Chapter 7
Shaping the "Deserving Refugee": Insights from a Local Reception Programme in Belgium

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7.1 Introduction

In 2015, almost a million refugees arrived in Europe. Although those who made it to Europe were only a small number compared to those displaced by the conflict, the sudden increase of asylum applications, mostly in Germany, mobilized public opinion and the attention of the media for months. While some asked to what extent Europe could bear what was described as a "human flood", others lamented that many among the applicants were not real refugees. Images of vulnerable refugees needy of assistance were reproduced along with images of threatening aliens overflowing European borders.[1] Since then, the discourse surrounding the "refugee crisis" has been in a way or another shaped by the idea of *deservingness*. Who deserves to enter into European territory? Who deserves to receive state-funded assistance?

In recent years, "deservingness" has increasingly become a focus of attention for those studying public discourse on refugees. Most authors investigating these issues highlight how these categories shape refugee reception systems, programmes of social assistance and the views of those who work in these programmes (Casati 2017; Hardy and Philipps 1999; Holmes and Castañeda 2016; Sales 2002; Walaardt

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[1] See Chap. 6 in this volume by Pogliano & Ponzo on the role of different actors (media, policy makers) in the production of public narratives on refugees.

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2013). While analysing Germany's reception context in the midst of the 2015 refugee crisis, Holmes and Castañeda (2016) argue that the lexicon of terror used to frame refugees and the crisis can have fatal consequences. As they write:

> The discursive frames used in the media and in political and popular narratives can help us learn a great deal about how the responsibility for suffering is shifted; how fears of cultural, ethnic, and religious difference are mobilized; and how boundaries of social categories are made and unmade, sorting people into undeserving trespassers versus those who deserve rights and care from the state. (Holmes and Castañeda 2016: 13).

The point here is to understand how the discourses on deservingness influence not only public opinion, but also practical interventions and programmes at a national and local level. We aim to understand to what extent and how these general discourses on deservingness are interpreted, reproduced and/or contested on a local level and how this translates into practice. This article contributes to this trend of literature by analysing a local assistance programme implemented in the city of Antwerp (Belgium). This programme was funded by the European Union in the aftermath of the refugee crisis. Its creation was directly linked to the surge in the amount of refugees entering Belgium. The programme aims to assist unaccompanied minors – recognized as refugees or receiving subsidiary protection[2] – who are about to turn 18 or have recently turned 18. This group represents a particularly vulnerable group in the professional caregivers' perceptions, since the youngsters' newly acquired adulthood leads to a sudden withdrawal of the public support measures available to unaccompanied minor refugees.

By examining the aims and the rationale of the project, as formulated by project team members, we aim to assess how categories characterizing the discourse on refugee crisis are reproduced, interpreted and questioned by local actors and stakeholders. In particular, we observe how the category of deservingness and its different dimensions have shaped the perspectives of those involved in this local intervention. The article illustrates the theoretical usefulness of distinguishing between three main dimensions of this notion: legal, moral and economic deservingness. In addition, we analyse how varieties in local stakeholders' perspectives on deservingness can be explained. By examining the interaction between locally rooted organisational cultures and wider European discourses, we point to the role of localities in shaping innovative policies.

We first discuss theoretical debates on the moralities of refugee assistance and elaborate on three different dimensions of deservingness: juridical, moral and economic deservingness. After briefly describing the context and aims of the local refugee programme, we analyse notions of deservingness in the project stakeholders' perspectives. Finally, we show how different dimensions of deservingness are often in tension with each other: while young refugees are expected to be "highly vulnerable" from a moral point of view, their inclusion in the programme depends on their capabilities to be economic deserving actors.

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[2] The refugee status is granted according to the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951. As a refugee, individuals are initially granted the right to stay in Belgium for 5 years, after which they are given permanent stay. Contrarily, subsidiary protection is more temporary and granted to those who cannot be defined as a refugee but who would face a real risk of being harmed upon return to the country of origin. (CGVS 2015).

7.2   The Deserving Refugee: Theoretical Debates About the Moralities of Refugee Assistance

Although the idea of deservingness has been central in recent academic debates on refugee reception and related discourse, it has rarely been examined in its manifold aspects. However, when reading the literature, it is evident how the image of the deserving refugee is a rather multifaceted one, evolving over time and space (Ludi 2014).

Some authors have highlighted how the image of deservingness in public discourse can change even in relatively short periods and influence asylum-related practices or attitudes. Walaardt (2013) has analysed the case of the Christian Turks who sought asylum in the Netherlands in the 1970s. He shows how after initial rejection by Dutch authorities, Christian Turks managed to successfully present themselves as "deserving refugees" by changing the refugee paradigm. At first portrayed as Eastern men seeking refuge from communist regimes, they then shifted the image of the refugee into a vulnerable, easily assimilable grateful victim. While previous assessments on asylum claims in the Netherlands were based more on credibility and persecution frames, those lobbying for Christian Turks introduced a moral frame justifying protection based on a humanitarian standard.

