STATE OF THE ART

BBOX
OCMW/CPAS and new migrants: opening the black box of policy in practice

Authors of this paper:
Roberta Perna, Hanne Vandermeerschen, Elsa Mescoli & Abraham Franssen

Promotors
Peter De Cuyper, Jean-Michel Lafleur & Abraham Franssen

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1 | Introduction

Throughout Belgium, the Public Centers for Social Welfare (PCSW) play a crucial role in granting access to social benefits for new migrants, and more generally, in their settling process and integration. For many newly arrived immigrants, the contact with social workers represent one of the first or main connections with local society. In addition, decisions taken at the PCSW can have a long-term influence on the integration of newly arrived. However, little is known about (1) the practices and interventions towards newcomers in PCSW's, nor is it clear which are (2) the underlying policies or motives that frame and motivate these practices and interventions. Therefore, we decided to undertake a study focusing on the policies and practices of granting of rights and social activation implemented by the PCSW with respect to newly arrived immigrants (newcomers). More specifically, we refer to non-EU nationals who have been living in Belgium for less than 5 years, with different administrative and legal statuses. Recognized refugees and newcomers who have been granted subsidiary protection constitute a major part of this group.

The number of beneficiaries of one or the other form of social assistance granted by the 589 PCSW's of Belgium has greatly increased over the last 10 years: the number of beneficiaries of a Social Integration Income (RIS) has increased from about 80.000 beneficiaries in 2008 to 144.151 in 2019. Of these, 25.502 RIS are attributed to recognized refugees or on subsidiary protection. According to the SPP Intégration Sociale (2019), recognized refugees currently represent 11.2% of the total population of RIS beneficiaries, which underlines the importance of understanding policy practice towards this group.

As demonstrated through several studies for the overall population (e.g. De Wilde & Marchal, 2019; Dumont,2012; Driessens & Franssen, 2015; Raeymaeckers & Dierckx, 2013), PCSW's differ between them in terms of the practices they apply when it comes to the granting of rights and social activation strategies. The reason for the differences lies in the (1) autonomy of PCSW's, who can have specific guidelines inside a common legal frame, and the so called (2) 'discretionary power' of social workers. It is therefore important to investigate how PCSW's deal with newly arrived immigrants as a target group, and whether PCSW's are well-equipped to cope with their specific needs, as other studies show this cannot be taken for granted (Brussig & Knuth, 2013).

Concerning the autonomy of PCSW's, Franssen and Driessens (2015) highlighted various factors that profoundly influence local welfare policy. Among these factors is the political affiliation of the representatives of the Social Welfare Council, as it must be borne in mind that they ultimately decide on the requests made to the PCSW. Formal and informal guidelines for social workers and the varying degrees of severity of applicants are considerably different from one center to another. The organizational characteristics of each PCSW, its service offer, as well as the socio-economic environment where it is located, are elements likely to have a substantial influence on the practices implemented. Based on these elements, we expect practices targeting newcomers to vary between PCSW's as well. Another factor influencing differences between PCSW's (and even within PCSW's), however, lies in the fact that social workers are typically 'street level bureaucrats' (we will develop this literature further in a specific section of this report), i.e. *"public service workers who interact directly with citizens and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work"* (Dubois, 2010; Lipsky, 1980). This discretion is necessary to translate guidelines into concrete practice in the field. In the context of

activation and elsewhere, discretion is not only 'an inescapable feature' (Terum et al., 2018: 39), it is also necessary for service delivery and effective policy implementation, as not everything can be spelled out in rules.Yet, the problem is that the discretion of the social workers, while being necessary, inherently carries a risk of differential treatment, or in this case perhaps also discrimination and the reproduction or reinforcement of social inequality (see e.g. Lotta&Pires, 2019; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2012; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2019; Thomann& Rap, 2018). Moreover, the clients themselves may experience this discretion either positively or negatively.

Concretely, the objective of our research is threefold. First, we will map the practices concerning granting of rights and social activation interventions targeting newly arrived immigrants/refugees at the PCSW level and make a typology of current policies and practices in terms of granting of rights and social activation interventions, thus bringing insight in present-day policy implementation. Second, we aim to shed light on the factors influencing the choices and decisions that social workers make concerning the allocation of social benefits and the application of social activation policies to newly arrived immigrants and refugees. We will take into account the societal, organizational and personal factors leading to these choices and decisions (thus providing an in-depth understanding of what gives rise to the identified strategies and of how they can be influenced). By doing this, we also aim to understand how the responsibilities over these issues are distributed and concretely performed in the field. Third, this study will provide insight in the accessibility of PCSW for newcomers and in the perception of the service delivery from the perspective of new foreign beneficiaries, who are often dependent on PCSW for their first steps into Belgian society, at least once they receive their residence permit.

This paper is to be considered as the first step in this study, presenting a literature review on the topic. Rather than jumping immediately to the empirical part of this research, we find it appropriate to first take a step back and establish a state of the art of the research in this area. The aim of the literature research presented here is to identify the lessons from this field of research, which will subsequently guide us in our empirically research. The literature study will allow us to fine-tune our research focus, make adequate choices in terms of research design and methodologies, and formulate plausible hypotheses. In the literature study, we focused on two subtopics and the associated branches of literature which we consider of fundamental importance for this research, more specifically the concept of accessibility, and the notion of "street level bureaucrats".

This paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, we will provide some information about the context of this research, addressing more particularly the (theoretical) functioning of the Public Centers for Social Welfare in Belgium and their role with regard to newly arrived immigrants. Subsequently, a third section provides insights in the concept of accessibility, which is of great value to understand the experience of users (migrants) and to evaluate service delivery. Further sections will then deal with the literature on streetlevel bureaucracies, which is in fact part of the puzzle in terms of accessibility of services. Therefore, in a fourth section, we present the main highlights from the (general) literature on street-level bureaucracy, starting off with the basic principles as established by Michael Lipsky (1980/2010), followed by a discussion on the evolution of the debate by other (and later) authors. In a fifth paragraph, we move to the central focus of our study, and present an overview of empirical findings in earlier research on how street-level bureaucracy operates in contexts similar to the context which we consider, i.e. the domain of activation, social assistance and welfare (solidarity). Moving forward even more to the centre of the debate, in a sixth paragraph, research on street-level bureaucracies and the welfare state in a context of migration and targeting clients of foreign origin are presented. In the conclusion, the lessons of the literature review are summarized, and the implications for the concrete implementation of our research are discussed.

2 | Research context: Public Centres for Welfare in Belgium and their role with regard to newly arrived immigrants

Our research project focuses on the policies and practices of social integration and activation implemented by the PCSW (called 'OCMW' in Dutch, or 'CPAS' in French) with regard to newcomers, that is to say people from non-European foreign nationality, legally present for less than 5 years on Belgian territory. In the context of the PCSW, a large part of this public of newcomers consists of recognized refugees or people who have been granted subsidiary protection.

First, it is important to specify that the **PCSW is not the only institution concerned with the reception and integration of newly arrived immigrants.** Depending on the status of the newcomer and his/her personal and family situation, other institutions such as municipal administrations, public employment and training services, socio-professional integration services (ISP), educational institutions, youth support services, and ultimately all the institutions that deliver public policies may be called upon to intervene and impact the trajectories of newcomers (Adam et al, 2018). It will therefore be necessary to take into account the connections and interactions between the various public and associative actors who constitute together the **public action network and the "multi-level" and "multi-actor" system of governance** of migration and integration issues in Belgium (Adam, Martiniello, & Rea, 2018; Hondeghem 2017; Van Heffen, Kickert, & Thomassen, 2000) concerned with the issue of reception and integration of newcomers.

In addition, there are **specific policies dedicated to the integration of newcomers,** with the establishment since 2004 in Flanders (and Brussels) of the "inburgeringtraject", in Wallonia of the "parcours d'integration pour primo-arrivants" since 2014, while in Brussels the BAPA (Bureau d'Accueil pour Primo-Arrivants, or Reception Office for newly arrived immigrants), a French-speaking reception program for newcomers, has been operationalised since 2016, (Xhardez, 2016). These reception[1] and integration policies - which have specificities and differences according to the regions - may overlap or interfere with the policies and practices of the PCSW targeting newcomers. This is the case for example of the interaction between the PIIS/GPMI (Projet individualisé d'intégration sociale), managed by the PCSW, and the integration programs mentioned above managed by the regional integration centres. Previous research has shown that these policies have not been elaborated – nor are they always implemented – in concertation among the different political levels and actors involved, and this fact may cause malfunctioning (see Gossiaux et al., 2019). On the other hand, not all newcomers necessarily apply for the RIS and the social benefits provided by the PCSW, either because they do not comply with the requested conditions of access to the concerned measures or because they are unaware that they could receive it, or because they deliberately decide not to resort to this kind of help or support (non-take up). Regardless of the reason for not applying – whether they do not need the social service, they do not know about it or they do not want it - newcomers develop other ways and strategies of survival and integration, including the direct

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[1] As for the reception of newcomers, it is mainly managed by federal bodies, and organized in collective reception centres hosting asylum seekers. However, the reception system also relies on local initiative of reception (ILA) hosting families with high potential of recognition of the refugee status, or newly recognized refugees before they enter the general housing system.

integration into the job market, and the mobilization of family and community solidarity (a "social capital" playing a crucial role in integration) (Gossiaux et al., 2019). Particularly for some communities, informal, friendly and family support and information networks play an important role in their integration process (Kasongo Dioso, 2015).

The fact remains that by virtue of their position in the social assistance system in Belgium and by their funcions, the PCSW constitutes a key actor whose finalities, functioning and services need to be studied in order to be able to understand the role and the impact of this institution on the integration of newcomers.

2.1   The missions of the PCSW: from "bancontact of the poor" to social integration

In Belgium, the social assistance granted by the PCSW aims to enable everyone to lead a life in conformity with human dignity (Art 1 of the Organic Law of the PCSW of 1976). This is subsidiary and residual aid, granted as a last resort, on the basis of the state of need, determined individually through a social investigation aimed at assessing the effective needs of the concerned person. This is why the PCSW agencies are considered to be the first and the last safety net, for those who do not have access to other forms of social protection or once the possibilities of applying to other social rights have been exhausted. Over the past 20 years (and even the last 45 years if we take into account the establishment of the PCSW in 1974 and the organic law of 1976), the PCSW as an institution has undergone considerable changes in its missions, organization, service delivery, socio-political environment and, as a consequence, in terms of the profiles of its beneficiaries.

2.1.1   The Right to Social Integration (2002)

Since the law of 2002 on the Right to Social Integration (DIS) ("Wet van 26 mei 2002 betreffende het recht op maatschappelijke integratie"), the general principle of socio-professional activation is an essential objective and condition of the assistance provided by the PCSW (Dumont, 2015). Even though reasons of equity and health can be invoked to exempt the applicant for assistance, allowing for an exception on this general principle, social assistance is now underpinned by the purpose of integration through and into employment. As the explanatory memorandum to the 2002 law on the right to social integration explains: *"The right to social integration is guaranteed by the PCSW when it offers a job to a suitable person. In order to receive the living income, the person concerned must indeed be willing to accept a job."* In French, the PCSW's – "Centre public d'**aide** sociale" - have been reclassified as "Centre public d'**action** sociale", meaning that this institution should not only be the last bulwark against social exclusion, it must above all be a springboard towards 'social integration'. As Daniel Dumont notes, the leitmotif of the DIS law is to move from strictly financial assistance to social action (Dumont, 2015: 175).

