others, on substance abuse. Creating this transition is experienced as challenging, given the multiple problems as described above.

France
Nomadic UMs with the same characteristics are also present in France, and are refered to as *jeunes en errance*. The French system concerning UMs could be considered as child-protection based. UMs fall under the responsibility of the child welfare services and are covered by the common law on child welfare until their 18th birthday. Because they are of minor age, UMs do not need to hold a residence permit; few UMs in France apply for asylum. It is possible for a minor to be issued either a temporary private and family life permit or an employee or temporary worker residence permit, depending on the age the minor entered the child welfare services. However, those belonging to the group of nomadic minors often do not enter the system; instead many can be found in the streets of, for example, Paris, being involved in criminal activities and networks.
Different initiatives have been developed for the group of nomadic UMs with multiple problems, including 'low-threshold reception areas' (see EMN ad-hoc query 2022.76, p. 22-23). However, evaluations do not seem to exist. The NGO Hors la rue is active in the streets of Paris doing outreach work and co-running a shelter, with similar goals as those of the professionals in the streets of Brussels. The shelter is used to create a bond of trust and an 'educative link' with the minors and is set up to be a transition or a so-called *trait d'union* (hyphen) between the streets and the institutions. This means that they also collaborate with different public services within Paris. They are flexible with the rules in the shelter and try to remain working with the minors also under challenging circumstances. Regarding the results of their work, Hors la rue report that (only) a few nomadic UMs wanted to work on their problems and accepted help.

Italy
In Italy, all minors have residence permit due to being a minor. They have the same rights as any Italian or European citizen minor. The residence permit is valid until they turn 18 years old. The permit for minor age is given with the purpose of inclusion in Italy and is valid only in Italy. According to the so-called Zampa legislation for minors – in effect since April 2017), identification papers are not necessary for the residence permit. UMs who are 16 years or older and who are still at school may work, but not more than 20 hours/week. They can combine the curriculum with an internship for practical training on the job, which is not paid. UMs who are 16 and are out of school, are allowed to work for 40 hours/week. It is then also possible to get a paid contract for three years to do apprenticeship at an enterprise to gain qualifications. After three

years, this contract can be prolonged or changed; this is also possible after turning 18. A job contract for UMs must provide some hours of training.
UMs who are about to turn 18 and who were granted a residence permit due to minor age have the possibility to continue with their guidance and integration until they are 21, in order to complete the social-inclusion path they have started. After 18, UMs can also apply for a permit for finding work. After the age of 21, ex-UMs who had a residence permit on the grounds of being a minor, can legally stay in Italy with the condition that they have a job.
The Italian reception system is financed by the central government, but it is organised at local level and is implemented by NGOs. In Italy, there are two levels of reception systems: the first level relates to the arrival of the immigrants; and the second level is focused on the integration of minors. At the second level accommodation centres, called 'educational communities' maximum 12 minors can be supervised. They are usually found in small municipalities or in the centre of the cities to promote a better inclusion of the minors in the local community. Within the context of this research we approached an educational community in the east of Italy. The guidance focuses on meeting the goals of the minors, which is usually to get a job. The aim of the educators is to help minors finding a job with an internship. According to the experience in this centre, about half of the UMs finds a job, after following an internship. The team collaborates closely with different multidisciplinary and cross-organisational professionals to promote the integration path of the minor, such as cultural mediators, who are seen as essential in the guidance of UMs, as well as psychologists who are specialized in ethno-psychological approach. These psychologists combine a classical Eurocentric approach with cultural elements that are tailored according to the needs of the minors. To ensure inclusion in the local community and bring a change in the attitudes of the local community towards UMs, the educational centres work third party actors. When the team is confronted with boys with multiple problems, it usually concerns boys from North Africa. Prevention is seen as the way to deal with this phenomenon, by ensuring the UM sees a psychologist when it is noticed that he is not feeling well. Although this system in general works well, according to our respondent there are also bottlenecks, among others in the access to regular public mental health care.

Spain
UMs have the right to legally stay in Spain due to minor age. They can neither be expelled from the country nor be detained for having an irregular status. Until they are 18 years old, they are accommodated in so-called protection centres (*centros abiertos de proteccion)*. The accommodation and guidance of unaccompanied minors are under the responsibility of the public child protection services, which are regionally organised by autonomous communities such as in Italy. In areas of arrival, there are specific centres for UMs; in other places they are accommodated with Spanish and other foreign children who are under the protection of child protection services. In November 2021, Spain modified the Aliens Regulation which introduced more legal rights and possibilities to (ex-)UMs. The main aim of the modification was to promote the integration/inclusion of (ex-)UMs into the Spanish society and prevent that UMs end up in a situation of irregularity and social exclusion, after reaching the age of adulthood. Since the reform of November 2021, UMs who are 16 years or older and who were under the protection of the child-protection system are allowed to work 8 hours/day similar to all children in Spain between 16 and 18 years old. UMs who turn 18 and who received a residence permit as a minor, as well as those youngsters who were under the protection of child services as an unaccompanied minor but turned 18 before obtaining the residence permit, are granted a residence and work permit for two years, under

certain conditions. In both cases, there are possibilities of extension. In addition, there is a transitory regulation for undocumented ex-UMs who were between 18 and 23 years old when the reforms were introduced, and who were under the protection of child protection services as a minor (see Chapter 4 for a detailed description of the November 2021 reform). The residence and work permit for (ex-)UMs is national and UMs who fall under this regime do not have the right to family reunion. Although the new regulations are still recent, and the longer term effects are not seen yet, according to the Spanish officials results of the modifications are positive, where there are big changes observed in the attitude of the youngsters, who are more willing to study and to integrate themselves and the majority of the (ex-)UMs are currently working.
Our respondents report that there are big differences in the way the protection centres are organised, their scale, extent of saturation, and the nature of guidance per autonomous community. In this research, we gathered information about the guidance of UMs with multiple problems in Catalonia, which is the destination (mainly Barcelona) for many Moroccan UMs who enter the country from the south, or where they pass through if they move on to other European countries. Most of the UMs with multiple problems (such as substance abuse and mental health problems) are referred to two different types of centres in the protection system: CREI (residential care centre with intensive education; *centres residencials d'educació intensive*) which apply, with interdisciplinary teams, a combination of schooling, socio-educational and therapeutic approaches to deal with behavioural disorders. The second type of centres, the therapeutic centres are meant for more serious mental health and drug addiction issues.
In Catalonia, there is also a Transcultural medical unit for mental health, which is part of an international consortium. Activities focus on improving the mental health care for immigrant populations, including the UMs.

Another noteworthy phenomenon regarding UMs is transnational mediation activities between Spain and a Moroccan NGO. The activities concern on obtaining necessary documents from Morocco in relation to the legal stay of minors in Spain and communication with the family.

What are the ways forward and possible solutions for the group of nomadic UMs with multiple problems in Europe?
Our findings indicate the challenging nature of dealing with the group of nomadic UMs, given their complex and interrelated multiple problems, including their involvement in criminal activities and networks. Although there is no ready-made solution for this group of minors, several possible solutions and ways forward or matters to be taken into account were brought forward by our respondents.