The image of the deserving refugee is context-dependent; it varies according to local institutional and socio-economic conditions. Casati's (2017) study of a small reception programme in a Sicilian town shows how local actors interpret deservingness through locally embedded moral criteria. These reflect the socio-economic marginality of the area and the limited institutional support provided to refugees and Italians alike. Casati (2017:13) argues that "notions of gratitude, suffering and autonomy take on specific connotations in relation to local economic, political and historical configurations". In particular, she illustrates how locals' evaluation of refugees' deservingness is based on how grateful these are to receive assistance – when resources are little for locals too –, how desperate they are (to justify prioritisation of refugees' needs over locals' needs), and how hardworking they demonstrate to be.

A review of the literature shows that deservingness encompasses several dimensions. The first dimension is grounded in legal definitions derived from the 1951 Geneva Convention. Deservingness here implies a legal entitlement to seek asylum and receive assistance in Europe. A sharp distinction is made here between *authentic* refugees, fleeing persecution or war, versus *bogus* refugees, unauthorized or economic refugees who are just trying to "jump the queue" for regular visas. While the former category is considered "deserving", the latter would have no legitimate reason to come to Europe. Interestingly, both human rights promoters and those in favour of state sovereignty over their territory use these categories of deservingness (Hardy and Philipps 1999).

The second dimension of deservingness emerges from a meritocratic, capitalist perspective, which identifies the deserving with the active, potentially productive refugee/migrant. This dimension of deservingness is built around the idea that

refugees represent a burden on welfare states (Sales 2002). The notion of particular groups representing a burden on society is older than contemporary refugee discourses, though. It can be found in discourses on the poor too. Katz (1989) investigated the common perception among Americans that the poor are undeserving of help because they brought poverty on themselves. Although this image has shifted in context and time, the idea has perpetuated and continues to influence the rationale of public social assistance. Deserving refugees are those who are thought to have the potential to evolve from their dependent position to an active one from which they will be able to contribute to national economy. It is assumed that investing in them is worthwhile, because the expected return on investment is significant. On the contrary, refugees who remain assistance receivers are framed as "profiteers" burdening host society.

The last dimension is ethical: who deserves hospitality most from a moral point of view? Who is most vulnerable? As it is framed in public discourse, the right of people to seek asylum and to be assisted is tightly connected to their vulnerability. This idea is reproduced by humanitarian discourse of international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) aiming to raise awareness and funds on the plight of refugees (Malkki 1996). Images of women and children are systematically selected over other representations to elicit compassion. Be it for strategic reasons or for sincere belief, refugees are continuously portrayed as traumatized people who have lost their home, their families and their possessions. In this stereotyped image of the refugee as the ultimate vulnerable victim, there is little space for personal agency, entrepreneurship and physical strength, which are indeed characterizing many of those who make it to Europe through extremely challenging voyages.

Remarkably, this image of the vulnerable refugee is employed not only by those who seek to protect refugees, but also by those who want to keep them outside national borders. American president Trump's statement that the European refugee crisis was mostly dominated by "young strong men" was precisely based on this assumption of deservingness. His words implicitly meant that those seeking asylum in Europe did not "deserve" their status as refugee not only because they were not vulnerable enough, but also because they were cowards escaping their responsibilities of defending the country and their families.[3]

Unaccompanied youngsters, the target group of the programme discussed in this article, occupy an ambiguous position within the above debate. On the one hand, these youngsters, usually boys, are portrayed as harmless, vulnerable children in need for help. On the other hand, they are also described as a group at risk (Bryan and Denov 2011), being potentially aggressive and prone to religious radicalisation. This is especially true in the Belgian public debate where young Muslim men represent the group mostly associated with terrorist attacks and religious fundamentalism (Fadil 2014).

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[3] See a media coverage about this at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2016/05/16/trumps-claim-that-young-strong-men-dominate-the-european-migrant-crisis/?utm_term=.ddafc80d9df6

7.3 Creating Categories, Crafting Policies: Views from a Local Programme in Antwerp (Belgium)

In the wake of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, a consortium of stakeholders in Antwerp applied for, and was granted, a 4.9 million budget by the European Regional Development Fund to set up a holistic support programme for "unaccompanied young adult refugees".[4] Antwerp is the second largest urban centre in Belgium with around 520,000 inhabitants. This city has a diverse population of which 48,5% is of foreign ancestry (Buurtmonitor Antwerpen 2015) including a considerable share of refugees.