Almost 20 years after its introduction, the principle of striving for social integration is now commonly accepted and firmly integrated in the functioning of the PCSW's. At the level of political actors and those in charge of PCSW, a broad consensus exists around the idea that the merely granting of social allowances (the PCSW as "Bancontact for the poor" ") does not suffice to counter the phenomenon of social exclusion which is a multi-dimensional and multi-factorial phenomenon.

2.1.2 Between employment and social activation

Along the same line, the PCSW have considerably strengthened their socio-professional integration tools through a wide variety of organizational forms and professional practices, in particular through the development of ISP (socio-professional integration) services and opportunities for the employment of beneficiaries under the "Article 60§7"[2] contract. The latter is the main form of employment used by the PCSW insofar as the institution directly manages it by acting legally as an employer. Individuals benefitting from this measure can be working in the PCSW's own services or at third-party services or companies.

If socio-professional integration and employment are the goals that are put forward through these measures, it should be noted that for a majority of PCSW users, **this goal remains distant, even elusive.** For example, in the Brussels-Capital Region, data for 2013 indicate that only a third of the beneficiaries of the integration income are the subject of support in terms of socio-professional integration, and the proportion of those who actually integrate in employment (mainly and temporarily via 'article 60' jobs) is even more reduced (Degraef & al., 2013).

The limits and difficulties in socio-professional integration have led many PCSW's **to develop specific social activation programs and mesures**. The term "social activation" labeling these measures refers to a category that allows for the financing of activities implemented by the PCSW through the Participation and Social Activation Fund provided for by the SPP Social Integration and it has been the subject of circulars setting the criteria of subsidization. However, a study carried out in 2012, commissioned by the SPP Social Integration highlighted the large diversity of social activation practices among PCSW's. *"Under the term 'social activation', a wide range of activities is offered, ranging from training projects such as language and computer courses to activities offered in a day center, socio-cultural activities and recreational, support groups, arbeidszorg, etc. Volunteering can also be part of it."* Franssen et al., 2013).

Due to the diversity in prospective beneficiaries and services delivered, categorizing and orienting users has become a central task of the PCSW (as organization) and of social workers (as fields agents).

2.1.3 The PIIS/GPMI as a central instrument for the action of the PCSW

The individualization of support has been further reinforced by the generalization of the PIIS. Indeed, since September 1st 2016, the PCSW has been required to formalize an "Individual Social Integration Project" (PIIS - GPMI) with all beneficiaries of the Social Integration Income, except for reasons of equity and health (appreciated by the PCSW). The PIIS represents a "contract" established between the PCSW and the beneficiary of the aid, specifying the objectives of social integration (engaging in studies or training, active search for employment, etc.) pursued by the user with the support of social workers from the PCSW. In others words, the PIIS is presented as a contract that lists the mutual rights and duties of the beneficiary and the competent PCSW. Whereas until 2016, it was only used for young people under 26 who relied on the PCSW, at present, it is compulsory for everyone. Non-compliance with the signed contract may result in a penalty of one month's withdrawal of the integration income (RIS) (three months in case of recurrence).

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[2] By working under an article 60 contract, the beneficiary can acquire professional experience as well as recover his / her right / or have access to unemployment. The duration of the contract corresponds in fact to the necessary duration which the beneficiary needs to be entitled to unemployment at the end of his / her employment contract. One of the criticisms generally leveled at the "article 60" mechanism is that it does not allow lasting integration into employment.

The establishment of the PIIS ensures a certain formalization of the objectives and the means implemented in the support of each user. For this reason, accounting for this measure is crucial to analyze PCSW practices. Notwithstanding the aim of formalization of the PIIS, previous research (Franssen et al., 2015) highlighted the large diversity of the types of PIIS (which are generally based on standard models which are personalized: PIIS-project determination, PIIS-study, PIIS-training, PIIS-house search, PIIS-professional insertion) and their implementation. Some PCSW's have thus developed a "PIIS-newcomer" model which provides for the monitoring of the "Integration path" implemented by the Regions.

2.2 The diversity of political orientations, organizational cultures and services of the PCSW

The diversity of the practices of the PCSW and their social workers is linked to the autonomy of the PCSW. Despite a trend towards the standardization of procedures – through the standards set by the PPS Social Integration (POD Maatschappelijke Integratie/SPP Intégration Sociale) and verified by the inspection services, and also through the implementation of IT tools (e.g. management of files) – each of the 589 PCSW's in Belgium constitutes a specific organization[3], the characteristics of which are determined by several factors, which will be described in the following sections of this chapter.

2.2.1 Philosophical, political and normative differences in the interpretation and application of legal and regulatory frameworks.

Despite a convergence on the principle of activation, we observe divergences between PCSW actors who place a focus on rights and those who place it more on the duties of the beneficiaries. Practices and discourses oscillate between these two poles. In the first case, the actors tend to limit the requirements of the contractualization of the integration income, which they consider to be unconditionally due to anyone whose state of need has been proven and objectified by the social investigation ("enquête sociale"). These PCSW's also tend to implement their integration mechanisms on a voluntary, non-binding basis, taking the demands, needs and desires of the person as a starting point. In the other case, it is considered that in exchange for the integration income (RIS/Leefloon), the user is bound to a series of legitimate obligations and that, in the event of non-compliance with these conditions, the integration income can be withdrawn.

A crucial point influencing the approach of each PCSW concerns **the willingness to work of its beneficiaries**. This notion is also the subject of divergent interpretations, ranging from strict to broad interpretations and resulting in varying requirements from one PCSW to another, especially in terms of "proof" of the implemented measures/received benefits. The same variety of approaches also concerns the assessment of possible exemptions on grounds **of "equity and health"**. Some PCSW's establish guidelines in this area while others stress the non-generalizable nature of these criteria, which by definition must be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

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[3] Even if in Flanders, the PCSW's are now merged into the municipality.

There are important differences between PCSW's from the point of view of the range of services that can be offered to users and the ways in which the trajectories are organized. While all the PCSW's have a general social service, in accordance with the legal prescription, the vast majority of the PCSW's also have an ISP service (sometimes reduced to a part-time staff and the possibility of offering certain users an article 60 job). The range of services also depends on the resources of the local network and on the partnerships established by the PCSW with other operators (working in specific domains such as alphabetization and language learning, education/training, ISP, social participation).

In other words, the PCSW functioning has moved gradually, depending on the size of the agency and the local political and organizational dynamics:

> 1) From a **PCSW providing "a basic service"**: granting of financial assistance (RIS, equivalents, one-off social assistance), with more or less regular monitoring by the social worker of reference;

> 2) to a **PCSW proposing / imposing for some of the users to take part to an ISP trajectory which may lead, for some of them, to employment - possibly via an article 60**. Depending on the size and organizational development of the PCSW (presence or not of an offer of "orientation and project determination", of training, of "employment tables", etc.), this support for socio-professional integration can itself be more or less concise or on the contrary complete. It can be slightly differentiated (i.e. only consisting in global monitoring) or on the contrary highly specialized (organised in several modules and stages).

> 3) to **PCSW's which have developed a "holistic", "360 degree" offer and approach**, ideally covering all users (those in great social distress as well as those ready for employment) and the various dimensions of their social and professional integration. Beyond the variety in the range of services, the integration trajectory of users is therefore organized in a variable manner. The degree of systematicness and specialization of the trajectories varies mainly according to the size of the PCSW and the available staff.

Thus, in some large PCSW's, we can observe a very sequenced and linear organization of the services or programs, where the user, in the course of his/her trajectory, passes from one service to another and from one referent to another and where his/her file, computerized, is accessible to all workers of the agency. Other PCSW agencies opt for much more integrated follow-ups, where the user keeps the same referent throughout his/her trajectory (Driessens et al., 2016).

2.3   Organizations under pressure from their environment

Finally, we must also take into account the increased pressures weighing on the PCSW's. The PCSW's, and therefore primarily their staff, have experienced a strong intensification of work over the past 20 years, leading to a scarcity of time and resources, amongst other things. PCSW staff complains, on the one hand, about the lack of time and resources and, on the other hand, about the lack of recognition of the scale and complexity of their work. Action-research carried out in 2014 with the PCSW agencies of the Brussels Region has already highlighted the pressures of the social, legal and political environment on their functioning, leading them to be confronted with a **triple "crisis" and mutation:**

1 - A permanent change in their users and their needs. The number of beneficiaries of one or another form of social assistance granted by the 589 PCSW in Belgium has increased very sharply over the past 10 years. The number of beneficiaries of a Social Integration Income increased from around 80,000 beneficiaries in 2008 to 144,151 in 2019. Of these, 25,502 RIS are allocated to recognized refugees or in subsidiary protection. In addition to the continuous increase in the number of beneficiaries, their problems and issues are evolving as well: from the residual populations of the "old poor" to "new poor" (young people, newcomers, people excluded from unemployment benefits, students, working poor, etc.), and from the need for assistance and material repairs to "multiple and complex" difficulties. These pressures related to the quantity and diversity of the beneficiaries are particularly exacerbated in the context of large cosmopolitan cities.

2 - **A change in its mission.** In addition to the changes already mentioned above, the autonomy of the PCSW's have led to the continuous definition of new goals and services (such as housing, energy, young people, social remobilization, training, citizenship, culture).

3- **A change in its organization.** Although local contexts are heterogeneous (think for example of the fact that since 2019, the PCSW's are 'integrated' ('ingekanteld') in the municipalities in Flanders), the PCSW does not escape the widespread transversal trends and demands of "managerial modernization" and the "new public management" of public action, relying on computerization and evaluation, constitution of the user as "client", professionalization and systematization of procedures, etc. (Degraef & al, 2013)

These factors and characteristics are all variables to be taken into account when analyzing the practices of PCSW and their actors towards their audiences in general. It will be necessary to analyze whether and how these variables influence the practices with regard to newcomers.

3 | Conceptualizing accessibility

Accessibility is an important underlying concept in the design of our study on policy practice towards immigrants. Indeed, one of the central research goals is to understand the accessibility of PCSW's for newcomers and to explore the perception of the service delivery from the perspective of new foreign beneficiaries. Therefore, we deem it necessary to include the meaning and operationalization of the concept of accessibility in our literature search. To do that, we needed to expand our search from the specific context of people of foreign origin – with available research focusing mainly on barriers for (subgroups of) immigrants in specific settings – to other research fields on care and service delivery not targeting migrants, since we were looking for a more general framework to orient or guide our empirical analyses. Especially in the context of health care research, a lot of work has been done to develop frameworks that allow to understand accessibility and its implications, which is informative for this study. Clearly, our context is different, as we focus on welfare and activation of new immigrants, rather than on health care. However, the developed ideas can guide our analyses, while we still make sure to take the specificity of our research setting into account. This section on accessibility is based on a broader literature research we performed earlier in the context of the development of an evaluation framework for Flemish integration policy (see Vandermeerschen, Havermans & De Cuyper, 2020); we have selected the most relevant aspects for the purpose of this study.

