A Participatory Action Research Study on Separated Migrant Youth Experiences in Northern France

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Social Work and Social Policy in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Summary

This thesis examines separated young people’s transitions to adulthood in Northern France. The emergent research literature on separated children and youth has identified the transition to adulthood as a particularly challenging period in their lives and the phenomenon has attracted increased research and policy attention over the past decade in particular. There is nonetheless a paucity of research examining how separated young people navigate and make sense of this period, and even less that seeks to understand their experiences through a youth-centred, participatory lens.

The research, which aimed to examine separated young people’s experiences of and perspectives on the transition to adulthood, was initiated in 2017, during a period of notable debate on child protection and migration policies and measures targeting unaccompanied and separated children in France. During this time, policy, academic and media debate was also fuelled by the dismantlement of several migrant camps, such as ‘the Jungle’ in Calais, ‘Grande-Synthe’ in Dunkerque, and several camps across the Départements of Pas de Calais, the Nord, Ile de France, among others. Despite a lull in immigration flows across Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic, these flows have since increased, with significant numbers of separated and unaccompanied children arriving in France, Ireland and elsewhere throughout Europe.

Underpinned by a critical epistemology, the research mobilised a four-phased Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodological approach involving the conduct of focus groups (Phase 1), informal group and one-to-one meetings (Phase 2), in-depth interviewing (Phase 3) and follow-up member checks (Phase 4). During Phases 1 and 2, the participating young people also organised a number of social actions that centred on creating awareness of their experiences of the transition to adulthood. Phases 1–3 of the study were conducted from November 2018 to July 2019 and Phase 4 was conducted in January 2021. Using snowball sampling and purposive recruitment approaches, 12 separated young people aged 18–24 years who had presented to Child Welfare Services in the Département of the Nord as ‘mineurs non accompagnés’ (MNA) [unaccompanied minors] were recruited to the study. The PAR approach combined several data collection methods to generate a deeper, more authentic understanding of the young people’s experiences and perspectives through data triangulation. The study’s participatory, youth-centred process also facilitated the development of safe spaces where the young people were supported to share experiences and develop mutually supportive relationships.

Central to this PAR study, both methodologically and theoretically, was an investigation of the mechanisms of power. The methodological approach aimed to examine the possible interplay of power, drawing on the work of Fricker, Freire and Foucault, among others, with the aim of addressing any potential power dynamics between the researcher and the research participants. This approach was mirrored in the theoretical underpinnings of the study, within which conceptualisations of non-linear youth transitions were mobilised alongside a Foucauldian lens of structural and micro-relations of power. These methodological and theoretical approaches
supported a detailed, youth-centred interrogation of separated young people’s transitions to adulthood and the various forces that shaped their lives.

The young people's understandings of ‘adulthood’ and the ‘transition to adulthood’ were strongly connected to the notions of interdependence, maturity and being responsible. However, securing legal status emerged, both symbolically and materially, as a central marker of their progression towards adulthood and significantly impacted their daily life experiences. The findings uncover an intricate, complex, and nuanced journey to adulthood for the study’s separated young people, supporting research which has critiqued conventional and overly prescriptive age-related notions of adulthood. The need for continued formal support upon reaching 18 years and beyond emerged strongly from the accounts of the young people, who almost always experienced a stark and concerning lack of support upon reaching ‘institutional’ adulthood.

This thesis demonstrates that critical moments such as ruptures in care and housing had a significant impact on the transition experiences of the study’s young people. However, prolonged experiences of uncertainty and precarity, as well as experiences of discrimination and perceived injustices, also impacted their daily lives as they progressed towards adulthood. Thus, a central argument of this research is that the transitions to adulthood for separated young people must be understood not only through the significance of critical moments but also through their ordinary, everyday life experiences. The study’s findings demonstrate that the transitions of the study’s separated young people were dynamic and ongoing, with critical moments and ruptures as well as daily stresses influencing their transitions.

The findings of this research extend current understandings of the power dynamics at work in the lives of separated young people and their impact on transition experiences. Forms of ‘power over’, such as structural power and the micro-physics of power, were influential in shaping young people’s transition experiences. The effects of Foucault’s (1995) Panopticon were found, for instance, to negatively impact the lived realities, behaviour, and outlook of many young people. Despite the clear impact of ‘power over’ in the lives of the study’s young people, many exhibited ‘power to’ through displays of (constrained) agency amidst a multitude of daily challenges. In this sense, intra- and interpersonal protective factors worked to support them to cope with adversity.

The findings of the research draw sharp attention to the importance of using youth-centred approaches to understanding the lives of separated youth as they transition to adulthood. The thesis concludes with policy recommendations that highlight that separated young people are unique individuals with diverse life histories, backgrounds and country contexts, who need integrated, interconnected supports from the point of initial presentation to authorities as unaccompanied minors through to their transitions to adulthood and beyond.
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Dedication

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The study explores separated young people’s lived experiences of the transition to adulthood in France. Using a participatory action research (PAR) approach with subjectivist and critical underpinnings, the research supported twelve separated young people\(^1\) from Francophone African countries to participate in an investigation of their perspectives on, and experiences of, their lives in France. The research was initiated in 2017, not long after the dismantlement of several controversial makeshift camps across the country that had emerged due to large numbers of arrivals and limited available housing options (Asylum Information Database (AIDA), 2017). In parallel, during this time, there was intense debate on reform of the child protection and migration policies and services responsible for separated children and young people. Notably, in October 2017, the prime minister announced that the age assessment of separated children would no longer be conducted by the services of *Départements*\(^2\) (local government, in charge of the Child Welfare Services), but rather come under the remit of the State (responsible for the immigration system) (Przybyl, 2017). This administrative shift indicated a move from a child-centric approach to a more migration-oriented perspective, where the emphasis is on the State taking charge of minors within the context of managing overall migration processes (Przybyl, 2017).

The French research literature on separated children has focused primarily on service provision and related political debates, typically drawing on the perspectives of professional and government institutions (for example, Cheval, Guzniczak, and Vella (2019); Nincheri, Titia Rizzi, and Radjack (2019)). Overall, there is a dearth of research on separated children in France and even less on their experiences of the transition adulthood. Consequently, the understanding of separated young people’s lives and experiences is extremely limited.

The core aim of this research was to produce a detailed analysis and contextualised understanding of the experiences of separated young people during their transition to

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\(^1\) The term separated young people/ aged-out separated children are used to describe separated young people who are now aged 18 years to 24 years.

\(^2\) France is separated into regions, *Départements* and district. Belonging to a region, the *Département* is the second-level administrative division of France. There are 101 *Départements* in France in total.
adulthood. Young people who presented to Child Welfare Services as 'mineurs non accompagnés' (MNA) [unaccompanied minors] upon arrival in France were recruited for the study. To create a rich picture of their transition experiences, both young people who had, and had not, been legally granted status as unaccompanied minors were included. The young people were recruited from the Département ‘Nord’ near the Belgian border. At the time the study was initiated, the research focus was particularly pertinent to this Département due to large flows of separated children arriving in the region and the intense – and, indeed, ongoing – local debate about policy and service responses targeting separated children. However, despite the policy attention given to this phenomenon, there was a paucity of research on the lives of the young people in the Nord.

Data collection was conducted over four Phases, with Phase 1 to 3 running from November 2018 to July 2019 and Phase 4 carried out in January 2021. Data were gathered with the participating young people during one participatory group project which consisted of three focus group meetings (5 sessions), 16 collective informal meetings, and three social actions (Phase 1 and 2). These social actions aimed at making their lived experiences of the transition to adulthood visible. The group project was supplemented with 23 informal one-to-one informal encounters (Phase 1 and 2), and the conduct of 12 in-depth interviews with separated young people (Phase 3 conducted in parallel to Phase 2).

This introductory chapter sets the scene by delving into the important contextual background to the research. To begin, a brief overview of the existing statistics concerning separated children in France is presented. From there, the historical evolution of the policy development of care responses for separated children in France is detailed, with attention then shifting to an account of French care and aftercare service provision for unaccompanied children and youth. Finally, the chapter concludes by presenting the rationale for the study and outlining the contents of the thesis.

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3 In French and European literature, there are an array of terms used to describe children migrating alone or without their parents/guardians. These terms, particularly unaccompanied minor, are often deployed interchangeably (Duvivier, 2009). In this thesis, the use of separated children/minors and unaccompanied children/minors are used interchangeably to reflect the literature cited.

4 Young people legally recognised as unaccompanied minors fall within the scope of child welfare measures as defined in Article L. 112-3 of the Code on Social Action and Families (Code de l’action sociale et des familles - CASF), which makes no distinction on the grounds of nationality but is based on the criteria of being a minor and in a dangerous situation (European Migration Network, 2021).
1.2. Separated Children in France

Over the past several years, the media spotlight has increasingly centred on separated children in France, a trend attributed to the increasing migration to the country, particularly in Northern France and Paris. France has witnessed a notable influx of separated children and young individuals, ranking among the highest in Europe. The 2022 data on international protection applications from unaccompanied minors (the most comparable data across Europe on this group) marked a record high for France (European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2023) revealing a 13.3% increase compared to 2021 figures (1,003 applications from unaccompanied minors in 2022, 885 in 2021) (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023, p.11). It should be however noted that, unlike their counterparts in other European countries, most separated children in France do not pursue asylum claims. Specifically, out of the 14,782 newly recognised unaccompanied minors taken into care services in France in 2022, only 6.8% (1,003 individuals) of all ‘mineurs non accompagnés’ (MNA) made applications for international protection (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023). Consequently, the prevailing emphasis in European literature on separated children who have engaged with the international protection process may inadvertently overlook the contexts and experiences of the larger proportion of unaccompanied minors in France. Accordingly, the French research instead concentrates largely on the shortcomings of procedures and care services for unaccompanied minors.

A key characteristic of French migration trends has been the unprecedented and continuous increase in flows of unaccompanied minors arriving in the country since 2015 (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018), except for the COVID-19 pandemic years of 2020 and 2021.

The national statistical monitoring system, the Mission ‘Mineurs Non Accompagnés’ [Mission for Unaccompanied Minors] (MMNA), introduced in 2013 (Frechon and Marquet, 2017) has published data and monitoring tables on MNA since 2017 (EMN, 2023). MMNA (2023) reported an overall rise in the number of unaccompanied minors arriving to France in 2022 compared to previous years (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023). In 2016, 8,054 separated children were placed in care by the justice system (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018).

In 2022, the majority who applied for international protection were boys aged 16-17 years. 82.5% of unaccompanied minors who apply for asylum in France that year were granted international protection (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023).
2018). This figure rose to 14,908 in 2017 and 17,022 in 2018 (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2020). There was also a slight decrease in numbers in 2019 to 16,760, followed by further declines in 2020 and 2021 due to the emergency State laws and temporary border closures implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2022). However, in 2022, the figures rose by 30.64% (or 3,467 persons) (demonstrated in Figure 1.1) (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023).

![Figure 1.1 The numbers of MNA in France between the years 2017 and 2022](source)

It is important to underline that these figures do not fully represent the number of separated children arriving in France. Available data on separated children in France are incomplete, with the actual figures estimated to significantly surpass those reported (Fiquet, 2016). The gaps in the data can be largely attributed to rising instances of unaccompanied children receiving unfavourable outcomes after their age assessments, leaving them without the corresponding legal status (as MNA) and excluded from care entitlements; also subject to the adult immigration system and needing to justify their reasons for remaining in France (Carayon, Mattiussi, and Vuattoux, 2020; Chaïeb, 2020). In 2017, for instance, 70,000 age assessments were conducted in 2017 (Carayon, Mattiussi, and Vuattoux, 2018). However, just 58% (41,741) of were granted minority status that same year (Mission bipartite de réflexion sur les mineurs non accompagnés, 2018). There is a paucity of data on those not granted status as MNA. Separated young people in this situation encounter particular challenges since they do
not have access to formal supports – understood to be targeted and mainstream services and structures provided by professional agencies with paid staff, including State-run and those run by NGOs – or a secure place to live, and are typically at risk of becoming undocumented (Nincheri et al., 2019).

Unaccompanied minors come principally from Francophone Sub-Saharan African countries. This trend has been linked to a combination of economic and linguistic factors, as well as prevailing migration patterns (Dambuyant, 2019). Over the past five years, most unaccompanied minors in care originated from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2020, 2023). These trends differ from many other European countries: for example, in 2017, less than 5% of unaccompanied minors in France came from Afghanistan compared with more than 50% in Europe during that same year (Dambuyant, 2019). However, similar to most other European countries, the available data indicate that only small numbers of unaccompanied girls are arriving in France, accounting for typically less than 5% of all unaccompanied minors in recent years (Frechon and Marquet, 2017). However, this number rose over the past three years to 6.8% (or 1,012) in 2022 (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023). This is a concerning trend given that unaccompanied girls are particularly vulnerable to risks related to smuggling and trafficking networks (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2020).

A large majority (75%) of unaccompanied minors were aged 16 or over in 2022, which is a relatively stable figure when compared to the previous year (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2022). Despite most separated children reaching ‘institutional adulthood’ (Chase, 2020) soon after arriving in France, there is a lack of research focusing explicitly on the lives of separated youth during period and little is known about their experiences of the transition to adulthood.

### 1.3. A Recent History of Separated Children in France

Migrant children and youth first entered public debate in Europe in the early 1990s, largely because of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

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6 44% of all MNA in 2022, 47% in 2021, 45% in 2020 (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023), 61% in 2017 and 2019, 67% in 2018 (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2020). In 2022, Tunisia moved to third place, surpassing Mali which dropped from first to fourth ranking between 2022 and 2021 ((Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023).

7 Girls accounted for 4.5% of the total population of recognised unaccompanied minors in 2018 and 2019 (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2020).
Child (UNCRC) at a European level\(^8\) but also due to the growth of child migration flows in many European countries and an incline towards restrictive migration politics across EU Member States (Crombé, 2019). Following European trends, the phenomenon of young migrants arriving alone in France became increasingly recognised during this period (Frigoli and Immelé, 2010). Notwithstanding the government’s commitment to guarantee child protection for all children on French territory, including non-nationals, under the UNCRC, migrant children and youth became subject to increasingly strict migration controls (described further later in this chapter).

An increase in the number of young migrants arriving alone in France, principally from Romania and countries in the Maghreb, sparked public debate on the care of separated children (Crombé, 2019). These minors were typically described as ‘young errants’, ‘young delinquents’, ‘street children’ and ‘homeless foreigners’ by the media and in local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Crombé, 2019 p. 25; Frigoli and Immelé, 2010 p. 132). The pejorative portrayals of these young people influenced the development of policy and service responses for separated children, where the emphasis was put on delinquency rather than a child’s rights perspective (Crombé, 2019). The first targeted initiatives for separated children in France were developed in Marseille in 1994, with the creation of the organisation ‘Jeunes Errants’ [Errant Youths], which aimed to support Maghrebian young people (Pryzbyl, 2017; Johnston, 2005).

1.3.1. Legal recognition

By the turn of the century, migration issues, particularly those related to the phenomenon of separated children, were gaining increased recognition across Europe as well as in France (Rollet, 2018; Frigoli and Immelé, 2010). At this time, minors arriving in France alone were typically labelled as ‘*mineur isolé étranger*’ [isolated foreign minor] (MIE) (Frechon and Marquet, 2017), a term that has been widely critiqued for its inclusion of the term ‘foreign’. It is claimed that the term encourages conditionalities or criteria on access to entitlements to care services based on a child’s status as a non-national (Kobanda, 2010). In 2016, due to a lack of consensus on the appropriateness term MIE (Etiemble and Zanna, 2013), and following European trends, MIE was replaced by the term ‘*mineur non-accompagné*’ (MNA) [unaccompanied minor] (Dambuyant, 2019). This change aimed to shift the focus from a child’s foreign/migrant status to his/her status as a minor who is in danger or at risk (Dambuyant, 2019).

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\(^8\) The UNCRC was ratified in France in 1990.
Unaccompanied minors were not mentioned in national legislation until the early 2000s (Frigoli and Immelé, 2010). According to Article 375 of the French Civil code, children granted legal status as unaccompanied minors are minors who are in danger (mistreated or at-risk children) and are, therefore, entitled to child protection (Etiemble and Zanna, 2013). Nonetheless, recognition of these children in legislation remains lacking and their entitlements and right to formal supports and care are, consequently, subject to interpretation by the justice system (Kobanda, 2010).

1.4. French policy responses for the care of separated children

French law is centred on affirming the right of unaccompanied children to protection. Upon their legal recognition as a ‘mineur non accompagné’ (MNA), they are entitled to access to care and social, educational, and legal protection until 18 years (EMN, 2021). According to Article 1 of the Law of 5 March 2007, which aimed to reform child welfare, Child Welfare Services (Aide sociale à l’enfance (ASE)) and Département Councils are responsible for their protection (EMN, 2021). Since the early 2000s, the care of separated children has been a subject of much political lobbying and debate (Etiemble and Zanna, 2013) and there have been frequent changes to the legislation related to separated children, particularly since 2010 (Frechon and Marquet, 2017).

There are multiple administrative levels for the governance of child protection and welfare systems for unaccompanied young people in France. Firstly, the prefecture represents the State (national government) at a Département level and oversees and manages policy implementation, such as the implementation of national migration policies through for example, law enforcement, processing and issuing residence permits, and the asylum application process. The Département (similar to a local authority) is responsible for implementing national policies and managing different public services – including child welfare - within each Départemental region, with its own administrative structure. The Child Welfare Services sit within the Département and are responsible for age assessments of unaccompanied minors and providing appropriate care and support.

9 Young people legally recognised as unaccompanied minors in France have no stand-alone legal status (Frechon and Marquet, 2017).
1.4.1. Decentralisation

In the early 2000s, there was an increase in the arrival of separated minors to Paris. However, the limited resources available meant that ASE was unable to provide appropriate solutions, which resulted in many of these young people becoming homeless (Pryzbyl, 2017; Johnston, 2005). This situation sparked public debate in which separated children were frequently branded as a 'social problem' (Pryzbyl, 2017 p. 4). Critical of ASE for their lack of engagement, local organisations mobilised to support separated children in terms of finding housing solutions and working to ensure that they had access to care (Pryzbyl, 2017).

In 2001, resulting from these controversies, the State initiated the Versini measure, funded by the Mayor of Paris and the State, which marked a significant structured response under which separated children were offered shelter and supports for accessing mainstream services (Johnston, 2005). The measure was initially successful, contributing to improving the situation of unaccompanied minors in Paris and to a better distribution of service provision between NGOs and ASE. However, services quickly became saturated and ASE once again struggled to find places for separated children, who were facing homelessness for a second time (Pryzbyl, 2017).

With the situation attracting growing criticism, there was a renewed focus on finding a solution, this time, one that centred on streamlining the new care system. The Versini measure was therefore restructured to better support Child Welfare Services to accommodate unaccompanied minors. A key aspect of the reform initiated by the Versini measure was transferring the responsibilities for several key services (including, tendering housing, outreach, emotional support, and age assessments) for unaccompanied minors entirely to three NGOs. These reforms initiated a process of decentralisation of care provision across France from the Département level to local organisations (Beddiar, 2019; Laurant, 2014). However, despite the reformed system, the new measures have faced substantial criticism for fostering a competitive market among organisations and conferring undue influence on private entities (Pryzbyl, 2017).

1.4.2. Repartition

Although many other Départements have also been faced with large numbers of separated children seeking care, limited responses have been developed outside of Paris (Pryzbyl, 2017). Départements have consistently urged the State, responsible for migration measures (but not child protection), to assume a more significant role in
caring for these young people, with several Départements declaring service saturation (Etiemble and Zanna, 2013). For example, in 2011, the Council President of the Département of Seine Saint-Denis announced the suspension of all measures targeting separated children and called for the State to take urgent action (Pryzbyl, 2017). The action, along with additional complaints about limited resources and service saturation from other Départements, led to the introduction of a ‘repartition’ system in the 2013 Taubira circular.¹⁰ This circular outlined procedures and guidelines which aimed to ensure that unaccompanied minors receive appropriate protection and care, including access to shelter, education, and healthcare. It sought to establish a comprehensive approach of burden-sharing across different Départements to ensure the welfare and protection of these young people within the French legal and social system. Image 1.1 on the following page illustrates the percentage allocation for each Département in 2022 (4.05%), demonstrating that the Nord is allocated the highest percentage across the territory. Overall, the repartition system has been widely criticised for separating young people from their support networks and leaving them at increased risk of isolation and emotional distress (Frechon and Marquet, 2017; Laurant, 2014).

Alongside repartition, the Taubira circular introduced State financial support for Départements to provide care (for up to five days) during the age assessment process and sought to harmonise practices for assessing the minority status on a national scale (Pryzbyl, 2017). The circular marked the establishment of a controversial national two-tiered care system, criticised for the prioritisation of separated children’s status as non-nationals.

Despite the introduction of the repartition system in 2013, services have remained saturated across Départements (Pryzbyl, 2017; Etiemble and Zanna, 2013). The profile and large numbers of separated children arriving from 2016 onwards have led to an increased policy focus and ongoing policy debates on budgets and service provision (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018). For example, several Départements once again suspended the care of separated children and called for State intervention (Pryzbyl, 2017). Furthermore, the continued focus on structural issues within these institutions has frequently ignored the best interests of separated children, who are often left with insufficient support (Pryzbyl, 2017).

¹⁰ Available at: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/circulaire/id/37174
Image 1.1 Repartition key for 2022 per Département

1.4.3. A move toward increased State involvement in care provision and coordination between Départements

More recently, legislative and policy change has led to ongoing debates about service provision for separated youth and further changes have since come into effect. Overall, until 2022, these changes largely reinforced the two-tiered system of care, focusing on repartition, the re-centralisation of certain procedures and responses to State level, and the collection of biometric data on separated children.

In October 2017, the French Government announced that State services would take over the age assessment of unaccompanied minors arriving in the country (Pryzbyl, 2017). Further reforms targeting separated children in migration legislation were introduced on September 10th, 2018 ‘pour une immigration maîtrisée, un droit d’asile effectif et une intégration réussie’ [for controlled immigration, effective asylum rights and successful integration]. This legislation introduced a system for automatically processing the biometric data of unaccompanied minors (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2019), where their fingerprints and other biometric information could be collected and stored digitally. The purpose of this measure was to help Départements to track the movements of these children across the country, also allowing them to establish whether a child had previously presented to Child Welfare Services in another Département, or had previously applied for a visa, residence permit, or international protection (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2019).

In 2019, several reforms were introduced and deployed to grant the State further responsibility for the care of separated children. These reforms related specifically to the implementation and use of separated children’s biometric data and the increased role of the State in financing care provision for separated children (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2019). In 2020, there was a further major legislative development\(^\text{11}\) with the introduction of the possibility for increased coordination between Départements and the State where the president of a Département Council can call on the assistance of the prefecture, particularly in regard to the age assessment (EMN France, 2021). Additionally, the modulation of the State’s financial contribution to age assessments was introduced (EMN France, 2021).

However, despite the introduction of these reforms and targeted policy responses, structural challenges in care provision persisted and separated children continued to

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lack vital support and face precarious situations. While the measures were welcomed by overburdened Département services, critics have argued that they undermined the State's commitments to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and prioritised migration control politics over the provision of services for separated children (Pryzbyl, 2017). Additionally, with attention focused strongly on the difficulties facing Départements rather than the best interest of the child, the matter of separated children's transition to adulthood remained largely ignored.

While the measures were welcomed by overburdened Département services, they faced significant criticism for undermining the State's commitments to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Critics argued that these measures prioritized migration control politics over the provision of services for separated children.

These issues, recognition of gaps in child protection measures, as well as rising numbers of unaccompanied minors, concentrated in specific Départements, prompted the adoption of the law of February 7th, 2022, relating to the protection of children [La loi du 7 février 2022 relative à la protection des enfants] (EMN France, 2022). While the legislation does not specifically target unaccompanied children, there are many relevant provisions (Council of Europe, 2023). The law, for instance, established a legal framework for sheltering and assessing unaccompanied minors by requiring a support file for minority assessments, facilitating improved identification and evaluation in criminal cases, and instituting temporary emergency reception (Eurostat and EMN, 2023). This legislation also modified the criteria for the distribution of unaccompanied minors between Départements and allocated exceptional funding to certain Départements for the care of unaccompanied minors entrusted to Child Welfare Services (Eurostat and EMN, 2023). Aiming to prevent sudden ruptures in care and to harmonise approaches to case management across different Départements, the law also provides for three measures to address these young people's transition to adulthood (EMN, 2022a). Firstly, unaccompanied minors at the age of 17, upon entering care, undergo an interview as soon as possible to help prepare them for their impending transition to ‘institutional’ adulthood. Secondly, unaccompanied minors entrusted to a trusted third party receive a one-year ‘private and family life’ temporary residence permit, issued no later than their 16th birthday, akin to those entrusted to the ASE. Finally, the law also includes an obligation for Départements to offer accommodation to young people entrusted to Child Welfare Services up to 21 years.

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12 ‘Institutional’ adulthood is understood to mean 18 years (Allsopp and Chase, 2017).
Although the benefits of these measures are still unfolding, they signify a proactive effort to safeguard and support the well-being of unaccompanied minors in the French context.

1.5. Child Protection for Separated Children in France

1.5.1. Separated children’s access to care in France

Départements are responsible for the reception and care of unaccompanied minors. However, the State also intervenes in age assessments, with the prefecture responsible for validating identity documents and, since 2019, registering those seeking protection from the Child Welfare Services (Council of Europe, 2023). When a young person presents as a separated child in France, they are not immediately entitled to care; they must first undergo a series of assessments that aim to determine their age and evaluate their vulnerability (See Figure 1.2) (Frechon and Marquet, 2017), during which time separated children are legally entitled to temporary protection for a period of five days (Gourévitch, 2018). However, this assessment process is frequently delayed, leaving young people isolated, without support and at risk of homelessness (Laurant, 2014). With many separated children aged 16-17 years on arrival (European Migration Network, 2018), such delays can result in a compressed and accelerated transition to adulthood (Roberts et al., 2017).

Determining the age of separated children can be challenging because they often present to Child Welfare Services without valid identification to confirm their date of birth (Carayon Carayon, Mattiussi, and Vuattoux, 2020). Others present to services with documents that are deemed invalid by authorities, for example, in cases where the available photograph does not bear resemblance to the child (Carayon et al., 2020). Disputed documents are usually sent to border police for verification and the police also may check fingerprints and/or interrogate the young person (Pather, 2019). Despite being ruled unconstitutional multiple times, the practice of interrogating separated children during document verification remains commonplace (Pather, 2019). Furthermore, at the point of presenting to border police, the separated child may be requested to undergo a series of medical tests (including bone tests, teeth examinations, measurements of the collarbone, etc.) (Gourévitch, 2018). However, these tests have a margin of error of approximately 18 months and consequently, experts recommend that tests should not be used to determine the age of separated children, who typically present to services at 16-17 years (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2018; Frechon and Marquet, 2017). However, although experts have
denounced the use of the tests, they remain an accepted age assessment method\textsuperscript{13} (Bailleul and Senovilla, 2016). In addition to document verification, further investigation into age and vulnerability is conducted through an interview which aims to analyse several prescribed markers including, behaviour, the legitimacy of the child’s story, apparent level of maturity and physical appearance (Carayon et al., 2020). The use of such indicators has been the subject of wide criticism and these evaluation procedures have been deemed by some researchers to be subjective, discretionary and arbitrary (Carayon et al., 2020). Figure 1.2 presents the age assessment procedure that unaccompanied children must undergo to determine their legal status.

\textbf{Figure 1.2 Age assessment procedure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{age_assessment_diagram.png}
\caption{Age assessment procedure}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{13} For example, on the 21\textsuperscript{st} of March 2019, the Constitutional Council deemed bone testing acceptable on condition that the results state and explain the margin of error (Carayon et al., 2020).
1.5.2. Entering into the care system in France

Large numbers of separated children are refused minority in France.\textsuperscript{14} While these young people can appeal to the children’s court, they are legally considered to be adults unless their appeal is granted (Carayon et al., 2020). Those who are refused legal status as an unaccompanied minor are therefore not entitled to child protection services, are considered adults and, in all practical terms, they age-out into the world of migration controls and procedures.

Unaccompanied minors are legally recognised as children who are in danger or at risk and entitled to care and legal representation until the age of 18 years (Carayon et al., 2020; Masson, 2008). Within the remit of the Child Welfare Services, Départements are responsible for child protection, reception and care of those with legal status as unaccompanied minors (Council of Europe, 2023).

Available statistics indicate that 94% of unaccompanied minors are taken into care within a year of their arrival to France (Frechon and Marquet, 2017). Supports provided generally include housing supports, education and training, medical care, support with administrative procedures and socio-professional integration, social assistance, aftercare planning and legal representation (Beddiar, 2019; Laurant, 2014). However, despite being taken into care, separated children may have limited or delayed access to supports (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018; Jamet and Keravel, 2017). Shortcomings in care structures have often left separated children vulnerable and at risk, for example, to homelessness; with limited educational supports and facing administrative difficulties as they transition to adulthood (Laurant, 2014).

1.5.3. Housing challenges

When separated children enter into care, ASE is obliged to find the young person a place to stay. Housing arrangements depend on the age of the minor and the availability of places but include children’s homes, foster families, social ‘hostels’ and specialised care structures (Maison d’Enfance à Charactère Social [social children’s home] (MECS)) and semi-independent living (for those aged 16-17 years) (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018). Nevertheless, due to service saturation, many separated children find themselves staying in inappropriate

\textsuperscript{14} An estimated 42% in 2017 (Mission bipartite de réflexion sur les mineurs non accompagnés, 2018).
accommodation, including hotels, temporary shelters or transitional housing for young workers called a ‘Foyer Jeune Travailleur’ (FJT) [Young Workers Residence]\(^{15}\) (Archambault, Siri, and Lardanchet, 2016; Beddiar, 2019; Gourévitch, 2018; Laurant, 2014). Measures have recently been taken to tackle the use of inappropriate, substandard accommodation under the new law on child protection (7th February 2022, described previously in the chapter), which prohibits, inter alia, the accommodation of children in hotels as of 2024 (AIDA, 2022).

Separated children’s social networks regularly fill gaps in the care system; for example, when no alternative options are available, volunteer foster families often provide housing solutions (Gourévitch, 2018). In this regard, the Law of 14 March 2016 on child welfare establishes a host programme with voluntary third parties in certain Départements (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018). In 2017, the Département of the Nord instigated a local volunteer family host network to encourage support in a family context that diversifies the types of reception available to young people and promotes their social and cultural integration as well as the citizenship commitment of volunteer families (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018). However, despite the various formal and informal housing supports, some separated children still find themselves sleeping rough (Laurant, 2014).

Shortcomings in housing solutions impact other areas of the child’s life since they may also have limited access to other services. Once a separated child has been placed in care, for example, an evaluation is conducted to assess their educational needs, match services to these needs, and prepare a ‘child plan’ (Jamet and Keravel, 2017). Article L223-1-1 of the Code de l’action sociale et des familles (CASF) states that the child plan, called a ‘Projet pour l’enfant’ (PPE), “aims to guarantee their physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual and social development. This document accompanies the minor for as long as they remain within the child welfare system” (EMN France, 2020 p. 22-23). The document must take into account the development, physical and mental health of the child, relationships with family and others and the child’s education and social life (EMN France, 2020). However, when a separated child

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\(^{15}\) ‘Foyer Jeune Travailleur’ (FJT) [Young Workers Residence], is a form of temporary supported accommodation (furnished and unfurnished individual units with communal living spaces) provided by NGOs. FJTs are available to young workers or those doing apprenticeships who are in precarious situations, who live alone, and are aged between 16 and 25 years. Some FJT also are available for students and young people seeking work. The length of stay is one month and can be renewed (Action-Sociale, 2023).
is in a precarious housing situation, conducting these evaluations can become challenging and the child may lose out on other entitlements – including education and psychosocial services and supports – that help to ensure a successful transition to adulthood (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018; Jamet and Keravel, 2017).

