Towards meaningful participation of unaccompanied refugee minors in buddy projects in the Netherlands

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Preface

In front of you is my master thesis 'Towards meaningful participation of unaccompanied refugee minors in buddy projects in the Netherlands'. This is the final part of my master *Pedagogische wetenschappen (orthopedagogiek).* I have worked hard on this thesis for nine months. It was not a topic I would have chosen in the first place and not everything went as I had planned. However, it was interesting and educative to delve into this topic and to be able to alternate this with my internship. Even though I will start working in the health care for people with a disability, I will probably come across the same issues as the professionals do with URMs, as regards taking the voice of the client into consideration.

I would like to thank dr. Josje van der Linden for her support and nice collaboration during this process. She has motivated me and given me the opportunity to write a thesis based on my interests. And she was always willing to look for a solution with me. I would also like to thank the experts who took the time to talk to me and share their experiences and challenges they face. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

Emmeke Arends,
Groningen, 24 June 2022

Abstract

The aim of this study was to analyse how the way the buddy projects for unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) in the Netherlands meet the needs and wishes of the URMs can be improved, to fill the gap in existing knowledge and to develop the resilience of the URMs. A desk-study was conducted to create an overview of the organisations and current buddy projects involved with URMs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five experts who work with these organisations and projects. The perspective of the URMs has been investigated on the basis of a previous study by someone else. Consequently, an infographic was created for the member check. The desk-study showed that many organisations and buddy projects are involved with URMs in the Netherlands. They all differ from each other and projects come and go constantly. Most buddy projects hardly include the voice of the URM. The experts acknowledged the importance of meaningful participation, but find it often hard to implement this. In general, they notice that people who work with URMs do not listen well, only pay attention to the limitations and expect URMs will not tell what they do not like. Contrarily, URMs are often not used to give their opinion, do not get the opportunity or do not dare to, even though they want to. This research shows that although meaningful participation is important for buddy projects and for URMs in particular, the implementation of this kind of involvement requires more research into the perspective of the URMs, as regards meaningful participation, and methods which connect integration, meaningful participation and resilience.

Keywords: URM, buddy projects, meaningful participation, integration, resilience.

Samenvatting

Het doel van deze studie was om te onderzoeken hoe de manier waarop maatjesprojecten voor alleenstaande minderjarige vluchtelingen (AMV's) in Nederland tegemoetkomen aan de behoeften en wensen van de AMV's kan worden verbeterd, om het gat in de bestaande kennis te vullen en om de veerkracht van de AMV's te ontwikkelen. Een bureaustudie is uitgevoerd om een overzicht van de organisaties en huidige maatjesprojecten die bij AMV's betrokken zijn te maken. Er zijn semigestructureerde interviews afgenomen bij vijf experts die met deze organisaties en projecten werken. Het perspectief van de AMV's is onderzocht aan de hand van een eerder onderzoek van iemand anders. Er is een *infographic* gemaakt voor de *membercheck*. De bureaustudie heeft laten zien dat er veel organisaties en maatjesprojecten zijn betrokken bij AMV's in Nederland. Ze verschillen van elkaar en de projecten komen en gaan. De meeste maatjesprojecten nemen de stem van de AMV nauwelijks mee. De experts erkennen het belang van zinvolle participatie, maar vinden het vaak lastig om daarnaar te handelen. Veelal zien ze dat mensen die met AMV's werken niet goed luisteren, alleen de beperkingen zien en verwachten dat AMV's niet zeggen wat ze niet leuk vinden. Tegelijkertijd zijn AMV's vaak niet gewend om hun mening te geven, krijgen ze de mogelijkheid niet of durven ze niet, terwijl ze dit wel willen. Dit onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat hoewel zinvolle participatie belangrijk is voor maatjesprojecten en AMV's in het bijzonder, de implementatie van deze vorm van betrokkenheid meer onderzoek vereist naar het perspectief van de AMV's wat betreft zinvolle participatie en de methoden die integratie, zinvolle participatie en veerkracht met elkaar verbinden.

Sleutelwoorden: AMV, maatjesprojecten, zinvolle participatie, integratie, veerkracht.

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List of abbreviations

COA	Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ICC	International Connection Class
OIJET	Ondernemen In Je Eigen Toekomst
SAMAH	Stichting Alleenstaande Minderjarige Asielzoekers Humanitas
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
URM (AMV)	Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (Alleenstaande Minderjarige Vluchteling)
WLG	Willem Lodewijk Gymnasium

1. Introduction

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (UNHCR, 2021), in 2020, there were about 26.4 million refugees as a result of conflict, violence and events disturbing public order. Within this group, 10,300 unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) were reported in Europe (UNHCR, UNICEF & IOM, 2021). Especially in 2015, a peak of URMs has been reported (Portnoy & Ward, 2020). Recently, a lot of refugees, including URMs, from the Ukraine has been reported in Europe, due to the invasion from Russia (Kamphorst, 2022).

An URM can be defined as someone who is under the age of 18, is separated from both parents, is not accompanied by a guardian and seeks asylum (Office of the UNHCR, 1997). Once URMs arrive in the Netherlands, they follow the same procedure as other refugees. In addition, URMs until 14 years old are cared for in foster families and URMs until 18 years old are assigned a guardian (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, n.d.a). The foundation Nidos is responsible for the practical and pedagogical daily care of the URMs. They go, like other refugee children, to an International Connection Class (ICC) (in Dutch: *Internationale Schakelklas*) (Pharos, 2019). Meanwhile, the asylum application is taking place. Once the asylum has been granted to the child, the child will be guided during the integration process into the host society among others by social workers (Noyon et al., 2020). The concept of integration will be discussed in the theoretical framework.

URMs are a vulnerable group. The children face challenges before, during and after fleeing (Jensen et al., 2019). During their flight they may have encountered traumatic experiences, which can cause several psychiatric symptoms like sleeping disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms and mood swings (Jensen et al., 2019; Wernesjö, 2012). Most importantly, they entered the new country without their family and therefore have little social support (Müller et al., 2019). After their arrival, they may feel lonely (Jensen et al., 2019). Their mental health problems are more severe than those of peers who migrated with a caregiver (Cardoso et al., 2019)

The integration process can lead to an increased feeling of confidence, self-assurance and stable living conditions, which influences their well-being and resilience (Hosseini, & Punzi, 2021; Uyterlinde et al., 2009). An example of the integration projects in which the URMs can participate are buddy projects (in Dutch called '*maatjesprojecten*'). The buddies and URMs can do activities together with each other, like sporting or drinking coffee (Naber, & Uzozie, 2016). A buddy can help the URM with social participation and integration. This can increase their feeling of connectedness with the host country (Korac, 2003).

Naber and Uzozie (2016) have conducted an exploratory research into buddy projects for URMs. One of their recommendations is to investigate to what extent the experiences and knowledge of an ex-URM can play a role in buddy projects. Although the research conducted so far has highlighted the effects of buddy projects, most researchers forgot to include the voice of the URMs, whereas the projects are all about them. According to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UN, 1989) decision makers have to act in the best interest of the child and take the voice of the child into consideration. The only way to do so is by asking them about their opinion. Including the wishes and needs of the child in the buddy project could increase their motivation to participate, improve the outcomes and make them feel they are being understood and listened to (Gill et al., 2019; Hosseini, & Punzi, 2021; Oliver et al., 2006; Walder, & Molineux, 2020).

In order to ensure the buddy projects meet the wishes and needs of the URMs and to fill this gap in existing knowledge, the following research questions have been developed:

How can the way the buddy projects for URMs in the Netherlands meet the needs and wishes of the URMs be improved?

1. *How are the URMs currently supported during their integration in the Netherlands?*
2. *In what way do the buddy projects support the integration of the URMs in their own views?*
3. *How can the needs and wishes of the URMs be accommodated in the buddy projects?*

2. Theoretical framework

Resilience

As mentioned before, URMs are a vulnerable group. During pre-migration, migration and post-migration they may suffer from mental health problems, feel lonely, experience poverty, hunger and violence. At the same time they have to learn a new language and culture and deal with discrimination and economic strains (Cardoso et al., 2019; Keles et al., 2018).

Not all URMs develop mental health problems (Carlson et al., 2012; Jensen et al., 2019). Despite their vulnerability they often show resilience, due to protective factors (Andersson et al., 2021). Resilience is the ability to adapt well to a new environment or situation, even after experiencing difficulties (Keles et al., 2018). It can increase their chances on a good outcome later in life (Carlson et al., 2012).