The programme is led by the city authorities and more in particular the local Public Centre for Social Welfare,[5] the agency responsible for social rights of all Antwerp residents. Other executive stakeholders are (1) the city's municipal agency for the integration of newcomers, (2) a hospital-based psychotherapist NGO, specialised in diagnosis of psychotrauma and therapy for young refugees, (3) a youth NGO, with a special focus on neighbourhood-oriented street corner work with urban youth, (4) an NGO specialised in empowerment, civic participation and adult education. All stakeholders involved have considerable experience with ethnically diverse and socially vulnerable clients, patients or participants. Most project team members are practitioners, who meet refugees and newcomers on a daily basis, as these are a part of the target population of their institution.

In the choice of the programme focus, the increase in the number of unaccompanied minors in Belgium has been significant. In 2015 the number of asylum applications of unaccompanied minors (3099) was six times higher than the year before (486). This growth was seen as an opportunity to develop a targeted assistance programme for "unaccompanied young adult refugees". An additional element of concern for municipal authorities has been the low educational background of a considerable share of unaccompanied minors, and their generally weak position in education, and later, on the labour market.[6]

The overall objective of the intervention is to empower "unaccompanied young adult refugees", with a particular focus on their (future) labour market position. The intervention is two-fold: on the one hand, it provides inexpensive small-scale communal housing with local residents;[7] on the other, it offers individual guidance and training trajectories for the refugees involved.

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[4] For more information about the programme, see Mahieu and Ravn (2017).

[5] At the time of the research, this was still a separate institution. In 2019 however, it has been integrated into Social Services.

[6] About foreigners' participation in the Belgian labour market, see Ouali and Rea (1999).

[7] For an up-to-date review of how locals and civil society more broadly are engaged in refugee integration, see Feischmidt et al. (2019).

7.3.1 Methodology

This paper focuses on the viewpoints of the stakeholders involved in the interventions' target group and the relationship between these views and the project design. The main source of data used are focus group discussions with the team members from the five executive stakeholder organizations involved. For each institution, one focus group was held.[8] In total, six group interviews were conducted, each with between two and four team members of one respective stakeholder organisation (N = 17). Interviews were conducted between January and February 2017, a few months after the launch of the project, but before the actual implementation started. Respondents were asked about their views on the project design, vision and goals; their experiences with, and perceptions about, young adult refugees; and their expectations about the project. In addition, the researchers observed several project team meetings. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all data was scrutinized with the aim of laying bare the underlying assumptions of project team members.

7.3.2 Legal Deservingness: The Legitimate Refugee

As mentioned before, the programme under study targets young refugees who have been granted legal protection (asylum status or subsidiary protection) in Belgium. The programme is therefore implicitly based on legal deservingness. This decision may stem from the strategic need to attract funds, or from a practical consideration that this type of integration programme would be less useful for asylum seekers or unsuccesful asylum applicants.

However, it should be noted that, while stakeholders may not have the intention to purposely exclude asylum seekers or groups without a legal status, the legal dimension of deservingness remains unquestioned and is reproduced in this programme. Implicitly, the prioritisation of refugees with a legal status indicates how investing in the future of asylum seekers or undocumented people is deemed as less feasible or efficient. An alternative approach can be found for instance in a Dutch cohousing programme where stakeholders decided to include both refugees and unsuccessful asylum applicants (see Chap. 12 in this volume, Geuijen, Dekker and Oliver). Differently, this programme focuses less on civic and social integration, and more on the development of individual entrepreneurial skills on the short-term.

While legal deservingness is an implicit premise of the programme, it is probably not the most important dimension to understand how local stakeholders have constructed it. The crucial question for professional caregivers providing assistance to

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[8] For the leading institution, the Social Centre for Public Welfare, two group interviews were conducted: one with the intervention's designers, and one with social workers involved in the implementation.

refugees is less "who deserves to enter and to stay in our country" but rather "which groups, within the larger population of refugees, deserve/are worthy of special care and attention?" Beyond purely *legal* interpretations of deservingness, *moral* and *economic* dimensions are crucial to understand local level policy discourses.

7.3.3 Moral Deservingness: The Vulnerable Refugee

The alleged vulnerable condition of the particular group of "unaccompanied young adult refugees" lays at the basis for the creation of the project. According to stakeholders, their vulnerable condition is multi-layered and can be discerned at the micro-, meso- and macro- level.

7.3.3.1 Micro-Level Vulnerability

On a micro-level, being "young and separated from parents or primary caregivers" is identified as a marker of increased vulnerability of this group compared to the larger refugee population. It implies nobody cares for them. This, in turn, increases the responsibility of the governmental care system and the receiving society as a whole.