1.5.4. Limited access to education

When this research started, separated children had the right to education in France (Fiquet, 2016) up to the age of 16 years (EMN France, 2020). Since then, legislation introduced on 26 July 2019 has made participation in education or training compulsory for all separated young people up to 18 years (EMN France, 2020). The compulsory training requirement is met when adolescents aged 16 to 18 are enrolled in school or an apprenticeship programme, a programme of support for social and professional integration or civic service or employment (EMN France, 2020; Eurydice, 2020).

Once in care, an educational evaluation is conducted to establish the level of French language proficiency and the child’s academic ability (EMN France, 2020). If the child’s level of education and language is deemed sufficient, they are oriented to a standard curriculum class, and, if not, they are re-oriented to specific educational programmes in the national education system (EMN France, 2020; Daryet, 2018; Bailleul and Senovilla, 2016).

Separated children aged 16 years and over face particular difficulties in accessing education (Valette, 2018). For example, in one Département, Child Welfare Services did not consider it necessary to register separated children aged 16 years and over in school (Valette, 2018). In addition, services have been reportedly slow to conduct educational evaluations with unaccompanied minors aged 16 years and over (Bailleul and Senovilla, 2016). Delays in the process of matching young people to courses are commonplace, often due to the limited school places available and, as a result, separated children may have to wait several months before being assigned a school (Bailleul and Senovilla, 2016). As they wait, children may be provided with French language classes, but they cannot access the formal education system (Bailleul and Senovilla, 2016). Exclusion or long waits in accessing care can also negatively impact

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16 Assessment is carried out by the Careers Information and Guidance Centre (Centre d’information et d’orientation - CIO) or by the Academic Centre for the Education of Children Speaking Other Languages (Centre académique pour la scolarisation des enfants allophones - Casnav) (EMN, France, 2020).
their ability to access education, with those waiting for transfers to other Départements (Bailleul and Senovilla, 2016) and those without a care placement and living in camps found to face such challenges (Valette, 2018). The barriers to accessing formal education can negatively impact the transition to adulthood for those aged 16 years and over. For example, to apply for a residence permit at 18 years, a separated young person must have evidence to show that they have followed an educational course with a duration of at least six months and which has led to a (vocational) qualification (EMN France, 2020).

1.6. The Emergence of European Policy Attention to Separated Young People’s Transitions to Adulthood

Since this PhD research was initiated, European institutional recognition that the transition to adulthood can be a particularly complex process for separated children has grown. For example, the Council of Europe Recommendation Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood - Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 (2019), adopted in April 2019, states that “young refugees no longer have access to the same rights and opportunities as they had as children and many of them, as adults, are likely to face an abrupt change in their ability to access services and support across many sectors” (Council of Europe, 2019). This recommendation calls for the safeguarding of the rights and opportunities of young refugees during the transition to adulthood, identifying youth work as a means of supporting the integration of young refugees as they transition to adulthood (Council of Europe, 2019).

The European Union has also placed an increased focus on the transition to adulthood for migrant youth in recent policy measures. For example, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the European Commission in March 2021 to better protect all children, help them fulfil their rights, and place them at the centre of EU policymaking. The Strategy invites EU Member States to “promote national strategies and programmes to speed up de-institutionalisation and the transition towards quality, family- and community-based care services including with an adequate focus on preparing children to leave care, including for unaccompanied migrant children” (Council of Europe, 2021 p. 12). More recently, the European Child Guarantee, adopted by the European Council in June 2021 to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing effective access of children in need to a set of key services, identified the challenges that children with a migrant background encounter and recommended that Member States consider the best interest of the child during the transition from care settings (European Council, 2021).
While until recently, only one-third of EU States, plus Norway, had transition supports in place for separated children and young people (EMN, 2018), efforts to improve the services available to aging-out separated young people have grown. For example, most EU Member States have now made it a priority to improve the protection, care and aftercare supports available to unaccompanied minors, with several Member States taking particular measures targeting the transition to adulthood, for example, through the provision of semi-independent housing, prolonged reception, access to the labour market and further education (Stapleton, Gökay, Chardymova, and Kayser (2023); EMN, 2022b).

Despite these policy advancements, and notwithstanding evidence of a greater focus on child migrants within policy and research, there is a notable dearth of dedicated policy and research attention to separated young people’s experiences and their situations and experiences upon reaching the age of legal adulthood and beyond (Allsopp and Chase, 2017).

### 1.7. Separated Young People’s Transitions to Adulthood in France

Often close to the age of 18 when they enter into the child protection system, separated children age out of the national care systems quickly (Frechon and Marquet, 2017; Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2018). When separated children turn 18, they are no longer protected under the UNCRC or child protection legislation and guardianship ends (EMN France, 2020). The transition to adulthood is an important juncture in the lives of separated children who face challenges in negotiating complex administrative procedures with limited support (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018).

#### 1.7.1. Preparing for majority

The Département is responsible for informing, preparing and directing separated children on issues related to residence permits, social services (including accommodation and social rights) and socio-professional integration services (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018). In accordance with Article L. 222-5-1 of the Code on Social Action and Families\(^\text{17}\), before separated children reach the age of 18, the Département Council must conduct an interview with

\(^{17}\) Added to the Code in the Law of 14 March 2016 (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018).
the child to review and plan the supports required by him/her for independence (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018). When unaccompanied minors are aged 17 years, the Département Council is also responsible for drafting an ‘access to independence’ plan. This plan focuses on developing a comprehensive solution to meet the young person’s educational, social, health, employment, housing and resource needs (EMN France, 2020; French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018). In addition to ensuring that all unaccompanied minors who enter care from the age of 17 years undergo an interview promptly upon accessing care, the new law on child protection adopted on the 7th February 2022 (described earlier in section 1.4.3) has also introduced specific measures for a better preparation for transition to adulthood through improvements in the quality of information provided during this interview (Council of Europe, 2023).

1.7.2. Aftercare provision

In France, while in principle, separated young people can access aftercare supports until they are aged 21 years (European Migration Network, 2015), little is known about the situations of those transitioning from Child Welfare Services (Direction Générale de la Cohésion Sociale (DGCS), 2020). Until recently, the aftercare supports available were limited and the assistance available generally focused on assisting a young person’s move out of Child Welfare accommodation (e.g. residential centres) (European Migration Network, 2015).

Juvenile court judges can order judicial protection for particularly vulnerable young people who have reached ‘institutional’ adulthood (Conseil d’Orientation des Politiques de Jeunesse and Conseil National de la Protection de l’Enfance, 2023; Council of Europe, 2023). Until 2022, when the new child protection law was passed, temporary assistance could be provided at the discretion of the presidents of the Département councils to young people who were under the ‘Young Adult Contract’ (EMN France, 2020; Daryet, 2018). Under the Young Adult Contract, separated youth up to age 21 years could access temporary assistance provided that they could demonstrate ‘social insertion’ difficulties (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010). They therefore needed to demonstrate their efforts to integrate into French society, typically related to continuing formal education or training (Frechon and Marquet, 2017; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010). With no other solution, an overwhelming majority of aged-out separated children apply to receive support under the Young Adult Contract (Frechon and Marquet, 2017).
Without a precise legal definition of the criteria of these young adult contracts in the Code of Social Action and Families there were divergent interpretations of criteria across Départements (Bourguignon, 2018). As a result, there was significant variation in the level of support provided under these contracts, including differences in eligibility criteria and the duration of the support (Bourguignon, 2018). The forms of assistance also varied significantly between Départements; for example, some offered financial aid based on regular or one-time allowances (such as assistance for obtaining a driver's license) and, others, housing (Direction Générale de la Cohésion Sociale (DGCS), 2020). Additionally, the contracts were not compulsory, which meant that Départements often reduced the length of these contracts (Daryet, 2018). Some Départements also implemented very similar programmes to the Young Adults Contract but under different names. For example, the “Contrat d'Entrée dans la Vie Adulte” (EVA) [Entry into Adult Life Contract] in the Département of the Nord included provisions for educational support, financial aid, temporary accommodation, and scholarships to pursue higher education (URIOPSS, n.d.).

The adoption of the child protection law of the 7th of February 2022 aimed to reconcile some of the policy differences between Départements. Under this new legislation, all former Child Welfare Service recipients are eligible for temporary assistance, such as the Young Adult Contract, up to the age of 21 years, with increased legal assistance and better access to different rights (health, accommodation, residence permit, education etc.) available for those benefiting from supports under a Young Adults Contract (Council of Europe, 2023). The law also includes an obligation for Départements to offer accommodation solutions to young people entrusted to Child Welfare Services up to 21 years (EMN, 2022a). Despite these positive developments, there are limitations remain. Firstly, for young people who experience difficulties in accessing care, including unaccompanied minors whose age was disputed, access to these aftercare supports remains at the discretion of Département councils (Council of Europe, 2023). Additionally, a recent report on social professional integration of care-leavers raised concerns about the lack of transparency and clarity regarding the implementation of this law (Conseil d’Orientation des Politiques de Jeunesse and Conseil National de la Protection de l’Enfance, 2023). This report found inefficiencies in

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18 In the Nord-Pas de Calais region, 89% of young people held a Young Adults Contract for a duration of six months or less (Bourguignon, 2018).
19 Several Départements reduced the contracts to six months maximum (Daryet, 2018).
20 Those who are not entitled to the temporary assistance aftercare measures or are denied it can lodge an appeal to the president of the Département council or to an administrative judge (Council of Europe, 2023).
the implementation of the law as well as ongoing issues regarding coordination between State and Départements and the persistence of territorial inequalities (Conseil d’Orientation des Politiques de Jeunesse and Conseil National de la Protection de l'Enfance, 2023).

1.7.3. Residence permits

Separated young people in France do not require a residence permit until they reach the age of 18 years. Most do not enter the asylum process and, instead, begin the long process of applying for temporary residence permits around the age of 18 years (Bailleul and Senovilla, 2016; Frechon and Marquet, 2017). When a young person is granted a resident permit, they can access social welfare supports and social security (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018) and rent private accommodation independently (Daryet, 2018). The procedure for receiving a residence permit may take several months (Daryet, 2018) and the long waiting time for permits often leaves separated young people living in precarity. Moreover, the type of permit granted has a direct impact on available aftercare supports (Frechon and Marquet, 2017).

Unaccompanied minors who were in the care of Child Welfare Services or a trustworthy third party (e.g. foster carer) before the age of 15 years can apply for nationality when they turn 18 years (Council of Europe, 2023). Those who were in the care of Child Welfare Services before their 16th birthday can apply for a temporary “private and family life” permit (EMN France, 2020, p. 47). Those who entered into care after their 16th birthday are not eligible for this permit and, instead, can be granted exceptional admission for residence (EMN France, 2020). However, these permits are

21 In 2016, over 8000 separated children were taken into state care, however, only 474 of these young people went into the asylum process (Frechon and Marquet, 2017).
22 Article L. 313-11, 2°bis of the CESEDA (Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile) [Code of Entry and Residence of Foreigners and the Right of Asylum] states that an “unaccompanied minor who has been in the care of the Child Welfare Services before the age of 16 and, on condition of the real and serious nature of the training, the nature of his or her relationship with his or her family in the country of origin, and the opinion of the host structure on the integration of this foreigner into French society” may be issued with a temporary “private and family life” permit (EMN France, 2020, p. 47).
23 This permit is also available to those victim of trafficking (EMN France, 2020).
24 The Law on Immigration, Integration and Nationality of 16 June 2011 (available at: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000024191380) introduced a new provision allowing for exceptional admission for residence for young adults who entered France as unaccompanied minors and were under the care of the Child Welfare Services after turning 16 years (EMN France, 2020). The provision is included in Article L. 313-15 of the CESEDA (Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile) [Code of Entry and Residence of Foreigners and the Right of Asylum] which states: “exceptionally and unless the individual's
not guaranteed even if the *Département* or local NGOs support the young person with the application as several conditions must be met when applying for such a permit (Daryet, 2018). These conditions include the nature of their relationship with their family in the country of origin, proof of engagement with education, and a positive appraisal of their integration into French society (EMN France, 2020; Frechon and Marquet, 2017; Martini, 2014). Demonstrating their integration, for example, through the uptake of aftercare measures, is important and improves their chances of securing residence status (Council of Europe, 2023). The prefecture also has the discretionary power to issue a temporary “student” residence permit to those who respect the criteria mentioned above and “seriously and conscientiously” follow secondary or university education courses (EMN France, 2020). Those enrolled in vocational training courses are not eligible for temporary student permits (EMN France, 2020).

There are several challenges faced by separated youth related to the need to quickly secure residency. Firstly, the conditionalities placed on permits leave many separated young people at risk (Frechon and Marquet, 2017), particularly as most present to Child Welfare Services after turning 16 years (described earlier in the chapter). If a separated young person is not enrolled in an educational programme, for instance, they may find themselves without residency and therefore may struggle to secure accommodation (Daryet, 2018). Additionally, to fulfil the residency criteria, separated children aged 16 years and over are typically directed to vocational training programmes, which should lead to an apprenticeship contract and enable them to quickly become independent (Frechon and Marquet, 2017). However, separated

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25 To access a residence permit at the age of 18 years, young people are required to demonstrate that they have engaged in education (including a professional training programme) for at least six months (Daryet, 2018).


27 According to the ELAP study of unaccompanied minors, 73% of the unaccompanied minors participating in the study were in vocational streams at aged 17 years. Only 15% of the young people with this contract 1600 young people in care aged 17-20 years in (wave 1) and 750 of the same young people 18 months later (wave 2) participated in the study. The sample included young people in care in two regions of France. 29% of the participants were or had been recognised unaccompanied minors (Frechon and Marquet, 2017).
children and youth often face difficulties securing apprenticeship contracts because of the challenges they confront in finding an employer and a temporary residence permit (Frechon and Marquet, 2017). Further challenges can arise due to the tendency of social workers to focus on meeting the requirements for accessing residence permits, potentially overlooking the psychological needs of the minor (Frechon and Marquet, 2017).

The shortcomings of French child protection mechanisms and the limitations of administrative procedures related to legal status, both before and after separated young people reach the age of 18, can significantly affect their future. European literature on separated children has consistently highlighted the challenges associated with their transition to adulthood, including mental health issues and their limited access to employment and educational opportunities (Groarke and Arnold, 2018; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010). Addressing these issues and ensuring durable solutions is imperative for the well-being and future prospects of separated youth (Groarke and Arnold, 2018).

1.8. Separated Children in Northern France

The French Child Welfare Services [(Aide Sociale à l'Enfance (ASE))] are managed at a Département level, with each Département responsible for implementing and overseeing these services within its jurisdiction. Over the past number of years, unaccompanied minors have been arriving principally in one of four Départements: Paris, Seine-Saint-Denis, the Nord and Pas-de-Calais (Frechon and Marquet, 2017). Many Départements have been faced with challenges related to the provision of care for separated children and solutions are less developed in Départements outside of the capital (Pryzbyl, 2017).

Since the late 1990s, the Département of the Nord has been confronted with high numbers of unaccompanied minors presenting to Child Welfare Services (Duvivier, 2008; Frechon and Marquet, 2017). Located close to major routes to England, Belgium and Holland, the Département is an epicentre for flows of separated children into France (Duvivier, 2008) and, over the past number of years, the Département Nord has had the highest intake of unaccompanied minors across all Départements in France (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023). In 2022, for instance, 597 unaccompanied minors were placed into Child Welfare Services in the Département Nord, the highest number among all of the French Départements (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023). In 2022, 395 children in the Nord were granted the status of unaccompanied
minor (MNA) as demonstrated in Image 1.2 which shows the number of persons granted legal status as MNA per Département in 2022. It should be noted that while some Départements may have a low percentage of MNA with legal status, they may accommodate a significant number of individuals self-identifying as such (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2023). The large number of separated children presenting to the Département has led to the saturation of Child Welfare Services (Fiquet, 2016). Due to the pressures on service provision, over the past several years, the Département has been repeatedly condemned by courts for the shortcomings of their child protection measures (Fiquet, 2016).

Despite the significance of the phenomenon of separated minors in the Département, in the Nord, there is a paucity of research on separated children and young people. The very limited academic literature on separated young people in the Nord has demonstrated the challenges they face, including a lack of available care placements, limited access to education, the risks faced by homeless separated children (including exposure to prostitution, criminal networks, police violence, and hunger), the lack of aftercare support, and the challenge of having to navigate complex immigration procedures upon reaching 18 years of age (Fiquet, 2016; Duvivier, 2008; 2010). However, most of what is known about separated children in the Nord has been published in Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)/international comparative reports, local government publications, and legal proceedings. These publications tend to have a regional level focus, concentrating particularly on the camps of Grand Synthe and the ‘Jungle’ (in the neighbouring Département of Pas de Calais), with the focus on controversy related to the living conditions which are often described as inhumane, degrading, and violating the fundamental rights of migrant persons (AIDA, 2017; Boček, 2016; UNICEF, 2016). However, the demographic profile of separated children in these camps is typically very different to those in the Nord. For example, in the Département Pas de Calais, where Grande Synthe and the ‘Jungle’ are located, in 2019, 24.4% of unaccompanied minors were from Afghanistan (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2020). However, in that same year, no Afghans were reported in the Nord, with a majority of recognised unaccompanied minors recorded as coming from francophone West Africa, namely Guinea, Mali and Cote d’Ivoire (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2020). 28

28 The further breakdown of this figure is: 23% Guinean, 20.5% Malian, 10.2% Cote d’Ivoire, 7.1% Algeria and 5.8% Bangladesh (Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2020).
Number of persons granted legal status as MNA per Département in 2022

Source: Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés (2023, p. 15).
1.9. Research Rationale

As outlined earlier, this study is about young people who, as children, left their homes in Sub-Saharan Africa without their parents or guardians, and journeyed to Northern France in search of a better future. The research includes youth who presented to the Child Welfare Services as unaccompanied minors (MNA) upon arrival in the Département of the Nord. The Département was selected for this study not only because of the limited understanding of the experiences of young people in this region but also due to the high number of separated young people present and the longstanding challenges in care provision, such as the saturation of services.

There are widely recognised benefits and positive life outcomes for those who have continued access to care after the age of 18 years, including better educational, employment and mental health outcomes (Stewart, Kum, Barth, and Duncan, 2014). Despite this, the relatively small body of existing European literature on separated young people’s transition to adulthood has highlighted the greater difficulties experienced by these young people compared to their non-separated peers in navigating this ‘child-to-adult’ transition (Council of Europe, 2023; Kauko and Forsberg, 2017; O’Toole Thommessen, Corcoran and Todd, 2017; Del Valle and Bravo, 2013). Frequently described as living in a legal ‘limbo’ between the compassion of the child protection system and repressive migratory mechanisms (Frigoli, 2010; Frigoli and Immelé, 2010; Pryzbyl, 2017), at 18 years, the transition to adulthood is said to hit separated young people like a “ton of bricks” (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018 p. 26).

The literature on separated children has repeatedly stressed the need for durable solutions in addressing the situations and needs of separated children (De Wal Pastoor; Del Valle and Bravo, 2013; European Migration Network, 2018; Groarke and Arnold, 2018; Quinn et al., 2014). In France, aftercare provision for separated young people, available until they are 21 years old, includes temporary assistance. Until the introduction of the child protection law of the 7th of February 2022, this primarily focused on supporting separated young people’s transition from Child Welfare accommodation. Since the introduction of this new legislation, aftercare now includes increased legal assistance and better access to rights such as health, accommodation, residence permits, and education for many. Nevertheless, aftercare remains discretionary and unevenly implemented across Départements, especially for unaccompanied young people whose age is disputed. Additionally, a range of complex, interlinked structural issues associated with care provision means that
separated young people typically confront difficulties as they transition to adulthood at 18 years (Frechon and Marquet, 2017; Hammouti, 2017; Duvivier, 2010). These challenges have been found to adversely affect their psychological wellbeing and mental health (Bailleul and Senovilla, 2016; Kobanda, 2010; Martini, 2014), with uncertainty linked to permit refusals associated with increased emotional distress, as separated young people grapple with the potential loss of the right to a future in France (Kobanda, 2010, p. 206). Policy debates and service provision largely respond to administrative challenges rather than the best interest of the child (Bailleul and Senovilla, 2016). Consequently, separated young people are often excluded from policy and practice decisions affecting their lives. Correspondingly, most research in the French context has involved the investigation of the perspectives of professionals on the situations facing separated children (see, for instance, Cheval (2019); Cheval et al. (2019); Hungbo and Fortineau (2018); Sinanian and Robin-Poupard (2018)). While this literature provides important insights into support provision for separated children, these studies have tended to focus on the systemic problems embedded in State responses (for example, Nincheri et al. (2019); Hammouti (2017); Pryzbyl (2017); Martini (2014) and Duvivier (2010)). Consequently, little is known about the experiences or perspectives of separated young people as they journey towards adulthood. Even less is known about those who do not follow typical transition pathways, such as those who are refused minority status and thus legally categorised and treated as adults.

To amplify the voices of separated young people and gain a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences, it is crucial to include their perspectives at the centre of decisions that define their lives (Kauhanen and Kaukko, 2020). By including their perspectives in the research process, it is possible to analyse their transition experiences within a framework of societal and structural constraints while also taking into account their agency. In this way, the study can offer valuable insights for crafting enduring aftercare policy and practice solutions (Healy, 2018; Roberts et al., 2017). A participatory action research (PAR) approach was adopted to ensure the inclusion of separated young people, and their perspectives, in the research process. The approach aimed to foster a youth-centred research process focused on encouraging the meaningful participation of young people. As separated children often are traumatised, with difficulties trusting adults (Sinanian and Robin-Poupard, 2018), this approach, which incorporated creative and qualitative methods, also facilitated trust-building and engagement and limited any potential risk of re-traumatisation.
1.10. Structure of the Thesis

This chapter has given a brief overview of the historical developments related to separated children in France. It has also highlighted French child protection responses for separated children. The chapter has highlighted gaps in the literature on separated children’s experiences of the transition to adulthood as well as the exclusion or neglect of the experiences and perspectives of separated young people in research in the French context. Using a participatory action research approach to explore separated children’s perspectives and experiences of the transition to adulthood, the thesis aims to fill the gaps found in the literature.

Following the introduction to the context and historical developments of responses to, and definitions of, separated children in France, the second chapter reviews the international, European and French literature on separated children and transitions, situating the French policy and research within the larger knowledge landscape. While the review draws attention to the range of challenges that separated youth encounter as they progress towards adulthood, it also underscores the resilience that enables them to forge ahead despite the obstacles encountered. The chapter concludes with a brief review of the limited theoretical work on separated young people’s transitions to adulthood.

The third chapter then presents the theoretical underpinnings of the research which draw on the youth transitions framework alongside a Foucauldian conceptualisation of power dynamics which emphasises the Panopticon and microphysics of power and also incorporates theorising on power ‘to’. This lens is argued to permit an exploration of how power shapes the experiences of separated youth as they progress towards adulthood.

Chapter four provides details of the methodological approach used for the study, including the ontological and epistemological foundations of the study, ethical considerations and the participatory action research (PAR) approach. Following this, the implementation of the research study is laid out and the iterative process of data collection and analysis is outlined.

The first findings chapter, Chapter Five, introduces the research participants. It then presents finding on their experiences of the age assessment process and their early experiences of life in care, illustrating their agency within a context of numerous
structural constraints. The chapter concludes by discussing the impact of their early care experiences on their transition outcomes.

Chapter six provides a detailed discussion of the young people’s perspectives on the transition to adulthood. Their experiences of preparing for this pivotal stage are interrogated. Following this, their experiences as they approached the age of 18 years, which emerged as a critical moment, are examined in some detail.

The third and final findings chapter, Chapter Eight, explores the young people’s lives beyond their 18th birthday. The findings presented demonstrate the various constraints that impacted their everyday lives and shaped their transition experiences. The power ‘to’ held by the young people is discussed, alongside an exploration of their coping mechanisms.

The concluding chapter, Chapter Nine, reflects the study’s findings and considers the contribution of the research to knowledge, with a particular focus on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of youth transitions, ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ to better understanding separated young people’s transition to adulthood. The chapter discusses the limitations of the study as well as possible directions for future research, concluding with a discussion of the implications of the research findings for policy and practice.
2. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

Having outlined the policy context and service provision for separated children and young people, with a particular focus on the French context, this chapter reviews the research literature on separated young people’s transition to adulthood. The literature review draws particularly from qualitative studies that focus on the lived experiences and perspectives of separated children and youth with the literature search strategy outlined in Appendix A. Literature Search Strategy. The chapter starts by discussing the terminology used to describe separated children and youth and this is followed by a discussion of emerging policy and research on separated children. Attention then turns to the range and types of care arrangements in place for separated children. The research literature on care and aftercare support for separated young people as they transition to adulthood is then reviewed. The second half of the chapter examines what is known about the mental health and psychosocial needs of separated youth, demonstrating the impact of both critical moments on their transition and everyday life experiences. The chapter then discusses the resilience, agency and coping skills of separated children and young people, with dedicated attention to research that has examined the role of social relationships and pro-social settings in the lives of these young people. The chapter concludes by reviewing a small body of theoretical literature on separated young people’s transition to adulthood, also addressing existing debates about social support, independence, and the role of structure and agency.

2.2. Separated or Unaccompanied?

Discussion and critical reflection on the terms used to describe separated children and youth is important, not least because this terminology can also shed light on policy responses to a child/youth population generally agreed to be particularly vulnerable or ‘at risk’ (Duvivier, 2009). A range of terms has been used to describe children who arrive in Europe without a parent or guardian (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2007) which, according to Chavez and Menjivar (2017), include unaccompanied minors, juvenile aliens, juvenile asylum seekers, refugee children, unaccompanied immigrant children, unaccompanied alien children, unaccompanied juveniles’ aliens, refugee children, and children asylum seekers. Internationally, definitions have centred primarily on two terms: unaccompanied minors and separated children (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2007),
with many researchers in the field having opted for these terms because they are endorsed at international and European levels (Senovilla Hernández, 2010). The term unaccompanied minor has been defined by The UN Committee on Children Rights under the 6th General Observation (2005) as children who are “separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so”. The same committee define separated children as children “who have been separated from both parents or from their legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily other relatives” (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) p. 6).

Despite the frequent use of unaccompanied minor/child, the Separated Children European Programme (SCEP) recommend the use of the word “separated” rather than “unaccompanied”, viewing the term as a more accurate, inclusive definition (Separated Children in Europe Programme, 2009). Critiques of the term ‘unaccompanied minor’ have suggested that it can also overlook the reasons for a child becoming unaccompanied as well as the various social actors involved in different stages of the child’s migration (Menjívar and Perreira, 2017) and thus risking separated children having limited access to support services (Arnold et al., 2014). SCEP defines separated children as those who are “under 18 years of age, outside their country of origin and separated from both parents, or their previous legal, or customary primary caregiver” (Separated Children in Europe Programme, 2009 p. 3).

Regardless of the differences, separated children and unaccompanied minors/children are often used interchangeably in the literature (Celikaksoy and Wadensjo, 2015; Maloney, 2002; Rozzi, 2008). Likewise, the interchangeable use of the terms is evident within international institutions, with, for example, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) often using the term unaccompanied minor synonymously to the SCEP definition provided, recognising that, although many children may be separated from their parent or caregiver, they may be accompanied by another adult (Chen and Gill, 2015). While the SCEP definition has been used in much of the academic and grey literature (Arnold et al., 2014), institutional definitions also influence the terminology used, with several studies having followed the UNHCR’s definition for unaccompanied minor (Bitzi and Landolt, 2017; Page, 2014; Derluyn and Broekaert, 2007).

Importantly, the range of terminology used highlights the various standpoints for understanding of this group of children and their needs and can also impact the treatment they receive in destination countries (Masson, 2008). As highlighted in
Chapter 1 (Section 1.3.1), the use of the term “mineur isolé étranger” (the direct translation of which is ‘foreign, isolated minor’) in France up to the early 2000s, for instance, has been described as a formal, legal approach to separated children/youth which developed from a need to find solutions to the limitations of the legal structures in place for these young people (Masson, 2008). When the term is deconstructed into its core components, namely, ‘minor’, ‘isolated’ and ‘foreign’, it is possible to glean a stronger understanding of the stance underpinning the State’s response. The term ‘isolated’ introduces the notion of danger and the absence of legal representation when the notion of danger is linked with ‘minor’ (Duvivier, 2009). However, the term ‘foreigner’ signals that the child’s entitlement to services is conditional rather than automatic, with limits placed on child protections associated with the status of ‘foreigner’ (Kobanda, 2010). Despite child protection legislation having no conditions regarding nationality or regularity, an absence of legal texts recognising these young people in France leaves the justice system to interpret their entitlements and their access to child protection provisions (Kobanda, 2010). As a result, although recognised as unaccompanied children, they are primarily viewed as foreigners, placing them in a paradoxical position between migration control and child protection policies (Duvivier, 2009).

In the following sections of this literature review and throughout this dissertation, when discussing previous literature and policy, the terms unaccompanied minor, unaccompanied child/young person and separated child/young person are used interchangeably. When used within this study, however, these terms are understood to encompass the other terms (for example, mineur isolé étranger, unaccompanied immigrant/ asylum seeking/ refugee children) discussed above. It should also be noted that when referring to the findings of this research and the young people who participated in the study, the SCEP definition of separated child is employed. This definition was chosen because it incorporates the diverse situations faced by the study’s young people and is also considered to be the most comprehensive, internationally recognised term available (Arnold et al., 2014).

2.3. The Emergence of Research Attention to Separated Children

The UNICEF (2022) estimated that, in 2022, more than 41 percent of all refugees globally were under the age of 18 years (estimated at 17.5 million child refugees and asylum seekers). In recent years, the lives and living conditions of migrant children and young people, particularly separated children, have attracted increased political and
research attention (Sandermann, Husen and Zeller, 2017) due in large part to the growing number of separated children arriving in Europe (Ní Raghallaigh, 2013; Quinn, Joyce and Gusciute, 2014) and the multiple challenges associated with what has been coined the migrant or refugee ‘crisis’ (Robinson and Williams, 2015). The phenomenon of separated children has also seen a new wave of political and media attention since the onset of the war in Ukraine, which has led to a greater number of children arriving to Europe alone. To date, research attention has centred largely on “documenting, critiquing, and responding to the migration triggers, lived experiences and protection needs of ‘unaccompanied’ or ‘separated’ child migrants in Europe” and “comparing the policy responses towards children and youth across EU Member States, Nordic countries and members of the Council” (Allsopp and Chase, 2017, p. 293).

