



# Future orientation

WORKING ON MEANINGFUL PROSPECTS FOR  
THOSE WITH A PRECARIOUS RESIDENCE STATUS

Introduction brochure for counsellors

AGENTSCHAP  
**INTEGRATIE &  
INBURGERING**



## Future orientation

### Working on meaningful prospects for those with a precarious residence status

*A Kruispunt Migratie-Integratie publication*

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The Kruispunt Migratie-Integratie became a part of the Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering on 1 January 2015.

## Who should read this brochure?

This brochure is intended for professional and volunteer counsellors who come into contact with undocumented migrants or inhabitants with a precarious residence status (in short: those with a precarious residence status).

Some of your clients have just recently arrived in the country, and others have been living in the country for several years. Many of them have very little chance of obtaining a legal residence status in Belgium. They have very few rights. Their lives are put on hold while they continue to hope for “papers”. Their original motivations and talents are left by the wayside in the meantime.

You sometimes feel powerless as you cannot give them “papers”; you want to give them useful advice, but you only seem to be able to provide emergency assistance. You often have little time, and yet you would like to do more than just “put out fires”. What can you do for these people? How can you explore other options, beyond the narrow focus on papers?

These are the questions that led to the development of a vision and methodology for future orientation.

## What can future orientation mean for you?

Future orientation is another way of looking at your clients. It helps you to see new possibilities in seemingly hopeless situations.

- You and your client will get a clearer view on the request for assistance and on the reality behind the questions.
- You will be able to structure interviews with those with a precarious residence status and you can make the most out of the limited time you spend together.
- You can work on a broader future perspective for your client, looking beyond their daily survival and tunnel vision on “papers”.
- You are able to work in a preventive manner: the reflection process about the future can start before the situation becomes critical.

Future orientation started as a group methodology. On page 25, you will learn how future orientation is organised within a group setting. The insights and exercises can also be used in one-to-one counselling sessions. This brochure is not a cookbook with bite-sized recipes. We encourage you to try new things. Your attitude and vision are the basic ingredients. This will be further explored in Chapter 3.

## What you will find in this brochure

This brochure introduces you to the vision and methodology of future orientation. We will first consider the broader immigration context and the specific assistance provided to those with a precarious residence status (Chapter 1). We will then describe future orientation in specific detail (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, we will look at the vision and role of counsellors. In Chapter 4, we will highlight the four most important areas impacted by future orientation: recognition, insight, reflection, and retaking control of one’s life. Finally, we describe what is required to make room for future orientation in your organisation (Chapter 5).

This brochure will also enable you to get acquainted with some of the pioneers of future orientation. You will find out more in the portraits of organisations in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent. We will also examine future orientation in a group setting in a separate article.

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## 1

# The case for future orientation

## Migration motives: looking for a better future

Migration is an age-old issue. Because means of subsistence and security are unevenly distributed, people go out to look for a better life for themselves or for their relatives. **Migration is usually motivated by necessity:** people leave their countries because their basic needs cannot be fulfilled in that country. In these unfulfilled basic needs, **the motive for migration** lies concealed. These needs are the original reasons for leaving. Migrants go out in search of security, stability, more financial stability, and opportunities to develop themselves and to be who they are.

The possibilities for legal immigration to Europe are very limited. People use the existing channels (asylum, student visas, family reunification, etc.) despite the fact that **they are not always tailored to their specific needs**. Their applications to remain in the country as a permanent resident are either refused or they lose their residence status after a given period of time. Others do not submit applications to remain in the country as a resident.

*“It is like building castles in the sand. They can very easily be washed away. You have a dream, but no hope.”*

a participant in Antwerp

**And yet they stay here.** The investment necessary to migrate and the risks taken do not outweigh the precarious situation in which they live here. The only solution often seems to be: “papers”. However, that specific option is not a possibility for many. **Their migration project grinds to a halt.** People survive from day to day, and the original reason for migration is soon lost in more pressing concerns.

*“During the first interview, we examine the reasons for coming here. People wanted a better life for themselves, or for their families, by sending money to them. We ask whether they’re able to send any money. It is often not the case. ‘And will it ever work in the future?’ Very few people are able to make their migration dream a reality. We examine what that means for them.”*

a counsellor in Brussels

## Migration policy

The possibilities for legal immigration to Europe are very limited. In recent years, the European Union has been focusing mainly on securing the external borders and on return programmes. And yet people continue to migrate. Many people only discover that they have **no chance of obtaining a legal residence status after they arrive in the country**. The Belgian migration policy is increasingly focusing on enforcement, limiting social rights and return programmes.



## Providing assistance to those with a precarious residence status

Those with a precarious residence status have limited social rights. The restrictive policy threatens to place them in an even greater degree of vulnerability. Those with a precarious residence status are often exploited, suffer from severe physical and psychological health problems, or resort to (sometimes illegal) survival mechanisms. This is detrimental both to them and to society.

As a counsellor, you will be confronted with serious violations of fundamental rights, and you will rarely find a satisfactory answer. Or you will see your work reduced to mere emergency assistance. This creates a lot of frustration and despondency. And you end up in gridlock, just like your clients.

### People with a precarious residence status

For purposes of readability, this brochure uses the collective term 'people with a precarious residence status'. This term is used for all people who are not sure whether they will ever be entitled to remain in Belgium as a permanent resident: people with a precarious residence status and undocumented migrants.

- **Precarious residence status:** any administrative residence status that only gives a provisional, temporary or conditional entitlement to a legal stay in Belgium.
- **Without a legal residence status:** any person is without a legal residence status in Belgium if he or she is not, or no longer, allowed to remain in the country under Belgian immigration laws.

*“We are seeing increasing numbers of people with psychological difficulties, created by the situations in which they live. People become sick, not just physically, but mentally too, because of the years spent being stuck in a hopeless situation.”*

a counsellor in Brussels



*“This is the hardest part of the job: you have single mothers with children coming to you looking for help and the only thing you can tell them is: ‘There is nothing available, everything is full, try the train station’.”*

a counsellor in Brussels

## Future orientation: looking beyond papers

In 2009, a number of integration and welfare organisations in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent started looking for a different way of providing counselling by organising group sessions with undocumented migrants. They called their approach ‘future orientation’: helping those with a precarious residence status to look beyond papers. This brochure provides an account of their experiences and insights.

## What is the position of the Flemish government on future orientation?

The Flemish Integration Policy also focuses on “foreigners without a legal residence status, and more specifically foreigners who are in Belgium without a legal residence status and who request assistance due to an emergency situation. [...] Humane counselling and assistance are also part of the objectives of the Flemish Integration Policy [...], focusing in particular on healthcare, primary education and compulsory education [...] and focused on orientation towards meaningful prospects for the future.”

The Explanatory Memorandum to the Integration Decree specifies that the Flemish government wishes to implement a policy aimed at foreigners without a legal residence status ‘with a view to obtaining a realistic perspective for the future [...] Implementing a policy aimed at guaranteeing basic rights (such as the right to emergency medical care for illegal residents, the right to urgent medical assistance for illegal residents and the right to education for minors) for foreigners without a legal residence status also implies that such people must be oriented, in the best possible conditions, towards a meaningful perspective for the future, for instance by informing them about programmes on voluntary return. In any event, no unwarranted expectations should be created with regard to their legal status.’

The General Welfare Centres (Centra voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk - CAWs) were assigned future orientation responsibilities by Decree: ‘centres shall offer a range of psychosocial support services for people with a precarious residence status and offer them new opportunities for meaningful future orientation based on their migration pathway and the given situation’.

In her 2014 – 2019 policy note, Flemish minister Homans wrote: ‘During this period of government, as part of coordinating powers and in close cooperation with the relevant competent Flemish and federal ministers, I wish to see local authorities and the Agentschap voor Integratie en Inburgering take measures to prevent situations of extreme poverty, abuse, exploitation and desperate situations and to lead these vulnerable groups to appropriate assistance and guidance.’