It is believed that being separated from one's parents since an early age, both during and after migration, has major psychological consequences. Stakeholders argue that many of these youngsters struggle with feelings of loss, trauma, stress or other psychological issues, related to the fact of being separated from their families. On top of the trauma accumulated during the journeys from their countries to Belgium, project stakeholders stress that these youngsters, being adolescent, are going through a crucial phase in their development.

These perspectives overlap with the findings of researchers that have investigated journeys of unaccompanied minors to Europe. Research has shown that unaccompanied minors in Belgium are experiencing higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to similar groups of children accompanied by their families, and native adolescents (Bean et al. 2007). Unaccompanied minors are generally at high risk of developing mental health problems due to (traumatic) experiences before, during and after migration (Derluyn and Broekaert 2007). However, studies have also highlighted refugees' resilience. Refugees are not simply passive recipients of care, instead, they are pro-active individuals that develop personal help- and support-seeking strategies and construct social networks (Williams 2006).

Stakeholders feel that existing public services in Belgium do not sufficiently address vulnerability in all its complexity. Therefore, their programme aims to provide psychological counselling, psychotrauma diagnosis, treatment to refugees and specialised training to team members.

While the young refugees' vulnerable position is emphasized by all stakeholders as one of the main reasons for the project, perspectives on their vulnerability differ.

One of the psychotherapists states that psychological problems are often underreported. However, this stakeholder also argues that refugees' psychologic problems are often wrongly pathologised:

> With regard to [the mental health of] refugees, there are two problems. On the one hand, psychiatric problems are underreported. On the other hand, there is a large pathologisation of difficulties that are situated in refugees' context. People underestimate what migration as a psychological process entails. It always involves an intensive mourning process. (NGO offering mental health care)

This stakeholder emphasizes that migration in general is a demanding psychological process involving grief for the accumulated losses. In addition, vulnerabilities often arise from harsh material and social circumstances of refugees in the receiving societies. In sum, this stakeholder warns against "decontextualisation" and a too individualised understanding of refugees' (mental health) problems.

Differently, team members of the NGO working with youth state that the vulnerability of "unaccompanied young adult refugees" is largely similar to that of youngsters with immigrant or deprived socio-economic backgrounds. Similar to the NGO's wider target group, unaccompanied young refugees are considered to be in need of individual and social empowerment. This can be acquired through self-development (e.g. the development of skills, reflection and self-knowledge) and emancipatory actions (e.g. raising a public voice). Interestingly, social workers from this NGO even refuse to label their target group as "vulnerable":

> We consciously do not talk about 'vulnerable' youngsters. A part of our target group is vulnerable, yes. And we do try to target those that are most vulnerable, but we do not talk about them that way, because it emphasizes their vulnerability. We talk about an urban crowd and focus on the opportunities within a city that is inhabited by this diverse crowd of urban youngsters. (NGO working with youth)

This quote illustrates how the concept of vulnerability itself is contested within the project team. In addition, the different views of two stakeholders illustrate how understandings of vulnerability are grounded in institutions' backgrounds.

7.3.3.2   Meso-Level Vulnerability

Beside their identifications of vulnerabilities on the micro-level, stakeholders also point at meso-level factors. They all agree that unaccompanied young refugees lack social networks. In particular, stakeholders argue that young refugees need to build new horizontal relationships with Dutch-speaking locals, as opposed to the more hierarchic vertical relationships with professional caregivers. These relationships should allow for the formation of *bridging capital*.[9] The main reason as to why refugees need these kinds of horizontal social networks is the presumed positive impact

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[9] When constructing social networks during resettlement processes, refugees may build ties with individuals from the same ethnic group leading to the development of bonding social capital. Bridging social capital, in contrast, involves ties between individuals from a different ethnic group (Putnam 2007). For a review of the concept of social capital in migration, studies see Portes (1998).

on their Dutch language proficiency. Remarkably, this focus overlooks other types of social networks or sources of social support young refugees might benefit from. The relevance and potential advantages of fostering *bonding capital* or existing social networks are not mentioned by the project team members. Furthermore, it should be stressed that social support and social networks can also be found in other life spheres. Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010), for example, found that religion significantly facilitated the coping strategies of unaccompanied minors while they were adjusting to living in a new country. However, in this project, religion or religious networks are not considered as relevant.

More specifically, stakeholders feel that young refugees' opportunities to encounter native citizens are limited. This understanding adds to their vulnerability because it is assumed that this negatively affects their sense of wellbeing and their potential for "successful" integration. Stakeholders observe that the environments young refugees navigate or reside in – Dutch language classes, the local reception centre, newcomer education and activities – allow them to get in touch with peers from foreign background only, with a lack of bridging capital involving the native population as a result. Stakeholders also point out the fact that native Belgian youngsters lack opportunities to encounter young refugees too. Communal living by young natives and refugees is thus seen as an opportunity to engender meaningful durable social interactions between these groups.