Keles and colleagues (2018) have shown that about 60% of the URMs show resilience. Reaching their destination, seeking asylum and acculturating successfully all by themselves already demonstrate resilience. Cardoso and colleagues (2019) elaborate on this by explaining URMs have a lot of hope, a sense of tangible goals and belief in their abilities to attain these goals. Religiosity and intelligence can also contribute to their resilience. These characteristics can be seen as individual protective factors (Carlson et al., 2012). Moreover, resilience is affected by contextual conditions. For example, close relationships and a sense of belonging to the new culture can influence the resilience (Keles et al., 2018). But also strong extended family systems can increase resilience (Cardoso et al., 2019). Social support and adapting to the new culture while maintaining parts of their own culture relieves many of the daily stressors and increases the self-efficacy of URMs (Andersson et al., 2021).

So, despite the challenges URMs face and their vulnerability, they can do well by developing resilience. Their resilience and well-being can be increased by successful integration.

Integration

In 1997, Berry has put forward the acculturation theory. Acculturation is a process that occurs when different cultural groups are in contact with each other for an extended period of time (Tolsma et al., 2012). Within this theory, four acculturation styles exist: integration, assimilation, segregation and marginalisation. The distinction between the four can be made by looking at whether one's own cultural identity is preserved and whether a relationship is entered with the other cultural group (see Table 1).

Table 1

Acculturation Styles

Relationship with other cultural group	Preservation own cultural identity	
	Yes	No
Yes	Integration	Assimilation
No	Segregation	Marginalisation

Note. Adapted from "*Cultuur en opvoeding*", by L. Eldering, 2014, p. 31.

This thesis will focus on the integration of URMs. Integration is the process in which migrants become part of the host society, while maintaining their own cultural identity (Eldering, 2014). In order to integrate, URMs need to learn the Dutch language, feel connected and have a stable living condition. This improves their well-being (Hosseini, & Punzi, 2021).

There are four types of integration, namely: social, cultural, economic and political integration (Hamberger, 2009). Social integration can be seen as a process that deals with social inequalities and the exclusion of people who do not have equal access to social services, benefits and rights enjoyed by other people in society. Education, work, health care, local community and participation in political, social and economic life are part of these services, benefits and rights. So, social integration concerns, among other things, forming friendships, well-being and following education (Correll, & Chai, 2009; Hamberger, 2009). The new social networks provide a feeling of satisfaction and stability and function as a buffer for stressful events (Cohen, & Wills, 1985; Kappa, 2019). To be able to encourage a successful social integration, Correll and Chai (2009) argue there should be a conducive policy. On the one hand, social integration can be driven by possibilities and choices of URMs. On the other hand, the extent of social integration also depends on the goal of refugees. In order to build a new life, social integration is needed. But if they get somewhere for a short period, for economic reasons for example, social integration may be less important since the resources are more important to their well-being (Luthra et al., 2018). However, in general, social integration is most important for the well-being of people (Andersson et al., 2021).

Cultural integration has to do with understanding the language, values and norms of the host society (Hamberger, 2009). The extent to which the refugees identify themselves with

the host society compared to their country of origin is an important indicator. So, it is important that refugees enter into a relationship with the Dutch culture, but at the same time they can also retain their own identity (Berry, 1997). The URMs from the research by Naber and Uzozie (2016) mentioned the importance of speaking the Dutch language to communicate with others, to perform at school and to participate socially.

Economic integration includes access to the labour market among others (Hamberger, 2009). This type of integration depends on the degree of self-reliance and competencies of the refugee. Self-reliance is often increased by civic integration and learning the language of the host country (Hamberger, 2009; Hanekamp, 2012). Political integration is seen as the last phase of the integration process. In this phase, for example, refugees have the right to vote and they have knowledge of the politics of the host country (Hamberger, 2009). Social integration and cultural integration together from the basis for the entire integration process. Once refugees have learned the (Dutch) language and made connections, it is easier to integrate economically and politically (Hamberger, 2009).

There are many organisations that focus on the integration of refugees. Helping URMs with the asylum-seeking process is important for their integration and well-being (Andersson et al., 2021). One type of projects these organisations and the government offer to improve especially the social integration are the so-called buddy projects (Naber, & Uzozie, 2016). So, on one side, the host culture should create opportunities for the refugees to integrate. On the other hand, refugees need to be open to integration and take their responsibility, which makes it a two-way process (Hosseini, & Punzi, 2021).

Buddy projects

There is no consistent definition for buddy projects. The buddy can be a peer, a volunteer, a professional coach or a family. The volunteer can be a former refugee or a student for example. The buddies can apply via the project, school, volunteer work, or someone else (Dekker et al., 2013; Naber, & Uzozie, 2016; Uyterlinde et al., 2009). Nowadays, buddy projects are very popular. There are many cutbacks on other kinds of projects due to budget cuts. But buddy projects are usually carried out by volunteers under supervision of professionals and therefore probably suffer less cutbacks (Dekker et al., 2013).

The URM will be connected to a buddy one-on-one for a certain period. They usually meet each other once a week. The activities they do together such as sports/exercise, drinking coffee, going to the movies or talk with each other. This can be meaningful for the URM, as well as for the buddy. The URM gets connected with the host society and the buddy can learn

something from the culture from the URM. And for both, their confidence will grow (Dekker et al., 2013; Naber, & Uzoie, 2016; Uyterlinde et al., 2009).

Besides the different types of buddies, several types of buddy projects exist. Most of them are offered by non-governmental organisations (Naber, & Uzozie, 2016). As buddy projects improve the social integration of refugees, they will also improve the other types of integration. All these types are important goals for URMs because they go, like their Dutch peers, through an important phase in which they develop emotionally, cognitively and socially. The URMs should get the same opportunities to develop socially and to participate in society (Naber, & Uzozie, 2016).

Research has been carried out into the effective components of the buddy projects. Firstly, a strict hiring policy is important to find the right buddies. Not everyone is suitable to support the URM in the right way. And the buddy has to be really motivated to guide the URM, be creative, reliable and enthusiastic. It is also helpful if the buddy has already some experience in offering support (Dekker et al., 2013; Van der Tier, & Potting, 2015). Secondly, a good match between the URM and the buddy is crucial. Therefore, this matching process is done by an organisation (Naber, & Uzozie, 2016). A good match is the foundation of the entire process, because it can influence the relationship of trust and support. It can be based on characteristics and interests they have in common. However, characteristics like gender, age or cultural background are not important to make a good match. A careful match can prevent disappointments on long term (Dekker et al., 2013; Van der Tier, & Potting, 2015; Van 't Hoog et al., 2011; Uyterlinde et al., 2009). Dekker et al. (2013) also recommend to apply different coaching styles, such as a supportive, active and instrumental style. This improves the contact between the buddy and the refugee. Moreover, the work of the buddies can be meaningful, but also confronting or demanding. Therefore, the organisation could supervise the buddies and offer trainings and meetings where buddies can share their experiences. This will increase the quality and support the buddies. At the same time, the organisation can also get an insight into the work of the buddy and its success or failure (Dekker et al., 2013; Van der Tier, & Potting, 2015; Uyterlinde et al., 2009). Finally, Dekker and colleagues (2013) and Van der Tier and Potting (2015) recommend to combine the buddy projects with professional services such as social workers or psychologists. This will help the URMs to process their traumas and increase the effectiveness of the interventions.

Uyterlinde and colleagues (2009) and Van der Tier and Potting (2015) have shown that buddy projects can increase the confidence of the URM, improve social skills, contribute to the independence of the youth and the youth gets the chance to meet new people. The latter

can be recognized as social integration, contributing to the development of resilience of the URM. According to URMs, the buddy projects enlarge their environment throughout the new connections and activities, again social integration. They valued the engagement of the buddy. Especially advice from adults was important to them (Naber, & Uzozie, 2016). At the same time, the buddy project can also influence the buddies. It can increase the psychological well-being, improve the social-communication and personal development and broaden their horizons (Van 't Hoog et al., 2012; Van der Tier, & Potting, 2015).

However, according to Rhodes (2004), an inadequate buddy can have the opposite effect. It can lead to dropping out of school, criminality and losing confidence in care. The organisation should take the request for help of the URM into consideration to find out whether a buddy project is the right intervention or not (Dekker et al., 2013).

So, buddy projects can help URMs to integrate by connecting them to a buddy to do activities together. One of the components that should be taken into consideration are the needs and wishes of the URMs. Nowadays meaningful participation is trending. According to Oliver et al (2006) it can increase the resilience of young people. However, literature concerning meaningful participation in buddy projects for URMs is lacking.

Meaningful participation

In general, meaningful participation means that someone should get the opportunity to get involved in decision-making that involves meaning, control and connectedness (Oliver et al., 2006). It can increase the feeling of belonging, which influences the well-being and resilience (Dunne et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2006). The right of the child to be heard is included in the CRC (UN, 1989) and should therefore be taken seriously. Moreover, including the voice of the child can improve services and outcomes of programmes (Carlton, 2015; Dunne et al., 2017).