The existing literature on separated children is interdisciplinary and multinational and, particularly in ‘Western’ countries, emerging research on this group has been conducted across a range of disciplines, including law, psychology, children and youth studies, migration studies, social work and medicine (Sandermann et al., 2017). The available evidence base on separated children strongly suggests that this group has specific needs related in part to the fact that they have to adjust to a new social context and culture, very often in tandem with an unknown language (Del Valle and Bravo, 2013). These needs include emotional and psychological support, access to education, training and information, employment, financial support, appropriate accommodation, health, support from a stable adult, and family contact and reunification (Barnardos, 2013; Council of Europe and UNHCR, 2014). According to the available Eurostat data, most unaccompanied minors seeking asylum arrive in France aged between the ages of 16 and 17 years, with 880 of 1,000 applications for international protection from this group at this age in 2022 (88%) (Eurostat, 2023). Immediately they face a myriad of challenges related to, for example, housing, care and aftercare support, education and employment, all of which become more acute at the point of turning 18 years (Chase, 2020).

Youth transitions research has long since documented the multiple milestones associated with young people’s transitions to adulthood which, according to Williamson and Côté (2022, p.10), in modern Western conventions include “completing education, adopting work roles, independent living, marriage, and parenthood”. While research has increasingly questioned the sequential, linear nature frequently used to

29 Data not available on separated children specifically.
demonstrate these transitions, it is still valuable, according to Krzaklewska, et al., (2023, p. 14) “to emphasise the importance of timing and duration in respect of the social reality experienced by young people and the obstacles they have to face”. The literature on unaccompanied children’s transition to adulthood suggests that this group experience many of the same milestones described by Williamson and Côté (2022), particularly those related to education, employment and housing. In this (limited) body of work, housing for unaccompanied youth tends to be linked to care and aftercare options. However, while relationships and social supports are considered central in the lives of these young people, there is a paucity on research on marriage and parenthood among this group. Whether this reflects the lack of the longitudinal research on these young people, or policy measures that tend to focus on this group’s protracted transition to adulthood, remains unclear.

More broadly, it is widely recognised that children leaving State care, which typically occurs at the age of 18 years, have fewer resources and support and face a protracted and accelerated transition to adulthood (Refaeli, Schuman-Harel, Brady, Mann-Feder, Munro, and Van Breda, 2023; Pinkerton and Rooney, 2014; Stein, 2008), they are vulnerable to social exclusion and have poorer outcomes related to education and employment, for example, than the general youth population (Gullo et al. 2021). Arguably, this situation is exacerbated for separated young people, who are a subgroup of this population. The literature on unaccompanied minors has highlighted the negative impact of the challenges associated with the transition to adulthood and the importance of durable solutions in addressing separated children’s situations and needs (Del Valle and Bravo, 2013; Quinn et al., 2014; European Migration Network, 2015, 2018; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010; Groarke and Arnold, 2018; Kenny and Loughry, 2018). However, it is important to note that while the transition from care is frequently challenging, there is diversity in how separated young people navigate this transition, with some valuing the sense of freedom and increased control over their lives that accompanies the care leaving process (Williams, 2018).

The sources of vulnerability of separated young people aging out of care are associated with four key elements, related to the fact that they have previously been in care, are adolescents, are unaccompanied, and are in a situation of migration (Gullo et al. 2021). Separated young people have far fewer resources (related to money, accommodation, education, work, support and so on) than their non-migrant peers, including other care leavers; they face language and cultural barriers and tend to have little or no protection (Gullo et al. 2021). Despite their entitlements, as recognised in the
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the migrant status of separated young people subjects them to immigration law (Gullo et al. 2021). Once they transition to ‘institutional’ adulthood – typically defined by State institutions as 18 years old – and irrespective of their diverse circumstances, the rights conferred on these young people as minors are lost (Allsopp and Chase, 2017).

Therefore, at the age of 18 years, until, or rather unless, their legal status is regularised, unaccompanied youth find themselves navigating constant instability and uncertainty (Allsopp and Chase, 2017). A recent European Migration Network (EMN) Inform on the Transition of Unaccompanied Minors to Adulthood has highlighted the realities that these young people face as they reach their 18th birthday, demonstrating that when an unaccompanied minor turns 18 years old, apart from special cases, one-third of EU Member States and Norway withdraw the provision of all supports and services to these young people (European Migration Network (EMN), 2022). These provisions include care provision, educational support, financial support, guardianship, and legal representation arrangements for legal status administrative proceedings.

The situation is particularly concerning for separated young people who are not regularised prior to transitioning to adulthood since they effectively transition into ‘illegality’ (Gullo et al. 2021). The uncertainty and limitations placed on their rights upon reaching the age of 18 can have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing as they strive for independence, control, and to secure a future (Allsopp and Chase, 2017). UK research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people has demonstrated that their wellbeing was threatened and destabilised because of changes and uncertainties related to “an invasive immigration and asylum system that ultimately dictated their futures” (Chase, 2013 p. 867). This study highlighted the need to support unaccompanied youth to feel in control of current and past experiences and to construct feelings of belonging and self-identity that support their future pathways (Chase, 2013).

As discussed in the previous chapter (Section 1.6), while there is evidence of a greater focus on child migrants within policy and research, research on the experiences and situations of separated young people as they transition to adulthood is significantly lacking and there is an evident need for more focused studies in this area (Allsopp and Chase, 2017). Albeit sparse, research has, however, identified an array of challenges that these young people confront at the point of turning 18 years, often emphasising their increased vulnerabilities, loss of protections and limited access to a range of services, including accommodation, welfare and psychosocial support (Bravo and
Santos-González, 2017; Chase, 2013; Hek, Hughes and Ozman, 2012; Ní Raghallaigh, 2007; Robinson and Williams, 2015). This relatively small body of literature has also highlighted the greater difficulties they experience compared to their non-separated peers in navigating the 'child-to-adult' transition (Del Valle and Bravo, 2013; Kauko and Forsberg, 2017; O'Toole Thommessen, et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2017; Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018). For example, a Swedish qualitative study of unaccompanied Sudanese care leavers has demonstrated that, in addition to the multiple obstacles facing Swedish non-migrant care leavers, unaccompanied minors encounter the added challenge of integrating into a new culture as well as the task of juggling multiple identities as care leavers, on one hand, and refugees, on the other (Söderqvist, 2014).

2.4. Types of Care Arrangements for Separated Children

The care setting that separated children occupy before turning 18 years is arguably important for understanding their transition pathways. The available literature on this topic demonstrates that there are a number of care arrangements available to separated children and that the placement of each young person depends on several factors including, for instance, age at the point of entering into care, the perceived vulnerability of a young person, the availability of placements and the country or local context. In the academic literature, foster care is often viewed as the most appropriate form of care in terms of meeting the needs of unaccompanied minors due to the opportunities offered through, for example, continuity and consistency of care, individualised support, opportunities to develop close relationships, and the provision of a safe space (Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh, 2017). In a Swiss study on the experiences of unaccompanied refugee minors in foster care, Morgan and Rieker (2022) described a range of ways in which foster family care can promote feelings of belonging and continuity. One was the construction of an ‘as if family’, which involved the young person negotiating ways to position her or himself within a foster family as a ‘family member’, which was associated with ‘family-like’ connections where there was an expectation that the relationship would continue after leaving the care of the foster family. Another example was that of unaccompanied minors being positioned as a ‘guest’, whereby the foster family acted as a ‘temporary home base’ with less permanency in the relationship. In a UK study of hospitality and family practices, Sirriyeh (2013) similarly conceptualised the relationships between foster carers and unaccompanied refugee minors using three relational models. Firstly, ‘like-family’, where kinship status and close bonds in relationships were present with markers such as ‘mum’, ‘son’ or ‘like a sister’, although without replacing bonds with biological

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families. Second, ‘guest’, where relationships centred on respectful relationships but a tight bond is not present. Finally, is what the author coins ‘lodgers’, where foster carers focus on delivering a contracted service, with distance and a level of tension found in the relationships (Sirriyeh, 2013). This study demonstrated that successful placements, where young people integrated into the families, developed a ‘like-family’ status.

The research literature has highlighted a range of benefits associated with foster care as well as the kinds of difficulties that unaccompanied minors face when living with foster families. American research on unaccompanied minors, for example, has found that those who are in foster care programmes have a better chance of transitioning from foster care into part-time or full-time employment, which it is suggested is related to the level of support youth receive through financial support, tutoring and so on (Hasson III, 2021). Additionally, a Swedish study found that longer foster care placements increased education levels and higher language proficiency are linked to increased rates of employment among young unaccompanied refugees (Çelikaksoy and Wadensjo, 2019). Nonetheless, while foster care can be a positive experience for some of these young people, challenges can also arise with such placements. Behavioural problems, the stress and uncertainty that unaccompanied young people experience, particularly related to their legal status and the fear of deportation, in addition to placement location, personality clashes, and the difficulties experienced by foster families in responding to the complex needs of these young people, may all have an impact on their relationships with caregivers (Horgan and Ñí Raghallaigh, 2017). In addition, some separated care leavers may find the move from foster care to an independent living situation challenging because of having to deal with a whole host of new responsibilities associated with managing a home while in education and/or work, as well as emotional challenges that may accompany living alone (Williams 2018).

Thus, despite the potential benefits of foster care for unaccompanied minors and increases in the provision of such care for this group, foster care remains underutilised throughout Europe (Horgan and Ñí Raghallaigh, 2017; Del Valle, 2013), with residential care settings dominating.30 In many countries, a key function of residential care is “to deal with adolescents with diverse problems which are scarcely compatible with family foster care” (Del Valle, 2013, p. 254). There is a paucity of research on the experiences of unaccompanied minors in residential care and on the relationship between well-being and the type of care and accommodation used to support unaccompanied minors.

30 It is worth noting that France has one of the lowest proportions of family foster care in Europe (Del Valle, 2013).
(Horgan and Ni Raghallaigh, 2017). However, one Dutch study of unaccompanied children’s ‘rearing environments’ found that unaccompanied minors in large reception centres received the lowest quality care, had higher rates of mental health problems, poorer access to mental health supports and were more likely to experience peer or emotional challenges (Zijlstra, 2018). These minors tended to do better in good-quality living environments, such as foster families or small-scale residential care facilities which could provide higher levels of support than in large centres (Zijlstra, 2018). Belgian research similarly suggests that unaccompanied minors in semi-independent living arrangements experience difficulties, including inadequate income and accommodation, limited social networks, loneliness and that they can also feel overburdened with responsibilities (Derluyn, 2018). Furthermore, an earlier Dutch study found that unaccompanied children living in foster care fared better and were more satisfied with life than those who lived in small reception centres (Kalverboer et al., 2017). The transition to adulthood can be particularly challenging for those leaving residential care, particularly since this may mark the last formal contact with care providers (Williams, 2018). In a Swedish study, unaccompanied young people who had aged-out of residential care reported that they did not have feelings of belonging. Instead, they felt isolated, finding it difficult to build social relationships post-care (Söderqvist, 2014).

There is a dearth of research on the benefits of other types of care. However, one Irish study examining the policy and practice related to care for unaccompanied minors found that hostel provision for young unaccompanied asylum-seeking supported the development of a peer network (Horgan and Ni Raghallaigh, 2017). More broadly, positive relationships between the staff in residential care have been identified as important in helping unaccompanied young people to settle in the host country (Chase, Knight and Statham, 2008).

More autonomous housing arrangements such as supported lodgings have been claimed to better meet the needs of separated youth (Horgan and Ni Raghallaigh, 2017). These types of care arrangements, which aim to support decision-making and independent living, tend to be designed for older young people, typically aged 16 years and above. However, despite the potential benefits of these care arrangements, research suggests that young people living in these settings may not be able to avail of the support and stability of others who live in alternative care facilities (Kalverboer et al., 2017). It therefore appears that care services must strike a balance between promoting resilience and autonomy and ensuring that separated young people’s needs
are supported through the provision of adequate care (Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh, 2017).

While separated children tend to have access to care, irrespective of their care arrangement, when they turn 18 years, they typically experience disruptions to their care placements which, in turn, lead to additional challenges. Many may lack access to suitable housing options as they age-out of care and may also face unequal treatment based on their legal status when seeking access to adequate housing (EMN, 2022b). For example, in certain European countries, those who do not secure a residence status (for example, those who are granted international protection) age out into 'illegality' where they may face return procedures (EMN, 2022b). Irish research on aged-out separated children seeking asylum has identified further challenges and risks related to the transfer of these young people from foster care into direct provision accommodation centres. These challenges were found to include aged-out separated young people having to share a bedroom with up to three other adults, their significant distance from their prior foster care placements, the limited financial supports available to them, and risks associated with involvement in drug use, prostitution and organised crime (Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton, 2017).

2.5. Service Provision for Separated Children: Gaps and Challenges

Most of the empirical literature on separated children and young people has focused either on the perspectives of service providers, typically through qualitative research approaches, or on the psychological wellbeing of separated children using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Concerning service provision, European social work and legal research have highlighted gaps in policy, services and the entitlements of separated children, with many researchers critical of government responses that place separated children at increased risk of poor outcomes and psychological distress (see, for example, Arellano, 2014; Arnold, Goeman and Fournier, 2014; Casey Wong, 2013; De Graeve, Vervliet and Derluyn, 2017; Frechon and Marquet, 2017; Mullally, 2011; Sloth-Nielsen and Ackermann, 2016; Zijlstra et al., 2017).

The large number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Europe has become a significant concern for many EU Member States who have had to respond to the increased pressures placed on their social services (Sandermann, Husen, and Zeller, 2017) but have been criticised on the grounds of providing unequal and/or inaccessible
access to services (Del Valle and Bravo, 2013). A range of structural problems have been identified in State responses targeting separated children across many EU Member States, including France. These issues include a paucity of resources, a lack of appropriate and overcrowding in reception facilities, inappropriate age determination procedures, prolonged stays in emergency and detention centres, overstretched care services and delays in legal procedures (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2016; Menjívar and Perreira, 2017; Robinson and Williams, 2015). Deficits in entitlements and inequalities in the care provision for separated children have also been noted in the literature as growing concerns (Jamet and Keravel, 2017; Martin, Christie, Horgan, and O’Riordan, 2011). Most researchers have been critical of government responses that place separated children at increased risk of poor outcomes and psychological distress (see for instance Arellano, 2014; Arnold, Goeman and Fournier, 2014; Casey Wong, 2013; De Graeve, Vervliet and Derluyn, 2017; Mullaly, 2011; Sloth-Nielsen and Ackermann, 2016; Zijlstra et al., 2017).

The international literature on separated children has stressed the importance of durable solutions in addressing their situations and needs, often emphasising the particular challenges associated with the transition to adulthood (Del Valle and Bravo, 2013; European Migration Network (EMN), 2015, 2018; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010; Groarke and Arnold, 2018; Kenny and Loughry; Quinn et al., 2014). This literature also suggests that many European countries need to provide better funding to support separated children (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010). Despite this, the priority of national policies has tended to focus on reducing care and service costs, meaning that sub-standard or inferior solutions have often superseded the best interest of the child (Del Valle and Bravo, 2013).

Additionally, the use of age as a criterion for access to care and services (when both assigning and terminating the status of an unaccompanied minor) has been criticised for creating a “minimalistic and bureaucratic apparatus of care that often fails to accommodate the [unaccompanied] young people’s actual needs” and creating “uncaring and exclusionary mechanisms that shape young people’s possibilities to be cared-for” (De Graeve, 2017 p. 80, 91). Often used in political discourse to argue that chronologically older unaccompanied young people need less support, the use of age as the central criterion to determine both their living conditions and entitled level of care has been criticised in the literature for separating ‘deserving’ young people from the ‘undeserving’ (Kenny and Loughry, 2018). As Derluyn (2018 p. 23) puts it:
... a 'politics of exception' is created whereby the immigration regime cares as a form of "discretionary humanitarianism" and out of compassion for the "most vulnerable" (children), but simultaneously frames the majority of refugees (adults) as less or undeserving and unwelcome.

Such policies may even have detrimental effects on mental health and wellbeing, with previous research finding that the child’s age on arrival significantly correlates with mental health outcomes due to those arriving in host countries earlier having a better chance of being placed in a highly supportive environment and being granted a residence permit (Zijlstra et al., 2018). Although separated children are entitled to care services once their age has been established, the interpretation of their rights and needs is impacted by their intersectional position, which also includes their immigration status and position as 'gendered and racialised Others' in society (De Graeve, 2017).

In addition to the limitations to care entitlements that are based on chronological age, in certain contexts there are delays with age assessment processes that leave separated young people for long periods without any or adequate care provision (Gimendo Monterde, 2019), which in turn negatively impacts their ability to prepare for the transition to adulthood. For example, a study of unaccompanied minors in Germany found that large numbers of arrivals and subsequent significant increases in demand for services resulted in unaccompanied children facing long wait periods before accessing care. Consequently, many unaccompanied minors were housed within adult refugee services or in emergency accommodation where they had access only to a bed and no support services and spent extended periods waiting to access follow-up care placements (Sichling, 2021).

While the transition to adulthood is generally reasonably well-researched within the field of youth research (Del Valle, 2013), separated young people’s transition to adulthood and the role of care services in this transition is one of the least examined aspects of their lives (Gimeno-Monterde, Gómez-Quintero, and Aguerri, 2021). However, several studies suggest that unaccompanied minors lack stable and standardised care during the transition to adulthood. For example, a study of unaccompanied minors’ legal transition to adulthood in Spain identified several significant institutional, contextual and legal difficulties in the care provision available to these young people during this period (Gimeno Monterde et al., 2021). Identified challenges included inadequate financial and technical resources in programs aimed at supporting the transition to adulthood, a lack of community-based approaches, and
gaps in legal and social supports (including challenges related to residence permits, education and employment opportunities, etc.) (Gimeno Monterde et al., 2021). Omland’s (2020) research in Norway that has examined unaccompanied refugee minors and their professional caregivers has also identified a lack of coordination in care provision and the ‘compartmentalisation’ of care as a challenge. The study found the outsourcing of administrative and legal procedures such as age assessment, residence permits, and family reunification to other service providers as particularly problematic (Omland, 2020). The compartmentalisation of care identified was said to result, on one hand, in a young person feeling alone and unsupported when navigating various complex administrative processes while, on the other, responsible professionals often found it difficult to understand why a young person may be suffering. A Belgian study on unaccompanied minors similarly found that compartmentalising care across various actors (including guardians, educators and teachers, for example) left many unaccompanied children without adequate emotional support (De Graeve, 2017). While Omland’s (2020) research highlighted the importance of those responsible for unaccompanied young people connecting and coordinating together in the provision of daily care for this group, the reality for most separated youth is that when they turn 18 years, they typically face even more restricted access to appropriate, coordinated care. To tackle such challenges, Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh (2017) recommend individualised care for separated children that can support them to cope with the complexities and vulnerabilities they are likely to confront while also taking account of their agency and resilience.

In addition to the structural challenges associated with care provision, Swedish research has further demonstrated the absence of emotional care on the part of service providers. In this study, while unaccompanied young people reported having adequate provisions to cover their basic needs, they felt that the professionals in their lives were ‘unsatisfactory’ in their provision of support (Stretmo, 2014). Seeking more than the ‘instrumental provision of basic needs’, these young people wished for close and affectionate relationships. Other studies on care provision for unaccompanied minors have shown that a lack of support may stem from service providers wishing to keep a professional distance is often considered good practice and that becoming close to a separated young person may be deemed unprofessional due to the system’s inability to provide this type of care consistently (De Graeve, 2017). Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh’s (2017) study of the social care needs of unaccompanied minors in Ireland highlighted other constraints faced by service providers who wish to have a more caring role. For example, staff within residential care settings may have legal mandates that do not
allow them to develop deeper connections or emotional relationships with unaccompanied minors. However, Sirriyeh (2013) stresses that while professionalism of care is important to safeguarding this group, it is also crucial to uphold everyday practices and displays of affection and care. This is particularly important for unaccompanied youth since their feelings of belonging are built around daily experiences (Morgen, 2022).

2.6. The Importance of (After)care Support during the Transition to Adulthood

At the age of 18 years, although separated young people no longer meet the institutionally defined vulnerability criteria associated with the status of ‘child’, they paradoxically may become more vulnerable due to the range of challenges they face as they transition from care into the uncertainties of ‘adulthood’ (Chase, 2020). These difficulties are typically amplified for youth who have an underdetermined legal status (Chase, 2020). As separated children turn 18 years, they face changes to their entitlements that can frequently signify a rupture in care and uncertainty about the future. Chase (2020, p. 440) describes the situation confronted by unaccompanied young people as a “politically induced precarity”, whereby separated youth seek autonomy in relation, for example, to employment, their financial situations, housing, relationships, education and day-to-day life, but are faced with institutional and structural barriers that significantly curtail their ability to move towards independence. These barriers also force aged-out unaccompanied minors to maintain many of the characteristics of ‘childhood’ – including constrained choice and institutional dependence – as they find themselves unable to envision and build their futures (Chase, 2020).

Continuity of care is frequently depicted in the literature on separated children as central to their wellbeing and integration and has been found to support unaccompanied minors to cope when faced with change in the host country (Zijlstra, 2018; Ni Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh, 2015). Some European countries, such as Belgium, have acknowledged the importance of continuity of care during the transition to adulthood and have put provisions in place for the transition period for separated young people post-care (EMN, 2022b). Provisions implemented in other European countries include, for example, a limited period of aftercare (in the form of prolonged stays in accommodation, moves to reception centres etc.) or psychological support such as counselling services (EMN, 2022b). Care planning is central to ensuring continuity of care and this process often takes the form of a ‘life project’, which is defined by
Drammeh (2010 p. 9) as “a plan, drawn up and negotiated between the minor and the authorities in the host country, represented by a designated professional, with contributions from a variety of other professionals”. The project considers a range of issues, such as personal profile, background and reasons for migration, linking with the present, and future aspirations and prospects of the young person, as well as their legal status and opportunities (Drammeh, 2010). The life project aims to ensure that the young person’s best interests are respected and to support them in developing the skills to integrate into society (Drammeh, 2010). However, while life projects can support continuity of care that centres on the individualised aspirations and situations of separated young people, expectations and future aspirations may not always correspond with the perspectives of service providers, who have been found to consider young people to be passive receivers of proposals designed for them (Rania, Migliorini, Sclavo, Cardinali and Antonella, 2014). Wade (2011) suggests that this discord may be related, on the one hand, to young people’s perceptions of themselves as adults who are ready to make adult decisions (due to their migratory experience) as aging-out separated young people and, on the other, to the perceptions of the authorities, who frequently consider them to be children and, therefore, not capable of making ‘good’ decisions.

In addition to care planning, aftercare is understood to be central to supporting unaccompanied minors’ transition to adulthood. In most European contexts, once a separated young person turns 18 years, there are possibilities of access to some level of aftercare support, although these supports vary depending not only on the country but also on the region or locality within any one country (EMN, 2022b). Aftercare provision may be implemented in a range of ways including, for example, by providing access to assisted or semi-independent housing (the case in one-third of European States); support with residence permits through a coordinated effort on the part of care providers and municipalities; prolonged educational supports; maintenance grants; and support with labour market access (EMN, 2022b). While these measures may exist in many countries, see Table 2.1 which outlines measures in place in many European countries, comparative European research on unaccompanied minors has shown that one-quarter of EU countries have no aftercare provision available once an unaccompanied young person turns 18 years (EMN, 2022b).

Furthermore, while in theory, most European countries have aftercare provisions in place for separated children when they reach 18 years, in practice, the care available may be inadequate, with most EU countries without a targeted strategy to support the
transition to adulthood of this group (EMN, 2022b). For example, according to Spanish national law, all care leavers, including unaccompanied minors, must be supported both before and after they leave care. This includes leaving care training and support from the age of 16 years as well as post-care targeted needs-based programmes in areas such as education, housing, social insertion, employment, financial and psychosocial support. However, despite the legislation in place, Gullo’s (2021) study of unaccompanied minors in Spain found that, due to a lack of local regulation, regions differ quite substantially in the extent to which support is available and provided to unaccompanied minors.

While the literature reviewed thus far provides considerable insight into the care and aftercare supports available to separated young people as they transition to adulthood, there is a paucity of research on the experiences of this group during this time. Little is known about their perceptions of care and aftercare services, which may influence their transition to adulthood, and even less is known about their lived experiences and whether and how these experiences are influenced by the support services available to them at the age of 18 years and beyond.
Table 2.1 Examples of aftercare measures across several EU Member States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age until which aftercare measures may be provided</th>
<th>EU Member State and examples of aftercare measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>MT: Accommodation is provided for up to one year to former unaccompanied minors who cannot afford to pay rent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>AT: Child and youth welfare services may continue providing support, depending on the province. Furthermore, NGOs offer aftercare places to former unaccompanied minors. BG: Residential care may be continued for former unaccompanied minors granted international protection if this service was already made available to them before adulthood. CY: Access to housing support services. FR: Access to support and services is continued for former unaccompanied minors who were in the care of child welfare services. HR: Access to housing support services. HU: Aftercare services can be granted (upon application) to former unaccompanied minors unable to provide for themselves. IT: Support to social integration can be prolonged for former unaccompanied minors who are in need and who already were taking part in a social integration process. SE: Access to aftercare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>HU: Aftercare services can be granted (upon application) to former unaccompanied minors if they are awaiting admission to a social residential institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 (23 if in full-time education)</td>
<td>IE: accommodation through foster care, supported lodgings, aftercare units and independent living; education through further education/training and employment; financial support through an aftercare allowance paid to the care leaver, as well as financial assistance with housing; external therapeutic support which may be funded by Tusla on a sessional basis, or may be provided by an NGO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>HU: Educational aftercare services for young adults if they have student status or are enrolled in adult education. LV: Access to aftercare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>EE: Access to aftercare and support services ensured by local authority. FI: Access to aftercare, the content of which depends on the needs of the young person in question. HU: Educational aftercare services for young adults if they have a student status with a higher education institution. SK: Accommodation is provided by the Centre for Children and Families for both asylum- and non-asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors reaching adulthood; the latter must continue to study/prepare for a profession or employment and be granted residence. NO: Aftercare is considered only in cases where an unaccompanied minor has received measures pursuant to the Norwegian Child Welfare Act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>CZ: Accommodation is provided to unaccompanied minors enrolled in education: they can stay in the Facility for Children of Foreign nationals until the end of their studies or until the age of 26 years old (end of the student status). They have the same rights as Czech minors in institutional care. They are provided with full direct support, and they have access to adequate conditions for living and studying. SI: Healthcare is provided to unaccompanied minors enrolled in education turning 18 years old. They remain eligible for healthcare equivalent to that of other children under mandatory health insurance, as long as they keep studying and up until they reach 25 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>LU: Housing support services are provided to unaccompanied minors who may retain access to services by the National Child Authority, if deemed particularly vulnerable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>HU: Access to aftercare services for a former unaccompanied minor in vocational or academic education may be extended until this age by the institution overseeing child protection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Migration Network (2022, p. 10).

2.7. Vulnerability and Mental Health Issues

As highlighted earlier, the services and care support available to separated children are critical to supporting their wellbeing and mental health. Significantly, unaccompanied minors have a higher prevalence of mental health problems than any other refugee group (Rodriguez and Dobler, 2021). Many have experienced armed conflict, poverty,
oppression, or the death of loved ones in their countries of origin and/or difficult journeys before arriving in the destination country. Moreover, at a key developmental stage in their lives, they find themselves having to adapt to new cultures, practices, and social structures (Denov and Bryan, 2014; Derluyn and Broekaert, 2007; Keles, Friborg, Idsoe, Sirin, and Oppedal, 2017; Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). Furthermore, transitions to adulthood for care leavers, including separated young people, are characterised by both “environmental and emotional instability”, which has been argued to contribute to a range of unfavourable outcomes, including mental and physical health issues, homelessness, substance abuse, unemployment, and poor educational achievement (Sirriyeh, 2018 p. 91).

Broadly echoing the findings of research on youth both in and leaving care, as well as the broader child and youth studies literature (Adefehinti and Arts, 2019), the research base on separated children and youth has tended towards a ‘deficit’ approach, that is, a focus on their vulnerabilities and the challenges they encounter. Existing research on unaccompanied minors has, for example, extensively examined the impact of pre-migration, often war-related, trauma and the role of demographic variables such as gender on mental health (Keles, et al., 2017). This focus on deficits or deficiencies is commonplace in research examining the lives and experiences of separated children. This tendency likely stems from the widespread characterisation of separated and unaccompanied minors as among the most vulnerable among refugee and migrant populations due to the multiple traumas experienced by many (Sarkadi et al., 2018).

A large number of studies in the field of psychology have focused on trauma, vulnerability and mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety (see, for example, Chase, 2013; De Graeve et al. 2017; Herz and Lalander, 2017; Kauko and Forsberg, 2017; Menjívar and Perreira, 2017; DeMott, et al. 2017; Sarkadi et al. 2018; Seglem, Oppedal and Raeder, 2017; Smid, Lensvelt-Mulders, Knipscheer, Gersons and Kleber, 2011; Vervliet et al. 2014). As one might anticipate, this body of literature has found that unaccompanied minors have significantly higher risks of poor mental health compared to their peers in the general population and accompanied migrant youth more broadly (Keles et al., 2017), with these risks strongly associated with trauma and stress. For example, a study of 35 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who had previously been held in British detention centres found them to have a high prevalence of psychiatric disorders (Ehntholt, Trickey, Harris Hendriks, Chambers, Scott and William, 2018). The findings of this research indicated that the stress associated with age dispute procedures and
detention left these children more vulnerable and sensitive to mental health difficulties. Other research on the mental health of unaccompanied minors has identified separated children as a high-risk group for developing mental illness and emotional problems, suggesting that this group’s psychological problems remain or even intensify as they grow older (Derluyn, 2012; Hodes, Jagdev, Chandra and Cunniff, 2008; Meyer DeMott et al., 2017). Such findings align with research on other vulnerable youth populations, such as care leavers, which had found that disadvantaged young people exhibit poor outcomes across several domains, including education, employment, family formation, housing, and health (Osgood et al., 2010, Häggman-Laitila et al., 2018).

While it is unsurprising that much of the literature on the vulnerability of separated children and youth has focused on stressors associated with major life events and traumatic experiences, daily hassles, including general and acculturation hassles, have also emerged as having an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of separated children and youth. Daily hassles, defined as “irritating, frustrating, distressing demands that, to some degree, characterize everyday transactions with the environment” (Keles et al., 2017, p. 1413), can be particularly harmful to the mental health of children. This is due to the prolonged and continuous coping efforts required and the limiting impact that daily hassles can have on an individual's ability to recover from other difficulties (Barrett and Heubeck, 2000). Norwegian longitudinal research with 918 unaccompanied refugees found that both general and acculturation daily hassles negatively impacted mental health, leading to depression, particularly when they occurred regularly and accumulated over time (Keles et al., 2017). This Norwegian study also revealed that daily stressors had an impact on the mental health and social functioning of the young people, highlighting the importance of considering not simply the possible range of pre-arrival traumatic experiences but also those stressors related to acculturation, including, for example, experiences of discrimination. Research findings in a small number of countries, including Australia, Belgium, the UK, Sweden, and Ireland, have also demonstrated the impact of daily hassles and everyday stress during the transition to adulthood on the wellbeing of separated young people (Crock, 2013; Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008; Ehntholt et al., 2018; Ni Raghallaigh, 2007; Sarkadi et al., 2018). These studies suggest that increases in emotional distress as separated young people grow older are associated with their experiences of, and interactions with, structural constraints within the host country, including the limitations of care systems and restrictive immigration and asylum policies. The daily uncertainty and stress experienced by unaccompanied youth during the transition to adulthood, related for example, to residency, resettlement and asylum procedures, and their
arrival at a key developmental stage, have been found to contribute significantly to depressive and PTSD symptoms (DeMott et al., 2017; Sarkadi et al., 2018; Seglem, et al., 2014; Smid, et al., 2011). The legal transition facing separated young people has been found to influence the emotional wellbeing and mental health of this group, as well as on other transitional milestones and pathways into adulthood related, for example, to education and employment. Chase’s (2020) research, for example, demonstrates that separated young people encounter uncertainties related to their legal status that can leave them dealing with indefinite periods of ‘waithood’ and insecurity, and place them at risk of becoming ‘illegal’, detained and/ or deported. The available European literature and data on unaccompanied minors, which concentrates primarily on asylum-seeking and refugee unaccompanied children (EMN, 2018), suggests that the asylum system is complex and difficult for young people to navigate and a significant stressor in their lives (Estrada, 2008). For example, a UN Norwegian-based qualitative study of 52 Afghan separated asylum-seeking children found that they depicted the asylum process as critically important in their lives and considered rejections and temporary permits to be life-shattering events. This research found an association between young people’s poor mental health and the uncertainty of their future residence status, particularly once they aged out of care. The findings also revealed the uncertainty of their future status to negatively impact their mental health with, for instance, many reporting suicidal thoughts (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017).