Beside their contacts with co-ethnic peers and other newcomers, unaccompanied young refugees' position in the care system implies that caregivers and other professionals (e.g. teachers) take a central position in these youngsters' everyday social encounters. The programme stakeholders too are professional caregivers and are thus part of the institutional 'carescape' (De Graeve and Bex 2017) surrounding the youngsters. However, they also problematize the implications of these vertical social relations:

> In a professional care relationship there is always a power imbalance: you have the therapist/caregiver who has a certain expertise, on the one hand, while you have the caretaker who needs assistance, on the other. Inevitably, there is a hierarchy. (NGO offering mental health care)

This quote shows that stakeholders are aware of the fact that refugees' vulnerable condition may be reinforced by the intrinsically hierarchical nature of the caretaker/caregiver-relationship. More than other stakeholders, this point was particularly stressed by the civic education NGO. Based on their experiences in other refugee-oriented projects, this stakeholder feels that positioning refugees as "persons in need" who are dependent on professional caregivers strengthens refugees' sense of ignorance and incompetency. The NGO argues that informal contact with ordinary citizens has the potential to influence refugees' self-perception positively, as they will learn that it is normal to struggle with everyday life matters, such as bureaucratic procedures. Therefore, the NGO for civic education particularly emphasizes the importance of the horizontal bridging capital:

> [In relationships with professional caregivers] there is no honest reciprocal connection. I think that the added value of the buddy [i.e. the native flatmate of the refugee] is that he or

she will engage in a real, more authentic relationship with the refugee. (NGO for civic education)

This quote shows the importance adhered by this NGO to the development of an egalitarian relationship between the refugee and his flatmate, an argument shared by all other stakeholders.

In sum, on the meso-level, the project team understands the refugees' vulnerability in terms of a lack of durable social relations with natives, and with non-professional "ordinary citizens" in particular.

7.3.3.3   Macro-Level Vulnerability

On a macro-level, stakeholders maintain that the particular age of the refugees (just 18 or slightly older) puts them in a vulnerable position within structural care policies in Belgium. This concern overlaps with findings in research on "care leavers". Studies have shown that young people who are forced to leave care due to reaching adulthood face an increased risk of social exclusion from various life domains (e.g. to have poor educational attainments, become homeless or end up in poor housing, have higher levels of unemployment, etc.) (Stein 2006).

In Belgium, most existing support services target either minors or adults, and there is no transition zone between these types of services. This problem is salient within regular services of some stakeholders involved in the programme. For instance, in the municipal agency for integration, actions for minors and adults are completely separated. Only recently, attention for people in the transition zone emerged. Introducing the new category of "unaccompanied young adult refugees" is in fact a way to cater the particular needs of this group. Different stakeholders stress that exactly because this group is not recognized as such — even an appropriate term is lacking — they "disappear" into the broader refugee population.

There are enough measures for minors, but from the moment they turn 18, they are considered as adults. They have to manage everything on their own without support.[10] (NGO working with youth)

We can notice here how this stakeholder expresses the need to adopt more fine-grained policies. By establishing new categories of vulnerable people deserving public assistance, the programme attempts to overcome this problem.

While the lack of policies for this group was denounced by all stakeholders, the NGO working with youth raised another concern. The NGO argues that these young refugees, like many other urban youngsters, face large barriers in their search for help and assistance in Belgian society. It is explained that these youngsters often feel discouraged and unable to engage with institutions (e.g., schools, health services, etc.) independently. According to this stakeholder, difficulties arise when

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[10] For a similar discussion of the age transition and its formal consequences regarding access to education see Chap. 9 (Glorius and Schondelmayer) in this volume.

negative encounters with societal institutions accumulate, leading to disengagement and distrust:

> According to the social-institutional vulnerability theory, youngsters experience a vulnerability towards institutions. We use this term often and we know the theory very well. Once you've been hurt four or five times, you will probably not go to that institution a sixth time. (NGO working with youth)

Subsequently, for this stakeholder it is important not only to strengthen youngsters on an individual level, but also to empower them on the societal level and to foster their engagement with broader society. Additionally, the mental health care NGO also notes how public institutions may add to refugees' vulnerability through exerting "institutional violence" on caretakers:

> I believe that many professional caregivers […] are totally unaware of the institutional violence. For example, if you have to go to court in Brussels, to enter that enormous building, *that*[11] is also a form of institutional violence. When you enter that building, you immediately get the feeling: 'I am *nothing,* in this court'. (Mental health care NGO)

