

# 'I do not know where the wind will blow me'

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*A research on the changing lives and  
survival strategies of aging long-term  
undocumented migrants in the Netherlands*



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Date: 9 July 2018  
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## **Table of contents**

Foreword	3
Summary	5
1. Introduction	6
2. Theoretical framework	9
2.1 Further definitions	11
2.2 Policies	13
2.3 Exclusion/inclusion – structure/agency	15
2.4 Embeddedness and ‘cimmigration’	20
3. Methodology	23
3.1 Sampling and gathering of data	24
3.2 Design of research tools	26
3.3 Analytical approach	29
3.4 Ethical considerations	30
4. Results	31
4.1 Changing work possibilities	31
4.2 Network	34
4.3 Mental health	40
4.4 Physical health	44
4.5 Criminality, detention and good conduct	47
4.6 Fears about the future	52
5. Discussion, conclusion and recommendations	57
5.1 Discussion and conclusion	57
5.2 Implications for existing theoretical and empirical knowledge	62
5.3 Recommendations for future research and policy implications	64
Bibliography	67
Appendix A Overview of respondents	73
Appendix B Interview guide	74
Appendix C Numerical representation of part of the data	76

## Foreword

The thesis in front of you is the fruit of about five months of work to finalize a one-year Sociology Master, track Migration and Ethnic Studies. The first five months of the academic year, me and my fellow students have gained a great amount of knowledge about, among other, international migration, immigrant integration, ethnic diversity, vulnerable groups, etcetera. One of the topics that inevitably comes with international migration is undocumented migration, especially in western immigration countries. I was interested in this topic from the beginning, because I already worked in an organization who supports undocumented migrants in The Hague before I started the master. Through this work, I came into contact with the LOS Foundation in Rotterdam, which is the national knowledge and support center for people, public and private organizations who support undocumented migrants (including their children). LOS informs organizations and individuals about the rights of undocumented migrants and how to make use of these rights.<sup>1</sup> Another activity of LOS is the enhancement of knowledge through researches.<sup>2</sup> I asked LOS where they saw a gap in literature and practice, which appeared to be ‘aging, long-term undocumented migrants’ and I was commissioned, not for pay, by LOS to investigate this topic.

The theoretical courses of the first half year helped me a great deal to ‘set up the theoretical scene’ of this thesis and the methods/analysis course that we had followed helped me to really make the data – the respondents – speak. I learned very much during the last five months, both about the subject and about the set-up and methods of a thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> For its most important activities and further information, see website LOS Foundation: <http://www.stichtinglos.nl/content/stichting-los>

<sup>2</sup> LOS publicizes the researches that have been conducted in consultation with them (sometimes in cooperation with other organisations) on its website. The researchers are often supervised by both the involved organisations and university professors of various universities in the Netherlands. See website LOS Foundation: <http://www.stichtinglos.nl/content/publicaties>

The whole process could not have been possible without the excellent supervision of dr. Pamela Pricket, whom I wish to thank here. She supported me and my fellow students of our thesis group (and before that of the analysis course) with much enthusiasm and knowledge. Further, I would like to give thanks to my second reader, dr. Apostolos Andrikopoulos, who was ready to give me advice and answers when I asked for it. I also would like to thank Rian Ederveen of the LOS Foundation, who advised me during the process. She is very experienced within the field and a ‘walking encyclopedia’ when it comes to undocumented migrants in the Netherlands. Further, I want to say thanks to the NGO’s who brought me in contact with my respondents and to the Stek Foundation, my employer in The Hague, who encouraged me to do this master. Finally, yet importantly, I am very grateful to all the respondents who shared their often difficult stories with me, sometimes emotionally. I did not only learn from and about their undocumented lives, but also from the persistence and strength that they displayed.

Lizebeth Melse

The Hague, 9 July 2018

## **Summary**

This thesis explores the most important changes that have taken place in particular areas of life of long-term undocumented migrants in The Netherlands and how these changes interfere with their survival strategies. Further, it elaborates on how these changes influence their ideas about the future. The areas of life that are examined are housing, income, support networks, mental and physical health, the role of criminality and detention and possible future scenarios. Findings are based on qualitative research; 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews are held with undocumented migrants who are here for more than 15 years and who are 50 years or older and the data are analyzed using an abductive analytical approach. The data show that long-term aging undocumented migrants are facing difficulties in all explored areas of life and that these difficulties have emerged and increased during the course of 15-30 years. People have found multiple ways to make ends meet, but the many years that they constantly had to adapt their survival strategies have taken their toll and there have been periods that people have lived or still live in dire circumstances. The option to return to their country of origin seems far away, but a majority sees their lives in the Netherlands as hopeless too: they find themselves in a stalemate position.

## **1. Introduction**

Wassim is in his fifties and has been living in the Netherlands for more than 20 years, without documents. The last half year, the police have been looking for him - he thinks it is the alien police - which makes him move from one house to another. Although he feels chased and although his life in the Netherlands would be easier with documents, he stays. He is working on a new procedure and hopes that it will lead him to a residence permit this time. This example is not an isolated one. The Research and Documentation Centre of the Ministry of Justice and Security estimates the number of undocumented migrants between 21.000 and 48.000 in 2012/13 (WODC 2015: 15). When talking with undocumented migrants in the Netherlands (other terms are for example unauthorized-, illegal-, irregular- or clandestine migration (De Genova 2002: 420), the option of return to their country of origin does not seem the best option to most of them, compared with staying illegally, starting another procedure or migrating to another country. 'Staying illegally/undocumented' in the Netherlands means that one does not have the official permission of the state to be here (Van der Leun 2003a: 19). Therefore, the government has many policies and regulations aimed at combatting illegal stay in order to lower the number of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands (Van der Leun 2006: 313).

However, given the abovementioned numbers, even after many years of being undocumented and lacking many rights, such as the right to work, the right to get social services and the right to start following an education after having turned 18, there are people who stay. This raises the question what makes these people stay and how they have survived so many years in a society where either having a job or receiving social benefits are important ways of making ends meet. When looking at studies within the broader field of migration, topics around asylum seekers and refugees seem to have received much more scholarly

attention than the area of undocumented migration (see for example Bakker et al. 2017 and van Heelsum 2017). Nevertheless, some scholars have extensively investigated the conditions and modes of survival of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands, resulting in various books and studies (e.g. Engbersen et al. 1999, Burgers et al. 2003 and van der Leun 2003a). These larger studies, focussing on a great number of life-areas of undocumented migrants, have been conducted about twenty years ago and as we will see later, the political climate has been changing and so have migration policies. The rules are stricter now, which is one of the reasons that the lives and survival strategies of undocumented migrants have been changing too. There are also more recent studies on this population, but a great deal of these studies only focusses on particular areas of life, such as domestic work practices, health issues or the criminalization of undocumented migrants (see for example Eleveld et al. 2017, Van de Sande et al. 2017 and Brouwer et al. 2017). One relatively recent study (Kox 2010) is more overarching and includes multiple areas of life of undocumented migrants in Utrecht. In order to be sure if particular areas of undocumented migrant's lives were under-investigated, if there should come more overarching research, or if there were other gaps, I consulted the LOS Foundation. The most relevant and under-investigated topic was 'long-term undocumented migrants who are 50 years or older'.

The reasons for focussing on undocumented migrants who are 50 years or older and who are in the Netherlands for more than 15 years are various. The LOS foundation and a great deal of other NGO's have asked attention for the notion that part of the population of Bed-Bath-Bread-shelters consists of long-term undocumented migrants with very little (legal) perspective (Koppes 2017: 6). Return becomes less and less of an option to this group, for example, because the network in the country of origin has high expectations of their return (in terms of money, goods, and status, which they lack) or their network might even have disappeared and besides, they might have developed a network in the Netherlands. Further,

their physical and psychological health might not be so good anymore as when they came, for example, because of the hardship they have experienced in the Netherlands and because of aging (ibid: 6, 28). These things lower the chance to be able to build something up when they would go back. In order to obtain a better picture of this group, it should be investigated how they have navigated life in the past 15 years or more, when being in the Netherlands and how changes in life and survival strategies influence each other. The outcome of such a research could be of use for various persons and institutions, such as NGO's who support these people, lawyers, (semi) governmental organizations and policy makers.

The main question of this thesis is: 'How have the most important changes that have occurred in particular areas of life of long-term undocumented migrants interfered with their survival strategies and how do these changes influence their ideas about the future?' The particular areas of life can be found in the sub-questions:

- What survival strategies regarding income and housing did respondents have and how and by what cause have these been changing?
- To what extent has their network changed and how has their network played a (changing) role in surviving?
- Did the physical and psychological health of the respondents change and how did their health and their survival strategies mutually influence each other?
- To what extent did and do criminality and detention play a role in their lives?
- How do they see the future and how is this influenced by their experience as being undocumented?

As can be noticed, I am touching on various areas - not just one or two - of the lives of long-term undocumented migrants. I have chosen to do so because many areas of their lives are interwoven and processes that occur in one area have linkages with processes in other areas. When choosing what to give more focus and what to leave aside, the data are guiding me. I



will picture the setting of the scene with a review of the relevant literature and the Dutch policies regarding undocumented migrants. After that, I will account for the methodology that I used to conduct the research, following with an analysis of the data and findings. I will finalize with a discussion and conclusion in which data and literature will come together.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

There is much relevant literature to be found on undocumented migration from both recent years and from a longer time ago and both within the Netherlands and abroad. However, it is very hard to find literature specifically about long-term undocumented migration. The little literature and information on long-term undocumented migration that I have found is mostly about adults who have been living in an immigrant country from their childhood, such as the Dreamers in the US (e.g. Shah 2008 and Nicholls 2013). This differs essentially from my research population, for example, because it is very likely that they have integrated much more in a society and because they do not know their country of origin to the extent my research population does. Regarding long-term undocumented migration, I thus will have to make use of literature that does not specify on this topic, but rather talks about undocumented migration ‘in general’. However, every aspect of social life is the outcome not of static entities, but of social interactions, of social processes (Elias 1984: 115-117). When thinking about *long-term* undocumented migration, the current situation of the migrants concerned is the outcome of many processes during many years on various levels. I thus want to use some important points from the literature on *processual thinking* – a way of thinking in which one tries to grasp social phenomena and aspects of social life not as isolated things but as the effects of other social aspects, changes and social processes (ibid) – and will relate this to undocumented migration.

Lamont et al. (2014) distinguish processes that take place at macro-, meso- and micro level and that processes on diverse levels also influence each other. They argue that social inequality is the product of social and cultural processes, often not intentionally initiated, but rather happening as “a side-effect of other ongoing activities” (2014: 573). However, intentional subordination is also a part of their repertoire. It goes too far for this project to extensively work out their ideas, but some of their examples might be useful. Domination and exploitation, for example, are processes that contain or lead to material inequality: a dominant person or group intentionally deprive another group or material resources (ibid: 576, 577; see also Elias 1984: 116 for the ‘process of power’). As we will see, macro-level processes are at stake in the subordination of undocumented migrants: decisions of the government and policy makers have consequences for the daily lives of undocumented migrants. In fact, the process of being or becoming undocumented has to do with the relation between the government and a person (see for further explanation ‘definitions’). Lamont et al. further describe how inequality can also be the product of symbolic domination, in which a subordinate group intentionally and unintentionally is deprived of “non-material resources, such as cultural and social capital” (Lamont et al. 2014: 577, 578). One can, for example, think of the access undocumented migrants have or have not to a network, such as friends, family and support organizations and the relations people have had or still have with this network, on a meso level. At the micro level of the person, one might see a changing health situation, more or less agency to choose where to live or work, etcetera; processes that also mutually influence each other.

## 2.1 Further definitions

There is a large number of terms used to describe the people that reside in a country without having the legal papers to do so, such as ‘unauthorized’, ‘illegal’, ‘irregular’ and ‘undocumented’, as noted by De Genova (2002: 420). All these different terms have one thing in common: they are used to categorize a particular group of people, “posited always from the standpoint of the migrant-receiving nation-state” (ibid: 421) and “defined against the benchmark of migration law” (Kubal 2013: 555). De Genova warns social scientists not to reify these categories as mere ethnographic ‘objects’ of study, by which they would reproduce their ‘illegality’ (De Genova 2002: 423). Although he makes a strong point in his critique of literature on undocumented migration, migration scholars will have to use particular terms and notions in order to describe their respondents, in order to contribute to the sociological debates and also in order to contribute to the improvement of the lives of this, often marginalized, particular group of migrants. However, we should indeed be aware of the fact that different terms used to describe undocumented migrants can imply different things. Kubal for example rightly points out that the term ‘illegal’ cannot be used to classify persons when taking into account the classical jurisprudence, in which the term merely is used for ‘acts’ (2013: 555, 556). In this thesis, I will mostly use the term ‘undocumented’, in the sense that the participants in this research do not possess the legal documents to reside in the Netherlands.