Regarding the guidance of this group of minors, tackling substance abuse and addiction, investing in a personal trust relationship, providing multi-disciplinary and culturally sensitive guidance and working with the family in the country of origin are considered as important ways forward. This also includes honest communication with minors about their legal perspective within the asylum system since the very beginning. Additionally, making sure minors have possibilities for internships and vocational training would arguably help in keeping minors occupied, increasing their self-esteem and skills possibly useful for their future.

Concerning the design of accommodation centres, attention should be paid to the group composition, considering the impact a large share of nomadic UMs with multiple

problems, especially with behavioural problems, has on group dynamics. Furthermore, accommodation centres should ideally be of small-scale (numbers named by some respondents range between maximum seven-eight or twelve).

Ways forward directed to the country of origin concern awareness-raising campaigns, working with minors' parents, and improving socio-economic conditions in the country of origin. (Sustainable) return to country of origin is considered to be hard to achieve in practice for different reasons: in general, UMs consider return to their home country as having failed the expectations of their family; virtually no minor wants to return, families are not open for return of minors (see also Kulu-Glasgow et al., 2021). Furthermore, some respondents think that minors' families are often not able to take care of the minors upon return. Finally, return may be difficult to organize given the requirements of identification and documentation and lack of bilateral agreements regarding return of migrants in general, and that there is likely re-migration after return.

An important suggestion some of our respondents make is related to the collaboration between different EU-countries on identification of UMs to be able to trace their journey through Europe, and on information exchange to be able to provide them with adequate care and protection (see also Von Bredow, 2019). In order to tackle the problem of involvement in criminal networks and exploitation, the importance of more police investigations are underlined, which should be coordinated at EU-level. It is also deemed important to raise more awareness on youngsters being victims of criminal exploitation instead of only as perpetrators of crime.

Lastly, providing legal perspective, including work opportunities in combination with vocational schooling, as well as legal opportunities into adulthood would help in keeping nomadic UMs (motivated) within the system. In this way, they would be able to fulfil their migration project within the system, and not in an irregular and nomadic existence. Offering more opportunities regarding the future would also allow minors to be motivated to do their best and it would provide the stability to work on the problems they struggle with.

5.3 Discussion

This research focused on unaccompanied nomadic minors with multiple problems. This is a group the Netherlands is struggling with as they pose behavioural problems in and outside the accommodation centres. The group also travels between the EU-countries without a residence permit. During our research, we came across various differences between the countries on which we focused on to see how they deal with this group.

Offering future perspectives

Our findings reveal differences in the admission policies for UMs: in South European countries Italy and Spain, the admission policy is mainly based on child protection. UMs are first and foremost seen as children in need of protection, and have the same rights as native children. In these countries, applying for asylum is not necessary for a residence permit. In the Northern European countries, such as the Netherlands and Belgium, the admission policy for UMs is based on asylum. Although UMs are also considered as children in need of protection in these countries, applying for asylum is the only or primary way to receive a residence permit. However, UMs coming from safe countries, such as those from Morocco, have little or no chances of receiving a

residence permit on the basis of international protection. In Italy and Spain, policies aim at the integration of UMs in the society and at offering them legal opportunities during the minor age as well as after the age of legal adulthood for building a future, as opposed to the Netherlands and Belgium, where they are allowed to stay under certain conditions, but have no future perspectives. Supervisors in asylum systems struggle with what they can offer to these youngsters within this context of limited legal possibilities. This situation can be associated with two important bottlenecks, one at the individual level, and the other at the governance level.

At the individual level, long procedures and the feeling of 'wasting time' (because of not being able to earn money) create feelings of frustration and injustice among these minors compared to other UMs who have more chances of receiving international protection, and lead to feelings of repeatedly being rejected. Dutch supervisors consider these to be among the underlying factors for behavioural problems and incidents in accommodation centres. At the same time, negative images of these minors as 'troublemakers' and expectations of incidents to happen (again) exist among some supervisors. This seems to create further frictions at the accommodation centres. That a group of UMs who actually are considered as not belonging to the asylum-system as they come from safe countries, are accommodated and supervised together with UMs in need of international protection due to lack of alternatives to meet the specific needs of the nomadic UMs with multiple problems creates a dilemma.

Concerning the governance level, the presence of nomadic UMs in the asylum system puts pressure on the asylum system in these countries, which is nowadays already under stress at the European level.

Negative societal consequences and breaking vicious circles at different levels

The migration system of nomadic minors in Europe seems to keep on feeding itself: at macro level, because of socio-economic differences between countries of origin and Europe, at the micro level, because of continued aspirations of young potential migrants and their families, social networks and false feedback mechanisms from peers who already migrated. At the meso-level, according to researchers and professionals, there are there are 'actors' who (probably) exploit some nomadic UMs in criminal networks in different European countries. Many respondents identified the lack of legal opportunities in North Europe as one of the important reasons why these UMs find themselves in such networks and in continued nomadic existence. An essential question is how to break this 'vicious circle' regarding the irregular existence of nomadic minors with multiple problems in Europe.

The relative lack of legal possibilities for UMs coming from safe countries contributes to a majority of these minors eventually disappearing off the radar. Although also in Spain and Italy, where UMs have more legal perspectives, some minors also leave the accommodation centres, at least in the case of Spain, the majority of UMs coming from Morocco stay in Spain, according to our Spanish respondents. The problem of UMs disappearing off the radar in the Netherlands and Moroccan UMs leading a nomadic life in Europe are issues that have already been signalled two decades ago (Kromhout & Lijstra, 2006; IOM, 2002) and are yet to be resolved. Nomadic youngsters who go off the radar from accommodation centres in the Netherlands, either lead an irregular existence in the Netherlands, or move on to another European country – where they find themselves in vulnerable situations. According to many respondents, the majority of nomadic UMs – either as a means to survive, or to send money to their families – is involved in criminal activities. In doing so, they may be exploited in different ways. Respondents report that dependency on substances also becomes a coping strategy with nomadic existence. Conflict becomes a normal way of communication to survive

in their world. The longer youngsters are in street situations, leading a nomadic life outside of the system, the more hardened they get and the larger is the distance between the accommodation system and the society. The vicious circle in which nomadic UMs find themselves, is hard to break, and there is no easy and one single solution for the issues.
The most common bottleneck to break the circle that is named by professionals in this research and in previous research, is the lack of appropriate regular medical care for this group, especially for those who are severely drug addicted. Complementary solutions from different domains (such as tailor-made healthcare for the particular characteristics and needs of the group, supervision focused on individual, culturally sensitive guidance and possible interventions at the level of the juvenile system) to integrally approach these minors from the very beginning, may contribute to tackle the issue of multiple problems. However, at the moment, it seems that the Dutch regular care system is not set up to deal with the specific needs of this group.

Channelling positive characteristics into positive behaviours
There are different narratives and ways to approach the group of nomadic minors with multiple problems. They can be seen as 'troublemakers' and perpetrators of crime. Their involvement in criminal networks does have societal consequences. Our findings provide the context and background of 'trouble making' behaviour and attempt to increase our understanding of why these minors behave in certain ways. Importantly, they are not merely troublemakers or perpetrators; they are at the same time children who had an unfortunate start in life, struggling to survive and are vulnerable to criminal exploitation. In this regard, they can be considered as 'victims' of their circumstances in the countries of origin and legal possibilities in (Northern) Europe.