A way to give URMs the opportunity to let them participate meaningfully, is to let them create and work with interventions, like buddy projects. In this way the buddy projects, or other interventions, may be enhanced according to their experiences and views. They have experienced the integration process already, so they understand what the new URMs are going through (Hosseini, & Punzi, 2021). Encouraging them to volunteer as a buddy for new URMs can also increase their professional skills (Carlton, 2015).

To summarize, URMs are a vulnerable group. However, because of personal characteristics and their environment they can develop resilience, A successful integration, by increasing the social network, getting to know the host culture and getting a job, improves the well-being. To integrate successfully socially and culturally, buddy projects have been

developed for refugees. According to the literature, letting URMs participate in the decision-making during the project, also known as meaningful participation, should improve their well-being and resilience too.

3. Methodology

The present study has examined the research questions through qualitative research methods. This type of research can provide in-depth information on the underlying opinions, needs and wishes of the URMs and people working with the buddy projects (Flick, 2018).

Current support of the URMs during their integration in the Netherlands

In order to answer the first research question, firstly, a desk-study has been conducted to create an overview of the organisations that are committed to URMs. Google and websites from organisations that work with refugees have been used to look for involved organisations. The following search terms have been used to find these organisations: *'organisatie'* (organisation), *'alleenstaande minderjarige asielzoekers'* (unaccompanied minor asylum seekers), *'alleenstaande minderjarige vluchtelingen'* (unaccompanied refugee minors), *'vluchtelingen'* (refugees), *'asielzoekers'* (asylum seekers) and *'Nederland'* (Netherlands). An overview has been made of the organisations committed to the URMs, based on the information found on the internet. It includes their target group, responsibilities, whether they offer projects or not and collaboration with other organisations.

Secondly, a desk-study has been conducted to create an overview of the current buddy projects for URMs and their characteristics. Google, websites from organisations that work with refugees and LinkedIn have been used to look for buddy projects in the Netherlands. Consequently, the snowball effect has been applied (Flick, 2018). Buddy projects for URMs specifically and projects where URMs, among others, can participate have been included. The following search terms have been used to find the buddy projects: *'integratie'* (integration)*, '*participatie*'* (participation)*, 'maatjesproject'* (buddy project)*, 'vluchtelingenkinderen'* (refugee children)*, 'alleenstaande minderjarige asielzoekers'* (unaccompanied minor asylum seekers)*, 'alleenstaande minderjarige vluchtelingen'* (unaccompanied refugee minors) and *'Nederland'* (Netherlands). The information found on the websites has been used to create an overview of the current organisations that work with buddy projects for URMs. It includes their target group, goal, type of buddy, type of recruitment and matching, type of activities and whether the needs/wishes of the URMs are taken into consideration.

Thirdly, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with people who work with the organisations committed to the URMs and people who work with buddy projects. The goal was to find out what their experiences are with the organisation or projects, what their thoughts are on meaningful participation of URMs in the buddy projects and whether they think it could be improved. In total, five experts have been interviewed. The first expert works for the organisation Pharos and has carried out the research on the project 'Mijn Tweede

Familie'. The second expert works at SAMAH, the third one works for the project 'Ons Maatjesproject' at the Willem Lodewijk Gymnasium (WLG) and the Alfa College. The fourth expert works at the organisation 'Jeugdformaat' and the fifth one at the organisation 'Piëzo'. All these organisations offer projects for the URMs, among others. The interviews have been conducted online in Dutch. This was done due to the COVID-19 measurements and the travel distance. The results have been translated into English by the researcher herself. The interview guide (see Appendix A) has been based on findings from the literature and the results from the overviews of the first sub-question. The participants have been collected via convenience sampling on the internet, due to limited time and connections. Via LinkedIn and the websites from the projects and organisations that came across in the first part of the first sub-question, the experts have been found and emailed with the question whether they wanted to be interviewed. All the participants have been asked to give informed consent (see Appendix B) and ethical clearance was gotten from the ethics committee of the faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences.

All the interviews have been recorded, transcribed and coded via the programme 'Atlas.ti'. A qualitative content analysis has been applied (Schreier, 2012). This is useful to analyse subjective viewpoints. Following the qualitative content analysis, a coding frame has been developed in advance, based on the literature and the interview guide (see Appendix C). When new issues were raised in the data, new codes have been added to the coding frame to match them. By using a qualitative content analysis, the transcripts have been analysed systematically, but on the other hand there was also some flexibility to add new codes (Flick, 2018). This has led to an inventory of the experiences of the experts with the buddy projects with a tentative analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches.

Support by buddy projects from the perspective of the URMs

In order to answer the second research question, the results of the interviews with the experts and the research *'Volg je dromen tot je niet langer kunt leven'* by Uzozie and Verkade (2016) have been used to research the perspective of the URMs. At first, many organisations and projects working with URMs have been approached, to find ex-URMs who wanted to share their experiences on to what extent their wishes and needs were met during the buddy projects. However, they were difficult to reach. Organisations either did not have their contact details anymore, or they could not share them due to privacy, or they did not want to ask them because they think URMs have already gone through a lot and should be protected and taken care of now. Therefore, the research by Uzozie and Verkade (2016), who work for SAMAH, has been used. Since SAMAH works with URMs, they could easily contact the ex-URMs to

ask whether they wanted to be interviewed for their research. The advantage of using these results is that the URMs do not have to be interviewed another time.

Uzozie and Verkade (2016) had interviewed nine ex-URMs who lived already more than ten years in the Netherlands and are in possession of a permit residence or a Dutch passport. All the ex-URMs did have contact with SAMAH before. Their motivation for choosing URMs that were already known with SAMAH was because URMs are hard to trace. Six of them are men and three are women and they are from five different countries in Africa and Asia. The goal of their research was to find out what URMs mean by empowerment and what they think effective elements are for them to build a future. They had some questions that had to do with meaningful participation, like feeling heard and understood in their daily life after arriving in the Netherlands. These results were used to describe the perspective of URMs.

Accommodation of the needs and wishes of the URMs in the buddy projects

The different approaches from the various buddy projects, an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, using the expert interviews and the experiences of the URMs from the research from Uzozie and Verkade (2016) together led to an overview in the form of an infographic (see Appendix D). In qualitative research, these results are often presented to the participants. In this way they can be asked to give feedback and their opinion on the results and ideas. This is called a member check (Koelsch, 2013). This overview has been e-mailed to the five experts of the first research question. Improvement points have been taken into account to answer the main research question. Expert 2 from SAMAH was the only participant who responded. Therefore, recommendations that were mentioned during the interviews by the five experts were used to describe the way accommodations can be made to meet the needs and wishes of the URMs.

4. Results

Current support for the URMs

Before presenting the overview of the current buddy projects, an overview of the organisations committed to URMs will be given to get a clear view of what is done for the URMs in the Netherlands.

Organisations committed to URMs

The overview of the organisations in the Netherlands that work with or for the URMs can be found in Table 2. The table shows what their target group is, what their responsibilities are, whether they offer projects for the refugees or not and with which organisations they collaborate.

As can be seen in Table 2, there are many organisations that work with URMs. There are eleven organisations in total. Nidos, SAMAH and Yoin are the only ones specifically for URMs. All the other organisations also focus on other refugees or asylum seekers or children, youth and families in general that need extra support. According to the interviews with the experts, Nidos and SAMAH are known to work with URMs and provide good care. SAMAH is relatively new and small, but has succeeded to become known as one of the most important organisations in the Netherlands for URMs. On the contrary, Pharos and Piëzo do not focus on a specific group, but on people who are underprivileged in health and care or who are at risk of being on the 'outside' of the society. Refugees and URMs are part of this group (Expert 1 and 5).