In most European States, aged-out separated children find themselves in legal limbo, meaning that if a child/young person does not enter the asylum system, they remain in a legal void once they turn 18 (Mooten and Rosenstock-Armie, 2006). Upon reaching the age of 18 years, separated children are no longer categorised as unaccompanied or separated children and having lost their status as ‘vulnerable minors’, find themselves subject to a range of immigration and administrative processes. A World Health Organisation report on legal status as a determinant of social security and health care benefits for migrants has demonstrated the fluidity of the lives of migrant persons, finding that as a migrant’s circumstances change, they can move between legal statuses (Hannigan et al., 2016). For example, an individual’s status may change from asylum seeker to refugee once their application has been approved, or they may find themselves classed as ‘undocumented’ if the application has been denied. There are several statuses under which aged-out separated children can move between, namely, asylum seeker, refugee, beneficiary of subsidiary protection, beneficiary of leave to remain/humanitarian leave to remain, and undocumented migrant (Hannigan
et al., 2016). The literature on separated children therefore points to a ‘paradox’ whereby these young people find themselves between the care and compassion of the child welfare services and the controls of immigration systems. This is particularly challenging for those who do not enter into a legal procedure before the age of 18 years and, instead, transition into ‘illegality’. The term ‘illegality’ was coined by Gonzales (2011 p.606). He defined it as “the set of experiences that result from shifting contexts along the life course, providing different meanings to undocumented status and animating the experience of illegality at late adolescence and into adulthood”. According to Gonzales, during this transition, many unaccompanied young people may experience a period of disorientation as they find themselves navigating several legal limitations. Furthermore, the legal and developmental limbo experienced by large numbers of separated young people can hamper their progress in terms, for example, of educational progression and transitions into the labour market (Gonzales, 2011 p. 606). In addition to these challenges, the stigma that unaccompanied young people often encounter associated with having no legal status can negatively impact their emotional wellbeing and mental health outcomes (Gonzales, 2011 p. 606).

The literature on unaccompanied children further demonstrates that, in addition to the loss of rights, many unaccompanied young people experience increased stress because of the legal limbo they confront at 18 years and their anxieties surrounding the prospect of a possible return to their country of origin. Return and repatriation are emphasised as a possible durable solution in many European States, with several countries returning aged-out undocumented separated young people to their countries of origin (EMN, 2015). However, while there is a focus on voluntary return, with measures in place to encourage reintegration and a ‘sustainable return’ (Robinson and Williams, 2015), Allsopp and Chase (2017) are critical of the prioritisation of immigration control in European policy due to its focus on return as the best ‘durable solution’ for aged-out separated youth. The emphasis on return is present in several European policy frameworks, including within European Commission programmes (e.g., The Stockholm Programme), bilateral return agreements with non-EU Member States, in cross-state initiatives (e.g., The European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors, discontinued in 2014) and in funding programmes (e.g., the European Return Fund) (Allsopp and Chase, 2017).

Return is often considered a ‘best interest’ option for unaccompanied young people. However, data from a number of European countries indicate that those who transition out of care without a legal right to remain in a country may choose to disengage from
services in order to avoid possible deportation (Allsopp and Chase, 2017). For example, a UK study of asylum-seeking separated young people in a voluntary return aftercare initiative reported the asylum process as a significant stressor in the lives of the young people, many of whom no longer considered their country of origin to be their home and expressed feelings of anger and fear about asylum rejections, a loss of support at the point of turning age 18 and the stress of potential deportation (Robinson and Williams, 2015). In a second UK study on the wellbeing of Afghan unaccompanied young people, Chase (2020, p.440) demonstrated that although the young people wished to become autonomous adults, the ‘politically induced precarity’ which results from the lack of a secure legal status negatively impacted their wellbeing, largely stifling their ability to build a future, become independent and grow. Instead, the precarity of their legal status forced them into a prolonged ‘childhood’ where they continued to depend on institutional support, lacked independence, had limited choice over their decisions in their lives and were at risk of exploitation.

The literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that irrespective of the country of origin, separated young people encounter a range of challenges. According to Bhabha (2006, p. 212) unaccompanied minors face a “paradoxical situation where those considered vulnerable and most in need of protection, care, and compassion may end up being particularly disadvantaged and discriminated against-objects of suspicion and fear rather than subjects with rights to dignity and due process”. While a significant body of literature demonstrates the impact of critical events on the mental health and wellbeing of separated children and youth, an emerging body of work further highlights the potential negative effects of daily stressors, including legal and administrative procedures, on the lives and experiences of separated children and youth.

2.8. Resilience among Separated Children and Young People

Unaccompanied children and young people are often depicted as a vulnerable group (Lekkai, 2020) and categorised according to their limitations which, alongside their status as unaccompanied or separated, positions them as inherently disadvantaged. While a significant body of literature has usefully uncovered the risks posed to the mental health and wellbeing of separated children, not all experience poor outcomes (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018). Importantly, deficit-centred research has been critiqued for focusing only or primarily on vulnerability, reinforcing a discourse of victimisation, and ignoring separated young people’s strength and coping capabilities (Bilotta and Denov, 2017; Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh, 2017; Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). Furthermore, resilience among separated youth has, to date, been
given far less research attention compared to studies that have centred on vulnerability (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). However, in recent years, and following trends in research on care leavers (such as Ponciano (2013); Stein (2005, 2006); Webb et al. (2017)), there has been increased research attention to the resilience of separated children and youth (Carlson, Cacciatore, and Klimek., 2018; Horgan and Ni Raghallaigh, 2017; Sulimani-Aidan, 2016; Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). Largely challenging ‘static’ representations of the vulnerability of this group, this research has acknowledged separated young people as agentic individuals (Horgan and Ni Raghallaigh, 2017).

Resilience can support separated children and young people to overcome challenges, often through their agency and choices (Sulimani-Aidan, 2016). Adversity fosters resilience which, according to Peña, Jones, Orange, Simieou, and Márquez (2018, p. 163), can arise from (a) a collection of characteristics that a person is born with to grow successfully despite having an underprivileged upbringing; (b) a person’s ability to handle stress competently; and (c) functioning positively in response to recovering from trauma. Resilience reveals itself in different ways depending on the individual. Young people may demonstrate particular attributes that contribute to resilience, for instance, self-reliance, perseverance, altruism, optimism, a sense of purpose and goal orientation (Lekkai, 2020; Peña et al., 2018). However, resilience typically manifests when protective factors prevail over the negative effects of adversity and stressors (Peña et al., 2018). It has been suggested that exposure to adverse and traumatic experiences can support the development of resilience and counteract risk factors (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2013).

This growing body of literature on the resilience of separated children and youth argues that, although these young people may face major difficulties in their lives, they equally demonstrate resilience and positive coping skills (Horgan and Ni Raghallaigh, 2017). Such skills are supported by several protective factors, including personal attributes, supportive and stable placements, social supports, meaningful relationships, religiosity and spirituality, life skills, and the opportunities available to youth to fulfill their future life projects related to education, employment and so on (Mels, Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008; Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Tachtler, Michel, Slovák, and Fitzpatrick, 2020; Vervliet, et al., 2015). An Irish study on unaccompanied minors’ coping skills has stressed that these skills are context-dependent, meaning that the contextual, past and present situation of each young person impacts their choice of coping strategy (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). This and other European studies have demonstrated
that unaccompanied children are not passive agents but rather play an active role in their own survival and are capable of developing resilience and coping mechanisms (Omland and Andenas, 2018; Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Vervliet, et al., 2015).

Studies in several countries have found separated young people to demonstrate purposeful agency and to be capable and resourceful individuals with remarkable strength and capacities to cope, adapt and survive (Carlson, et al., 2012; Korkiamäki and Gilligan, 2020; Lekkai, 2020). In a Finnish study of 18 unaccompanied asylum-seeking boys, Korkiamäki and Gilligan (2020) demonstrated that the boys displayed purposeful agency in the form of resistance, which assisted them in developing resilience to adversity while also enhancing their capacity to exercise agency. This study identified four strategies of resistance exhibited by the young people when responding to the negative labels assigned to them, namely, resigning, resisting, conforming and performing ordinariness. Resigning involved the young people adopting the “diminished and powerless identity laid on them by the refugee label and exhibited withdrawal from the agentic behaviour of aiming to make a change in their lives”; resisting came in both more forthright (such as speaking out against misrecognition) and discrete forms (for instance, breaking rules); conforming included using tactics (e.g. working hard, being friendly and active) to contradict stigmatising assumptions about and low expectations for unaccompanied young people; and performing ordinariness, which was a less conscious, subtle act, involved just behaving as any typical adolescent in mundane activities, which raised other people’s awareness that the unaccompanied were in fact “ordinary young people” (Korkiamäki and Gilligan, 2020, p. 6). Some of these strategies could be perhaps considered to risk a counter-effect if certain of the above-described actions were interpreted by an adult, who held a position of power, as unfavourable. However, the findings of this Finnish research demonstrated that the young people’s strategies of resistance promoted resilience as a central coping mechanism.

In a mixed methods American study, Cardoso (2018) examined the survival mechanisms and coping techniques adopted by unaccompanied migrant youth, which were found to fall into two categories: 1) adaptive, more positive techniques, such as social coping and the positive strategies and 2) maladaptive skills, which are more harmful to the wellbeing of the young person and associated with unfavourable outcomes. Cardoso’s (2018) mixed-methods study found that the maladaptive strategies used by the young people included self-harm, escapism through substance abuse, social isolation, withdrawal, and avoidance while the adaptive coping strategies
included talking to a trusted individual from their social networks (family, friend, counsellor, peer, social worker, etc.), hanging out, playing sports, going for a walk, attending a religious service, and prayer. Unlike the maladaptive skills, this skill set had no association with any mental health difficulties (such as PTSD, depression, suicidal thoughts, or trauma exposure). While other studies on separated children and youth have not categorised coping skills in this way, some research has found that this group displays similar positive coping strategies such as adjusting by learning and changing and assuming a positive outlook (Lynnebakke and Pastoor, 2020; Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010).

It is worth noting, however, that although the categorisation of coping skills can bolster understanding of the experiences of separate children and youth, the interpretation of either the positive or negative nature of a particular skill is arguably subjective. For example, independence has been described as both negative and positive in different studies. In a study of resilience and coping mechanisms among unaccompanied minors living in Ireland, Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) interpreted acting independently as positive since the skill was viewed as related to a minor feeling in control of their circumstances and as helping them to cope. However, Kidd's (2003) research on coping among street youth in two Canadian cities, while noting the importance of independence, cautioned that emphasising only the positive dimensions of independence may be counterproductive in that, for example, it may limit young people's capabilities of learning from others.

2.8.1. Promoting resilience and wellbeing through social relationships and pro-social settings

In addition to intrapersonal resources, social work and youth research at a European level has highlighted the importance of interpersonal resources in the lives of separated young people in counteracting the difficulties they are likely to encounter. For example, research conducted by the ISMU Foundation (2019) suggests that interpersonal resources may take the form of formal and informal relationships. Formal relationships include those mediated by processes of institutionalisation and inclusion while informal relationships are spontaneous, arising and developing through country-of-origin community groups and peer groups. The ISMU Foundation (2019) also discuss the value of relationships that are built within institutional settings (e.g., school or a reception facility) that extend beyond the formal role of a professional. Similarly, a study of unaccompanied minors in Paris conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of social connection and relationships, finding that
ongoing social interactions between volunteers, staff and unaccompanied minors through an NGO programme reduced feelings of isolation and promoted health (Gautier, 2020).

Social networks and supports are key protective factors for the resilience of separated youth (Rodriguez and Dobler, 2021). A review of the literature on the resilience among unaccompanied asylum-seeking children found that lifetime relationships, namely positive early family relationships, as well as connections to family, adults and peers in country of origin, positive relationships in the host country, such as with peers, within different pro-social institutions (e.g. educational, religious and cultural) and care arrangements, all promoted resilience. Peer relationships, for example, were found to play a key role in the children’s lives, providing opportunities to share experiences, speak their native language and engage in activities, also acting as ‘bridge builders’ to the culture in the host country (Rodriguez and Dobler, 2021). Other studies of disadvantaged youth have found that peers provide emotional support, safety and help with surviving challenging circumstances, and can be particularly important when ties are broken with family (Kidd, 2003). The challenges faced by separated young people at the age of 18 years mean that it is particularly important to support them to build social networks, such as friends, as well as hobbies and interests (Sirriyeh, 2018). Friendship networks and activities can act both as support networks and as a purposeful way of spending time, which can contribute to maintaining self-esteem and therefore bolster separated young people’s ability to cope with the challenges they are likely to face as they transition to adulthood (Sirriyeh, 2018).

While the focus of research has tended to be on social relationships that are physically present in the lives of young people, an emerging literature on migrant youth suggests that close relationships may include family members who are not physically present but also spiritual relationships with God, which have been found to help to bolster resilience (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). For example, a study of meaning-making among refugee and Norwegian young people found that social relationships and connections were central to meaning-making, in that connections with family in the young people’s country of origin as well as spiritual connections helped them to find meaning in their lives (Dybadahl, Sørensen, Hauge, Røsvik, Lien and Eide, 2021). Similarly, an Irish study of unaccompanied minor’s coping skills demonstrated that coping and maintaining continuity was facilitated by a trust in God (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010).
There is also evidence that pro-social institutions and settings can support the development of social relationships among separated youth. Indeed, relationships in such settings can be particularly durable and reciprocal and are often not found in formal child protection institutions because they may be challenging for professionals to achieve (Sirriyeh, 2018). Educational settings have been found to play a particularly important role in the lives of unaccompanied young people (Fuller and Hayes, 2020) in that they support pathways to integration, provide opportunities to build social networks and promote a sense of belonging (Bitzi and Landolt, 2017; Miller, 2013). Research on the mediating role of schools in supporting psychosocial transitions among unaccompanied young refugees upon resettlement in Norway demonstrated the supportive role of education in the lives of unaccompanied young people (De Wal Pastoor, 2015). The findings of this study suggested that ‘adequate schooling’ can counteract the socioemotional or academic challenges that may result from the additional needs of unaccompanied refugee students associated with, for example, traumatic pre-migration experiences and their limited social networks (De Wal Pastoor, 2015, p. 252).

Schools and the education system can assist separated young people with various life transitions and prepare them for the future (Vidal de Haymes, Avrushin and Coleman, 2018; Martin, et al., 2011). In the Canary Islands, for instance, education has been identified as an important driver of positive transitions into employment among migrant groups (Alonso-Bello, 2020) while a UK study on the educational experiences of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors found that education can facilitate socialising, provide a stable environment, a sense of ‘permanence’ and support, and is linked to a better life in the host country (Fuller and Hayes, 2020 p. 420). In addition to education, employment is widely recognised as contributing to the wellbeing and integration of separated youth. Employment and, more specifically, the pay rate and number of hours worked, have, for instance, been found to positively and directly influence the self-sufficiency of unaccompanied refugee youth (Evans et al., 2021). Similarly, a Swedish study of Afghan unaccompanied refugees’ understandings of integration demonstrated that employment and related opportunities where minors could contribute to society were central to their integration into their communities and society (Hosseini and Punzi, 2021).

While the benefits of social relationships and connections are clear, European social work and youth researchers have repeatedly expressed concern about the absence of social support available to separated young people as they transition to adulthood.
(Kauko and Forsberg, 2017; O’Toole Thommessen et al., 2017; Smyth, Shannon and Dolan, 2015; Roberts et al., 2017). A recent UK study of unaccompanied minors’ transition to adulthood demonstrated that challenges confronted by them in the construction and maintenance of social relationships were strongly associated with wider political and legislative conditions. For example, when unaccompanied young people turned 18 years, they were frequently forced to move on from their care placement, leading to the loss of the social connections they had developed in foster care, religious spaces (e.g., Mosques) or other community spaces (Chase, 2020). The development of intimate relationships was also negatively impacted by the uncertainty of their legal status. Dybdahl et al.’s (2021) Norwegian-based research has demonstrated that changes such as moves in care as highlighted by Chase (2020) or changes in educational settings have been associated with sadness, loss and stress in the lives of unaccompanied youth, exacerbated by the absence of supports.

Refugee research has documented ‘almost insurmountable barriers’ of access to education – particularly among young refugees who arrive after the compulsory school age – associated with the limited education offered outside of language learning, which excludes large numbers from educational opportunities (Morrice, 2019). Referring to the “chasm between the aspirations of refugee youth and the reality of systems and policies to support them”, Morrice (2019, p.402) argues that policy ignores the different pathways and needs of these young people and calls for a longer-term, inclusive approach to their educational needs. Structural barriers have been shown to negatively impact access to adequate schooling, particularly among those over the age of 16 years, both during and after their international protection process (De Wal Pastoor, 2015). According to Chase (2009), structural barriers can be reinforced by service providers who work within State institutions. Furthermore, categorisations of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ youth and other polarising categorisations have been argued to negatively impact separated young people’s ability to access education and other critical resources (Bitzi and Landolt, 2017; De Wal Pastoor, 2015). Finally, uncertainties, such as those associated with international protection processes, can impact on feelings of ‘permanence’ and may discourage some young people from engaging with education. Transitions and changes from educational spaces have been found to be associated with a reduction in feelings of support and stability (De Wal Pastoor, 2015).
Despite these challenges, refugee research suggests that many young refugees have high levels of educational resilience,\footnote{Educational resilience can be defined as “the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences” and conceptualised “not as the product of a single precipitating event, but of continuous interaction between an individual and characteristic features of the environment” ((Wang et al., 1997, p. 4) in Lynnebakke and Pastoor (2020)).} displaying high motivation and hard work at school as well as positive future expectations despite the difficulties they face (Lynnebakke and Pastoor, 2020). To a large extent, this educational resilience illustrates the interplay and co-existence of vulnerability and resilience in the lives of separated children and youth (Arnold, 2017). Despite the prominence of a research focus on vulnerability, and the myriad of challenges that separated youth typically confront as they transition to adulthood, a growing body of work demonstrates that they have a clear capacity to cope. Nevertheless, relatively little is currently known about how they navigate and cope with these challenges or about how they experience the transition to adulthood.

2.9. Theorising Separated Young People’s Transitions to Adulthood

While, as demonstrated in the sections above, research on separated children has examined concepts related to resilience, wellbeing and vulnerability, separated children’s transition to adulthood remains under-theorised (Gimeno-Monterde, et al., 2021). Indeed, existing scholarship on the transition to adulthood of separated young people has been critiqued for lacking robust theoretical and conceptual groundwork (Sirriyeh and Ni Raghallaigh, 2018). Although limited, available research on the transitions of these young people has been largely atheoretical, typically documenting their characteristics, the care and aftercare systems available to them, and the shortcomings of interventions designed to meet their needs. It is important to acknowledge that this emphasis is perhaps unsurprising since separated youth transitions have only recently become a research and policy priority. Nevertheless, the increasing recognition of the policy relevance of this issue, as well as the politicisation of measures supporting separated children and youth, has led to a tendency to link research on aged/aging-out separated children with policy or political agendas.

Finally, the dearth of theoretical rigour within research on the transitions of separated youth arguably reflects developments within the broader field of research on care leavers, which has been critiqued for under-theorising the transition out of care (Glynn,
Several studies have documented the transition experiences of care leavers; however, this research has more often than not been descriptive and solution-orientated rather than theoretically informed (Lee and Berrick, 2014). According to Glynn (2021, p. 1), under-theorisation within research on care leavers has been subjected to critiques that can be grouped into three broad areas, including “a focus on outcomes research, a lack of theoretically informed studies, and an absence of theory building”.

Critiques of the lack of theoretical advancement within the leaving care literature have led to a growing number of studies that have attempted to theorise the experiences of care leavers over recent years, albeit such work remains somewhat limited (Glynn, 2021). While this body of research has focused primarily on the concepts of resilience, identity development and social capital (Glynn, 2021), agency and emerging adulthood have also been used as lenses through which to theorise care leavers’ transition experiences. Additionally, coinciding with growing research attention to the transitions of separated young people, a small number of studies have contributed to theory-building. Reflecting trends within the broader care leaver literature, emergent research on separated children and youth has drawn on a diverse range of theoretical lenses, including conceptualisations of agency through the life course approach (McDonald, 2016) and the interplay of agency and vulnerability (Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö, 2017), notions of deservingness (Wernesjö, 2020), recognition theory (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018), the capabilities approach (Chase, 2020), resilience (Qin et al., 2015; Hartwell, 2011), emerging adulthood (Qin et al., 2015), and transnationalism (Söderqvist, 2014, 2017; Söderqvist, Bülow, and Sjöblom, 2015).

The diverse theoretical lenses adopted in the above studies provide two key insights into separated young people’s transitions to adulthood. The first of these relates to the importance and influence of social networks and support systems in the lives of separated young people as they transition to adulthood (McDonald, 2016; Qin et al., 2015; Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018; Söderqvist 2014, 2017; Söderqvist et al., 2015). For example, a study focusing on the cultural adaptation of Sudanese unaccompanied refugee emerging adults following their arrival in the USA demonstrated the positive impact of connections with family in the young people’s country of origin. These connections often supported the development of a sense of purpose, contributed to their motivation to succeed and anchored them in their native culture and identity (Qin et al., 2015). Foster families and social services were also found to be central to the successful adaptation of the study’s unaccompanied youth.
However, on the other hand, the lack of adult support available to the young people negatively impacted their transition experiences, leaving them in a unique trajectory of development, coined by the authors as “a protracted period of semi-adulthood” within which they struggled to adapt (Qin et al., 2015 p. 234). Similarly, in a study of former unaccompanied youth in Sweden, Söderqvist (2014) demonstrated the influence of ‘transnational’ social relationships on young adulthood. This study used the ‘transnationalism’ framework to understand how borders between countries can fade away, arguing that this lens can promote awareness of connections among people from different nations. The authors suggest that unaccompanied young people’s everyday practices are influenced by processes that transpire because of transnationalism. For example, in addition to residential care staff, relationships with family and friends in different countries, facilitated through the development of technology, impacted their sense of belonging, as well as the dreams and aspirations of the study’s young people (Söderqvist, 2014). Söderqvist et al. (2015) have argued for the importance of recognising the critical role of social support in host, transit, and origin countries as separated youth transition out of care. They also called for a shift from a focus on independence and autonomy to one of interdependence.

Similarly, although not explicitly mentioned by Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh (2018), the authors’ recommendations echoed Söderqvist et al.’s (2015) appeal for a stronger focus on interdependence, emphasising the need for continuity of support and care, both during and after unaccompanied young people’s transition to adulthood. These studies reaffirm an increased recognition within the wider youth studies literature on the importance of supportive relationships and spaces during the transition to adulthood, particularly in the case of youth with complex support needs. For example, based on a qualitative study of 43 Norwegian care leavers, Paulsen and Berg (2016) make a strong case for incorporating the concept of interdependence into our understanding of care leavers’ transition to adulthood. In this study, care leavers were found to experience a non-linear or ‘yo-yo’ transition process, switching between seeking family support and independence. Similar to Qin et al.’s (2015) findings, Paulsen and Berg (2016) found that despite the focus of care systems on supporting autonomy, care leavers frequently struggled and needed increased support as they transitioned from care. Demonstrating that these young people are both dependent and independent and “embedded in meaningful relationships and communities” (Paulsen and Berg, 2016 p. 125), the study highlights how the concept of interdependence can acknowledge the importance of spaces where young people can make social connections and gain social support (Paulsen and Berg, 2016).
A number of studies on separated youth have demonstrated that both individual factors, such as the young people’s agency, and structural factors impact their lived realities and their future outcomes. Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö (2017), for example, observed that while agency and resilience are integral parts of unaccompanied young people’s wellbeing, there are also structural constraints (such as labour market barriers) that shape their outcomes.

Similarly, in her research on the subjective wellbeing and capabilities of Afghan unaccompanied youth in the UK, Chase (2020) identified an interplay between structural barriers and unaccompanied young people’s agency, such that structures and systems impact the wellbeing of the young people. Structures, for instance, were found to generate “new ways of ‘being’ and ‘doing’”, whereby unaccompanied youth reclaimed control over their circumstances (Chase, 2020 p. 452). Their agency was demonstrated to be in “a constant process of compromise and trade-off by the young people, with respect to what they need to forego in the present in order to possibly have greater freedoms and opportunities in the future” (Chase, 2020 p. 452).

Hartwell’s (2011) research on former unaccompanied refugee minors in the USA similarly highlighted a duality between agency and structure. In this study, the unaccompanied refugee youth described challenges as including structural constraints (such as multiple responsibilities at 18 years, difficulties related to education and employment, and negative experiences in care), as well as protective factors linked to agency (including individual strengths, skills development from previous life experiences), which shaped their lives in resettlement. Social supports, including supportive social relationships built with host communities, through community involvement, and maintained with those in the country of origin, were found to also act as protective factors.

Finally, and importantly, while structural factors certainly have been found to impact the transition experiences of separated youth, Wernesjö’s (2020) Swedish study of unaccompanied young people observed that social conditions and discourses can also shape the lives of these young people and their demonstrations of agency. In other words, the environments they live in, along with prevailing societal narratives, can impact their opportunities, behaviours, and ability to exert control over their lives. This research found that the categorisation of unaccompanied young people as undeserving (for instance, as vulnerable victims or threats) influenced how they positioned themselves either within or against such representations. This study’s findings drew strong attention to the need to recognise those wider societal factors, in addition to
traditional structural influences (such as societal systems, frameworks and institutions),
that can shape the agency and experiences of separated youth as they transition to
adulthood. It also highlights that societal discourse on the vulnerability of separated
young people is an important and influential factor that should be examined separately
from broader structural issues when seeking to understand their experiences.

2.10. Conclusion

The international and European literature has demonstrated the raft of complex
challenges and disadvantages faced by separated children as they transition to
adulthood. While a growing body of research has examined the lives of separated
children and youth, academic and political interest in their lives during the transition to
adulthood is far more recent. Globally, the existing body of research falls short of
offering a complete and thorough understanding of the lives of these young people,
eglecting the complexities of their experiences as they navigate the transition to
adulthood.

Notwithstanding some notable advancements in the academic and policy spheres in
understanding and responding to separated children’s transition to adulthood, there
remains a dearth of research on their lived experiences and perspectives on the
transition to adulthood. Perhaps, more fundamentally, the limited research conducted
to date on their transitions to adulthood has been primarily informed by a deficit
approach that overwhelmingly focuses on separated young people’s vulnerabilities and
the challenges they confront. While this body of research has drawn attention to the
(sometimes extreme) adversities experienced by separated youth, there is arguably a
need to ‘de-problematise’ their transitions and to better understand the measures and
mechanisms that bolster their ability to navigate uncertainty.

As outlined briefly in the Introduction to this work, the core aim of this research is to
generate an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of
separated young people as they transition to adulthood in Northern France. It seeks to
take account of the complexities in the young people’s lives and to move away from
understanding separated youth experiences in terms of their vulnerabilities; instead,
acknowledging, celebrating and supporting their strengths and meaningful
engagement. Aligning with this perspective, a youth-centred, Participatory Action
Research approach, underpinned by a critical stance, was adopted for the study. The
following chapter strives to build on the existing knowledge base by adding theoretical
depth to understanding the transitions of separated children, drawing in particular on the work of Michel Foucault.

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed a large body of empirical literature on separated children and youth. In so doing, it delved into several critical issues, including policy measures, service provision, and care arrangements tailored for separated youth. This review brought young people's vulnerabilities to the fore and also demonstrated their resilience in navigating a multitude of challenges, providing a critical backdrop to understanding the complex dynamics involved in separated young people’s transitions to adulthood.

While the empirical literature has contributed significantly to our practical knowledge, theoretical gaps are evident. The need for theoretical explanations becomes apparent as efforts are made to understand the nuanced transition experiences of separated young people. A clear theoretical lens can significantly enhance understanding of the processes and mechanisms that shape the experiences of separated youth and also pave the way for developing more targeted interventions and comprehensive support systems. Building on the empirical foundations set out in the previous chapter, this chapter presents the theoretical underpinnings of the current research. It starts with a detailed examination of the youth transitions literature. Attention then turns to the structure/agency debate and, here, the contribution of the work of Michel Foucault is discussed in some detail. It is argued that there is an interplay of different dimensions of power, namely, power over (structure and micro-relations of power) and power to (agency), which significantly shapes young people’s lives as they progress towards adulthood. Attention must therefore be directed not simply to the vulnerabilities of separated young people but also to their displays of agency when examining their transition experiences.

3.2. Exploring Theoretical Dimensions of Separated Young People’s Transitions

As described in Section 2.9, there is a noticeable scarcity of theoretical analysis concerning the experiences and outcomes of separated young people as they transition into adulthood. Nevertheless, the insights arising from this early scholarship provide the starting point for the development of a theoretical framework for this study.
This research draws on theories that can account for the importance of protracted transitions and social supports, notions of interdependence, as well as the duality of structure and agency and their influence on separated young people’s lives. However, before discussing these concepts, it is important to address a number of key debates within the youth transitions literature.

3.2.1. Theorising youth transitions and emerging adulthood

For several decades, the concept of youth transitions has been central in youth studies research and youth policy. Analyses of change in youth transitions broadly follow generational patterns that centred on either the baby boomer generation (born from 1946 to 1965), Generation X (born between 1965-1976), or Generation Y (born from 1977 to 2001) (Wyn, 2014). In the 1950’s and 1960’s, Piaget and Erikson advanced Hall’s contribution to adolescent development and, building on Freud’s work on the development stages from infancy to maturity, proposed youth as a life stage (Wyn, 2014). During these years and into the 1970s, theories on youth culture and subculture also emerged, including new understandings of inequality among youth. However, prior to the 1980s, short, stable and predictable transitions were said to characterise the transitions of young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007a).