Torpey writes that ‘modern states have “expropriated the legitimate means of movement” and monopolized the authority to determine who may circulate within and cross their borders’ (1998: 239). Undocumented migrants are ‘stuck’ because they are officially not allowed to circulate within the country or to cross the border and come back. The only legitimate move would be out of the country. A person who - by the state - is perceived as

‘undocumented/illegally staying’ may have entered the country either illegally/without permission or legally but has overstayed her/his visa or another type of permit. A person who has been born in the Netherlands can also be undocumented when she/he is born to undocumented parents (Van der Leun 2003a: 19). The notion that the state decides who may be in its country and who may not goes hand in hand with inclusion and exclusion within a society, which I will elaborate below.

In Dutch politics, in the policy landscape/government organisations that implement policies, the most often used term is ‘illegal aliens’ [*illegale vreemdelingen*] or ‘asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected’ [*uitgeprocedeerde asielzoekers*] or just ‘illegals’ [*illegalen*] (see diverse websites of government institutions, reports and parliamentary papers<sup>3</sup>). In Dutch media/public discourse the same terms are used to describe undocumented migrants<sup>4</sup> as well as in the older Dutch scholarly literature (Burgers et al. 2003, Engbersen et al. 1999, Van der Leun 2003a). Some more recent studies within the Dutch context have utilized the terms ‘irregular migrants’ and ‘illegally staying persons’ (Kox 2010, Van Meeteren 2010), partly to avoid the criminalizing undertone of ‘illegals’ and because the discussion on the topic ‘illegality’ and ‘no human being is illegal’ has become more apparent in the literature from the early 2000s and onwards. In discourses of support

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/terugkeer-vreemdelingen/terugkeerbeleid> ;

WODC (2015). Schattingen illegaal in Nederland verblijvende vreemdelingen. Retrieved from

[https://www.wodc.nl/binaries/2402-volledige-tekst\\_tcm28-73349.pdf](https://www.wodc.nl/binaries/2402-volledige-tekst_tcm28-73349.pdf);

<https://www.politie.nl/themas/illegaliteit-vreemdelingen.html>;

Parliamentary paper: parliamentary questions and answers. ‘Gemeenten en rijk ruziën nog steeds over bed-bad-brood’. 25<sup>th</sup> May 2016;

Parliamentary paper: parliamentary letter. ‘Opvang en terugkeermogelijkheden van vreemdelingen in de G4’. 13<sup>th</sup> January 2015.

<sup>4</sup> NRC, 10-02-2017. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/02/10/alle-partijen-zijn-boos-op-illegale-vreemdelingen-a1545405>; Telegraaf, 25-09-2017. <https://www.telegraaf.nl/video/373890/vlucht-illegale-vreemdeling-gefilmd>

organizations/NGO's, the term 'undocumented migrants' is now mostly used<sup>5</sup>, which, as I said earlier, is the term that I will utilize in this project.

## **2.2 Policies**

Whereas the Netherlands recruited guest workers in the 1960s and welcomed 'spontaneous migrants' in the 1960s and 1970s, the government has taken a much more restrictive stance since the 1990s, with the 1980s as a sort of transition period. One could argue that before the 1990s, being undocumented or holding papers was not of such a big difference, at least not compared to later, for example, because an undocumented person would less quickly be bothered by tax administration or for other 'civilian plights'. Although with some fluctuations, strict measures have been accumulating ever since the 1990s (Burgers 2003: 263, Van der Leun 2006: 313). In 1991, registering in the population register of the Netherlands in order to obtain a social-fiscal number became impossible for undocumented migrants, to withhold them from having a formal job (Broeders et al. 2007: 1599). In 1994, a few acts were introduced that required employers to only hire workers with a residence permit and that required employees to be able to prove their identity in the workplace (Van der Leun 2006: 313, Engbersen et al. 2006: 211). In 1998, the Benefit Entitlement (Residence Status) Act, also referred to as Linking Act, came into effect, in which the claim for public services became linked to residency status. Apart from necessary medical care, education for children under 18 and publicly financed legal assistance, all other public services became formally inaccessible for undocumented migrants (Van der Leun 2006: 314, 315). There were only two limited legalisation measures in the 1990s: the 'six-days measure' in 1995 and the 'white illegals measure' in 1999; both aimed at the regularisation of undocumented migrants who

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.amnesty.nl/encyclopedie/ongedocumenteerden-illegalen-en-uitgeprocedeerden;>  
<http://wereldhuis.org/>

had been working formally/'white' for a certain period of time and who had been insured during (a part of) their working period (Benseddik et al. 2004: 58).

A revised Aliens Act became effective in 2001. There have been multiple 'revised acts', but this was one with more impact than some others. It ensured that when an asylum claim was rejected, asylum seekers' shelter or housing could be ended more easily and regulatory authorities received more executive powers to enforce this (Kox 2010: 23). In the rest of the 2000s, a comprehensive range of measures had to make sure that undocumented migration would decrease, including the extension of surveillance regarding illegal work, an intensifying of alien-surveillance and more extended methods of identification control (ibid: 23-25, van Meeteren 2010: 59). Staring mentions renewed political attention and new rules and sanctions in the early 2010s, including attention for the criminalization of illegal stay, and the rejection of a residence claim for people who had been undocumented before (2012: 396, 397). Besides from the aforementioned small-scale 'six-days measure' and the 'white illegals measure', there was one more moment of regularization in 2007: more than 25.000 former asylum seekers were legalized (Van Meeteren 2010: 67). The rest of the past 30 years was a period of increasing restrictiveness.

The reasons for more restrictive policies in immigration countries are various and have changed over the last decennia. It is important to note that the basis for more restrictive policies lies in the assumption that such policies will limit the influx of migrants and that more tolerant policies will increase it (Burgers 2003: 262). Although various studies show that this is an erroneous assumption – "restrictive policies tend to have counterproductive results" (Entzinger 2000 in De Haas 2005: 1280), for example, because it interrupts patterns of circular migration (see for more explanation ibid: 1280 et seq.) – this belief is widely spread in immigration countries until today. We thus need to see the mentioned policies in this light – meant to stop the influx of migrants. From the 1970s onwards, the economic

situation in European welfare states started to weaken and unemployment, especially in segments where the lower skilled guest workers were represented the most, increased. Therefore, governments wanted to limit further immigration and started to develop more restrictive policies in order to do so. Further, from the mid-1980s onwards, the social and political acceptance of migrants decreased, worsening in the 1990s and 2000s: immigrants were seen as ‘unwanted and dangerous others’ and crime and nuisance and ‘being an immigrant’ were more often perceived as being related to each other (van der Leun et al. 2011: 444). National security also plays a role in political and public discourse, especially after 9/11, and the discourse emerged that terrorists enter western countries under the pretext of being a refugee (Holmes et al. 2016: 18). However, despite the increased restrictiveness of policies, the implementation of policies often is different from the original intentions of law- and policymakers. This is partly because of the ‘counterproductive results’ mentioned above, but also because professionals within (semi-) governmental organisations to a greater or lesser extent turn a blind eye towards undocumented migrants, as various authors claim (Leerkes et al. 2012, Van der Leun 2003a and 2006).

### **2.3 Exclusion/inclusion - structure/agency**

As mentioned above, the state decides who is welcome to be inside its borders and who is not. The power of the state on this point is not the same in all countries and is not of all ages. Torpey (2000) notes that states have competed with other institutions such as churches and private enterprises to appropriate the monopoly on ‘the means of movement’ of people. The last centuries it has become clear that states have achieved this monopoly in many ways: through passports, identity cards and identification techniques, both at the border and inside or even outside of the nation-states they ‘control’, the ever more accepted definition of states as

‘national’, laws, etcetera (2000: 1-7). Torpey indicates that many sociologists at the end of the last century talked about the modern state as ‘penetrating’ society in order to obtain what they needed to survive. Habermas (1987) writes for example that the systems of the economy and the state ‘penetrate’ into the lifeworld of people in order to reproduce the whole system of the society (1987: 367). Torpey critiques such views of seeing the state as staying above a society and a society as more or less weak receivers of benefits and control of the state. He describes a more ‘subtle’ way of the state to ‘take hold of’ its citizens, by ‘embracing’ a society; giving people the idea that the state ‘cares’ about them (2000: 10-13). Others have compared the state, or the way the states presents itself, with a family: the state as ‘the father of the nation’ or a family grows its children not only to become a good member of the family but also of the nation-state (see Delaney 1995 and Yuval-Davis 1996). However, the state does not want to ‘embrace’ all people residing within its borders. People who do not possess the right documents to be in a nation-state, cannot be embraced by the state, rather they are excluded from many benefits and rights.

There can be found different layers of being ‘embraced’ by the state. Van Houdt et al. (2011) exemplify this point by comparing the systems of becoming a citizen of three Western European nation-states: the UK, France and the Netherlands. Not everybody who possesses the right documents to reside in these countries can become a citizen. One has to meet certain conditions, such as a certain proficiency of the language, knowing some things about the history of a country, being a ‘good’ and self-sufficient citizen, etcetera (2011: 412-416). Further, immigration countries often have multiple residence permits, as indicate some examples from the Netherlands: one-year permits based on medical reasons, multiple year work-permits, temporary permits based on human trafficking, etcetera.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, people that reside in a country without papers, could very well meet all the ‘soft’ conditions to

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<sup>6</sup> See website Immigration and Naturalization Service: <https://ind.nl/Paginas/overige-redenen.aspx>



become a citizen whereas people that have all the papers do not. There are some examples that people are granted residence permits based on such ‘soft’ conditions such as being ‘a good citizen’ or being ‘assimilated enough’, for example in Israel and Spain (see Kalir 2010, Garcés-Masareñas 2012 and Della Torre 2017). Della Torre describes that in Spain a certain extent of ‘*arraigo*’ or ‘rootedness’ can be a basis for regularization, of which ‘efforts towards integration’ is one of the conditions (2017: 19, 20). Although much more limited, the ‘*Duldung*’ or ‘Toleration’ program in Germany shows similar features. Rejected asylum seekers and refugees who face obstacles in returning to their country of origin (for example because they cannot get a passport of their country) receive more rights the longer they stay in Germany, including rights on education, social benefits, housing, and work. The longer they have stayed, the more rights they have built up and the more chance they have for regularization on the basis of ‘sustainable integration’ (Horrevorts et al. 2018). However, in the most western immigration countries, such rules are very limited or do not exist, including in the Netherlands. Rather, the development of skills or proving oneself is hindered by migration policies and laws (Coniglio et al. 2010: 109). Thus, documents are usually the strongest condition: despite possibly meeting all the conditions of a ‘good’ citizen, undocumented people are ‘less embraced’ by the state than people with residency who do not meet the conditions to become a citizen. Gleeson et al., citing Enghceren, even call it a “*master status* that outweighs and overpowers all other social characteristics” (Enghceren 1999 in Gleeson et al. 2012: 3).

‘Not being embraced’ by the state, or the formal exclusion of undocumented migrants by the state can be seen in many different ways. Although it differs from country to country, they usually are not allowed to work, to receive social benefits, to rent or buy houses etc. The aforementioned Benefit Entitlement (Residence Status) Act in the Netherlands is an important example in which the government tries to ‘impose migration control’ within its borders (Van

der Leun 2003a: 115). Coutin - who studied undocumented migrants in the US - even mentions “‘the social space of illegality’ an ‘erasure of legal personhood, a space of forced invisibility and exclusion that ‘materializes around them wherever they go’” (Coutin 2000: 30 in De Genova 2002: 427). De Genova mentions that in the US “the policing of public spaces serves to discipline undocumented migrants by surveilling their ‘illegality’ and exacerbating their sense of ever-present vulnerability” (various authors in De Genova 2002: 438). Within these notions of exclusion, undocumented migrants seem to be ‘captured’ in structures of national laws and policies. Ambrosini notes that much literature converges to this notion and to the idea that undocumented migrants have little control over their lives and have few options to be autonomous. (2013: 15). However, one must not forget about their agency and the - mostly informal - inclusion that many of them manage to obtain.

A lot of undocumented migrants are ‘looking for loopholes’, as is the significant title of Van der Leun’s book in which she describes how “illegal immigrants, who are legally excluded, manage to be incorporated into Dutch society” (2003a: 11). Although she acknowledges the fact that more restrictive policies hamper the opportunities to survive, there are still ways for undocumented migrants to become informally included into society, even in a highly regulated welfare state as the Netherlands (ibid: 165). Here resounds Torpey’s notion that states do not *effectively* control the movements of people, but at least have the *authority* to do so (Torpey 2000: 5). Andrikopolous, for example, exemplifies how West-African undocumented and regular migrants share identity documents, among other to obtain work (2017: 73 et seq.) Others also have noted the agency of undocumented migrants, their creative ways of bypassing the law and their survival strategies among which their means of becoming incorporated in spatial and ethnic communities in order to obtain, for example, informal housing and employment (Ambrosini 2013: 15, 45; Engbersen et al. 2006: 214 et seq.). Criminality can be a part of such informal activities; in fact being undocumented is often

associated with criminality. However, there is little evidence that these two notions coincide (Van der Leun 2003b: 188).