Notably, what comes forward from our data and analyses is that nomadic UMs are at the same time smart, resilient, competent and have a strong agency to survive the nomadic life and all the challenges that come with it. The recent policy changes in Spain concerning possibilities for legal work for minors and aiming at preventing them from ending up in a situation of irregularity and social exclusion show a different approach to minors coming from safe countries. One of the underlying ideas behind the policy changes in Spain is that offering more legal possibilities for the group of minors with economic motives – notably the right to work, also after turning 18, and regulating their transition to legal adulthood by law, is a way to offer alternatives to involvement in criminal activities. In the words of a Spanish respondent: 'We do not encourage them to come, but once they are here we must take care of them; instead of being on the streets and committing crimes, they can be useful to our economy.'

It is clear that the question how to deal with nomadic UMs with multiple problems is not only a policy issue for the Netherlands, but for Europe in general. This group of UMs can be compared to the European youth with multiple problems who grow up in socio-economically underprivileged families and who end up in juvenile detention, except that these UMs have the additional problem of lacking residence permit in countries where the admission policy for UMs is based on asylum (unless their asylum request is granted). In the core, they suffer from largely similar problems: experiencing lack of perspective, a feeling of not being wanted and an unfavourable family background. Within this context, it is important that European countries actively and regularly exchange their experiences on the outcomes of different (good) practices, different immigration systems and the wanted and unwanted results of their policies.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

Our results show pathways for future research. In our research, we covered a broad spectrum of research questions; in the context of our study we could only 'touch upon' these topics and some of our results raise further questions. It is therefore necessary that further research among this group is done. Firstly, research among nomadic minors themselves to reveal their own narratives, in-depth research into their involvement in criminal networks and their agency therein, as well as their exploitation. Secondly, we need to gain (more) insight into the outcomes (such as immigration flows of UMs) and effectiveness (such as involvement on criminal activities of (ex-) UMs) of the recent policy changes in Spain, as well as that of the possibilities offered to UMs in Italy. Looking further into the experiences of these countries can contribute in understanding what does and does not work in approaching nomadic minors with multiple problems. Thirdly, it has not been possible to come to conclusions about the size of the target group of this research, neither in Europe nor in the Netherlands. Further research, based on quantitative methods, is necessary to reveal these 'dark numbers.' Finally, future research can explore the possibilities of setting up a system at the European level, to keep track of these minors during their migration trajectories to see if it is possible to set up interventions for these minors instead of them disappearing off the radar or living in irregular existence.

Samenvatting

Ik heb niets te verliezen

Rondreizende alleenstaande minderjarige vreemdelingen in Europa

Achtergrond

Alleenstaande minderjarige vreemdelingen (AMV's) die naar Europa komen vormen een bijzonder kwetsbare groep migrantenkinderen, die reizen zonder dat hun ouders of andere volwassenen gezag over hen uitoefenen. In veel Europese landen is het aanvragen van internationale bescherming de voornaamste manier voor hen om opvang en een verblijfsvergunning te krijgen. Echter, minderjarigen afkomstig uit zogenaamde 'veilige landen', waar over het algemeen geen (angst voor) vervolging bestaat (bijvoorbeeld Marokko, en in Nederland tot juni 2021 Algerije) maken weinig of geen kans op een verblijfsvergunning op basis van een asielaanvraag. Sommige van deze veelal Noord-Afrikaanse jongeren reizen van het ene Europese land naar het andere, op zoek naar mogelijkheden om te werken en geld te verdienen. Volgens Nederlandse begeleiders (voogden en mentoren in de opvangcentra) kampt deze groep nomadische minderjarigen vaak met multiproblematiek, zoals drugsverslaving en psychische problemen. Dit is ook de groep die soms incidenten veroorzaakt in of buiten de opvangcentra of betrokken is bij criminele activiteiten (zie ook Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2021). Uit onderzoek in Nederland blijkt dat veel van deze jongeren voor of tijdens de asielprocedure van de radar verdwijnen. Er bestaan vermoedens dat ze of zonder verblijfsvergunning in Nederland blijven of doorreizen naar verschillende andere Europese landen. Over het algemeen is de kennis over deze groep beperkt en versnipperd. Het doel van dit onderzoek was om meer te weten te komen over de achtergrond van deze groep minderjarigen, en kennis op te doen over de ervaringen van andere Europese landen met deze specifieke groep minderjarigen.

Doelstellingen en onderzoeksvragen

De algemene doelstellingen van deze studie zijn:
- het schetsen van een beeld van het nomadisch bestaan van AMV's met (multi-) problematiek in Europa;
- het onderzoeken van de achterliggende redenen van hun nomadisch gedrag en de (multi)problemen die ze hebben; en
- het verkennen van (beleids)maatregelen die andere Europese landen nemen met betrekking tot de begeleiding van en zorg voor deze groep.

De doelgroep van het onderzoek hebben we als volgt gedefinieerd:

AMV's die geen of weinig kans maken op een verblijfsvergunning na het indienen van een asielaanvraag of die helemaal geen asielaanvraag indienen *en* bij wie sprake is van (multi)problematiek, zoals mentale gezondheidsproblemen, drugsgebruik/-verslaving, en/of die gedragsproblemen laten zien binnen of buiten opvangcentra en tussen verschillende EU-landen rondreizen zonder verblijfsvergunning.

Bij de start van het onderzoek hebben we ons niet beperkt tot een bepaalde herkomstgroep.

De onderzoeksvragen zijn:

1 Wat is de omvang van deze groep AMV's en wat zijn hun achtergrondkenmerken (bijvoorbeeld nationaliteit, situatie in hun land van herkomst – onder andere de aard van hun (multi)problematiek)?
2 Wat zijn hun motieven om hun land te verlaten (pushfactoren) en naar Europa te komen (pullfactoren)? Wat zijn hun verwachtingen?
3 Wat is de aard van en de redenen voor het nomadisch leven in Europa?
   – Welke informatiebronnen gebruiken zij tijdens hun nomadisch leven en welke informatie hebben zij?
   – Welke factoren spelen een rol bij de keuze om naar een bepaald land te gaan en er (tijdelijk) te verblijven?
   – Waarom vragen ze al dan niet asiel aan en/of maken ze gebruik van opvangcentra?
4 Wat is de aard van (multi)problematiek in Europa en wat zijn de onderliggende oorzaken van deze problemen?
   – Zijn ze betrokken bij criminele netwerken; wat is er bekend over de mogelijke uitbuiting van deze AMV's? Zijn er andere vormen van slachtofferschap waaraan deze groep is blootgesteld (bijvoorbeeld de situatie in het land van herkomst, ervaringen tijdens migratie/nomadisch leven)?
5 Wat zijn de ervaringen van andere EU-landen met nomadische AMV's?
   – Hoe ziet de opvang en begeleiding van deze groep eruit in deze landen?
   – Welke (beleids)maatregelen hebben deze landen genomen met betrekking tot de begeleiding van en zorg voor van deze groep?
   – Wat is er bekend over de resultaten en efficiëntie van deze maatregelen?
6 Wat zijn de oplossingsrichtingen waaraan gedacht kan worden voor de groep nomadische AMV's met (multi)problematiek in Europa?

Methoden

Dit onderzoek is beschrijvend van aard en gebaseerd op kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden. Om de bovengenoemde verkennende vragen te beantwoorden, gebruikten we een multimethode benadering en verschillende bronnen van informatie.

