

ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS
RESIDING IN BELGIUM

TO WHAT EXTENT UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS HAVE ACCESS TO
EDUCATION IN BELGIUM AND HOW THE LACK OF EDUCATION
IMPACTS THEIR LIVES

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Acknowledgements	5
Abstract	6
1. Introduction	7
2. Undocumented migrants in Europe	10
2.1. The Role of Migration throughout European History	10
2.2. The Politicisation of Migration in Europe	14
2.3. European Legal Framework on Migration	15
2.3.1. Definitions	15
3. Consequences of Irregular Migration	17
4. Belgium as a Case Study	20
4.1. Scope of undocumented migrants in Belgium today	20
4.2. Belgium as a destination country for undocumented migrants	22
4.3. Political discourse on migration in Belgium	22
4.4. Legal hindrances for undocumented migrants in Belgium.....	25
5. Deliberate exclusion	28
6. Theoretical framework	29
6.1. Political construct: Structural violence	29
6.2. Sociological approach: Conservation of Resources Theory	31
6.3. Psychological approach: Individual experiences and aspirations.....	33

6.3.1. Discrimination	33
6.3.2. Integration.....	35
6.3.3. Educational aspirations.....	36
7. Access to education for undocumented migrants in Belgium	37
7.1. Children	37
7.2. Adults.....	39
8. The Role of Individuals - Good practices.....	40
9. Methodological framework	41
9.1. Data Collection	41
9.2. Research quality.....	43
10. Challenges	43
10.1. Ethical considerations.....	43
10.2. Difficulties	44
11. Results.....	45
11.1. General information about the respondents	45
11.2. Duration of stay in Belgium.....	46
11.3. Languages used during the interviews.....	46
11.4. Everyday activities of the respondents	46
11.5. Importance of knowing the local language.....	46

11.6. Access to education.....	48
11.7. How lack of education affects their lives and future plans.....	48
11.8. How the lack of access to education affected their ideas about Belgium.....	51
11.9. Security concerns.....	52
12. Contact with other parties involved	52
12.1. Educational institutions	52
12.1.1 Schools.....	52
12.1.2. Universities.....	52
12.1.3. NGOs	54
12.1.4. Sammy Mahdi, State Secretary of Asylum and Migration.....	54
13. My Journey	55
13.1. Language Courses.....	55
14.1.2. University	56
14. Discussion and Conclusion	60
Bibliography	65

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Abstract

Education is one of the very few essential activities along with sports and arts that create an inclusive society since it brings millions of people together, regardless of their differences. It is, therefore, one of the crucial factors for creating a cross-cultural society. Primary education is mandatory for all children between 5 and 18-year-old children in Belgium. Furthermore, this additionally applies to children of asylum seekers, refugees, and other foreigners who have any type of official residency permit in Belgium rather than solely Belgian nationals. Moreover, children whose parents do not have any legal status in Belgium, the so-called 'sans-papiers' are also included in this. Yet, this inclusivity does not extend to adults (18+) who do not have any legal status or residency permit in Belgium and aim to continue their education. This research aimed to touch on the issue of access to education of undocumented adult migrants in Belgium. To further explore this topic, this study applied both primary (interviews) and secondary (information available online) research methods. This research aims to both increase the knowledge and information available surrounding access to education for undocumented migrants in Belgium and to reflect on how lack of access to education affects their lives.

'No human being is illegal: Human beings can be beautiful or more beautiful, they can be fat or skinny, they can be right or wrong, but illegal? How can a human being be illegal.'

-Elie Wiesel, Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor

'Human rights are not a matter of charity, nor are they a reward for obeying immigration rules. Human rights are inalienable entitlements of every human being, wherever they are and whatever their status.'

-Navi Pillay, Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Pillay, N. 2011)

1. Introduction

“Mijn schoenen zijn kapot! (in English: My shoes are worn out!).” These were the first words that the 29 year-old Bangladeshi man who has been living in Belgium for nine years told me when explaining his struggle accessing education. We often take the right to education for granted and do not even question that there might be people living in our neighbourhoods who are deprived from this right. Moreover, the absence of education makes us think of resource-limited countries as shown on TV fragments where the US and EU aid programs are trying to help rural communities of such countries and areas have access to education. However, if we look closer to in our surroundings, we will see that even in developed and democratic countries such as Belgium, there are still groups of people who are deprived of the fundamental right to get education. Access to education for undocumented migrants is the main topic of this thesis. By reflecting on my personal experience and experiences of other undocumented migrants, this study aims to increase the awareness on this topic and hopes to provide evaluations and recommendations on the current policy in regards to the access to education for undocumented migrants.

Education is a universal right recognised by different international and national conventions and treaties.

Article 14 (1) on the Right of Education in the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights states that:

“Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training;”

Further in Article 26 (2) in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is written that:

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”

The main international laws and treaties apply to all migrants and this might be true for the majority of people, but unfortunately, about 30 million children and youth are out of school out of 258 million people who are not living in their home country according to UIS data as of 2019 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, 2019). Neither, has the right to education been a guarantee for everyone residing in Belgium. Albeit previously collected data showed that Europe and Northern America have the lowest percentage of out of school children and youth (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, 2019). Figures have shown that in comparison to native citizens, the chances that nationals of third countries will experience social exclusion or poverty are three times higher (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, 2019). This also holds true for education. In contrast with the 7.3 % of nationals, 26.5 % of third-country nationals leave school early. While

10.7 % of nationals aged 18-24 year olds are neither employed nor in education or training, the numbers are three times higher when it comes to third-country nationals (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, 2019). In addition to this however, in the context of Belgium, there are an estimated 85,00-160,000 people who are residing in Belgium illegally and they have no access to education whatsoever.

As a result of the severity of this situation, the present study will delve into the topic of the right to education for undocumented migrants residing in Belgium. By doing so, this study will shed light on the importance of education for undocumented migrants, as well as how the absence of the right to education affects their lives, inquire their challenges when trying to access educational institutions, and look at how it affects their ideas about the host country.

Thus, this study intends to answer the two-part question of “To what extent do undocumented migrants have access to education in Belgium and how does the lack of education impact their lives?” These questions will be answered using both primary (interviews) and secondary (information available online) research methods. This research aims to increase the amount of knowledge and information available regarding this marginal group of people and reflect on how the absence of the right to education affects the lives of the undocumented migrants living in Belgium.

This thesis will first start by examining already existing data on the context of irregular migration first in the general context from Europe and then more specifically, in Belgium. Consequences of irregular migration and the scope of undocumented migrants living in Belgium as a case study will be explored in the following chapter. In chapter six theoretical and conceptual framework will be presented. The difference between children’s and adults’ access to education and the good practices will be discussed in the following chapter. Chapter nine represents the

methods and methodology used for the current study. Accordingly, results and analysis of the applied methods will be discussed in the following chapters. The last two chapters will conclude and present my own journey.

2. Undocumented migrants in Europe

2.1. The Role of Migration throughout European History

Causes of migration nowadays have not changed that much from the causes in the past. People have always moved from one place to another either forced as a result of a warfare or forced displacement or for voluntary reasons, in the search of better economic circumstances or escaping oppressive conditions. Migration has always been an important part of socioeconomic life and political discourse since 1500s if not earlier (de Haas, 2019).

From the book by de Haas, 'The Age of Migration,' we learn that in the mid 19th century, the Industrial Revolution gave rise to a large scale migration. Millions of people migrated from one continent to another. From Europe the migration was mainly to the Americas, Southeast Asia and North Asia. Some were able to organise their lives as migrants and integrate into the society, some went back to their home countries and many others became labour migrants, who were mostly *unfree workers* in the slave economy. The ugly side of the labour migration was the *chattel slavery*, who were working in the plantations and mines as slaves and the next generations were also bound to do the same. Most of them were slaves descended from African countries. Fortunately, slave trafficking was abolished by 1888. In the second half of the 19th century *indentured workers* came to replace slaves, who signed up voluntarily, did receive some income and the living conditions were better than their original living conditions, which gave them the initiative to stay (de Haas et al., 2019).

De Haas et al. in 'The Age of Migration' distinguished four main phases in the European migrations after WWII. The first phase was from 1945 to 1973, when Western European countries' economies started growing rapidly and accepting greater number of migrants from former European colonies and European peripheries. The second phase, from 1973-1989, was known for family migration, At this stage, it was already impossible not to let the families reunite and settle down. Sometimes, one member of the family would settle down in Europe and then find employment opportunities for other family members. These families started to settle down, have children and social costs for things such as healthcare and education started to emerge. It was already too late to restrain the numbers of foreign workers as many started to settle down permanently. In the third phase, 1989-2008, several remarkable events took place. The fall of Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and subsequently, the gradual involvement of the post-soviet countries into the European Union. The 1995 Schengen Agreement was another prominent point in this period, which originally started as a corporation between Germany, France and BeNeLux countries. The intention of this agreement was the abolition of internal border control and establishment of the free movement of people.

From 2008 onwards, politicians in Northwestern Europe started to create fears among the population surrounding incoming migration. Migration became highly politicised. High rates of unemployment pushed many immigrants to rely on the social welfare system and this phenomenon created a perception amongst the native population that migration was a threat to the social welfare system. The politicisation of migration reached its peak in 2015, as the year was most commonly defined as Europe's Refugee Crisis. Due to several armed conflicts in their home countries, 5.6 million Syrians, Afghanis and Iraqis found their way to Europe via the Mediterranean sea into Turkey and Greece (De Haas, 2019).