Chauvin et al. describe the agency of undocumented migrants as a process of ‘coming out of the closet’, in which the closet is “a phase of resource acquisition and accumulation of civic capital which can later be mobilized as a political pivot” (2014: 425). He mentions examples of undocumented migrants who become politically active and “have played leading roles in pro-legalization movements” in different parts of the world (Barron et al. and Nichols in Chauvin 2014: 425). In literature about the situation in the Netherlands, such big mobilizations are not to be found, however, in a smaller amount, people have spoken out and protested. During the execution of the temporary legalization measure ‘white illegals’ in 1999 for example (mentioned in 2.2) some hundreds of ‘white illegals’ – thus people who had been working formally/white for a certain period – went on hunger strike when the government decided that they did not meet the conditions for legalization, after which their cases were reconsidered and a part of them was legalized in retrospect (Krikke 1999: 188, Benseddik et al. 2004: 58).

Until today, people speak out in protest individually and collectively, of which the ‘we are here’-movement in Amsterdam is a current example of an active group. This movement squats unused buildings in order to, among other, gain visibility, have a place to organize their struggle and protest against the ‘denial of their (legal) existence’ (Dadusc, 2017)<sup>7</sup>. However, due to more restrictive policies in the past 30 years, the agency of undocumented migrants has been curtailed when comparing it with many years ago. Many undocumented migrant workers of the 1990s who had missed the collective legalization have lost their jobs at the beginning of the 2000s (Benseddik et al. 2004: 153 et seq.). Kox describes multiple examples of undocumented migrants who could not at all be ‘picky’ when looking for work (including

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<sup>7</sup> See also the website of ‘We are here’ <https://wijzijnhier.org>

exploitation-like situations) from the 2000s onwards because there was very few supply (2010: 72-74). Further, there are many observations that undocumented migrants have alienated from the people and the environment around them, something that could have caused psychological and physical problems, (Burgers et al. 2003: 179 et seq., Engbersen 2003: 246). Partly because of big worries about the situation of many undocumented migrants, the amnesty in 2007 was initiated by support organizations and municipalities, who enforced the national government to do something about it (Koppes 2017: 9).

Given the aforementioned stances in the structure/agency debate, there are observations and examples of both structural forces in which undocumented migrants seem to be 'caught' and their individual choices and autonomy. Ambrosini brings these two directions together: "the agency of migrants and the interests of receiving societies, subjective aspirations and structural factors, actions of networks, and institutional functioning are not opposed to each other but instead are mutually reinforcing" (Ambrosini 2013: 15); a treatment that I tend to agree with.

## **2.4 Embeddedness and 'crimmigration'**

Van der Leun (2003a) describes how undocumented migrants in the Netherlands can become informally included in society. Besides from interviews with police officers and professionals of Human Service Organisations such as schools, hospitals, and housing corporations, her research is also based on an extended research among undocumented migrants in the 1990s. Engbersen et al. (1999) have used, among other, this earlier research, combined with new research in Utrecht, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam, to create a framework of 'embeddedness' of undocumented migrants in Dutch society. This framework proposes that the opportunities of this group depend on the extent to which they are embedded in spatial, relational and

bureaucratic structures. The spatial structure refers to urban areas where there are migrant communities, cheap and informal housing possibilities and economic opportunities to informally make some money. The relational structure refers to the extent that undocumented migrants have access to and support by networks of their own ethnic group. The third structure, the bureaucratic embeddedness resonates in Van der Leun's research (2003a) and refers to the execution of policies concerning arrest and deportation and to the informal tolerance of the undocumented stay of migrants by governmental and semi-governmental organizations (Engbersen et al. 1999: 13 et seq.). The embeddedness-framework thus is based on research of more than 20 years ago, for which I think that parts of it will no longer be as useful as during that period.

This is partly due to the increasing criminalization of undocumented migration during the last decades. Staring (2012) refers to Van der Leun's argumentation when explaining how 'crimmigration' is slightly increasing in the Netherlands (Van der Leun 2009 in Staring 2012: 396), which is the intersection between crime control and immigration control (Van der Woude et al. 2017: 4). She and Staring argue, among other, that there are more cases in which aliens have been 'declared undesirable' since 2000 (a duplication of 750 to about 1500), that the tackling of human smuggling and -trafficking/exploitation is more aimed at the perpetrators than at the protection of the victims and that the government is, more than before, considering to make being undocumented a misdemeanor punishable with a fine or imprisonment (Staring 2012: 396, see also Van der Woude et al. 2014). This has not changed a lot in recent years: making being undocumented a misdemeanor is still on the political agenda of this and recent cabinets, although it never came through so far<sup>8</sup> and also literature of only last year is indicating that 'crimmigration' is clearly operating in both Europe and the Netherlands (Van der Woude et al. 2017: 4). It seems that the public discourse is not

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<sup>8</sup> See information on website LOS Foundation. <http://www.stichtinglos.nl/content/strafbaarstelling-illegaal-verblijf>

explicitly popularizing the phenomenon, but the media do follow the political discourse on it, which is, as we have seen, criminalizing undocumented migration more than before (ibid). One could argue that the embeddedness that undocumented migrants 'used' to survive twenty years ago is now harder to obtain. Housing corporations might be more reluctant to turn a blind eye, there might be more fear of employers of controls of undeclared workers, etcetera. However, parts of the embeddedness framework might still be applicable to this project and both the pros and critiques on the framework might help to analyze the data.

Especially the concept of relational embeddedness can be found in many other studies on undocumented migration, yet it is also criticized. Minian found that undocumented Mexican migrants in the US who had bigger networks (mainly with co-ethnics), found more ways of circumventing restrictive policies than migrants without a network (2018: 215). However, support of co-ethnics and shared time with them can also lead to problems such as competition, social control and negative rumors (Ambrosini 2013: 110). Düvell (2006) uses various case studies throughout Europe through which he argues that networks (be it with co-ethnics or other types of networks) are not necessarily a prerequisite for the opportunities of undocumented migrants. Particular groups of undocumented migrants in the UK, for example, used market mechanisms such as advertisements and the buying and selling of information as strategies for survival. However, also in this case is admitted that even the use of market mechanisms cannot entirely be separated from socioeconomic networks (ibid: 182). Other studies found that undocumented migrants relied on family relations - obviously with co-ethnics, - but did not want to be in touch with other members of their ethnic group. Further, undocumented migrants whose ethnic community is relatively small, often associate with other migrant groups (Van Meeteren 2010: 22, 23). At last, Mahler stresses the asymmetrical and conflictual relations between co-ethnics, both documented and undocumented (Mahler 1995 in Engbersen et al. 1999). In light of the stricter policies of the last decades, it remains to

be seen how deep undocumented migrants can be embedded within their network and if stricter policies also have had an influence on this part of the embeddedness framework.

So far, I have elaborated on processes, definitions, and policies in the Netherlands, I have linked the exclusion and inclusion of undocumented migrants in a nation-state to the structure/agency debate and I have worked out different views on embeddedness and ‘crimmigration’. There could be said much more, such as the stigmatization this group encounters, the role of religion in their lives, islamophobia that probably could be linked the undocumented migration, etc., yet all of that goes beyond the scope of this project.

### **3. Methodology**

A research population such as undocumented migrants is hard to reach. After all, they have many reasons to stay out of sight of state officials or of anyone else who could possibly report them to the alien police (Van der Leun 2006: 320). Moreover, it is likely that it is even more difficult to reach the population of this project, namely undocumented migrants who are 50 years or older and who are in the Netherlands for more than 15 years. Atkinson et al. call groups that are in unusual or stigmatized conditions ‘hidden populations’ and have certain important suggestions how to reach them, to which I will further refer below (2001: 2). The best way of conducting research among hidden populations is qualitative of nature and consists of, according to various scholars, time and labor-intensive strategies such as ethnographic fieldwork and face to face interviews (a.o. Van der Leun 2003a: 32; Barrett et al. 2015: 4). Qualitative research “is typically used for providing an in-depth understanding of the research issues that embraces the perspectives of the study population and the context in which they live. It is most suitable for ‘why-questions’ to explain and understand issues and

‘how-questions’ that describe processes or behavior” (Hennink et al. 2011: 10). The context in which undocumented migrants live, their perspective of the situations they are in, their behaviour and the processes of becoming embedded (or not) that have taken place throughout their lives in the Netherlands; all these aspects are of interest for this project and thus could best be found and analysed through qualitative research. Furthermore, qualitative research is very suitable to speak with participants about sensitive topics (ibid), such as psychological well-being and hardship, periods in detention or other difficult events, which were part of the interviews. I have conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews on which I will further elaborate below.

A great deal of the lives and activities of a hidden population takes place ‘in the shadows’. Therefore, other quantitative and qualitative methods, such as surveys, the analysis of statistics, focus groups and observational fieldwork are either not appropriate or beyond the scope of this project. Through quantitative methods such as surveys, one cannot explore life stories, go in-depth and react to specific responses. The same counts for the analysis of statistics (e.g. numbers of people in alien detention). Further, focus groups and observations would not be appropriate either, for example because of the fact that this population is so hard to reach, because this group is not automatically gathered at one place (at least not the ones who are here for more than 15 years) and because I am particularly interested in the changes and processes within single life stories.

### **3.1 Sampling and gathering of data**

The most important means of sampling that I used was a purposive sampling strategy, through which I wanted to ensure that the final sample of my project would consist of the particular category ‘undocumented migrants of 50 years old, who have resided in the Netherlands for



more than 20 years' (see Robinson 2014:32). As I will refer to below, I have slightly changed these criteria, in order to obtain sufficient participants. I have gotten access to this population through gatekeepers (see Hennink et al. 2011: 92 et seq.). The gatekeepers are social workers, volunteers, and coordinators of projects that support undocumented migrants throughout the country. I already knew about six of them through my own work as a coordinator of a shelter for undocumented migrants in The Hague and contacted them by e-mail, face-to-face contact or by phone. Further, I have gotten in contact with other gatekeepers through the LOS Foundation. I have joined a meeting for support organizations for undocumented migrants, organized by LOS, where I have asked participants to bring me in contact with the people they support. I have sent a follow-up mail to all participants (more than 40 people) and got about 20 responses, of which 12 responses were fruitful in the sense that I came in contact with respondents. Appointments with three respondents were arranged by the social worker and I received the telephone numbers of the other 18 respondents, so I could make an appointment. There were no 'no-shows', so I did not need extra time to arrange new appointments. The appointments took place in the cities where people stayed: Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Almere, and Deventer.

I have conducted interviews with 21 people of 12 different countries<sup>9</sup>, of which one person appeared to be 39 (in parts of his file that the social worker had checked, there had been a wrong date of birth). I decided to not use his interview for my analysis, but since it was only my second interview, I could use the interview for some corrections of my interview questions. The 20 interviews I have used lasted one hour to two and a half hours. When I noted that I could not get 20 participants in time if I held onto the criteria of being 50 years or older and being in the Netherlands for more than 20 years, I decided to inform particular gatekeepers (that already told me that they would have more participants if the criteria were

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<sup>9</sup> See for an overview of the respondents, their age, time in the Netherlands and country of origin, Appendix A

less strict) that the age could also be 'end of 40s' and '15 years or more'. In the end, I interviewed people of 49 years old up to 69 years old, residing in the Netherlands 14½ years up to 31 years. This means that there were people living more than half of their lives in the Netherlands, a person who entered the Netherlands after his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and other varieties in between. I included the participant who is in the Netherlands for 14½ years (instead of 15 years or more) because I only knew during the interview that he did not meet the criterion of 15 years and because his story was important and similar to others. To keep things clear, I am talking about '15 years or more' throughout the thesis, in which this person is included. One of all respondents was not undocumented anymore; she had obtained a 5-year residence permit about two years ago, after 18 years. She could very well inform me about the changes that had taken place throughout her 'undocumented life' in the Netherlands and about her survival strategies. However, topics such as current psychological well-being or ideas about the future could very well be colored by the fact that she is in a relatively 'better' position now, having many more rights than other respondents. The information she gave me about such topics, I have handled with caution.

Apart from purposive sampling, the others means of trying to get in contact with the research population was snowball sampling, in which participants could give me names and numbers of other potential participants (see Vogt 1999 in Atkinson et al. 2001: 2). This worked only out for one person, with whom I came in contact through two other respondents who lived in the same shelter as he.

### **3.2 Design of research tools**

To gather my data, I have heavily leaned on in-depth/semi-structured interviews with undocumented migrants, because that was a very useful and appropriate way to learn more

about their survival strategies over a long period of time and the changes that have taken place during their lives without papers in The Netherlands. Moreover, in-depth interviews are appropriate to talk about sensitive topics such as criminal records, detention, addiction and psychological well-being. Various researches in the last decades among undocumented migrants in the Netherlands have used this method (Engbersen et al. 1999, Burger et al. 2003, van der Leun 2003a). I have recorded 20 of the 21 interviews, after having asked permission of the respondent. One of the respondents disagreed with taking a record, so I made notes of the interview directly after it. In one case, about half of the interview was not well recorded due to a technical problem, so I also made notes of that part directly after the interview. I have transcribed all other interviews, except for the one with the 39-year old person, because I did not use that interview for my analysis.