### SOURCES:

- [www.codexvlaanderen.be](http://www.codexvlaanderen.be) > Decreet betreffende het Vlaamse integratiebeleid (30 april 2009, artikel 3) [Decree on the Flemish Integration Policy (30 April 2009, Article 3)]
- [www.codexvlaanderen.be](http://www.codexvlaanderen.be) > Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering betreffende het algemeen welzijnswerk (21 juni 2013, art. 11, 24\*) - [Decision of the Flemish government on general welfare work (21 June 2013, Article 11, 24\*)]
- [www.vlaamsparlament.be](http://www.vlaamsparlament.be) > parlementaire documenten > Beleidsnota Integratie en Inburgering 2014-2019, ingediend door mevrouw Liesbeth Homans, viceminister-president, Vlaams minister van Binnenlands Bestuur, Inburgering, Wonen, Gelijke Kansen en Armoedebestrijding (Nr 137 (2014-2015), p. 19) - [2014-2019 Integration and Citizenship Policy Note, submitted by Ms. Liesbeth Homans, Deputy Prime Minister, Flemish Minister for Home Affairs, Citizenship, Housing, Equal Opportunities and Poverty Reduction (No. 137 (2014-2015), p. 19)]

# vzw Integratie en Inburgering Antwerpen – de8

de8 is the integration centre for the city of Antwerp. The integration centre's Fundamental Social Rights team has been working with people with a precarious residence status for several years, around issues including housing, self-perception, healthcare and legal assistance. During the regularisation campaign of 2009, the organisation noted that many people lived in hopeless conditions : they did not meet the criteria and were therefore not eligible for regularisation. Many people live with false hopes and they do not have access to accurate information. Furthermore, counsellors noted that clients often returned again and again, always with different problems. Counsellors feel powerless.



María Arredondo and  
Sam Mampaey, de8

## Showing the way

Counsellors María Arredondo and Sam Mampaey started up the first 'orientation course' in early 2010. Their aim was to ensure that users were better informed, were provided with the right information and received help in finding their way. Over the first six months of 2010, they were looking for the best approach. In the summer of 2010, they started anew following an inspiring conversation with an employee of Meeting vzw (Brussels).

## More objectives

María and Sam adjusted their goals: in addition to information, they aimed to strengthen or begin a reflection process, to work on self-esteem and to make people take a more active hand in taking control of their lives. Around 25 four-day group courses were held between 2010 and 2013.

## Anchoring

During this period, the organisation helped 169 participants. María and Sam mainly give the course in English. They are the permanent facilitators. In 2013, they describe their methods in writing. The Antwerp Integration Centre has chosen to embed the methodology in other organisations. An increasing number of regional organisations are calling on María and Sam's experience for information and training on future orientation.

de8's brochure and workbook are available on their website (in Dutch only). Visit [www.de8.be](http://www.de8.be) > 'publicaties'.

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de8 became a part of vzw Integratie en Inburgering Antwerpen on 1 January 2015.

## 2

# What is future orientation?

## Definition

Future orientation is a combination of a vision and methods used for counselling people with a precarious residence status.

Future orientation aims to motivate people to start thinking about a meaningful future:

- You connect with what really matters to the client. A good starting point is discussing **the original reasons for migration**. ‘What did you hope to achieve by migrating?’ ‘What was your dream?’ ‘How did you picture your future in a foreign country?’
- The clients receive **comprehensive and accurate information** regarding their personal situations. This clarifies their stalled migration project. Additionally, you will take the time to reflect with them about the **past, present and future**.
- The counsellor is a coach who provides **emotional and rational support** during the reflection process (see also Chapter 3).
- Future orientation focuses **on four areas** (see also Chapter 4):
  - **Recognition:** clients feel that they are recognised as individuals.
  - **Insight:** clients have an accurate and comprehensive image of their (residence) situation.
  - **Reflection:** clients go through an awareness-shaping process as part of which their past, present and future are actively linked to each other.
  - **Taking control of their lives:** clients take steps towards a new perspective for the future, which they experience as meaningful.
- The vision and the exercises of future orientation can be **used in a group setting or during individual counselling sessions**.

### IN PRACTICE

## Goals and means

“Immigrating to Europe or applying for residence are not ends in themselves. They are strategies aimed at meeting a given need, achieving a specific vision for the future. We therefore examine the original motivations, looking beyond the current deadlock. From there, we look for new ways to meet the unfulfilled basic needs, or to give a new and meaningful twist to the perspective for the future.”

*“People without a legal residence status are people, first and foremost, with dreams and motivations. A legal residence status is not an end in itself, but the means to achieve a dream.”*

a counsellor in Brussels



## For whom?

Future orientation is useful for **providing guidance to those with a precarious residence status whose migration pathway has ‘stalled’ or is likely to stall**. The length of time a person has spent in Belgium is of little importance. This type of discussion requires **a certain amount of mental stability** from the clients, and **willingness to think** about their own lives.

Future orientation was created for the purpose of providing counselling to undocumented migrants, but it is now **also inspiring counsellors and teams who work with other target groups** with a precarious residence status: asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, victims of human trafficking, new arrivals (family reunification, students), prisoners, homeless people with a precarious residence status, etc.

*“It seems difficult to think about the future with people whose basic needs are not met, but it is not impossible. Very vulnerable people in particular need to see progress in their stalled situations, and to be given the impetus to use their own inner strength.”*

*a counsellor in Brussels*



# Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel (Meeting project), Regionaal Integratiecentrum Foyer & CAW Brussel

Meeting was founded 16 years ago as a meeting place for refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. In 2008, a reform became necessary and Meeting became a reception and support centre for undocumented migrants, because there was a lack of reception and counselling facilities for this target group in Brussels. The need for a reform was motivated by the announced regularisation to take place in 2009 and as a result of concerns over a more restrictive policy that would take effect thereafter. The project looked for a way to work structurally with people who did not qualify for regularisation.



Ellen De Leener and  
Ronnie Tack, Meeting  
project

## Meaningful prospects

Counsellors find that residency (papers, return, etc.) is not an end in itself, but a means to achieving something that people consider to be important. There is growing public support to work on broader orientation towards meaningful prospects for the future, starting with the motivation for migration.

## Cooperation

The partners Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel (project Meeting) and Regionaal Integratiecentrum Foyer started up group courses in 2009. Using temporary project funding (Ministry of Welfare), a networker built up a partnership of cooperation with the CAWs.

Meeting facilitates the group courses and organizes reunions and a socio-legal hotline. Integratiecentrum Foyer supports the development of a vision and methodology and provides

information on residence status in the course. In the CAWs, counsellors use future orientation during individual counselling sessions.

## Over 20 courses

Over 20 group courses were organized between 2010 and 2013. Each course lasted three consecutive days. Ellen De Leener and Ronnie Tack of Meeting give the courses. 255 participants took part during the above-mentioned period.

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The Regionaal Integratiecentrum Foyer vzw became a part of the Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering on 1 January 2015.

## 3

# Vision and role of the counsellor

Above all, future orientation represents a **different way of looking at things**. Your attitude and vision as a counsellor are crucial. We believe that the basic elements described below are necessary for those wishing to work with future orientation.