Literatuurstudie

Aan het begin van ons onderzoek en tijdens de uitvoering hebben we op bepaalde trefwoorden gezocht naar literatuur in Google (scholar). Verder hebben we gebruik gemaakt van de sneeuwbalmethode, door literatuur te gebruiken die is geciteerd in publicaties die we zelf hebben gevonden (*citation chaining*), en van literatuur waar sommige van onze respondenten onze aandacht op vestigden.

Persoonlijke communicatie met Nederlandse experts
In sommige gevallen hadden we vragen over de Nederlandse praktijk of het Nederlandse beleid met betrekking tot AMV's die uit 'veilige landen' komen of met betrekking tot AMV's in het algemeen. Wanneer we de antwoorden op deze vragen in de openbare bronnen niet konden vinden of de informatie die we hadden gevonden verdere vragen opriep, hebben we contact opgenomen met experts van de relevante organisaties. In dit rapport noemen we de informatie die we op deze manier hebben verzameld 'persoonlijke communicatie' en vermelden we daarbij de naam van de instelling waarvan wij de informatie ontvangen hebben.

Focusgroepen met Nederlandse begeleiders
In de beginfase van onze dataverzameling hebben we vier focusgroepen gehouden met mentoren werkzaam bij het Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers (COA) en Nidos-voogden, professionals die onder andere rondreizende AMV's met multiproblematiek begeleiden. Daarnaast namen PON-mentoren, COA-gedragsdeskundigen en Nidos-gedragswetenschappers deel aan deze focusgroepen (voor de definitie van de PON zie Box 1.1, en voor de taken van COA-gedragsdeskundigen en Nidos-gedragswetenschappers zie paragraaf 1.3.5, voetnoot 6 en 7).

Interviews met professionals en onderzoekers in verschillende Europese landen
In het kader van dit onderzoek hebben we interviews

gehouden met negen onder-zoekers uit verschillende landen. De meesten van hen hadden onderzoek gedaan onder de Noord-Afrikaanse nomadische AMV's, voornamelijk Marokkaanse minder-jarigen. Hun aandachtsgebieden varieerden van de situatie van de minderjarigen in het land van herkomst en de invloed daarvan op multiproblematiek, aspiraties voor migratie naar Europa, betrokkenheid bij criminele netwerken en uitbuiting daarin
(in het land van herkomst en in Europa), nomadisch gedrag en begeleiding van AMV's buiten het systeem. 131
Daarnaast hebben we achttien professionals geïnterviewd die betrokken zijn bij de begeleiding van minderjarigen in de opvangcentra of van minderjarigen die op straat wonen in verschillende Europese landen, die in hun werk met de doelgroep worden geconfronteerd, of overheidsfunctionarissen. De geselecteerde landen waren: België, Frankrijk, Italië en Spanje.

Interviews met professionals in Marokko
Om meer inzicht te krijgen in de achtergrond van Marokkaanse AMV's die naar Europa migreren en zich in Europa in een kwetsbare positie bevinden, hebben we in totaal vier professionals van drie organisaties in Marokko geïnterviewd.

Casus: interview met een nomadische AMV
We hebben een interview gehouden met een nomadische minderjarige in Nederland. In zijn verhaal komt veel informatie terug die we verzamelden via interviews met professionals en onderzoekers. Zijn migratietraject en zijn nomadische leven in Europa komen overeen met het algemene beeld van nomadische AMV's in Europa en vormen een waardevolle illustratie van onze resultaten.

Ad-hoc query onder de nationale contactpunten van het Europees Migratienetwerk (EMN)
In samenwerking met het Nederlandse Nationaal Contactpunt van het Europees Migratienetwerk (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, Onderzoeks- en Analysecentrum) is er een ad-hoc query uitgezet onder de EMN lidstaten om de onderzoeksvragen over

de omvang van de nomadische minderjarigen (met multiproblematiek), de aard van de begeleiding die de Europese landen aan deze groep bieden, en of er evaluaties zijn van hun beleid of maatregelen, te kunnen beantwoorden.

Educated guess 'light'
Om een indruk te krijgen van de omvang van de groep Marokkaanse nomadische minderjarigen met multiproblematiek in Nederland, pasten we een 'light' versie toe van de zogenaamde 'educated guess'-methode.

Resultaten

Omvang van de groep en achtergrondkenmerken

Uit de resultaten van de EMN ad-hoc query (2022.26) bleek dat het met dit instrument lastig was om erachter te komen of andere EU-landen (naast Nederland) de specifieke doelgroep van dit onderzoek herkennen, alsmede om inzicht te krijgen in de omvang van de groep.
Volgens de Nederlandse en Belgische supervisors komen nomadische AMV's met multiproblematiek die weinig kans maken op een asielvergunning, vooral uit Noord-Afrikaanse landen, zoals Marokko, Algerije, Tunesië en Egypte.

Om in ieder geval enig inzicht te hebben in de omvang van de doelgroep in Nederland, pasten we een 'light' versie toe van de zogenaamde *educated guess*-methode, waarbij we Nederlandse begeleiders die deelnamen in onze focusgroepen vroegen de omvang van de groep in Nederland in te schatten voor de periode 2019-2021. We hebben deze schatting beperkt tot AMV's die uit Marokko komen, omdat dit de meest voorkomende nationaliteit was in die periode onder de AMV's die uit Noord-Afrika komen. Het gemiddelde geschatte aantal ligt tussen de 400 en 800 – inclusief de AMV's die zich buiten het opvangsysteem bevinden (zie hoofdstuk 2). Vanwege de lage respons en de voorzichtigheid waarmee de begeleiders hun schatting gaven, moeten deze resultaten met grote behoedzaamheid worden behandeld, en slechts als *'guesstimates'* worden beschouwd (cf. Bos et al., 2016).
De overgrote meerderheid van de nomadische minderjarigen zijn jongens. Hun leeftijd was onderwerp van discussie onder de Nederlandse en Belgische begeleiders. Gebaseerd op hun ervaring, hebben de begeleiders het vermoeden dat een deel van de groep meerderjarig is. De leeftijd die jongeren zelf aangeven varieert over het algemeen van 15 tot 17 jaar. Er zijn echter ook minderjarigen die jonger zijn. Omdat de Marokkaanse AMV's relatief vaker werden genoemd als onderdeel van de doelgroep, hebben we ons vooral gericht op deze groep minderjarigen. Wat betreft de situatie in land van herkomst hebben we ons ook gericht op Marokko, omdat in Nederland de meeste AMV's afkomstig uit Noord-Afrika Marokkaans zijn.

Motivaties voor migratie

Nomadische Marokkaanse minderjarigen met (multi)problematiek verlaten hun land met een slechte uitgangspositie: ze komen veelal uit (zeer) sociaal-economisch achtergestelde gezinnen, waarin geweld, misbruik en drugsmisbruik voorkomen. In combinatie met een gebrek aan toekomstperspectief in het land van herkomst als gevolg van (extreme) armoede onder jongeren, instabiliteit in werkgelegenheid, laagbetaalde banen en het gebrek aan betaalbare openbare scholingsmogelijkheden, zijn er tal van pushfactoren waardoor jongeren ambiëren te migreren.