Subsequently, global developments in labour markets and production led to youth transitions becoming increasingly portrayed as “extended”, “arrested” and associated with an “emerging but ever-retreating state of adulthood” (Wyn, 2014 p. 6). In the 1980s, conceptualisations of youth transitions focused primarily on developmental approaches using normative transitional (institutional and social) stages (such as education, marriage, independence, and employment) as markers, with adulthood considered the endpoint (Wyn, 2014). The preoccupation with markers of progress led to a division between the fields of youth cultures and youth transitions which remains apparent today (Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn, 2011). During this period, a “new adulthood” was seen to emerge where young people spent more time in formal education, less time in secure employment, had greater debt, were more financially dependent on parents and welfare, and married later (Wyn, 2014 p. 6). The school-to-work transition, for instance, was considered to be more protracted, fragmented and erratic than previously (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007a). These changes resulted in the recognition of more diverse experiences of the transition to adulthood as well as complex pathways to adulthood (Wyn, 2014).
In 2000, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett introduced the concept of 'emerging adulthood' to describe the period of life between adolescence and 'full' adulthood, arguing that the transition has become increasingly complex and prolonged. He contended that this period extends from age 18 to 25 years and should be acknowledged as a crucial, distinct stage in life, both demographically and subjectively, and for identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). He termed this stage 'emerging adulthood', which he depicted as an extended transitional period between adolescence and adulthood (Nelson, 2020). He linked this stage to three key markers: accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Arnett, 2007b). Since its introduction, the concept of emerging adulthood has strongly influenced discussions and debates within youth studies research (Furlong, 2017) and youth transitions research, more specifically. Youth transitions research has particularly emphasised delays in the normative transitions of young people in industrialised countries, often claiming that the transition is a time of opportunity and identity exploration (Arnett, 2007a; Goodwin and O'Connor, 2009; Woodman and Leccardi, 2015). Such notions focus to a large extent on how young people can make a ‘smooth’ transition to adulthood – on critical moments, transition markers, and sequential steps – and consider youth as an incomplete state, such that when a young person reaches adulthood, they have ‘arrived’ (Wood, 2017).

Except for Qin et al.’s (2015) examination of the cultural adaptation of Sudanese unaccompanied refugee emerging adults (see Section 2.9), there is a paucity of research on separated youth that has applied the emerging adulthood lens. However, owing to a greater acknowledgement of the need to better understand the experiences of care-experienced youth, the concept of emerging adulthood has played a crucial role in understanding the process of transitioning out of care more broadly (Sulimani-Aidan and Melkman, 2018). Building on this imperative, recent research by Van Breda et al. (2020) reinforces the significance of applying this framework when seeking to inform research on young people’s experiences of care and aftercare, arguing for the use of an emerging adulthood lens in care and aftercare research. In their cross-country study of the experiences and conceptualisation of extended care, the authors contend that extending the duration that a young person is officially classified as in the care of the State would provide a longer period in which transitions can take place. Therefore, this could avoid a situation where care leavers have to adjust to several transitions simultaneously.
Recognising emerging adulthood as a distinct phase of life, characterised by unique challenges, opportunities, and developmental tasks, the lens provides a framework for garnering a richer understanding of delays in reaching key markers of adulthood; recognising that young people may have different experiences during this stage depending on their differing socio-economic and cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, the concept of emerging adulthood – while providing a valuable lens for understanding contemporary/normative youth transitions – has also been critiqued.

The conflation of youth and adulthood with age-related categories has, for example, been criticised for ‘bookending’ youth with the uncritical concept of adulthood as a point of arrival (Wyn, 2014). Others have also argued that such a lens can lead to a misrepresentation of young people’s realities. For example, rather than constituting a ‘new way’ of becoming an adult, it has been suggested that the concept is only relevant to privileged youth (Bowen, Ball, Jones and Miller, 2021). While recognising the potential of emerging adulthood to contribute to a more robust understanding of the differences between minority and majority youth, Syed and Mitchell (2013) question the relevance of such theorisations to other young people, such as ethnic minority youth and care leavers, who demonstrate different transition characteristics compared to their far more privileged peers. For example, challenges have surfaced when applying the concept of emerging adulthood to the transition experiences of ethnic and racial minority youth. These difficulties relate to a disconnect between the lens and these young people’s contribution to family functioning, as well as between the importance given to the notion of independence and their lived experiences. Additionally, some critics contend that emerging adulthood is only available to youth with sufficient means. They argue that since ethnic and racial minorities are overrepresented in lower social socio-economic groups, they may not have the ‘luxury’ of emerging adulthood (Syed and Mitchell, 2013). Such concerns have extended beyond ethnic and racial minority youth with, for example, an American study of ‘cross-systems youth’ finding that the study’s young people had experiences that were at times inconsistent with conceptualisations of emerging adulthood. Some had, for instance, experienced considerable instability during this period of their lives (Bowen et al., 2021).

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32 The study defines cross-systems youth as being homeless, involved in the child welfare system, and having educational challenges at any point prior to age 18 (Bowen et al., 2021).
A large body of research on care-experienced youth\textsuperscript{33} has demonstrated the numerous challenges that these young people face, particularly at the point of leaving care. This work has drawn strong attention to their far more compressed, fragmented and accelerated transitions to adulthood compared to their non-care counterparts (Courtney and Thoburn, 2011; Stein, 2005, 2006a; 2014; Webb et al., 2017). In an early study, these transitions were categorised by Stein (2006) as: 'Moving On', ‘Survivors’ and ‘Victims’.\textsuperscript{34} Upon reaching the age of 18 years, many care leavers are required to live independently without many of their previous care supports (Rogers, 2011) and are expected to instantly reach adulthood (Stein, 2005, 2006). A far smaller body of research on separated children’s transition to adulthood similarly asserts that separated young people face a compressed and accelerated transition to adulthood (Gimeno-Monterde et al., 2021; Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018).

It is widely recognised that young people who experience intersecting forms of disadvantage often have different transition experiences from other young people (Smith and Dowse, 2019). Despite this, and the aforementioned critiques, the normative linear approach continues to dominate youth transitions research, policy and practice on marginalised youth populations. The limitations of an orthodox youth transitions lens become evident when applied to the experiences of separated youth since it risks inadequately capturing the complex realities of these young people and falls short of fully understanding their unique challenges, diverse trajectories, and coping mechanisms.

3.2.2. Rethinking notions of linearity in youth transitions

To better consider the realities of all young people during the transition to adulthood, Cuervo and Wyn (2014) call for a more complex understanding of youth transitions that

\textsuperscript{33} Note, that while separated young people generally can be considered as a subcategory of care experienced youth, these young people often face additional challenges and different realities which relate to their status as unaccompanied minors transitioning to adulthood when compared to French care experienced youth. Resultingly, while the implications of research on care leavers can provide insights into the experiences of separated youth, it should be noted these implications may not necessarily be directly transferable.

\textsuperscript{34} Young people ‘moving on’ from care have likely had a gradual preparation for leaving care, with stability and continuity in their lives and their resilience enhanced by their care and post-care experiences. The ‘survivors’ experience more instability, disruption and movement than those in the ‘moving on’ group and are likely to leave care earlier, face sudden ruptures in care, have few or no qualifications, and also may encounter challenges in their personal relationships. The third group of ‘victims’ are the most disadvantaged often with many damaging pre-care family experiences, in care challenges such as many placement moves and behavioural or emotional difficulties, and poor life chances (Stein, 2006).
accounts for twists, delays and unexpected moments, as well as the significant markers and critical moments, in their lives as they transition to adulthood. Acknowledging the nuances in the lives of separated young people can pave the way for a more comprehensive and empathetic understanding that goes beyond the constraints of the normative youth transitions frameworks. In line with this, there is an emergent youth transitions literature which seeks a more nuanced understanding of young people’s experiences of the transition to adulthood. Smith and Dowse’s (2019) research on young people with complex support needs, for example, suggests that youth transitions are significantly more complex than the linear conceptualisations of them, which have tended to centre on sequential phases with a beginning, middle and end. Instead, the study demonstrates that although critical moments, liminal periods and meaning making times were found, the young people experienced “cascading, overlapping and entangled moments and moments of stasis, inertia and consistency” (Smith and Dowse, 2019 p. 14). The research argues that these liminal periods are not a result of the young people’s failure to transition, but rather stem from a lack of support, partly related to the “failure of siloed support systems to understand the intersectional nature of their transitions” (Smith and Dowse, 2019 p. 15). This study’s findings underscore the pressing need for a more holistic and inclusive approach to conceptualising youth transitions to ensure that the diverse needs of individuals navigating complex transitions are adequately addressed and supported. Acknowledging the shortfalls of normative youth transition models for understanding recent changes in youth transitions and the different nature of transitions for disadvantaged and marginalised youth, there has been increased impetus for the development of new transition frameworks that centre on and account for continual interdependencies (Wood, 2017).

Seeking to account for the complexity, continuity and change of separated young people’s transitions, and concerned about neglecting the everyday lives and experiences found ‘in-between’ normative transition markers, the current study aimed to avoid an oversimplification of their transition to adulthood (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014). Drawing from the work on the ‘History of the Line’ by the anthropologist Tim Ingold, this research therefore adopts a lens that can account for the nuances and complexity in the lives of separated youth and enables an examination of their present experiences and everyday relationships. Ingold’s (2007) conceptualisation of linearity arose from a critique of the Western theorisation of linearity, which conceptualises linear as straight and rigid. Ingold compares such notions of linearity to the metaphor of a ‘dotted line’, which is “broken into segments and then compressed into a point” and which, when
fully “linearized”, is “a chain of point to point connections” without life or movement in between (Ingold, 2007 p. 151). These understandings of linearity have been demonstrated earlier in this section within conceptualisations of normative youth transitions that centre on critical moments, sequential patterns, and transition markers. The steps and stages, often termed as ‘breaks’, ‘turning points’, ‘ruptures’ and ‘critical moments’ in much of the youth transitions literature, suggest change occurs as a sequence of discontinuous events (Hall et al., 2009). Similar to the dotted line described by Ingold (2007), normative youth transitions are mapped out as a succession of events within which young people are understood to move through a series of steps, stages and markers of becoming with little recognition for the growth in-between these instances (Wood, 2017).

Critiquing dominant understandings of linearity, Ingold (2007) reconceptualises the notion, proposing that linearity can be symbolised as an endless, continuing line where “as in life, what matters is not the final destination but all the interesting things that occur along the way” (Ingold, 2007 p. 50, 169, 170). Here, Ingold uses the metaphor of ‘wayfaring’ through life, where movement and time are reframed as a non-linear process rather than a destination and change is viewed as gradual and continual (Wood, 2017; Ingold, 2007). According to Ingold (2007 p. 117-118):

> For although the time of life is linear, its linearity is of a particular kind. It is not the kind of line that goes from point to point, connecting up a succession of present instants arrayed diachronically as locations in space might be arrayed synchronically. It is rather a line that grows, issuing forth from its advancing tip rather like a root or creeper probes the earth.

By framing linearity in this way, youth transitions can be reimagined as an unending, constantly evolving process with no discernible start, middle or end. Through this lens, understanding adulthood as a point of arrival shifts to a recognition of the continuity between youth and adulthood along a never-ending, yet twisting, pathway of life. This approach also incorporates the relevance of past experiences because the past is conceptualised as a continuity into the present where “the past is with us as we press into the future” (Ingold, 2007, p. 119). This is also acknowledged in other fields, for example, in the context of complex systems, as ‘path dependency’ (Hooker, 2011).

Such a conceptualisation is already present in the youth studies literature in, for example, Wood’s (2017) critique of the normative frameworks and binaries in youth
studies which centre on static, orthodox understandings of linearity. Wood (2017) sought to better account for complexity and uncertainty in the lives of young people during the transition to adulthood. For this, he integrated Ingold’s understanding of linearity into a flexible conceptualisation of youth transitions that recognised young people as both simultaneously “being” and “becoming” where they live both “youthful and adult lives” (Wood, 2017 p. 1186). Youth transition research tends to favour sudden, rapid, spectacular change over creeping, everyday change (Wood, 2017). However, this conceptual framework sought to account for the ordinariness of change, the integrated and intertwined nature of young realities, alongside a conceptualisation of time that moves from a stepwise, linear progression to one that includes deep connections with the past.

Wood’s (2017) lens accounts for continuity and change – the moments ‘in-between’ in addition to the twists and turns – in the everyday lives of young people, highlighting the relevance of past experiences and recognising the importance of continuity where “the past is with us as we press into the future” (Ingold, 2007 p. 119). This conceptual framework also provides new “opportunities to analyse ruptures, critical moments and turning points, not so much as isolated events, but rather as part of broader processes and courses of events” (Wood, 2017 p. 1184). Here, there is a notable shift from understanding adulthood as a destination to seeing it as an ongoing journey intertwined with youth, following a twisting, pathway of life that never truly ends. By recognising that “every ‘critical moment’ is both one of continuity and change”, this perspective supports an investigation that can better account for continuity, and not just change, in the lives of young people as they transition to adulthood (Wood, 2017 p. 1184).

3.3. Exploring the Interplay Between Structure and Agency

Within the theoretical youth transitions literature, there is significant debate on the role of structure and agency in young people’s lives. Driven by much of the post-war theorising on young people’s place in society, and often framed with reference to their educational and employment opportunities, there is a strong consensus in the field of youth research that social structures have a significant impact on the lives and experiences of young people (Evans, 2002). In this thesis, social structures are understood as patterns of social relationships, institutions, and norms that shape and influence the lives of separated young people. The structural lens is rooted largely in a determinism perspective, which considers that actions are governed by structural factors that influence an individual’s life. Agency, on the other hand – which is understood as the capacity of young people to act independently and make choices
that shape their lives – typically follows the concept of voluntarism, which argues that individuals are free-willed, rational and can make their own choices and decisions.

Until the end of the late 1980s, youth transition research tended to be shaped by determinism, whereby attempts were made to understand how structures influenced young people's lives during the transitions to adulthood (Heinz, 2009). However, the 1990s brought a shift in youth transition theory, influenced by the concept of individualisation proposed by Bauman (2000a, 2000b) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). This shift moved the research focus from structural factors to research that sought to understand how young people make decisions, choices, and future plans. Importantly, an acknowledgement that social structures are not the sole determinants of young people’s life chances led to the introduction of the concept of agency (Evans, 2002). This shift, which has endured, has resulted in increased recognition of young people’s agency during the transition to adulthood. Young people are now increasingly understood to work on their identity(ies) by developing their capacity, social networks and relationships as they adapt to new or different situations (Wyn, 2014).

The empirical literature on migrant and separated youth has demonstrated that, despite frequently being categorised based on their vulnerability, young people’s agency is visible in various ways and contexts. Johnson and Gilligan’s (2020) research, for instance, has demonstrated agency in the lives of migrant youth on the Thai-Myanmar border, who used a range of strategies to negotiate the continued, everyday precarity they confronted. Similar coping strategies have been found in a qualitative US-based study, which demonstrated the strategies used by Sudanese unaccompanied refugee youth, which included actively seeking out and developing social support networks, the suppression of traumatic memories and distraction, meaning-making, and hope (Goodman, 2004). The findings of Irish research on the experiences of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors echo these findings, suggesting that despite the multiple changes and challenges in their lives, the young people, whose lives were often characterised by vulnerability, purposefully used coping strategies as they navigated challenging situations (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). This research argued that the young people were “agentive purposeful actors” (Frydenberg 1999, p. 23), who cope in a variety of individual ways depending on what they perceive as most appropriate to their circumstances” (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010 p. 9).

Despite growing recognition of the role of agency in the lives of separated youth specifically and, more generally, within the youth studies literature, there is continued debate on both the definition and mechanisms of agency (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014;
Spencer and Doull, 2015). Some researchers, for example, have criticised the ambiguity surrounding agency (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014), with others calling for a more nuanced and diverse conceptualisation of agency to better account for such ambiguity (Ahearn, 2001). Notable concerns have also been raised about the link between agency and power, as well as the intricate relationship between social structures and agency (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014; Spencer and Doull, 2015). In this regard, Spencer and Doull (2015) cautioned against the inappropriate use of agency in place of power, highlighting challenges related to understanding the dualities of structure and agency and stressing the need to theorise the complex dynamics of power. Aiming to address these concerns and to better understand the power mechanisms found within, and between, structure and agency, the following subsections draw primarily from the work of Michel Foucault and his conceptualisation of power, ‘power over’ (centring on social structures and micro-interactions of power), ‘power to’ (focusing on agency), and the interplay between these concepts.

3.3.1. Conceptualising power

Although the notion of power is central to understanding society (Clegg and Haugaard, 2009), its conceptualisation is controversial (Göhler, 2009). Due to the complexity of the term, power is a contested concept or, rather, “cluster of concepts”, and difficulties arise when attempting to find a common definition (Clegg and Haugaard, 2009 p. 1). According to Foucault (1980c p. 88), it is important to ask:

... *What are these various contrivances of power, whose operations extend to such differing levels and sectors of society and are possessed of such manifold ramifications? What are their mechanisms, their effects and their relations?*

Child and youth researchers have called for a nuanced understanding of power. For example, in an examination of the impact of power and power relations on the experiences of children in foster care in Ireland, McGregor, Devaney, and Moran (2021) demonstrated that power and power relations are multi-dimensional, non-linear, and complex. The research underlined that power is not “either good or bad but rather exists and can be used to either effect” and found that power relations extensively influenced the experiences of youth in foster care (McGregor et al., 2021 p. 14). Power was shown to manifest across different interactions, at the meso-level (such as with individual workers), exo-level (including with a general child welfare team), and at the macro-level (for instance, the wider child policy and procedures which inform practice).
Each level of power had the potential both to liberate and to restrict the lives of the young people, who often found themselves powerless against the inherent authority of the systems responsible for ensuring their basic right to survival. Despite this, the study emphasised that where power exists, resistance is found, highlighting the complexity of power, which needs to be understood from several different dimensions.

While only a relatively small number of studies have used a lens of power to examine the lives of separated youth and children, Basic’s (2022) research, which involved the participation of six unaccompanied young refugees in Sweden, also found evidence of the multi-dimensional manifestations of power in the lives of these young people. These included the concrete, physical exercise of power (such as power exercised in a context of war) and the anonymous-bureaucratised exercise of power (such as the explicit and implicit exercise of power by professional actors and through periods of waithood creating often prolonged periods of uncertainty). Albeit a small study, these findings provide important insights into the power relations that can contribute to shaping the experiences of unaccompanied young people and can serve as a point of reference for research on the power in their lives (Basic, 2022). Chapter 2 of this thesis demonstrated that separated young people’s transition to adulthood is often influenced by a range of factors outside of their control, including, for example, changes and uncertainties related to “an invasive immigration and asylum system” (Chase, 2013 p. 867). Therefore, examining the effects and manifestations of power in the context of their diverse interactions as they journey toward adulthood is arguably critical when seeking to comprehensively grasp the impact of power in their lives and its role in shaping their transition experiences.

This study therefore conceptualises power by taking account of different central characteristics of power through the notions of ‘power over’ and ‘power to’. Coined in 1972 by Hanna Pitkin, many discussions have focused on the notions of power over and power to alongside the development of new theoretical perspectives on power in the 1980s and 1990s (Göhler, 2009). Göhler (2009 p. 28, 29) provides a useful definition of power over and power to:

*Power over means power over other people, enforcement of one’s own intentions over those of others, and is thus only conceivable in a social

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35 For example, discourse analysis (Foucault), structural functionalism (Parson), Bourdieu’s conceptualisations of capital and hegemony etc. (see Göhler (2009) for more information on these particular theories).
relation. Power to, on the other hand, is not related to other people. It is an ability to do or achieve something independent of others. It is not a social relation. This distinction corresponds to a different normative judgment of power. Exercising power over within a social relation always produces a negative result for those subjected to it, because it narrows their field of action. This is the case regardless of the possibly noble intentions or positive outcomes of the exercise of power. A’s autonomy within a power relationship necessarily means correspondingly less power for B. Power to, on the other hand, is generally considered favorably. The reason for this is that power to is not directed at others, but at the individual or the group as actors themselves. The focus is not on the effects of power on others, those subjected to it, but on power as the ability to act autonomously. In this sense, power is constitutive for society.

Power over and power to can assist in conceptualising how and where power is produced. Power over is understood to limit the possibilities for action of other people (can be linked to structure). Power to is associated with one’s own capacity to act, and thus creates autonomy (can be linked to agency) (Göhler, 2009). However, it should be noted that, while power can be understood as either power over or power to, the dynamics of power are complex and ambiguities can emerge; for example, power can, at times, be simultaneously repressive and productive.

3.3.2. Exploring ‘power over’ within the fabric of social structures

Power over can be conceptualised through Foucault’s understanding of power, where “the basis of the relationship of power lies in the hostile engagement of forces” (Foucault, 1980c p. 91). For Foucault, power is, above all else, a relation of force that is exercised and exists only in action (Foucault, 1980c p. 89) and can be therefore understood as an effect and continuation of a relation of domination. Power over may appear in both actual and potential forms of power. Actual power appears when influence is clearly exerted over another; demonstrated, for example, with openly exposed aspects of power (Göhler, 2009). Potential power, on the other hand, manifests as less obvious or covert forms of power, such as, for example, unequal access to information or the influence of societal norms. Societal norms, for instance, establish binding obligations which are often unquestioned unless breached, yet subtly shape the behaviour of all members of society (Göhler, 2009).
Here, Foucault’s analysis of power linked to rights is useful. According to Foucault, ‘right’ is not just about laws; rather, rights put in action relations of domination exercised within society between different actors (Foucault, 1980c p. 95). In other words, the system of ‘right’ and the domain of law are permanent agents of relations of domination where rights can be viewed in terms of the methods of the subjugation that they instigate (Foucault, 1980c p. 95). Foucault calls for analyses of power to focus on its ultimate manifestations and extreme mechanisms, where power surpasses and extends beyond legal norms and becomes invested and embodied in institutions and techniques (Foucault, 1980c p. 97).

Therefore, by conceptualising rights as agents of domination that exert power over separated young people, it becomes possible to analyse the broad influence of structure over the transition pathways and experiences of these young people. Rights may be beneficial and provide separated young people with support and services during their transition to adulthood. However, they may also subject them to conditionalities related to their entitlements and constrain their transition pathways. For example, in most countries, before the age of 18 years, separated children have certain rights and entitlements in terms of access to services based on their age and their categorisation as vulnerable. However, when they turn 18, these rights may cease and their access to supports may become limited or dependent on a new range of conditions that the young person must fulfil. In a study of Afghan unaccompanied young people’s transition to adulthood in the UK, Chase (2020 p. 452) found that the lives of the young people, who had no secure legal status, were influenced by the system of ‘right’ and the domain of law (structural constraints and obligations), which limited their rights and eligibility for services. They were thus “constantly striving for such freedoms against structures and systems which systematically thwart[ed] their efforts” (Chase, 2020 p. 452).

Foucault’s conceptualisation of disciplinary power using the Panopticon can further assist in understanding many features of power over among separated youth. The Panopticon can be understood as a “generalisable model of functioning” that integrates both control and knowledge (Foucault, 1995 p. 205). It serves as a framework to examine how power relations manifest in everyday life. However, the concept must be detached from any specific use and rather understood as a diagram of a power mechanism reduced to its ideal form (Foucault, 1995 p. 205). In the Panopticon, power and knowledge converge. The key effect of the Panopticon is “to induce in the inmate [or individual] a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic
functioning of power” (Foucault, 1995 p. 201). Here, in a perfect state, the actual exercise of power becomes unnecessary. In other words, power is automated and individualised, and becomes the technique used by a society to regulate its members. Through the Panopticon, power becomes anonymous and more functional, such that those subjected to power tend to be strongly individualised through mechanisms of surveillance, observation and comparison. Here, ‘the norm’ is the reference point and those who do not conform to this norm are considered to be ‘gaps’. Individuals are excluded through processes of individualisation, where authorities operate by establishing binary divisions (such as normal/ abnormal, delinquent/ non-delinquent). In this framework, a person labelled as ‘delinquent’, for example, would undergo greater levels of individualisation than the ‘non-delinquent’ population. Separated young people who do not follow the normative pathways or reach the expected outcomes are often considered as failing due to their own shortfalls (Moodley, Raniga, and Sewpaul, 2020), rather than due to the wider societal factors that influence their lives. Resultingly, it could be argued that power over dynamics are at play, where those who do not reach the normative standards are marginalised or ‘othered’.

The following characteristics are central when conceptualising the mechanisms of power over using the Panopticon (Foucault, 1995):

1) Visibility: subjects are always visible to power.

2) Individuality: an individual is categorised as a describable and analysable object in a comparative system where the overall phenomena can be measured (for example, group descriptions, characterisations of collective facts, calculations of gaps and differences between individuals, and their distribution).

3) An examination: Through an examination, each individual is categorised as a ‘case’ that can be measured, described, judged and compared with others but also a case that can be ‘corrected’, ‘classified’, ‘normalized’, ‘excluded’, etc. This examination is central to procedures that establish the individual as both an effect and object of power and also of knowledge.

Through this procedure of objectification and subjection, new modalities of power emerge. Each individual receives his/ her own individuality as his/ her status, which is linked to the features, measurements, gaps and markers that characterise the individual and redefine them as a ‘case’.
Certain key aspects of the Panopticon can be associated with the concept of individualisation, which underpins many theories of normative youth transitions. Individualisation proposes that individuals actively navigate risks and uncertainties, constantly reflecting on the consequences of their actions (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007a). In this context, some youth researchers argue that structures becoming less significant, allowing young people “to reflexively create their own identities and lives free of structural constraint” (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014 p. 463). Côté (2014 p. 187) explains that individualistic understandings of youth transitions have led to assumptions regarding the needs of young people that, in turn, impact their pathways:

Individualistic explanations for social structural changes are being accepted and young people are enticed to believe that they ought to delay the assumption of adult roles, producing a variety of personal problems, self-blame for failures, and wasted opportunities (e.g., Jay, 2012). But perhaps most seriously, public policy is affected as policymakers come to believe that the exclusion of young people from the work force and the delay of their financial opportunities are both “natural” developmentally and a “choice” individually, and therefore no youth policies need to be formulated to support those in need. Consequently, the financial and emotional needs of current and future generations are being ignored or misconstrued to the detriment of the wider society.

These prevailing assumptions also suggest that “[s]tructures have become more obscure as individuals have been made more accountable for their labour market fates” (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007b p. 7). Although individuals may have some awareness of the conditions shaping their realities, the focus falls on their attempts at “personal intervention” rather than on the structural constraints that influence their lives (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007b p. 7). Setbacks and challenges are framed as individual failings rather than outcomes linked to external processes (Wyn, 2014) and those who do not conform are compared with ‘the norm’. This conceptualisation can thus be understood as an example of the power over symbolised in the Panopticon framework. In this model, as they transition to adulthood, young people are expected to respond to complexity and precarity by taking individual responsibility for systemic failures (Wyn, 2014 p. 7) and continuously reflecting on the consequences of their actions (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007a). Those who do not achieve the expected markers or do not follow
expected pathways are considered to have failed and are held responsible for their failings (Wood, 2017).

The Panopticon model has been used previously to critically examine issues of power and marginalisation in the lives of separated youth. For example, several aspects of the Panopticon framework were uncovered in a UK study of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people (Chase, 2009). The study’s young people felt individualised and categorised as asylum seekers. The categorisations of these young people have been the subject of discussion in other literature on separated children and young people. Wernesjö (2020), for instance, demonstrated that categorisations of deserving and undeserving influenced Swedish separated young people’s perceptions of their agency and the actions taken by them in either challenging or conforming to such categorisations. Chase (2009) also found that processes of structural control and power were enforced through the surveillance and monitoring of unaccompanied youth by professionals operating within different systems, such as child protection and asylum. The social relationships formed by the study's young people with social workers, for example, were impacted by their associations of these social actors with institutional systems and the perceived power that they held. Several described being under “regular scrutiny” by a range of actors, including social workers, immigration officials, other personnel from the different systems, media, and the general public (Chase, 2009 p. 2052).

The manifestation of power in social relationships, such as those described by Chase (2009), is central to the work of Foucault. He conceptualises mechanisms of power as not solely “localised in the state apparatus” but also functioning outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses on a smaller and everyday level (Foucault, 1980a p. 60). He argues that while State power is effective and important when attempting to understand the dynamics of power, State apparatuses cannot be examined in isolation as this may risk overlooking the multiple effects and mechanisms of power that are not directly transmitted through the State (Foucault, 1980b p. 72). These mechanisms are coined by Foucault the ‘microphysics of power’. They are considered to be force relations (i.e., the basic unit of power) and include the subtle and decentralised ways in which power operates at an individual level within various social institutions. For example, this can be observed in the actions or behaviours prompted, impelled, or coerced by one individual’s social interactions upon another (Lynch, 2014). These power relations operate in a bottom-up manner, commencing at the micro level through individual behaviours and interactions. These dynamics then evolve into broader
patterns that contribute to the establishment of national norms or regulations. Power thus begins to work at a macro level where larger strategies, institutions and characteristics emerge from the various relations, processes and systems.

According to Foucault, these micro-forms of power “sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximising its effectiveness” (Foucault, 1980b p. 72). By locating power with the individual who “has at his disposal a certain power, and for that reason can also act as the vehicle for transmitting a wider power”, power can be considered ambiguous (Foucault, 1980b p. 72). Here, it is possible to link power over back to an individual’s agency, whereby an individual can act and diffuse power. If the individual transmits this power in a way that limits the possibilities for action by others, then we find examples of power over. To use this conceptualisation of power in the case of separated youth acknowledges that while social structures hold a certain ‘power over’ these young people, power is acted out and reinforced by those working within such structures (e.g., social workers, administrative staff, immigration officers, etc.). This structural power may therefore be further reinforced by others in wider society (e.g., NGO staff, community groups, young people’s peers, etc.).

The potential power over young people resulting from normative conceptualisations of youth transitions and the power plays symbolised within the Panopticon becomes particularly apparent in the case of those, such as separated children, who do not follow or fit into societal norms. Critiques of this normative youth transition lens argue that it has, in effect, created categories of “at risk” or non-conforming young people who are targeted by policy measures that aim to create conformity (Wyn, 2014). Separated children and youth are typically categorised by their ‘inscribed vulnerability’ (Chase, Otto, Belloni, Lems, and Wernesjö, 2020), and as “groups of fledging or stigmatized subjects, designated as “populations”, adhering to a certain “groupism”” (Chase et al., 2020 p. 463). They are thus widely considered to be “at risk” (Chase et al., 2020 p. 463). Consequently, these young people are frequently the targets of policy measures that echo the power features of the Panopticon model. For example, policy measures frequently encourage separated children and youth to conform to accepted societal norms while simultaneously overlooking the unequal social and economic structures that create the challenges they encounter (Moodley, et al., 2020).

The examination of the role of power in the lives of separated young people responds to the need to adopt a theoretical lens that comprehensively analyses the manifestation of power over in their lives. The prevailing normative conceptualisations of youth transitions have arguably contributed to the development of policy measures that seek
conformity and risk perpetuating Panopticon-like power plays. Consequently, a specific focus on the dynamics of ‘power over’ becomes imperative. Foucault’s conceptualisations of power, namely his conceptualisation of rights, the micro-physics of power and the Panopticon, can help to shed light on the broader structures and social interactions that shape their lives and experiences.

3.3.3. The agency spectrum: Navigating ‘power to’ in the face of ‘power over’

Agency can be understood as either internal to an individual or produced by a social structure (Spencer and Doull, 2015) and is a concept frequently used by youth studies researchers to refer to “active subjectivity, intentional action or ‘free will’. The lens of agency may also be drawn upon to discuss choices or decision-making and forms of self-expression” (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014 p. 462). In the youth studies literature, agency is often described as “the capacity or ability to act” (Spencer and Doull, 2015 p. 904) and therefore can be linked to the concept of power to. Power to can be understood as an ability (Morris, 2009). In contrast to power over, which is often associated with negative outcomes for those subjected to it, power to operates differently. It is not directed towards others and, instead, involves the capacities and capabilities of an individual themselves (Göhler, 2009). This aspect of power to can be linked to Foucault’s analysis of the individual’s role in power mechanisms. According to Foucault, even though an individual is subjected to power, they are not merely passive; rather, they also serve as conduits or vehicles of power themselves (Foucault, 1980c p. 98). This conceptualisation relates to the notion of the ‘productivity’ of power whereby “power to produces the social relations through which power acts and in which the individual is thus also ‘produced’” (Göhler, 2009 p. 29).