## Broad perspective

- Your client is **not just someone without a legal residence status**: future orientation focuses on clients' entire identity, on all of the client's talents and skills, and the various roles they have.
- **You actively explore the situation behind the actual request for assistance** (shelter, school, health, etc.). 'How do you feel about the fact that we cannot provide an immediate solution to your request for shelter?' 'How had you imagined your life in Belgium?'
- **You explore the original motivations, dreams and reasons for migration**. Applying for legal

### IN PRACTICE

## Broad perspective

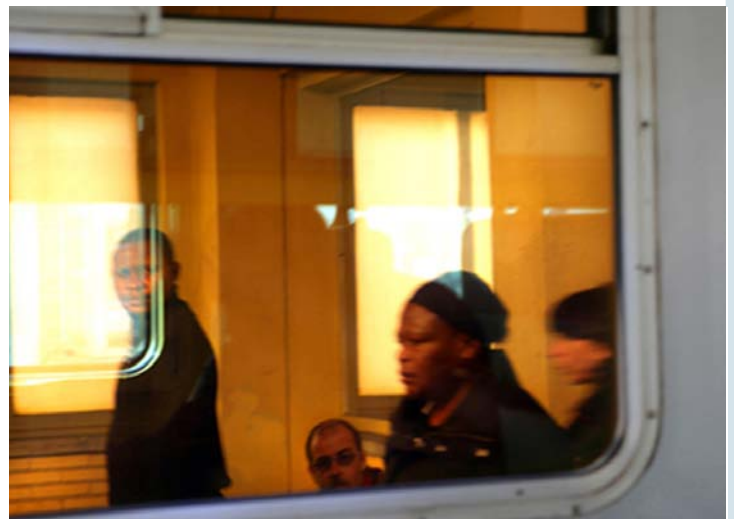
"Some of the people I meet regularly want to talk about their ongoing residence application. I use this opportunity to broaden their perspective: 'What will you do if your application is approved? What will you do if your application is denied? Do you have a plan B? Do you have a plan if you are forcibly deported?'"

residence status (regularisation, asylum, student visa, etc.) is not an end in itself, but a means to shaping a specific dream for the future. This also applies for returning to the country of origin.

### IN PRACTICE

## Beyond the initial request for assistance

"My client wants to know whether he stands a chance of being regularised. I have to disappoint him: there is a high likelihood that he is not eligible. I ask him how he feels about this bad news. What did he hope to achieve through regularisation? What did he dream of when coming to Belgium?"





## Autonomy

- Your client determines **the pace and progress of the counselling process**.
- You work with **vulnerable people**. Keep that in mind. Carefully explore how far you can go, in order to avoid additional emotional trauma.
- A meaningful perspective is **a perspective that the client deems to be meaningful**.

*“We do not tell people what to do. We tell them what they can do, and ask them what they want to do. You can only get people to make choices if you can ensure that they are strong enough to make decisions by themselves.”*

a counsellor in Antwerp

## Empowerment

- You start with **your clients’ original motivations** and what they hoped to gain by migrating.
- You look for **the things that give your clients energy, the things that inspire them**. The focus is on what they still want to achieve in life and not on that which they cannot (or no longer can) do.
- Future orientation aims to **make people understand** that the outcome of their situation is not only in the hands of their lawyers, the government or a higher spiritual power.

*“As counsellors, we have a tendency to always help people to move forward. However, there comes a time when you have to say: there is nothing more I can do here. I sometimes have to disappoint people. But, in doing so, we place responsibility in their hands. If you do not do that, you only prolong their dependence and ignorance.”*

a counsellor in Ghent



## IN PRACTICE

## Empowerment

“Clients often ask whether I have a solution for their situation. I try asking questions until the matter is clarified: ‘What type of solution are you looking for? What would you like?’ I always tell them that they are part of the solution.”

## Focus on the process

- Your work is **focused on the long term**, not only on finding short-term solutions.
- Future orientation is **‘going down the road together’** in a reflection process that is dynamic and difficult to predict. Sometimes the process remains in stasis for a long time and sometimes it will pick up momentum. People can come back on a decision taken at an earlier stage of the process.
- You are not the only person who has an influence on your client’s reflection process: try to **examine and engage the broader network**.

## Counsellors as coaches

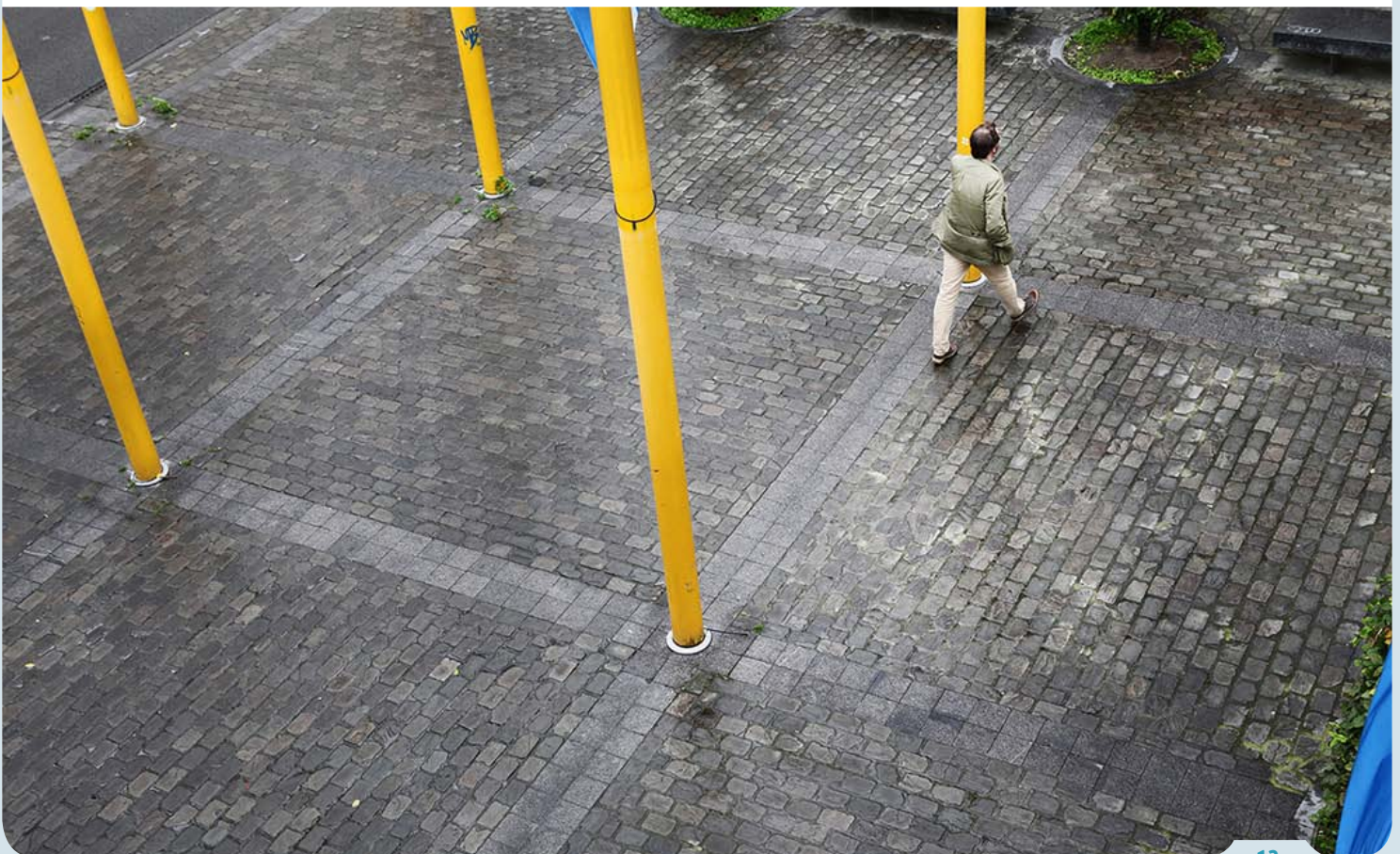
Coaching is **encouraging and supporting** your client’s growth and reflection process.

This requires **looking at yourself** too: is your entire attention focused on your client? Do you believe that you can make a difference? Can you put aside your own frame of reference and opinions? Your sincere attention is more important than applying a certain interview methodology.

### Tips for a coaching attitude\*:

- Focus on **possibilities**, not on difficulties.
- Be **on an equal footing** with your client: reflection and awareness cannot be imposed, and the client is the expert about their own situation.
- Coaching **requires engagement**: it is a focused and action-oriented process. The aim is to give your client the energy to take the next step.
- **Be authentic**, share what you are feeling: your own interpretations and doubts, etc.
- **Make your client’s dreams palpable**. Ask questions until the matter is clarified: ‘When do you want to start? How will you approach it?’
- Don’t be afraid to confront, but do so in a **constructive and engaging** manner.