In the literature, there is no consensus on a definition of accessibility. Yet, to give an idea of what 'accessibility' means, we can refer to the definition of the World Health Organisation (1978) as an example, stating that *'Accessibility implies the continuing and organized supply of care that is geographically, financially, culturally and functionally within easy reach of the whole community. The care has to be appropriate and adequate in content and amount to satisfy the needs of people and it has to be provided by methods acceptable to them'* (pp. 58-59). Other examples include Rogers (1999), stating that *'Optimal access means providing the right service at the right time in the right place'* (p. 866); or Frenk (1992) defining accessibility as *the degree of adjustment between the characteristics of health care resources and those of the population within the process of seeking and obtaining care."*

Even though there is a large variety in definitions,it is however acknowledged that accessibility is a complex and multidimensional concept (Russell et al., 2013) and various recurring elements can be identified throughout the multitude of definitions in the academic literature. In what follows, these recurring elements will be presented one by one.

3.1 'Degree of fit' – interaction between the client and the system

A first important element, which can be found in many definitions of accessibility, is the idea of a "degree of fit", more particularly between clients and the system. This idea was already a key element in the seminal work of Penchansky and Thomas (1981), who define access as *"a concept representing the degree of 'fit' between the clients and the system. (…). Access is viewed as the general concept which summarizes a set of more specific areas of fit between the patient and the health care system"* (p.128). Comparing definitions of access in the context of health care, Russell et al. (2013) reach the same conclusion, stating that *"access to health care involves dynamic interactions between health service characteristics and population characteristics"*. Put

differently, a first element to retain when studying accessibility, is that accessibility should not be seen as an 'absolute' characteristic of a service, but rather as the result of an interplay between a service on the one hand, and the users on the other, as well as the degree of fit between both. As argued by Russell et al. (2013: 61), the implication of this is that policy interventions cannot merely target the 'supply side' (the characteristics of the service, 'the system') but always need to consider the interplay with the 'demand side' (the characteristics and needs of the population, 'the clients') as well.

3.2   Interplay between multiple actors at different levels

Secondly, and closely related to the previous point, accessibility is the result of an interplay between multiple actors at different levels. For example, a distinction to make is between the service providers (those actors which are called 'street level bureaucrats' earlier, who are in direct contact with the clients/users/beneficiaries), and the system itself (EXPH, 2016). At the level of the service providers, elements such as the staff composition (number, socio-economic and demographic characteristics, etc.), their knowledge, skills, their preconceptions, perceptions, attitudes, etc. play a role into the accessibility of the service itself. Also intercultural competences are part of it. At the level of the system, factors to consider are for example the affordability, acceptability or availability of the service (EXPH, 2016; cf. infra). In addition, other domains or components of society can play a role, such as the general attitude towards foreigners in society. Lammertyn (1998), amongst others (see also Vandenbroeck and Lazzari, 2014 for another example), made a similar point, distinguishing different actors operating at different levels to establish the accessibility of a service. Among the actors, they mention the client/person in need and the care worker. Accessibility is influenced by the way in which the service delivery or organization is designed and organized (including the availability of resources, the working conditions, etc.), by the global structure of the care (including how it was organized and institutionalized over the years, what responsibilities are placed in a same organization, is it public or commercial, etc.), and by the broader society (impact of the policies of other overlapping or connected fields, presence or absence of support in society, etc.). In sum, this second element shows that what is referred to as the 'system' operating in an accessibility process should be further disentangled; it comprises different components, actors and levels, interacting with each other.

Before discussing a third relevant element of the conceptualization of accessibility, we need to mention some additional research findings with regard to the impact of the 'system' (and more particularly, the organization of it) on accessibility, which seem particularly relevant in the context of our study on welfare policies and policy practice towards immigrants. Koning and Banting (2013) show that the legal framework and regulations have a clear impact on accessibility. These authors analysed forms of social exclusion in terms of welfare/social protection of immigrants in Canada. They mention, among other things, that practices of exclusion are structural in social protection systems due to what they call 'direct disentitlement', i.e. not (yet) having the right to certain forms of protection or support as an immigrant compared to other citizens (think of regulations on the right to work, differences in social security entitlement, etc.).

Relevant in the context of our study is also the concept of 'administrative burden' (Burden et al., 2012; Moynihan e.a., 2014). Administrative burden is defined as an individual's experience of policy implementation as onerous (Burden et al., 2012). These are burdens which citizens experience when interacting with public administrations, and these burdens have an impact on whether or not they can access and use these services. The 'burdens' differ from rules; they are costs that individuals experience in their concrete dealings with government. Administrative burden consists of 'learning costs', 'psychological costs' and 'compliance costs'. Table %% shows how the various components of 'administrative burden' are defined.

Table 1The components of administrative burden (Moynihan et al., 2014: 46)

Type of cost	Application to social policy
Learning costs	Citizens must learn about the program, whether they are eligible, the nature of benefits, and how to access services
Psychological costs	Citizens face stigma of participating in an unpopular program, as well as the loss of autonomy and increase in stress arising from programm processes
Compliance costs	Citizens must complete applications and re-enrollments, provide documentation of their standing and avoid or respond to discretionary demands

Third, based on insights from behavioral economics, the authors argue that individuals do not take a rational approach when it comes to these burdens; costs and benefits are not rationally weighed but rather experienced personally and emotionally: "*the impact of burdens depends on how individuals construct the world, not on objective measures of costs and benefits*" (Moynihan et al., 2014: 46). For example, 'reasonable' burdens from a policy maker's point of view can have a major impact on citizens. In addition, there is a tendency to choose the 'now' over the future, and avoiding burdens in the 'now' may be preferred over significant benefits in the longer term (e.g. not investing in a long application procedure in the present, whereas this would provide benefits in the future). In summary: small burdens can be a big deal, as Moynihan and colleagues phrase it. The authors also emphasize that creating or reducing such burdens is often also a political choice; they speak of 'hidden politics', in which meaningful policy changes can take place relatively 'unnoticed'; changes in regulations and the like can pass for 'technical matters' while in fact it concerns substantive, political choices concretely impacting the individuals' experience of the concerned system/services.

3.3 Accessibility as a continuum

The terminology of 'degree of fit' (see above), or also 'degree of adjustment', implicitly indicates that accessibility is a continuum. It is not a black and white story, but there are many shades of grey in between. In addition, Ricketts and Goldsmith (2005) underline that access is also a dynamic process *'where there is the potential for individuals and families to learn and modify their behavior'* (p. 274). The authors speak of 'dynamic axes of learning and adaptation'. Clients are, in a sense, consumers who learn from experience and act on that experience to choose whether or not to make use of a service. Ricketts and Goldsmith also add that the dynamic nature of access is often not included in research.

3.4 Multidimensionality

According to Penchansky and Thomas (1981), the 'degree of fit' translates into a number of 'areas of fit', or dimensions of access. These different dimensions are availability, accessibility, accommodation, affordability, and acceptability. In table %% we present the explanations per dimension, as expressed by Penchansky and Thomas. The examples come from the health care sector as the dimensions were developed by the authors in this context.

Table 2 Dimensions of access according to Penchansky and Thomas (1981)

Dimension	Explanation
Availability	The relationship of the volume and type of existing services (and resources) tothe clients' volume and types of needs.
Accessibility	The relationship between the location of supply and the location of clients, taking account of client transportation resources and travel time, distance and cost
'Accommodation'	The relationship between the manner in which the supply resources are organized to accept clients (including appointment systems, hours of operation, walk-in facilities, telephone services) and the clients' ability to accommodate to these factors and the clients' perception of their appropriateness
Affordability	The relationship of prices of services and providers' insurance or deposit requirements to the clients' income, ability to pay, and existing health insurance.
Acceptability	The relationship of clients' attitudes about personal and practice characteristics of providers to the actual characteristics of existing providers, as well as to provider attitudes about acceptable personal characteristics of clients

These dimensions can be found in later work of many other authors, often in a modified or further developed form. The definitions of the dimensions differ between authors as well. As giving an exhaustive overview would lead us too far from our specific research aims?, we will pick the work of Russell and colleagues (2013) as an illustration (other examples: see f.i. Levesque et al., 2013; Roose&Bouverne-de Bie, 2003; Thomasevski, 2001; Vandenbroeck&Lazzari, 2004). Russell and colleagues (2013) come to 7 dimensions: the dimensions of availability, affordability, accommodation and acceptability are retained, while 'accessibility' (which is a dimension in the work of Penchansky& Thomas, amongst others) is captured here by 'timeliness' and 'geography'. They also add 'awareness' as an extra dimension. Table %% gives an overview of the description of each dimension by Russell et al. (2013:64). Of particular interest in this overview is that the idea of 'degree of fit', of interplay between supply and demand, is strongly expressed in the presentation of the dimensions.

Table 3 Dimensions of access by Russell et al. (2013: 64)

Dimension	Definition: The fit between:		
	Health system characteristic	↔	Population characteristic
1. Availability[19,10,17,18]	The volume and type of services	↔	The volume and type of population needs
2. Geography[7,20]	The proximity of providers to consumers	↔	The ease with which the population can transcend this space
3. Affordability[10]	The direct and indirect costs of securing health care	↔	The consumer's ability to meet direct and indirect costs of health care
4. Accommodation[10,13]	The manner in which the supply resources are organised	↔	The consumers' ability to contact, gain entry to and navigate the health system
5. Timeliness	The time until health care can be provided	↔	The urgency of the need for health care
6. Acceptability[10,24]	The provider's attitudes and beliefs about health and personal characteristics of consumers (eg. age, gender, religion, ethnicity)	↔	The consumer's attitudes and beliefs about health and personal and practice characteristics of providers
7. Awareness	The communication of health and health systems information to consumers	↔	The consumer's understanding of their health needs and knowledge of how to have these needs met.

Source: Russel et al, 2013:64

Russell and colleagues further concretised the different dimensions by translating these into key questions that policymakers need to address in order to ensure reasonable access. The concrete context here is that of the access to primary health care in remote and rural areas of Australia (PHC stands for primary health care). However, the issues that the authors raiseare of relevance for our study since they are based on a concrete example of how the dimensions of access/accessibility can be operationalized in more specific questions for research and policy, showing how these dimensions of accessibility translate into practice.

Table 4 Translation of dimensions of access into key questions for policymakers, by Russell et al. (2013:66)

Access dimension	Key policy question
Availability	Are sufficient core PHC services available to consumers in rural and remote communities?
Geography	How easily can consumers in rural and remote communities get to PHC services, or services be delivered to consumers?
Affordability	How easily can consumers in rural and remote communities afford PHC services?
Accommodation	Is the PHC service organized in such a way that suits the context from which the consumer comes?
Timeliness	Is the PHC service easily obtained in a timely way?
Acceptability	How well does the PHC service meet the sociocultural needs of consumers?
Awareness	How well do consumers understand their health issues and PHC services available to them

3.5   Criticisms and pitfalls in studying accessibility

In the literature on accessibility, many author stress the fact that quality should also be taken into account when studying this process, whereas this element often tends to be omitted (Goddard & Smith, 2001). Moreover, Goddard and Smith note that the quality of services provided to clients with identical needs can differ between population groups, which actually brings us back to the value of the concept of street level bureaucrats in this context, and gives support to our idea of the added value of combining both concepts in our study.