De rol van de familie bij de beslissing om te vertrekken is niet altijd expliciet en is divers. Het lijkt erop dat de ouders de minderjarigen over het algemeen niet aanmoedigen om te migreren, maar ze ook niet tegenhouden, met het idee dat hun kinderen hen financieel kunnen helpen als ze Europa bereiken. De wens van minderjarigen om zich tegenover hun ouders, vooral tegenover hun moeders, te bewijzen door geld te verdienen, wordt door meerdere respondenten naar voren gebracht als een van de pushfactoren.

Wat de pullfactoren op macroniveau betreft, is een beter sociaal-economisch perspectief in Europa de voornaamste factor. Factoren op microniveau, zoals aspiraties en verwachtingen van de minderjarigen, en de manier waarop zij Europa visualiseren (een 'paradijs'; het 'El Dorado' – de mythische gouden stad, de droom van een 'Europese' manier van leven) spelen echter een essentiële rol. Europa wordt gezien als een geografische setting waar ze hun Europese droom kunnen verwezenlijken, geld kunnen verdienen en naar hun families kunnen sturen, en spullen kunnen bezitten die als statussymbolen worden gezien.

Nomadisch bestaan

Volgens onze Spaanse respondenten blijft de meerderheid van de Marokkaanse AMV's die in Spanje aankomen, in Spanje. Het is volgens hen slechts een minderheid die verder reist in Europa. Onvrede over de opvangcentra in Spanje of helemaal niet in het opvangsysteem willen, werving door criminele netwerken, in aanraking komen met de politie, en van leeftijdsgenoten horen dat er de mogelijkheid is om ergens anders (snel) geld te verdienen zijn redenen die worden aangevoerd waarom deze minderjarigen vanuit Spanje naar andere Europese landen vertrekken.

In Europese landen waar het toelatingsbeleid voor AMV's gebaseerd is op asiel (zoals in Nederland) hebben minderjarigen afkomstig uit zogenaamde 'veilige landen' weinig kans op een verblijfsvergunning. Omdat ze terugkeer niet als een optie beschouwen, zien ze het nomadische leven als het alternatief. Een dergelijk leven wordt gekenmerkt door een hoge mate van agency en mobiliteit binnen Europa, waar minderjarigen betrokken kunnen zijn bij criminele activiteiten, die zij volgens onze respondenten zien als een overlevingsstrategie om geld te verdienen. Hierin verschillen nomadische minderjarigen met multiproblematiek van AMV's die meer kans hebben op internationale bescherming binnen asielsystemen – die zich in een bepaald land vestigen, onder andere op zoek zijn naar betere studiemogelijkheden en zich vaak willen herenigen met hun familie in Europa.

In het nomadische bestaan van AMV's spelen sociale netwerken, feedbackmechanismen van hun nomadische *peers* in verschillende landen, en informatie die wordt gedeeld op sociale media (WhatsApp en Facebook-groepen) een cruciale rol. Volgens een onderzoeker is deze informatie vaak gebaseerd op voortdurende geruchten; ze zijn ongecontroleerd en veranderen snel. Vervolgens beïnvloedt deze informatie de perceptie van de nomadische AMV's van de verschillende Europese landen. Ze reageren op deze informatie en navigeren tussen verschillende landen op basis van hun behoeften.

Wat betreft Nederland noemen de respondenten de volgende redenen waarom de nomadische minderjarigen naar Nederland komen:

- aankomst in Nederland hoort bij nomadisch gedrag en Nederland is geen beoogde bestemming voor vertrek uit het land van herkomst;

- voordelen van het Nederlandse opvangsysteem (goed georganiseerde en comfortabele opvangcentra met goede voorzieningen, weekvergoeding);
- imago van Nederland bij de nomadische jongens als een land waar het mogelijk is om in opvangcentra voor AMV's te verblijven, ook al zijn ze meerderjarig;
- Nederland is een veilige en rustige plek voor nomadische minderjarigen;
- een vriendelijke Nederlandse politie en minder gevolgen voor gedragsproblemen of strafbare feiten in vergelijking met andere landen;
- imago van Nederland dat het mogelijk is om zwart te kunnen werken;
- beschikbaarheid van drugs en mogelijkheden om geld te verdienen door drugs te verkopen;
- aanwezigheid van diaspora en familie;
- gebrek aan een terugkeerovereenkomst tussen Nederland en Marokko; en
- invloed van praktijken in andere Europese landen ('waterbedeffect').

Multiproblematiek

Onze resultaten bevestigen dat nomadische minderjarigen last hebben van psychische problemen, vaak kampen met (ernstig) middelengebruik en verslaving (gebruik van medicijnen Rivotril en Lyrica als drugs) en daarnaast gedragsproblemen vertonen die kunnen leiden tot incidenten binnen en buiten opvangcentra. Deze incidenten, die in ernst verschillen, kunnen vechtpartijen, verbaal en non-verbaal geweld en zelfbeschadigend gedrag omvatten. Bovendien zijn deze jongeren vaak betrokken bij criminele activiteiten en netwerken en zijn er aanwijzingen voor uitbuiting binnen deze netwerken. Volgens onze bevindingen is het bestaan van onderling gerelateerde multiproblematiek onder nomadische AMV's terug te voeren op de ongunstige gezinssituatie in het land van herkomst. Deze problemen worden verder ontwikkeld in relatie tot ervaringen tijdens de doorreis naar Europa en het nomadische bestaan in Europa en/of het straatleven, en de relatief beperkte legale mogelijkheden voor deze minderjarigen in sommige EU-landen.

Betrokkenheid bij criminele netwerken, mogelijke uitbuiting en andere vormen van slachtofferschap

Verschillende respondenten in zowel Nederland als in andere landen delen de mening dat betrokkenheid bij criminele netwerken vrij veel voorkomt onder de doelgroep, en dat deze netwerken niet noodzakelijkerwijs grote netwerken zijn maar ook een 'micro' karakter kunnen hebben. Onze resultaten geven ook aan dat de grens tussen betrokkenheid van AMV's in criminele netwerken en uitbuiting door deze netwerken vrij dun is (zogenoemde *victim-offender* overlap).
De Nederlandse begeleiders zijn van mening dat de meerderheid van de Noord-Afrikaanse jongeren betrokken is bij een of andere illegale activiteit binnen een netwerk. Dat zijn hun indrukken, maar zij horen ook concrete verhalen van de jongeren dat deze betrokken zijn bij drugsnetwerken of netwerken die zich bezighouden met diefstal. Er zijn aanwijzingen dat er bewegingen zijn tussen Nederland en Frankrijk en soms België voor betrokkenheid bij criminele activiteiten. Volgens onderzoekers met expertise op het onderwerp die we hebben geïnterviewd, ontstaat betrokkenheid van deze jongeren bij dergelijke netwerken op een subtiele manier door socialisatie, en niet door een actieve rekrutering. Meerdere Nederlandse begeleiders wijzen erop dat AMV's in criminele netwerken worden gelokt door volwassen (Noord-Afrikaanse) mannen of invloedrijke minderjarigen in de groep; er zijn ook vermoedens van uitbuiting. De risico's voor 'rekrutering' en criminele uitbuiting worden door Nederlandse begeleiders hoger ingeschat wanneer opvangcentra voor AMV's zich op hetzelfde