Table 2

Overview of organisations involved in URMs in the Netherlands

Organisation	Target group	Responsibilities	Projects on offer [a]	Collaboration [b]
COA (*Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers*) (n.d.)	Asylum seekers	The COA's are responsible for the care and guidance of the URMs and other asylum seekers in the Netherlands. According to the *Wet Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers* they have to provide asylum seekers shelter, guide them to a future in the Netherlands or abroad and provide them with the necessary resources. They have created special shelters for the URMs like 'small-scale shelter facilities' and 'small-scale accommodation facilities'. Within these shelters there are people from the COA who help the URMs with the daily activities.	No	Nidos, Vluchtelingen-Werk, Pharos
Nidos (n.d.)	URMs	Nidos is a certified youth protection institution. They take care of the guardians and supervision of the URMs who have requested asylum and stay at one of the COA's. They are responsible for the development of the child. Professionals carry out the youth protection measure. The guardian can help the URM with the asylum request and look after him/her.	No	COA, Pharos, Jeugdformaat, Sterk Huis
Pharos (n.d.)	Underprivileged in health and care (URMs among others)	Pharos is an organisation that tries to reduce the large differences in health among the Dutch population. One of the groups they focus on are refugees, since they often deal with health inequalities. If their health improves, their participation and integration should also improve.	Yes	SAMAH, VluchtelingenWerk, Nidos, COA
SAMAH (*Stichting Alleenstaande Minderjarige Asielzoekers Humanitas*) (n.d.)	URMs	SAMAH is a foundation that helps to improve the well-being of URMs from the age of 12 to 25 years old. They try to represent the interests of the URMs and to strengthen their position in the Dutch society.	Yes	Pharos, VluchtelingenWerk
LOWAN (*Landelijke Onderwijs Werkgroep voor Asielzoekers en Nieuwkomers*) (n.d.)	Newcomers who follow primary or secondary education	LOWAN supports schools who offer education to the newcomers. This can be primary or secondary education. They offer information on financing, laws and regulations and educational practice.	Yes	No
VluchtelingenWerk (n.d.a; n.d.b)	Refugees and asylum seekers	VluchtelingenWerk supports refugees during the first few days in the Netherlands. If the refugees have to wait for their asylum, VluchtelingenWerk tries to shorten the wait and answer juridical questions. Once the refugees get to stay in the Netherlands,	Yes	COA, Pharos, SAMAH

		VluchtelingenWerk can try to get their family to the Netherlands and find a new home. They also offer lessons for the integration process.		
Piëzo (n.d.b)	People who are (at risk of being) 'outside' of the society	Piëzo stimulates and supports people to participate and integrate in society. They want to give people the opportunity to discover and develop their talents and skills.	Yes	Jeugdformaat
Jeugdformaat (n.d.)	Children, youth and parents who need some extra help (URMs among others)	Jeugdformaat is a youth care provider in the region 'Haaglanden'. Among others they take care of the URMs. They focus on increasing the self-reliance of the URMs to be able to participate and integrate in the Dutch society. They also offer shelter and support to the URMs.	Yes	Nidos, Piëzo
YOIN Lindenhout (n.d.)	URMs and ex-URMs	YOIN Lindenhout is a youth care provider in the region 'Gelderland'. They support URMs from the age of 16 years old and even after they turn 18 with their shelter and development in the province Gelderland. They want to let the URMs participate in the neighbourhoods, school, and sports activities. The URMs are supported by trained professionals. Some of them have been a refugee themselves.	No	No
Sterk Huis (n.d.)	People with a difficult or threatening situation at home or a difficult period (URMs among others)	Sterk Huis is a youth care provider in the region 'Brabant'. They want to offer everybody a safe and independent life. By using knowledge from specialists and smart treatment methods they want to increase the self-reliance. For the URMs in specific they offer shelter and support by offering a personal mentor on top of the guardian from Nidos.	Yes	Nidos
Elker (n.d.)	Children, youth and parents with complex development and education questions (URMs among others)	Elker is a youth care provider in the region 'Noord-Nederland'. Together with the guardian from Nidos they discuss what is going well and where the URM needs more help. They want to increase the resilience and supporting the URM in a healthy development.	No	No

[a] Projects such as buddy projects or comparable activities.

[b] Collaboration with one of the other organisations committed to the URMs.

It should be noted that, as can be seen in Table 2, most of the organisations have different responsibilities. Some take care of the guardians, shelter or education. Others focus on offering support or on improving the well-being, integration or resilience of the URMs. There are also organisations like Nidos and contract partners of Nidos where the URMs live, or the COA's for the refugees that do not have a status yet: "These are of course the parties you have to work with and do the real work" (Expert 1). This is in contrast to other organisations like Pharos. They do not work with URMs directly, but they develop projects for them (Expert 1). Jeugdformaat, YOIN, Sterk Huis and Elker are youth care providers and have almost the same responsibilities. However, they all operate in different regions.

Not all the organisations offer activities for the URMs (or others). It differs per organisation whether they do or not. Some offer buddy projects or fun activities with peers while others only focus on offering practical support.

Finally, Nidos, COA and Pharos are the larger organisations. They work together with each other, but also with other organisations. Pharos, SAMAH, Nidos, COA and contract partners from Nidos are part of the URM platform for example. The platform is a place where they come together to discuss what is going on among refugees (Expert 1). Pharos always works together with different organisations in order to develop new projects (Expert 1). Expert 5 from Piëzo says they "try to connect our 800 volunteers to everything". Piëzo sends their volunteers to accommodation facilities from Jeugdformaat for example. The smaller organisations do not work together with each other very much.

Current buddy projects

A general overview of the current buddy projects for refugees in the Netherlands can be found in Table 3.

As can be seen in Table 3, there are currently six projects in the Netherlands that work with URMs. Mijn Tweede Familie and Maatjesgroep from the Regenboog Groep are specifically for URMs and the other projects are also for refugee children/youth, some even until the age of 30 years old. Table 2 shows SAMAH is the only organisation specific for URMs and youth until the age of 25 that offers projects. Expert 2 explains it is important to keep supporting URMs after they turn 18, because as soon as they turn 18, they are on their own. They often still do not understand the Dutch system, which causes them to often end up in poverty or debt.

Table 3

Overview of current buddy projects for URMs in the Netherlands

Name project (and organisation)	Target group	Goal	Type of buddy	Recruitment and matching	Activities	Including needs/wishes of URMs
Mijn Tweede Familie (Pharos & SOVEE, n.d.)	URMs	Increase participation and self-reliance	Family (consisting of at least two adults who are a couple)	Matching based on expectations from the family and URM	Everyday family activities	Ask for opinion on project afterwards
New@Home (ZonMw, n.d.)	Refugee children from the age of 12 until 20 and URMs	Social integration and guide refugee in Dutch society	Student or volunteer between the age of 18 and 30 years old	Unclear	Explore social neighbourhood, drinking coffee, visit parties.	Unclear
Maatjesproject (WLG & Alfa College) [a]	Refugee children and URMs	Social and cultural integration. And informative for the buddies	Peer	Only students from the fifth year of the WLG can apply. Match based on age and interests	Group activities at school occasionally	Ask for opinion on project afterwards
Maatjesproject (De Regenboog Groep, 2018)	(ex-)URMs	Support URMs in transition to the age of 18 years old	Peer between the age of 18 and 30 years old	Requirements need to be met and interview in order to match	Help with administration, find a job, study choice, increase social network	Yes, activities based on needs/wishes of the URM
Ondernemen In je Eigen Toekomst (OIJET) (New Dutch Connections) (De Senerpoint Domis et al., 2015)	(ex-)URMs and refugee youth until the age of 30	Contribute to the well-being and self-reliance of the youth by increasing their network and work purposefully on their future	Coach and peer between the age of 18 and 30 years old	Volunteer has to be involved in the society, be social and active. Match based on interests or preference	Conduct training assignments together	Yes, activities based on needs/wishes of the URM/refugee. Regular feedback moments
Taal & Toekomst (Piëzo, n.d.a)	Refugee youth from the age of 16 or older	Improving the Dutch language and skills from youth	Language coach	Interview with the organisation, matching is unclear	Practice Dutch language, inform on labour market	The coach works supplementary on what the youth needs

[a] Data retrieved from the interview with Expert 3.

Table 3 shows that there are many different projects for URMs. They can be organised by large or local organisations or schools. Their content and methods differ as well. There are probably many more projects, but they could not be found on the internet. This is just a small overview of projects.

Goals. The projects have different goals, but most of them overlap and focus on social and cultural integration and increasing the self-reliance of the URMs. Some projects have the same goal for every participant, while other projects have goals that match the needs and wishes of the URMs.

Expert 1 from Mijn Tweede Familie explains that refugee youth live until their 18th in an accommodation facility and have people around them who support them. "And when they turn 18, a lot falls away. The youth said they really wanted to get in contact with normal Dutch people, like how do they live here" (Expert 1). So, with their project they wanted to increase the chances of getting in contact with the Dutch society, experience a feeling of belonging, learn the Dutch language and "give them a family that they can go to or who takes care of them" (Expert 1). With this they also wanted to increase the chances of finishing internships and education of URMs. All of this can be seen as social, cultural and economic integration.

Expert 2 from SAMAH says that it differs per person what the goal is. They talk to the URM to find out what their need is at that moment. This can be social integration, but also cultural or economic integration. Expert 2 also thinks that "all the things are really interdependent. Your access to the labour market and your knowledge of norms and values and language also have to do with who your network is and what information you receive". They want to give the youth the right information and skills so they can be in control of their lives.

The Maatjesproject from the WLG and the Alfa College is quite new. Their main goal is to let the refugee students practice the Dutch language and meet Dutch students (and the other way around). Throughout the activities they carry out, the refugees get to learn more about Dutch festivities like 'Sinterklaas' for example. And at the end of the schoolyear, the refugee students have prepared a presentation in Dutch which they present for the Dutch students. Meanwhile, they also want the students from the WLG to "get away from the white island" by learning something from the refugee students (Expert 3). Expert 3 argues they focus on social and cultural integration "since this is what we have in our power".