The interview guide that I used consisted of 5 themes, each divided into sub-questions<sup>10</sup>. I conducted two pilot interviews and noticed during the first one that I should learn the guide by heart as much as possible and that I should only use a paper with the themes and questions in keywords, which worked well during the second pilot interview and the rest of the interviews. It contributed well to the idea that an interview should feel like a ‘normal conversation’ to the respondent as much as possible, so she/he feels most comfortable (see Hennink et al. 2011: 109). I could include the first pilot interview in my research, since the respondent fully met the research group conditions. I slightly adapted the interview guide during the course of the data collection, on which I will elaborate below under ‘analytical approach’. The interviews were held in the houses/rooms where people stayed at the time of interviewing and at locations of support organizations, depending on what place people preferred and where it was possible to have a private place where there was no noise of others. The interviews were held in Dutch or English, depending on the best language of the

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<sup>10</sup> See for the entire interview guide Appendix B

respondent. One interview was partly in Dutch, partly in Spanish, because the Moroccan respondent could speak Spanish quite well and preferred to express some things in Spanish rather than in Dutch.

Semi-structured interviews and especially with the population of this project, have their limitations, which I tried to anticipate as much as possible. The quality of the interview highly depends on the researcher's skills to empathetically listen, to know how to react to emotions, to be flexible in terms of topic order and there is no one to reflect on the interviewer since it is one-to-one (Hennink et al. 2011: 131). Staying calm, asking if they were willing to answer specific (difficult) questions and letting them know that I saw their hardship and that I was compassionate with them were my means of dealing with emotions of respondents. I had to be very flexible with the topic order because the things that people started telling about in the beginning were very different. For example, some respondents immediately started to tell about their experiences in detention, although I had assumed that to be a difficult topic for later in the interview. In every interview, I thus kept an eye on the topic/keywords list to see if all topics had received enough attention and tried to follow the conversation when asking questions and follow-up questions. In the course of the period of interviewing, I tried to reflect on my interview skills when transcribing, but also by talking to others about it. The last limitation of semi-structured interviews is that interviewing, transcribing and coding are very time- and labor intensive. This meant for this project that I often could not transcribe and code an interview immediately after and that I had to cluster it; transcribing various interviews at once. Without transcription, it is not possible to code the interview and to write memos, so I did not start that right away, but only later in the interview period. I do not think that this has had far-reaching consequences for the process of analysis, but it is a lesson learned for future research.

### **3.3 Analytical approach**

When using an abductive analytical approach, as I did, the researcher goes into the field with a broad theoretical understanding of the research topic (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 179, 180). For this project, it means that I have gained good understanding and knowledge about the various theoretical stances that research on undocumented migration both within and outside of the Netherlands take, as well as about the most influential policies that the Dutch government has implemented during the last decades, targeted at undocumented migrants. Apart from reading literature and policy documents, a few years of work experience with this group helped me to go into the field with a good basis. I have coded the transcriptions of the interviews (initially line by line and incident by incident coding, followed by focused coding) (see Charmaz 2014: 109 et seq.) and I have placed recurring codes either under the existing themes or under newly arising themes. This brought me back to the literature and I thus was moving between literature and data, searching for the extent to which data were in line with existing theories and where surprising or puzzling data challenged existing concepts. Transcribing, coding and moving between literature and data also meant that I have partly adapted the research questions and the interview guide in the course of the interview period, as well as my focus during interviews. Later, I asked, for example, some more follow-up questions about particular changes that had taken place in the lives of the informants than in the beginning and I asked more specific questions about their ideas regarding return to their country of origin. Although the scope of this project is too small to conclude that complete novel theories emerged, the scope of the project was big enough to conclude that there are at least some valuable complements to existing knowledge to be found in the data (see also Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 179, 180). As we will see later, that has, among other, to do

with the considerable length of time that the respondents have been living in the uncertain position of being undocumented.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

From the beginning, it was bright and clear that I would have to take into account ethical considerations, working with a research population that risks detection by the alien police and in some cases even risks deportation (Lahman et al. 2011), for which I have mainly used guidelines of Hennink et al. (2011: 64 et seq.). The research participants will not notice any direct positive consequences of the research for themselves. However, since I conduct the research for the LOS foundation, their participation will add value to the lobby of LOS towards local and national governments to improve the situation of older undocumented migrants. I asked gatekeepers to be clear on especially the first notion towards participants and I repeated this when starting an interview. Gatekeepers and I myself were also clear on the fact that people could choose whether to join the research or not. Furthermore, after having asked if I could record the interview I put the recorder on and I ensured the respondents' anonymity by not using their names in the analysis and report and by keeping records and transcripts for myself within password locked digital environments. I also ensured them that parts of the transcripts/information from the interviews that will be shared, will be used in such a way that they cannot be used to trace the respondents (see also Lahman et al. 2011: 316). The reactions on these notions were very diverse: some asked me if I could not just put their whole story in a newspaper, which expressed their wish to be heard and probably also their hopes that they would have more chances once they told their stories. Others were a bit suspicious, probably out of fear that the alien police would find them. Only one was, as he expressed, suspicious of any 'official', including the IND, support organizations and also a bit

of me. However, he gave me some valuable information about a few topics. He was the only one who did not want to be recorded.

## **4. Results**

In this chapter I show changes in the lives and survival strategies of long-term undocumented migrants and what is the impact of being undocumented for such a long time on these people, examining six areas of their lives: reducing work possibilities, strained support networks, worsening mental health, physical health problems, the impact of ‘crimmigration’ versus their efforts to live right and do well and fears about the future. Changes in these areas of life affect other areas of life and affect their survival strategies, which I will show with examples from the data. A part of the data, which can be expressed in numbers, is also shown in the tables, to be found in Appendix C.<sup>11</sup>

### **4.1 Changing work possibilities**

Six respondents arrived in the Netherlands after 2000, 14 respondents came before 2000, of which two in the 1980s and 12 in the 1990s. Six of the latter group were working undeclared a lot and felt satisfied with their lives. Fifteen people in total have worked undeclared in the Netherlands while being undocumented. Three people had had the chance to work legally when they had temporary papers. Various respondents who did undeclared work for a few or even for many years were fairly satisfied with their lives. With the work they did, they had money to rent a room or a house, usually together with friends/acquaintances. However, they tell that working and earning money to provide for their living became harder during the

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<sup>11</sup> These tables can be used in addition to the text and only give a limited overview of a part of the data.

course of their lives in the Netherlands. I interviewed “Jamal” in a night shelter where he stays each day from 5 pm to 9 or 10 in the morning. Of his work experiences, Jamal says:

I came to the Netherlands in 1990. I worked a very long time in the hospitality sector, (...) This moment, working in the Netherlands was very good. Working in the hospitality sector is a very good life. I’m telling you honestly. (...) It is very easy, a room with somebody, or a house. That time is very good, easy to find work, easy to find a house, enough salary. (...) But now, everything is different. (Jamal, 58, 28 years in the Netherlands).

The life he lived about 20 years ago is in sharp contrast with the life he is living now. His life in the nineties as an undocumented migrant (his tourist visa had expired after a couple of months), was probably not that different than the life of some Dutch colleagues or permit-holders who worked in the same sector, at least not regarding the things he mentions: easy to find work and a house, enough salary, being satisfied. The fact that he mentions that it was easy to find or have a room/house with somebody implies that he had a network, which also becomes clear during the rest of the interview. About nine respondents had similar experiences: in the 1990s and/or early 2000s, they recall, they had relative ‘good lives’ for some or even for more than 10 years. However, for all of them, things are different now and have deteriorated, as becomes clear from the following quote:

Thirty years here, having worked and paid taxes and now...I have nothing. (...) I do not have a room, I sleep in the basement of a friend of mine. I do not have work. I am sick. I have worked, but all the money is gone.

(Latif, 54, 28 years in the Netherlands)

Latif hints at the unfairness of his situation, as he also makes clear in other parts of the interview: he worked and paid taxes and now...he has nothing. He implies that he was doing a



good thing by paying taxes; he paid something to the Dutch government, but he does not get anything in return in this moment of need. On the contrary, it is the Dutch government who plays a great role in causing the changes that he and the other respondents have experienced and still are experiencing. In fact, Latif summarizes how government policies caused changes in the lives of undocumented migrants:

After 2000 it gets difficult for illegals. There is only work in the high season. After 2002, 2003, 2005, the laws have changed. Illegals are not allowed to work anymore. (...) And I could pay rent until 2006, 2007 and then, everything has been destroyed. No work, no income, no social benefits, nothing. (...) I looked for work, I asked, but they say: "Sorry sir, I want to help you, but I have to pay €8000 or €12.000 as a fine. And they control every two, three weeks". (Latif, 54, 28 years in the Netherlands)

When trying to remember when it started to be harder to find work, he mentions a sort of 'transition period'. In the 2000s it started to become problematic to find enough work to have enough money to rent a house and provide in his living. During these years he only could work a couple of months in which he had to earn enough money to 'survive' the whole year, which might have been quite a challenge for Latif. Looking back, he sees 2006/2007 as a big turning point: since then "everything has been destroyed". Employers whom Latif asked for work, rejected him because of their fear for fines, adding that they often were controlled. These notions correspond with notions of other respondents who had worked and correspond with policies described in the theoretical framework and especially with the intensifying of controls. Stricter policies regarding work, social benefits, etcetera were introduced in the 1990s and extended in the 2000s. Further, surveillance and control intensified in the 2000s. However, changing policies were not the only reason that respondents could not find work anymore. Solomon gives another reason:

You see me sitting down here because I'm sick. But trust me, all my life is work. (Solomon, 51, 26 years in the Netherlands).

Solomon explains the fact that he does not work at the moment by telling me that he fell seriously ill in 2005. About eight respondents also mentioned their bad health as playing a role in not being able to find work anymore. Further, other problems were mentioned as reasons, such as a failed relationship and a declining network. 12 out of the 15 who had worked explicitly mentioned that it had become more difficult to find work and the other three found it very difficult from the beginning.

Looking at the whole group, five respondents did never work or stopped working either because employers would not take them anymore and/or out of fear for controls. People who never worked and people who lost work had to have other means of surviving and getting some money. 10 people had received money from a support organization to rent a room and provide their living for short periods (a couple of months) to longer periods (many years). All had had the help of friends and acquaintances in the form of money or food and/or housing. This varied from a little bit of money of various acquaintances to get some food to a long-term of free housing. 13 had received money and housing from the COA (Central Organ Asylum seekers) during periods that they were applying for an asylum permit. Three people earned some extra money in an asylum center by doing chores.

## **4.2 Network**

As referred to in the theoretical framework, relational embeddedness within an own ethnic group, but also within a wider network of other migrant groups and within nationals of the country where undocumented migrants live, is often seen as playing an important role in surviving. This was recognizable during the interviews, in which became clear that

respondents especially ‘used’ their network (especially co-ethnics and people of other nationalities) to find a place to sleep, to eat and/or to get some money to eat, to take a shower, etc. In other words, when in times of need, they turned to their network for their basic needs, as also can be seen in various excerpts in this paragraph.

Except for one who saw his network improving, about half of the respondents did not mention significant changes in their network. ‘Not seeing changes’ in their network, was not always positive. It often meant that they did not have a big network from the beginning, but also that they did not want a bigger network, because of bad experiences:

I know many people, for example from the asylum centers, but I do not want to be friends with all of them. I have chosen two people. When you have many acquaintances, you also get a lot of trouble.  
(Ramez, 49, 17 years in the Netherlands)

At times I see friends that I met in the asylum center driving cars. They ask: ‘don’t you recognize me? Weren’t you the one that I met in the asylum center? Are you still in this situation, has nothing changed?’ Well, if you stop your car because you want to tell me that you are driving a car, you’d better go!  
(Tracy, 51, 17 years in the Netherlands)

Ramez relates contact with people with getting in trouble and says that he has consciously chosen to keep his network small, for that reason. Tracy also expresses bad experiences with friends who she does not see as ‘real’ friends; she feels that they only want to tell her how well they are. Only four respondents were fairly satisfied with their network and with the way a small group of friends, acquaintances and/or family treated them during the most of their time in the Netherlands. When comparing the literature on relational embeddedness of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands, especially in the bigger cities (e.g. Engbersen et al. 1999), with the data, it seems that the possibilities to be embedded within migrant groups has shrunk in the last 20 years. The networks of most respondents seem to be smaller and

more fragmented than various research groups that participated in an extended research on undocumented migrants in the 1990s (ibid; Burgers et al. 2003). Further, in the course of 15 up to 30 years, half of the respondents saw their network decreasing or 'at risk' of becoming smaller and they expressed that they felt like a burden on their friends and acquaintances.

W: My daily bread was severe. It was very tough for me, though there are Ghanaians living here. If you go to them today, you cannot go to them tomorrow. They have their families and sons. You cannot depend on them all the time. (...)