terrein bevinden als dat voor volwassen asielzoekers en wanneer AMV's na het bereiken van 17,5 jaar in een AZC worden geplaatst.
Volgens onze resultaten komt vooral Parijs naar voren als een knooppunt van criminele activiteiten en netwerken, waarbij zowel Marokkaanse als Algerijnse minderjarigen en volwassenen betrokken zijn. Naast Frankrijk worden in Duitsland in luxekleding gespecialiseerde criminele netwerken genoemd en zijn er aanwijzingen of vermoedens van criminele netwerken in Spanje en België. In deze gevallen is het moeilijk om inzicht te krijgen in mogelijke uitbuiting, en verschillen respondenten in hun vermoeden of er wel of geen sprake is van uitbuiting. Gerelateerd aan de dunne lijn tussen betrokkenheid bij criminele activiteiten en uitbuiting is de afhankelijkheid van minderjarigen van drugs in combinatie met hun wens om (snel) geld te verdienen en in dat kader hun afhankelijkheid van anderen, ook om te overleven in het straatleven. Wat Marokkaanse minderjarigen in Frankrijk betreft, lijkt de vermoedelijke uitbuiting meer tijdelijk dan continu, en de situatie van minderjarigen kan snel veranderen.
Naast criminele uitbuiting zijn er signalen van seksueel misbruik en uitbuiting van deze groep AMV's, die ook binnen de criminele netwerken plaatsvinden.

Opvang en begeleiding in andere Europese landen

Om inzicht te krijgen in de opvang en begeleiding van deze groep specifieke minderjarigen in andere Europese landen, is ingezoomd op vier landen, België, Frankrijk, Italië en Spanje. De EMN ad-hoc-query leverde onvoldoende informatie op over dit onderwerp.

België
België heeft te maken met dezelfde groep nomadische AMV's als Nederland, ook qua nationaliteiten. Begeleiders en professionals herkennen dezelfde multiproblematiek onder deze jongeren. Net als Nederland kan België worden geclassificeerd als een overwegend op asiel gebaseerd toelatingssysteem voor AMV's. Alle AMV's worden opgevangen door Fedasil, het federaal agentschap voor de opvang van asielzoekers. De juridische mogelijkheden en perspectieven voor de groep nomadische AMV's zijn relatief beperkt. Minderjarigen die geen asiel aanvragen, behoren meestal tot de groep nomadische AMV's, en worden ondergebracht in een apart centrum. Dit is een zogenoemd 'observatie- en oriëntatiecentrum', wat inhoudt dat begeleiders meer informatie proberen in te winnen over deze minderjarigen en hun situatie. Dit is dezelfde aanpak als voor minderjarigen die wel een verzoek indienen voor internationale bescherming. Wat anders is, is dat begeleiders nomadische AMV's bewust proberen te maken van hun situatie en voorlichting geven over (nadelen van) het leiden van een irregulier bestaan na 18 jaar.

Vaak verlaten nomadische AMV's het opvangcentrum en velen van hen bevinden zich in de straten van Brussel. Professionals die op straat en in een dagopvang met deze minderjarigen werken, streven ernaar contact met hen te leggen en te onderhouden en hen te ondersteunen in hun behoeften. Meer specifiek wat het dagcentrum betreft, proberen de professionals een vertrouwensrelatie met de minderjarigen op te bouwen en proberen ze hen van de straat weer in het systeem te krijgen; dit doen ze door slechts beperkte spelregels (geen vechtpartijen, geen drugs) te hebben voor de dagopvang. Ook werken ze onder meer samen met partnerorganisaties op het gebied van middelengebruik. Het creëren van deze overgang wordt als uitdagend ervaren, gezien de vele problemen zoals hierboven beschreven.

Frankrijk
Dezelfde groep nomadische AMV's is ook aanwezig in Frankrijk en vormt een klein deel van het totale aantal AMV's in het land. Deze minderjarigen, *jeunes en errance* genoemd, worden geïdentificeerd als nomadisch, zowel binnen Frankrijk als in Europa in bredere zin. Het systeem van Frankrijk met betrekking tot AMV's kan worden beschouwd als gebaseerd op kinderbescherming. AMV's vallen onder de verantwoordelijkheid van de jeugdzorgorganisaties en vallen tot hun 18e verjaardag onder publiekrechtelijke regelingen inzake kinderwelzijn. Omdat ze minderjarig zijn, hoeven AMV's geen verblijfsvergunning te hebben; weinig AMV's in Frankrijk vragen asiel aan. Het is mogelijk dat een minderjarige een tijdelijke verblijfsvergunning voor privé- en gezinsleven of een verblijfsvergunning voor werknemer of tijdelijke werkkracht krijgt, afhankelijk van de leeftijd waarop de minderjarige bij de jeugdzorg is binnengekomen. Minderjarigen die voor ten minste drie jaar onder de bescherming van het systeem staan, kunnen de Franse nationaliteit aanvragen. Degenen die behoren tot de groep nomadische minderjarigen komen echter vaak niet in het systeem; in plaats daarvan zijn er velen te vinden in de straten van bijvoorbeeld Parijs en zijn ze betrokken bij criminele activiteiten en netwerken.

Italië
In Italië hebben alle minderjarigen recht op een verblijfsvergunning omdat ze minderjarig zijn. Ze hebben dezelfde rechten als elke Italiaanse of Europese minderjarige burger. De verblijfsvergunning is geldig tot ze 18 jaar worden. De vergunning voor minderjarigen wordt gegeven met het oog op integratie en is alleen geldig in Italië. Volgens de zogenaamde Zampa-wetgeving voor minderjarigen (van kracht sinds april 2017) zijn identiteitsdocumenten niet nodig voor de verblijfsvergunning. AMV's die 16 jaar of ouder zijn en nog op school zitten, kunnen het schoolcurriculum combineren met een stage voor praktijktraining, die niet wordt betaald. Amv's die 16 zijn en niet meer op school zitten mogen 40 uur per week werken. Het is dan ook mogelijk om een betaald contract voor drie jaar te krijgen om stage te lopen bij een bedrijf om kwalificaties te behalen. Na drie jaar kan dit contract verlengd of gewijzigd worden; dit kan ook na 18 jaar.
AMV's die op het punt staan 18 te worden en die een verblijfsvergunning kregen wegens minderjarige leeftijd, hebben de mogelijkheid om hun begeleiding en integratie voort te zetten tot ze 21 zijn, om zo het traject van sociale integratie dat ze zijn ingeslagen te voltooien. Na 18 jaar kunnen AMV's ook een werkvergunning aanvragen. Na de leeftijd van 21 jaar kunnen ex-AMV's die een verblijfsvergunning hadden op grond van minderjarigheid legaal in Italië blijven, op voorwaarde dat ze een baan hebben.
Het Italiaanse opvangsysteem wordt gefinancierd door de centrale overheid, maar wordt op lokaal niveau georganiseerd en uitgevoerd door NGO's. In Italië zijn er twee niveaus van opvangsystemen: het eerste niveau heeft betrekking op de aankomst van immigranten; en het tweede niveau is gericht op de integratie van minderjarigen. Op het tweede niveau bevinden zich opvangcentra, zogenoemde 'onderwijsgemeenschappen', waar maximaal twaalf minderjarigen kunnen worden begeleid. Ze zijn meestal te vinden in kleine gemeenten of in het centrum van steden om een betere integratie van de minderjarigen in de lokale gemeenschap te bevorderen.