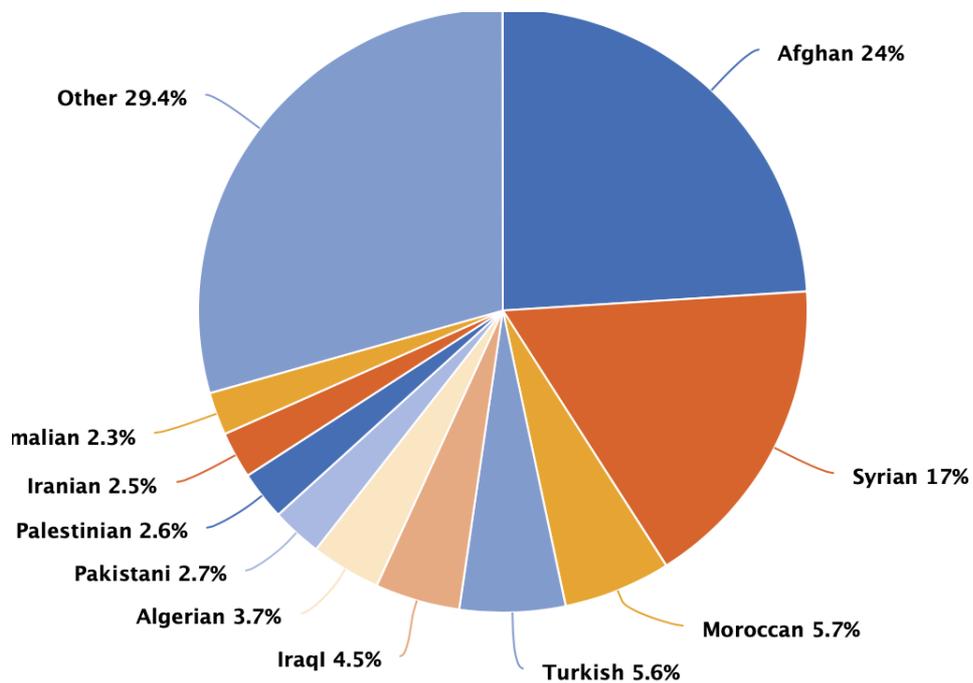
The establishment of Schengen zone and the development of the internal European market of people, goods and capital has increased not only the number of intra-EU migrants but also has largely increased the non-EU migration. During this period the number of undocumented migrants went higher as there was still demand for lower-skilled labour migrants. This demand was met by recruiting seasonal worker or involving undocumented migrants.

Meeteren in her report ‘Irregular Migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands’ refers to the words of Sassen, “illegal migration has emerged in all Western economies since World War II” (Meeteren 2014). The period of 1970-1975 is considered to be a crucial point for the study of irregular migration. At this time, most of the Western European countries stopped previous bilateral agreements on migration flows, closed their frontiers for foreign workers, and began imposing effective border controls (Martini and Raphael, 2014). This does not mean that no irregular migration occurred prior to this, however, the post World War II period was remarkable regarding the irregular migration because next to economic fluctuations, political and institutional transformations were happening, which were crucial in determining the attitudes towards undocumented migrants (Martini and Raphael, 2014). One of the most prominent institutional change factors for migrants was the decolonization of the Nord-African regions of the ancient French Empire (A. Lyons 2015). As a result of these institutional and social changes, migrant's legal and undocumented statuses was also changing. In the last decades, irregular migration has gained increasing attention in Europe.

According to European Commission and Frontex, in 2019 there were 141,700 illegal border crossings, which includes 106,200 sea crossings and 35,500 land crossings. However, it is important to highlight that not all undocumented migrants enter Europe through illegal border crossings. Some enter the country legally and at some point become undocumented. For a more

visual representation, Figure 1 below shows data collected by Frontex in 2019 on illegal EU border crossings by nationality.

Figure 1: Illegal EU border crossings by nationality in 2019 (Frontex, 2019)



In the period of January-November of 2020 114,300 illegal border crossings took place which was 10% less than in the same period of 2019. The most part of the illegal border crossings were sea crossings (106,200) and 35,500 land borders crossing. In 2019, 491,000 number of non-EU citizens were ordered to leave the EU compared to 458,000 of 2018. In the same period of time, 142,000 non-EU citizens were returned to a non-EU country and the main nationalities that were ordered to leave the EU were Ukrainians (19%), Moroccans (11%) and Albanians (7.2%). (European Commission, 2019).

2.2. The Politicisation of Migration in Europe

According to the Gallup's World Poll conducted for the International Organization of Migration (IOM) between 2012-2014, "European residents appear to be, on average, the most negative globally towards immigration, with the majority believing immigration levels should be decreased" (IOM, 2014). It is no surprise that the majority of natives experience negative feelings, if not threat, when they hear the words, undocumented migrants. Comments on a news article such as undocumented migrants steal our jobs, they are criminals, they are a threat for the society and culture, are rife on the internet. Given that the public and political discourse has characterized undocumented migrants as a threat to society, this negative connotation does not come as a surprise.

Public opinion about immigration is being heavily carried out by opposition (Simon and Lynch 1999). The highly politicized term 'illegal' is most frequently used. This term has also become of the most discussed issues in Europe. It has become a general rule to use the term 'illegal migration' in the official communication and state documents, while academic researchers, scientists and some media prefer to use the notion of 'undocumented or irregular' migration. For this purpose, the study will use the term undocumented migrants henceforth.

The use of the term 'illegal migrants' is highly criticised by different social and non-governmental organizations. Several activists and volunteers organise movements to show their disapproval for this term. There are several groups on social media with the name "no-one is illegal, niemand is illegaal" where one can see several actions these groups take, including hanging posters with their slogan from their balconies, as well as peacefully protesting in the

streets with these posters, amongst other methods. Additionally, there are others who use arts and images that challenge racist and discriminatory messages, such as "Immigrant, migrant. Where is the line drawn? Why? We are not illegals, we are movers, we are contributors, we are here to stay." Several authors argue that "migrants can never be illegal themselves, only their activities can be illegal" (Schrover, M., 2008), (Dossier 2005).

In her book 'How Immigration Became Illegal,' Aviva Chomsky, a writer and immigrant rights activist, shows how 'illegality' and 'undocumentedness' are concepts that were created to exclude and exploit. She also claims that the essential, fundamental ability to say immigrant rights are human rights are still crucial and central issues. According to Chomsky, "undocumented migrants are human beings who have arbitrarily been classified as having a different legal status from the rest of the [...] inhabitants." She stated "that there is simply no humanly acceptable reason to define a group of people as different and deny them rights" (Chomsky, 2014). Another book titled 'Are Human Rights for Migrants?' draws once again our attention to the fact that even though the written laws claim to be for every human being, in practice, this falters. "Virtually, no one would claim that migrants are not entitled to human rights. Yet, despite the widespread adoption of a 'universal language' by many actors, including states, there remains a gap between the promise of human rights for all, and the reality of discrimination and abjection habitually and consistently faced by many migrants' (Dembour & Kelly, 2011).

2.3. European Legal Framework on Migration

2.3.1. Definitions

Before delving deeper into understanding what an irregular (very often called illegal) migrant is and who undocumented migrants are, the definition of migration and a migrant are of imperative importance.

In 2020, International Organization of Migration defined the term migrant as:

“An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally-defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.”

Consequently, migration is being defined as: “the movement of a person or group of persons from one geographical unit to another across administrative or political border, wishing to settle definitely or temporarily in a place other than their place of origin.” (IOM, 2020).

According to several articles, undocumented migrants are considered to be a very vulnerable group (Massimo Merlino, Sergio Carrera, 2009). Irregular (illegal) migration is being differently defined by different actors in different countries. In 2011, the International Organization for Migration defines it as “movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving country.” As such, migration can therefore be legal and illegal. Put shortly, legal migration is when individuals cross international borders and stay legally in the given country and illegal migration is when individuals cross borders (legally or illegally) and their further stay in the host country is not seen as legal.

Official website of the European Union differentiates two contexts wherein it defines irregular migration: global context and European context. In the global context an irregular

migrant is ‘a person who, owing to irregular entry, breach of a condition of entry or the expiry of their legal basis for entering and residing, lacks legal status in a transit or host country’ (European Commission, 2019). In the European context an irregular migrant ‘is a third-country-national present on the territory of a Schengen State who does not fulfil, or no longer fulfils, the conditions of entry as set out in the EU Regulation of 2016 or other conditions for entry, stay or residence in that EU Member State (European Commission, 2021). According to the Migration Policy Institute and Migration Data Portal, four common types of undocumented migrants exist, albeit that this is not an exclusive list. The main four types are the following: The first group represents nationals of one country who cross the borders of another state clandestinely. The second group represents nationals of one state, who cross the borders of another state by using fraudulent documents. The third group represents nationals of one state who enter another state ‘properly’ but ‘wilfully’ overstay their legal stay. And the fourth group represent asylum seekers, when at some point their asylum or medical procedure got rejected, however they continued to stay in the country without any legal documents.

3. Consequences of Irregular Migration

Undocumented migrants face daily challenges. They are living and working in a severe vulnerable situation. They get no financial or social support from the local authorities or municipality and they have to take care of their rent, monthly water, electricity and gas charges, all without having any official source of income. This fact leads some to engage either in criminal activities or land in the informal economy. Furthermore, access for undocumented migrants to the labor market is, if not completely, mainly restricted. As a result of undocumented migrants residing in Belgium not having the right to work and having no state protection, they oftentimes resort to black markets in the economy. Johan Wets from the Higher Institute for Labor (HIVA) states: "If all illegal workers in certain labor-intensive European or American industries were

arrested, those sectors would collapse. Consumers want affordable fruits, vegetables and other foods. Without that cheap, flexible but illegal workforce, many products become too expensive" (Mondiaal Nieuws, 2016). Economists from the Catholic University of Louvain (KU Leuven) have also evaluated that by regularising and turning illegal economic activity of certain groups of undocumented migrants into the legal economic sphere, it will improve macroeconomic indicator and would have the same effects for the economy such as legal migration. (de la Croix et al., 2009), (Caritas Europe, 2019).

People in this group are very vulnerable because they are living in a constant fear that they might get caught, detained, sent to a closed centrum or be deported to their country of origin. Oftentimes these people, based on their residency status, are afraid to report work abuse or sexual abuse.

Being undocumented and living in constant fear of being deported and in the state of constant waiting for an answer from the migration officials and having no stable place in the host country makes migrants and their children lose their sense of belonging. They do not belong here but simultaneously they do not belong to their host country as well. Different scholars have examined this phenomenon. Meloni for example calls this state of not belonging 'betwixt' (Meloni, 2019). According to him this state is the in-between state. This condition deprives undocumented migrants sense of belonging to the group (Hondagneu-Sotelo, P., & Avila, E. (2003), (Meloni, 2019).