Second, there is the problem of needs that remain unmet, which should also be taken into account when studying accessibility. In the context of mental healthcare, the WHO uses the term 'treatment gap' to denote the gap between the number of people with a particular condition and the number of people treated for it (Kohn et al., 2004). In other words, this means *the difference between the true prevalence rate and the proportion who receive any kind of treatment'* (Thornicroft &Tansella, 2013). A similar reasoning can be found in the concept of 'unmet need'; this is a frequently used indicator for access within the health care sector. We mention this here, because it may also be relevant to assess the extent to which there is a 'treatment gap' ('treatment' in the broad sense of the term, including other forms of assistance or counselling), or an 'unmet need', in other areas. This is also closely related to the concept of non-take-up of provisions in terms of welfare (see f.i. Bargain, Immervoll&Viitamäki, 2012; Bruckmeier&Wiemers, 2011). In Belgium and elsewhere, individuals may 'fail' to apply for support to which they are entitled, even if it would be of great benefit (see e.g. Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn Brussel, 2016, on non-take up of social rights within the Brussels region). Exploring and understanding non take-up is an important element in analyzing the accessibility of an organization.

Third, and more fundamentally, accessibility as a concept also meets with a lot of criticism (see among others CousséeenRoets, 2011, De Bisschop 2010, Van de Walle 2011, within a context of youth work). The core ideaof these critics is that accessibility does not call into question the service offered itself. The offer is considered as given, and only 'how to lead the target group to that offer' is studied, while the existing offer itself may not be the best possible option for the target group. The existing offer is not value-free. While we agree with this conclusion, in our opinion, this criticism can partly be addressed by - and at the same time it also points to the importance of - including criteria such as acceptability and appropriateness as dimensions of accessibility, and including the 'fit' between the needs of the target group on the one hand, and the offer on the other hand, in the analysis.

We end this section on the concept of accessibility by presenting an inspirational model of access, provided by Levesque et al. (2013), in which these points of concern are well addressed, and which brings together many important elements that have been raised throughout this section.

3.6   Summarizing model by Levesque, Harris and Russell (2013)

Levesque and colleagues present an inspirational model of access (in the context of health care), which actually provides a summary of this section on the concept on accessibility, as it comprises most of the lessons we identified from the literature. The authors actually provide two complementary graphical representations, the first one (fig.%%) is presented as the definition of access, the second is presented as a conceptual framework by the authors, but both are helpful to understand and study the issue of access.

Figure 1 Graphical representation of 'access to health care by Levesque et al. (2013:4)
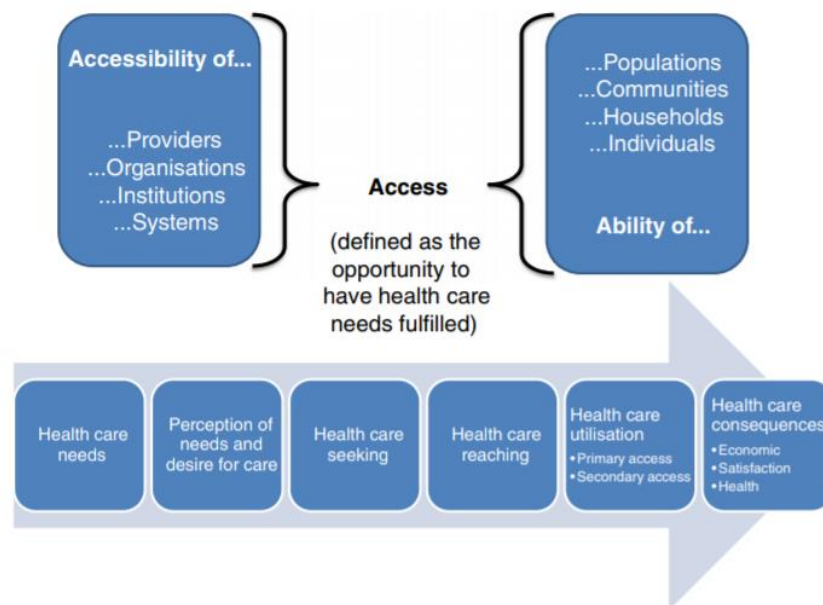
This first representation illustrates how access is the result of a degree of fit between the supply-side on the one hand, and the demand-side on the other, with both sides consisting of different actors. It acknowledges the different layers in the supply side, such as providers, organisations, and systems. This representation also shows how 'seeking help' – in this case in terms of health, but it also holds for other services – is the result of a chain of actions, starting from a need and – if all goes well and all steps are successful – ending in the use and benefit of a service.

However, these different steps, require different abilities from the side of the user, and access is also determined by the characteristics of the supply, referring to the dimensions of approachability,

acceptability, availability, accommodation, affordability and appropriateness, as mentioned earlier. These factors are graphically represented in the second model (fig. %%), representing the theoretical framework of access to health.

Figure 2 Theoretical framework on access to health care, by Levesque et al. (2013:5)
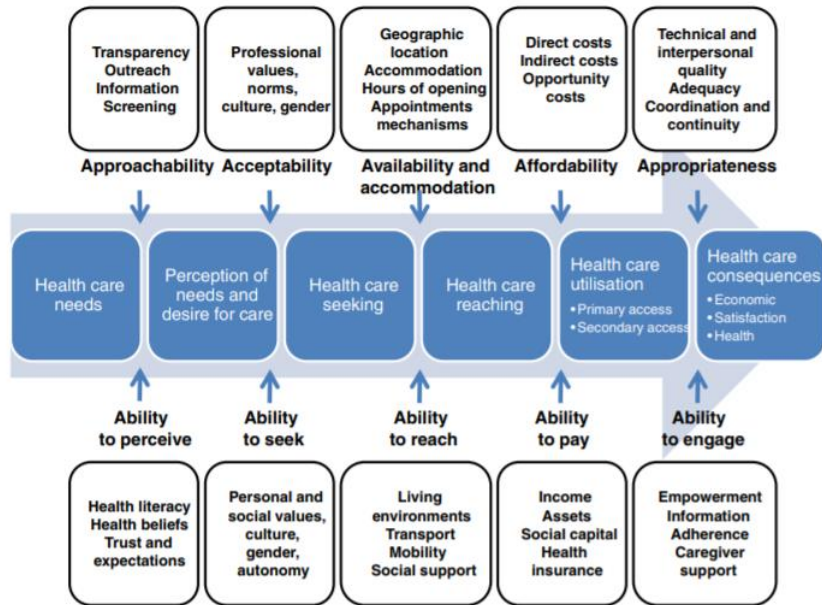
In the next section, we shift our focus from accessibility to the notion of street-level bureaucracies. Yet, both concepts are closely related, as understanding the functioning of street-level bureaucracies is part and parcel of the accessibility of a service.

4 | Street-level bureaucracy

4.1 Origins of a concept

By focusing on *street-level bureaucracy* and the 'dilemmas of the individual in public services', Michael Lipsky (1980/2010) initiated a new scholarly theme. By bringing in conversation a growing literature on bureaucratic discretion (Kaufman 1960; Wilson 1967) with the emerging debate on policy implementation (Ingram 1977; Pressman and Wildavsky 1973), he contributed to the foundation of bottom-up approaches to policy analysis. With his book, in fact, Lipsky challenged the conventional perspective in public policy studies, which considered policymaking as a hierarchical and linear process (following on from clear policy goals to coherent decisions to neutral implementation), and failures in achieving policy goals as the result of incompliant bureaucracies escaping managerial and political control (for a review of that debate, see: Schofield 2001).

Questioning the preconditions of that normative approach, Lipsky offered a different perspective, coining the concept of street-level bureaucracy (hereafter: SLB) as common denominator for 'the schools, police and welfare departments, lower courts, legal services offices, and other agencies whose workers interact with and have wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of public sanctions to citizens' (Lipsky, 1980: xi). 'Street-level' thus refers to the fact that these workers operate in direct contact with individual citizens, while 'bureaucracy' implies that these workers are performing their job in public service. Although they can be employed by private agencies (e.g., private schools, private-led prisons, private non-profit healthcare centres), the distinctive feature of street-level workers relies on them fulfilling public tasks.

Focusing his analysis on these actors' practices in their daily encounters with citizens, Lipsky argued that 'public policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or top-floor suites of high-ranking administrators, because in important ways it is actually made in the crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers' (Lipsky 1980: xii). Rather than formal laws, it is 'the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures [that] effectively *become* the public policies they carry out' (Lipsky 1980: xii; original italics).

A core proposition of the SLB theory is that certain structural conditions consistently characterise street-level work, which are key for understanding bureaucrats' practices. First, formal policies often do not have clear, knowable, and operationalisable goals. If we acknowledge that policymaking often requires compromise - which makes clarity and coherence unlikely, especially in sensitive and politically contested policy domains - what exactly SLB implementing policies are supposed to do is not straightforward.

This is even more relevant in contexts characterised by insufficient resources to deal with increasing citizens' demand, the second structural condition that characterises street-level work. Accordingly, 'an implicit tension between resource constraints and the inexorable demands for public service' (Lipsky 1980: 172) characterises street-level work, meaning that there is an inherent gap between policy goals to be achieved and the resources allocated to do so: while citizens' demand for public services is unlimited, in fact, bureaucratic resources of time, information, and staff are necessarily constrained. As a consequence, when constraints are increasing and/or resources are diminishing,

'bureaucrats do not do just what they want or just what they are told to want. They do what they can' (Brodkin 1997: 24).

Finally, 'policy-as-written' always requires a certain degree of interpretation, particularly when it targets highly complex (and time-consuming) cases. Assessing the eligibility of a potential beneficiary to a governmental social programme, deciding on an application for family reunification presented by a migrant woman to reunite with her children, adopting decisions on cases of domestic violence, are just some examples of typical, complex situations that SLB have to deal with on a daily basis, which require 'improvisation and responsiveness to the individual case' (Lispky 1980: xii). This work thus often involves 'complex tasks for which elaboration of rules, guidelines, or instructions cannot circumscribe the alternatives' (Lipsky 1980: 15). It requires responses to the 'human dimensions of situations [...], which are not reducible to programmed formats' (ivi). Consequently, it will be difficult, if not impossible to severely reduce SLB's room for discretion. Discretion, which can be defined as the autonomy of bureaucrats to make binding decisions concerning the distribution of public services and resources, is thus a core, inherent dimension of street-level job.

According to Lipsky, these structural conditions (ambiguous policy goals, insufficient resources, complex demands) shape discretionary decisions of SLB in systematic ways. To deal with these constraints, SLB develop varieties of 'coping mechanisms' that indirectly but significantly shape policy on the ground. For instance, SLB may modify their initial job conceptions, reducing the ideal image of the job to a more pragmatic version. They may adapt their conceptions of users, standardising and simplifying their work-load, setting 'emergency' priorities, categorising clients' deservingness, and giving more attention to 'easy' clients (creaming). They may shift administrative/bureaucratic costs and paperwork to clients, favouring 'speed over need'. In other words, from Lipsky's perspective, these mechanisms are aimed at creating a manageable work-load: SLB are framed as rational actors, who attempt to cope with structural constraints while improving their working conditions.

4.2   Nature and determinants of SLB's discretion: evolution of the debate

Since Lipsky's seminal work, a range of empirical studies have extended the field (for elaborate overviews, see: Hupeand Hill 2007; Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010; Brodkin 2012; Hupe 2019), turning SLB into a key theme of public administration research.