Me: Did you also have to sleep outside?

W: Of course. [sighs emotionally.] I've been hanging around, in the steps. You know, these steps that they don't close. (...) And if I'm in the house, I see the person that is living..., I can see the change of the face. I can see that he is not happy to see me all the time. (Winston, 50, 27½ years in the Netherlands)

At the moment I talk with Winston, he receives money from the Council for Refugees to rent a small room and to buy his food. However, before that, it was troublesome for him to find a place to sleep and to have something to eat for several reasons. For Winston, the places that were the most 'logical' to go to for basic needs, were the houses of other Ghanaians he knew in the city. However, they could barely help him, as he says that he can depend on them for just a very short time, maybe one or a few days. He mentions that these people have their own families, which probably means that they did not want to house or feed an extra person for long. Like Winston, almost all of the respondents were in contact with co-ethnics, and also had contacts with people from other nationalities, although the number of contacts varied a lot per person and could be very small. 12 people mentioned that they also had frequent contacts with Dutch people. As mentioned above, such contacts were used, among other, to find a place to sleep. Especially when they could not pay for a room, like Winston, they often had to move a lot from one house to another and to keep on asking people. However, if they could

not find a place, the street was the only option, as about half of the respondents told me. Abigail, also from Ghana, had a similar experience as Winston regarding staying with people:

Me: So where could you live?

A: I don't have a specific place to live. When I saw a Ghanaian, I could come for one or three weeks or so (...) And then they said: You can't stay because you don't have documents. Maybe the police will come, so you will have to find another place'. (...) If you don't have money, you don't have anything. That is very, very difficult.

Abigail provides another reason that people did not want to keep her in their houses: they were afraid of the police. It is of course very probable that the people where Winston slept had the same fears, although he did not mention it to me. Both Winston and Abigail received, at a certain point, money from a support organization to rent something, like 8 other respondents. Once that was the case, Winston tells, he could be somewhere for longer, but as his second quote suggests he still does not feel very welcome. This is especially striking because he pays for the room. Until the day we speak, he is having the idea that he is disturbing the life of the people he lives with and at such moments, he leaves the house. In a sense, he tries to unburden these people, which I heard from many respondents. One of them is Zayd, who was in general quite positive about his network, but he also mentioned that he worked hard to keep the contacts with friends and acquaintances good:

I give good words to people. Therefore, my contact with people is good. I told you, if I need money and I ask them, nobody says 'no'. And if I need a place to sleep, they don't say 'no'. Therefore, I said to myself, I'm going to [name of shelter/support organization] to sleep. Because I respect myself. (...) It is good not to keep on asking for a place. Sometimes, if you live with people and I need to take a shower, he also needs the bathroom. Or using the tv... it is not my house. And then the man might start saying bad things about me. (Zayd, 59, 31 years in The Netherlands)

It is noteworthy that Zayd seems to have kept his network big and good enough that he could ask people for money or a place to sleep and they would give it. He says that it has to do with his own kindness to people; 'he gives good words to people'. However, he does not think that his kindness can help him to get such places 'forever' and he has decided that he should not ask these people for a place to sleep anymore. He mentions various reasons for this, among which the fact that he respects himself. Always asking people for help might feel like 'begging' and apparently he does no longer feel comfortable with that. Zayd, who has lived a quite independent life for a long time, might want to not be dependent on people too much. Probably depending on a support organization to get some food and to have a place to sleep does feel better than depending on friends all the time. Moreover, if the time comes that he again needs their help, he could more easily go back to them. Further, he is afraid that somebody who helps him might find reasons to say bad things about him. He does not state that this would have bad consequences for his 'image' in the rest of his network, but if his friends and acquaintances also know each other, this might very well be the case. Thus, he seems to consciously 'unburden' his network, to keep a good contact.

Comparing Zayd's situation with the situation of Winston, Zayd seems to have a bigger and more stable network with people who are really willing to help him. However, they both feel that their network could have a sort of 'expiry-date' and that they need to find ways to postpone the moment that people from their network do not want to help them anymore. Wassim has more or less the same experience with his network and thinks that friends get tired of him:

L: How about your acquaintances and friends in the past?

W: yeah, I still have them, but I don't feel like calling them. If I want, I can call them. But they get tired of me. Can I take a shower at your place? Can I sleep in your house? Can I wash my clothes? (...)

Some people and organizations care, which is good. But I don't want their care anymore, I want to work. I have taken care of myself for a very long time. (Wassim, 54, 21 years in The Netherlands)

Like Zayd, he seems to be afraid to lose a sense of self-respect when depending too much on others. The difference with Zayd's case is that Wassim also does not want to depend on organizations, although he lives in a support organization's shelter. He emphasizes that he has taken care of himself for a very long time; it is possible that his pride has been wounded for having to depend on others for so long. Like Winston, he also thinks that the people he asked for help many times are 'tired of him', although Wassim admits that he could call them if he wanted. These cases are exemplary for the other cases in which respondents saw (a risk of) their network declining and increasing difficulties in making use of a network can also be found in previous researches on undocumented migrants (e.g. Kox 2010). The next step often was, as Winston's case demonstrates, living a marginalized life on the street or, like Zayd's case shows, turning to a support organization. The difference with examples from the literature is that previous research groups did not merely consist of undocumented migrants who are here for more than 15 years. As can be seen in various examples above, the length of time that people are in the Netherlands without papers seems to play an important role in the breakdown of their network. Asking a friend for help has not been problematic from the beginning, but by coming back too often and keeping on asking for help, they seem to risk the loyalty of friends and acquaintances. This means that even the strongest people and the people that have been able to maintain a network and to make use of it for many years, eventually run the risk to lose it, finding themselves dependent on support organizations or even on the street, as other, weaker respondents experienced from the beginning. Negative changes in the lives of respondents, such as the loss of jobs and the loss of friends contribute to the necessity to constantly reconsider their means of survival, as we have seen above. Further, such changes and the uncertainty it comes with also affects the mental health of the help

### 4.3 Mental health

The mental hardship that many of the respondents feel is best expressed by Wassim:

‘You know, when life is hard, you can stay strong for a long time. But then, after even more time, you are lost. (...) A few years, I can be strong. I can keep going. But now, I’m fed up. I don’t feel like going anymore. You know, you may feel cold, warm, hunger, you may be outside or inside, it may be day or night, all is fine... you become indifferent. (...) This life is harsh. (...) Already more than 20 years, I can’t put my feet on the ground. I’m always walking somewhere in the air without knowing where the wind will blow me. I’m just waiting when the hard wind comes to throw me somewhere in a corner again. It’s harsh, it’s harsh.’ (Wassim, 54, 21 years in The Netherlands)

Wassim expresses that he is a strong man, who has been able to take care of himself for quite a long time, which also becomes clear in various parts of the rest of his story. Yet the last years, it has started to be too much and he expresses that it almost makes him indifferent. With the words ‘you are lost’, he might mean that he has lost the strength to change anything about his situation, the strength to fight depression. He has fought for a long time, but since his fight has taken so long already, he does not believe in a good outcome anymore. In a way, he has lost hope. He expresses an extreme uncertainty about the future, he can end up ‘anywhere where the wind will blow him, throwing him somewhere in a corner’. This uncertainty has been present all his life in the Netherlands, yet it starts to be a bigger burden since the last years. The desperation and the sense of feeling out of control expressed by Wassim is exemplary for the stories of almost 75% of the respondents, although 100% of the respondents reported a certain amount of stress about their situation of being without papers and about the problems that come out of that (the one documented respondent felt well now, but had experienced it when still undocumented).



When comparing the quote of Wassim with the stories of all respondents and with the literature, we find multiple ‘winds’ that could ‘knock undocumented migrants over’. As shown in paragraph 4.1, stricter policies that cause people to lose their jobs are one of these ‘winds’ that very much influence the lives of the respondents, as well as laws that deprive them of rights to opt for social benefits, social housing, etcetera. Although the networks of undocumented migrants can be of support, the uncertainty of this support and the idea that they are a burden to their friends are also factors that can influence the lives and mental health of people. Further, as we will see in paragraph 4.5, being arrested and being put in detention are factors that ‘knock people over’, since these are unexpected things that the respondents cannot control and heavily influence their lives and minds. They are criminalized, which makes the wonder ‘what they have done wrong’, although they are not guilty of any crime. The last ‘wind’ that I mention here is the repetitive ‘no’ of the IND and in court, which obviously is related to strict policies of the government. In 15 to 30 years, some people have had staying permits that expired after a year for example, but most of their lives in the Netherlands, they received negative decisions, which has had an impact on all of the respondents and is well expressed by Tracy:

I am scared of those IND people. Everything I did was canceled. Negative, negative, negative [upset].  
And then I forgot myself and depression came in. (Tracy, 51, 17½ years in the Netherlands).

Tracy’s depression was caused by a combination of the things she experienced in the Netherlands and traumas from before, as several other respondents also reported. She and eight other respondents received or had received professional psychological help, while the other respondents thought that they could not get such help or that it would not help them. Further, seven respondents reported to get medicines to reduce stress or depression related complaints, but since I did not literally ask all respondents if they used medicines against

psychological diseases, there could be more who do. The ones who, at the moment we talked, stayed in a night shelter, stayed with friends for free or paid for a room, but felt very uncomfortable because the house they stayed was too small for too many people, obviously had more stress about the basic need of a roof over their head. One of them reported not always to be able to buy food and that he sometimes went to bed hungry. The mental hardship that respondents experienced could even lead to thoughts of suicide, as expressed by Anouar:

From the outside, I look like a complete person, without problems. But really, inside I feel very sad, tired and old. It is especially hard to find a roof over my head and it makes me sad that other people get a permit and I do not. So sometimes I think of killing myself, but then I talk with people who try to give me advice. (Anouar, 51, 22½ years in the Netherlands).

Including Anouar, five respondents had thought of suicide, although it is likely that this amount is bigger, since I did not literally ask about this topic. In previous researches, thoughts of suicide of respondents and mental health problems also emerged (Kox 2010 and Koppes 2017). Koppes distinguishes thoughts of suicide and mental health problems between recent undocumented migrants and undocumented migrants who are here for more than five years and concludes that, within her research group, people who are here without papers for more than five years have more mental health problems and more thoughts of suicide than recent migrants (2017: 28, 29). Within this project, the amount of people that reported to have thought of suicide is not higher, but the amount of respondents that reported mental health problems, feelings of hopelessness and stress is higher than in both previous researches (100% reported stress about the ongoing uncertainty and, as mentioned above, 75% reported feelings of desperation, compared with about 60% mental problems and feelings of hopelessness for five+ years undocumented migrants in Koppes' research, 30% for recent migrants in Koppes' research (ibid) and 30% for migrants in Kox' research (2010: 101). This

comparison could lead to the conservative conclusion that mental health problems increase, the longer people are without documents. This is not an unexpected conclusion, but it still can be an important indicator of the mental health problems that undocumented migrants are likely to develop. A last example shows that even the strongest people run the risk of mental breakdown:

I fight against depression. Knowing that I am the only one for the children. I have to really fight it. So sometimes, I can be down, but immediately when seeing them, it is like a reason to sit up, to come out of where you are, to refuse it, to fight it. When I go out, I'm constantly hearing, 'oh, you have nice and well-behaved children'. That is the light in the darkness. So you hold on to that. (Catherine, 52, 23 years in The Netherlands)

Catherine is an anomalous case in various ways within the group of 20 respondents. She was, despite all the difficulties she and her family face, quite positive and she told me that she also 'enables' and advises other people such as young people from her church who have difficulties at school. As can be taken from the quote, her children are the main reason to stay so positive. However, this is not without an enormous effort 'to fight depression'. Hearing that her children are very nice and well-behaved is gratifying to Catherine and it implies that she not only puts the effort in fighting depression but also in educating her children as well as possible. All the other respondents either do not have children or do not have them so close, which means that they lack this important reason to stay positive. They have to fight depression and other mental problems in other ways in which they, as we have seen, often do not succeed.

#### **4.4 Physical health**

When looking at the literature about the factors that increase the risk of the development of health problems, one sees that migration is one of these multiple risk factors (see e.g. a review of multiple researches on health care disparities and poor health in both America (US and Canada) and Europe (Switzerland) - Grabovschi et al. 2013). From researches closer to home, we know that refugees and asylum seekers run a higher risk on health problems than nationals of the immigration country where they reside (Gerritsen et al. 2006, Goosen 2014: 16) and undocumented migrants even more (Kox 2010, Benseddik et al. 2004). Benseddik et al. further note that the health problems increased the average length of undocumented stay and the average age of the respondents (ibid: 148). It thus was to be expected that respondents would have or have had health problems, all the more so because the average age of the respondents was about 57 years, which is much higher than in previous researches on undocumented migrants in the Netherlands (all aforementioned researches did not specifically select an aging population). If the ‘average Dutch national’ is experiencing more health problems when getting older (CBS 2018), all the more is an undocumented migrant who has less access to health care.