Another issue that impacts undocumented migrants well being and adds in to their precarious situation is having limited access to healthcare. Access to healthcare is one of the most important aspects for the undocumented migrants. According to the European Magazine for Sexual and Reproductive Health (2015), "being an undocumented migrant multiplies the risk of

being exposed to ill-health and entitlements on national levels are often at odds with the rights stated in international human rights law” (Biswas, et al, 2012). In the same article Keygnaert and Timmerman argue that “social, cultural, economic and physical environmental factors, such as poverty, discrimination, inadequate housing, socially disintegrated communities, material deprivation, income inequality, oppression and unemployment, lack of social support and lack of education are all ill-health factors which immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants in Europe face on a daily basis” (Keygnaert, 2014). Oftentimes these people, based on their residency status, are afraid to report work or sexual abuse. In the same article the authors emphasise that in most cases “abuses are not reported, due to lack of knowledge of their rights and the legal system, and fear of negative consequences for their asylum procedure or integration in society. Perpetrators are aware of this mechanism and take advantage of it” (Keygnaert, Timmerman 2014).

Undocumented migrants’ access to healthcare differs between various European countries. In the Netherlands, for example, undocumented migrant’s right to healthcare is largely acknowledged. In the Netherlands “undocumented migrants have greater entitlements and have access to primary, secondary and tertiary care” (Biswas et al, 2012). In Belgium, there are more restrictions for undocumented migrants access to healthcare. Here, undocumented migrants have the right to emergency care. Currently, urgent medical assistance is only intended for medical assistance for which the "emergency" is demonstrated by a medical certificate, and this can include both preventive and curative care (Bouckaert, 2008).

When undocumented migrants become a victim of a crime or an accident, for instance if they are being sexually harassed, raped or when they are being exploited at their workplaces, most of the times they do not file a complaint to the police as they are afraid that their irregularity will come to the surface and they will get deported. The police has the obligation to report the details

of the undocumented person to the Immigration Services. However, The European Victims Directive (2012/29 /EU) states that “the rights set out in this directive towards victims are applied in a non-discriminatory way, including with regard to their residence status”. In practice however, these guidelines have not yet been included into the Belgian legislation which might result in an undocumented migrant being a ‘double victim,’ firstly of the crime and secondly time of being deported (Samelevingsopbouwbrussels, 2019).

It is worth mentioning though, that very recently, on 18 March 2020, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) formulated two recommendations. Firstly, governments should make sure that public and private professionals are not obligated to turn in people who are suspected to be undocumented, on behalf of the immigration policy. Further, the ECRI acknowledges the fact that undocumented people cannot easily access fundamental rights without the risk of starting a procedure for deportation. Therefore, the second recommendation asks Belgian authorities to ensure that the commission responsible for the evaluation of the national anti-discrimination legislation disposes of enough resources to expand the scope of her activities (DeMorgen, 2020).

4. Belgium as a Case Study

4.1. Scope of undocumented migrants in Belgium today

According to the 2019 yearly report of Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil), 27,450 persons applied for an asylum at the Fedasil arrival centre. At the same time, the number of the returnees in 2019 was 2,426 persons; out of these 1,532 people were undocumented migrants. The countries with the highest number of the returnees were Brazil, Romania and Ukraine (Fedasil, 2019). In 2020, the number of the returnees was 1,847; 1,039 of which were undocumented migrants (Fedasil, 2021).

Despite some data being available, it is still very difficult to come up with exact and definite numbers when it comes to undocumented migrants. Yet, what is definite in regards to undocumented migrants is that they live in a situation of marginalisation due to migration status, the limited access to healthcare, education, legal services and having more or less of a decent life is almost impossible. As mentioned in the Book of Solidarity of PICUM, the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants “in many countries in Europe, undocumented migrants live in a situation of marginalization. (PICUM, 2003).

According to the Civic Integration Agency, as of 2007, more than 100,000 undocumented migrants are residing in Flanders and Brussels. This increase has been predicted to be as a result of the 2015 migration crisis when thousands of migrants used Belgium as a transit point to travel further to the United Kingdom. The Federal Information Center for Healthcare (Het Federaal Kenniscentrum voor de Gezondheidszorg) estimated that as of 2015, there were about 85,000-160,000 undocumented migrants residing in Belgium (Roberfroid D., Dauvrin M., 2015). Samenlevingsopbouw, a Brussel-based organization engaged in supporting the social movement of migrants, offers another way to calculate the number of undocumented migrants in Belgium by adding the total number of people whose 9bis/ter requests were rejected to the total number of rejected asylum seekers, files or persons. This method will again not allow us to come closer to the exact number of undocumented migrants residing in Belgium, as there are also large numbers of undocumented people who have never applied for an asylum, nor launched a humanitarian or medical regularisation request and are not registered in the municipality where they live. According to the estimates presented by Samenlevingsopbouw, there are more than 120,000 undocumented migrants living in Belgium, mostly in Brussels, but they acknowledge again that this number is a very approximate calculation (Samenlevingsopbouw, 2019).

4.2. Belgium as a destination country for undocumented migrants

There are several reasons people choose to come to Belgium via irregular ways. The most important reason people chose to do it irregularly is that they can not get visas in a regular way and therefore choose to cross the border illegally or get visas via criminal networks through migrant smugglers. Smugglers help potential migrants with illegal border crossings not only by sea, but also by cars and planes. One of the policy milestones of the 2020 The New Pact on Migration and Asylum was the development of a new EU action plan which will combat migrant smuggling in the period of 2021-2025 (European Commission, 2020).

The majority of migrants flee their home countries for reasons such as war, violence, unfair economic situations or climate change leading them to have no perspective on their future where they live and thus look for better opportunities for themselves and their children elsewhere (Agi, 2019). Undocumented migrants represent a very diverse group of people. They have different nationalities, different educational backgrounds, and each having their own perspectives for the future. This group consists of single men and women or families with and without children (Agi, 2019). Irregular migration has its own characteristics inside every nation state.

4.3. Political discourse on migration in Belgium

Illegal migration is one of the most heated discussions in the political discourse. Tom van Grieken, party leader of Belgian Vlaams Belang, a Flemish nationalist, right-wing populist party in his handbook titled 'Migration in 24 broken promises' uses the words illegal migration 16 times showing how the government failed to conduct stricter policy towards undocumented migrants. Belgium's former minister for Asylum and Migration, Theo Francken in an interview with De

Morgen said: "Illegal migration has to stop, because this will end badly for everyone" (De Morgen, 2018). No matter how many experts have come up in the news stating that undocumented migrants are not stealing the jobs from the natives, people continue to view them as the main reason for unemployment rates. Very often just being an undocumented migrant is enough for the state to use control, suspicion and punishment. Research on prejudicial attitudes show that prejudicial attitudes, threats and anxiety are higher amongst people when it comes to undocumented migrants (K.Murray 2012).

Even though several studies have shown that these negative feelings among autochthone community are created by adverse political discourse and media representation, people still continue to have strong feelings when they hear the words undocumented or illegal migrants.. Bloomaert and Verschueren in the book 'Debating Diversity: Analysing the discourse of tolerance' when exploring the connections between immigration discourses and nationalist discourses and by analysing the words of then Minister of Interior affairs, Louis Tobback argue that asylum seekers and undocumented migrants are being represented 'as a plague' for society and that government officials adopt these negative stereotypes and deploy it to communicate their repressive policies.

"No one can tell me approximately today how many illegals run around in our country. But there are tens of thousands, and apparently they must be well-behaved people, otherwise we would have had Brixton twenty times over! All these illegals do not have any access to the normal social provisions and can, therefore, not possible function normally in our society. A state concerned about its social order cannot keep this up. This situation can explode at any moment and that is my greatest concern." (Bloomaert, Verschueren, 2014).

Bloomaert and Verschueren by analysing this text show that even though Tobback talks positively about ‘illegal aliens’ that do not harm or upset local people at the same time he (supposedly also many others) link these people with crime and assume that something bad may happen if no intervention happens. Bloomaert and Verschueren argue that politicians believe that the process of having foreigners get integrated into the Belgian society has proven to be so problematic that ‘Belgian society is judged to be incapable of absorbing more diversity. This is not seen as a deficiency of Belgian society, but as a natural state of affairs’ (Bloomaert, Verschueren, 2014, pp 188).

Bloomaert and Verschueren acknowledge also that the politicians are aware of the possible negative impacts racism may have and recognise the positive initiatives the politicians have taken so far such as the fact that for example the political refugees that had to wait for a decision for more than five years had received their residency permit.

A more recent demonstration of xenophobic responses by radical right wing parties was the immigration crisis of 2015 where the governments also reproduced these extreme right messages. Terrorist attacks of 2015 and 2016 in France and Belgium increased the anti-islamic, anti-foreigner rhetorics.

Lucassen in the article ‘Peeling an Onion: the ‘Refugee Crisis’ from a Historical Perspective’ argues that there are several reasons that explain the rise of radical right populist parties in Europe. Among them he mentions the large scare immigration in 1970s of guest workers from North Africa and Turkey and their family reunification cases, which then was not met with much anxiety and only several decades later became part of the refugee discourse. Secondly, the effects of globalisation, which resulted in increasing social inequality. Thirdly, the

problematisation of Islam which linked asylum seekers from Islamic countries with terrorism and with their refusal to integrate (Lucassen, 2018).

Lucassen, by comparing two periods of refugee crisis, namely that of 1990 and of 2014-2016 shows that during the last asylum crisis Western and European politicians became alarmed and 'in some cases downright apocalyptic' while in 1990's this was not the case. Lucassen argues that public discontent was so high not only due to the negative media coverage, but most importantly the Islamist terrorism of 2000s and 2015-2016 which resulted in restrictive policies towards asylum seekers, hate crimes and violent attacks on the homes of asylum seekers carried out by right-wing extremist militant groups in addition to the factors mentioned above (Lucassen, 2018).

4.4. Legal hindrances for undocumented migrants in Belgium

According to the law, being an irregular migrant in Belgium means the person doesn't have the right to continue his/her stay in Belgium (Agentschap Integratie en Imburgering). Irregular migrants are also being called 'illegals,' 'clandestine,' 'sans-papiers,' 'people without papers,' 'undocumented' and 'unauthorised' (Baldwin, Edwards, 2008). However, these terms can be deemed problematic, similarly to the term 'illegal.' For instance, not all illegal migrants are unauthorized. The usage of the term irregular is also sometimes criticized, because at the time of the border crossing the person who is escaping war or alike situation may be irregular but upon his arrival and request for an asylum his irregularity may disappear.