At a first level, the conceptualization of the nature of discretion has been extended, questioning the idea of this phenomenon as a dichotomous one (absence *versus* presence of discretion). From this standpoint, Evans and Harris (2004: 881) have revealed how discretion rather 'operates along a gradient, allowing different degrees of professional freedom within a complex set of principles and rules'. Accordingly, discretion can be interpreted as: i) the autonomy 'granted' by decision makers to bureaucrats so they can do their jobs; ii) a space 'created' by the ambiguity and uncertainty of policies; or iii) bureaucrats' 'ability' to subvert rules and laws. Discretion, therefore, can be understood as a graduated scale of freedom of bureaucrats to take binding decisions towards citizens, which range from formal autonomy to the informal use of the interstices between rules. Likewise, these authors highlight how discretion is not necessarily negative or positive in nature. On the contrary, 'in some circumstances it may be an important professional attribute, in others it may be a cloak for political decision-makers to hide behind, or it may be an opportunity for professional abuse of power' (Evans and Harris 2004: 871), thus calling for empirical, situated analyses of street-level work.

'Search[ing] for the place of the individual' in public services (Lipsky 1980/2010: xi), a significant stream of research has addressed the individual determinants of bureaucrats' decisions, looking for an explanation of variation in street-level practices at the micro level.

Firstly, research converges in recognising the key role played by bureaucrats' personal views in orienting - and leading to variation in - street-level practices. According to Maynard-Moody and

Musheno (2000, 2003, 2012), SLB' decisions are particularly shaped by their personal beliefs about what is fair and unfair, and about which clients are deserving or undeserving of bureaucrats' concern. From these authors' perspective, in fact, street-level bureaucrats first 'make moral judgments about the relative worthiness of the citizen client, and then they use rules, laws, and procedures to help those they consider worthy and punish those they deem unworthy' (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000: 351) (for an overview of the concept of welfare deservingness, see: van Oorschot et al. 2017; Section 4.2 in this paper). Similarly, other scholars have highlighted how the varying degree of street-level agreement with policy content affects bureaucrats' decisions (May and Winter 2009; Tummers 2013). Looking at the 'policy predispositions' or 'policy preferences' of SLBs, these authors demonstrate that caseworkers' attitudes towards the policy goals to be implemented vary empirically and significantly influence street-level work.

Empirical variation in street-level workers' practices has also been analysed in relation to individual characteristics, paying particular attention to bureaucrats' gender (Saidel and Loscocco 2005; Wilkins 2007), and racial and ethnic background (Pitts 2005; Wilkins and Williams 2009). Analysing whether the identity markers of bureaucrats affect the distribution of outputs to users who share these same characteristics (the so-called 'active representative bureaucracy'), findings appear inconsistent on this regard. In relation to the dimensions of race and ethnicity, for instance, some studies found that bureaucrats belonging to ethnic minority groups use their discretion to reduce the discriminatory treatment clients of the same groups have historically received from public bureaucracies (Hindera 1993; Selden 1997), while others contend that the presence of officials with ethnic minority backgrounds may even increase racial disparities (Wilkins and Williams 2009).

Another factor that has been identified as a significant driver of discretion concerns the degree of professionalisation of bureaucrats' occupation (Evans and Harris 2004; Ellis 2011), opening an ongoing debate on whether 'professional work' and 'bureaucracy' form a dichotomy. Focusing on highly-institutionalised professions, such as in the medical domain, ethical and professional values are considered to play a key role in orienting discretional decisions. Notions of fairness or justice, often involving ethical codes of conduct, may determine 'value discretion' of professionals (Taylor andKelly 2006), who are expected to exercise their judgments based on training, knowledge and experience. When professionals face tasks that contrast with their codes of conduct, therefore, discretion becomes an expression of a professional culture that guides and legitimises workers' practices (Ellis 2011).

However, although professions – their nature, degree of institutionalisation and recognised autonomy - are clearly different, the daily work of a medical practitioner, a teacher, a judge, or a caseworker is nevertheless characterised by direct interactions with citizens on the one hand and, particularly since the advent of the so-called 'New Public Management' doctrine, by increasingly managerial control (Brodkin 2011a, 2011b). As policy delivery, and service provision in particular, increasingly occurs not only through state's actors, but also through private non-profit/for-profit organisations and mixed public–private arrangements, several studies have focused on 'street-level organisations', paying specific attention to the role played by organisations' management and evolving managerial strategies in orienting street-level practices (Riccucci et al. 2004; Ellis 2011; Brodkin 2011a). High-level managers of public organisations interpret legal rules in regard to organisations' priorities, define workers' position within the organisation, organise, coordinate and distribute work, and hold prerogatives to reward or penalise staff usingformal and informal incentives or sanctions. By effectively choosing 'what counts' in an organisation (Brodkin 2011: i255), they hold a significant power in orienting street-level practices. Within this stream of analysis, research on whether the proliferation and penetration of quantitative performance metrics to assess efficiency in public services reduces SLB's room for discretion has exploded (for an overview of the debate, see: Brodkin 2012).

Overall, the vast majority of the empirical studies on SLB look for explanations of discretionary practices at the micro level. On the contrary, the question of how and to what extent this variation is

associated to individual characteristic and personal view, or to differences in the broader social, economic and political context and institutional settings in which SLB operate has received less attention (Hupe and Buffat 2014).

Accordingly, much literature ignores the fact that implementation contexts vary across and within countries. Across countries, great differences exist in terms of political-administrative systems and institutional designs, so that the degree of bureaucratic autonomy granted to agencies in unitary systems, such as France, may differ from the one that characterises federal states, like Belgium. Similarly, different types of welfare regimes and underlying logics of welfare solidarity can be found across Europe (Esping-Andersen 1990). As welfare states are 'powerful institutional forces embodying ideas and practices associated with inclusion, exclusion, membership, belonging, entitlement and identity' (Geddes 2003: 152), SLB's expected behaviour and daily practices may differ from one welfare context to another, as well as in relation to the perceived 'welfare deservingness' of potential beneficiaries (Laenen 2018; Laenen et al. 2019; Ford 2016). This consideration also applies in countries characterised by decentralised welfare arrangements, in which different territorial welfare and political traditions may play a role in orienting SLB' practices. Therefore, further studies are needed to unveil 'how discretion is nested within the context of routines, practice ideologies, rule following, and law' (Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010: 253). Because policy implementation – and thus SLB's practices - arises from the interaction of a policy with its setting, 'we cannot anticipate the development of a [...] theory of implementation that is "context-free"' (Berman 1978: 32).

5 | The 'workfare state', activation policies and street-level practices

5.1   Professional identity v. bureaucratic tasks

Social work is probably the research domain where the SLB perspective has been taken up the most to understand the factors influencing caseworkers' decisions and their effects on social policy outcomes (for a recent review, see: Nothdurfter and Hermans 2018). Addressing the fields of adult social care or elderly care, social assistance or activation services, this research stream has focused on the specific dilemmas and complexity of social work practice, particularly in contexts characterised by the shift from the 'welfare' to the 'workfare' state, to which this section specifically refers.

Accordingly, SLB research in social policy has largely contributed in broadening Lipsky's narrow interpretation of frontline workers as individuals coping with structural constraints. Focusing on the challenges caseworkers deal with at the everyday level of practices, these studies delve into the specific tensions and complexities of social work, addressing in particular its professional dilemmas. Differently from other policy domains, in fact, discretion in social work is interpreted not only as 'an inescapable feature' (Terum et al. 2018, 39), but it is also necessary for tailored service delivery which takes into account individuals' specific needs (Tummers and Bekkers 2014). Within this perspective, ethical and professional values are considered the central explanatory factor behind discretional decisions. In other words, professional values lead social workers to adopt practices of 'value discretion' (Taylor and Kelly 2006) – instead of Lipsky's 'coping discretion' - to facilitate claimants' access to benefits, particularly in the case of disadvantaged individuals. As these workers are expected to exercise their professional autonomy and decide upon users' specific needs on the basis of professional training, knowledge and experience, discretionary decisions are the result of a professional culture that guides and legitimises workers' practices (Ellis 2011). However, in the context of activation, little attention has been paid to the notion of professionalism and the role of professional values in the use of discretion (van Berkeland and van der Aa 2012; Nothdurfter 2016), also because of the lack of consensus on whether street-level work in activation services is a more administrative function or a more professional activity (van Berkeland van der Aa 2012).

Narrowing this review to the specific sub-domain of activation which BBOX also focuses on, the debate on social workers' use of discretion has significantly evolved in the last twenty years, in parallel with the shift from traditional 'welfare' to contemporary 'workfare' policies. Since the early 1990s, and increasingly after the turn of the millennium, activation measures have been consistently introduced in the areas of unemployment and social care across Europe (Borghiand van Berkel 2007; Eichhorst et al. 2008). Based on the assumption that overly generous welfare states nourished a *habitus* of dependency among benefit recipients (Rice 2013), activation measures should provide strong incentives for users to find work and become economically self-sufficient. Such incentives may be provided in the form of 'carrots' (such as job trainings or individualised labour market reintegration programmes), or as 'sticks' (such as conditioning access to social assistance benefits on job applications, introducing sanctions towards non-compliant beneficiaries).

While emphasising responsiveness to the specific needs of vulnerable groups, however, several studies have pointed out the contradictions that this system may create in terms of targeted beneficiaries and expected outcomes (Lindsay et al. 2015; Ellis 2007; Brodkin and Marston 2013;

Brodkin 2011b). On the one hand, in fact, the expansion of activation programmes has been associated with increased compulsion and conditionality, raising administrative barriers to access social benefits for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. On the other hand, the introduction of 'New Public Management' approaches in public services has been accompanied by the development of performance systems that often evaluate workers' activity according to the achievement of beneficiaries' short-term job outcomes. Consequently, caseworkers are rewarded for placing people in work as quickly as possible, rather than on the basis of responsiveness towards claimants' individual needs. Hence, as these studies suggest, these reforms in the goals and procedures of the welfare state have altered organisational and bureaucratic practices to emphasise workfare's harsher regulatory features while undermining its potentially enabling ones.

Focusing on the street-level, several studies have addressed the ways in which caseworkers deal with the double task of 'counselling' – that is, to support and advise unemployed users in their search for a job by building rapport and trust– and 'enforcing' – that is, to follow-up and eventually constrain beneficiaries' job-search behaviour by threatening them with sanctions (van Parys 2016; Nothdurfter 2016; Ellis 2007). While the majority of such contributions assume that 'activation work', which includes monitoring and sanctioning, is incompatible with a traditional social work repertoire (Brodkin and Marston 2013; Hasenfeld 2010, 1999), others argue for SLBs' capacity to balance them in their daily encounters with policy beneficiaries (van Parys and Struyven 2018).

Addressing the consequences of more counselling-oriented or enforcing-oriented approaches on users' involvement, Djuve and Kavli (2015) develop a framework that distinguishes between two types of service users (passive 'pawns' v. autonomous 'queens', according to their agency) and of social workers (care-oriented 'carers' v. rule-oriented 'clerks', according to their practices). By looking at the encounters between these types of actors in the Swedish welfare system, they identify four alternative interaction outcomes. When 'carers' are confronted with 'pawns', they tend to postpone decisions and wait until the service user expresses stronger agency. When encountering disagreeing 'queens', they are inclined to give in to the wishes of the service user, even though they might not think the goals and measures suggested by the service user are the best ones. On the contrary, 'clerks' often decide on behalf of 'pawns', while they tend to overrule wishes from disagreeing 'queens'. As the authors suggest, only one of these strategies actually entails users' empowerment ('carers' giving in to 'queens'), while the others point out to failed implementation of user influence, challenging the underlying logic of the 'activating State'.