Structuration theory similarly describes a reciprocal process of ‘structuration’, indicating that agency produces structures that serve as the conditions that govern human agency (Göhler, 2009). These structures can be both constraining and enabling (Giddens, 1979, p. 70). The concept of the ‘productivity’ of power recognises power as not only repressive and limiting but also generative and productive. Together with Structuration Theory, this concept can thus help to transcend dichotomies of agency and structure and facilitate an analysis of how societal structures shape the lives of separated young people. It also highlights how these structures produce agency, which in turn reproduces conditions of human agency (Giddens, 1979, p. 70). Here the use of a qualitative PAR methodology was adopted to provide the flexibility to comprehensively analyse these complex dynamics and the reciprocal relationship
between agency and societal structures. It also sought to address the interplay of power relations within the research process itself.

Conceptualising *power to* in this way can be useful in challenging the ‘deficit-approach’ frequently deployed in research on separated young people (Lekkai, 2020). This approach foregrounds the vulnerabilities of separated youth, who are framed as individuals lacking agency and whose lives are shaped almost entirely by external, structural factors. While this approach has uncovered the myriad of risks confronted by separated young people, it ignores their strengths and individual agency (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). In response to such critiques, research has begun to examine the agency and capabilities of separated children and young people. As detailed in Chapter 2, this body of work has highlighted their ability to demonstrate agency despite the structural constraints they are forced to navigate (Carlson, et al., 2012; Korkiamäki and Gilligan, 2020; Lekkai, 2020). For example, a qualitative study of unaccompanied minors in Ireland clearly reveals the young people’s agency despite their vulnerabilities and the many structural constraints they faced (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010 p. 9). Equally, while it is important to acknowledge the agency of separated youth, it has been argued that the more agency is foregrounded, the less importance is given to social structures (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). Consequently, if agency is over-emphasised, important power dynamics related to social structure may be overlooked.

When seeking to understand the dichotomy of *power over* and *power to*, what Foucault terms the microphysics of power is useful. According to Foucault, power develops, first, in local, individual choices, behaviours, and interactions (these can be conceptualised as *power to* and linked to agency), which combine in various ways to build into larger social patterns and later macro forms of power (exhibited in social structures) (Lynch, 2014). These macro forms of power then impact the individual's *power to*, and the cycle is self-perpetuating. Here, Foucault moves away from solely individualistic or deterministic concepts of power and rather considers macro power to be the result of many micro relations (in which *power over* and *power to* are exhibited), arguing the need to consider the ripple effects in micro events and interactions and their importance when understanding macro-phenomena.

This conception of power does not eliminate the agency of subjects; rather, agency is understood as ‘constrained’. This signifies that a person can still make their own choices even if these choices are limited by wider power relations influencing their circumstances (Lynch, 2014). If agency is understood as ‘restricted’ by social
structures and power relations, and as a force within young people (demonstrated, for example, through resistance to social structures), structure and agency can be recognised as central features that shape young people’s lives (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). These power plays are increasingly acknowledged in the youth studies literature where, in attempting to tackle the dichotomy between structure and agency, many scholars have proposed a middle ground between the two concepts (Woodman, 2009). In this middle ground, the mutual dependence, duality, and interlinking nature of power over and power to are demonstrated through structure and agency.

A number of studies have analysed the co-dependence of structure and agency through the notions of ‘constrained’ or ‘bounded’ agency (when an individual’s structural position influences their available resources) or ‘thick and thin’ agency. Here, relating to Foucault’s conception of power, agency is viewed as being possessed by young people but ‘constrained’ by their social environments (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). Brady and Gilligan (2018), for instance, conceptualise the agency of care leavers using a life course perspective, understanding that the young people’s social and cultural environments constrain their agency. By conceptualising agency within the constraints of social structures, both the “complex negotiations between different actors in which individual agency and structural factors interact” and the ‘invisible’ constraints that influence the experiences and lives of care leavers came to the fore (Brady and Gilligan, 2018 p. 75).

Research on Afghan unaccompanied young people’s transitions to adulthood in the UK found the interplay of structure and agency to manifest in the lives of separated youth. In this study, Chase (2020) found that the unaccompanied young people were continuously defined and impacted by their relationship to social structures (migration status, the beliefs, values and ‘norms’ that shape institutional structure definitions of ‘vulnerability’ and related policy/practice responses). However, the young people also demonstrated agency, constantly striving for freedom from structural constraints, including, for instance, a lack of legal status. This barrier was found to stifle their personal growth and independence, leaving them in a state of “institutional dependency” but without the formal support necessary to progress their lives. However, in the face of these limitations, they devised new approaches to regain control over their circumstances. For example, the unaccompanied youth articulated their wish to become ‘adult’ and autonomous and identified their aspirations and hopes for their futures (e.g., through work and education, creating a home, developing intimate relationships and everyday achievements such as opening a bank account). Holding on
to ideas and hopes for their potential futures sustained the young people during these challenging periods (Chase, 2020). The findings documented by Chase (2020) related to hope and aspiration can be understood as ‘imagined futures’, which can be considered an expression of agency in its own right (Smith, 2017). ‘Imagined futures’ are defined as “the ability to imagine alternative possibilities and critically reflect and evaluate individual habits based on current circumstances – that shapes one’s capacity to perform non-routine tasks within problematic or unfamiliar contexts” (Smith, 2017 p. 158). These aspirations can thus reveal how young people make sense of their present realities.

While like structure and agency, a distinction must be drawn between power to and power over, the interdependence of these concepts is evident (Göhler, 2009). The notion of power to can be liberating since it recognises that individuals can become self-aware, have hope in the face of adversity, and affect change over their lives and their futures. Through such an understanding, if power over is conceptualised as an ongoing ‘battle’, the struggle cannot be lost since it is never truly over (Lynch, 2014). This perspective offers opportunities to resist, echoing Foucault’s assertion, “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978 p. 95). Resistance can thus be conceptualised as a fundamental feature of power to whereby, without resistance, there is no power relation. Power can consequently be understood as operating in the interplay between force and resistance, a dynamic that permeates all social relations, whether at the micro and macro levels.

Chase’s (2009) research, which was discussed earlier in relation to the Panopticon and demonstrated the limited power of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum in the UK, provides an example of the mutually reinforcing nature of the relationship between power over and power to and the manifestation of power to through youth resistance. The young people in Chase’s (2009) study displayed resistance to the perceived control exerted by structures over their lives, where they felt, for instance, that the asylum system and categorisations of asylum-seekers encroached upon almost every aspect of their daily lives. Their agency, illustrated through their resistance to structural forms of power, was evident. For example, the young people chose to become silent and withhold certain information from various actors, including social workers and other professionals, the public and certain peers. While this silence was often perceived by others as secrecy and deceptiveness, Chase (2009) suggested that it may in fact reflect an act of agency in that the young people resisted the pressures placed on them by various features of power over, namely, the multiple systems of surveillance.
Within youth studies, acts of resistance against social structures and norms are often considered, without question, as examples of agency (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). While this may often be the case, it is important to acknowledge that structural inequalities can be reproduced by young people themselves and to recognise other expressions of agency, such as the agency demonstrated by those young people who prefer to conform and decide not to resist (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). For example, a young person may ‘submit to’ or ‘adapt to’ their position to cope/survive, both of which are arguably acts of agency in and of themselves. Therefore, if an individual actively chooses to be passive (rather than reactive) because they believe that this will help them to fare better, this can still be considered a choice, albeit bounded, in the context of power relations.

In an attempt to account for such limitations, Coffey and Farrugia (2014) propose a further conceptualisation of ‘empowered agency’, which again links to notions of power to. ‘Empowered’ agency is conceptualised as “a capacity for action which emerges in a relational context and changes according to the opportunities for different kinds of social action that young people have” (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014 p. 467). According to this conceptualisation, agency allows young people to take ownership of their lives and to become competent participants in social life where they stand up to and resist existing dominant power structures (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). The concept of ‘empowered’ agency acknowledges the opportunities (and thus limitations) of the different kinds of social actions or acts of agency that young people may have. Consequently, it can contribute to a more inclusive analysis of agency and resistance. The mutual dependence of agency and social structures are again central to this notion of agency (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). For example, although young people are encouraged to be active citizens, government authorities often seek and encourage active citizenship on their own terms and expect citizens to comply and obey (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). However, this can consequently simultaneously foster and sabotage agency.

To summarise, for this research, power to is understood to manifest in various ways, including through resistance, imagined futures and empowered agency. Agency is conceptualised as ‘bounded’ by societal structures. This theoretical framework supports an examination of the expressions of power in the lives of separated youth throughout their transition by embracing the nuanced interplay between power over and power to. By acknowledging this duality, the framework can comprehensively consider the multifaceted impact of power relations on the experiences of separated
young people. This approach not only enhances understanding of how power operates at various levels but also underscores the importance of recognising the agency and capacities of separated young people within the broader context of power relations and dynamics that surround them.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the broad theoretical landscape of the youth transitions literature. Within this expansive scholarship, two key arguments have come to the fore that have implications for efforts to understand the complexities inherent in this transitional phase. First, it is evident that there is a need for a theoretical framework that goes beyond traditional notions of independence and autonomy. (Smith and Dowse, 2019; Wyn, 2014). Such a framework should appropriately strive to bridge the conceptual gaps between structure and agency by recognising the interplay between ‘power over’ and ‘power to’.

Arising from a critical appraisal of several key concepts within the youth transition literature, this thesis proposes a departure from normative youth transition frameworks. This research seeks to move beyond static notions of youth transitions and to better account for the nuances and complexity of separated young people’s experiences as they transition to adulthood. Therefore, this study draws from the work of Ingold (2007) and Wood (2017) to better understand separated young people’s transitions to adulthood. At the heart of this theoretical approach is a non-normative youth transition framework which conceptualises separated young people’s transition to adulthood for separated as a dynamic, continuous process (Wood, 2017). This framework also accounts for both continuity and change in young people’s lives, acknowledging critical moments and ruptures as well as the ordinary, everyday experiences that shape their experiences.

The theoretical frame of this study also incorporates a critical perspective on the duality of structure and agency. Rooted in Michel Foucault’s influential work (Foucault, 1995, 1980, 1978), it draws on the notions of power over and power to interrogate the role of structure and agency in shaping the transition experiences of separated young people.

The study’s qualitative PAR approach aligns strongly with the theoretical framework of the research since, in addition to enabling a contextualised, rich understanding of their transition experiences, PAR places young people at the centre of the research process,
also acknowledging the power imbalances that may arise as the study unfolds. The following chapter provides a detailed account of the study's methodological approach.
4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

Having detailed the context of the research and the policy environment impacting aged-out separated children in France, reviewed the international literature, and outlined the theoretical framework for the study, this chapter presents the key philosophical and ethical principles guiding the research process. This study aimed to explore aged-out separated children’s experiences and perceptions of the transition to adulthood in Northern France while supporting them to engage with the research process by asking three questions:

- What are separated young people’s perceptions and understandings of the transition to adulthood?
- How do separated young people experience this transition?
- How does power shape separated young people’s transition experiences?

With separated young people positioned centrally within the research endeavour, a core objective was to support them to engage with the research process in their own way and on their own terms. Also aiming to address potential power imbalances within the research process and to provide a space for young people to actively engage with the research, the study applied a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, incorporating a range of data collection techniques, including qualitative, ethnographic, and non-formal education methods. Multiple participant-centred methods were included; namely, one nine-month participatory group project involving three focus group meetings (five sessions); 16 collective informal meetings and three social actions (Phase 1 and 2); 24 one-to-one informal encounters (Phase 1 and 2); 12 in-depth interviews (Phase 3 conducted in parallel to Phase 2), and a follow up member check involving the participation of 10 of the study’s young people 18 months later in January 2021 (Phase 4).

This chapter introduces the study’s PAR approach, as well as the opportunities and limitations of using such an approach. Next, the ethical principles underpinning the research, the research design and method selection and the implementation of the
research are discussed in detail. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of the analytical process.

4.2. Creating a Youth-centred Research Design

4.2.1. Underpinning assumptions and philosophical perspectives

This section examines the different theoretical standpoints which reflect my values and understanding of knowledge during the research and upon which I relied to situate myself in the study. The section also discusses and critiques PAR and issues of power.

4.2.1.1. Deeper meanings, lived realities and contradictions

The research is underpinned by a critical realist ontology, which argues that reality exists independent of our perceptions. This stance recognises the role of aged-out separated children in the construction of their own realities, but also acknowledges the ‘myriad of institutional processes’ and structural factors (e.g. structural violence, power imbalances, legal borders etc.) strongly interlaced with their lives (Chase et al., 2020 p.463). Therefore, in the context of the current study, reality was understood as more than a construct. The critical stance adopted aimed to address the tensions within the lives of young people, as well as the contradictions and power imbalances that shape the realities of separated youth. (Coleman, 2015, Fay, 2014).

The epistemological stance of this study was subjectivism, which is an underlying assumption of critical studies. This perspective encouraged an understanding of the meanings and experiences of separated young people, recognising each young person’s role in the construction of the realities of their lives (Fay, 2014). Through the epistemological lens of subjectivism, knowledge is understood as located in the context of each young person's culturally situated experiences, with reality and knowledge shaped by these experiences, rooted in certain contexts, time, and place, and constructed in a reality based on social conception (Chukwu, 2015). When knowledge is influenced by the subjective, experiential interpretation of people’s realities, the nature of knowledge is established by understanding meaning and making sense of reality (Jackson, 2013).

Adopting critical theory as the theoretical perspective underpinning the research facilitated going beyond merely describing and interpreting meaning. Critical theory, developed by the philosopher Roy Bhaskar in his work “A Realist Theory of Science” (Bhaskar, 1978), is underpinned by the fundamental assumption that every form of
social order entails some form of domination (Morrow, 1994c). Critical philosophers argue that we live in a world of dehumanisation, oppression and domination where power relations constrain the realisation of human potential (Appelrouth, 2012, Morrow, 1994c). Albeit in different terms, a body of migration studies literature alludes to different forms of power disparities faced by some separated young people. For example, Chase et al. (2019 p. 463) are critical of categorisations of separated youth and children that define or portray them as ‘the other’ and as perpetual victims. The authors argue that these categorisations are derived from the politically induced ‘inscribed vulnerability’ imposed by the immigration and care systems, which serve to reinforce power imbalances. A critical stance brings to attention the power hierarchies found within the socio-economical structures that impact on the experiences and lives of separated young people by placing reality in the tensions found within the social order itself (Morrow, 1994b).

4.2.2. Addressing power using a PAR approach

Research to date has often failed to consider the experiences or perspectives of separated young people who, repeatedly labelled as vulnerable, have been typically represented as passive agents and ‘the other’ (Chase et al., 2020 p. 463). To include them in the construction of knowledge, a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach was adopted for this study. PAR belongs to the broader and well-documented family of action research (Coughlan, 2019). It is a collaborative, participatory, social research paradigm that focuses on ‘opening communicative spaces’ where all involved partake in the critical thinking that informs inquiries (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b p. 8). PAR has been commended by action researchers for its “ability to capture the lived experiences of the participants” and for enabling researchers to explore real social problems and human communicative interactions (Feekery, 2023, p.1). PAR can provide opportunities for open and non-threatening dialogue and reflection on different aspects of an identified issue (in this case the transition to adulthood experienced by separated youth), while also enabling checks on the validity and accuracy of the conclusions drawn throughout the process (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). PAR approaches have also been found to promote empowerment and positive, supportive relationships between those involved with PAR projects, with

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36 In 1977, Orlando Fals Borda defined PAR as it is known today: ‘a variety of community-based approaches to knowledge creation which combined social investigation’ (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014d p. 584).
benefits derived by both the research participants and the researcher(s) (Dickson and Green, 2001).

Action research methodologies, much like PAR, have been described as “designing the plane while flying it” (Herr and Anderson, 2014). A genuine PAR process is typically demonstrated by its change in shape and focus over time whereby, while research is initially planned, there is scope for adapting and modifying the research process to the context in which it is conducted (Feekery, 2023). Recognising the need to adapt as the research process progressed, the research design aimed to support the participants to meaningfully engage, seeking ways to address the interplay of the societal contradictions and structural (pre-) determinations that risked limiting their involvement (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022; Chase et al., 2020). The approach strove to tackle knowledge biases arising from so-called ‘hidden’ power, which invalidates and excludes the knowledge of certain groups, for instance, by limiting opportunities for participation in decision-making processes (Gaventa, 2015 p.466), by producing local knowledge through a collaborative partnership with the participating young people.

Despite PAR’s potential to support young people to participate in knowledge construction, there have been many critiques of PAR and participatory research with young people. These critiques have focused, to a large extent, on the far-reaching claims made by researchers about the benefits of PAR (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022); for example, the claim that PAR is ‘more’ empowering and/or morally and ethically ‘better’ research compared to other research traditions (Holland et al., 2010 p. 360). Although PAR researchers may claim that their research is underpinned by an emancipatory paradigm, it cannot be assumed that simply involving beneficiaries in PAR inevitably leads to empowerment, emancipation or the transformation of power relations (Dona, 2007; McTaggart, 1994). Indeed, participants may feel overwhelmed or discouraged rather than empowered as they develop a deeper understanding of the challenges they encounter (Dona, 2007). Some participatory researchers have also claimed that the research is ‘empowering’, particularly when conducted with children and young people, despite the research process being highly managed by the researcher in practice (Holland et al., 2010 p. 361). Some authors have expressed concern about the potential risks of PAR methods in terms of their fulfilment of a researcher’s pre-established agenda(s) rather than the concerns of the community or communities under study (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014d). Other critiques suggest that power hierarchies may be reinforced by PAR processes (Dona, 2007), particularly
if the use and control of knowledge\textsuperscript{37}, and the power dynamics found within the research interactions, are ignored (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022; Gaventa, 2015).

### 4.2.3. Tackling the shortcomings of a PAR approach

The risks outlined above, associated with the conduct of PAR, are particularly important when conducting research with separated young people who, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, tend to be labelled and understood as a marginalised, vulnerable, relatively powerless population. To tackle the potential pitfalls and dangers of PAR, particularly in terms of power dynamics, a critical examination of power was undertaken by investigating three aspects, namely: 1) the manipulation of knowledge; 2) power in social relations; and 3) structural forms of power. Different lenses were used to better understand power within the PAR processes, drawing from the radical traditions and social values historically found in PAR.

#### 4.2.3.1. A process of conscientisation

To better understand the power struggles and domination found in the construction of knowledge and to support a critical reflection on knowledge power hierarchies in the research process, I drew from the seminal work of Miranda Fricker (Fricker, 2007) and Paulo Freire (Freire, 2005a p. 50).

Fricker’s (2007) concept of ‘epistemic injustice’ offers key insights into situations where separated young people may be unfairly treated in their capacity as ‘knowers’\textsuperscript{38} through two primary concepts: testimonial injustice and hermeneutic injustice. Testimonial injustice is understood as direct injustice. This occurs when a listener’s prejudice diminishes the credibility of a person’s ‘testimony’ compared to what credibility it should have been given (Fricker, 2007 p.4). A hypothetical example of testimonial injustice in relation to a separated young person is a teacher who dismisses a separated young person’s contribution to European culture during class because they assume that s/he does not know anything about Europe based on preconceived stereotypes of migrants, failing to recognise and value the young person’s knowledge.

Hermeneutical injustice differs from testimonial injustice in that it is not perpetuated by individuals (Fricker, 2007). Rather, it stems from the broader issue of gaps in societal collective understandings that can limit people’s ability to effectively make sense of, or

\textsuperscript{37} For example, through the control of media, limiting access to information and education, etc.

\textsuperscript{38} Knowers is understood to mean those who engage in the process of knowing, understanding, and acquiring knowledge.
communicate their perspectives or experiences. Hermeneutical injustice arises out of a gap in “our shared tools of social interpretation” (which Fricker terms as “hermeneutical resources”). This leads to misunderstandings and a person’s sense of being unheard, where they consequently find themselves disadvantaged in terms of their participation in the construction of knowledge and social meaning (Fricker, 2007, p.6). Collective forms of understanding are thus rendered structurally prejudicial (Fricker, 2007). A hypothetical example of this form of injustice concerning a separated young person may be a young person who, upon arrival in the Nord from another country, tries to explain the challenges s/he faced along that journey and the various cultural differences between her/his country of origin and France. However, because they lack a shared understanding of the challenges and nuances associated with migration, the locals struggle to understand these experiences and downplay the challenges encountered by the young person due to a lack of awareness of the complexities of migration.

The use of a PAR approach in the current study sought to tackle testimonial injustice by valuing and supporting the young people’s capacities as ‘knowers’. To address the inherently more abstract hermeneutical injustice, the study sought to address how and why knowledge prejudice, disadvantage and marginalisation may arise in the research process. Therefore, Freire’s idea of critical pedagogy was drawn upon to explore opportunities to tackle such manipulation of knowledge through a PAR approach.

According to Freire, to tackle the manipulation of knowledge, marginalised populations must undergo a process of ‘conscientisation’ (Crotty, 1998 p. 165). This entails, firstly, acknowledging power imbalances and societal contradictions affecting them; secondly, recognising ‘oppression’ as a limiting situation that they can transform; and, finally, using this newfound understanding of reality as a motivational force for taking liberating action against the identified obstacles (Freire, 2005a p. 44-47).

39 The term conscientisation is defined as: to render conscious or to awaken/ increase consciousness and involves “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality”. (Freire, 2005b, p. 37).
40 This process is understood by Freire as a process of critical thinking. The marginalised populations (referred to by Freire as the ‘oppressed’) must discover that they are involved in a dialectical relationship to the ‘oppressor’, where without the ‘oppressed’, the ‘oppressor’ could not exist. The ‘oppressed’ must then ‘struggle to free themselves’ from this dynamic. (Freire, 2005a).
41 It should be noted that, the action itself is the development of consciousness which is understood to be a critical self-insertion into the reality of one’s situation. Crotty, 1998). In other
Aiming to go further than simply including separated young people in research, this PAR study aimed to encourage a process of conscientisation. In other words, it sought to incorporate a process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action (Kaukko, 2016). This process of conscientisation was understood as occurring within real people and within real social structures, in solidarity with others through dialogue (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, when designing and conducting the research, creating opportunities for dialogue, group discussion, and interaction with different institutional structures were all deemed to be critically important. This process was understood as occurring within action-reflection cycles, which similarly involve observing and taking stock of what is happening, reflecting on an issue, and taking action, as well as evaluating the action and subsequently modifying the process where the research process could then move in new directions (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011).

The study’s young people were therefore together invited to participate in a process of dialogue, critical reflection and action (Reason and Bradbury, 2001a p. 8). Underpinned by a critical epistemology, the research aimed to support participants to be ‘critical’ and to investigate the consequences of different perspectives, systems, and practices (Jordan, 2009) while simultaneously encouraging them to act against real and apparent injustice by creating actions together aimed at changing or influencing any negative consequences (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022; Kemmis and Nixon, 2015). Together, reflection and action produced ‘theory-in-action’ whereby theory and action had a mediating dialogue or ‘praxis’ (Kaukko, 2015 p. 49), encouraging change through words, as critical reflection occurs, further action takes place creating, what Freire terms as ‘transformative power’ (Baum et al., 2006 p. 856) signifying that action and reflection are interdependent with critical reflection already an action.
critical reflection and avoiding ‘cold and cynical’ theorizing (Kaukko and Fertig, 2016 p. 32).

4.2.3.2. Social relations and structures of power

In PAR, researchers do not assume an objective or neutral stance; rather, they must open themselves up to be impacted by the experiences of the participants (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014c). Despite this, PAR researchers have at times conceptualised power as repressive and as something ‘known’ by the researcher, largely ignoring more nuanced and indistinct power dynamics (Holland et al., 2010 p. 362). This is perhaps unsurprising when we consider Fricker’s (2007) hermeneutical injustice described in the previous section. For example, it could be argued that gaps in shared understandings may perhaps result in these researchers not fully grasping or considering the subtle, nuanced and more discrete aspects of power mechanisms that may arise within PAR processes. However, this narrow understanding of power suggests that it can be ‘given up’ by the researcher to less powerful participants (Janes, 2016 p. 75). Resultingly, it overlooks the researcher’s own privilege and the unequal knowledge relations that could perpetuate and create the very power hierarchies that PAR researchers aim to mitigate (Janes, 2016; Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014b).

To address these issues, the PAR process sought to create an inclusive, equitable environment where different views and experiences are acknowledged and valued. It also aimed to take account of the various structural factors that shape the social, political and historical conditions impacting on knowledge development (Janes, 2016). Through this frame, I drew on a postcolonial lens to provide a moral compass to avoid obscuring my own privilege and to better acknowledge power as dynamic, contextual, uneven and inevitable, and implicated in all spaces and positions (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022; Janes, 2016). I also recognised that my privilege could not be taken away or reduced, even if my personal value systems reject oppressive systems and hierarchical practices (Janes, 2016).

Foucault’s work on the microphysics of power (discussed in Chapter 3) also provided a framework for understanding the power hierarchies that appear within and as a result of, the PAR processes. Through this lens, power was recognised to be found within the discourses, practices and institutions inherent in all social relations (Gaventa, 2015). For the duration of the study, I drew on Foucault’s microphysics of power as well as Fricker’s (2007) lens of epistemic injustice to reflect on whose knowledge was valued
and on any unintentional power relations. I acknowledged that a power dynamic and knowledge hierarchies may foster, and be reinforced, in the social relationships found within external and internal research structures (Dona, 2007). Additionally, I understood that these may be further produced and reproduced within the research processes, including those that may be assumed to be emancipatory (Janes, 2016). Consequently, I had to pay attention to the potential, and sometimes unclear, power-plays found within the many relationships formed during the research process (Gaventa, 2015).

Tackling the structural factors shaping power, the blurry microphysics of power and epistemic injustice also signified an acknowledgement of my own positionality – as a well-meaning but well-positioned and well-educated, white, European, English-speaking woman – and the potential impact of my positionality on my relationships with the study’s participants. Drawing insight from the action research literature on children and young people (see for example Kaukko (2016)), I adopted several strategies to promote power shifts such as seeking feedback, advice and perspectives on the research process and my practice from the study’s young people as well as from my academic supervisor, my peer researchers, and the study’s gatekeepers.

Additionally, to elucidate power and privilege throughout the research process, I engaged in reflexivity and critical reflectivity (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014a) guided by a Structured Ethical Reflection model (described in the following section). Although commonly confused with one another (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014e), Fook (1999) distinguishes between reflexivity as a position and reflectivity as a process, while acknowledging that both work to complement each other. Undergoing a process of reflexivity involved recognising and acknowledging the influence of my position as a researcher, within social, cultural and structural contexts (Fook, 1999, Shaw and Gould, 2001). I needed to develop an awareness of the potential influence of my own personal assumptions, beliefs and potential biases that shaped my judgement, decisions, and behaviours throughout the research process (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022; Gonnerman et al., 2015; Etherington, 2004). A process of reflectivity complemented reflexivity in so far as, once the influence of my assumptions and actions were considered, I then began to understand my position in relation to others and altered my practice accordingly (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022; Fook, 1999).\(^2\)

\(^2\) The continuous and deliberate process can be a reflection on what happened (single-loop learning) and, closer to notions of reflexivity, the process can also involve a reflection of the underlying assumptions behind actions taken (double-loop learning) (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014e).
These strategies supported me to develop critical self-awareness and to reflect on my role and positionality within the research process. Importantly, this reflexive, reflective process helped me to respond to and manage complex ethical conundrums and to gain insight into my own research practice, recognise power asymmetries within the research process and improve my research practice to better meet participants’ needs (Streck, 2015).

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the conduct of this research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (REC), School of Social Work and Social Policy, TCD. Ethics was a central consideration to all aspects of this study’s PAR approach and participants were invited to shape and contribute to the ethical approaches used in the study. While the protocols included in the application for ethical approval provided me with important blueprints for protecting the study’s participants, I also used the Structural Ethical Reflection (SER) model to guide the study (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022). The SER model was conceptualised by Brydon-Miller (2015) drawing from community covenantal ethics (Mary Brydon-Miller, 2015). In this model, I incorporated both my own and the young people’s values and sought to tackle some of the issues related to epistemic injustice and potential power imbalances described in the previous sections. The research process was therefore underpinned by core values, including “a respect for people and for the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process, a belief in the ability of democratic processes to achieve positive social

43 Further ethical approval was not required in France.
44 Covenantal ethics is understood as “reciprocal relationships in which participants have a mutual responsibility toward one another and toward contributing to the successful outcome of the research process” (Stevens and Brydon-Miller, 2016 p. 432).
45 To include the participants in the structured ethical reflection process, the decision on the final principles was made after the first focus group session in Phase 1, drawing on the values and principles underpinning a participatory group agreement that was developed with the participants (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022). Details of the group agreement are provided later in this chapter in the section on data collection.
46 I used the SER model primarily as a first-person process, first identifying the ethical values central to my own research practice. Out of over 60 ethical values, I distinguished the most important 14 key themes that represented my principles (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022). Although the principles were grouped by theme, I often grouped several themes together (Stevens et al., 2016). Seven core principles were chosen to guide the research process and the SER grid was then developed. This grid served as a compass, guiding the research process to ensure that the underlying values remained at the centre of decision-making. Substantial time was dedicated to reflecting on different questions in the SER grid. To include the participants in the structured ethical reflection process, the decision on the final principles was made after the first focus group session in Phase 1, drawing on the values and principles underpinning a participatory group agreement that was developed with the participants (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022). Details of the group agreement are provided later in this chapter in the section on data collection.
change, and a commitment to action” (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003 p. 15). Departing from the more commonly used ethical protocols because of their focus on the values and principles of the researcher, the SER framework supported a guided reflection on the implementation of these values during each step of the research process (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022).

By grounding all decision-making throughout the research process in seven core values outlined in Appendix B, I became better equipped to tackle unforeseen ethical dilemmas and emerging power imbalances, developing a heightened awareness of my actions, positionality, and privilege in the research process (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022). For example, although PAR is recognised by researchers to be potentially beneficial and empowering, it can be both challenging and risky to implement (Guy, Feldman, Cain, Leesman and Hood, 2020). I particularly struggled to navigate my ‘place’ in the research process, finding it difficult to remain in different roles, such as that of the ‘facilitator’ and sometimes becoming frustrated with the process and the group dynamics, which became increasingly informal as the research progressed. Using this guided reflexive, reflective process, I learned to ‘let go’ and focus solely on being with and listening to the participants, which in turn supported the research process to evolve naturally and to better support meaningful youth engagement (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022).

4.3.1. Negotiating anonymity

Although ensuring the anonymity of participants may appear to be a clear-cut ethical issue for researchers, in PAR, particularly when researching marginalised populations, questions of anonymity are complex and require significant consideration (Korkiamaki and Kaukko, 2022). In this PAR study, like many other participatory studies with children and youth (Korkiamaki and Kaukko, 2022; Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018; Kiili and Molanen, 2019; Spriggs and Gillam, 2019), there were challenges associated with striking a balance between safeguarding the young people from potential harm and supporting a process which sought to foster their empowerment, particularly in regard to maintaining their anonymity.