Another major macro-level element adding to the vulnerability of "unaccompanied young adult refugees", relates to their disadvantaged position in the local housing market.[12] The problem is especially pressing in urban centres, such as Antwerp, where most refugees tend to move. Stakeholders all denounce the lack of decent, affordable housing for refugees in general. Although other groups of citizens experience similar problems, refugees are particularly vulnerable to discrimination on the private housing market. Their foreign names and appearance, low proficiency in Dutch and (usually) dependency on social welfare benefits contribute to natives' distrustful attitude towards them. Moreover, upon receiving a refugee status, refugees have to leave state-funded shelters within 3 months. Young single refugees are in a disadvantaged position as they have very limited savings (which is needed to cover the warrant) and because single-room accommodation is sparse and relatively expensive. The combination of all of these elements turns young refugees into easy targets for exploitation by dishonest house-owners:

> The fact that [this programme] provides decent, affordable housing also means that these young refugees won't be living in housing where, let's say, mushrooms are growing on the walls. This is a huge problem in Antwerp. In our services, we encounter many young refugees who are living in houses where you wouldn't even let your dog enter, while paying a monthly rent of €500 to €600. (Integration agency)

We conclude that notions of moral deservingness are saliently present in stakeholders' perspectives on young refugees. The fact that this project actually creates a 'new' category of refugees, extending the notion of "unaccompanied", usually connected to the group of unaccompanied minor refugees to adult refugees, shows that stakeholders find this target group to be "worthy" or "deserving" of special care. They perceive this group as being vulnerable, needy, neglected by current policies

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[11] Words in italics are emphasised by the interviewee.

[12] For a broader discussion on the housing of refugees after acquirement of a legal status, and on how local policies impact upon housing opportunities, see Chap. 10 in this volume (Adam et al.).

and services and want them to be recognized and cared for. The project's stakeholders thus seem to feed into the more general stereotyped image of the refugee as the ultimate victim. As was mentioned before, the reasons for this type of portrayal can be based on both sincere belief and/or strategic reasons. In the context of this project, framing the target group as "vulnerable" can, next to other grounds or beliefs, also be perceived as a strategic choice. We can assume that the more vulnerable a group is perceived, the easier it is to find resources for a project catering to the needs of the group. Therefore, creating a perception of vulnerability is important.

Another essential aspect to take into account in how the vulnerability of this group is discussed, is the fact that the overwhelming majority of "unaccompanied young adult refugees" are boys. As mentioned before, in current public discourses, young male, especially Muslim, refugees are often framed as potential threats to the nation state. In the official project proposal, one of the main objectives was formulated as follows: "successful young newcomers set an example to their peers and personify an opposing force to growing fears about failed integration and radicalization in Belgian cities." Although several stakeholders were sceptical about this project objective, the fact that the project coordinator included this as one of the project's main goals shows that it plays a role in the project design and the way in which the target group's identity is constructed. We can assume that the focus on these youngsters' vulnerability and deservingness is also a way of opposing racist and gendered discourse in which young immigrant Muslim men are framed as dangerous and threatening to Western society.

7.3.4 *Economic Deservingness: The (Potentially) Productive Refugee*

However, to be morally deserving is not enough to be part of this programme. The ultimate goal of this programme is to *empower* young adult refugees, understood here as enabling them to build an independent future in Belgian society. It is assumed that all of the project's interventions will contribute to this main objective: increasing refugees' skills through training and learning, building social networks, participating in leisure activities, etc. Importantly, the focus on *young adults* reveals the preventive nature of the programme. By and large, the goal of the intervention is to shield participants from the social problems mentioned above through preventive actions. Actions are introduced to stimulate active participation and, as such, to avoid the development of a problematic condition of dependency, rather than to help (older) unaccompanied adult refugees who already are in this vulnerable situation. This explains why the intervention targets the age group of 18–21; there is a strong belief that young adults will benefit most from the intervention.

> They are going to stay here. They are going to build a life here. We don't want them to end up again in statistics of youth unemployment or early school leaving. So, you have to be able to grab them quickly and prevent them from leaving school or being unemployed.

Because at that age, there is a real risk that they will disappear 'under the radar'. (NGO working with youth)

The various trainings and activities aiming at increasing refugees' skills are mandatory. So only those who are willing to make efforts, "deserve" the support and care offered by the project. Especially the social welfare agency stresses that refugees have to be willing to commit themselves to learn Dutch, to attend trainings, etc. If they display a lack of motivation for these activities, candidate-participants are not allowed to enter the project. This attitude may however reproduce the discourse on the "deserving poor", mentioned above. Those willing to cooperate with social interventions, deserve care; while a lack of compliance with the social measures designed to take them out of poverty would be interpreted as a sign of laziness. The non-compliant would be perceived as guilty of his/her own misfortune and for that, "undeserving" (Katz 1989). The programme too is based on the assumption that only a group of committed refugees will be able to benefit from the programme.