*\* Inspired by: Jef Clement, Inspirerend Coachen, Lannoo, 2008*





# Intercultureel Netwerk Gent (ING vzw), CAW Oost-Vlaanderen & Samenlevingsopbouw Gent

The 'Mensen zonder papieren' (undocumented migrants) unit of the Intercultureel Netwerk Gent vzw (ING vzw) has been organizing Coexistence and Orientation (Samenleven en Oriënteren - SenO) information courses since 2003. ING vzw is the integration centre for Ghent. The course informs undocumented immigrants about their options in Ghent: how to apply for residence status, health, welfare, education, etc. The group counsellors are sometimes faced with restrictions: there are increasingly fewer options for providing orientation to those with a precarious residence status. ING vzw is inspired by Brussels and

Antwerp and has been working on its own future orientation programme since 2012.



Nele Van Haver (ING vzw) and Ann De Smet (CAW Oost-Vlaanderen, Transithuis)

## Transithuis

Other welfare organisations in Ghent have had to deal with the target group's increasing need for support. CAW Oost-Vlaanderen's Transithuis is specialized in assisting those with a precarious residence status and receives many requests for help. Counsellors were looking for new ways of working, looking beyond the need for papers. They learned about the future orientation methodology during a training course. They were enthusiastic, and they convinced their team coach to get to work.

## Partnership

In the autumn of 2012, the Federaal Impulsfonds approved a project application submitted by CAW Oost-Vlaanderen, ING

vzw and Samenlevingsopbouw Gent. There were sufficient resources to provide counselling in the year 2012-2013. The partners explicitly opted for a strong partnership. ING vzw and CAW took up their roles as counsellors and support workers, and Samenlevingsopbouw carried out the policy work.

## Groups and individuals

In the autumn of 2012 and in 2013, the organisations experimented with a combination of group sessions and individual counselling. The group sessions were moderated by two counsellors: someone from ING vzw and someone from the CAW. Other colleagues provided information on residence law, returns and further migration. The four day group sessions took place over the course of two consecutive weeks. The participants were able to request individual interviews with CAW coaches during and after the sessions.

## Tree of Life

The common thread of the group work in Ghent was the "Tree of Life", as a metaphor for the past, the present and the future. A reunion was organized one month after the group course. The partners organised four series of courses in the autumn of 2012 and in the course of 2013, attracting 21 participants.

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The Intercultureel Netwerk Gent became a part of Ghent's municipal Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering on 1 January 2015.

## 4

# How future orientation works

Future orientation impacts four areas:

1. **Recognition:** clients feel that they are recognised as individuals.
2. **Insight:** clients get a comprehensive and accurate view of their (residence) status and are given insight into their stalled migration project and the realistic prospects for the future.
3. **Reflection:** clients go through an awareness-raising process as part of which their past, present and future are actively linked to each other.
4. **Taking control of their lives:** clients take steps towards a new perspective for the future, which they experience as meaningful.



## 1. Recognition

**Recognition is the basis** of future orientation.

People lose their connection with themselves during migration and the period of uncertainty about their residence. Their identity narrows down to being an undocumented immigrant.

Future orientation **shifts the focus to the individual** again. In doing so, you notice that the clients flourish, confide in you, become more talkative, express gratitude. Recognition creates emotional space and a greater sense of self-esteem, both of which are necessary in order to be able to think about the future.

*“People are approached as people again. Lacking legal residence status is merely a part of who they are, it does not define them as a person. We recognise their talents, and that boosts their self-esteem. We bring people back to themselves, so that they may move forward.”*

**a group counsellor in Ghent**

**Jean-Claude Métraux** (a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist) describes four types of mutual recognition that can be tackled during future orientation.

1. **Legal recognition** is an important form of recognition in Western countries: whoever you are, we have the same rights in the eyes of the law. The current migration policy provides few opportunities to give this form of recognition to those with a precarious residence status.
2. **Social appreciation**: being seen and understood by the people surrounding us. You can show appreciation for:
  - The reasons which led people to leave their countries and the difficult path they have taken;
  - Feelings of sadness, grief and anger regarding the stalled migration process;
  - The efforts that people undertake to live and survive in difficult conditions, to find a place in society;
  - The roles that they take on nonetheless (for instance as a parent, friend, person of trust, etc.).
3. **Recognition of existence** means: as a human being, they must be respected as a unique person. You can give recognition of existence by:
  - Articulating your client's talents and uniqueness (for instance: optimism, being a good cook, sharing knowledge, etc.);
  - Showing what connects you as human beings;

#### IN PRACTICE

### Lack of time

"We often have very little time to counsel individuals. Or we only see clients for a single session, or for short periods of time. Nevertheless, I try to work on recognition and creating a connection in the short time I spend with any given individual. It helps to imagine that every conversation is the last that we will be having together. I want to ensure that the client remembers this meeting as: 'Someone really listened to me that time'."

#### IN PRACTICE

### Recognition for the stalled migration process

"When clients ask for a food parcel, they tell us how hard it is to survive. I thank them for their openness in sharing this information with me. They are proud people; it is not natural for them to admit to an outsider that they are having difficulties. I feel that these conversations help them to face their loss and failure. I try to make room for the emotions that accompany such moments. At other times, I sometimes try to help them to draw up a list of all the positive experiences in Belgium: 'What are you getting out of this difficult period for you?' Recognising loss and identifying benefits can provide the strength to formulate a new perspective."

- Being alert to details and picking up on the "small" things that people say;
  - Listening attentively and referring to things that they said earlier: 'You once told me that...'
4. **Gratitude** for what people contribute to society, to the lives of others.  
You can express gratitude by:
    - Thanking people for what they tell you;
    - Working on equality in the relationship: try to restore the imbalance in the exchange by saying something about yourself and your own vulnerability.

*Inspired by: Jean-Claude Métraux, La migration comme métaphore, La Dispute/SNÉDIT, Paris, 2011.*

## 2. Insight

People with a precarious residence status are often **very poorly informed** about their (residence) situation and possible options for the future. They do not know what they are entitled to or why their application was denied. Or they receive conflicting information: their lawyers provide them with different information than what they were told by the counsellor. **Ignorance fosters frustration and false hope.**