As it has already been mentioned above, undocumented migrants have very limited rights and access to the services. As such, they have no right to work; they have no income nor subsidiary protection. Some rights they do have are for example, the right to primary and secondary education for minors. Undocumented migrants also have the right to urgent medical assistance as well as limited legal assistance (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering). Belgium foresees policies and regulations in regards to undocumented migrants on the Federal and Flemish level. The federal government is responsible for residence legislation (including regularization) (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering).

In the last decade and especially after the regularisation campaign of 2010 and terrorist attacks 2015 and 2016 in Brussels and Paris, Belgium adopted a very strict migration policy. These restrictions affected mainly undocumented migrants. These restrictions were intended to exclude, isolate and finally expel undocumented migrants from the country.

Upon becoming State Secretary of Asylum and migration, Maggie De Block from the Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats party, adopted and announced a very strict migration policy. After several years, she was appointed as State Secretary of Asylum and Migration again. In an interview, she warned that she has not changed her mind and that “she is still the same Maggie.” (Maggiedeblock, 2018). She repeated her famous expression from back in 2011, “voluntary if possible, forced if necessary.”

In 2014, Theo Francken from the New Flemish Alliance (NVA) became the State Secretary of Asylum and Migration and continued the very strict policy towards undocumented migrants. Again, he excluded the chance of a general humanitarian regularisation and when the terrorist attacks of Paris and Brussels in 2015 and 2016 took place, the policy became even more stricter. Among several other restrictions, Francken adopted laws to charge 358 euro for a regularisation

request for each adult, made it legally possible for families with children to be kept in a closed centrum and came up with a sound legal framework to create a law within which the investigating judge grants the Immigration Office, in collaboration with the police, the authorization to enter a private home, in order to transfer the undocumented migrants who reside there to a closed center (Samenlevingsopbouwbrussel, 2019).

It was expected that with the newly assigned State Secretary of Asylum and Migration, Sammy Mahdi from the Social-Democratic and Flemish political party, a change would come. In the political note of 20 November 2020, State Secretary recognised that the asylum and migration policy is in need of some composure and brought along guidelines (eight in total) to make the policy more realistic. These guidelines include aspects such as respect for international laws and treaties, protecting the vulnerable groups, tackling abuses and to counter undocumented (unlawful) residence amongst other things. The later should be done by provision of information by various actors from the very beginning of the procedure and by intensive guidance of undocumented migrants (Dekamer.be, document number 55 1580/014). This policy could be efficient for newcomers, although for undocumented migrants who have been residing in Belgium for many years, this can not be called a solution to the problem. In the same document, Sammy Mahdi, by referring to the regularisation of the undocumented migrants, confirms that regularisation is applicable in very specific cases only (Dekamer.be, document number 55 1580/014).

In the scope of the program ‘De zeven vragen’ on news site HLN, I was allowed to ask the Secretary of State one question and I asked about his policy towards undocumented migrants. He confirmed the same answer as his predecessors and confirmed once again that he is not planning any collective regularisation for undocumented migrants (HLN, 2020). Albeit in the general policy note and the several times in different occasions that the Secretary of State confirmed that no

regularisation should be expected and voluntary and/or forced returns are the solution for irregular migration, some experts do see potential for positive change and baby steps in the field (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2020).

5. Deliberate exclusion

According to the Gallup's World Poll conducted for the International Organization of Migration between 2012-2014 "European residents appear to be, on average, the most negative globally towards immigration, with the majority believing immigration levels should be decreased" (IOM, 2015). Another survey, conducted by the European Social Survey shows that 65% of the respondents regard migrants as the main reason for an increase in criminality. (Caritas 2019).

Various political and social organizations are deploying different tactics to exclude people in a socially vulnerable position (Samenlevingsopbouw, 2019). The target of this exclusion is very often the most vulnerable of all groups with migration background, namely the undocumented migrants. This policy of strong exclusion leads undocumented migrants to extreme poverty, constant stress of uncertainty and fear of being expelled from the country, makes them more vulnerable for abuse and exploitation. Therefore, it should not come with a surprise that the majority of natives experience negative feelings, if not threat, when they hear the words, undocumented migrants. Comments on a news article such as undocumented migrants steal our jobs, they are criminals, they are a threat for the society and culture, etc are rife on the internet. Given that the public and political discourse that has characterized undocumented migrants as a threat to society, this negative perception does not come as a surprise.

6. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the present research embraces analytical frameworks to address the respective research questions. To address the first research question of to what extent undocumented migrants have access to education in Belgium, the analytical framework of 'structural violence' will be used to explain why undocumented migrants lack the opportunity to have access to education. The hypothesis is that the social and institutional injustices in the form of lack of access to education for undocumented migrants residing in Belgium becomes a form of discrimination.

To address the second research question, how the lack of access to education affects the lives of undocumented migrants, the Conservation of Resources theory will be used. The corresponding hypothesis is that undocumented migrants, not having access to education and therefore unable to add new skills to the ones they already had as well as learn the local language lowers their chances to integrate into society and leads to certain levels of stress. This section will explore both theories in the context of education, discrimination, and integration.

6.1. Political construct: Structural violence

The term structural violence was first used by sociologist Johan Galtung. According to Galtung structural violence is “the indirect violence built into repressive social orders creating enormous differences between potential and actual human self-realization” (Galtung, 1975). Galtung used this term structural violence to show the differences between what people could have accomplished if the circumstances were different. In other words, between people’s potential

reality and the present reality (Thoughtco, 2021). Various scholars used the concept of structural violence in different contexts. Pool and Geissler (2006) refer to structural violence as "the constraints on behavior and options imposed by institutionalized inequalities in wealth and power on those who are underprivileged: namely women, the poor, those of colour" (Salem et al., 2016; Pool and Geissler, 2005). According to Saleem et al., "structural violence refers to injustices embedded in social and institutional structures within societies that harm individuals' wellbeing and prevent them from meeting their needs." Schepper-Hughes define structural violence as "the violence of poverty, hunger, social exclusion, and humiliation [inevitably] translates into intimate and domestic violence" (Scheper-Hughes, Bourgois, p 1, 2017).

Galtung refers to conflict both as an 'actor conflict' and 'structural conflict' (J. Demmers, 2017). The first refers to the conflicts that manifest themselves through violent acts while in the case of the latter, 'structural conflict,' the violent act is less obvious. Therefore, in the case of direct violence, the perpetrator is more visible and known while in the case of structural violence, the violence does not necessarily have an agent. "People may feel frustrations, and even at times act upon these frustrations..." Some experts refer to structural violence as a "force without a face" (J. Demmers, 2017). The notion of structural violence is very significant as it enables the analysis of multilayered injustices and inequalities embedded in social, economic and political institutions.

In the migration studies, the notion of structural violence has been applied to several cases such as immigrant neighbourhoods, closed and open detention centres (Rucman, 2016) and access to healthcare and welfare for undocumented migrants (Cuadra, 2011) (Quesada, 2012).

This study aims to investigate and document the impact of structural violence on the lives of undocumented migrants and how structural violence manifests itself when undocumented

migrants do not get the opportunity to access educational institutions and they are deprived of the basic and fundamental right to education.

6.2. Sociological approach: Conservation of Resources Theory

Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001) posits that people try primarily to gain and maintain resources and when there is a threat to lose these resources or a failure to gain new resources, stress occurs. According to Hobfoll (1989; 2001), resources can be seen as ‘desired goal objects’ and may include both material things such as cars and houses as well as psychological aspects such as friendships, self-esteem, etc. Shortly put, many things that are valuable for the individuals. These things vary from individual to individual, from culture to culture and from society to society. COR theory states that stress develops in people’s minds when they are not capable to achieve the goals that members of the same social group have already acquired.

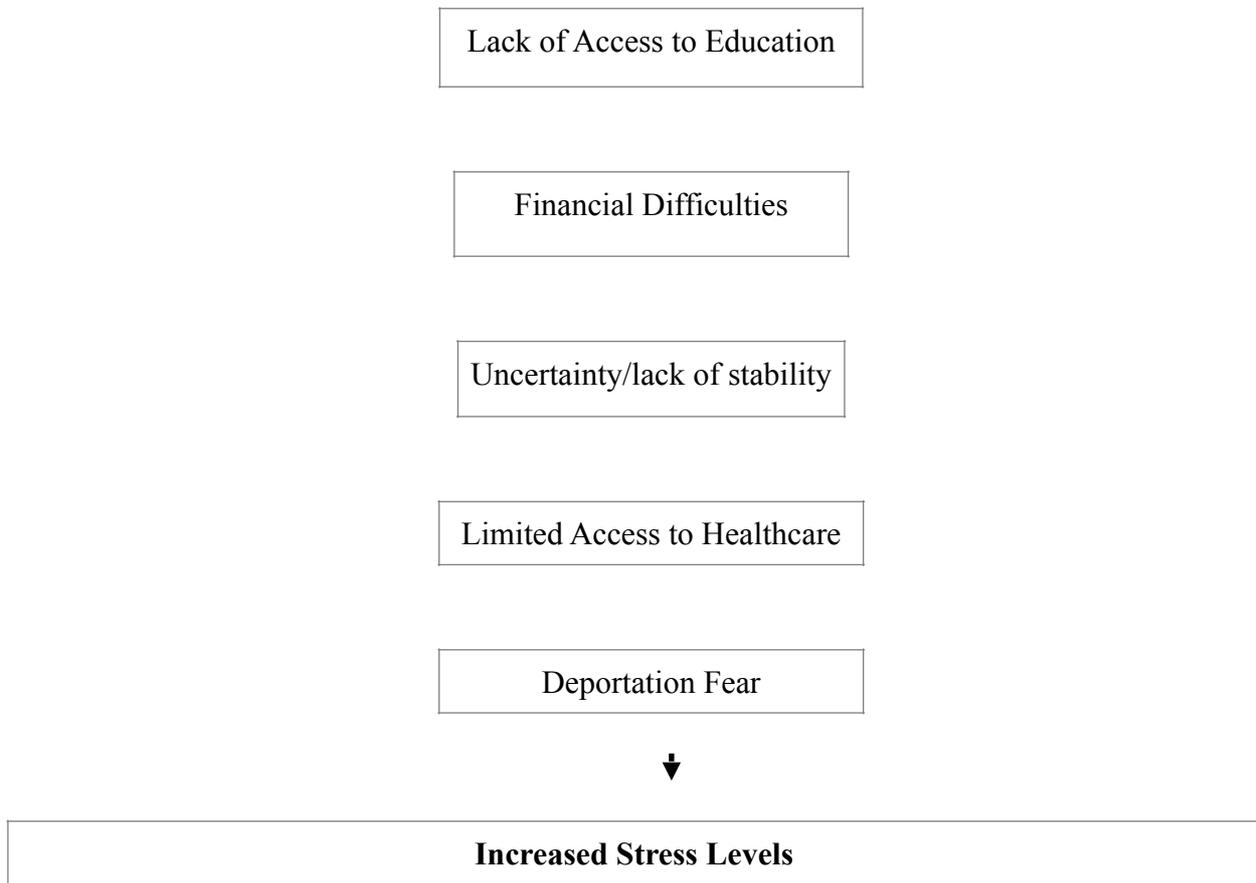
Hobfoll’s theory was also used by different studies on migration and implied to contextualise findings. For instance, Roubeni et al. used the theoretical framework of COR theory to analyse the patterns that “immigrant parents employ to make up for migration-related losses and the value they ascribe to particular resources that are available to them in the new host country” (Roubeni et al., 2015, p 281).