During the data collection process, one young person clearly expressed that he wished to be identified throughout the entire research process, including in all written outputs related to the study. All others explicitly expressed their wish to remain anonymous, with no link made between their identities and the views and perspectives offered by them. Yet, the same young people were motivated to develop and participate in social
actions in the public sphere – youth events, conferences, and so on – (described in detail later in this chapter) which posed a risk to their anonymity (Korkiamaki and Kaukko, 2022).

To tackle this challenge, it was crucial to scrutinise and critically reflect on the issues in consultation with the study’s young people and, during the early months of the research, we discussed the different options and all possible ramifications at length. During these discussions, I was concerned primarily with respecting the role of each participant and their demands throughout the research process and also with ensuring that they remained safe. Consequently, participants who wished to identify themselves in public events associated with the research project were invited to sign an anonymity waiver form on their participation in public events and activities. To mitigate any potential harm associated with exposing the young people’s visual identity, the young people who participated in the social actions reached a consensus. They agreed that all images would be blurred or cropped to prevent the possibility of them being recognised or identified by other young people or adults known to them.

The participants were also invited to provide a pseudonym which would be used to link their accounts and any other data related to them in this thesis and any publications arising from the research. The young people were provided with a document, with my signature, verifying that a particular pseudonym was linked to them. Unfortunately, these strategies did not resolve the ethical issues related to the participant who wished to identify himself and it was decided that this participant’s (real) first name would be included in the study. However, to protect all participants, this participant’s real name is not distinguished from the pseudonyms assigned to other participants. As a result, although the participant can identify himself, a reader of this thesis or publications arising from the research cannot identify the participant who opted to have his real name used.

In the write-up of this thesis, a final measure was adopted to ensure the anonymity of the participants whereby quotes from the young people were inconsistently identified at times, only providing relevant information in instances where their anonymity would not be compromised.

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47 All participants who participated in public events and activities signed the form.
48 10 of the study’s 12 young people provided a pseudonym.
4.4. Choosing the Methods

A critical realist ontology guided the choice of methods for this study, alongside recognition of the need for multi-method, youth-centred methods that aim to uncover the underlying mechanisms and structures that shape the lives and experiences of separated young people. Central to this stance was the incorporation of methods that aimed to support critical, open conversations about the role of power in shaping the young people’s realities as they journeyed to adulthood, as well as methods that ensured that participants would be recognised, valued and seen as active agents in the context of existing power mechanisms (Feldman, 2023). It was recognised that participatory knowledge can only be achieved through critical engagement in and with social reality, where critical subjectivism occurs through a “synthesis of naïve inquiry (a knowing based on feelings, emotions and experience) and scientific inquiry, bridging the subjective-objective divide to provide an approach to human inquiry that is objectively subjective” (Ledwith, 2007 p. 600). Underpinning the participatory approach with a critical ontology also aimed to ensure that an examination of power structures, equal and reciprocal relationships, and democratic practices that value participant knowledge, were front and centre of the research process (Feldman, 2023).

The PAR study therefore aimed to “engage young people in identifying problems in their own lives or communities, collecting and analysing data to understand the problems, and advocating for changes based on their evidence” (Ballonoff Suleiman et al., 2019 p. 3). PAR is particularly useful in the conduct of research with marginalised groups since it focuses on research relationships and therefore shifts the research processes towards relational ways of knowing (Nutton et al., 2019). The approach recognises that authentic participation is not achieved by ‘climbing a ladder’ but rather by aspiring to engage young people as full partners throughout the research process (Brydon-Miller and Kral, 2019). The study’s data collection methods were therefore designed to be adaptable and inclusive and to support the study’s young people to actively participate in, and take ownership of, the research process from the outset. While it was not possible to formally involve the young people in the study design, I engaged with separated youth as early as possible, seeking to tailor the methods to their needs and capacities (Ballonoff Suleiman et al., 2019). For example, during my 14 field visits to prepare for field entrée during Year 1, to inform the selection of relevant

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49 This refers to the ‘ladder of participation’ which describes various levels of involvement or engagement that individuals or groups can have in decision-making processes or activities.

50 It was not possible to formally include young people in the research proposal or design before ethical approval had been granted by the Research Ethics Committee in TCD.
and effective data collection methods, informal consultations were conducted with several separated young people as well as with some relevant practitioners (including NGO staff, volunteers and community groups).

In PAR, the use of several data collection methods is recommended to generate a deep, more authentic exploration of participants’ experiences and to overcome, through triangulation, the limitations of relying on a single approach (Kaukko, 2015). Qualitative methods, particularly interviews and discussion-based workshops or focus groups (Howard and Somerville, 2014), are the most common data collection methods used in PAR. The following data collection methods were therefore chosen at the outset for this study:

1) a participatory collective group project which was designed to begin with focus groups and which could then be adapted to facilitate the development of a youth-led research process;
2) in-depth interviews with separated young people.

However, as detailed below, the research process evolved dynamically to adapt to the needs and preferences of the study’s participants and, at different points, the research design moved from a youth-led process to co-management to a researcher-led or partner-led process. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the field methods used and the actions developed in collaboration with the young people, categorised according to researcher-led, participant-led, co-management and partner-led methods.

Figure 4.1 Overview of the study’s data collection methods

![Figure 4.1 Overview of the study’s data collection methods](image)
4.4.1. Participatory group project

4.4.1.1. Focus Groups (Phase 1)

Central to this study was a commitment to respecting research participants and to placing their experiences and perspectives centre-stage. By actively involving separated young people in shaping knowledge on their own terms, the research also aimed to address broader gaps in societal understanding of their lives, seeking to counteract what Fricker (2007, p. 153) terms ‘hermeneutical marginalisation’. The participative group project was chosen with these goals in mind, aiming to facilitate the participants to have an active role in the research (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014d).

This participatory project was designed to include discussion-based focus groups to facilitate the creation of a positive, safe sharing environment, limit distress when discussing challenging experiences or topics and encourage participants to develop collective social actions. Deemed less intrusive and demanding than traditional research methods, in addition to focus group discussion, multiple creative, culturally relevant, arts-based methods (rich pictures/charts, text and so on) (Chase, 2020) were incorporated into the focus group design (see Image 4.2 for examples). These varied methods encouraged trust-building and the creation of a participant-centred, inclusive process and also supported the development of a deeper understanding of the young people’s experiences and daily lives (Chase et al., 2020).

Fricker explains that when there is unequal hermeneutical participation in certain significant areas of social experience, those in the disadvantaged group are “hermeneutically marginalised” (Fricker, 2007, p. 153).

Refer to Strasser and Tibet (2019) for an example of the use of these methods with unaccompanied children.

The first of the pictures in Image 4.2 is a picture of seeds growing in a soil with flowers growing from the seeds and a watering can helping the flowers to grow. This was for an activity in the first focus group session that aimed to explore the young people’s expectations of the participatory group project, what they felt they could contribute to the project and any potential challenges that they envisaged. The second picture illustrates a ‘Problem tree’ activity which was designed to support focus group participants to reflect on the causes and consequences of key issues on arrival and the impact that they had on the transition experiences of separated young people.
Critical reflection was encouraged by combining the different methods with dialogue (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014d) and with ‘Participatory Rapid Appraisal’ (PRA) tools which supported participants to express themselves and share information in their own way and stimulated discussion and analysis (Save the Children UK, 2001). The PRA tools comprised a mix of verbal and written methods including, for example, brainstorming, focus questions, mapping, small group discussions and timelines (Theis and Grady, 1991). Image 4.3 provides an example of Coulibaly’s timeline, which was drawn during the first focus group meeting and illustrates the fluctuations in his life experiences since his arrival in France.
Participatory analysis was conducted at the beginning of focus group sessions, during which my interpretations of the data garnered from the previous session were collectively reviewed by the young people present. Methods to support this approach to data analysis, including ranking exercises, problem trees, and thematic mapping, causal diagrams, were used to aid the process (Vaughan (2014). The interpretations of the data were then refined. This participatory review also examined the data collection process and any feedback was integrated into future plans, thus ensuring that the research process was adapted to the young people’s needs and that the study design supported their active engagement and also helped them to make sense of their experiences (Aldridge, 2012). Decisions about changes to methods were made in collaboration with the young people through ongoing cycles of feedback and alongside the reflexive, reflective process described earlier. The tailoring of the study’s data collection methods to the needs of the study’s participants enhanced the validity, authenticity and relevance of the research (Swartz and Nyamnjoh, 2018; Ponciano, 2013).

4.4.1.2. Collective social actions

This study’s PAR approach aimed to include a process of conscientisation where young people were invited into a collective process of dialogue, critical reflection, and action (Reason and Bradbury, 2001a). The research was therefore designed to encourage the young people to develop collective social actions against real or apparent injustices in their lives (Kemmis and Nixon, 2015). The principal value of social actions as a method was that it shifted the focus from ‘extractive’ data collection methods and sought to encourage and incorporate the co-construction and meaning-making of the experiences of the study’s young people (Chase et al., p.466). These social actions were designed to be youth-led, whereby they could determine the direction of action to take, with the young people having unrestricted discretion to conceive, execute, and manage the actions in a manner of their choosing, including with varied formats, durations, and frequencies. The details of the social actions implemented are detailed later in this chapter.

To support the participants as they navigated and reflected on the different stages of these social actions and the overall aims of the group project (described later in the chapter), the cyclical six-phase model ‘EIPARS’,54 presented in Image 4.4, was

54 EIPARS is an acronym for Engagement, Identification, Planning, Action, Research Reflection and Reward, and Sustainability (See Image).
incorporated into the participatory group project design (Chen et al., 2007). The EIPARS model provided a comprehensible frame to support young people to identify the key issues impacting their lives and collectively create and implement social actions aimed at addressing these issues through the following six steps:

1) Engagement: Developing rapport with different stakeholders to collaborate with them and to identify and address issues that were important to the young people;
2) Identification: Supporting the participants to identify issues;
3) Planning: Partnering with young people to develop plans on how they would like to take social action to address their concerns;
4) Action: Encouraging young people to develop and implement action projects to raise consciousness about the issues within their communities;
5) Research, Reflection, and Reward: Engaging young people in an evaluation of their action projects and the overall research process;
6) Sustainability: Ongoing efforts to continue identifying and addressing the issues outlined by the participants (Chen et al., 2007, p. 129).

Image 4.4 The adaptation of the EIPARS model (as discussed with participating young people)

In addition to acting as a guiding compass for the young people, I also drew on EIPARS to hone my own research practice, particularly when seeking to support the young people in developing and implementing their social actions.
4.4.2. Informal group and one-to-one meetings (Phase 2)

An important outcome of the participant review process was the creation of a new Phase of data collection, moving from the more structured focus group sessions (retrospectively understood as Phase 1 of data collection) to more casual meetings with the study’s young people in their own homes and other spaces where we ‘hung out’ and interacted less formally. Throughout Phase 2, let go of my perceived need to adopt a specific researcher role and control the process (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022). Supporting a shift in power in favour of the young people, Phase 2 was designed by them to include informal group meetings in these familiar spaces, where they chose the time and frequency of meetings. Individual informal meetings were also incorporated into Phase 2 to provide spaces to share more intimate, specific concerns and experiences in a comfortable and safe setting (Holland et al., 2010). These open, exploratory methods were crucial to supporting the study’s separated young people to construct, represent and share more complex representations of themselves (Chase, et al., 2020). These ongoing, informal, shared encounters facilitated a more inclusive research process which provided spaces where social and emotional supports could be fostered, as has been found in participatory research with other groups, (see, for instance, García Iriarte, Díaz Garolera, Salmon, Donohoe, Singleton, Murray, and Spelman’s (2023) research with people with learning disabilities). This approach also avoided “over essentialising young people’s experiences” and, instead, enabled the ordinariness of the young people’s transition experiences to come to light as they navigated challenges in their lives (Chase et al., 2020, p. 470). The methods used for data gathering included researcher journals and memos, and young people’s storytelling.55

4.4.3. In-depth interviews (Phase 3)

While the participatory group project aimed to support the establishment of group norms and stimulate discussion and reactions (Mack, Woodsong, Athleen, Macqueen, and Nameymack, 2005), in-depth interviews were deemed more appropriate for the examination of sensitive or personal topics and for delving deeper into participant responses, such as nuances, contradictions, connections and relationships (Mack et al., 2005). Qualitative research is increasingly valued and recognised in policy making

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55 Informal group meetings involved participants cooking, eating and ‘hanging out’ together at different participants’ houses and, for instance, on picnics. Informal individual meetings involved one-on-one meetings between a young person and I where we typically went for a walk or to a café together.
arenas for its ability to answer questions related to complex and challenging social problems (Glynn 2019, Neale et al. 2012). It is also common for PAR researchers to incorporate interview techniques (see, for example, Anyon et al. 2018; Kaukko and Fertig, 2016; Chen et al., 2007) since in-depth qualitative interviews are underpinned by similar ontological and epistemological assumptions as PAR and are well suited to capturing individuals’ lived experiences and meaning making (Mack et al., 2005).

With a focus on supporting participant engagement and the creation of collaborative social encounters, in-depth interviews aimed to facilitate participant-led discussions and to create a rich picture through open-ended questions (Swartz, 2011; Mack et al., 2005). With the interview guide developed by drawing from themes identified from the preliminary analysis of Phase 1 data and the learning arising from the early stages of Phase 2, the conduct of in-depth interviews sought to validate and expand on the insights already garnered and to enable the development of further unique understandings of the transition experiences of separated young people (Swartz, 2011; Busza and Schunter, 2001).

Per the focus group design, creative and task-based methods were included in the in-depth interview structure to support participants in sharing experiences and perspectives that may have been otherwise too difficult or distressing to discuss directly (Rogers et al., 2018; Wallerstein and Auerbach, 2004). These methods also sought to build rapport, support participants to fully engage and lead the interview process (Swartz, 2011) and facilitate participant-led discussion and sharing (Conolly, 2008). They were designed during the data collection process based on findings from the preliminary analysis of data arising from Phases 1 and 2 of the research as well as feedback from participants gathered during the group project. Three methods were included in the design, namely: a social network mapping activity which provided a youth-led platform to enable discussion of young people’s social relationships; the

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56 The social network mapping activity adapted the Convoy Model of Social Relations, which places the closest and most important individuals in three concentric circles, representing three levels of closeness – close, closer and closest (Antonucci et al., 2014). The activity also drew from an adaptation from the Five Field maps measure which deleniates different segments of the map into formal structures, friends, family, etc (Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare, nd.). A simplified map was created to support participants to lead the direction of this activity.
choice of a song, which provided a memory of their 18th birthday and; the choice of a ‘Dixit’ image card to describe their feelings at the end of the interview.

4.4.4. Member check (Phase 4)

While validity in qualitative research is typically achieved through triangulation, this approach does not guarantee that the research participants will agree with the final results (Caretta and Perez, 2019). I therefore sought “an improved shared understanding of data and analysis through a dialogical, and recursive process among researchers and participants” (Caretta and Perez, 2019, p 370). I also wished to incorporate a method that could potentially address emergent epistemic injustices by tackling power imbalances in the knowledge exchange between me, as a researcher, and the participating young people (Caretta and Perez, 2019). To complement the ongoing participant review process during Phases 1 to 3 and to support data triangulation, member checking was incorporated into the research design to further enhance the validity and rigour of the study (Caretta and Perez, 2019). Member checking is a technique sometimes used in participatory methodologies and deemed by some as “the most crucial technique for credibility” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 314 in Cho and Trent 2006). Member checks were included in the final stage of data collection (Phase 4), providing an opportunity for the study’s participating young people to comment and provide feedback on my analysis and interpretation of the data arising from the research. As described in detail later in this chapter, the member checks involved two aspects; firstly, a ‘catch up’ on the young people’s situations where they responded to a small number of questions about their lives at that time as well as changes they wished to note since Phase 3 and; secondly, their responses to my interpretation of Phases 1 to 3.

4.5. Implementing the Study

4.5.1. Sampling and inclusion criteria

The research, which was exploratory and relatively small-scale, used a sample strategy that aimed to generate a rich and detailed understanding of separated young people’s perspectives and experiences of the transition to adulthood. Having worked in the

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57 The incorporation of music in the interviews followed the recommendation of Wilson and Milne (2013 p. 12), who used creative sensory methods to gain detailed insights into feelings of belonging and the self-identity among young people with care experience.

58 Originally created as a storytelling game, Dixit cards contain colourful, dream-like imagery on different action themes (Sophia, 2016). Dixit/ image cards are useful when supporting individuals to express themselves (see for example, Sophia, 2016).
Département of the Nord and elsewhere in the region with separated children and young people for some years prior to commencing this research, I had a large network that I could draw from to assist with recruitment to the study. This previous experience also provided me with a detailed understanding of the potential complexities of accessing this group of young people, which are generally agreed to be a hard-to-reach population. With this in mind, a snowball sampling strategy was the preferred approach to sampling and recruitment. This sampling approach involved contacting potential participants through referrals from members of the migrant youth service community (e.g. volunteers, social workers, etc.) (Roschelle et al., 2018). Since this sampling technique can tend towards homogeneity (Dahinden and Efionayi-Mäder, 2009), purposive sampling was also used, with the aim of generating a diverse sample in terms of the prior care histories and legal status of participants. Unfortunately, due to the reluctance of gatekeepers\textsuperscript{59} to engage with the research, snowballing sampling was the principle technique employed throughout the recruitment process.

Young people who had presented to Child Welfare Services when they arrived in France as unaccompanied minors [‘mineurs non accompagné’ (MNA)]\textsuperscript{60} were included in the study. The sample of aged-out separated children was selected as per the following inclusion criteria. All participants had to:

- Be aged between 18 and 24 years;
- Have arrived in France before the age of 18 without their parents or guardians;
- Have presented themselves as a ‘mineur non accompagné’ (MNA) [unaccompanied minor] to the Child Welfare Services in the Département of the Nord;
- Feel comfortable communicating in English or French.\textsuperscript{61}

To give informed consent and to participate in the study, participants had to demonstrate that they understood the research aims and what their participation would

\textsuperscript{59} Explained in more detail later in the section.

\textsuperscript{60} The study did not limit the inclusion criteria to young people who had successfully gained legal status ‘mineurs non accompagnés’ (MNA) [unaccompanied minors] by the Département of the Nord, rather extended to all those who had presented themselves to authorities as MNA. Therefore, participating young people included those who were, and were not, granted legal status as MNA by the authorities.

\textsuperscript{61} All participants recruited spoke French rather than English. Therefore, all data collected with the participants was in French while my own journal entries and memos were in English.
involve (see Appendix C. Information Sheet for the Young People and Appendix D. Consent Forms for the Young People provided during recruitment to potential participants). A young person could not participate in the research if they did not have the capacity to understand what the research was about and what participation involved and/or to communicate their decision to participate. Due to resource restrictions and in keeping with the aims of the study, participants who were under the age of 18 years, who had an intellectual disability and/or were currently residing in a detention centre or prison, were not included in the research. A total of 12 separated young people were recruited to the study.

4.5.2. Access and recruitment

Accessing and recruiting unaccompanied children and youth is notoriously challenging and becomes increasingly difficult when seeking to engage those who may have disengaged from formal systems and structures at the age of 18 years (Chase et al., 2020). Therefore, my previous experience in the Nord and my pre-established relationships were critically important to both access and recruitment. Access was understood as an ongoing social process and was continuously negotiated and renegotiated during the fieldwork process (Finn, 2015). Accordingly, during the first year of the PhD, I conducted 14 field visits to the Nord to support preparation for field entrée by keeping abreast of the current political situation concerning migration, gaining feedback on the research design and preserving my relationships with my previously established contacts. Working with my informal social networks through continued collaboration and volunteering, alongside potential participants and with relevant gatekeepers (carried out at a distance and during the field visits), helped me to anticipate and adapt to potential challenges of access during the study (Chase et al., 2020). It also helped me to build rapport and to gain the trust of several young people. Early into the second year of the PhD, I relocated to France and began to identify gatekeepers, with the aim of gaining access to a diverse sample of young people.

Recruitment was facilitated primarily by my professional networks, which had been built over many years with separated young people, volunteers, and service providers in local civil society organisations. My prior relationships and the focus on developing

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62 Originally, the study was intended to be a comparative analysis between Ireland and France, which is why the information sheets reference Ireland. However, the Irish context was subsequently excluded due to the extensive data set collected in France.

63 Despite contacting all key service providers and civil society organisations in the Département, the inclusion criterion which required participants to be aged 18-24 years proved
trust during the research process supported access to potential participants, many of whom would normally have been hesitant to participate and engage in a research process such as the one presented to them (Chase, et al., 2020).

By targeting a range of institutional and civil society actors who were providing services to separated children and young people, I also compiled a list of services and organisations and, upon obtaining ethical approval, initiated the process of contacting potential gatekeepers. I subsequently met with gatekeepers who expressed an interest in the research to more fully explain the study and request their formal cooperation and consent to facilitate the research.

Having explained the research and answered their questions, three gatekeepers (one local NGO and two service providers) agreed to facilitate access and recruitment. Before they consented to facilitate the research, I met gatekeepers to discuss the research and to respond to any of their questions or wishes for clarifications. The first, and principal, gatekeeper was a local independent, voluntary, grassroots organisation with which I had well-established connections. My relationships with members of this organisation were central to the success of the research in that several staff members supported the research in numerous ways, often going above and beyond what was expected or asked of them. Two State-funded service providers also gave their consent to act as gatekeepers; unfortunately, however, recruitment through these gatekeepers was not successful.

limiting for many potential gatekeepers since most organisations and service providers were no longer working directly with separated young people after they reached 18 years. As a result, several stakeholders felt that they could not support the research.

64 Stakeholders contacted included several civil society organisations who provided services to immigrant young people and separated children, one NGO network, one citizen initiative working to support migrants living in particularly precarious situations, Département officials who were responsible for supporting separated children and young people, and several state-funded service providers.

65 Ethical approval was granted from the Research and Ethics Approval Committee in the School of Social Work and Social Policy, TCD.

66 To protect the identity of participants, gatekeepers have not been named.

67 In addition to recruitment, for example, these gatekeepers provided support with logistics, including gaining access to meeting spaces, providing financial support for materials and food, and supporting funding applications for the young people's participation in different events.

68 In the first service, I never succeeded in making any contact with the social (care) workers responsible for supporting separated children and young people. In the second service, I was more successful. I met the two social workers responsible for separated children in the second service. I conducted one field visit with a social worker where I had the opportunity to visit and talk to separated adolescents in their homes. Unfortunately, the young people encountered were under 18 years old and thus could not be included in the sample.
The recruitment process was carried out incrementally from October 2018 to June 2019 as illustrated in Image 4.5, which describes the recruitment strategies and numbers of young people recruited month-by-month. Seventeen individual recruitment meetings were held with participants to develop rapport and provide information about the research.69 Developing rapport and participant engagement were priorities, with the recruitment process adapted to each individual’s needs. This was facilitated by meeting at locations and times that were convenient for each young person and emphasising informal interactions premised on trust, solidarity and friendship (Chase et al., 2020); for example, having coffee with prospective participants, going for walks, ‘hanging out’ and interacting informally.

When a young person indicated an interest in participating in the research, they were invited to meet to discuss the research, the consent forms and information sheets (see Appendix C. Information Sheet for the Young People and Appendix D. Consent Forms for the Young People). All young people were fully informed about the aims of the study and what their participation involved, with only those who gave their full informed consent included as participants. Discussion about ethical aspects of the research, including informed consent, was understood to be an ongoing process.70 If a young person decided to participate in the group project, plans were made to find a suitable time to organise the first participatory group session. Participants who joined the group project at a later stage were invited to attend the next group meeting. Two participants opted to participate only in an in-depth interview and, as a result, only interview sessions were scheduled for them. Participants were assured that they did not have to answer any questions if they did not wish to and that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no negative repercussions. All participants who remained actively involved in the group project consented to participate in an individual interview.71

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69 Generally, one per participant, but there were second meetings with some participants who wanted further information.

70 For example, before each interview, further verbal consent was sought from all participants who had already provided written consent. It was recognised that the participant’s circumstances or wishes may have changed over the months between the beginning of the project and the interview date. Therefore, despite having previously consented to participate in the interview, the young people’s consent was not assumed.

71 Two young people dropped out of the study. One decided not to take part having previously given consent and another young person joined one focus group session but did not continue with the participatory group project as he told that he was too busy to attend due to work commitments and he lived a considerable distance away.
4.5.3. Translation process

Qualitative researchers have been criticised for failing to recognise the role and impact of translation on data and analysis, which can have consequences for the findings of research (Larkin et al., 2007). Minimal translation of data is recommended to avoid meanings getting ‘lost in translation’ (Corbin and Strauss, 2014 p. 285), to ensure rigour and to gain an accurate representation of the data (Twinn, 1997). Therefore, all data collection and analysis were conducted in French, which was the mother tongue or the second language of all the study’s young people. For translation, to support a contextualisation of the experiences shared, I took the role of the primary translator as a fluent French speaker who was acquainted with the culture and values of the participants (Al-Amer et al., 2015) and had a detailed understanding of the participants, context, and data.

Data analysis was conducted in French, with translations only conducted for data that was directly cited and included in the thesis. To avoid misrepresentation of meaning, nuances were translated with caution (Al-Amer et al., 2015). A nuanced translation was achieved by maintaining the conceptual equivalence of the translated data and supplementing translations with explanatory notes (Gawlewicz, 2016). Often it was difficult to find appropriate equivalents of words in English (Twinn, 1997), which meant that semantic and content equivalence was prioritised over word-for-word translation.
when there was no corresponding meaning for words (Larkin et al., 2007). To guarantee rigour and to avoid translation errors, professional translators also verified the translations (Al-Amer et al., 2015).

4.5.4. Transcription

All audio recordings were transcribed. I transcribed several in-depth interviews myself but having gained a detailed understanding of the transcription process and due to time pressures, I enlisted the support of a transcription service. Having completed one test interview, a team of three Francophone researchers with prior experience working with young migrants and separated children in France and Sub-Saharan Africa were hired to transcribe all remaining audio recordings. The transcribers signed ethical protocols before beginning transcription and were made aware of the contextual and linguistic nuances in the interviews. Instructions were given to them to transcribe verbatim, with all gestures, pauses, utterances, and so on included. All transcripts were edited and rechecked, with the most common errors being gaps, misspellings, misunderstood words and missing paralinguistic communication (e.g., pitch changes, non-verbal cues) (Halai, 2007). An individual identifier was assigned to each transcript and removed all identifying information, including the names of places and people from the interview transcripts.

4.5.5. An iterative process of data collection and analysis

Previous PAR researchers, such as Khanlou and Peter (2004, p. 2338), have argued that PAR “may be more effective in long-term designs” featuring stable involvement of research participants. Taking this on board, this research study was implemented over four Phases: Phase 1, 2, 3 and Phase 4, which was conducted in January 2021. This phased approach helped to ensure that the young people had the opportunity to be involved in the entire research process, including the member check, which aimed to garner their views on the analysis and interpretation of the study’s data.

The data collection process can be best characterised as ‘messy’ and non-linear and as involving several ethical, logistical, and methodological challenges requiring consideration over the course of the four Phases (Baum et al., 2006). The participation of the young people fluctuated at different points during the data collection process

72 The external translators were sent the original data excerpts and asked for their own translation. I then compared both translations and made necessary adjustments, ensuring nuances were appropriately translated.
owing to issues related to their availability and/or personal challenges that arose for some at different points in time. Twelve participants continued to engage with the research process, albeit in different ways, until the end of the fieldwork period. Of the 12 young people, nine engaged with the group project. I, in consultation with these participants, negotiated various iterative and often parallel processes during data collection, which shifted between researcher-led, participant-led and co-management (illustrated in Figure 4.2), with the young people taking increasing ownership of the research process as it progressed.

Figure 4.2 The dynamic research process

Commencing during Phase 1 of the data collection process, data analysis was iterative (Kaukko, 2015) and conducted in a cyclical manner over the course of the research. Thematic analysis was selected to guide the analysis of the project’s large volume of data because of its flexibility and ability to support an analysis of rich and complex qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) (described in detail later in the chapter). Rather than aiming to fit into a pre-designed framework, thematic analysis supported a data-driven process (O’Malley, 2018) and followed the ongoing, participatory, action research process of listening, dialogue and action, illustrated in Figure 4.3.
The thematic analysis aimed to examine the entire data set across multiple stages of data collection (Sheridan, 2017; Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, & Thomson, 2012). In this way, the research sought to unify the data collection phases over time and capture the complexity of the young people’s transitions to adulthood. Along with the iterative process of participatory thematic analysis, synchronic analysis, which is recommended for longitudinal research (Sheridan, 2017), was considered suitable because of the study’s phased approach. For this analysis, repeat cross-sectional data analysis was systematically conducted during each phase. Preparation for each analytical phase involved revisiting the data multiple times to identify concepts and patterns, and to develop categories and codes across the entire data set. It is important to note that the coding categories evolved, with later phases (Phase 3 and 4) incorporating more conceptual or theoretical constructs. This method, along with the emergent themes from the iterative phases of data collection and analysis, captured both “change and continuity over time” (Sheridan, 2017, p. 107).

Additionally, case profiles were prepared to provide detailed and succinct accounts of key points discussed by the young people in their interviews and informal one-on-one encounters. The case profiles assisted in better accounting for and understanding the young people’s perspectives over time (Henderson et al., 2012). To further analyse the data, tables (or ‘matrices’) were developed to understand critical moments and
processes relevant to the analysis (Sheridan, 2017). These incorporated aspects such as access/exclusion from care, ruptures in housing, care, education, and residency. Mapping different aspects of the young people’s transitions over time (from Phase 3 interviews to Phase 4 member checks) helped to generate a comprehensive overview of their transition pathways, including those related to education, employment, housing, and residency.

A key challenge during data analysis was the task of managing and interpreting large amounts of data (Bryman, 2008) in different forms and collected across different data collection phases. Therefore, throughout each phase, and linked to the action-reflection cycles described previously in this Chapter (Section 4.2.3.1), a simultaneous process of data collection and analysis was mobilised to circumvent some of the challenges associated with managing the data analysis process. This approach had many advantages: it supported the ongoing refinement of the research methods, encouraged continuous theme development and refinement (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012) and supported the recognition of saturation, also avoiding the risk of over-recruitment (Bowen, 2008).

Data analysis can contribute greatly to the power a researcher has and, while participant engagement is sought in PAR processes, the analysis stage is often one of the last to be opened up to participatory techniques (Jackson, 2008). Despite the related challenges, central to this study’s data analysis process was a commitment to listening to the participants’ perspectives and experiences and paying attention to the emotions and ‘hidden voices’ (Wallerstein and Auerbach, 2004). To ensure their active engagement with the data analysis process and to support a critical discussion where participants could engage in a mutual inquiry into the transition to adulthood, open dialogue was encouraged. The young people were invited to give feedback on both the progress of the research and the emergent findings as they came to light. As described in detail later in the chapter, their feedback was sought, both formally through a review process (Phase 1 and 4) and informally (Phase 2) when I asked them for feedback on my interpretations and understandings of the data and themes. Details of these processes are outlined in Appendices E, F, G and H. This iterative data analysis process involved compiling and interpreting the emerging themes and coding

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73 The ‘hidden voices’ and emotions were analysed informally and formally from early in data collection through journaling observations and reflections, writing summaries of encounters, and when coding transcripts.
and re-coding data, both during and after each phase of data collection (Guy et al., 2019).