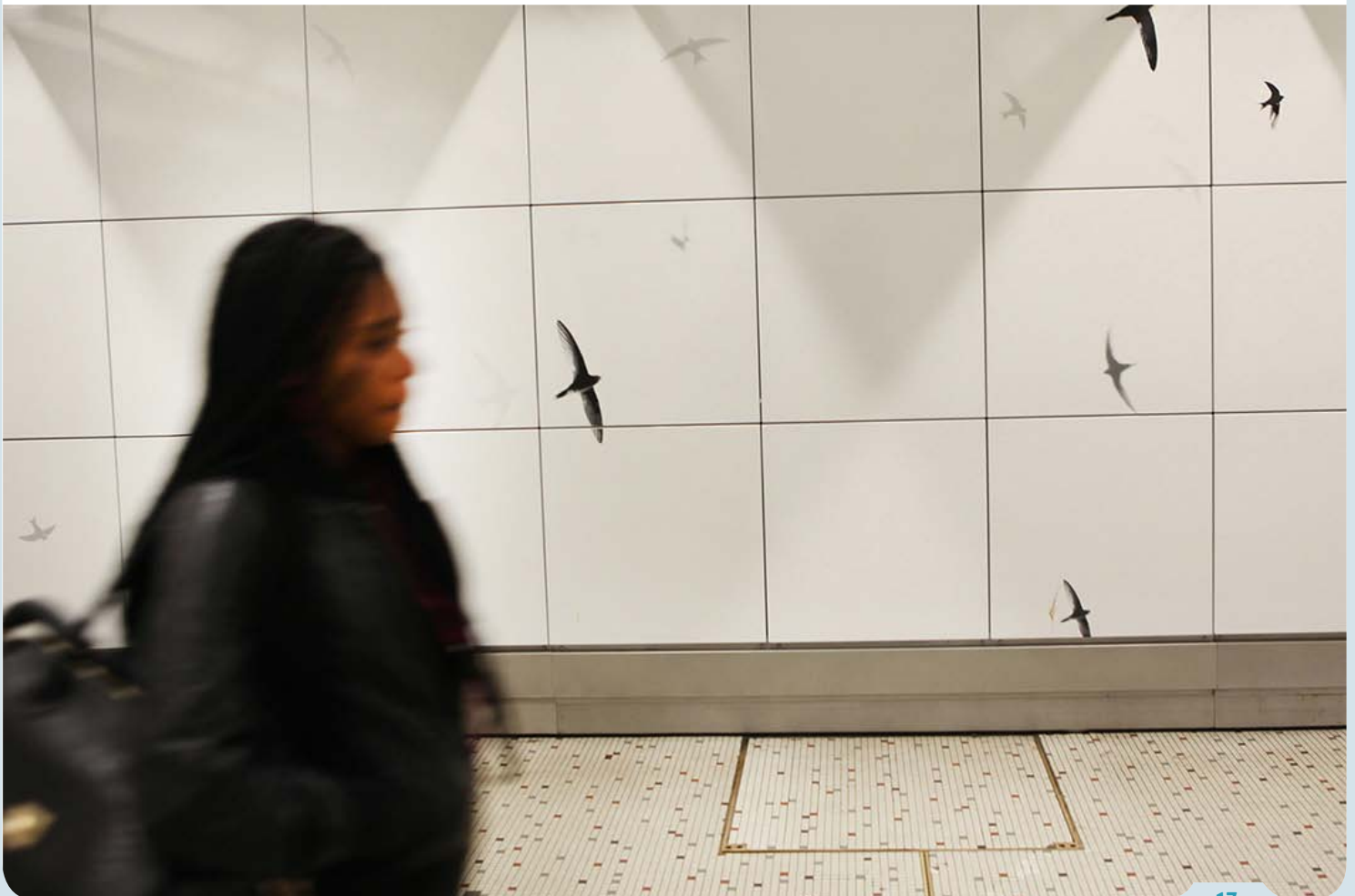
*“They never get told why they were denied. They cannot let go of the negative decision.”*

a counsellor in Ghent

### Insight into the broader context

Many clients feel powerless because they have little knowledge of the workings of Belgian society. It can be helpful to provide them with **more information**.

- What is Belgium’s **policy on migration**? Who takes the decisions? Who influences such decisions?
- How does this **society** work? Why are documents and procedures so important?
- What are the **possibilities** in terms of housing, healthcare, and work?
- What is the **role of a lawyer**? What can I and can’t I do for you in my capacity as a counsellor?





*“Future orientation also entails providing insight into the workings of the political structure. Who is responsible? How does the legal system work? And why does it work in that way?”*

a counsellor in Brussels

## Insight into the residence options

Potential right to residence is a means to achieving a specific migration objective. **These options are currently very limited.** Accurate and comprehensive information helps to dispel myths and misconceptions. We will not go into the legal and technical aspects of each option in this brochure. For further information, please visit [www.kruispuntmi.be](http://www.kruispuntmi.be).

There are only four residence options for those with a precarious residence status:

- Legally residing in Belgium;
- Migrating to another country (where legal residence may or may not be possible);
- Returning to the country of origin (at their own initiative, with or without support, or following forcible deportation);
- Continuing to live in Belgium without a legal residence status.

In order to have an informed reflection about the future, it is necessary to **thoroughly explore and weigh the four options against each other**. You provide each client with accurate and comprehensive information, tailored to their specific situation. It is important to **be honest**, and to **paint the full picture**. Always check whether the client has correctly understood the information.

*“There are four and only four options for residence. We cannot make a fifth one magically appear. The options are limited, but they must be explained in full. It is only by doing so that mental space can be created.”*

a counsellor in Antwerp

### IN PRACTICE

## Equivalent options

“The client must see the added value of going for a particular option. I therefore discuss all four options and I put them on an equal footing. Future orientation is not talking about returning. Our counsel is not limited to the options that the policy puts forward as priorities. I help to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the various options. Although difficult, I do not express any preference. I look for that which gives my client energy and that push them forward. And I ask critical questions to make the perspective realistic.”

*“People have many counsellors: their lawyers, their network. There are often myths about migration out there. I consider it our duty to dispel these myths. Often, it only then becomes clear why their application was denied, for instance. And only then can the grieving process begin.”*

a counsellor in Brussels





## IN PRACTICE

## The exercise with the 4 chairs

Purpose: the client gets first-hand experience of what it feels to move forward, to make a choice and to take responsibility for that choice.

Approach:

- Put four chairs in the middle of the room. Each chair represents a residence option.
- Ask the client to sit on the chair (the option) that they would choose at that point in time.
- Ask questions: 'Why did you sit on that chair? What can this choice bring to you? What do you lose by choosing this chair? Is this choice realistic? Which other chair would you choose if this option is not realistic?'
- Invite the client to sit on a different chair. 'What would happen if you sat on this chair? What do you feel sitting here? Is this a realistic option? What would be required for you to make a different choice? What can you do to make that happen?'
- Work with the client on drawing up an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of the four different options. 'What can this option bring to you? What do you lose by making this choice?'
- Repeat the chair exercise at a later date. The reflection process may take a different direction based on new information and considerations. Explore the reason for this change.

### No final decision

The ultimate goal of future orientation is not making your client take a final decision on one or the other option. Thinking about the future is a circular, evolving process that is difficult to delineate in time.

Your contribution to this process:

- Your client is aware that there are **four and only four residence options**. This is the framework within which their perspective for the future can take shape.
- Your client has the opportunity to **thoroughly explore** the options with you. What is legally possible? Can I shape my future within one of the residence options?
- You offer **emotional support** during this difficult exploration.

*"People always think that there is a loophole somewhere in residence law, something they didn't know. After the explanation, they come to the conclusion that this is simply not true. This gives people headaches."*