Experts 4 and 5 from Jeugdformaat en Piëzo say they focus on social integration. They want to increase the world of others, because it is very restricted for some URMs and buddies.

To show how lonely the URMs are, expert 4 gives an example of a boy who wanted to go to Iran: "He misses his plane and then you notice that he calls at seven in the morning. Why does he call me? Because he doesn't have another number in his phone. That is what touches me". Especially Piëzo wants to connect people with each other. "We are all social beings and we all want to live a full life and be in contact with each other. But we don't know how to meet each other. We facilitate that" (Expert 5). On top of that they also want to show the youth that there are people willing to help you (Expert 4).

Buddies. As can be seen in Table 3, every project has a different kind of buddy. A peer between the age of 18 and 30 years old is the most common type, but families, language coaches, or other volunteers can also be seen as buddies. The interviews show that it is not difficult to find buddies. There are always a lot of people who want to participate. A lot of projects and organisations find it important to have an equal relationship between the URM/refugee and the buddy. All the projects and organisations have professionals who can support the URMs/refugees when necessary.

Mijn Tweede Familie uses families or couples as buddies. A match is made based on the expectations from the family and from the URM. By having a whole family as a buddy, the URM gets the opportunity to meet many different people (Expert 1).

SAMAH has different buddies such as ex-URMs or peers. They think it will help URMs when they have a buddy who has experienced the same as they have (Expert 2). There is a recruitment and matching process. Expert 2 states for example that people should volunteer because they want to do activities together and because they want to meet someone from a different part of the world, not because they just want to help someone. If students want to volunteer to get study credits for example, there is no equality anymore.

The Maatjesproject from the WLG matches Dutch peers to the refugee students, based on their interests. They organize meetings for the students to find out more about the project (Expert 3).

Jeugdformaat does not have typical buddies like the other projects have. They have different volunteers like a bicycle maker, a cook or someone who wants to teach them to play guitar. They can either be matched to an URM based on their needs and wishes or matched to a whole group of URMs based on their interests. They also think it is important that both sides enjoy their time together.

Piëzo also has many different buddies, depending on the type of project. For the project Taal & Toekomst they use language coaches, but they also have sport buddies or ex-refugees for example. Like SAMAH and Jeugdformaat, Piëzo considers the equality between

the URM/refugee to be important. This has been described by Expert 5 in the following way: "The knife cuts both ways. And if it goes into equality, then it will work. If it is reciprocal, then yes, it can be a beautiful thing. Those young people feel that too". They do not have to recruit their volunteers. By meeting people via via they already have a very large network.

Meaningful participation. As can be seen in Table 3, the websites of the projects did not always show whether the voice of the URM/refugee is included or not. According to their websites, Maatjesproject from the Regenboog Groep and OIJET do take the voice of the URM into account. They base the activities on the interests and wishes of the URMs. The interviews gave more insight into the other projects and organisations.

All the experts agree that meaningful participation. "Yes, of course that is exactly what they do at SAMAH, so that is really nice. […] That is what really empowers someone" (Expert 1). Expert 1 can imagine there is a lack of meaningful participation in society, but at the same time there are already a lot of initiatives to improve the meaningful participation for youth. During the pilot from Mijn Tweede Familie the researchers have asked the URMs what they thought of the project. SAMAH pays a lot of attention to including the voice of the URM. "That is actually the key to SAMAH's working method. Everything we do, we do together with the youth. They know best. We help with the translation, but they know best what they need or what they have missed" (Expert 2). Expert 3 from the Maatjesproject from the WLG gives her students and the URMs the opportunity to decide what activity to do together. Expert 4 from Jeugdformaat tries to share the story of the URM more, because only then other people will know what is going on and how we can help someone. She gives an example of a boy who has a lot on his head. He has not seen his family for six years and he does not know whether they can get to the Netherlands or not. Some people will tell him to get out of bed because he is being lazy. But she thinks it is more important to find out together with him what is feasible for him at this moment. Expert 5 from Piëzo explains that meaningful participation is important to make people feel good and to increase their resilience. They apply positive health when refugee youth get stuck at school. This is a conversation technique that focuses on the own control. They try to find out what someone wants and what they need to reach this.

Despite the fact they all think meaningful participation is paramount, they all face challenges as regards meaningful participation. Expert 1 mentions that the URMs will never say they do not like something:

They are not used to having their own opinion at all. So, to find out what they really think is of course very complicated. That is why organisations like SAMAH are so good at it. They have youth who do that. That is not the case with this project. The project is not set up that way. (Expert 1).

Expert 2 says a lot of people only notice what is not possible for the URM. The youth have gone through a lot, so they want to make their journey and the efforts worth it:

We notice in everything that it is sometimes very difficult for people to be open to what young people want and what they need. And then bring that back together to something that is realistic. They will sit on that chair, saying no, we know better what you need. Often out of good intentions, but often doesn't work. (Expert 2).

Expert 3 says she thinks their students are quite young and usually school decides what to do. "To be honest, at least at our school, projects and school trips are really full. Too full to my taste, with everything teachers have come up with what's going to happen. That does not invite our students to think" (Expert 3). She thinks, in this way, the peers are not prepared to come up with their own activities during the project or give their feedback on it, even though she would like her students to do so. "In the ideal school the students think along about education" (Expert 3). She thinks the URMs are still getting to know the country and its culture. Therefore, it might be difficult for them to come up with their own ideas for activities for example. Afterwards they always ask everyone what they thought of the project. But Expert 3 is not sure to what extent this can be called meaningful participation. She also does not know how to find out what everyone really wants and how to take all of it into consideration. Expert 4 says a lot of people usually do not listen well; they hear want they want to hear. However, the youth are also very busy. They have to go to school, have side jobs, so they do not have much time. Expert 5 notices that the extent of meaningful participation depends on the efficiency from the person who wants to work together with them. They have to want to work together with the URMs and include them. "My first question is: have they even looked into the target group?" (Expert 5). The youth go to school and work in the evening. But a lot of people who want to meet them want to make appointments between nine and five. That is impossible, because they have to go to school. "You just always want to put the interests of the youth first. And not just because you want to set up your beautiful project" (Expert 5).

So, they all noticed that still a lot needs to change in our society to actually include the voice of the URM. At this moment, not enough people pay attention to this (Experts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

Strengths and weaknesses. The strengths and weaknesses on reaching the goal and the buddy differ per project. Mijn Tweede Familie argues that a family who is involved, that consists of at least two adults who are together, which the URMs do not have at that moment, is very valuable for the URMs. Their network is very large, so the URM gets the opportunity to expand his network very easily. However, the URMs are not used anymore to take a family into account, because most of them had to travel alone for years. They do not show up at appointments for example, because they forgot to contact the family (Expert 1). The strength of SAMAH in reaching the goal is that they discuss the problems with the URMs. In this way they can work very efficiently and goal oriented. However, they have experienced struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic, because usually they meet the youth in a low-key way. Due to COVID-19 pandemic there were not able to do so. One of their strengths as regards the buddies, is that while the youth learns something from the buddy, the buddy should also learn something from the youth. This makes the situation "less official" (Expert 2). A weakness is that in the beginning the youth did not understand what the idea of the project was. There were no guidelines, so the buddies and the URMs could meet each other whenever they wanted to and decide on the activities they were going to do together. Expert 3 from The Maatjesproject mentions they struggle with the cultural integration, because that is very wide, and they do not have much experience with the project and other cultures yet. There is a lot of variety within the ICC and students are inclined to stick to their friends or culture within their class. They have tried to improve this by decreasing the group activities. Another difficulty is that the refugee students have to travel very far in order to get to school. They cannot stay after school to meet with their buddy, because they have to get the bus to get home on time. This restricts their freedom. Moreover, the URMs go for only one year to the ICC and not all of them live in the city or they move afterwards. That makes it difficult to find them and to let them participate in developing projects and policies (Expert 3). A strength from Piëzo and Jeugdformaat is that they have gathered a lot of buddies and other volunteers. In this way, the refugees have a lot of opportunities to increase their network. However, refugees sometimes experience discrimination. This can make it hard to integrate socially, because people from the host society hold them back in this, by shutting them out for example. Expert 4 explains she thinks "… for a number of things that you cannot do by yourself, but also not to only involve yourself […] I think our strength is that we match people who have a real affinity

with it, who also benefit from it themselves". Expert 5 elaborates on this by arguing that their variety of buddies can be seen as a strength because "you can apply it to everything".