Compared to other stakeholders, the welfare agency is especially focused on activation and on strengthening refugees' productivity potential rather than on elements relating to a moral deservingness of care. In order to comprehend this stance, it is important to understand the welfare agency's general mission. For the agency's team members, the implicit comparison group for "unaccompanied young adult refugees" is the broader population this institution provides services for: social welfare recipients. The agency's main goal is to facilitate welfare recipients' social integration and to empower them to become independent from social welfare. The obligation for refugees to engage in project activities conforms the broader policies of this institution for all of its clients: care is contingent upon individual efforts. In return for the financial social welfare benefits and the services that clients receive, the welfare agency expects certain efforts from the recipients, that should ideally lead to independence from social welfare. The centre can withdraw social benefits from welfare recipients that do not commit themselves to obligations.

The choice for the particular target group, the preventive character of the interventions and its focus on refugees becoming productive citizens reveal the existence of an *economic rationale* in the programme design. This economic rationale is strongest in the statements of the welfare agency. Other stakeholders highlight active participation in society as well, but from a different point of view. The NGO working with youth also concentrates on activating the participating refugees and urban youngsters in general, but they distance themselves from the welfare agency's assumption that the provision of care should depend on the client's individual effort. This discussion seems to be intertwined with broader discussions on integration of migrant youth. When asked about the recurrent use of the word "integration" in the project proposal, one of the youth workers expressed a critical perspective about pushing towards assimilation/integration:

It [the welfare agency's frequent use of the term integration] tells us something about their assumption that youngsters should be 'integrated'. We [the NGO working with youth] feel that a bunch of people [refugees or second and third generation youth] simply have the *right* to be who they are and to be here. […] And that is a different viewpoint than the one focussing on all the things youngsters have to do until they 'belong': 'you have to learn Dutch,

you have to know the rules, you have to put the trash out, you have to be able to talk to your neighbour, because if not…'. (NGO working with youth)

This quote illustrates how this NGO stresses the moral dimension of deservingness more, and rejects the economic rationale. Similarly, for the NGO offering mental health care, active participation as a form of social integration is also important not for economic reasons, but because their integration is seen as a leverage for psychological wellbeing.

In spite of different point of views, all stakeholders find it important that participants undertake steps to become active members of society. However, all project partners emphasize that active participation in society is a long-term process. Both the welfare agency and the integration agency stress that the success rate of the project is not dependent on the number of refugees enrolled in education or work at the end of the programme. There is no predefined standard outcome to be expected for all; rather, the yardstick of success is the difference between a refugee's position at the start and at the end of the programme.

Another essential project objective that draws on economic deservingness is "to support refugees in creating a clear and realistic vision and plan for their future life in Belgium." One of the psychotherapists explains why this is important:

Some of these youngsters arrive here with very high expectations regarding their position in our society and in particular in the labour market. They expect to find a good job quickly and to raise enough money to support their families back home. However, in reality there is usually a mismatch between their skills and our labour market. In addition, because many are nearly illiterate, their learning progress is very slow. […] Upon arrival in Belgium, they are often deeply disappointed […]. Therefore, it is important to help them to turn this sense of disillusionment into a positive future ideal. (Mental health care NGO)

From stakeholders' perspectives, young refugees either lack aspirations, or have aspirations unsuitable for their new life in Belgium. With regard to this point, however, research has shown that refugees' individual aspirations are not lost in the flight; rather, they are crucial to understand their migration trajectories, their determination to overcome geographical borders as well as their pathways once arrived in the new country (Belloni 2016). However, these aspirations, such as the aspiration to support family back home (Nunn et al. 2014) or to become a professional football player or a doctor, may not be in line with what social workers, teachers, and other professionals dealing with these youngsters expect (Glorius and Schondelmayer, Chap. 9 in this volume). On the one hand, these aspirations may be considered unsuitable for young men in their late teen years, as being loaded with responsibilities toward left-behind kin implies they are unable to focus on personal development. On the other hand, these aspirations may not be seen as legitimate, because unrealistically high for someone who has limited possibilities to pursue higher education. This attitude corresponds with the local support programme's aim to (re)shape refugees' aspirations in order to increase their participation in the Belgian labour market, while taking into account young refugees' disadvantaged position in that market.

In sum, notions of economic deservingness are present in professional caregivers' perspectives about refugees' active participation. This is most visible in the governmental perspectives (the welfare agency and integration agency); however, these notions are expressed in a nuanced way. Other stakeholders take into consideration moral dimensions of deservingness (vulnerabilities) more strongly. In the next section, we take the analysis one step further by investigating how these two types of deservingness in stakeholders' perspectives interact. As we will argue, stakeholders' attempt to reconcile both perspectives leads to inherent tensions in their approach.