By applying the COR theory, the research aims to show that most of the times, migrants are not being able to acquire new resources which they aimed for or not being able to use the resources they already have. Furthermore, they are also not able to add extra resources to the ones they already have which leads to certain levels of stress. Essentially, the research will attempt to

shed light on the psychological problems of high stress levels which undocumented migrants encounter when they are denied access to education.

Along with academic concerns, there are also other psychological factors that lead to increased stress levels such as deportation concerns, financial concerns, future concerns, uncertainty, lack of control over their own life and so forth. Figure 2, on the following page, was created with the purpose of providing a visual demonstration of the links between all the above mentioned factors.

Figure 1: Conservation Theory applied to lives of undocumented migrants



6.3. Psychological approach: Individual experiences and aspirations

6.3.1. Discrimination

Having limited or no access to education can lead to certain forms of discrimination. Over the last decades, scholars have dedicated numerous works on the study of state policies that help to regulate or restrict migration and concluded that these policies have mostly failed (Castles, 2010; Cornelius et al, 2004). Many scholars have also argued that the reason for a restrictive and limiting migration policies is the long history of “racism and racial and ethnic discrimination”

(Fine, 2016). Discrimination based on migration starts by dividing migrants into several groups such as undocumented migrants, migrants with temporary residence permit, migrants with permanent residency permit and migrants who have already gained their citizenship status. Under international human rights law, discrimination on the grounds of migration status is prohibited. Undocumented migrants are not seen as beholders of citizens' rights, which is incorrect when looking at it from two perspectives: international legal treaties and commitments and arguably the most important, from the moral perspective. According to the European survey conducted by Caritas Europe, 65% of the population believe that migrants increase crime, 38% believes that migrants take away jobs from native-born residents and 25% believes that migrants undermine cultural life in Belgium (Caritas Europa 2019). Moreover, Blommaert and Verschueren in the book 'Debating Diversity' mention that "in the European Poll in late 1997, carried out in the context of the European Year of the Fight against Racism, showed that the Belgians were the 'most racist' among Europeans with a 55 per cent self-identification as 'more or less racist'" (Blommaert, Verschueren, 1998). The level of education, among other factors play a significant role on person's perception and attitude towards migration. Despite the increase in discriminatory and racist expression in recent years and the call to the Belgian government from different organizations such as Unia (an independent public institution fighting discrimination and promoting equal opportunities) to adopt a federal plan to fight discrimination and racism, much has still yet to be done.

Since this study is focusing on undocumented migrants, it is important to acknowledge the types of discrimination that this group faces on a daily basis. This includes limited access to healthcare and education, no social assistance, no work permit, no child allowance, limited access to judicial services and so on. Ultimately, these types of discrimination lead to a lack of a sense of belonging in their host country and pushes them to stay closer to their ethnic community.

(Schwartz et al., 2010). In addition, living in the conditions of status differentiation and constant precarity leaves no space for integration. (Ellerman, 2019).

6.3.2. Integration

The term integration is perhaps the most used when it comes to migrants and ethnic minorities. Integration, from the point of view of migration studies, indicates the inclusion of an individual or group of individuals from one background into the host society (IOM, 2005). The term integration is a key concept in the strategies of acculturation along with assimilation, separation and marginalisation. Further, it also refers to the process of human interaction and participation in the host society whilst still maintaining the cultural identity of the home country (Berry, 1997). In the last decades, integration strategies implemented by most European countries, including Belgium, are very often evaluated as a form of forced assimilation. The obligatory integration programs have not proved to be effective and many European countries and policy makers are still in the search of a better integration plan. Many scholars argue that granting equal citizenship and legal rights is a guarantee for having a fully socially, culturally, politically and economically integrated society and that equal legal rights can be a serious tool to achieving this goal (Bauböck, 2001). Even though many authors focus mostly on the importance of socio-economic-cultural integration of migrants into the society, Bauböck states that the process of excluding certain groups in society from the decision-making process for a long period of time is non-democratic and in the end will have dismissive repercussions (Bauböck, 2003; Bittmann, 2010).

Education, being one of the central ways for migrants' integration is being done largely through language. Language is of an utmost importance when it comes to communicating and integrating into society. Being competent in the first language or in lingua franca (the national

language of the given country) is a primary tool for integration and further educational accomplishments. Consequently, if they are able to get education, research shows that education has a positive impact on people who live in poverty, have unstable lifestyles and those that constantly have to change their place of living.

6.3.3. Educational aspirations

In migrant stories, hope is a dominant factor. Individuals who migrate may have different educational backgrounds at the time of migration but they might have common educational aspirations, as well as socio-economic and political objectives. Certain immigrant families regard education as a means of gaining a better socio-economic status (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012). These aspirations and hopes have a positive impact on migrants' psychological state in the stressful situations of migration and acculturation (Berry, 1997). Many migrants believe that their 'endured sacrifice and hard work' will in the end turn their and their children's lives for the better (Roubeni et al., 2015). When there is a discrepancy between the pre-migration aspirations and post-migration realities (Murphy and Mahalingam, 2006), migrants adjust their aspirations to the new reality of the host society (Bloch et al., 2009). If they fail to achieve their aspirations or even lose the resources they had before, certain level of stress takes place (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001). Because undocumented migrants live in the shadows and their voices are not being heard, it is even more important to understand the educational aspirations of undocumented migrants.

7. Access to education for undocumented migrants in Belgium

7.1. Children

As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, this research will focus on the access to education of undocumented migrants who are 18 years and above. However, it is noteworthy to mention that minors or children of undocumented migrants do have the right to primary education. They are given access to compulsory school until the age of 18. However, they have no access to vocational education or to higher education institutions. A Brussels-based organization engaged in protecting the rights of the undocumented people 'Coordination des Sans Paper' created a list of rights that undocumented people and their children have or are denied of. According to this organization, children of undocumented people are not allowed to leave the Belgian territory for school-related activities. They also cannot continue their studies once they are adults. According to an article published by Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), a network of organizations working to ensure social justice and human rights for undocumented migrants, titled 'Amplifying the voices of undocumented people in Europe' states that even undocumented children face challenges to complete primary and secondary education. For instance, upon registering at school they did not have an identity card and therefore the schools could not guarantee that they will receive their final certificate upon finishing school. Furthermore, schools may demand birth certificates, national identification papers or proof of residency to issue a certificate. The article emphasises the important role schools, teachers, federations and unions can play in changing the situation for the better:

“They can ensure that personal information of children or their parents is never shared with immigration authorities, thereby maintaining a relationship of trust with the child and their family and ensuring that the child continues their education. Joint advocacy

can also push for changes in the law, allowing for children to access non-compulsory education, vocational training, and traineeships.” (PICUM, 2019).

In 2018, UNESCO published an academic piece written by Fons Coomans, UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Peace at Maastricht University, titled 'Building Bridges not Walls.' In the article, the salient role of education in the response to migration is stressed upon. In addition, he recognises the important role education can play in connecting societies and cultures.

“Ignoring education in the response to migration is a failure to recognise its power to address diversity and promote inclusion. Through effective teacher training and teaching materials, a good education can provide people with the skills to engage with different cultures and challenge stereotypes. It can build much-needed bridges across cultures and divides, and forge a path towards a more cohesive and just world.” The same article also recognises that if denied a good basic education, “an entire generation may be lost” (Coomans, 2018).

It is worth mentioning that in comparison to other European countries, like in Germany, schools, social institutions, and hospitals are obliged to report on the undocumented migrants. In Belgium, this is not the case. Only government officials have a duty to report. Other services and institutions do not. People without legal residence can contact them without fear of being reported (Agentschap Intergratie and Inburgering, 2019). In Germany, a daycare center was even taken to court for not reporting an undocumented toddler to the police (Mondiaal Nieuws, Sara Frederix, 2006).

7.2. Adults

This study aims to focus on the rights of the undocumented adults. As a result of this research it is evident that undocumented migrants do not have the right to go to a school where they can learn the local languages. The current research found that undocumented people who have been residing in Belgium for more than 9, 10, 11 even 12 years, and the fundamental right to go to school to learn Dutch or French is absent. Access to language courses and vocational education as well as higher education are very contested as they are often not recognised by national law as being part of compulsory education (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, 2019).

Several studies have confirmed the positive impact education has on the socio-economic and political integration of migrant groups (PICUM, 2019, Caritas, 2019). It has also decreased their chances of getting involved in criminal activities. However, one can imagine that by granting undocumented migrants with an access to educational institutions, discontent and anger will rise amongst certain groups in the population.

The explanation that many of the undocumented migrants do not settle down is not grounded, as majority of the undocumented migrants I met reside in Belgium already more than 5 years and they see their future too in Belgium. It is therefore realistic to understand that many of the undocumented migrants still continue their stay in Belgium despite the fact that they are not allowed to access educational institutions. It is therefore necessary to grant this people with an opportunity to learn the local language, gain new skills and be prepared to get employed the moment they receive residency permit (Coomans, 2018).

This study began by quoting Article 14 of the EU charter on the fundamental rights to education. Additionally, Title II of the Belgian Constitution named 'The Belgians and their rights', states that "Although the Constitution speaks of the rights of the Belgians, in principle, they apply to all persons on Belgian soil." Simultaneously, the Belgian Constitution Article 24.1. states the following: "Education is free; any preventive measure is forbidden; the punishment of offences is regulated only by the law or federate law." Article 2 of the Protocol to the ECHR, reads as follows: "No person shall be denied the right to education." Despite this, one can say it is remarkable that before 2011, undocumented adults did have access to education. In 2011, the social-democrat Minister of Education Pascal Smet changed the policy, and gave priority to people in the asylum procedure. Even though the Christian and Social Labour Unions were against this change, it was still implemented and is still up to date (Bruzz, 2011).