      Projects coming and going. Expert 2 explains a lot of projects come and go. In 2015 and 2016 there were a lot of refugees. As a consequence, there were a lot of funds available to create local projects for that group. By using the money, municipalities could say they did something for the refugees. "It is also somewhat the trend that municipalities or funds want to give something to a project" (Expert 2). The project subsidy is there to set it up, try it out and then they expect the project to make it more sustainable. "Organisations want to do something for the target group [URMs] and then [projects] shoot like mushrooms out of the ground" (Expert 2). They get money for two or three years from a municipality or a fund. With that money they can set up a foundation. But they do not know how to find these URMs and they do not know what they want. "I think it is a shame if new projects keep emerging and all of them have to reinvent the wheel. I think you should at least inquire before you start about what it all means and why you do this" (Expert 2). At some point the municipality should start financing and the municipality will not do that. Projects either have to stop or find funding in a different way. All of this does not mean Expert 2 thinks projects should stay the same: "There are things that have been around for a very long time and are stuck in what they always do. I do not think that is necessarily a good thing". However, Expert 3 thinks the number and changes of projects is not a problem: "I think that is exactly how it works." Behind every project are one or two passionate people. Things could bleed to death if the match disappears, because someone gets sick for example.

The perspective of the URMs

      All the participants in the study of Uzozie and Verkade (2016) had contact with other URMs and later also with someone from a buddy project. These connections were very meaningful, because the URMs could count on them when they had to make an important decision, or the buddies or caregivers motivated them to reach their goal. "I think that is very important, if you are working on your future, being supported by something or someone. Because you cannot do everything on your own. You get something from every angle" (Boy, quoted in: Uzozie, & Verkade, 2016). The URMs also had contact with organisations such as SAMAH, VluchtelingenWerk and Nidos. The diversity of organisations was very useful, because in this way the URMs could enlarge their future perspective, since they had a lot of different questions (Uzozie, & Verkade, 2016).

      On the other hand, some of the URMs were not used to give their opinion or ask questions, because in their culture at home they were not used to do so (Uzozie, & Verkade,

2016). Sometimes the URMs did not dare to tell what kind of support they needed, since they thought they should feel grateful for the safe place they got and did not want to complain. Some were told they had to be grateful. Moreover, a lot of them did not dare to give their opinion on something. They felt it was exhausting to explain why they differed from other people, or their mentor did not hear them. So, they sticked with the other nationals, because they understood each other.

Most of the participants from Uzozie and Verkade (2016) mentioned that they felt as if they did not have much to say in several important decisions regarding school and housing. The people who helped them did not give them the opportunity to do so or did not inform them well enough, even though they meant well. Only afterwards the URMs knew they had the opportunity to make their own decisions.

The URMs interviewed by Uzozie and Verkade (2016) expressed that they want to be heard and feel supported whenever they make a decision. It does not mean that everything has to go their way or that their mentors/guardians always think it is the right decision. But they want to be taken seriously and they value the opinion of people who are important to them. Uzozie and Verkade (2016) explain that the URMs who are actively involved in arranging matters themselves can benefit from these skills later in life. They also argue it needs an investment to get to know the expectations of the URM and the mentor or caregiver.

Accommodation of the needs and wishes of the URMs in the buddy projects

An issue all five experts mentioned during the interviews, is that almost everyone who works with URMs finds it hard to figure out what the needs and wishes of the URMs are and does not always try to include the voice of the URM. The infographic (see Appendix D) illustrating on this issue did not provoke a reaction. However, during the interviews the experts gave recommendations on what to consider when trying to meet the needs and wishes of the URMs.

Expert 1 and 2 explained the value of using ex-URMs as buddies for the new URMs. By matching them, the ex-URMs can take away some shame and make the URMs feel as if they are not alone, since the ex-URMs have gone through the same. This is in line with the feeling of equality that must be created according to Expert 2 and 5. The buddies should not only help, but also learn something from it themselves. They also both mentioned the importance of giving the URM the opportunity to respond verbally. According to Expert 2 people should not translate complex issues or policy lists for the URMs: "Ask them questions they understand. You will see they have a lot to say (laughing)". Expert 5 states that people who want to work with URMs have to immerse themselves in the target group and adapt to

the lifestyle of the URM among others. In addition, projects and organisations should also be available after URMs turn 18, because they often need more time to understand the Dutch system according to Expert 2.

Expert 2, Expert 5 and Uzozie and Verkade (2016) emphasize people should stop discouraging the URMs and telling them what is not going well and impossible, as regards school, jobs and helping their families. Instead, they should try to understand them, look at what is possible and tell them what is going well and what can go better. Expert 5 explains they have a conversation tool called 'positive health' that focuses on the wish for change and autonomy. Expert 4 elaborates on this by explaining we have to really listen to the URMs, "we should not listen to what we want to hear". This can be done by sharing their story, so we know what is behind someone, instead of making assumptions. She also mentions the large number of new youth coming from the Ukraine. "It will not stop for a long time. We have to listen to them. It is quite often young people who know very well what they want, don't they?" (Expert 4).

5. Conclusion and discussion

The goal of this research was to find out how the way in which buddy projects for URMs in the Netherlands meet the needs and wishes of URMs can be improved.

The results show that there are many different organisations involved with URMs. They all have their own responsibility and most of them collaborate with other organisations. Moreover, there are a lot of different buddy projects for refugees in the Netherlands to help the URMs integrate socially. However, only six projects could be found on the internet. They either state they ask whether the URMs liked the project or activity, or they match the URMs to a buddy based on their interests and some base their goals and activities on the needs and wishes of the URMs. All of this can be seen as a movement towards meaningful participation.

The interviews with the experts have shown that buddy projects nowadays come and go. Organisations try to invent a new type of project in a short period of time instead of learning from others. Meanwhile, in the end they often do not have enough money to continue. All five experts agreed on the importance of meaningful participation. However, they all face challenges while trying to reach this. All five experts mentioned there is a lack of opportunities towards meaningful participation in society by people who work with URMs. According to some of the experts, many people only notice what is missing and what is not possible for the URM and people do not listen well. Moreover, they either argue URMs will not give their opinion easily or they think they are too young to give their opinion.

The results from Uzozie and Verkade (2016) show that URMs often felt they had to be grateful and therefore did not dare to tell what kind of support they needed or give their opinion. Even though they wanted to be taken seriously, some were not given the opportunity to do this.

Although there is a platform to discuss problems and advice, projects and organisations are still figuring out how to meet the needs and wishes of the URMs. Offering the experts an infographic to discuss experiences or advice did not contribute to this either. During the interviews, the experts have given some recommendations on what needs to be changed in society and projects.

So, there are two sides that need to be considered when including the voice of the URM. The URMs themselves sometimes struggle to make their voice clear. On the other hand, organisations and projects come and go and argue it is difficult to find out what the needs and wishes are, although they want to. The time to invest in this issue is lacking.

Theoretical reflection

Van der Tier and Potting (2015) agree with the fact that the number of buddy projects is probably much larger. The projects are constantly evolving; they come and go, change names or take over projects from each other. They often have a short duration due to funds they have for only a certain period (Naber, & Uzozie, 2016). This makes it difficult to get a clear overview of all the projects. Everyone tries to reinvent the wheel, instead of trying to learn from each other (Uyterlinde et al., 2009). However, it is good to see many people try to create opportunities for URMs to integrate, because a successful integration has a positive effect on the well-being and resilience of the URM (Andersson et al., 2021).

The results show that all the organisations and projects want to pay attention to the needs and wishes of the URMs, but they often find this hard to do. They all match the buddy and the URM based on their interests or expectations. Additionally, afterwards they ask the URM what they thought of the project or activities. Both can be seen as a step towards participation. However, meaningful participation not only involves giving your opinion, but also having control and feeling connected (Oliver et al., 2006). This feeling of belonging is important, because it contributes to the resilience of the URM and to the success of the integration process (Andersson et al., 2021; Dunne et al., 2017).

The fact that meaningful participation is difficult to achieve can also be seen in other domains, such as the mental health care and the establishment of laws and policies concerning children (Jørgensen, & Rendtorff, 2018; Lyon, 2007). Although the professions involved in working with children may differ from each other and the results from this study cannot be transferred just like that, they could learn from each other (Sinclair, 2004). The existing knowledge on meaningful participation for refugees and the results from the interviews are for example in line with the research on youth engagement strategies for mental health and substance use interventions by Dunne and colleagues (2017). They have shown that focusing on the resilience instead of on the vulnerabilities, having a welcoming environment, having staff who experienced the same as the youth and genuinely offering participation improve the youth engagement.

Dunne and colleagues (2017) also came across similar challenges as the participants from Uzozie and Naber (2016). They mentioned barriers in implementation of meaningful participation from the perspective of the youth such as a lack of information or opportunity, shyness and an absence of interest.

Meanwhile, Teixeira and colleagues (2021) state society cannot keep up with the innovations regarding participation among youth activists. Policies often do not take the views

of children and youth into account. Adults usually hold negative attitudes about youth, such as passive, immature and very vulnerable. This is in line with the aspects the experts from the interviews observed in today's society.