Spanje
AMV's hebben in Spanje het recht op een verblijfsvergunning vanwege hun minderjarige leeftijd. Ze kunnen het land niet worden uitgezet omdat ze een irreguliere status hebben. Tot hun 18e worden ze opgevangen in zogenaamde beschermingscentra

(*centros abiertos de proteccion*). De opvang en begeleiding van alleenstaande minderjarigen vallen onder de verantwoordelijkheid van de publieke kinderbeschermingsorganisaties, die regionaal worden georganiseerd door autonome gemeenschappen, net zoals in Italië. In aankomstgebieden zijn er specifieke centra voor AMV's; op andere plaatsen worden ze opgevangen met Spaanse en andere buitenlandse kinderen die onder bescherming staan van de kinderbescherming. In november 2021 is de Spaanse Vreemdelingenwet aangepast, waardoor (ex-)AMV's meer wettelijke rechten en mogelijkheden hebben gekregen. Het belangrijkste doel van de wijziging was om de integratie van (ex-)AMV's in de Spaanse samenleving te bevorderen en te voorkomen dat AMV's na het bereiken van de legale volwassen leeftijd in een situatie van irregulariteit en sociale uitsluiting terechtkomen. Sinds de hervorming van november 2021 mogen AMV's die 16 jaar of ouder zijn en die onder de bescherming van het kinderbeschermingssysteem vielen, 8 uur per dag werken, net als alle kinderen in Spanje tussen 16 en 18 jaar oud. AMV's die 18 jaar worden en als minderjarige een verblijfsvergunning kregen, evenals jongeren die als AMV onder de bescherming van het kindbeschermingssysteem stonden maar 18 werden voordat ze de verblijfsvergunning kregen, krijgen een verblijfs- en werkvergunning voor twee jaar, onder bepaalde voorwaarden. In beide gevallen zijn er mogelijkheden tot verlenging. Daarnaast is er een overgangsregeling voor ongedocumenteerde ex-AMV's die tussen de 18 en 23 jaar oud waren toen de hervormingen werden ingevoerd en die als minderjarige onder het kindbeschermingssysteem vielen. De verblijfs- en werkvergunning voor (ex-)AMV's is nationaal en AMV's die onder dit regime vallen, hebben geen recht op gezinshereniging. Hoewel de nieuwe regelgeving nog recent is en de effecten op langere termijn nog niet zichtbaar zijn, zijn de resultaten van de wijzigingen volgens de Spaanse professionals positief, waarbij er grote veranderingen worden waargenomen in de houding van de jongeren, die meer bereid zijn om te studeren en om te integreren. De meerderheid van de (ex-)AMV's werkt momenteel.

Oplossingsrichtingen

Onze respondenten brachten verschillende mogelijke oplossingen en manieren naar voren hoe om te gaan met de doelgroep van dit onderzoek. Wat betreft begeleiding werden de aanpak van middelengebruik en verslaving, het investeren in een persoonlijke vertrouwensrelatie, het bieden van multidisciplinaire en cultuursensitieve begeleiding, het werken met de familie in het land van herkomst, en eerlijke communicatie met minderjarigen over hun juridische mogelijkheden als belangrijk genoemd. Bovendien zouden mogelijkheden voor stages en beroepsopleidingen hen kunnen helpen bezig te blijven, hun gevoel van eigenwaarde te vergroten en vaardigheden te leren die nuttig kunnen zijn voor de toekomst. Daarnaast worden kleinschalige opvangcentra, waar specifiek aandacht is voor groepsdynamiek, als mogelijke oplossing gezien. Verder worden suggesties gedaan voor maatregelen gericht op de landen van herkomst, en voor samenwerking tussen verschillende EU-landen onder meer op het gebied van identificatie en bescherming om het probleem van betrokkenheid bij criminele netwerken en mogelijke uitbuiting aan te pakken. Ten slotte zouden het bieden van legaal perspectief, inclusief mogelijkheden om te werken en praktijktraining te volgen en juridische mogelijkheden na het bereiken van legale volwassen leeftijd, helpen om nomadische AMV's binnen het systeem te houden en zou het hen de stabiliteit bieden die nodig is om aan hun problemen te werken.

Discussie

Het bieden van toekomstperspectieven

Onze bevindingen laten een verschil zien in het toelatingsbeleid van de onderzochte landen met betrekking tot AMV's: in de Zuid Europese landen Italië en Spanje is het toelatingsbeleid gebaseerd op kinderbescherming. AMV's worden in de eerste plaats en vooral gezien als kinderen die beschermd moeten worden en hebben dezelfde rechten als de minderjarige burgers van deze landen. In die landen is het aanvragen van internationale bescherming niet nodig voor het verkrijgen van een verblijfsvergunning. In de Noord-Europese landen zoals Nederland en België is het toelatingsbeleid voor AMV's gebaseerd op asiel. Ondanks het feit dat ze ook gezien worden als kinderen die beschermd moeten worden, is voor hen het aanvragen van internationale bescherming de voornaamste en soms de enige manier om een verblijfsvergunning te krijgen. Echter, jongeren die uit veilige landen komen, zoals die uit Marokko, hebben weinig tot geen kans op internationale bescherming. In Italië en Spanje doelt het beleid rond AMV's op de integratie van deze minderjarigen in de samenleving en op het bieden van toekomstperspectieven en het opbouwen van een toekomst, ook na het bereiken van 18 jaar. Dit in tegenstelling tot Nederland en België waar deze jongeren wel onder bepaalde voorwaarden mogen verblijven tot zij 18 worden, maar waar ze geen toekomstperspectieven hebben. Begeleiders in landen waar de toelating van AMV's hoofdzakelijk gebaseerd is op asiel, worstelen met wat ze de jongeren kunnen bieden binnen een context van (zeer) beperkt juridisch perspectief. Onze bevindingen laten zien dat nomadische AMV's in Nederland min of meer in het asielsysteem worden 'geduwd'. Dit kan gepaard gaan met twee belangrijke knelpunten: een op individueel niveau (gevoelens van frustratie onder jongeren door lange procedures en door 'tijdverspilling', en gevoelens van onrechtmatigheid wanneer ze zich vergelijken met hun leeftijdsgenoten die wel een kans maken op een asielvergunning – factoren die volgens Nederlandse begeleiders mede aan de basis liggen van gedragsproblemen en incidenten in opvangcentra), en het andere op bestuurlijk niveau (druk op het asielsysteem in deze landen, dat tegenwoordig al onder druk staat op Europees niveau).
Tegelijkertijd bestaan er bij sommige begeleiders negatieve beelden van deze minderjarigen als 'overlastgevers' en verwachtingen dat incidenten (opnieuw) zullen gebeuren. Dit lijkt voor verdere fricties te zorgen binnen de opvangcentra. Dat een groep AMV's die eigenlijk wordt beschouwd als niet behorend tot het asielsysteem omdat ze uit 'veilige landen' komen, wordt opgevangen en begeleid samen met AMV's die internationale bescherming nodig hebben zorgt voor een dilemma.