8. The Role of Individuals - Good practices

Marie-Bénédicte Dembour wrote in her 2010 article 'What are human rights? Four schools of thought' propose that there are four main schools of thought in regards to the human rights. The first school of thought, called the 'natural school', interpret human rights as a given. The 'deliberative school' sees human rights as "political values that liberal societies choose to adopt" (Dembour, 2010). The third group, the 'protest group,' believe that human rights should always be fought for as "one victory never signals the end of all injustice (ibid.)" and lastly, the fourth group is the discourse group which believes or on the contrary, does not believe in the human rights. They believe that the language plays a pivotal role and especially the language that 'surrounds the human rights' and it is being used to address political claims (Dembour, 2010).

This study came across different local initiatives that play an important role in protecting the undocumented migrants' right to education and can be classified in the protest school who

fight and advocate for the right to education for undocumented migrants. The importance of these initiatives have been recognised by many organizations who also finance these initiatives. PICUM, the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, also emphasises “the important role schools, teachers, their federations and unions can play in changing the situation for the better” (PICUM, 2019). Sometimes schools choose to “not see” or “see through the fingers” the absence of identification cards of the undocumented migrants and thus still allow undocumented migrants to continue their studies and pursue the educational path they chose to. Other organizations that should also be classified as good practices are initiatives when senior citizens or other volunteers gather and free of charge provide language lessons (mostly verbal every day speech) free of charge to undocumented migrants.

These practices are not widely spread and not every undocumented migrant knows about these options. Others already have some basic level of the language and prefer more systematic, profound knowledge which would allow them speak by making less mistakes. This level of language proficiency can only be obtained by regularly attending conversational and grammar language courses.

Albeit the existence of these practices, institutions and organizations is of great importance, no one can decline that access to educational institutions is the only way to guarantee efficient learning process.

9. Methodological framework

9.1. Data Collection

There are several reasons qualitative method of research was chosen. To explore the research question, qualitative research methods such as interviews with undocumented migrants

were used to get insight into real life experiences. Essentially, as a way of gaining insight on the impact lack of access to education has on their lives and on what their future educational aspirations are. Unfortunately, there is limited quantitative data available, such as statistical data, tabulations, surveys, and simulations on how many undocumented migrants currently reside in Belgium, how many of them requested to be enrolled in language courses or how many of them requested to study or already study at the university. This is due to the fact that many of them live under the radar and out of the eye of the public.

Qualitative research tools such as individual semi-structured interviews and contact with the schools providing language classes to foreigners were implemented for the purposes of this study with the aim to gain a deeper understanding of the situation at hand. To understand to what extent undocumented migrants have access to education in Belgium and how lack of access to education affects their lives and ideas, both online and face-to-face interviews were conducted. Also three schools in West Flanders that provide language courses to migrants as well as three universities were contacted. Three schools that are providing language courses to migrants are namely SNT Brugge (Stedelijke Nijverheids- en Taalleergangen), Agentschap Integratie and Inburgering Roeselare and Creo Roeselare. To get a better understanding about the undocumented migrants' access to higher educational institutions three universities were contacted. The universities contacted were Ghent University, Katholiek University of Leuven and Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

In total, 10 interviews were conducted, three of which online (via Zoom) and with the help of social networks such as WhatsApp and Viber. The other seven interviews were held face-to-face. During the face-to-face interviews, Covid-19 restriction were strictly followed. A distance of 1,5 meter was kept and all participants wore a face mask. The only distinction that was made while choosing interviewees was the age of the respondents. As this research focuses on the access

to education for undocumented migrants above 18 years old, respectively the interviewees were also 18 plus. There was no distinction made based on religion, age, gender, length of stay in Belgium etc.

To get an even better view in regards to the undocumented migrants' access to education a question was sent to the State Secretary of Asylum and Migration Sammy Mahdi using the social media platform Instagram.

9.2. Research quality

During the interviewing process, seven of the ten interviews were recorded with their consent. The other three interviews did not give consent. In every interview, more or less the same questions were used. Before the interview, the topic of the interviews was thoroughly explained to the respondents. The Snowball sampling method was used to find new interviewees. Interviewees agreed to connect the researcher with other potential people who might be interested in taking part in the interviews. Most of the interviews were taken in a natural setting for the interviewees. The respondents were told that they can choose not to answer a question or to stop the interview whenever needed. They were also told that they can check the answers they gave again when the interview was done.

10. Challenges

10.1. Ethical considerations

Ethical dilemmas were of central importance given the fact that the participants of present research were irregular migrants, which by itself showed the extreme precarious position they were in. Being 'illegalised' brings with it a range of other complications, such as being afraid to go

to the police in case of abuse or daring not to take public transportation out of fear to be caught by the authorities. It was therefore of the utmost importance to make sure that this research did not harm the participants. In this regard, one of the steps that was taken was to make sure that the interviewees remained anonymous. The recordings of the interview are kept on a personal computer in a file protected by a password. A copy of the recordings is also saved on a memory card which is also password protected. Another ethical issue was to avoid at all costs the usage of biased and offensive language or terms in this research paper. An example might be the usage of terms 'illegal migrants' instead of illegalized migrants or undocumented migrants. Consciousness of the usage of the proper language was carefully implemented.

10.2. Difficulties

Covid-19 has had significant consequences on this research. Initially, the plan was to have interviews with thirty participants however since the physical contact was limited, it was not possible to conduct more interviews than 10. Language was another barrier. Some of the interviewees spoke English, others limited Dutch, therefore communication did not go as smoothly. However, language and communication issues were to be expected in this area of research. In the majority of the interviews time limitations were also an obstacle. Because some of the interviewees were reached with the help of a third person and the third person was also present in the building where the interviews were being conducted, we agreed to limit each interview to a ten to fifteen interview which was a challenge. In the course of the interviews other topics also were emerging such as the difficulties and challenges they are facing when it comes to access to healthcare, their daily activities and personal life, racism, discrimination, but these topics were not deeply explored.

11. Results

11.1. General information about the respondents

As explained earlier in the methodology, in total 10 interviews were conducted. The age of all interviewees is above eighteen. The minimum age of the respondents was 20 years and the maximum age was 40 years. Three of the respondents were female and respectively seven male. Of all the respondents, only one was in the process of getting an education. The respondents were originally from the following countries and had the following profiles:

Table 1:

Country of origin	Number of respondents	Currently residing	Previously obtained education
Armenia	2	Surroundings of Brussels	Middle school (10 years in total)
Armenia	1	Gent	Middle school plus pedagogical college (unfinished)
Afghanistan	1	Brugge	Is currently studying in one of the technical schools to become a cook
Bangladesh	1	Brugge	Middle school
Ethiopia	1	Brugge	Completed 7 years of school
Iran	1	Brugge	N/A
Kosovo	1	Brugge	N/A
Russia	1	Brugge	Technical school
Rwanda	1	Brugge	Middle school plus computer courses

11.2. Duration of stay in Belgium

The maximum duration of the stay of the respondents in Belgium was 22 years and the minimum duration of the stay was 6 years.

11.3. Languages used during the interviews

Three of the ten interviews were conducted in Armenian (first language of the interviewee and the interviewer), six interviews were conducted either in English or Dutch or interchangeably. One interview was conducted with the help of a family member of the respondent since the respondent could not speak neither English nor Dutch. She could only communicate in her mother tongue.

11.4. Everyday activities of the respondents

Four of the respondents mentioned that they are working in black economy to be able to survive as they do not get any social assistance. One respondent works as a volunteer. The rest of the respondents said that they are unemployed and not doing anything. This is a very sensitive topic and chance is big that more respondents were working in black economy. Therefore, the question of how they survive when they are not involved in social welfare programs or when they are not allowed to work was not asked.

11.5. Importance of knowing the local language

As it was expected, vast majority of the respondents (nine out of ten) said that it is very important for them to know the local language. One respondent answered no, that most important

thing for him was to get work permit and that he can work and live without even knowing the language. Nine of the ten of the respondents have at some point during their stay (mainly at the beginning of their stay) followed some Dutch/French courses. However, at some point when their request for an asylum was rejected, they had to stop the classes.

Quote 1: *“If you live in this country, the most important thing is the language. For the communication”.*

Quote 2: *“It is of an utmost importance for me to be able to speak Dutch in order to make friends. Sometimes I feel myself stupid when people approach to me at the street to ask something and I can't even give an answer”.*

At this point the respondent became emotional.

Quote 3: *“Yes, I think it is very important. Because you cannot be integrated without speaking the language. It is everywhere. For example: if you go to Rwanda for working, you stay for a long time, for 5 years. You will also have to learn the language. It is everywhere. So, you cannot be integrated if you don't know the language”.*

Quote 4: *“Of course, of course. Because first of all... If you want to do some other, some other options... Like If you want to do some opleidingen, (tr: training) first of all: you have to learn Dutch. If you don't know Dutch... For example, If you want to do... If you want to work in construction. So you have to know the language.”*

These conversations illustrate not only how important it is for undocumented migrants to have access to education, but also how their educational aspirations are not being fulfilled. How

they are not being able to add to the resources or to the knowledge they already have, neither are they able to use the resources they have obtained before because of various obstacles such as not knowing the local language, not having access to labor market, etc. They all acknowledge that without knowing the local language the integration process will fail.

11.6. Access to education

Majority of the respondents (seven out of ten) have already tried getting access to language courses but they were not allowed. However, two respondents reported that even after their procedure was stopped and they became undocumented, they were allowed by the school to finish all the levels of French. Yet, their further inquiry to get another skill (in French: formation) was rejected. One respondent was in the process of obtaining an education to later become a cook. The respondent arrived to Belgium as a minor and was enrolled in the school. After he became an adult, his residency permit was taken from him and his right to education too. The school decided ‘not to see’ this and gave him the chance to further continue his education. Other respondents tried several times to have access to education but their attempts were not successful and with the same reasoning that they were not in possession of an identity card.