Methodological reflection

It was difficult to make an overview of the current buddy projects for URMs. A lot of projects come and go all the time and most of them do not have clear policies on their websites. Because of this, the overview is probably not complete and many small-scale or local projects are not included in the table and it is not sure to what extent they take the needs of wishes into consideration in their project.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was not possible to interview the experts live and to do a member check physically. It was easier to make an appointment with the experts to interview them online and therefore no travel time was needed. The experts could sit at a location of their choice. Research has shown that maximizing personal comfort helps to reduce the anxiety associated with interviews. However, the quality of the light, camera, microphone and internet can influence the interview. Besides, body language is more difficult to see during a virtual interview than in real life. It is harder to see whether someone is nervous or relaxed for example. These aspects could influence the quality of the interview (Lee et al., 2021). The member check has been carried out via an infographic which was sent by e-mail. Ideally, the member check was done through a physical discussion with all experts together, so a discussion between the experts could take place. Only one expert responded. To prevent a biased recommendation on how to meet the needs and wishes of the URMs, the results given by the experts during the interviews have been used to explore this issue.

During the research it was hard to find ex-URMs who wanted to talk about their experiences on meaningful participation in buddy projects. The number of organisations involved in URMs, the peak of refugees in 2015 and 2021 (Kamphorst, 2022; Portnoy & Ward, 2020) and the number of buddy projects for refugees suggest there should be a lot of URMs in the Netherlands. Organisations and projects argued they did not want to ask the URMs because they have already gone through a lot and they deserved privacy and rest right now. Some explained they did not have the contacts of the URMs anymore, due to privacy reasons. The URMs often "disappear", because they move abroad or get into financial or social trouble and quit school. This makes it difficult for organisations and projects to find them again and contact them (Staring, & Aarts, 2010). Some organisations also argued they did not have time to find ex-URMs who were interested, because they were too busy with the

incoming immigrants from the Ukraine. Therefore, the perspective of the URMs could not be researched in this thesis through interviews.

A hazard of the qualitative content analysis is that because categories are made in advance, based on the literature, the depth and underlying meanings may get lost when analysing and processing the data. This risk has been taken into account by creating new codes when a new category came across during the analysis of the data (Flick, 2018).

Recommendations for practice

Organisations, projects and their sponsors are recommended to spend more time on building their expertise to create an effective integration project for URMs. Instead of trying to reinvent the wheel in a short period of time, organisations and projects could perhaps learn from each other and cooperate by sharing their experiences and findings. A platform on URMs where problems and ideas are discussed already exists. Perhaps more organisations or projects could join the platform, or the platform could share their knowledge and signals they pick up with the others.

The experts from this study mentioned that people who work with URMs still need to learn a lot when it comes to meaningful participation. These people can be recommended to be aware of this concept and be open to it, by talking to the URMs and think in possibilities instead of limitations. In addition, professionals need to realize that URMs also have a voice that needs to be heard. They are recommended to find a way to implement meaningful participation in their projects, while keeping the diversity of URMs and their backgrounds in mind. Since there are not many experiences on meaningful participation of URMs, these developments might lead to a completely different kind of project on integration than buddy projects.

For the development of the concept of meaningful participation of URMs, it could be recommended to invest in building knowledge on meaningful participation and developing policies on meaningful participation by learning from other domains. It seems as if a lot of domains face the same challenges regarding meaningful participation and are not benefiting from the experiences and knowledge that already exist. By making use of a platform for example, they could learn from each other.

Recommendations for further research

It can be recommended to do more research into the perspective from the URMs, to know what the difficulties from their perspective are. Meaningful participation and integration are both two-way processes after all. The host society and the professionals are on one side and the URMs are on the other side. This research and other research have shown the

difficulties on meaningful participation in integration, especially from the perspective of the professionals. But knowledge on the experiences from the URMs is lacking.

The exchange of knowledge and experiences with other domains could perhaps also be useful to develop new methods in which integration, resilience and meaningful participation are linked to each other. A lot of professionals who work with URMs are struggling to take the voice of the URM into consideration during their integration among others, although it is important for the outcome of the integration process and resilience of the URMs.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide Experts

Beste meneer/mevrouw,

Nogmaals bedankt voor uw deelname aan het onderzoek. Gedurende het interview zullen er verschillende onderwerpen aan bod komen. Deze zullen elke keer eerst kort worden geïntroduceerd.

Organisatie
- Hoe lang werkt u al voor deze organisatie/met dit project?
- Hoe lang heeft u al ervaring met deze doelgroep?

Doel project
Uit de literatuur bleek dat over het algemeen het doel van maatjesprojecten sociale participatie en integratie is. Integratie is ook wel een proces waarbij leden van een niet-dominante groep zich mengen met een dominante groep. Hierbij is er sprake van een hoge graad van zowel cultuurbehoud als van participatie en aanpassing aan de andere groep. Er bestaan 4 soorten integratie, sociale, culturele, economische en politieke integratie. Bij sociale integratie draait het om sociale ongelijkheden en kunnen deelnemen aan sociale diensten en het vormen van vriendschappen. Bij culturele integratie gaat het om begrijpen van de taal, normen en waarden van een maatschappij. Economische integratie toegang hebben tot de arbeidsmarkt. En politieke integratie het recht hebben om te mogen stemmen.

- Op welk type integratie focussen jullie je? En waarom?
- Hebben jullie daarnaast nog een ander doel? Hoe willen jullie dat de AMV's dat bereiken?
- Wat zijn de knelpunten met betrekking tot het bereiken van de doelstellingen? Zijn er ook sterke punten?

Werving maatjes
Er bestaan veel verschillende soorten maatjesprojecten met veel verschillende typen maatjes.
- Welk type maatjes hebben jullie? (leeftijdsgenoten, professionals, volwassenen)

Een goede match tussen een maatje en een AMV is van groot belang. Bij sommige organisaties is er een strikt protocol voor het aannemen van maatjes, waarbij er onder andere wordt gekeken naar in hoeverre iemand geschikt is, wat zijn/haar ervaring en interesses etc. zijn.
- Hoe verloopt de werving bij jullie?
- Wanneer is een maatje geschikt/ongeschikt?
- Bieden jullie trainingen en supervisie aan de maatjes? Waarom wel/niet?
  Een training en/of supervisie kan ook de maatjes weer ondersteunen in hun werkzaamheden en de progressie in de gaten houden.
- Hebben jullie naast maatjesprojecten ook professionals die de AMV's kunnen ondersteunen?
- Wat zijn de sterke punten van jullie werving/matching?
- Wat zijn de zwakke punten van jullie werving/matching?

Betrokkenheid van AMV's

Tenslotte is tegenwoordig meaningful participation, oftewel jongeren betrokkenheid, een belangrijk onderwerp. Hierbij is het van belang dat AMV's de kans krijgen om te laten weten wat zij graag willen en hoe zij ergens over denken. Dit kan bijvoorbeeld door ze mee te laten denken over de projecten of door ze later te betrekken als maatje.

- Wat vindt u van het concept meaningful participation?
- In hoeverre wordt bij jullie project de stem/mening van de deelnemer en de buddy betrokken? Kan dit nog beter/anders?
- Zijn er specifieke kwesties die zich voordoen bij AMV's?

Veel wisseling projecten

Aan de ene kant zijn er tegenwoordig heel veel verschillende maatjesprojecten. Dit komt omdat er veel projecten worden opgericht. Maar tegelijkertijd worden ook veel projecten stopgezet.

- Wat vindt u ervan dat er zoveel projecten als maar komen en gaan?
- (Waarom is jullie project stopgezet?)

Inmiddels zijn we bij het eind van het interview aangekomen.

- Heeft u nog vragen/opmerkingen of wilt u nog iets toevoegen?
- Heeft u nog tips voor mij als interviewer.
- Zijn er nog andere professionals/experts die ik voor dit interview zou kunnen benaderen of via wie ik contact kan opnemen voor het contact met AMV's?
- Wilt u het transcriptie van dit interview inzien voor eventuele correcties?
- Zou u het eindverslag willen inzien?

Nogmaals, heel erg bedankt voor de medewerking!

Appendix B

Informed Consent- en toestemmingsformulier

Informatiebrief
Masterthesis 'Maatjesprojecten voor Alleenstaande Minderjarige Vluchtelingen'

Beste meneer of mevrouw,

Alvast heel erg bedankt voor uw deelname aan het onderzoek!