Nevertheless, research findings about the degree to which caseworkers are willing to take into account users' wishes and the impact of bureaucrats' attitudes towards users' employment chances are ambivalent. Behncke and colleagues (2010), for instance, found that caseworkers who attach less importance to unemployed people's wills and demands than to control and sanctions are more likely to put pressure on beneficiaries, by assigning them to programmes and control their availability for work (even without the consent of the unemployed person). According to the results of the study, those caseworkers who put less emphasis on developing a co-operative and harmonic relationship with users increased the latter's employment chances in the short and medium term. At the very opposite, comparing private and public job placement offices, Toerien and colleagues (2015) argue that higher performance in private offices derives from their more collaborative approach with users when compared to public services. In between, in their study on the influence of caseworkers' interaction styles on unemployed users' transitions to work, Weatherall and Markwardt (2010) found that neither formalism (opposite to empathy) nor coercion affect the transition to employment of users. Rather, when contrasting the impact of SLBs' attitudes on users' employment chances with the one of individuals' socio-economic characteristics, caseworkers' behaviour explained rather a minor part of variation in users' transitions to employment.

5.2 'Who deserves what?' SLBs and welfare solidarity

Acknowledging the changing nature of European welfare states and their impact on street-level practice is fundamental not only to understand the context in which SLBs operate, but also the broader societal logics that may orient caseworkers' decisions. These logics supply the *moral* categories SLBs refer to when assessing applicants' deservingness to welfare, and they legitimate bureaucrats' practices on the front-line (Garrow and Grusky 2013; Rice 2013).

Accordingly, research has consistently demonstrated that the general public is more likely to support certain categories of prospective welfare beneficiaries (e.g., the elderly) than others (e.g., the unemployed youth), mobilising the so-called CARIN criteria (van Oorschot2006; Kootstra 2016; van Oorschot et al.2017; Laenen 2018). More specifically, the process through which individuals assess who is deemed deserving of social support and who is not, relies on five main criteria: Control (the extent to which a person has contributed to her current situation of need), Attitude (e.g. gratitude), Reciprocity (the extent to which the person has already contributed to the society), Identity (whether the person is part of the 'in-group' or not) and Need.

So, for instance, Petersen and colleagues (2011) found out that an aged man who has been on the labour market all his life (Reciprocity criterion) is almost three times more likely to get public support to receive social welfare, when compared to a young man without a lot of work experience. Similarly, according to a recent study on European attitudes towards asylum seekers (Bansak et al.2016), voters favour applicants who will contribute to the recipient country's economy (Reciprocity), who have suffered severe physical or mental distress rather than economic hardship (Need), and who are Christian rather than Muslim (Identity), suggesting that public preferences over asylum seekers are shaped by evaluations of their potential economic contributions, humanitarian concerns, and anti-Muslim bias.

Although welfare deservingness research has largely addressed public opinion, recent SLB studies have provided evidence that street-level decisions concerning welfare eligibility are partially driven by the same characteristics that guide public opinion's perceptions of deservingness: users who are not considered especially needy or who repeatedly violate SLBs' expectations with regard to the willingness to work are more likely to be sanctioned (De Wilde2017; for specific research on the 'Identity' criterion in welfare deservingness, see Section 5.1).

Interestingly, recent studies have addressed the 'situated' nature of deservingness judgements to understand whether local constructions of deservingness influence the use of SLBs' discretion. Analysing the tasks of caseworkers between 'people processing' (checking for users' eligibility to a social assistance programme) and 'people changing' (effecting change in users' behaviour), Altreiter and Leibetseder (2015) found that, in the highly decentralised Austrian welfare system, local constructions of deservingness were an important factor shaping both SLBs' use of discretion and social policy outcomes across local contexts. On the contrary, addressing the factors that determine SLBs' assessments of users' willingness-to-work in 89 Flemish municipalities, De Wilde and Marchal (2019) found relatively little variation between cities (which, according to the authors, can be explained by similar characteristics of these municipalities in terms of political ideology and organisational settings of welfare offices). Rather, they found substantive variation at the caseworker level, largely explained by the characteristics of individual workers and their attitudes towards the welfare state and welfare solidarity more generally.

Therefore, questions of whether welfare deservingness evaluations differ between social workers and the general public, which applicant's attributes activate this category in street-level bureaucrats' decisions, and how it varies across welfare and political contexts, are still in a black box, calling for more systematic analyses of welfare deservingness evaluations in street-level decisions.

6 | SLBs, migration and the welfare state

The interplay between welfare states and immigration regimes and policies is fundamental to understand the production of distinctive patterns of immigrants' social rights across countries. On the one hand, welfare systems are powerful institutional forces that embody ideas of inclusion, exclusion, membership, belonging and identity (Geddes 2003),drawing a line between those who should be considered legitimate members of a community and those who should not. On the other hand, immigration regimes and policies regulate migrants' inclusion in or exclusion from society, setting the rules and norms that govern migrants' possibilities to enter a country, to acquire residence permits, and to participate in the economic, cultural and political life of a destination country (Sainsbury 2012). Consequently, different profiles of migrants – translated into different 'administrative slots' (e.g., recently arrived or long-term economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, family members, undocumented migrants) are associated with different degrees – and hierarchies - of entitlement to social rights. Economic migrants and refugees usually enjoy the higher degree of social protection in a destination country, while undocumented migrants often are at the edges of countries' welfare systems.

However, while official policies and programmes define 'migrant categories' and their associated social rights in destination countries, the concrete responsibility to assess migrants' eligibility to and implement these measures is in the hands of SLBs, the gatekeepers of welfare states (van der Leun 2006). Accordingly, research has often revealed the importance of SLBs in the implementation of migration-related policies. As way of example, research has addressed the role of SLBs and their discretionary decisions towards migrants in the specific domains of immigration (Eule 2014; Jordan et al. 2003), asylum (Dahlvik 2018; Saltsman 2014), family reunification (Mascia 2020), citizenship (Mazouz 2019), as well as education (Svensson 2019; Bruquetas Callejo 2014), healthcare (Perna 2019; Vanthuyne et al. 2013), welfare and social assistance programmes (Björngren Cuadra and Staaf 2014; Duhant 2015).

Understanding how SLBs and migrants interact on the front-line of welfare systems, the motivations behind social workers' discretionary practices, as well as how migrants engage in these relations, however, is fundamental to assess not only the existence of any gap between formal policies and actual practices, but also the process of socialisation that migrants, and recently-arrived migrants in particular, undergo. As representatives of the state (Lipsky 1980; Dubois 2010), SLBs contribute in establishing the expectations - and self-image – of migrants in relation to that state; they 'impact the socialisation of individuals into their role and category as immigrants' (Eule 2014: 5).

6.1 From discretion to discrimination? Street-level practices and attitudes towards migrants

The decisions welfare bureaucrats make in their encounters with migrant users have a great impact on the lives of individuals and their families, as they decide on the eligibility to access social benefits and programmes. While SLBs' decisions and practices significantly shape the possibility for any individual to access a country's welfare state, this is particularly so in the case of migrants, for which

welfare offices often represent the first and main point of contacts with the destination country and its institutions.

Interpreting front-line workers as 'actors of integration', several studies have analysed the ways SLBs may adapt, bend, circumvent and even subvert official policies and programmes to grant access to social rights for migrants, and vulnerable migrants in particular, regardless of restrictive policy frameworks (Marrow 2009; van der Leun 2006). From this perspective, SLBs often choose to make their jobs harder, and even put themselves at risk, to help those migrants they deem morally deserving, grounding their discretionary decisions on the basis of service-oriented claims and professional ethics. However, as these studies contend, such practices tend to vary according to specific professional roles.

In her analysis of the implementation of restrictive policies towards migrants in the Netherlands, for instance, van der Leun (2006) identifies a relationship between SLBs' restrictive attitudes and the level of professionalisation/autonomy within a sector. According to her findings, teachers in primary education and healthcare professionals enjoy high levels of autonomy and they tend to use this autonomy to help rather than to exclude vulnerable migrants. At the other end of the spectrum, public housing and social assistance workers tend to show more restrictive attitudes towards migrants and to strictly implement formal policies when compared to healthcare and primary education workers, due to the higher level of monitoring of bureaucrats' decisions in these policy domains.

Similarly, as Marrow (2009) points out in her study on US bureaucracies, those bureaucrats working in the most service-oriented offices, such as schools and medical services, tend to act in the most responsive ways towards migrants when compared to those working in public offices that combine service with stronger regulatory missions and roles, such as social workers, and – even more – legal bureaucrats in law enforcement agencies or courts. Her study also suggests that discretionary decisions are shaped by government policies, which do not only determine bureaucrats' behaviour by setting the institutional 'rules of the game' for including/excluding newcomers, but they also have the power to mediate street-level practices more indirectly, by shaping the conceptualisation of their professional roles and responsibilities.

Next to variation across professional roles, other studies have addressed variation in bureaucrats' individual predispositions towards migrant beneficiaries, highlighting the importance of workers' moral judgements about migrants' deservingness of social protection, particularly at times of migration and economic crises (Perna 2019; Jilke and Tummers 2018; Björngren Cuadra and Staaf 2014; Ventuyne et al. 2013; Bruquetas-Callejo 2014). Although addressing different social policy areas, these studies indicate that 'committed bureaucrats' tend to adopt discretionary practices of inclusion on the basis of humanitarian claims and/or invoking their professional role and ethics towards 'vulnerable' users. Drawing on an ethnographic study at welfare offices in French-speaking Belgium, for instance, Andreetta (2019) analyses how paperwork and all documentary practices caseworkers are obliged to conform while assessing migrants' entitlement to welfare benefits may result in restricting access to social assistance for vulnerable migrants. However, the author also reveals how paperwork may be used as a strategic resource by 'committed' caseworkers to aid excluded beneficiaries bringing cases against the administration. As her analysis indicates, in fact, SLBs faced with competing interpretations of law may adapt their documentary practices to ensure they comply with the administrative guidelines for financial reasons and to avoid managerial sanctions, while at the same time encouraging litigation against the administration by producing documents that can help the vulnerable groups win.

At the opposite, street-level workers showing restrictive attitudes often mobilise discourses concerning migrants' opportunistic behaviour and 'welfare shopping' strategies to legitimate the adoption of discretionary practices of exclusion towards 'illegitimate' beneficiaries. Accordingly, SLB research has shown that workers ground their judgements on stereotypes, and more generally, wider social norms that are shaped by shared cultural beliefs (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2012; Raaphorst and Groeneveld 2019; Thomannand Rap 2018). As the field of immigration and

integration is strongly ethically loaded (Hagelund 2010) and the spread of anti-immigration attitudes has been reported widely in contemporary Europe (Thomannand Rap 2018), several studies have pointed out the ways in which street-level bureaucrats may reproduce the stigmatising discourse on migration and welfare of some political parties (Lafleur and Mescoli 2018; Perna 2019; Ventuyne et al. 2013).

Overall, these studies reveal the existence of a structural tension between 'care' and 'control' welfare bureaucrats are often confronted with in their everyday encounters with migrants, which result from the shifting of migration control tasks to welfare state's actors and the contradictory goals between social policies and immigration policies that originate therefrom (Ataç and Rosenberger 2019; Lahav and Guiraudon 2006).