a counsellor in Brussels

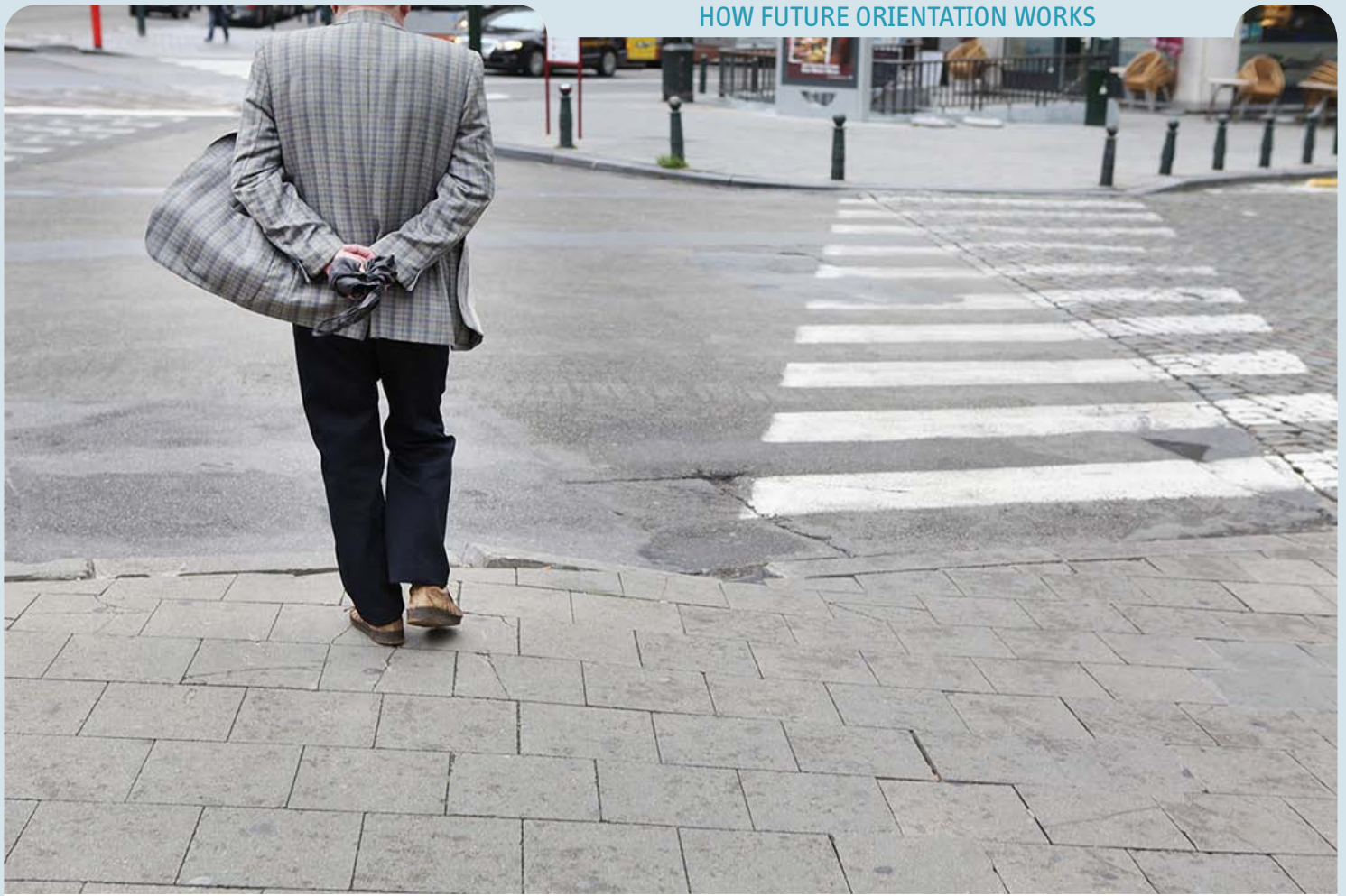
### Returning is not taboo

Returning to the country of origin is one of the four residence options in future orientation. You provide your client with accurate information about forced deportation and the support available to them in the event of voluntary returns. This information can make people think. The decision remains their own.

*"Honestly, there are positive sides to returning. The chances of making it here are like an atom, so small. When I think about returning, I immediately think of my family. Maybe I can rebuild my life, marry, or even start a family. But the question is: will I be safe? I have considered the various options. But I cannot return home now."*

a participant in Antwerp

Many of those with a precarious residence status **do not consider returning to be an option**. They have invested too much in their migration project. There are insufficient opportunities for the future in their countries of origin. Or it may be too dangerous for them to return. But that situation can change. It is therefore important that clients are made aware that they can come to you to discuss this option in the utmost confidentiality.



### Staying here without a legal residence status

Many clients choose to remain in Belgium without a legal residence status. Here again, you can enhance your client's understanding by informing them of the **consequences**: their rights and the risks.

- What does the absence of legal residence status entail in this country? Are you aware of your rights and duties?
- Where can you (no longer) go? Do you have a network that you can rely on?
- Are you aware that you cannot legally work and are you aware of the risks of working illegally?
- Do you know where you are going to live?

*"I have heard many things and I now want to think a little more about them. The discussions were often difficult and sometime painful, but I believe that it is important to be realistic and to not delude yourself, because you yourself are the first victim of that type of thinking."*

a participant in Antwerp

The 'choice' to remain here without a legal residence status does not have to be the end of the future orientation process. You can continue to encourage reflection by asking questions:

- How do you see your future and how does living here without a legal residence status contribute to your future?
- What was your motivation when you came here? What is important in your life at this point in time? Can you fulfil this need in another way?

### IN PRACTICE

## Confronting

"Accurate and comprehensive information helps to dispel myths. Confronting people with the limited possibilities for remaining in Belgium legally is often sobering. It makes people rebellious or just despondent. I keep in mind that such discussions can sometimes provoke strong emotions. I sometimes have another colleague explain the residence options, while I remain present in the room. In this way, I remain the person of trust and I can support my clients while they process the information."

*“With this information, people discover why their choice of a particular residence option was not realistic from the start. The hard truth can also be enlightening. The process of dealing with this information and understanding it often only starts at that point in time. And suddenly there is room for a new perspective for the future.”*

a counsellor in Brussels



## Where to find accurate legal information?

- Information about the four residence options:
  - Residence statuses, rights and duties: [www.kruispuntmi.be](http://www.kruispuntmi.be).
  - Legal helpdesk of the Kruispunt Migratie-Integratie: [www.kruispuntmi.be/contact](http://www.kruispuntmi.be/contact).
  - A specialised legal department in your region: [www.kruispuntmi.be/contact](http://www.kruispuntmi.be/contact) > gespecialiseerde organisaties in Vlaanderen en Brussel.
- Information about the support possibilities in the event of voluntary return is available at [www.fedasil.be](http://www.fedasil.be) > vrijwillige terugkeer. The site also provides the addresses of return partners, where your client can obtain concrete information tailored to their specific situation on a voluntary and anonymous basis.
- Information about the situation in countries of origin:
  - [www.ecoi.net](http://www.ecoi.net)
  - [www.vluchtelingenwerk.be](http://www.vluchtelingenwerk.be) > helpdesk Planet Search
  - [www.caritas-int.be](http://www.caritas-int.be) > asiel&migratie > re-integratie
- Information about life without a legal residence status: [www.kruispuntmi.be/publicaties](http://www.kruispuntmi.be/publicaties) > Infogids voor hulpverleners en begeleiders van mensen zonder wettig verblijf.
- Information for clandestine workers, labour rights (fair wage, leave, holiday pay, etc.) and the risks of undeclared work can be obtained from the Organisatie voor Clandestiene Arbeidsmigranten: [www.orcasite.be](http://www.orcasite.be).

## 3. Reflection

Future orientation's reflection exercises create the necessary mental space to consider the future beyond the here and now. They offer a break in day-to-day survival. The exercises broaden the client's perspective and break up the crippling, single-minded focus on papers.

*“Each client is passively or actively preoccupied with the future. Every conversation, no matter how short, can be an opportunity to get this process moving forward.”*

a counsellor in Brussels

Reflection is **more than just a thought process**: it is mainly concerned with **emotions and meaning**. The exercises cause your clients to pause and get in touch with:

- Their **original reason for migration** and their dreams
- Their **multiple** and **evolving identities** (different roles)
- Their **talents and strengths**
- The **four residence options** and their **advantages** and **disadvantages**
- Their **personal life goals**

The exercises are not a recipe to be followed to the letter. You can use creativity to adjust them to your work context.

## IN PRACTICE

## Reflection exercise: the lifeline

Purpose: the client examines their life from a distance and places the current period in a long-term perspective.

Approach:

- Draw a line on a sheet of paper. The start of the line is the client's year of birth. Divide the line into equal parts each representing a period of 5 years.
- 'How old are you?' Mark the line with a colour from the starting point to the point representing the client's age.
- 'How long have you been in Belgium?' Mark this period on the line in a different colour.
- 'What age do you think or hope to reach?' Mark this point on the line.
- 'How do you see your life in 5 years, in 10 years, in 20 years? What is your current dream and what is that dream like?'



*"This exercise was the most important one for me, because it teaches you to understand: if you spend a long time in Belgium without papers, how will you do this? Are you moving forwards or actually backwards? You have to give the matter serious consideration."*

a participant in Antwerp

## IN PRACTICE

## Reflection exercise on talents

Purpose: this exercise aims to find out what motivates people, what they dream about, what gives them energy. You obtain a broader insight into the client's identity and talents.