Negatieve maatschappelijke gevolgen en het doorbreken van vicieuze cirkels op verschillende niveaus

Het migratiesysteem van nomadische minderjarigen in Europa lijkt zichzelf te blijven voeden: op macroniveau door sociaaleconomische verschillen tussen landen van herkomst en Europa, op microniveau door aanhoudende aspiraties van jonge potentiële migranten en hun families, sociale netwerken en in het algemeen valse feedbackmechanismen van leeftijdsgenoten die al zijn gemigreerd. Volgens de geïnterviewden zijn er op meso-niveau 'actoren' die (vermoedelijk) sommige jongeren uitbuiten in criminele netwerken in verschillende Europese landen. Meerdere respondenten wezen op het gebrek aan legale mogelijkheden in Noord-Europa als een van de belangrijkste redenen waarom deze AMV's betrokken zijn in criminele netwerken en waarom ze zich in een voortdurend nomadisch bestaan bevinden. Een essentiële vraag is hoe deze 'vicieuze cirkel' met betrekking tot het irreguliere bestaan van nomadische minderjarigen met multiproblematiek in Europa kan worden doorbroken.

Nomadische jongeren die uit de Nederlandse opvangcentra verdwijnen, leiden ofwel een onregelmatig bestaan in Nederland, ofwel reizen door naar een ander Europees land – waar ze in kwetsbare situaties kunnen terechtkomen. Slechts weinig AMV's keren terug naar het land van herkomst. Als deze minderjarigen in straatsituaties terechtkomen, wordt het gebruik van middelen een strategie om met een dergelijk bestaan om te gaan. Hoe langer ze in straatsituaties zitten en zich buiten het systeem bevinden, hoe groter de afstand tot de samenleving en instituties binnen het systeem. Conflict wordt een normale manier van communiceren om te overleven in hun wereld. De vele problemen waar deze jongeren last van hebben, voeden elkaar en creëren een vicieuze cirkel op individueel niveau. Deze vicieuze cirkel is moeilijk te doorbreken en er is geen gemakkelijke en eenduidige oplossing voor deze problemen. Het meest voorkomende knelpunt om de cirkel te doorbreken die in dit onderzoek en in eerder onderzoek door professionals wordt genoemd is het gebrek aan (voldoende) aansluiting op de reguliere medische zorg, vooral voor ernstig verslaafden. Complementaire maatregelen en een integrale aanpak (zoals zorg op maat voor de bijzondere kenmerken en behoeften van de groep, individuele en cultuursensitieve begeleiding en mogelijke interventies bij de jeugdzorg) vanaf het begin kunnen bijdragen aan de aanpak van multiproblematiek.

Positieve eigenschappen omzetten in positief gedrag

Er zijn verschillende manieren om de groep nomadische minderjarigen met meerdere problemen te benaderen. Ze kunnen worden gezien als 'overlastgevers' en daders van misdaad. Hun betrokkenheid bij criminele netwerken heeft wel degelijk maatschappelijke gevolgen. Onze bevindingen bieden de context en achtergrond van overlastgevend gedrag en dragen bij aan het beter begrijpen waarom minderjarigen zich op een bepaalde manier gedragen. Belangrijk is dat ze niet alleen overlastgevers of daders zijn; het zijn tegelijkertijd kinderen die een ongelukkige start in het leven hebben gehad, worstelen om te overleven en kwetsbaar zijn voor criminele uitbuiting. Onze gegevens laten tevens zien dat nomadische AMV's ook slim, veerkrachtig en competent zijn en een sterke agency hebben om het nomadische leven en alle uitdagingen die daarmee gepaard gaan te overleven. De recente beleidswijzigingen in Spanje met betrekking tot mogelijkheden voor legaal werk die als doel hebben om een irregulier leven en sociale uitsluiting te voorkomen, ook na het bereiken van 18 jaar, laten een andere aanpak voor AMV's zien. Een van de achterliggende ideeën achter de beleidswijzigingen in Spanje is dat het bieden van legale bestaansmogelijkheden aan de groep AMV's met economische motieven, en het bij wet reguleren van hun overgang naar legale volwassenheid, een manier is om alternatieven te bieden voor betrokkenheid bij criminele activiteiten, situaties waarin deze jongeren hun bovengenoemde positieve eigenschappen op een negatieve manier gebruiken.

Het is duidelijk dat de uitdagende problematiek van nomadische AMV's met multiproblematiek niet een aandachtspunt is enkel voor het Nederlandse beleid, maar voor Europa in het algemeen. In dit kader is het van belang dat Europese landen actief en regelmatig hun ervaringen uitwisselen over de uitkomsten van verschillende *(good) practices* en verschillende immigratiesystemen en de gewenste en ongewenste resultaten van hun beleid.

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Appendix 1 Composition supervisory committee

Chairperson	
Dr. Joris van Wijk	Free University of Amsterdam
Members	
Dr. Abdessamad Bouabid	Erasmus University, Rotterdam
Drs. Eliane Smits van Waesberghe	Verwey-Jonker Institute, Utrecht
Catelijne Sillevis, M.A.	Stichting Nidos
Drs. Agmar Altena (until March 2023)	The Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, The Hague
Joske Geraedts, Msc/Med (from March 2023)	The Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, The Hague
Sacha van den Berg, Msc. (until May 2022)	then Directorate of Migration Policy, Ministry of Justice and Security, The Hague
Remha Kiros, LL.M. (from May 2022)	Directorate of Migration Policy, Ministry of Justice and Security, The Hague

Appendix 2 List of respondents

Table A2.1 List of respondents

Organisation	Country	Form of data collection
Prof.dr. Ilse Derluyn; dr. Océane Uzureau University of Gent	Belgium	Duo interview
Fedasil	Belgium	Individual interview
Fedasil, Sugny Accommodation centre for UMs who do not apply for asylum	Belgium	Individual interview Group interview
Fedasil, My Future Project	Belgium	Duo interview
Macadam, Brussels	Belgium	Individual interview
Sub-municipality of Brussels	Belgium	Individual interview
dr. Nadja Dumann University of Kent	Belgium	Individual interview
Ministry of Justice; Directorate of Juridical Protection	France	Individual interview
Hors la rue, Paris	France	Two individual interviews
dr. Olivier Peyroux SciencesPo, Paris (Researcher & senior expert on migration and trafficking in persons)	France	Individual interview
dr.Francesco Vacchiano Ca'Foscari University of Venice Associate professor, Anthropology, and clinical pyschologist	Italy	Individual interview
CESIE, Sicily	Italy	Individual interview
Small-scale accommodation centre for UMs	Italy	Individual interview
Bayti	Morocco	Individual interview
IOM	Morocco	Duo interview
Wasata	Morocco	Individual interview
NIDOS, legal guardians and behavioural scientists	The Netherlands	Two focus groups
NIDOS, behavioural scientist	The Netherlands	Individual interview
COA, mentors, and behaviourists	The Netherlands	Two focus groups
An unaccompanied minor	The Netherlands	Individual interview
Municipality of Manresa (Catalonia) (Researcher and social worker)	Spain	Two individual interviews
Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration	Spain	Individual interview

Organisation	Country	Form of data collection
Directorate General for Minors in Catalonia	Spain	Duo interview
Prof.dr. Elisa Garcia España University of Malaga (Researcher, Professor of Criminology)	Spain	Individual interview
Prof. dr. Mercedes Jiménez Alvarez Autonomous University of Madrid (Researcher, Professor of Anthropology)	Spain	Individual interview
UNICEF	Spain	Individual interview
Maria von Bredow National Council of Crime Prevention (Researcher and investigator)	Sweden	Individual interview

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