Moving beyond the analysis of these tensions between the institutional level and the street-level, other studies have addressed their impact on the integration outcomes of migrants. Addressing the activation domain, for instance, Hagelund and Kavli (2009) analyse caseworkers' attempts at negotiating the tension between employment-based v. social inclusion considerations when working with migrant beneficiaries whose labour market prospects are conceived of as poor. Using data from the implementation of a Norwegian activation programme for newly arrived refugees, the authors identify two distinct frameworks of interpretation: an activation discourse, where the main emphasis is on formal integration in the labour market, and a citizenship discourse, which broadens the meaning of 'participation' to include other forms of engagement of recently-arrived refugees in the country. Depending on which frame is mobilised, caseworkers will pursue different goals. In the case of the former, they will insist on the importance of formulating precise employment goals, with the side effect of reducing activation to mere participation in the labour market. When a citizenship frame is invoked, caseworkers will extend the concept of 'participation' to activities other than work; however, this could lead to the definition of too general goals, affecting the employment prospects of recently-arrived refugees.

Similarly, Shutes (2011) addresses the impact of a job outcome-oriented performance system on the responsiveness of providers to the needs of unemployed refugees. According to her findings, an emphasis on short-term job outcomes conflicts with supporting refugees who are 'harder to help', particularly those with English language needs. Similarly, it conflicts with supporting refugees to access employment according their skills and interests to the extent that it encourages caseworkers to focus on placing refugees in 'easy to access', low-skilled and low-paid jobs. Consequently, activation and integration programmes whose performance is assessed on the basis of short-term job outcomes reproduce labour market inequalities experienced by refugees[4].

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that, to date, studies attempting to detect the existence of substantial discrimination in SLBs' decisions towards migrants are inconsistent in their findings. On the one hand, research has detected the existence of significant differences in SLBs' decisions towards applicants of foreign origin or minority ethnic background when compared to natives. For instance, in their study on Danish employment agencies, Pedersen and colleagues (2018) find that welfare offices with a larger percentage of non-Western migrant users impose a significant number of sanctions and dispense them with greater frequency. Importantly, their findings suggest that employment agency caseworkers were more likely to recommend sanctions for ethnic minority (Middle-Eastern origin) users than for ethnic majority (Danish origin) ones. Similarly, studying activation policies in Germany, Brussig and Knuth (2013) found that migrants were subject to a more straightforward work-first regime than non-migrants and, more generally, that non-European migrants experienced harsher form of activation than other applicants.These findings confirm the so-called 'immigrant penalty' hypothesis in the welfare deservingness theory (see Section 4.2), according to which migrants are often perceived as less deserving of social protection when compared

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4 As shown in previous research targeting the integration policies implemented in Wallonia, this process is also connected to the fact that the existence of structural barriers to the recognition of immigrants' diplomas and skills leads to professional downward and consequent frustration felt by individuals (Gossiaux et al., 2019).

to natives, as they tend to score low on the 'Reciprocity', 'Attitudes' and 'Identity' criteria (Reeskens and van der Meer 2019; Ford 2016; Harell et al. 2016).

At the opposite, for instance, Jilke and Tummers (2018) report an 'immigrant advantage' in their study on welfare deservingness perceptions among US teachers, according to which these workers tend to prioritise 'needy' students (characterised by low academic performance and belonging to minority groups) over 'hard-workers' (the student is deserving of teachers' help because she/he earned it). Similarly, Terumand colleagues (2018) found indications for 'reverse discrimination' in Norway – with males from an ethnic minority group being less likely to be sanctioned in the provision of activation measures.

In between, other studies refute both conclusions, reporting no differences in SLBs' response rates by nationality or ethnic background of the applicants. What these studies do indicate is rather the existence of important differences in bureaucrats' attitudes towards non-natives and the tone/content of responses. Relying on an audit-style experiment of over 1,000 housing authorities to test whether street-level bureaucrats racially discriminate between citizens applying for governmental programs, for instance, Einstein and Glick (2016) found that, although public housing officials responded at equal rates to requests for aid in the housing application process coming from white, black and Hispanic citizens, significant differences were reported in the tone of bureaucrats' responses towards the latter. Similarly, Hemkerand and Rink (2017) analyse German welfare offices' responses towards applicants of different nationalities/ethnic backgrounds. Although they found no significant differences in response rates, their findings indicate that non-German applicants received responses of significantly lower quality when compared to natives, potentially deterring the former from applying for benefits.

6.2   Migrants' welfare expectations and (re)actions

As the previous pages indicate, research has extensively addressed the so-called welfare-migration nexus, focusing either on the level of policies or on the level of street-level practices. Nevertheless, when analysing the daily encounters between social workers and migrants on the front-line of welfare states, it is fundamental to take into account the views of welfare applicants as well (Raeymaeckers and Dierckx 2013). Accordingly, migrants are not just passive beneficiaries of social programmes and benefits. Rather, they hold expectations about their deservingness and access to social protection on the one hand, and they may adopt different strategies to respond to their social protection needs on the other hand, engaging or disengaging with the welfare system of a destination country for different reasons and at different degrees.

Drawing on a survey conducted with migrants living in a Northern Italian city and originating from the Maghreb region, China and the Philippines, for instance, Albertini and Semprebon (2018) address migrants' subjective expectations about welfare deservingness. As their findings suggest, migrants hardly expected any welfare support to comply with individuals' and households' care and financial needs. Where some support was expected, it related to financial support for children, while no expectation emerged in relation to elderly care, which was assumed to be a family responsibility. When addressing the motivations behind deservingness, respondents perceived the Italian state as having an obligation towards them when in need due to their active and long-lasting participation in the labour market – and of the taxes they have paid on their labour incomes. Similarly, in their study about the Dutch welfare state, Kremer (2016) found that a significant proportion of migrants participating in the research believed that people should not be entitled to welfare state rights immediately upon arrival. Rather, they favoured what the authors define 'earned citizenship', with access to the welfare state being a consequence of participation in the labour market and social security contributions. The same conclusions are reported by Osipovič (2015) in her analysis of Polish

migrants' conceptualisations of welfare deservingness in the UK, according to which these migrants reported a strong preference for conditionality of welfare based on contributions through work, payment of taxes and law abidance, while they interpreted needs-based claims as problematic.

The 'Reciprocity' criterion thus represents a key issue that has been often identified by studies addressing the ways migrants claim for and 'perform' deservingness. In their study on Belgium's practice of removing residence rights of unemployed EU citizens, for instance, Lafleur and Mescoli (2018) point out how these EU citizens often engaged in collecting evidence (e.g. a long-term employment contracts) to demonstrate their deservingness to residency and social rights, while distancing themselves from (non-EU and recently-arrived) 'undeserving' citizens. Similarly, in their study on Estonian migrants' conceptualisations of the Finnish welfare state, Alho and Sippola (2019) indicate how participants highlighted their participation in the labour market, payment of social security contributions and 'justified' use of the welfare benefits as the motivations behind their deservingness of welfare benefits, distinguishing themselves from the 'non-deserving' migrants, that is, those who – from their perspective - 'do not contribute' to the Finnish welfare state.

Nevertheless, the possibilities to demonstrate welfare deservingness on the basis of previous participation in the labour market may be difficult for migrants, and recently-arrived migrants or vulnerable migrants in particular. Moving from expectations to actual encounters, academic and policy research has often pointed out to the difficulties migrants experience when applying for social benefits due to linguistic, cultural and administrative/bureaucratic barriers, among others (Holzinger 2020; Scheibelhofer and Holzinger 2018; Kretsedemas 2005). As indicated in Section 3, in fact, 'accessibility' is composed by different dimensions, and lack of appropriate consideration of each of them might lead to migrants' indirect exclusion from welfare benefits.

7 | Conclusion

The current paper presented a literature review focusing on the topic of policy implementation in the field of social welfare, integration and social activation towards newly arrived immigrants. The extensive study of the literature, which is reflected in this paper, can be considered as a first hurdle we have taken, in view of our own research (referred to as BBOX) on policies and practices towards newly arrived migrants at welfare institutions. Indeed, the findings of the literature review will orient us in the design of our study and guide us in setting up our fieldwork in the best possible way. In addition to presenting an extensive literature review, in this paper, we also presented the functioning of the public centres for welfare in Belgium and of their role with regard to newly arrived immigrants, as this is the context of the BBOX study.

BBOX makes use of qualitative research methodology as well as a quantitative survey, and has a threefold objective:

1. To **map practices concerning granting of rights and social activation interventions** concerning newly arrived immigrants/refugees at the PCSW level and make a typology, bringing insight in current policy implementation

2. To shed light on the **factors influencing choices and decisions** social workers make concerning social benefits and social activation among newly arrived immigrants and refugees both taking **societal**, **organizational** as well as **personal** factors into account (i.e. an in-depth understanding of what gives rise to the identified strategies and how they can be influenced). Who takes which decision for whom, and why?

3. To bring insight in the **accessibility of PCSW for newcomers** and **in the perception of the service delivery** from the perspective of new foreign beneficiaries, who are dependent on PCSW for their first steps into Belgian society.

By way of conclusion of this literature review, in what follows, we summarize the main facts and findings unravelled in this paper. The short summary is then followed by a concise discussion on the implications for our own study in terms of topics to address. We conclude by presenting our next steps forward.

7.1 Main facts and findings

In the literature review, we first studied the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the concept of "accessibility". In order to get in-depth insights into this notion, we have also drawn from the literature on health care research, expanding our search beyond a specific focus on immigrants. We first highlighted the fact that this notion describes a multi-dimensional process and that, for this reason, it cannot be defined univocally. However, some recurring elements help to study the issue of accessibility, and these are:

- o the "degree of fit" between clients (their needs and demands) and the system (the offer and functioning of social benefits);
- o the interplay of different actors (both those associated with the system and the clients) operating at different levels to ensure accessibility and the impact of a plurality of factors on their behaviour;

- o the dynamic nature of the process of accessibility;
- o the multidimensionality of access (including the dimensions of availability, accessibility, accommodation, affordability, and acceptability).

Moreover, research accounting for the temporal dimension of accessibility, i.e. the compliance of the service delivery with the needs of clients in a timely manner, brings us to pay attention to when immigrants benefit from a social intervention, and to whether this is appropriate with regard to their life history[5]. Also the notion of 'administrative burden' (Burden et al., 2012; Moynihan et al., 2014) is insightful to understand accessibility and practices of inclusion and exclusion. Taking into account these elements allows us to consider (and to study) accessibility as an issue related to both the system and the clients, providing us with a comprehensive view of this process.

Included into the variety of factors influencing the accessibility (and its experience by clients) of a service are the concrete ways in which "street level bureaucrats" (SLB) implement (social welfare) policies. This also means taking into account the possible consequences of bureaucratic discretion. In the section of our review devoted to this notion, we highlighted the fact that adopting the SLB approach allows to conduct a bottom-up analysis of public policies and to study these on the basis of their implementation into practice (albeit taking into account the structural conditions influencing the implementation, including overall welfare arrangements and institutional designs). The SLB literature shows the complexity of the concrete situations in which social workers and clients found themselves while delivering or accessing a social service. We also took into account the evolution of the debate on SLB and the empirical studies that extended the field of application of the concept. More specifically, we drew attention to the fact that discretion may operate at different degrees, with both negative and/or positive effects, and needs then to be considered as a graduate scale of freedom of bureaucrats when implementing policies in practice.