Almost all respondents have health problems, varying from small problems (for example pain in the knees) to severe illnesses, such as cancer and severe renal failure. 17 respondents reported using medicines for physical health problems. 13 respondents report that they have more health problems than before. One respondent did not have much health problems all along and six report that they had and have a lot of health problems, but that they have received such good treatments (for example two HIV-patients who started medication during their time in the Netherlands) that they feel better than before. At least half of the respondents were outspokenly positive about the medical care they got in the hospital and/or

the doctors. No one was outspokenly negative. The most respondents had the idea that the doctors that attended them were not bothered by the fact that they did not have papers, it only caused some problems at the reception sometimes, when entering the hospital. Despite good treatments once they were in contact with medics, health problems still could influence respondents' survival strategies.

[Wassim has worked a lot in various garages] And then I stopped. I got sick of the products they used. I got problems with my stomach and my neck. But I had to pay my rent (...) But working in the garage was not possible anymore with the condition of my body. So I called my father sometimes and asked him if he could send me 300 or 400 euro. And then I found some work in construction. (...) But that was incredibly heavy work and my hands and back hurt a lot of it; I even had a back-surgery. (Wassim, 54, 21 years in The Netherlands).

[After that, Wassim found a job as a painter, but he was exploited there, he told. After a few years, he walked away, despite not having other work. Last year, he started to get money from a support organization to rent a room somewhere]

Wassim had various jobs in garages, with which he earned enough money to survive for many years. However, the products started to cause health problems and he had to stop working and therefore, he had to look for other means of surviving. That time, his father and mother still lived and could send him some money, after which he found another job where he also got health problems after a while. Although he did not report it specifically in this case, it must not have been easy for Wassim to ask money from his father. He told me that he does not like to be dependent on persons and organizations, and going 'back' to your parents to ask for money is probably not something a proud man likes to do. However, apparently, he saw no other options at that point than bridging a time without salary and other forms of income by using money from 'home'. In the meantime, he looked for other work in order to provide in his living and he found another, very heavy, job as a construction worker where he got other

health problems. Due to these different health problems Wassim got in different jobs, it became more and more difficult for him to find something where he could earn his money. That made him accept a situation of relative exploitation (long days, low salary and a very discriminative boss, he recalled emotionally) for about six years, after which he could not stand it anymore and walked away. Where Wassim is a rare exception in getting money from his parents in his country of origin, the loss of work or not being able to find work due to health problems is something that other respondents also experienced. Like Wassim, people found that health problems forced them to look for other means of surviving. Another example is that of Anouar, who told me that he could no longer sleep in a shelter because his health worsened there:

A lady arranged a place for me in the bed-bath-bread location in [mentions place]. I slept there for two nights, but then I fell completely sick because so many people smoked there. Even if they smoked outside, the smell they brought into the shared bedrooms was problematic. (...) And then I stayed with different friends. (Anouar, 51, 22½ years in the Netherlands)

The Bed-Bath-Bread (BBB-) location Anouar is talking about is a shelter for the night, meant for people without papers. These locations are usually very basic and as he mentions, he is sleeping with other people in a room, which is problematic since he has a smoke allergy (he mentions it several times during the interview). A BBB-shelter usually is an ‘ultimate’ solution when somebody does not have another place to sleep and/or for example when he/she cannot stay with friends or acquaintances anymore. However, Anouar has no other choice than to try his luck again at his friends’ places. Although this case is not about earning money to rent something, we can see a similarity with Wassim’s case: health problems causing a need to look for other strategies to survive. Wassim asked his family for help, after which, much later, he needed to accept the financial help of an organization to rent a room. Anouar

cannot accept the basic help of an organization due to his health problems and goes back to moving from house to house, from friend to friend. Because of being undocumented they could never claim state-support, such as disability benefits, which forces them to always think of new and creative ways of looking for solutions. However, these two men and many other respondents express, that they almost reach the point that they are not able to find other solutions anymore.

#### **4.5 Criminality, detention and good conduct**

Various studies show that the involvement of undocumented migrants in criminality in the Netherlands is limited and less than the involvement of people with a residence permit or the Dutch nationality (see e.g. Burgers et al. 2003, Kox 2010). Reasons for that are, among other, that they respect rules and laws, that they fear the effects of criminal behavior and the notion that they have a network to rely on (thus, for example, do not need to steal food when hungry) (Kox 2010: 84). It is clear that this project does not aim to give a representative view of the involvement of undocumented migrants in crime. However, there can be said something about it: the involvement in crime among respondents is similar with Kox' much bigger research; about 15% of the respondents were involved in crime at a certain point. This means that three respondents acknowledged that they had been in detention for criminal behavior (the longest period was about 1,5 year), although that was more than 15 years ago for all the three of them. One was arrested for fighting, one was accused of rape that time (as far as I know is this not the reason that he does not have a residence permit) and the other was arrested for, as he told me, many minor offenses that still hampered him from getting a permit. The other 85%, or 17 respondents, explicitly mentioned that they always obey the rules, that they 'are not a criminal' and/or that they have never done something wrong. Paradoxically, only five

respondents were never arrested. In this paragraph, we see that ‘cimmigration’ is at work among respondents and we see what is the effect of restrictive policies: people do not understand why they are ‘treated like a criminal’ and why their ‘doing good’ does not seem to matter, which makes them feel confused.

The 15 respondents (including the three that had conducted criminal behavior) that had been detained, were arrested for not having papers and been in alien detention one time for about a day up to more than 10 times for several months (one month up to 10 months). Although they knew that ‘not having papers’ was the reason for their detention, they wondered why they had been detained, since ‘they had not done anything wrong’. They could not understand why someone should be in detention while doing ‘nothing criminal’ (including the ones that had conducted criminal behavior, because they had long served their sentence for that). Almost all of these 15 respondents were upset about it and mentioned it various times during the interviews, like Latif:

What have I done?! I am not a criminal! I am 30 years here and I have not done anything wrong. Please go and put criminals in detention, not the quiet and kind people, not the people who do not have any rights. We did not do anything wrong! (...) I worked here, I even paid taxes! (Latif, 54, 28 years in the Netherlands)

Latif told me that he was in detention twice and he assured me that the only reason was that he could not show identification to the police when they asked him for it. He emphasizes that he behaves well - being quiet and kind, working and paying taxes - and sees these things as contradictions to the fact that he was placed in detention. As can be noted in the quote, he is upset about his detention periods. Before he came in detention, the image he had of ‘people in jail’ might have been an image of ‘people who did not obey the law’, ‘people who did criminal things’. All of a sudden, he found himself (a well-behaving immigrant) in jail for the



first time in 2008 and during the interview, he expressed his frustration about this and about the system around it: “please go and put criminals in detention”. Like mentioned in the theoretical framework, ‘crimmigration’ is the intersection between crime control and immigration control; a phenomenon that is at work here. Although undocumented stay is not officially criminalized, a vast majority of the respondents has actually been punished for the fact that they could not show papers to a police officer (often after a minor offense such as cycling without lights) and during the interviews, they express their frustration about it. Several reports show that detention has a negative impact on the physical and mental health of detainees, although people cannot always provide specific reasons for their feelings of mental hardship (Amnesty International et al. 2016, JRS Europ 2010). The mere fact of ‘being in detention’ already has an impact (ibid: 10), as expressed by Ayoub:

Detention was bad, very bad. You are locked up every day. You cannot be outside a lot and the people make you crazy. (Ayoub, 54, 31 years in the Netherlands)

Except for one respondent who mentioned that he, in days that he could not find something to eat and a place to sleep, almost preferred some days in detention, everybody expressed negative feelings about their time in detention, like Ayoub. Where detention itself negatively influences the mental health of people, one can imagine that every arrest and period of detention can make a person more vulnerable in various ways: they might have lost a rented room, they might have lost small jobs to earn some money and they might experience more fear for detention than before. Like mentioned in the theoretical framework, the surveillance of undocumented migrants by the government can function as a way to discipline them and to increase their sense of vulnerability, which I often heard from respondents. Evgeni (49, 14½ years in the Netherlands) for example told me that he once was arrested for not having an ID

while he was helping somebody during an accident. When he saw another accident happening recently, he did not dare to help, out of anxiety to be arrested again.

Besides from being anxious about arrest, a great deal of the respondents was confused and indignant that their good behavior could not lead to a residence permit:

I have been here all my life; all my life I have spent in this country. And I have not committed any crime. When they caught me, they took my fingerprints and they could see, that I have not committed any crime. I just appeal to them [to the government] to help me. For me also to start a new life.  
(Winston, 50, 27½ years in The Netherlands)

In a way, Winston asks ‘the government’ to take into consideration that he is here for a very long time, without committing any crime. Winston was also taken into detention a few times for not having papers and his fingerprints were taken. He might see this as ‘an extra proof’ for his innocence and an extra reason to look at his situation; a reason to help him. He wants to start ‘a new life’ by getting a permit. Like Latif, Winston mentions the time of his stay in the Netherlands, combined with his innocence. In a way, they wonder how long they have to prove that they are worth it to get a permit. Although good conduct and the absence of criminal behavior is not a sole juridical ground to get a permit, more than 75% of the respondents wondered why this would not be the case and especially the many years of good conduct would, in their view, add up to this. This was best expressed by Evgeni:

I do not understand the rules of the IND [Immigration and Naturalization Service]. For us in the Soviet Union, if you changed jobs, your new boss could ask your old boss about your history, about your qualities. The Netherlands does not take such things into consideration. I am living here for 15 years now. You should look at what I have done here! And what I am still doing until now. (...) And it is not only about me, it is about others too. (Evgeni, 49, 14½ years in the Netherlands)

Evgeni is trying to grasp the rules around getting a permit by comparing his situation in the Netherlands to a situation of before and some regulations in his country of origin. It sounds logical to him that behavior is taken into consideration in decisions of a boss/a company, but also of a government and he might not be aware of how close that is to reality in the Netherlands. After all, conduct certainly is taken into consideration in many jobs (there for example exists a ‘Certificate of good conduct’ for a wide variety of jobs)<sup>12</sup>, but also in the granting of citizenship to migrants (looking for example at the questions of a civic integration exam that also are about ‘appropriate behaviour’ or the refusal of granting a permit to a migrant with criminal records (another respondent told me that he did never get a permit, because of a criminal record of a long time ago). Like mentioned in the theoretical framework, there are some examples in which a residence permit can be granted on the basis of a great extent of integration. Evgeni might have had a bigger chance to get a permit in Spain or even in Germany, applying to the rules around ‘*arraigo*’ or ‘*Duldung*’. However, such examples are scarce in immigration countries, including the Netherlands. All respondents very much wished ‘to be embraced by the state’ in order ‘to start a new life’, as Winston noticed, and a part of the respondents might very well meet the ‘soft conditions’ of the government to become a Dutch national (e.g. speaking the language, doing voluntary work, etc.). One could argue that this would do more justice to the things one has done. However, the *master status* of having papers overrules the social characteristics of the respondents. This confuses the most respondents and the long-term that they already are in the Netherlands contributes to their confusion: even such a long time of trying to live a good life does not help them.

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<sup>12</sup> See the website of the Ministry of Justice: <https://www.justis.nl/producten/vog/index.aspx>

#### **4.6 Fears about the future**

When I asked how the respondents thought about the future, no one currently considered to return to his/her country of origin. Interestingly, this shows that Dutch migration policies, intended to make people return to their country of origin or at least to leave the Netherlands, have failed for this population. Six people explicitly mentioned that they had seriously considered leaving the Netherlands, of which five people had thought about going back, one person had considered migration to another country and one person had considered both. Since I have not explicitly asked if people had considered returning to their country of origin all from the start of the interviews, there could be more people who had considered it. The reasons that they had not returned that time were various: lack of network, seeing danger, lack of medical care, advised by their network in Netherlands or country of origin not to return. Further, due to restrictive policies, people could not go and ‘check’ the situation in their country of origin, even if they wanted, because they would not be able to enter the Netherlands afterward. So in a way, restrictive policies were and are counterproductive and keep people here.