7.3.5 Tensions Between Different Dimensions of Deservingness

The programme aims at balancing different rationalities, drawing on notions of both economic deservingness and moral deservingness, which we discussed earlier. The tensions between these dimensions are especially salient as the programme is negotiated between stakeholders with diverse perspectives.

While the moral deservingness of the specific target group is emphasized and used as a justification for the creation of the project, it is important to note that the most vulnerable among the group of "unaccompanied young adult refugees" cannot enter the project. Upon entering the programme, candidate-participants are screened during an intake procedure in which a psychotherapist assesses to what extent youngsters suffer from trauma, chronic stress, 'frozen' grief, etc. Those with very severe psychological issues (e.g. depression, paranoia), problematic social behaviour (e.g. aggression) or a criminal record are not eligible to enter the project. Stakeholders mainly fear that their inclusion would overburden the resilience of the refugee's flatmate, which would eventually make communal living impossible. As this would negatively affect the expected impact of the project, it can be considered a pragmatic choice to exclude the most vulnerable refugees. If we consider this from the framework of economic deservingness (Sales 2002), the decision to exclude the most vulnerable refugees also indicates the tensions between different dimensions of deservingness. While from a moral point of view (Malkki 1996; Casati 2017), the most vulnerable need care more than anyone else; from an economic viewpoint it is more rational to invest resources in the group that is most likely to benefit from the project.

In addition, those who are most needy in terms of Dutch language acquisition are excluded from the project. Upon entering the project, candidate-participants are required to have sufficient proficiency in Dutch. If this is not the case, they are excluded as stakeholders feel their inclusion would significantly affect various intervention actions of the project. It is argued that certain training methods (such as participatory ones, where Dutch is the language of instruction) will be difficult to apply and will have little effect. With regard to communal living, it is expected

that when Dutch language proficiency is low, the quality and quantity of social interaction between the flatmate and volunteer will be limited. Once again, this implies a trade-off between the logics of moral and economic deservingness, as discussed in Sect. 7.2.

The intertwinement of moral and economic dimensions of deservingness are also salient in the external communication of the programme. On the one hand, there is a focus on the vulnerability of the targeted group: the young refugees are portrayed as lacking a supportive social network and being somewhat 'lost' in Belgian society. Simultaneously, it is stressed how a high 'return on investment' of the project is expected because of the young age of the participating refugees: it is a group worthy to invest public money in today, in order to reduce the burden they would impose on the welfare state tomorrow.

7.4   Conclusion

This article explored how the "refugee crisis" and related discourses have become the main frame for local level policy interventions and assistance programmes. By examining the categories and views employed in the tailoring of a local support programme in Antwerp, we have shown how the idea of "deservingness", as a central notion in wider European discourses on reception of refugees, is represented in the perspectives of different local stakeholders. Their perspectives, as we highlighted, vary according to their different organisational backgrounds. Each organisation perceives deservingness according to their historical mission and the usual target population of their services. The collaboration of different welfare and integration agencies, and health care, youth and civic educational NGOs, produces within the frame of one project a plurality of understandings associated to the idea of the deserving refugee.

As illustrated throughout the article, the creation of a target group as well as the description of young refugees' special needs is grounded in different dimensions of deservingness, which usually remain undistinguished in academic debates. We explored deservingness along three main dimensions: the legal, the moral and the economic one. While different dimensions of deservingness of care are often evoked in an interwoven manner, our empirical analysis of professional practitioners' accounts also reveals the tensions between a moral and economic approach to deservingness. On the one hand, the vulnerability of young refugees is used as a rationale for the creation of the project. Due to their vulnerable position, "unaccompanied young adult refugees" are seen as deserving extra support and care. On the other hand, when refugees are perceived as being *too* vulnerable, because of severe psychological issues or weak language proficiency, they are not eligible to enter the local support programme. This tension between moral and economic deservingness

demonstrates that, in making decisions about what categories of refugees to support, not only moral rationalities but also economic, efficiency-driven rationalities are employed by local stakeholders.

Finally, it should be noticed that discourses on deservingness are linked to stakeholders' different aspirations about the kind of citizens young refugees should become. Talking about who deserves assistance and protection implies a discourse also on what citizenship, integration and participation in the society of arrival means. Our point here is that discourses on deservingness do not only function as ways of shifting "responsibilities from historical political and economic policies supported by powerful actors" to refugees themselves, as claimed by Holmes and Castañeda (2016: 13). In discussions concerning what kind of refugees are deserving assistance and for what reason, different actors within the receiving society reproduce, discuss and contest positive and negative models of citizenship. Our case study, thus, illustrates how refugee reception programmes may serve as a laboratory for reflection on the kind of society – and the kind of membership in this society – that local civil and state organisations would like to promote.

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