Dit interview zal worden gebruikt voor mijn masterthesis aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Hierbij zal het onderwerp "maatjesprojecten voor Alleenstaande Minderjarige Vluchtelingen" (AMV's) en uw ervaringen daarmee centraal staan. Er is de afgelopen jaren al veel onderzoek gedaan naar maatjesprojecten. Zo is onder andere al veel bekend over de werkzaamheid en de effecten. Daarnaast is ook het concept meaningful participation, oftewel jongeren betrokkenheid, erg trending. Dit is onder andere van belang omdat het de jongeren het gevoel geeft dat er naar ze wordt geluisterd en dat ze worden begrepen. Er is echter nog weinig onderzoek gedaan naar de mate van jongeren betrokkenheid in maatjesprojecten, terwijl de projecten wel om hen draaien. Het doel van het onderzoek is om te kijken in hoeverre maatjesprojecten aan onder andere de behoeften en wensen van AMV's tegemoetkomen.

Meedoen aan het onderzoek is vrijwillig. Wel is uw toestemming nodig. Lees de informatie goed door. Wanneer u vragen heeft, kunt u die altijd stellen. Ook heeft u op elk moment recht om uw deelname aan het onderzoek te beëindigen. Hiervoor hoeft u geen uitleg te geven.

In kwalitatief onderzoek waarin deelnemers om hun meningen en ervaringen worden gevraagd, is het een goede gewoonte om deze antwoorden achteraf in combinatie met de antwoorden van anderen in een geanalyseerde vorm voor te leggen aan de deelnemers. Dit is een member check. Dit zal via de mail plaatsvinden. Om u hiervoor uit te nodigen, zal ik uw persoonsgegevens moeten raadplegen. Hiervoor wordt u expliciet om toestemming gevraagd.

Aan de deelname van het onderzoek zijn geen risico's of nadelen verbonden.

Vanwege COVID-19 zal het interview online plaatsvinden. Hiervan wordt alleen een geluidsopname gemaakt. De opname zal enkel door mij beluisterd worden om de gegevens te kunnen verwerken en te analyseren. Daarna wordt de opname verwijderd. De gegevens zullen vertrouwelijk worden behandeld en de resultaten zullen geheel anoniem worden verwerkt. De gegevens worden bewaard op een Y-schijf in de beschermde digitale omgeving van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Het is mogelijk om achteraf het transcript of het gehele onderzoek te kunnen lezen.

Indien u tijdens het interview of achteraf nog vragen heeft, mag u die altijd stellen. Dit kan door mij te mailen naar emmekea@gmail.com of bellen naar +31610681486.

Nogmaals bedankt!

Met vriendelijke groet,

Emmeke Arends

Informed consent
Masterthesis 'Maatjesprojecten voor Alleenstaande Minderjarige Vluchtelingen'

- Ik heb de informatie gelezen en de gelegenheid gehad om vragen te stellen.
- Ik begrijp waar het onderzoek over gaat en wat er van mij wordt verwacht.
- Ik begrijp dat deelname aan het onderzoek geheel vrijwillig is. Ik kan op elk moment stoppen, zonder hiervoor een reden te hoeven geven.

Toestemming voor deelname aan het onderzoek:
[ ] Ja, ik geef toestemming voor deelname
[ ] Nee, ik geef geen toestemming voor deelname

Toestemming voor het maken van audio-opnames tijdens het onderzoek:
[ ] Ja, ik geef toestemming voor het maken van audio-opnames van mij als deelnemer
[ ] Nee, ik geef geen toestemming voor het maken van audio-opnames van mij als deelnemer

Toestemming voor de registratie van persoonsgegevens
[ ] Ja, ik geef toestemming voor de registratie van mijn persoonsgegevens
[ ] Nee, ik geef geen toestemming voor de registratie van mijn persoonsgegevens

Toestemming voor benadering na het interview:
[ ] Ja, ik vind het goed als de onderzoeker mijn persoonsgegevens gebruikt om mij te benaderen zodat ik de door mij gegeven antwoorden kan controleren voor aanvullende informatie en/of om de voorlopige analyse van de antwoorden te becommentariëren
[ ] Nee, ik geef geen toestemming voor benadering na het interview

Volledige naam deelnemer: ……………….
Handtekening en datum:

Volledige naam onderzoeker: Emmeke Arends
Handtekening en datum:

Appendix C

Coding frame for the interviews with the experts

Main code	Sub-code
Organisation	- Work duration long
	- Work duration recently
	- Experience yes
	- Experience no
	- Information organisation
	- Information project
	- Collaboration yes
	- Collaboration no
Goal project	- Integration social
	- Integration cultural
	- Integration economic
	- Integration political
	- Other goal
	- Reaching goal strengths
	- Reaching goal difficulties
Recruitment buddies	- Buddy peer
	- Buddy adult
	- Buddy professional
	- Buddy ex-URM
	- Buddy other
	- Buddy suitable
	- Buddy unsuitable
	- Buddy strengths
	- Buddy difficulties
	- Recruitment strict
	- Recruitment not strict
	- Matching yes
	- Matching no
	- Training yes

	- Training no
	- Supervision yes
	- Supervision no
	- Support professional yes
	- Support professional no
	- Recruitment strengths
	- Recruitment difficulties
	- Recruitment improvement
	- Recruitment no improvement
Meaningful participation	- Participation important
	- Participation not important
	- Voice URM is included
	- Voice URM is not included
	- Participation strengths
	- Participation difficulties
	- Participation improvement
	- Participation no improvement
Number of projects	- Many projects good
	- Many projects bad
	- Changes finances
Dutch system	- Transition to 18 difficulties
	- Transition to 18 strengths
	- Dutch system difficulties

Note. The blue codes have been developed in advance. The red codes have been added during the coding of the coding frame.

Appendix D

Figure D1

Infographic front side

Figure D2

Infographic back side

BETROKKENHEID AMV'S

Ja, maar ...

Alle geïnterviewden vinden de betrokkenheid van AMV's belangrijk. *"Dat is eigenlijk de key van de werkwijze van SAMAH"* en *"Het is dat waardoor je iemand ook echt in zijn kracht zet."* In het landelijk AMV platform worden bijvoorbeeld signalen besproken en op basis hiervan worden projecten ontwikkeld.

Maar er moet nog veel in de huidige maatschappij veranderen om écht de stem van de AMV mee te kunnen nemen. *"Aan alles merken we dat het soms heel lastig is voor mensen om open te staan voor wat willen jongeren nou en wat hebben ze nodig."*

Sommigen hebben hier soms zelf ook moeite mee. *"Hoe kom je erachter wat iedereen graag wil? En als je het weet, kan je dan met iedereen rekening houden?"* of *"Ze zullen nooit zeggen wat ze er niet leuk aan vonden."* Volgens anderen ontbreekt ook vaak de tijd voor professionals of AMV's om ervoor te zitten, omdat AMV's naar school moeten en werken en professionals op bepaalde tijden werken.

DE AMV'S AAN HET WOORD?

Bijna niet, want...

De AMV's waren lastig te bereiken. Hierdoor kon ik niet zelf met ze in gesprek gaan. Gelukkig zijn Uzozie en Verkade (2016) wel eerder met ze in gesprek geweest en heb ik de ervaringen van de AMV's uit hun rapport kunnen halen: Volg Je Dromen Tot Je Niet Langer Kunt Leven.

Hieruit bleek dat de AMV's niet door alle hulpverleners op de juiste manier werden ondersteund. Vaak durfden AMV's niet aan te geven welke hulp ze nodig hadden of hun mening te geven, omdat ze dachten dat ze dankbaar moesten zijn of omdat ze dat niet waren gewend om te doen. Ook hadden ze het gevoel dat ze maar weinig te zeggen hadden in belangrijke beslissingen omtrent school en huisvesting, terwijl ze dit achteraf gezien wel hadden willen doen. Vaak wezen de hulpverleners ze op verschillende belemmeringen of gaven ze weinig informatie, meestal uit goede bedoelingen.

De AMV's willen zich echter graag gehoord en ondersteund voelen en willen serieus worden genomen.

HOE NU VERDER?

Adviezen/tips/opmerkingen?

Een tijdje geleden heb ik met u een interview afgenomen. In dit overzicht zijn in grote lijnen de resultaten van alle interviews te zien.

Ondanks de verscheidenheid aan projecten en organisaties was iedereen het er mee eens dat de betrokkenheid van AMV's belangrijk is. Ook de AMV's zelf willen graag gehoord worden. Iedereen loopt echter overal tegen verschillende punten aan. Er zou in de maatschappij meer aandacht moeten zijn voor de betrokkenheid van AMV's, want dit kan nog veel beter.

Mijn vragen zijn nu wat u van deze resultaten vindt en of u nog opmerkingen of ideeën heeft over hoe projecten en organisaties meer aandacht zouden kunnen besteden aan het meenemen van de mening van AMV's?

Graag zie ik uw reactie tegemoet via de mail.

Contact

Masterthesis – Meaningful participation of unaccompanied refugee minors in buddy projects in the Netherlands

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