I did not give ‘categories’ when asking why people did not want to return, but I left it open to the respondents to come up with reasons. Of course, people often have various reasons not to return, similar to the abovementioned, that often reinforce each other. Almost half of the respondents (particularly respondents with an asylum background) thought it still would be dangerous for them to go back. Almost half of the respondents mentioned that they either would not want to go back empty-handed or would not want to start at zero. About half of the respondents were afraid that they could not get the medical care they would need (they had for example heard about people dying because they could not pay the medicines). A quarter explicitly mentioned that they like the Netherlands too much to consider any other

country to live and ‘felt as if being Dutch’. 15 respondents thought that the network they had had in their country of origin either had disappeared or would not be able to receive and support them when they would come back. Osip belonged to the former; he told me that he would not find anyone there anymore:

My last brother has died one year ago and then, nobody is left. My friends also have moved, to Turkey, Russia, Ukraine and other countries. I have nothing there! It is a foreign country to me. My country is here, my friends, my children, my grandchildren are here. (...) So I wait, for a permit or the angel of death. Which one comes first, I do not know. Only God knows. (Osip, 68, 15½ years in the Netherlands)

Osip’s comments are quite similar to the stories of particularly the respondents who had sought asylum; in the time they left, for example, because of political reasons, others (including family members and friends) had also left. Like Osip, all respondents had already lost family members; parents, but also brothers and sisters, which also contributes to a diminishing network. Like mentioned above, people, including Osip, often have various reasons why they do not want to return to their country of origin, that lay both in their country of origin (e.g. the absence of a network) and in the Netherlands (e.g. having built something here). Osip is getting older and wants to stay close to his children and grandchildren who have obtained permits on various grounds. Due to these different reasons, he feels more attached to the Netherlands than to his country of origin, as he is referring to it as ‘a foreign country’. Although not all respondents described the Netherlands as ‘their country’, almost all respondents expressed a bigger attachment to the Netherlands than to their country of origin. Knowing the language, knowing their way, understanding a bit of the culture, having some acquaintances, etcetera, were things that often came back during the interviews. For Osip, a

combination of reasons makes him decide that he will never go back, no matter what happens: he is waiting for either a permit or the death.

Where Osip tells that his network has disappeared, Zayd knows that he still has family in his country of origin. However, this does not give him a better opportunity to return, partly because it is such a long time ago that he was in his country:

So I cannot go back to my country, you see. All the small children have grown up, my sisters are grandmothers now. My parents have died, so where should I go? I cannot start a new life there. And my sisters... their husbands would never accept me. (Zayd, 59, 31 years in The Netherlands)

He speaks about small children that have grown up now and about his sisters who are old now. This implies various things: there have passed many years, more than 30, and things have changed. People have continued their lives and Zayd has not been part of these lives for more than half of his life. Being with his sisters is not an option for him, because they have their families, especially their husbands, who are not at all awaiting him with open arms. On the contrary, 'they would not accept him', which makes it hard for Zayd to imagine that returning would be a realistic option. About eight respondents spoke about having some family in their country of origin and having some contact, although the frequency and intensity of the contact differed per person. However, when it came to getting the support of their families if they returned, they could, like Zayd, not see that as a realistic option. Further, Zayd says that he 'cannot start a new life there'. He probably does not only refer to the impossibility of getting the support of his family but only of becoming self-sufficient, for example by getting a job. Latif is wondering the same, and expressive depressive feelings about it:

I cannot go back, because... how could I work there? I am 54 now. With whom could I work? They would say: 'Sir, you are too old'. You do not have a profession, you do not have diplomas and your age is almost 55. (...) When I am thinking about the future, I can only think that I have fallen and cannot stand up. I have drowned and nobody gives me a hand. My future is black. (Latif, 54, 28 years in The Netherlands)

Latif knows that the economic situation in his country is not good and he estimates his chances of getting a job there, at his age and without any education, very low. Although Latif is the respondent with the fewest financial support of the whole group who even does not always have enough to eat, he estimates his chances in his country of origin even lower. Like many other respondents, he mentions his age and feels that becoming older lowers his chances to survive. This depicts the idea of many respondents: their age, and associated uncertainties and problems are becoming an 'extra' burden for their future. It is becoming a burden that brings almost all respondents in a kind of 'stalemate position': returning is not an option for them, but being in the Netherlands without papers starts to be a heavier load than before. For Latif, this load has become so heavy, that he is very negative and depressed about the future, which he expressively describes using metaphors like 'I have fallen', 'I have drowned' and 'nobody gives me a hand'. He gets some help of friends, but he knows that that is temporary and feels that his future is unknown. Although not as expressively as Latif, Evgeni also describes his life as quite a tough life, and things getting more complicated when thinking of the future:

The IND [Immigration and Naturalization Service] says that I can go back, but I am 100% sure that I cannot go back. If I could have, I would have returned. I mean, being in the Netherlands has not been easy for me. 15 years I am sleeping here, there, on the street and in rooms. (...) Many people around me go where they want to go. But I feel as if I am in prison, although I am not literally there. (...) And things get more complicated now I am getting older too. (Evgeni, 49, 14½ years in the Netherlands)

Evgeni uses the fact that he still is in the Netherlands and is having a hard time here as a kind of proof towards the IND that he cannot go back to his country of origin. He emphasizes that it has not been easy for him to be here: he even has slept on the street, sometimes for several months in a row and the other places where he could stay were always uncertain, including the room where he is staying now. Friends from before, for example, people that he met in asylum centers ‘go where they want to go’. Like all other participants, he knows that he cannot travel. Although it is not very likely that he and the other participants would be ‘caught’ if they crossed the border to Belgium or Germany, no one actually travels. This might partly because of fear, but also because of a lack of money. Evgeni feels ‘as if in prison’, a resemblance of the feeling of almost all participants: being stuck in their lives in the Netherlands. Almost half of the participants explicitly mention a ‘stalemate’ position: going back is not an option for them, but the situation here is bad and deteriorating. The notion of Evgeni that ‘other people go where they want to go’ can thus be seen as both literally and figuratively: other people (with permits) can travel, but also have more choices how to live their lives. Evgeni is the youngest of all participants, but he feels that his life is becoming more complicated due to his age. This might, for example, have to do with his health problems and with his idea of chances to get work once he has a permit (as he mentions in another part of the interview). He feels that 15 years is a long time and that there is not much chance that things get better as long as he is undocumented.



## **5. Discussion, conclusion and recommendations**

### **5.1 Discussion and conclusion**

Hereafter I will answer the research question: ‘What are the most important changes that have occurred in particular areas of life of long-term undocumented migrants and how have these changes interfered with their survival strategies? How do these changes influence their ideas about the future?’. To do so, I will discuss the most important findings and link these to the theoretical framework. Further, I will elaborate on the implications that this research has for existing theoretical and empirical knowledge, followed by recommendations for future research. I will finalize with possible policy implications.

People used several strategies to arrange income and housing: doing undeclared work and renting a place, receiving money or shelter from support organizations or getting the support of their networks of friends and acquaintances. They have been on the move a lot – including sleeping outside – in the course of 15-30 years and it has become more difficult when compared with 15-30 years ago. The most important reasons for not finding/having work anymore were stricter policies and stricter controls, health problems and, related to that, aging. The stricter policies and controls were especially noticed by those who had managed to make a living and to be working for many years. These respondents who had felt a considerable amount of ‘free choice’ to ‘live a good life’, were hampered in their lives by macro structures around them, as the others – who depended on others immediately after arrival – were, in a sense, hampered by structures around them from the beginning. Increasing difficulties to find a place to stay often had to do with, except for lacking money, a small or declining network. Both macro-, meso- and micro processes are at work here. The

deprivation of resources (e.g. not finding work because of changed policies, losing money and shelter of COA) by the government (macro process) hampers the economic situation of the respondents. Receiving support of organizations or of the network (meso process) is getting more difficult because of the many times/long periods that they received support. Personal problems, such as a deteriorating health (micro process) hampered former survival strategies (especially work). Structures seem to overrule the agency of the people; many 'subjective aspirations' that I referred to in the theoretical framework cannot become reality when people have to struggle for their daily bread and a roof over their heads.

Zooming in on the network of friends, acquaintances, and family (meso level), we see that it is and was often used for basic needs such as food, a place to sleep and moral support. As explained in the theoretical framework, the opportunities of undocumented migrants partly depend on their embeddedness in relational structures, often within the own ethnic group, but also within other migrant groups. In this research, it is clear that for the majority, respondents' networks are under pressure: it is small and fragmented since they came here or it has diminished or is at risk of diminishing; reasons why they cannot deploy their network enough for their basic needs anymore. The contact they have are both with co-ethnics, other nationals, and Dutch people, but the overall relational embeddedness has gotten weaker over time. People try to find solutions and try to unburden the persons they often go to. When they do not find support in their network any more or want to unburden it, they turn to support organizations. As we can see, the amount of choices lowers, so here again, structures seem to overrule the respondents' agency.

Regarding mental and physical health, the lives of the respondents changed a great deal during the course of their 15-30 year in the Netherlands. All reported stress about their situation and a great majority had feelings of desperation and felt 'out of control', feelings that, generally spoken, had become stronger, the longer people resided in the Netherlands

without papers. Various factors have contributed to such feelings, including stricter policies through which people lost their job, a declining network, arrest and detention and a repetitive 'no' of the IND. Thus, feelings of 'losing agency' grew stronger in the course of people's time in the Netherlands; a process on the micro level was influenced by micro-, meso- and macro processes, as shown by the factors mentioned above. Feelings of mental hardship could be so strong that suicide became an option to a part of the respondents.

Besides mental problems, a great majority suffered from physical constraints, that had deteriorated during their lives in the Netherlands. A worsening mental and/or physical health clearly influenced other areas of life, such as the possibilities to work, to think about the future and also housing. People had to find other ways of surviving (e.g. depending on network or support organizations) when they could not work anymore in particular jobs, which often brought them to a worse situation than before. A worsening physical health also influenced their mental health, because it made them worry a lot. It is noticeable that there were no complaints about their health treatments by general practitioners and in hospitals. More than that, half of the respondents were outspokenly positive about it and did not have the idea that they were treated differently than people with papers. Thus, medicines and professional help could, to some extent, alleviate both mental and physical pains. Where we see various forms of exclusion, including deprivation of disability benefits and an insurance, we also see that they find loopholes: professional medics did not care much about their undocumented status and helped them. In a sense, the state is not completely and effectively monitoring the execution of its laws here.

For a majority of the respondents, criminality did not play a role in their lives and it never did, yet almost as many respondents had been arrested and detained for not having papers and despite 'being innocent'. Criminal law and migration law intersect here and a process of 'crimmigration' is at work. Being arrested can be seen as intentional subordination

by a dominant party, through which inequality between the state and the undocumented migrant becomes visible. Although it would cost more time to unravel the interference of this process with other processes, such as working and having a place to stay, one could imagine that such processes interfere in a negative way: a period of detention can mean that people cannot work anymore, cannot get money of organisations anymore to pay an (illegally) rented room, etcetera. Inequality and exclusion of certain rights become visible in arrest and detention on the basis of a *master status of* being undocumented; all other qualities of a person, including ‘not doing criminal things’, are of less importance here. Becoming more rights and/or increasing ones chances on regularization by ‘living good’, as in some other countries (e.g. Spain or Germany), are not an option in the Netherlands. Further, arrest and detention of themselves and of others influence their lives outside of prison: they know that they are more vulnerable than others (a documented person is never detained for cycling without lights). As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the state can use this to ‘discipline’ undocumented migrants and tries to discourage others to become undocumented instead of leaving the country. In the structure/agency debate, structure again seems to predominate. However, a quarter of the respondents was never arrested, which probably means that they had strategies to evade arrest; an interesting thing that would need more investigation.

The most respondents find it very hard to think about the future because they do not see return as a realistic option and at the same time, being in the Netherlands without papers has proven to be hard as well. As explained in the analysis, they give many reasons for not wanting to return: the network in the country of origin has declined or would not support them, they think it is still dangerous, they do not want to go back empty-handed and/or they are afraid of not being able to get the right medical care and medicines. Further, some respondents explicitly said that they do not want to leave the Netherlands because they know

and like the country now, because they ‘feel Dutch’. However, the long-term of their undocumented stay in the Netherlands and 15, 20 or even 30 years of uncertainty take their toll: most respondents feel hopeless about their future. The reasons for this hopelessness, also about their situation in the Netherlands, can be found in various areas of their lives: no or low income, a small network, dependence on support organizations, worsening mental and physical health, rejections of the IND and periods of detention. All these points have fostered feelings of hopelessness and together with their ideas about return - they do not see it as a realistic option - many respondents see themselves in a stalemate position.

Seeing oneself in a stalemate position again does not imply much agency, at least the respondents do not see how to free themselves from the difficult position that they are in. From their perspective, it is hard to find loopholes in the system. However, now we have looked closely at various areas of their lives, there might still be some loopholes to be found and there might still some agency to be seen. After all, they literally have survived so far, by employing many different survival strategies, working at undeclared jobs, using their contacts such as friends, acquaintances, and family, asking organizations for support, and so forth. One could argue that they might be able to continue their undocumented lives. Yet the question is, how long they will hold on and if the structures they feel to be ‘caught in’ are not becoming to tight around them, as expressed in the analysis: ‘I am drowning. I am falling and I cannot stand up’. As mentioned before, many respondents still have contacts with lawyers, who are trying, via many different juridical ways, to get them their papers. They want to be embraced by the state and in a way, they wish that others can see them for their identity, not for their identity papers, the thing ‘that outweighs all other social characteristics’.