We also studied the ways in which the SLB approach has been applied to the research domain of social work more specifically, and the interplay between bureaucratic discretion and broader institutional (and supra-institutional) shifts in the approach to social welfare itself. This element is particularly relevant when analysing social activation measures, since the reforms in the goals and procedures of the welfare state have altered organisational and bureaucratic practices, with the risk of shifting social workers' focus from the actual effects on clients, to complying with implementation procedures. The notion of "deservingness" refers to a crucial factor operating in street-level practice influenced by the changing nature of European welfare states, i.e. the assessment, based on a set of normative criteria, of whether clients are entitled or not to certain rights.

Finally, we accounted for the interplay between welfare states and immigration regimes and policies through studying the literature on SLB, migration and the welfare state. Specific issues such as inclusion, exclusion, membership, belonging and identity are both conditions and effects of the access of immigrants to social rights and social activation interventions on the one hand, and to the very same rights related to immigration on the other hand. Moreover, this particular stream of literature permits to understand the specific forms of interactions between SLB and migrants on the front-line of welfare systems, and the ways in which both profiles of actors engage in the established relations (as well as their reciprocal representations). These interactions may have a high impact of the life course of immigrants and their integration in the local context. In fact, within research addressing the so-called welfare-migration nexus, it is fundamental to take into account the views of welfare applicants as well, since migrants are not just passive beneficiaries of social programmes and benefits. Overall, throughout this comprehensive literature review, we paid attention to the organizational level, the level of the case workers/social workers, and the level of the clients (immigrants). The intention is to gather knowledge on the possible differences in practices and life experiences of the

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[5] We also refer here to the fact that immigrations rules and related administrative tasks often put immigrants in situation of waiting and stuckedness (on this topic, see for example Hage, 2009). Therefore, social intervention may come after a long period of insecure and extremely precarious situations experienced by immigrants.

social actors involved in the process of delivering and accessing social rights and social activation interventions targeting newly arrived immigrants and refugees.

7.2 Implications for the BBOX research

The aim of this literature review was to identify those factors and elements that we may consider while conducting research in the field. First, **we retain the importance of investigating the different levels and actors** involved in the process of granting/accessing social benefits. Then, for each of these levels/actors, **some topics and points of attention** are relevant for our study. We will consider these elements to plan and conduct our fieldwork activity; they are meant as a starting point to develop more detailed interview/observation grids.

7.2.1 Organisational level

At the organisational level, we will identify the main areas in which social welfare interventions and social activation policies targeting newcomers operate, and we will study the common legal framework informing these interventions and policies, also paying attention to changes occurred over time. In addition, we will gather information on the economic ressources allocated to social services, including the source of funding (be they federal, regional or local), the ways in which the ressources are distributed and for which specific tasks they can be be used. This will allow us to acquire knowledge on the functioning of PCSW's with regard to newly arrived immigrants, as well as on the social rights and social activation interventions targeting these publics in Belgium (including the required conditions to access them).

A second main point of interest at the organisational level is the concrete implementation of the legal framework, meaning the concrete organisation of the social welfare agency and of the service delivery, which may also rely on specific communication activities within the agency and toward its public. This also means to assess the degree of autonomy of the agency, at the level of the management (Social Welfare Council and services managers) and at the level of the delivery of the service. We will investigate for example the existence of specific formal/informal guidelines elaborated on the basis of the legal framework to rule the functioning of the agency, as well as the methods used to monitor the actions of social agencies (and social workers). Concerning the specific topic of the access to rights and social activation interventions mentioned above, as well as the issue of administrative burden, we will also study the procedure to follow to make the demands, and the ways in which the follow-up of these is organised, by paying particular attention to the temporal dimension of the given responses.

Contextual factors may influence the delivery of the service, in the sense that a set of elements external to the social agency itself but operating in the local environment where it is situated can orient social welfare intervention. For this reason, we will also take the characteristics of this environment into account, such as the political orientation of the local government, the socio-economic context, immigration levels in the municipality, etc.

To study these topics, we will interview the representatives of the social welfare councils, and the managers of the agencies/services.

7.2.2 Level of the service delivery

At this level, we will study more deeply the interplay between different levels, ranging from the legal framework and managerial decisions to the the concrete experience of the case workers/social workers. This means to investigate, for example, social workers' use of existing guidelines, their opinion on them, the possibility (or necessity) for them of exerting discretionary power (i.e. making choices and taking autonomous decisions), etc. This topic concerns the compliance with existing rules and experiences (and needs) in the field, as well as the decision-making process, the role and responsibilities of each social actor involved and the eventual system of rewards/sanctions that may be at place (and also functions as monitoring tool). Since we expect to collect examples of differentiated experiences, we will study the attitudes of case workers/social workers in specific situations of service delivery and we will try to understand the factors leading to them. These factors may be of different order: societal (connected with the social and professional status of the social worker, for example), organizational (linked to his/her position within the social agency and his/her tasks and responsibilities), personal (concerning his/her own point of view and experience regarding his/her work and the clients he/she meets).

Moreover, through focusing on the experience of social workers, we will gather information on the main profiles of clients that they encounter, and we will study their narratives on the service delivery itself and the concerned social welfare policies. This also includes to investigate the opinion and perception of social workers concerning the changes occurred over time with regard to social policies and their implementation.

Also at this level, contextual elements are to be considered and include, from the perspective of social workers: the overall approach of the agency toward the demands that it receives; the compliance of the social service offer with the needs of the local population (and on the basis of the allocated resources) and the temporality of these needs and demands; the eventual collaboration with any other (types of) local associations; the political and socio-economic environment where the social workers operate; the overall approach of the city/local population on immigration and diversity issues.

At this level, the interviewees will be the case workers/social workers of the selected case studies (CPAS/OCMWs).

7.2.3 Level of the experience of the clients (immigrants)

A first point of attention at this level of research is the accessibility of the social services from the perspective of clients (immigrants). The focus will be on the personal experience of immigrants concerning social services, meaning, first, the information received about them, and then the concrete interaction and the steps undertaken. This also means to gather information on which social benefits immigrants apply (or not apply) for, and for which personal reasons and/or reasons of accessibility, as well as to assess whether the social service and the social intervention respond to immigrants' needs and under which conditions. In addition, we will investigate the eventual difficulties that immigrants may face in the process of accessing and benefitting from a social service. These difficulties may concerne space, for example the geographical location of the service and its distance from the place of residence of individuals, or the distance among different social services and their accessibility by public transport or associated costs, etc. And they may concern time, both with regard to present engagements of individuals, for example their family obligations that may influence the possibility of complying with administrative rules, and to their immigration trajectory, since the social benefits may arrive in appropriate/inappropriate times and after long periods of waiting.

Studying immigrants' personal experience of the social services also means to assess whether they are satisfied or not of the social intervention and its effects/results (including the fit between their needs and the support offered), and to gather information on the process in which they were involved, including the narratives on the interactions with the agency and its social workers. Services and benefits might not originally be designed for third-country nationals, causing accessibility issues, or, on the other hand, they might be designed with third-country nationals in mind, but based on stereotypes or false assumptions of what they need. The aim is also to study the presence or absence of experiences of discrimination, as well as of difficulties faced (to access the service and/or to benefit from the social intervention), unmet needs, etc., and this in connection with the life experience (and migration history) of the individuals concerned.

Contextual factors also have an impact on the experience of immigrants. In fact, the political and socio-economic environment in which they live, the overall approach of the city/local population on immigration and diversity issues are elements that, as mentioned already, can orient the decisions taken locally and at the level of the social services. The overall environment where immigrants live influences their life experience within it; it may cause for example more recurrent episodes of discrimination. It is also important to map locally the existence of associations to which immigrants resort to in order to address the issues they face and mostly in order to support their access to social benefits.

The people interviewed at this level of the research are newly arrived immigrants/refugees relying on PCSW services.

7.3   Next steps forward

The topics listed above will inform the design of more detailed interview grids to be used during the fieldwork activity in order to answer the research questions of BBOX, while taking the insights from the literature review into account. The planned methodology includes semi-structured, in-depth interviews with relevant social actors at the organisational and implementation level, including the president of the PCSW and/or the secretary, the social workers working with immigrants and the managers of the social services targeting socio-professional integration. We will also gather documents that may be useful to analyse the legal framework and the functioning of the agency and the services (e.g. internal guidelines, examples of PIIS/GPMI contracts with newly arrived immigrants…). We plan to select 20 case studies (20 PCSW's), spread over the 3 Belgian regions, and including both large cities as well as medium and smaller towns and villages. The selection will be made based on different variables such as the number of (immigrants) beneficiaries of social assistance and the political orientation of the municipal council. The selection will aim at gathering the most diverse sample possible of case studies, in order to produce a global overview on the topics we study.

We will subsequently conduct comprehensive interviews with 90 newly arrived immigrants about their experience of the PCSW. The interviews will be conducted in the 3 regions, in (some of) the same municipalities selected for fieldwork with social workers and managers at CPAS. They will be aimed at understanding the point of view of immigrants over their settlement trajectory. Since the methodological approach is qualitative, we do not aim at statistical representativeness but rather at ensuring the greatest internal diversity of the sample according to socio-biographic characteristics (gender, age, social trajectory, context of residence, status). In order to access the field, we will rely upon previous contacts within PCSW agencies, as well as upon those organisations that work in the domain of the management of migration issues (associations, regional centres for integration, reception centres, etc.). Yet, the qualitative study will be complemented by a quantitative survey,

reaching as many PCSW's as possible, which will also allow to verify the generalizability of the results of the qualitative study.

Through the BBOX research activities and the research results that we expect to reach, we aim at contributing to the literature streams that we presented in this paper in two main ways. First, starting from the empirical level, we will bring data on new and specific case studies that are selected from Belgium, a country whose particular political functioning (intertwining federal, regional and local competences) may have peculiar effects on the ways in which SLBs operate. Accounting for the dynamics occurring in the three regions of the country is also a benefit for the research, allowing to reach a comprehensive overview of the studied issues and translating specific empirical findings into new theoretical conceptualisations. In fact, the majority of SLB research grounds on single or small-n cases studies. Instead, our analysis targets 20 case studies that are located in as many cities and in three regions, all characterised by different political traditions and pre-existing immigration patterns. This diversity and the scale of our research will allow to identify those factors – both context-specific and context-trascending – that shape policy implementation practices on the ground. Moreover, our focus on the domain of social welfare and social activation intervention targeting newcomers will enable us to contribute significantly to the specific literature addressing the importance of SLBs in the implementation of welfare and social assistance programmes in particular, among other migration-related policies. In this framework, we will also contribute to the (lacking) specific conceptualisations of accessibility with regard to the social intervention and policies targeting immigrants.

Secondly, the importance given in the BBOX research to the perspective of immigrants themselves will enable us to gather relevant data that at present is less developed in the literature on SLB. This means to account for the experience of immigrants of the social policies targeting them, highlighting their active role in the studied processes and the concrete impact of these policies on their life experience. Moreover, by combining the analysis of the different levels and actors involved in the process of granting/accessing social benefits, thus intertwining the legal framework with the concrete practice in the field, the contextual elements influencing them, and the experience of social workers and immigrants themselves, we aim at studying the emerging dichotomy (in practice) between the "activation" discourse, targeting a quick formal integration of newcomers in the labour market – and also, often aimed at measuring it –, and the "citizenship" discourse, that broadens the approach – and the opportunities for individuals – to other issues connected with the participation of immigrants to the local environment.

By paying attention to these elements, it will also be possible to elaborate policy recommendations that aim at improving the social welfare service delivery system in ways that better responds to the needs of clients.

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