11.7. How lack of education affects their lives and future plans

As it was expected nine out of ten respondents said that their life quality would be different if they were given an opportunity to learn the local language or to study further. Some of the effects potential access to education would have on their lives they mentioned would be ‘become more open, more social, have more friends, have more opportunities.’

Quote 1: *‘I do not have any friends from here and the first reason for that is not knowing the language...it is very difficult to have social contacts without knowing the language’.*

Quote 2: *'I have tried to download some programs on my phone to learn the language by myself, but I do not trust my own strengths because there can be many many mistakes. It is totally different when there is a teacher who can correct your mistakes but when you learn the language by yourself you make a lot of mistakes and you speak with mistakes, and because of that I start feeling ashamed, I got complexes and get locked into myself and can no more communicate freely... Sometimes I feel myself stupid when people approach to me at the street to ask something and I can't even give an answer'.* At this point the respondent cries.

This quote aligns with Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory in the way that not being able to add to one's existing resources and have educational aspirations fulfilled leads to stress.

Interestingly enough, all respondents still see their future in Belgium. Some described their future positively and the main factor for the positivity was the hope. Others said that they see their future "very dark, nothing is sure, I see no light."

Quote 1: *"Nothing is sure. What is going to happen. No light. That is the problem. Without papers you can not build anything. Nothing. Or begin something. You can not do anything."*

Quote 2: *"I do not know. Without papers I can not say anything"*.

These quotes accentuate the impact of the unstable situation undocumented migrants appear to be and its relation to COR theory and specifically the two out of four categories of the COR theory, namely absence of conditions (for example absence of employment) and absence of resources such as for example knowledge, when investments in knowledge are not happening and as a result stress levels go up. Traumatic events from the past such as war, unequal opportunities,

can also play a significant role on a person's resources, its preservation or accumulation. Hobfoll et al. argue that post-traumatic events can also have a significant impact and determine the coping capabilities of the individual (Hobfoll et al., 2012).

From the other hand, there were several respondents who saw their future in a positive a light. This was inextricably connected with the notion of hope, which is another characteristic of the COR theory.

Quote 1: *“Oh my god. How do I see my future? It's a very good question, but it's difficult to answer it. Ja... you know... for the people... who... who are not allowed to work... Can you imagine their futures? Can you imagine their futures, huh? So okay, I'm always positive. That's important for me, okay. Maybe one day my future will be okay. I'm always positive.”*

Quote 2: *“I see my future very positively. I see myself with papers (means residency permit documents), learning dutch and then, when I am done learning Dutch, I am going to study in an art school. I am drawing. Studying in an art school is my dream. This is how I see my future.”*

Hope aligns with another characteristic of COR theory and that of optimism and hope. One of the fundamentals of the COR theory is that individuals always look for certain conditions that will help them ‘in retaining, protecting, and building resources. They seek to create a world that will provide them with pleasure and success’ (COR in Stress and Trauma., 2020). According to Hobfoll et al., individuals who remain positive and do not lose their hope have more chances of recovery and positive outcomes than the ones who lose their hope and are unable to stay positive following a trauma. Individuals who lose their hope have more chances to lose their coping skills and mechanisms and are more prone to have PTSD (Post traumatic Stress Disorder). (Hobfoll et al., 2007). Hobfoll suggests 5 core elements to restore hope two of which are crucial to this

research. The five elements would help to restore hope are: a strong belief in God, a responsive government, a positive superstitious belief, positive mass media messaging, and lastly schools, universities, the media and natural community leaders helping to enforce and rebuild hope by helping people focus on the positive and rebuilding strengths (COR in Stress and Trauma., 2020).

11.8. How the lack of access to education affected their ideas about Belgium

Only two of the respondents said that their perception of Belgium has changed negatively and did not want to elaborate further on this. The other eight respondents said that their perception of Belgium in general and people they have met have not changed. They have a positive perception of Belgium. Nonetheless, some of their remarks were very interesting. Namely, they made a distinction between Belgium and the excluding policy that has been deployed towards undocumented migrants in the last decade. They argued that the Belgian politicians should implement ‘softer rules,’ be more ‘foreigner-friendly, which would be beneficial both for the foreigners and the Belgium as well.’

Quote 1: *Belgium needs to have softer rules when it comes to the basic needs of people, for example housing, food, healthcare and then education. These needs should be fulfilled’.*

Quote 2: *‘I can not say that my perception of Belgium has changed in a negative way. I believe that it has to do with politics. In politics there are some people who are against immigrants, who are always against. But they are not all of them, you know’.*

11.9. Security concerns

When conducting interviews, undocumented people were noticeably sensitive to the issue of their security. Out of fear to be deported back to their home country they prefer to be anonymous and they prefer their real name not be used in the research. These people are also very sensitive when it comes to the contact with the police. They would rather not report a crime that they were witness of that was done to them out of fear to be deported. Women are particularly vulnerable and they fear to report a sexual assault.

12. Contact with other parties involved

12.1. Educational institutions

12.1.1 Schools

As mentioned earlier two schools, namely SNT Brugge and Creo Roselare, plus one integration office (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering Roeselare) were contacted to enquire whether access to education is not allowed for undocumented migrants. Only from two of these institutions was an answer received. Both SNT Brugge and Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering Roeselare confirmed that undocumented migrants are not allowed to register for either language courses or for any other specialisation.

12.1.2. Universities

As part of the study, three universities were also contacted. Ghent University, Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven) and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). According to the Ghent University's Admissions Officer, an undocumented migrant may apply to the university only if he or she is in possession of any type of identity card (national passport will also suffice). Further,

they should be able to show that he/she is in process of obtaining residency permit in Belgium. No reduction of the admissions fee is possible. So the undocumented migrant will have to pay the full tuition and fees.

The Admission's Officer of Catholic University of Leuven admitted that in her experience of 18 years she has seen only very few undocumented migrants who wanted to pursue education at their university. This phenomenon is comprehensible since undocumented migrants have many other daily worries such as housing and healthcare issues, therefore education will not always be the first thing on their mind. In addition, when undocumented migrants are already deprived from the right to have access to language courses, it is understandable that many of them will not even dare to go to university. The Admission's Officer of KU Leuven confirmed: "How would they afford? Where would they live? [For undocumented migrants,] questions mostly concern getting a scholarship and a room in one of our residencies. We advise to start the procedure."

Vrije Universiteit Brussel confirmed that undocumented migrants are not allowed to enrol at the VUB as "they should provide the university with a residence permit at the moment of finalising their enrolment at the VUB."

To conclude, it becomes obvious that for undocumented migrants who wish to enrol at the higher educational institutions it is either totally not possible or possible with limitations to the point that it becomes almost impossible due to the criteria such being in possession of an identity card (it can also be national passport) or to be in the procedure of obtaining residency permit in Belgium whilst still having enough financial means to cover the university tuition and admission fees.

12.1.3. NGOs

To better understand the role of NGOs in advocating and assisting undocumented migrants to gain access to education two NGOs were also contacted. Particularly, PICUM, the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants and Coordination Sans Papier Bruxelles were contacted. The research questions of the present study were presented in the communication with these NGOs.

PICUM representative refused the request for an interview because of the workload, but kindly provided with other sources that could have been of interest for the current study. From Coordination Sans Papiers Bruxelles no answer was received.

12.1.4. Sammy Mahdi, State Secretary of Asylum and Migration

On 12 December 2020, a question was sent via the social platform Instagram to the State Secretary of Asylum and Belgian Christian-Democrat politician, Sammy Mahdi who is a member of CD&V and in March 2020 became a member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, in regards to the access to education of undocumented migrants in Belgium. With his permission, his answer to the question “Why undocumented migrants do not have access to education?” was the following:

“Toegang tot het onderwijs zal ik zeker verder onderzoeken. Het is voor mij wel belangrijk dat mensen kunnen studeren en competencies aanleren. Ik doe wat ik kan!” Translated in English to “I will certainly investigate further access to education. It is important to me that people can study and learn competencies. I do what I can!”

13. My Journey

13.1. Language Courses

I came to Belgium 11 years ago. Upon my arrival I already had a university diploma which later became recognised by the Belgian state and a one year diploma from the University of Wyoming, USA. Education has always been an important part of my life. Upon arriving to Belgium I was forming my own little family, having many issues with the documents for a residency permit and since I had a temporary card for some months I was able to follow Dutch classes. If you live in West Flanders getting along with English or French is not an easy task and knowing Dutch is a must. So, I was very enthusiast to know Dutch enough to be able to communicate with the locals. But my ‘happiness’ of having access to Dutch classes didn’t last long as my temporary residency card was taken and I was obliged to stop the language classes. I tried alternative ways like borrowing self study books from the library, some websites but this is not the way one learns a language. I also felt that the knowledge I gained while studying Dutch at CVO Roeselare would vanish if I did nothing.

After having contacted dozens of schools in the neighbourhood cities Brugge, Roeselare, Oostende, Torhout I always got rejected because I needed some type of an identification card that was to be issued from the Belgian authorities. Not being in possession of such a card my access to these schools was prohibited.

Then I decided to check the language courses of the universities and the closest to me but still quite far were language courses of the Ghent University (it takes me almost 1,5-2 hours to get to Gent, first by bicycle (30min), then first train to Brugge and then a second train direction Ghent). I was pleasantly surprised to find out that I could register for the language courses

provided by the university online and that I didn't need to provide any ID, just national registration number (rijksregisternummer). The joy of having access to language courses didn't last long when I saw the fees. By then I was already working as a volunteer at the local school, helping the local churches with their accountancy and even though the money I was gaining was very little but I decided to save for a while and then go for it. Which I did. I registered for the language classes at the Ghent University. I did a pretest to determine my level of Dutch and I could directly go to level 5.

The four weeks of Dutch classes cost me about 575-600 euros (375 euros for the classes (I didn't fall under any category for a reduced fee) and 200 euro transportation costs to travel every working day from Aartrijke to Gent). Every time when I would get a notification from the teachers of the language courses I would cross my fingers and then open the email with the hope that the classes were not going to be cancelled. I just wanted to get the most from those six hundred euros. Those four weeks were full of joy for me, the travelling to Gent every day was such a pleasure for me. In a long time it felt like I was doing something important, worthy and I was so proud of myself that I could follow a language course. Later that month I passed the exams, received my B2 certificate and the sadness overwhelmed me as I realised that it was done, I couldn't afford another 600 euros for another level.