## **5.2 Implications for existing theoretical and empirical knowledge**

When comparing this research with relevant existing theoretical and empirical knowledge, various things come to the fore. The findings expose an overruling of agency by structures who are difficult to control by the undocumented migrants themselves. Although the amount of choice (regarding housing, support of the network, looking for medical support) differed per person, a general trend can be noticed of declining agency in the course of 15-30 years of living without papers. A mutual reinforcement of structures and agency of undocumented migrants, as Ambrosini (2013) proposed, might be ‘too optimistic’, in the sense that the population of this research does not seem to have much of a choice anymore. Further, the findings that even good conduct will not make the state ‘embracing’ this population and the confusion of them about this are in line with Engheeren’s ‘master status, that overpowers all other social characteristics’ (1999 in Gleeson et al. 2012). One can even meet the soft conditions to become embraced by the state (e.g. speaking Dutch, working as a volunteer and behaving well), but the papers overrule it and rather, a part of this population has experienced a process of ‘crimmigration’, which is in line with notions of various scholars (e.g. Staring 2012 and van der Woude et al. 2014).

Except for similarities with existing researches, there are also differences to be found. When looking at previous researches on undocumented migrants in the Netherlands, we might cautiously conclude that the extent of self-sufficiency, the mental and physical health, the using of support networks etc. on average become more problematic. The ‘loopholes’ proposed by Van der Leun (2003) seem to be much more limited than one or two decennia ago. Further, the relational embeddedness of this population seems lower than in researches of 20 years ago (e.g. Burgers et al. 2003 and Engbersen et al. 1999) and health problems are as big or bigger than in other studies (e.g. Kox 2010 and Koppes 2017). One of the reasons for

this might be the long term that this population has been in the Netherlands. No other previous study on undocumented migrants in the Netherlands has solely focussed on people who are here longer than 15 years, which appears to be a very relevant factor: generally speaking, their lives get worse, the longer they are here and their hopelessness increases.

This having said, it needs to be clear that the results of this study are not representable for the whole population of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands, nor for the part that can be seen as long-term undocumented migrants. The selection was purposive and the selected population was too small to be able to generalize. One might wonder if the selection process has had a (too) great impact on the results: when recruiting participants via support organizations, one can expect people who – obviously – are in need of support. However, because the selected population is in the Netherlands for more than 15 years, a majority did not receive help of these support organizations from the beginning. Many of them have been self-sufficient for certain periods of time, but the changes in their lives and around them, on micro-, meso- and macro-level have made them dependent on others. Further, a non-representative population like this, investigated through a qualitative method like in-depth interviews, can provide us a deeper understanding of their perspective and processes of behavior, seen in the light of the context in which they live. The in-depth semi-structured interview appeared to be a powerful tool to use in this context, including the flexibility that comes with it (e.g. regarding choice of place, order of questions, dealing with emotions and speaking about sensitive issues).

### 5.3 Recommendations for future research and policy implications

Given the scope of this project and arising from the results, there are topics that I did not investigate and that might be interesting and important topics for further research:

- It would be good to gain more information about the legal possibilities that people have had and the multiple procedures that they went through. Since by far not all respondents knew about their legal procedures – some, for example, referred to their lawyers for more information, others confused former procedures with a current one, etc. – I could not include legal issues and it would be interesting to find patterns in the ‘procedure history’ of long-term undocumented migrants and what (im)possibilities arise from that. In such a research, it would be wise to include interviews with social workers and/or lawyers who know the files of these people.
- It would be interesting to deepen out particular topics that also were part of this project, such as the possible future scenarios of long-term undocumented migrants, including their fears and unwillingness to return to their country of origin. The reasons for this unwillingness could, for example, be compared with return policies and the conditions of return that the government (the IND) executes. Also, Dutch migration policies (including return policies) could be compared with examples of other countries, such as the ‘*Duldung*’ program in Germany or the ‘*arraigo*’ program in Spain.
- Most respondents are fairly satisfied with medical treatments. However, it is not clear if the access to health care is the same as for documented people and it is likely that it is not, because medics are supposed to give only ‘emergency treatments’. More research would be good to see if especially this aging population receives all medical care that they are entitled to.



- If a researcher could get access to aging long-term undocumented migrants who are not supported by organizations, if there are any, it would be interesting to compare them with this group. They might be in a 'risk-zone', ready to ask for support, but to be sure about that, there should be more research.

This research might have the following policy implications for the national government, for local governments and for support organizations:

- Make sure that aging long-term undocumented migrants have 24 hour-shelter or that they receive money to rent a place. Be sure that the 'extra' vulnerable people (with mental and/or physical health problems) get enough time to recover or stabilize before they have to work on future scenarios. The constant search for housing and the pressure of conditions takes its toll and makes people mentally and physically unstable, especially taking into account their age and the health problems that they already have.
- Do not penalize documented people who take undocumented migrants in their house to stay there (for example by taking away or reducing social benefits). Rather, also offer support, for example, to think about future scenarios, to the undocumented migrants who live in their network.
- Improve prevention of physical health problems, especially the most common problems of aging people. For example: make sure that professionals who are in touch with long-term aging undocumented migrants can identify signals of health problems and will support them to go see a doctor; make sure that there is enough information provided at places that these people visit how they can identify health problems themselves, where they can go to a doctor and to what support they are entitled.
- Improve prevention and identification of mental health problems. Aging long-term undocumented migrants have much stress and feelings of 'losing control'. Make sure that

people are provided in their basic needs: a roof over their head, food and security and make sure that professionals can support them.

- Stop alien detention. It criminalizes vulnerable people who are not guilty and it disrupts their modes of survival (loss of the place where they stay, loss of money of support organizations, etc.), which can result in a more marginalized position once they return in the society.
- Develop a point of contact in the bigger cities for long-term undocumented migrants and collect the most common problems. This research shows that they have more specific problems than recent undocumented migrants which might need more specific support.
- Consider new policy-models in the Netherlands, similar to the '*arraigo*' program in Spain or the '*Duldung*' program in Germany. It is more aimed at justifying the presence and contribution of long-term undocumented migrants to the Dutch society.
- Consider a general amnesty and/or a permanent regularization for aging people who are in the Netherlands for more than 15 or years. These people have lost most contact and also 'mental connection' with their country of origin and/or have more network here (although small or under pressure). It is very likely that they will not go back and moreover, it is clear that these people often live in inhumane circumstances in the Netherlands.
- Take into account that that abovementioned suggestions are also usable for dealing with undocumented migrants who are here for a shorter period of time. Recent undocumented migrants have similar problems and this study shows that it is very likely that their problems will get worse, the longer they are in the Netherlands.

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## Appendix A Overview of respondents

	<b>Year of arrival</b>	<b>Years in the Netherlands</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>
Respondent 1 (male)	1990	27,5	50	Ghana
Respondent 2 (male)	1997	21	54	Iran
Respondent 3 (male)	1991	26,5	51	Ghana
Respondent 4 (male)	1992	26	56	Pakistan
Respondent 4 (male)	1992	26	56	Pakistan
Respondent 5 (male)	2001	17	63	Afghanistan
Respondent 6 (male)	1990	28	50+	Iran
Respondent 7 (male)	1989	29	64	Suriname
Respondent 8 (male)	2001	17	49	Afghanistan
Respondent 9 (male)	1987	31	54	Morocco
Respondent 10 (male)	1998	20	69	Afghanistan
Respondent 11 (male)	2002	15,5	68	Azerbaijan
Respondent 12 (male)	2003	14,5	49	Armenia
Respondent 13 (female)	2001	17,5	51	Cameroon
Respondent 14 (female)	1997	21	66	Ghana
Respondent 15 (male)	1990	28	58	Egypt
Respondent 16 (male)	1995	22,5	51	Sudan
Respondent 17 (female)	2000 (1985 Germany)	18	63	Ghana
Respondent 18 (male)	1990	28	54	Egypt
Respondent 19 (female)	1995	23	52	Cameroon
Respondent 20 (male)	1987	31	59?	Algeria

## **Appendix B Interview guide**

I hereby confirm that I will protect your anonymity to the best of my ability. No one but me will have direct access to the record of the interview and the transcription. I will make sure to anonymize your name when referring to parts of the interview in the report. I will avoid using, citing or publicizing parts of the interview that can directly lead to you.

### Demographics/Migration part I

(I expect to already know the name, age, and country of origin of the respondent, through the gatekeeper)

1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself? (Asking follow up q's, listen to important details)
2. Could you tell me a little bit about your migration 'history' here, in the Netherlands?
3. Specifically, and if it doesn't come out of q. 2: How long have you been in the Netherlands? (Was that consecutively or) have you been out of the Netherlands in the meantime? If yes, where have you been?
4. If not told yet: Have you had a residence permit? What did you do to obtain a residence permit (after you lost it)?

### Survival strategies part I (daily life/network/work)

5. How do you spend your days/evenings/weekends? → Not used a lot..!  
How has this changed over the years?
6. Could you tell me something about your family?  
How is your contact with friends/social workers/others? Are they from your own nationality, another nationality and/or Dutch?  
How has the contact with your network changed over the years?
7. How do you manage to make a living?  
If work is a part: what kind of job(s) do/did you have?  
If financial support: network? Family? NGO's?  
How has this been changing over the years?

### Criminal records and detention

8. Are there any activities you've gotten involved in since being in the Netherlands that you found difficult or made you uncomfortable?
9. (If not mentioned:) Did any of these activities have to do with criminality? Since... From other stories of undocumented migrants and from other researches, I know that it sometimes happens that one gets in touch with criminality/with people that are involved in criminal activities.
10. How did you get involved?

11. Being involved in criminal activities might involve detention as well. Have you been in detention?  
Specifying: was that 'normal' detention or alien detention? If yes, in both cases: how long and how did you get out? How did you feel when you were there and when you got out?

#### Survival strategies part II (health and housing)

12. How is your health (physical and psychological) and how has it been the past (...) years in The Netherlands? How has it been changing over the years?
13. Have you had health related support? If yes: where and how did you find it?
14. Another thing I've heard and seen is that some undocumented migrants experienced such hardship and rejections of the IND that they starting using drugs or alcohol. Did you? Have you had or do you have any addiction? If yes, did you receive help and how did you find it?
15. Where did you find housing all these years? How did you find it? How has this been changing over the years?

#### Future/Migration part II

16. You've told me some things about the past (20/...) years in the Netherlands. (If not told yet:) How did you actually come here? (If not in answer:) I've heard people telling about voluntarily leaving their country of origin, but also about forced leaving. Did you experience such a thing?
17. If not yet told/if relevant: You've told me about your criminal activities and something about your addiction. You also told me about your attempts to get a permit. How did these things have to do with each other? For example, did criminal activities or addiction have to do with not getting a permit?
18. What different options have you considered regarding the future (think of staying illegally, new procedure, migrating to other country, return to country of origin)? Specifically: have you considered return and if yes, why?
19. How do you think about the future now?  
Do you still have a network in your country of origin and what are their expectations?  
What kind of possibilities of survival would you have (financially, housing, medical care)?

## Appendix C Numerical representation of part of the data<sup>13</sup>

<b>HOUSING</b>	<b>After arriving</b>	<b>In between</b>	<b>Now</b>
Asylum Centre (COA)	13	13 (repeated procedure)	0
Renting room (own money)	5	9	0
Renting room of corporation (money of support org.)	0	4	4
Shelter night	0	9	4
Shelter 24h	0	11	6
In network (unpaid)	2	17	3
In network (paid with money support org./ municipality)	0	12	3
Street	0	10	0

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>After arriving</b>	<b>In between</b>	<b>Now</b>
Legal work	1	2	0
Undeclared work	6	15	0
Chores at COA	3	0	0
Small living allowance (COA, shelter, support org.)	13 (mostly COA)	15(+/-2)	11 (mostly support org.)
Small living allowance to rent a room	0	16	7
No income, food of others	0	15(+/-2)	2

<b>NETWORK</b>	
During time in the NL:	
Stable	9
Increasing	1
(At risk of) decreasing	11

<b>MENTAL HEALTH</b>	
Stable (during time in the NL)	2 (although reported stress)
Improving (during time in the NL)	1 (who now had permit)
Worsening (during time in the NL)	17
Professional help	9
Medicines	7
Thinking of suicide	5

<sup>13</sup> Numbers in all tables are based on a total of 20 respondents

<b>PHYSICAL HEALTH</b>	
Health problems (during time in the NL)	20
Very serious sickness (still or before)	6
Improving (during time in the NL, due to treatment)	6
Worsening (during time in the NL)	13
Stable (during time in the NL)	1
Positive about medics	10 (no one was negative)
Taking medicines	17

<b>CRIMINALITY AND DETENTION</b>	
Criminal records	3
Detention for criminal records	3
<u>Alien detention</u>	
None	5
1 day - 5 months	10
5-10 months	3
10+ months	2

<b>FUTURE/RETURN</b>			
Seriously considered to leave	6	Do not want to leave the NL	20
<u>Did not go because:</u>		<u>Reasons:</u>	
Fear of danger in country of origin	4	Fear of danger in country of origin	9
No network	5	No network/ network is old, sick or moved	15
Was advised not to go	1	Not back empty-handed/not willing to start at 0	9
Medical problem	2	No acces to medical care in country of origin	9
No money	1	NL is good/I feel Dutch	5