Approach:

- Place a large number of photographs or images of people performing various activities (jobs, sports, social interactions, etc.) on the table.
- Ask the clients to choose the activities they enjoy or would enjoy doing.
- Ask about the significance of this choice: 'Why did you choose this photograph (explicit and implicit associations)? How do you feel looking at this photograph? What does this photograph mean to you?'
- Explore possibilities: 'Are you currently doing this? Where and how could you achieve this?' Focus on the client's own experience and knowledge. If possible, fill in the gaps with your own experience and advice.



## IN PRACTICE

## Reflection exercise: the Tree of Life

Purpose: you enable your client to connect with themselves, with the past, the present and the future.

Approach:

- Ask the client to draw or paint a tree on a large sheet of paper.
- The tree symbolises life. Ask questions and ask the client to write down keywords next to the various parts of the tree:
  - Roots: past – talents: ‘What do you enjoy doing? What are you good at? What did you dream of when you came here? What did you gain by migrating? What did you lose?’
  - Trunk: present - internal and external support: ‘What drives you? What keeps you strong? What exhausts you? What makes you get up every morning?’
  - Branches: future – options for the future: ‘What do you dream of? Which goal do you wish to achieve? What would you want to change?’
  - Fruit: new life goals: ‘What is necessary to achieve them? What can you do yourself? How will you approach that?’

The creative form of working (drawing, painting, etc.) appeals to other talents and helps to bridge the language barrier. The tree can continue to grow, and to grow branches too, over the course of several counselling sessions. The exercise makes changing and bringing movement to a situation possible.

*“I miss my family terribly. It is very difficult being here for so long without seeing your family. I lost my family, my job and my friends. What I gained is the fact that I’m still alive. I was not beaten or attacked, but I am here without papers.”*

a participant in Antwerp

## 4. Taking control of your life

The information and reflection exercises provide clients with insight into a possible perspective for the future. It may sometimes be necessary to encourage some people: ‘There is no-one else who can do this for you’. They may sometimes want to effect change: ‘I cannot go on like this. Something has to change’.

The clients say how they want to reshape their future, for instance, by following training: ‘In this way, I will not return home empty-handed’. Others want to expand their network through volunteering or by learning to cope with anxiety and stress, by looking for a new place to stay, by repairing the relationship with their family, etc.

**These are all steps which they must take themselves.** You coach them in doing this, ensuring that their goals for the future are very concrete, meaningful and realistic. A realistic and personal goal gives meaning and energy. Drawing up a concrete schedule and plan stimulates accountability. Short-term actions are an opportunity to regain control, or to take ownership of certain aspects of their lives.





*“Of course, many people keep hoping to get their papers, but we explicitly state that they are only a means to achieve a particular goal. We expand their perspective: we want them to move away from an obsession with papers, papers, papers to a much broader view of the future. We ask what the papers mean for them. Many people believe that papers are the keys to paradise. We try to downplay this aspect. Not because we want to remove all hope, but simply because we want to take a realistic look at the situation. All your difficulties will not disappear once you obtain papers.”*

a counsellor in Antwerp



## IN PRACTICE

### The goal ladder

Purpose: your client formulates a goal for the future, and thinks about how it can be achieved.

Approach:

- Take a large sheet of paper and draw a ladder on it.
- Question 1: ‘What do you want to change about your situation in the coming weeks or months?’ Take the time to define a goal that is very concrete, meaningful and realistic. Write down the goal above the ladder.
- Question 2: ‘By when do you want to achieve this goal?’ Write down a date next to the goal.
- Question 3: ‘What is needed to achieve your goal?’ Write down the various answers (intermediary goals) on separate cards. Then discuss the cards:
  - ‘What can you do by yourself?’
  - ‘What do you need support for? Who can you ask for support?’
  - ‘What has to happen first?’
- Arrange the cards on the ladder, from bottom to top. They form the steps to the goal.
- Take a photograph of your client next to the ladder. Print the photograph and give it to the client. The photograph acts as a reminder for the client and as a reason for a follow-up interview.

*“People often say: ‘without papers, I am no-one’. However, if they are able to let go of this focus, they will see that they have forgotten that they are also someone else. Not just a person without papers. Time passes while they are waiting for papers. We then ask them: what are you going to do with that time?”*

a counsellor in Ghent

# Future orientation in a group setting



Future orientation was originally developed as a **group course**. Group work is **an effective form** of working on recognition, insight and reflection for those with a precarious residence status.

Future orientation in a group setting is **an intensive course** of three to four days (six to eight half days), spread over two weeks at most. Working in this way quickly establishes **trust** and a **strong connection** between participants and counsellors. The intrinsic link between the various exercises deepens **the process of creating awareness**.

Some organisations have no experience with group work (yet). If you want to try it out, information is available in the **manual** and **work book** of the Antwerp integration centre de8: [www.de8.be](http://www.de8.be) > publicaties > toekomstoriëntering.

## Advantages of group counselling?

- **A fate shared:** participants overcome their isolation and extend the network that they can turn to for support.
- **More learning opportunities:** participants inspire each other and learn from each other.
- **Inspired by other visions and experiences:** participants ask each other questions and share various life experiences. In doing so, they hold up a mirror to each other.
- **Safety:** people can receive information anonymously and process it in their own time.
- **Psychological support:** comfort, encouragement, shared burdens and care.
- **Space for informal contact.**
- **(Financial) efficiency:** more people receive accurate and comprehensive information at the same time.

*“The major advantage of group work is the exchange that occurs between participants. This helps open up many new perspectives.”*  
a counsellor in Ghent

## Things to look out for in group counselling?

- **Work on positive group dynamics, safety and trust:** negative dynamics can make participants confirm each other's feelings of being a victim.
- **Recruit broadly:** through partner organisations in your network, flyers, posters in selected neighbourhoods and shops, churches and mosques, through key figures in the ethno-cultural community you want to reach.
- **Size:** approximately 10 people.
- **Contact language:** trust and mutual exchanges are best achieved in groups comprised of people that share a contact language.
- **Mental stability:** group dynamics require a certain level of mental stability from the clients, as well as a willingness to reflect on their own lives.
- **Intake:** in interviews with each participant, gather personal information that is relevant to the course: language skills and level of understanding of the language, health status, etc. Clarify mutual expectations.
- **Location:** find a location that is accessible and familiar that has a kitchen and an eating area. Make it homely and cosy, so that people can feel welcome and at ease. Ensure that there is enough space for creative work forms.

- **Two counsellors:** counselling a group process is an intensive process, both in terms of substance, practical arrangements and emotional burden. It is necessary to have two counsellors. It is best to suspend other assignments during that period.
- **Informal gatherings:** take time out to allow for informal contact, for instance by cooking or eating together. Such informal encounters give participants the chance to 'show' themselves in a different light. Yet, these are not times when group counsellors can sit back. They have to remain attentive to what the informal moments can provide: trust, positive dynamics, and input for the reflection discussions.
- **Transfer and follow-up:** make arrangements with partner organisations for the continued monitoring of clients if you are unable to do so yourself. Look for ways of transferring the experiences and goals of the group work to the individual counsellor.

*“Had the future orientation course been given individually, I would not have come into contact with the other people. We were able to eat together and you could feel the solidarity around you. I still regularly see people I met during the course.”*  
a participant in Antwerp

## Combination with individual counselling?

Some clients go their own way after the group course. For others, the course is only the start of the awareness-creating process. Some participants admit they still need individual counselling in order to further flesh out their perspective for the future. Future orientation in a group setting can be a stand-alone process, but it is best associated with a longer-term individual guidance process.

It is therefore important that the various counsellors and organisations involved work on the basis of the same vision and that instruments are developed to enable the client to understand and follow the process. For instance, a 'back and forth' document that is kept by the client.

### IN PRACTICE

## Group and one-on-one counselling are complementary

In Ghent, future orientation is provided both as group and one-on-one counselling.

- Prospective participants have a preliminary interview with an individual coach (a counsellor from the CAW Oost-Vlaanderen).
- The participants take part in four group sessions (each Tuesday and Thursday during two consecutive weeks). Having individual meetings between the group sessions is still possible.
- The individual coach continues to provide counselling after the group sessions.