14.1.2. University

Getting a master's degree has always been on my wish list. Of course, I never expected it would take me this long to get one but when one lives in 'illegality,' what used to be very important and in the top three of your to wish list (education for example) becomes not that urgent anymore. Other priorities emerge.

One has to be very persistent (dare) to even think about going to the university when you have been rejected several times based on the fact that you do not have the same rights as other migrant groups not even talking about other citizens. And it is a right to get an education, I am not talking about a right to housing, right to work, right to medical care, to social welfare and social security, etc, which are of a primary importance.

Sometimes when I think about the reasons why Belgium would not allow undocumented migrants educate themselves, I wonder if the state in reality reaches its goal, ie making undocumented migrants feeling isolated to the point where they will eventually decide to voluntarily leave the country. I could not find a research which would show how many of the undocumented migrants decided to go back to their home country based on the fact that they didn't get the chance to go to school or learn the local language. I assume none, or very few. A disturbing question raises then on why does Belgium deny the importance of education when it comes to the undocumented migrants and why does Belgium need some hundreds of thousand inhabitants on its soil who do not speak the language, have almost no rights and lead a degrading way of life. The state, for some reason, do not want this group of people to learn the local language which is the only way to integrate into society, learn about their rights and responsibilities, build social contacts and improve as a human and social being. So, is Belgium's, one of the leading European countries,' whose democracy index is 35th globally and has signed, concluded and ratified several international agreements and treaties, approach to the problem of irregular migration acceptable? (Citizenlab, 2020).

Besides having a large group of people who are deprived of their rights and lead degrading lifestyles several studies have also shown that due to irregular migration there has also been shift to illegal activities (G. Engbersen; D. Broeders, 2010). Due to the legal state policy certain groups of undocumented migrants resort to criminal activities to prolong their irregular stay. (Engbersen

et al. 2006). Engbersen en Broeders (2010) argue that excluding undocumented migrants from having access to formal economy and employment and the public services is pushing certain groups of undocumented migrant to criminal activities (G. Engbersen; D. Broeders, 2010). It is not very surprising that some of these people resort to illegal activities as having no work permit and no other source of income does not leave very many options. In the most cases undocumented migrants resort to black economy and in the best case scenarios undocumented migrants are being hired as a volunteer, but the official reimbursement of being a volunteer is as low as 1.388,40 euro a year (Financien.belgium.be).

The Conservation of Resources stress theory of Hobfoll I used in this thesis comes to prove the psychological non stable place undocumented migrants are. Time to time when my true self wins the undocumented self of mine I become full of ideas and plans for the future. It was one of those moments several years ago when I decided to make an appointment with someone from the student admissions office at the Ghent University. I was lucky enough to meet a very friendly woman who at first couldn't hide her surprise and embarrassment because she didn't know what to answer to my question of whether I could get enrolled at the university without having no identification card issued by the Belgian authorities. She told me that she had to check it with her colleague and that she would be back soon. I was not nervous at all, I knew she was going to give a negative answer, so I just enjoyed the moments of being in the university building.

As expected, the lovely woman came back and the first thing she told me was that I shouldn't be afraid, (which I was not) and that she was not going to report me to the police. As it was also already expected she said that unfortunately I can not be enrolled at the university without a valid identification card. She also told me very friendly that she was going to check with another colleague of hers and she kindly asked my email address to get back to me in case she would have more news for me. When I left the university, the sun was shining and I decided to

take a walk in the central streets of beautiful Ghent and then walk to the station. While walking to the station I decided to take a look at my phone and quickly checked my email. To my great surprise I saw an email from the woman from the admissions office. She was informing me that I might be able to enrol at the university with a condition that I need to have a passport (does not necessarily have to be issued by Belgium, my national passport would also suffice), a proof that we are in a procedure of obtaining legal status in Belgium and that I will have to pay the whole tuition and fees and no reductions were possible. (I will forever be thankful to this woman. If it wasn't her willingness to inform further with another colleague of hers and her readiness to help me, it would probably take me another ten or twenty years to get a master's degree. Once I get my diploma I am going to pay a visit to her).

Immediately, I felt a rush of joy just from the thought that I would finally be allowed to study, but the thought of the tuition and fees being so high (1847 euro) brought me back from my dreams to the reality and once again made me feel hopeless. After that email I made up my mind that I was going to do it and started saving religiously only for that purpose. A colleague of mine at the school where I was working agreed to buy the meal checks from me I was getting from the school for the work I was doing, I started asking for a small reimbursement for the accountancy I was doing at the time and two years later I have saved enough to enrol at the university.

I am perhaps one of the luckiest ones among all the undocumented migrants. While others are struggling to solve daily problems related to housing, shelter, work, healthcare, I was able to get access to education, one thing that everyone has right to and as article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights state 'higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit' (Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights). A right one has to fight for in one of the most democratic countries in the world.

14. Discussion and Conclusion

By investigating the impact of structural violence (Galtung, 1975) through intersectional and qualitative analysis of interviews on the undocumented migrants, it becomes clear that the impact is vast. Having no access to education, living in constant situation of waiting, having no certainty for the future significantly increases the stress levels and lowers the life quality.

Contact with various educational institutions confirmed that access to language courses and vocational education for undocumented adult migrants is prohibited in contrast with other groups of society such as applicants of international protection, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants with temporary residence permit, migrants with permanent residency permit and migrants who have already gained their citizenship status. This aligns with the theoretical framework of structural violence and the conceptual framework of *discrimination*. Even though under international human rights law, discrimination on the grounds of migration status is prohibited, this is not the case for undocumented migrants and their access to education. As in the most cases of structural violence, in this case, as well, the impact is not direct but immense in the long run as well as it affects several aspects of life. The chain begins where the discrimination starts; as a result, undocumented migrants are not able to acquire language skills, which in its turn is a massive obstacle to *integration*. As a result of failed integration and *educational aspirations* that were not fulfilled, stress and other psychological issues happen, which may contribute to serious health issues, both somatic and mental (COR theory, Hobfoll, 2007). Wherever the access to higher educational institutions is permitted, other obstacles emerge such as paying the whole tuition without any reduction or social rate, being in possession of a national identity card, being in process of obtaining residency documents etc. Therefore, the chances that an undocumented

migrants will pursue education are very low given the above mentioned factors plus the fact that they do not have any official source of income.

The analysis of the interviews demonstrated that undocumented migrants live in a constant condition of stress caused by various factors which also include not being able to foster the resources they already have, preserve those resources and add to those resources. Hobfoll (2007) suggests that being able to add resources to the existing ones will foster the coping mechanisms of the individual and not being able to do so will result in not only losing those coping mechanisms but also losing hope, having negative thoughts and “shattered world view.” Two of the five core elements that Hobfoll et al. suggest to restore positive attitude and hope include having a *responsive government, schools and universities*, which can help to rebuild strengths. (Hobfoll, 2007).

This study also demonstrated that having access to education, learning the local language and adding up to the knowledge they already have is of utmost importance. Nine out of ten respondents would pursue their education if given the chance.

Having an opportunity to act and live based on how far one’s hard work and talent can take him is an ultimate component of a just society. In one of his latest books, ‘The Tyrant of Merit’ Michael J. Sandel, quotes the words of writer James Trustlow Adams from the book ‘The Epic of America’, saying:

“It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be organised by others for what they

are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth and position.” (Adams, 1931, p 404).

This best describes the idea of having or aiming to have a society without injustices and based on merit.

Going back to the Conservation of Resources theory, also, looking back at my personal experience, I would like emphasise that education can be a powerful tool to overcome stress caused by the inability to change things, by having no control over your own life, by not being able to add more resources to the ones you have already got or using up the resources one may have accumulated. Universities and generally educational institutions are and can be safe spaces for many more. It is not only the routines that give a better structure to one’s life and bring some balance, but the process of gaining new knowledge (adding up new resources to the already existing ones), of getting to know other students and professors and their views on certain issues that bring more added value to ones life. I believe this is the case with every human being but some human beings are not given the right to do so.

“But if the common good can be arrived at only by deliberating with our fellow citizens about the purposes and ends worthy of our political community, then democracy can not be indifferent to the character of the common life. It does not require perfect equality. But it does require that citizens from different walks of life encounter one another in common spaces and public spaces. For this is how we learn to negotiate and abide our differences. And this is how we come to care for the common good.” (Sandel, 2020, p 227).

The objective of this research was twofold. Firstly, to examine the literature on structural violence and COR theory to understand to what extend structural violence imposed by the political

structures impacts the lives of undocumented migrants in the scope of not having access to education. Secondly and most importantly, to give voice (and let my voice also be heard) to the hardships that undocumented migrants have to undergo. By combining the theory with these specific cases, this research aimed to give a realistic insight into the reality of undocumented migrants. By doing so, I hope to raise awareness of this issue amongst academics and policy makers and hopefully this will influence a change on an institutional level. Specifically, by enabling undocumented migrants' access to language courses and to higher educational institutions. As Waterston stated "The normalization of structural violence means cruelty and injustice can pass for common sense and be understood by the general public as just the way things are naturally" (2005). Like Waterston, I strongly believe that normalisation of structural violence of this type, will lead to justifying exclusion and violence which will later also lead to a justification of other wrongful behaviours.

Drawing parallels with the work of Bloomaert and Verschuere used earlier in this study, who in their book 'Debating Diversity Analysing the Discourse of Tolerance' state that their book is not only the result of the research they have conducted but also a result of the 'story of involvement of the authors in what they have described and analysed' and that their 'voice automatically represents a particular position within the debate'.

I do also realise that my positionality has deeply influenced this research and that my voice in this thesis has a particular place, but I hope this study which includes review of the debates related undocumented migrants and their access to education as well as my personal involvement will have a positive impact for the decision making process of the state policy makers when deciding to extend or to ban a fundamental right to education to undocumented migrants.

I also acknowledge that further and deeper study might be needed to have a better assessment of the current situation in regards to the access to education for undocumented migrants as by design, participants of the current study were mostly residing in West Flanders (7 out of 10) and a broader spectrum of respondents representing different parts of Belgium will give a better and broader understanding of the issue. Therefore, the findings of this study might not be generalisable for all undocumented migrants from all parts of Belgium. Even though the methods used in this study made it possible to give answers to the two research questions this study was looking for but I also realise that in order to get a broader understanding of the current issue and the underlying reasons a further study will be needed to confirm and deepen the current research.

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