This way of working requires much coordination and consultation. Exchanging information between the various counsellors involved is still a very labour-intensive process. The partner organisations in Ghent are currently experimenting with a digital “monitoring document”.

# 5 Future orientation within your organisation

Do you want to get started with future orientation? Can future orientation find a place in your organisation? Below you will find the main preconditions:

- **Making a clear and informed choice** to work with those with a precarious residence status, based on the principles of future orientation. The choice and vision must be shared throughout the whole organisation: from workers to management and the Board of Directors.
- **A 'learning' organisation:** there must be sufficient openness to challenge and possibly adjust existing procedures and the organisation of work.
- **Ensuring a supportive environment for counsellors:** your team must be given sufficient time and space to support each other through peer review, supervision, etc. People need to be able to further educate themselves about immigration law, for instance.
- **Playing an active role in a network:** your organisation knows about other organisations that deal with the target group and helps to build a regional network with partner organisations.

## Working with other organisations

Working with people with a precarious residence status is a complex and difficult task. Different organisations are often involved for the same persons or families. **Cooperation and coordination** between various stakeholders and organisations in your region are necessary.

What is the added value of cooperation?

- **Better support** for counsellors through shared peer reviews or client consultations.
- **A common practical vision:** 'How do we want to provide services and assistance to people with a precarious residence status over the long term? Which roles do each stakeholder take up in this respect?'
- **Shared knowledge** of bottlenecks and a joint strategy for policy watch activities and working on structural solutions.
- **More efficient use** of people and resources.
- Your clients will be **less inclined to shop around**.



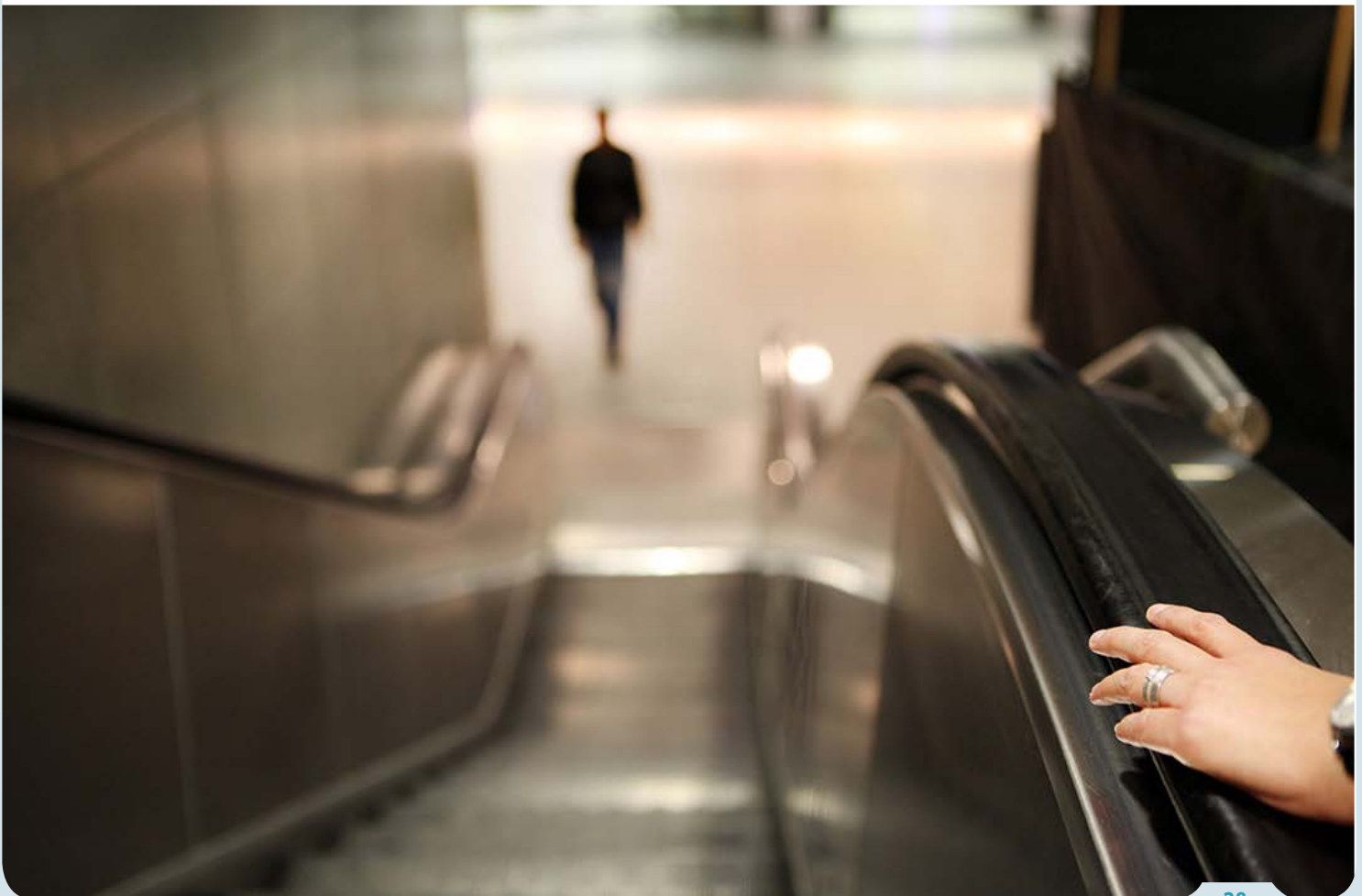
**IN PRACTICE**

## Three partners for future orientation in Ghent

In 2012, Intercultureel Netwerk Gent, CAW Oost-Vlaanderen and Samenlevingsopbouw Gent wanted to develop a range of future orientation services. In doing so, they hoped to build a bridge between integration and welfare work for undocumented migrants. The CAW submitted a project application to the Federal Impulsfonds.

- ING vzw and the CAW organised future orientation group sessions. The two counsellors are a training worker from the integration centre and a reception employee from the CAW.
- A few CAW counsellors (from various sub-operations) provided individual counselling to participants. They had preliminary interviews with each client prior to the group course, as well as a few follow-up interviews.
- Samenlevingsopbouw Gent is working on the policy watch component of the services provided.

The structural cooperation is gradually coming together and requires a significant investment in terms of time and energy. The various organisations (each with their own culture) have to learn about each other, make working arrangements, align their respective visions, etc. The main challenge is to maximise complementarity.





# Future orientation

## WORKING ON MEANINGFUL PROSPECTS FOR THOSE WITH A PRECARIOUS RESIDENCE STATUS

Do you regularly come into contact with undocumented migrants or people with a precarious residence status as a counsellor? In that case, you know that working with this specific target group is not easy. Your clients' residence options are very limited. Many of them are forced to survive on a day-to-day basis. Their immigration process has stalled.

Can you do more than just offer emergency assistance? Can you work together to think about the future, moving beyond the one-sided focus on papers? Future orientation focuses on what people consider to be important and what gives them strength. The vision and the working methods in this brochure help you to provide meaningful counsel to those with a precarious residence status.

In cooperation with: vzw Integratie en Inburgering Antwerpen - de8 ([www.de8.be](http://www.de8.be)), Intercultureel Netwerk Gent vzw (IN-Gent, integratie en inburgering, [www.ingent.be](http://www.ingent.be)), Centrum voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk Oost-Vlaanderen ([www.cawoostvlaanderen.be](http://www.cawoostvlaanderen.be)), Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel, Meeting project (reception and support point for people without a legal residence status, [www.meetingvzw.be](http://www.meetingvzw.be)), Integratiecentrum Foyer Brussel vzw (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering, [www.foyer.be](http://www.foyer.be)).

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[www.integratie-inburgering.be](http://www.integratie-inburgering.be) and [www.kruispuntmi.be](http://www.kruispuntmi.be)

The Kruispunt Migratie-Integratie became a part of the Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering on 1 January 2015.

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