Overall, this iterative process of data analysis which was conducted alongside the data collection process enhanced rigour by ensuring that each round of data analysis built upon evidence gathered during the previous cycle (James, Milenkiewicz, and Bucknam, 2007). It also helped to address any possible misinterpretations and misrepresentations in the data (Swartz and Nyamnjoh, 2018). Furthermore, the process supported a more dynamic, responsive, youth-centred research process and promoted a deeper understanding of the young people’s experiences.

To illustrate this iterative process, the participating young people in the third focus group session (Phase 1) revisited the key themes that I identified in previous sessions. They validated the themes I had analysed—housing, social supports, residency, education, health, and care during the transition—but suggested broadening the 'residency' theme to encompass 'administrative procedures' in general. They felt that this theme would be more appropriate as they felt it should also include interactions with border police, the appeals process for those refused unaccompanied minor status and age assessments. The participants highlighted the significant impact that these early administrative encounters had on their transition experiences, which I had not previously understood to be particularly relevant to their transitions to adulthood. They also provided additional relevant information for each theme and ranked them according to their perceived importance, also emphasising their interconnections.

During subsequent cycles, as I listened to the young people’s stories, they discussed their perspectives on different themes and as we developed social actions together, the themes, including administrative procedures and their subcategories, were further refined. For instance, through this iterative analysis process, the constraints imposed by these procedures became increasingly evident. The process resulted in a key finding which recognised that the young people’s early experiences shaped their later transition experiences. Here, both the structural forms of power over and the micro-interactions of power over, including those encountered since their arrival in the Nord,

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74 It should be noted that the participants were not offered original data for analysis unless requested. We did, however, spend lengthy periods discussing outputs from the social actions. Only one participant requested their transcript but this was not for the purpose of analysis.
were identified as playing a significant role in shaping their experiences as they journeyed to adulthood.

This iterative process ensured that my interpretations remained flexible and responsive to the nuances and complexities of the participants' realities. The continuous interplay between research and action, both in group settings and in the context of one-on-one dialogues, contributed to a transparent and rigorous data analysis, and deepened my understanding of the emerging themes (James et al., 2007). Saturation of concepts and new information was reached with a sample of 12 separated young people. To provide a clear understanding of the data collection and analysis process, the following sections provide an overview of the implementation of the study across the four Phases as they unfolded. This is followed by an account of how exiting the field was managed.

4.5.6. Phase 1

Phase 1 involved the conduct of three focus group meetings. The iterative process of data collection, preliminary participatory analysis and review of data interpretation is illustrated in Appendix E. An Overview of the Step by Step Data Collection, Analysis and Review Process in Phase 1.

4.5.6.1. Focus Group Sessions (Researcher-led)

The focus group sessions functioned as “an incubator of new meanings, representation and language and thus [was] the focus for the production of a particular local theory or 'situated knowledge' regarding the phenomena in question” (Genat, 2009 p. 102). During the focus groups, the young people began to develop a participatory group project during which they critically reflected on their experiences as well as the challenges they encountered since their arrival in the Nord. The focus groups, which ran for approximately three hours including breaks, were audio-recorded with the permission of all participants. A large volume of data was gathered from these sessions, including audio recordings, drawings, flipcharts, post-it notes, written observations and journal entries. Additionally, there was a collective critical reflection during these focus groups. In these reflections, participants began to collectively acknowledge the impact of various structures on their lives and reflect on the actions they might take to address these limiting forces. Maintaining a focus on non-formal learning and sharing experiences, the focus group sessions also fostered a space for informal interaction, socialising and relationship building between participants, which were vital to the success of the research project (Kidd and Kral, 2005).
During the early stages of the group work, participants struggled to take ownership of the project. However, with encouragement, the participants quite quickly demonstrated increased ownership of the group project by taking responsibility for leading its direction. For example, the participants critically reflected on their experiences and determined the aim of the group project, which became a central focus of the overall research and the starting point for developing group actions for social change. The aim established by participants was as follows:

*To identify the challenges facing separated young people since their arrival in France and create visibility of their realities and experiences during the transition to adulthood.*

A review process was incorporated into each focus group meeting using creative, informal education methods to facilitate the young people to provide valuable input and feedback on the research methods, the group dynamic, suggestions for changes and feedback on preliminary data analysis and interpretation (Jackson, 2008). The Blob Tree drawing (Wilson and Long 2005) from the first focus group provides an example of a creative method used by the young people to evaluate the first focus group session (Image 4.6). This young person evaluated the session as a positive, supportive space with the young people “holding each other up” and supporting each other to learn.

*Image 4.6 Blob tree evaluation of a young person in the first Focus Group meeting*
Data analysis

A formal process of participatory analysis was conducted during the Phase 1. Analysis of the data from the focus group sessions was undertaken in a number of phases, largely led by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) phases of thematic analysis. Dialogue and reviewing of themes throughout the different phases of data analysis (described in detail in the following subsections) supported verification and validation of the analysis.

Firstly, after each session, I familiarised myself with the data. Initial coding was then undertaken with data open-coded and recurring categories and early themes were identified and explored. Visual and written data were analysed by hand and the data were then entered into the data management system, Nvivo, and open-coded for a second time. Journal entries, field notes and observations were also analysed using Nvivo. Preliminary analysis was conducted on the audio recordings, prior to transcription, which had been inputed into Nvivo and open-coded directly from the audio file. Through this process, an initial set of coding categories, which were grounded in the data, emerged (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data preparation was then necessary and the preliminary themes, codes and categories were set out on flipcharts in an understandable, clear format for presentation to the young people at the subsequent focus group meeting (Jackson, 2008).

Finally, at the beginning of the second and third focus group meetings (Sessions 2a and 3a, as illustrated in Appendix E.), I discussed my emerging ideas and early interpretations of the data with the participants, who had, by that time, become familiar with the data and reviewed the various categories and themes. The group then provided feedback, clustered the categories, and refined these into emergent themes (Jackson, 2008). Appendix I provides an example of how preliminary themes arising from Focus Group 1 began to emerge during this process. These were further refined during later stages of the iterative data analysis process. Image 4.7 illustrates the changes made by the young people (detailed in Section 4.5.5), where they introduced a new theme of [administrative] ‘procedures’, included the category ‘titre de séjour’ [residence permit] under this theme, and refined the data to add new categories.

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75 These phases include familiarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 35).
76 Note, after Phase 3, these audio recordings were transcribed and thematically analysed for a second time following the analysis process described later in this chapter under the section, Phase 3.
Participants also summarised the previous workshops for those who could not attend, which provided further insights into the key issues of importance and relevance to them.

Image 4.7. Example of a flipchart of revised emerging themes from preliminary analysis in Focus Group session 3 (in French)

4.5.7. Phase 2

Phase 2 comprised 16 informal group meetings, 24 one-to-one informal meetings and three social actions. The iterative process of data collection, preliminary participatory analysis and review of data interpretation is illustrated in Appendix F. An Overview of the Step-by-Step Data Collection, Analysis and Review Process in Phase 2.

4.5.7.1. Informal group meetings (Co-management)

Despite receiving positive feedback from participants on the workshops, alongside their strong expressions of a desire to remain engaged, participation waned to some extent during December 2018 and early January 2019,\textsuperscript{77} signalling a need to revitalise the group project. Following the success of the informal, supportive environment during Phase 1, and intending to encourage better engagement, one participant decided to

\textsuperscript{77} In the review process, when I enquired about the decrease in participation, participants reported that the room was too far away, that they had other commitments, and explained that they faced regular disruptions and changes in their lives (changes in accommodation, jobs, legal status etc.) which meant that it was not always possible for them to attend.
host an informal event. He invited the group members to his house to 'catch up', mark
the start of the new year, and celebrate one of the other participant's birthdays. Five
participants were available to attend and we cooked together, laughed, shared stories,
and chatted together. During this informal meeting, I gained new insights into the
participants' lives, particularly about their everyday realities as young people, and we
also became closer as a group.

This event had a noticeable positive impact on the group dynamic and, from this point,
the research process shifted from a researcher-led process to one of co-management.
The participants increasingly took the lead in the research process by, for instance,
hosting meetings, cooking, making decisions on social actions, and deciding on the
length and frequency of meetings and format of the group project (Stapleton and
Mayock, 2022).

Between January and July 2019, 16 of these informal group meetings took place,
averaging between three and four hours per meeting. Due to their informal nature, the
meetings were typically not audio-recorded and data were instead recorded through
journaling and observational notes. However, two short peer interviews were
conducted and audio recorded between four research participants during these
meetings. These were transcribed and included as data. New issues and experiences
were often introduced (and/or reiterated) by participants naturally in conversation with
each other as well as during the development of social actions; later becoming
important sources of data and supporting the data analysis process. Image 4.9
illustrates a typical start of a meeting where the young people and I shared an 'apéro’
together, prepared by the young person who was hosting, and enjoyed each other's
company before we began work on the group project activities.

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78 The participants decided not to use these as part of their social actions but they were included in the data set (with participants' permission).
79 Slang for the French term *apéritif*, which means a social gathering in a relaxed, convivial atmosphere where we enjoyed snacks together.
80 All food and drinks were paid for by me out of the research budget.
These informal meetings provided “other ways of observing, knowing, and appreciating the lived experience of another” (O’Neill and Roberts, 2019, p.77) where the young people’s stories and perspectives emerged naturally in these informal spaces (Swartz, 2011). Over the course of the research process, group members developed closer relationships; sharing experiences, learnings, feelings and ideas and also supporting each other to a greater extent over time. The following journal entry, dated 31 January 2019, documents my feelings about, and perceptions of, the atmosphere and the impact of the project:

After leaving the meeting, I feel inspired and motivated. The young people are taking the project on as their own. I facilitate but they are really running with it. More than that they are coming together as a result of it [the research project], finding supports and supporting each other in simple ways - through music, hosting each other, cooking for each other, talking and laughing together. It is lovely to see and very heart-warming. I feel inspired but also lucky to be part of it.

Despite the benefits of these informal encounters, there was the potential for ethical conundrums. Firstly, the use of spaces, such as young people’s homes, which are typically considered ‘private’, produced some complex ethical questions and considerations. However, conducting data collection in familiar, culturally sensitive spaces which focused on the every day and where the young people felt comfortable is argued to support the deinstitutionalisation of participation (Horgan, Forde, Martin and
Parkes, 2017), foster a more inclusive, participatory approach, and reinforce social relationships between the group members (Swartz, 2011). Carrying out, or rather continuing, the research process in their own homes also supported the young people to shape the environment in which the research was conducted and to take the lead on the conversations held within these spaces. Another aspect to consider is the importance that the young people placed on becoming autonomous in this context. Those who extended invitations to the group to visit their homes did so with a sense of pride, underscoring the value placed by them on their newfound independence and their willingness to share personal aspects of their lives, suggesting a level of trust and openness. Finally, by conducting informal meetings in their homes, the study’s young people, who so often depended on others for support, could reclaim control and power by sharing their resources with others in a context or space where they were acknowledged as making a valuable contribution to the group.81

A further ethical consideration centred on the matter that, although the space created by the group was perceived as ‘safe’, heated discussions did arise at times, often due to differing viewpoints, elements of a personality clash, or when one participant reprimanded another about something they were unhappy about (more often than not, this was related to timekeeping). This created challenges in finding ways to manage such disagreements (Caretta and Perez, 2019). A group agreement developed during the first focus group session, illustrated in Image 4.9, was central in this regard as it clearly stated the mutually agreed underlying values that guided the group. Therefore, despite these brief moments of tension, the participants remained respectful of each other, often referring to the group agreement when working through any issues that arose. In these instances, before ending the meeting, any minor issues such as these were resolved.

81 It is important to note, however, that while these informal group meetings were frequently held in the homes of the young people, they were not conducted in my own home. Swartz’s (2011) research with youth in a South African township demonstrated that the dynamic of a youth-centred research process changed as did relationships between the researcher when the research was conducted in the researcher’s own home.
4.5.7.2. Informal one-to-one meetings (Participant-led)

Aiming to support an investigation into the young people’s daily life experiences through a range of interpretive approaches (O’Neill and Roberts, 2019), individual research encounters occurred in different forms over the course of the fieldwork – as we travelled to and from meetings, met for coffee and walks, attended events together or talked by text or telephone. A total of 24 one-to-one informal meetings, which ran for approximately one hour per meeting, were recorded during the fieldwork phase of the research. These meetings facilitated a shift in power in favour of the young people, adapted to each young person’s individual needs. They also encouraged the young people to share detailed and open narratives that captured their experiences and perspectives, thus moving beyond predefined assumptions about migrant youth (Chase, et al., 2020). The individual informal meetings differed in terms of where we met and how much time we spent together, indicating a shift from the earlier more formal approach taken to the research process in Phase 1.

These meetings strengthened my rapport with each participant and provided new insights and modes of learning into their everyday experiences with, for example, the participants tending to share more intimate experiences and perspectives during these meetings (Holland et al., 2010). A further shift in power dynamics was evidenced by the research process moving from a researcher-led and co-led process to being
participant-led with, for example, many young people inviting me to meet with them. These individual encounters enabled me to adapt the research process to the changing needs of the study’s participants while also facilitating continued participant engagement and a shift in power dynamics. Additionally, these encounters captured change in the everyday experiences and contexts of the young people over time. Through journaling, I maintained my reflections on, and observations of, these encounters, which in turn provided important background information on the process of change during the young people’s transition to adulthood.

**Data analysis**

The journals and notes made after each encounter with the young people during Phase 2 of the research were important sources of data and I continuously worked to create initial codes and to familiarise myself with these data using manual open-coding. I also entered the data, as it was gathered, into the data management software, Nvivo, and began to inclusively code the data by labelling and grouping it into meaningful categories using a number of the coding methods outlined by Saldaña (2015). This Phase 2 coding process was firstly separately coded from the data from Phase 1 but later the data from the two phases were linked and I began to analyse these codes through visualisation techniques, such as concept mapping, aiming to identify patterns, relationships between concepts, and overarching themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This iterative process was ongoing as the data collection process continued, supporting the refinement of the analysis as new data were gathered.

As noted by other PAR researchers who have worked with unaccompanied children (Kaukko, 2015), during Phase 2 of the research, the young people preferred the more ‘fun’, youth-led aspects of the research process, such as informal meetings and developing social actions rather than the more formal task of revising or refining emergent themes. This is perhaps unsurprising since they were themselves the driving forces behind these aspects of the research process. Consequently, although the preliminary analysis was more informal during Phase 2 of the study, it unfolded through informal discussion of all emerging ideas and interpretations of the data with the young people. Subsequently, drawing from my notes and journal entries based on these discussions, I further refined the categories and codes to ensure that they were better aligned with the experiences and perspectives of the young people.  

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82 These methods included, for instance, descriptive coding, causation coding, process coding, and emotion or value coding (Parker, 2021).
During the informal group and individual meetings, and in the context of the development of social actions, through dialogue, young people critically reflected on their realities, developing their own analysis and actions related to this reality (Wallerstein and Auerbach, 2004). These informal spaces provided a detailed understanding of their everyday experiences, where I could ask questions, develop new insights into the data, and iteratively continue to refine codes to better interpret their experiences of the transition to adulthood. During these meetings, young people also frequently spontaneously repeated moments and experiences that marked their experiences and selves, which in turn enabled the refinement of categories and themes related to critical moments during the analytic process. Finally, participants summarised the key points of previous group meetings for those who had missed them, which provided further insights into what held significance for them.

**4.5.7.3. Social actions (Participant-led)**

The young people developed a group project, within which they implemented a number of social actions between December 2018 and June 2019. These social actions centred around telling stories, with the young people using different mediums (a PowerPoint presentation, an interactive workshop, a short film, written stories, and peer interviews) to share their experiences with the wider public. The processes of developing and sharing these stories provided a wealth of rich and diverse data on how the young people actively made sense of their circumstances (Chase et al., 2020), their daily lives, their experiences, opinions, and the various challenges that they faced. Journal extracts and memos documenting the process of creating actions provided important background information and deeper insights into the participants’ lives, in addition to the primary data collected from these social actions, such as outputs, transcripts from the short film and peer interviews, PowerPoint presentations and speeches, short stories and planning documentation. The seven young people who participated in the group project developed and implemented three key social actions at local and international levels, which included:

1) A PowerPoint presentation (approximately 20 minutes) made at a local festival that aimed to create awareness of the issues faced by separated young people during the transition to adulthood;

2) A workshop at an international policy conference (approximately 1 hour). This interactive workshop aimed to share the young people’s perspectives and analysis of the implementation of Section 6 ‘ensuring durable solutions’
of the European Commission ‘Communication on Protecting Children in Migration’ Recommendation.\textsuperscript{83}

3) A short film entitled ‘La Vie en Europe’ [Life in Europe] (21 minutes), which sought to create visibility of the situations faced by separated young people who arrive in Europe from Sub-Saharan Africa.

The first two social actions in particular provided opportunities for the young people to exchange their experiences and reflections with the wider public, as well as with several key stakeholders such as politicians, academics, members of NGOs, and service providers. Image 4.10 illustrates, for example, various stakeholders engaging with the workshop at the international conference, led by one of the young people.

**Image 4.10** The workshop (social action 2) underway with one of the study’s young people presenting to the participants

![Image of workshop](image)

**Data analysis**

The process of developing social actions also provided avenues for participants to discuss and collectively analyse themes that may have, otherwise, been too difficult or harmful to discuss directly (Wallerstein and Auerbach, 2004). For example, during the development of the short film, Dinoh initiated a participatory process of analysis where, using a brainstorming activity, the group critically reflected on their understanding of the preliminary data. They then began to group the data, identify and cluster themes, and then focus on “making sense of the whole thing” (Jackson, 2008), arranging, ranking, and ranking.

\textsuperscript{83} Details of this Communication are available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/the-protection-of-children-in-migration.html.
and linking the key themes in the context of a story. The journal extract from 22 April 2019 briefly describes this process.

We discussed several different themes to include in the short films and the young people described a timeline of the key moments from arrival in the Nord to their 18th birthday and post-18 years. All of this was discussed in great detail, with some young people disagreeing at the outset but, eventually, a consensus was reached. The themes chosen by the group to be covered within the short film were ranked as follows:

- Arrival in the town;
- Arrival in a service that is “supposed to take the young person into care” (the service conducting the age assessment);
- Refused status as an unaccompanied minor;
- The importance of support from different informal (volunteers, community groups) and formal (NGOs, lawyers) sources in terms of accessing information;
- Being legally confirmed as an unaccompanied minor in court;
- Gaining status as an unaccompanied minor but no access to care, homeless again;
- Placement in care (life improves);
- Starting to think about the transition to adulthood (needing good grades, a residence permit, to volunteer);
- Challenges encountered on the week of the 18th birthday; and
- Life at 18 years.

The young people did not include life beyond 18 years as a theme for the short film, preferring instead to leave the film’s ending open to interpretation, as they felt that this would better reflect the complexity of navigating life post-18 years and the diversity of different experiences.
There were barriers to the young people’s direct involvement in the write-up of this thesis, not least of which were those related to institutional procedures and the necessity for the thesis to be written in the English language. Additionally, apart from one young person (who asked if he could be listed as a co-author on the PhD, which was not possible given institutional requirements), the participating young people did not generally articulate or demonstrate a significant interest in contributing to this aspect of the research process. However, the social actions, particularly the short film, enabled the young people to communicate the narrative of the data in their own way (Jackson, 2008).

After a social action was implemented, a collective reflection on the action followed, where participants were supported to critically examine the different aspects of, and any new approaches to, the issue(s) addressed and/or critiqued during the action (Wallerstein and Auerbach, 2004). This critical reflection provided further detailed, holistic understandings of participants’ perspectives and also strengthened the accuracy of data interpretation and analysis. These inputs from the young people were recorded in memos and journal entries. Finally, in addition to constructing situated knowledge and promoting a shared, collaborative environment, this process of mutual inquiry facilitated the development of key topics, areas and categories for Phase 3 of the study, which involved the conduct of in-depth interviews.

4.5.8. Phase 3


4.5.8.1. In-depth interviews (Researcher-led)

On average, interviews were approximately 90 minutes in duration and were held in various locations, including young people’s houses, a university library, a local park or a coffee shop. The participants were given the option to be audio recorded and 10 of the young people consented to having their interview recorded.84 Twenty hours of

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84 Despite guarantees of confidentiality and clarifying that the interviews would not be shared publicly, two participants (Siaka Tanga and Diouma) were worried that someone might recognise their voice if recorded. Both interviews were consequently conducted without an audio recorder, and data was instead collected through notetaking, with notes drafted as close as possible to the words of the young people (Caretta and Perez, 2019; Jackson, 2008).
interview time were recorded during this phase of the research. In terms of creative activities, five young people completed the social network maps (see Image 4.11), which supported a discussion of the protective role of supportive social networks in their lives.

Image 4.11 A social network map depicting important relationships in one young person’s life

Four participants chose and described a song/music that they associated with their 18th birthday, which provided a starting point for discussing this period of their lives. In the final creative activity, the young people were invited to choose a ‘Dixit’ image card to depict how they felt and were asked to explain their choice (see Appendix I. An Example of a Preliminary Thematic Analysis Process). Seven cards were chosen by the young people, who used these to highlight a range of concerns about their situations as well as key experiences, perspectives, and insights. Some of the young people used the card to describe their feelings more generally or to add final comments. For example, Dinoh told of his hope that things might improve with time, also expressing the need for optimism and perseverance. Image 4.12 illustrates the card he chose for this reflection.

Here, I am alluding to time ... I think that, with time, many things will change, not all things, but many things will change, with time and the will of others ... It's difficult for some today, but with time, it will be

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55 Males are represented by blue hearts and females by pink hearts.
56 Key messages that arose through this activity included the isolation some young people were experiencing, the importance of supportive social relationships, the wish for, but challenges related to, integration, cultural differences, the need for social justice.
easy, or less difficult. Now, it is necessary just to be patient, to continue to believe.

**Image 4.12 The Dixit image card chosen by Dinoh**

During the in-depth interviews, I focused on actively listening to the participants and their needs and was particularly attentive to any difficulties or stress that could potentially arise during the interviews. I often offered participants the option of taking a break or changing topics when I felt that there may be a risk of stress. While no young people became distressed during the interview, participants sometimes made it clear that they did not want to discuss a particular topic. In instances when this occurred, the topic was abandoned and the conversation shifted to an alternative issue. Each interview ended with a discussion about the participant’s hopes for the future and feedback and commentary were also sought from young people on the research in general, the interview itself and the participatory group project.\(^{87}\)

All suggestions and feedback made by the participants were integrated into future interviews and the group project. While the young people sometimes found it difficult to participate in all aspects of the research because of time constraints and other issues, overall, they were positive about the research and their involvement in the study. They particularly emphasised the following:

- The research process enabled them to build supportive friendships that centred on a collective purpose, despite their cultural differences;

\(^{87}\) Only participants who were involved in the participatory group project were invited to reflect on how they felt about the group project and give feedback on the process.
• They had the opportunity to feel involved, even if not available to always participate in every aspect of the process;

• A space was created supporting them to share their perspectives, feelings and experiences and “to release what is in your heart” (Diouma);

• The research process supported positive, mutual learning and provided a space where they shared a “common story with similar pathways and similar objectives – to succeed, become autonomous, independent, a wish to change things” (Dinoh), and to also learn from each other’s “different situations” (Coulibaly).

• The project rendered the experiences of the young people visible in the wider public, which they felt could support wider change: “It [the research project] makes the situation visible, and I find that really beautiful. Because sometimes we’re struggling, and people around us don't know. And it’s just a matter of explaining things so that people can realise” (Coulibaly).

Data analysis

Following each interview, I completed an interview summary of key points and issues, with these insights used to further refine the interpretation of the data from the other Phases of the study. Another round of thematic analysis began upon returning to Ireland following the completion of Phase 3 of the research when all audio files were transcribed and verified. The audio data was coded using the software package NVivo and the data were then analysed thematically.

4.5.9 Phase 4

Phase 4 comprised member checks. Appendix H. An Overview of the Step-by-Step Data Collection, Analysis and Review Process in Phase 4 illustrates the iterative

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88 These included: 12 in-depth interviews, audio from short film, peer-led interviews, audio from the workshop presented at the international conference, and the 3 focus group meetings.

89 When analysing the interview data and the data from the other transcriptions thematically, I labelled and coded the dataset, creating categorisations with both semantic (surface-level) and latent (underlying) codes (Parker, 2021), also incorporating a number of different coding methods (using the techniques described earlier in this chapter). I then linked these categories with those developed in the preliminary analysis of data from Phases 1 and 2 of the study. From there, I began concept-mapping across this larger dataset, probing and seeking connections between the codes. Seeking to consolidate them around a central concept with higher-level themes and patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006), I also reflected on how the emergent themes related to the wider empirical and theoretical literature, and each other, iteratively moving between the data set and the literature to confirm my interpretations.
process of data collection, preliminary participatory analysis and review of data interpretation undertaken during Phase 4 of the research.

4.5.8.2. Member checks

Having completed the Phase 3 analysis process, I returned to France to complete a member check with the young people in January 2021 and over a period of four weeks, eleven young people participated in this process. According to Caretta and Perez (2019), when conducting member checks it is not possible to assume homogeneity among research participants. Therefore, before commencing Phase 4, to ensure the findings captured the heterogeneity of the study’s young people, I revisited and verified the analysis to ensure inclusivity in terms of the range of emergent perspectives in the data (Caretta and Perez, 2019), refining these, as necessary. I then invited each participant to complete an individual member check to assist with data analysis, and feedback, and to enable the refinement of data interpretation (Cahill and Torre, 2007). This member check was recorded using memos, note-taking, and journaling.

Overall, data interpretation was validated by the member check and there were surprisingly few divergent or contradictory comments from the young people. Nevertheless, some minor changes and a number of concepts and themes were refined (Caretta and Perez, 2019). For example, I had proposed that the concept of ‘belonging’ was important in the young people’s lives and, while some young people agreed, it was clear that their understanding of ‘belonging’ was strongly connected to their need for supportive social relationships rather than having a sense of belonging in and of itself:

*For belonging, Coulibaly explained that he understands this to signify not being alone, or isolated (Journal entry, 15 January 2021).*

Some others also disagreed or questioned the concept of belonging and this enabled me to redefine this concept. Cedric, for instance, felt that the concept did not capture the importance of social relationships in terms of providing support.

*He questioned the concept belonging, saying that it is not really the issue, that people don’t want to isolate themselves (Journal entry, 13 January 2023).*

The member checks therefore demonstrated that my initial use of the concept of belonging did not accurately represent young people’s experiences and perspectives
and was therefore redefined to better account for the importance placed by them on ongoing social supports.

During the member checks, I also invited the young people to have a follow-up discussion on their lives at that point in time and any changes they had experienced since the end of Phase 3 of the research. A summary document (see Appendix K. Member Check Guide) provided a basis for this discussion. In this document, I also provided feedback to them, including a concise summary of their situations as they had described to me during Phase 3. No audio recordings were taken because this process was conducted in a more casual, informal manner, with data recorded, both in situ and subsequently using memos, note-taking, and journal entries. Eleven young people were available to meet me, although one young person, Bintou, was under time pressure so while the member check was undertaken, time did not allow for detailed follow-up discussion.

**Data analysis**

The data collected in Phase 4 was initially open-coded manually. Then the data on age, legal status, housing situations, employment, education, and financial situation were collated into an excel file and compared with the data from Phase 3 of the study. Visual methods of analysis, such as graphs and charts, were used to interpret the data. The amount of data collected in Phase 4 was relatively small and, for this reason, rather than entering them into Nvivo, these data were also coded and then categorised manually with the support of concept mapping. I then followed the same analysis process used in Phase 3, which reaffirmed the interpretation of data arising from Phases 1 and 3, demonstrating saturation. A final concept-mapping process was conducted and I again reflected on the relationships between emergent themes and the wider empirical and theoretical literature.

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90 Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, typically these meetings were held outside in public places, such as train stations, and parks but some young people preferred to meet in residential centres or invited me to their homes, particularly as it was extremely cold weather. In such cases, we wore masks during our conversations to stay protected. I had also planned to organise a number of group meetings, however, restrictions deemed this unviable.

91 I labeled and coded the dataset, creating categorisations using different coding methods. I then linked these categories with those developed in the analysis of Phases 1 to 3.

92 While further participant member checks and validation would have been optimal, due to financial constraints and personal circumstances, this was not possible. However, given the importance of continued engagement and participant-centred approaches even after the research has been completed (Caretta and Perez, 2019), efforts were made to create accessible, understandable versions of the research findings. Currently, a visual representation...
4.5.9. Exiting the field

The study's participatory research approach – which unfolded over an extended period – supported trust building and the establishment of strong rapport with the study's young people. Although research relationships typically end when a researcher leaves the field (Kaukko et al., 2019), my relationship with many of the young people extended beyond a 'traditional' research relationship. During the research process, I tried to balance different roles, including those associated with acting as a 'supporter', 'organiser', 'researcher', and 'listener'; all the while acutely aware of the power hierarchies potentially embedded in the relationships that I formed with participants throughout the research process (Irwin, 2006). I acknowledged that while I had focused on developing a good rapport with all participants, closer bonds had developed with a number of the young people.

Paradoxically, since my relationship with young people had extended beyond what is normally expected in the conduct of research, there was a risk of reintroducing the very ethical dilemmas that I had sought to avoid through the implementation of a participant-centred methodology, including disappointment, dependency, hurt, broken trust, alienation, and betrayal (Kirsch and Kirsch, 1999). I was very aware of the potential harm that an abrupt departure could have on the young people and was especially careful when exiting the field (Kaukko et al., 2019), particularly following Phase 3 of the research when the main stages of data collection were complete. I implemented three key strategies which aimed to avoid hurt or harm to the study's participants and to also address potential ethical issues associated with leaving the field after Phase 3. These strategies included:

4) Transparency and facilitating the development of new social relationships;
5) Recognising the young people's engagement; and
6) Seeking opportunities for following up with the young people.

4.5.9.1. Transparency and facilitating new social relationships

From the point of initiating fieldwork, I made it clear to the participants that I would return to Ireland to finish the study after data collection was complete. However, over the course of the data collection process, I noticed that a number of young people and video (in French and English) of the study is being developed with the support of a visual graphist and, when complete, this will be shared with the young people along with a summary of the thesis in French.
became increasingly reliant on my support, which led me to encourage them to make contact with several (relevant) support services. During the final three months of Phases 2 and 3 of the study, I discussed possible opportunities for the continuation of group activities following my departure and arranged meetings between the young people and several volunteers and youth-led groups.93

The end of the data collection period was marked by my departure to Ireland. To ensure that there was clarity about the end stage of the research process, participants were invited to a barbeque, hosted by a local NGO working on projects with separated youth to further encourage the development of new relationships. Five participants were available to attend.

In addition to the barbeque, the study’s participants were invited to participate in an international youth rights event (see Image 4.13 for a selection of photos) to celebrate the end of the data collection process. Participation in this event aimed to encourage participants to gain more confidence and exposure to different networks in the youth sector, to continue actions without my formal support, and to meet other young people from across the world. Although not all young people were available to participate, four attended this week-long event.94 95

93 For example, one participant suggested that the group join an established theatre group run with other separated young people. I arranged a meeting between the two groups of young people and as a result, one member of the theatre group joined us for two of our activities and the participants were encouraged to develop projects together.
94 My observations and journal entries prepared during the event provided important background information for the successful interpretation of the study’s primary data.
95 Participants who could not attend either the barbeque or the youth event were invited to meet individually with me to say goodbye, with meetings arranged with all but two of the participants before completing Phase 3 of the research. I phoned the final two participants to thank them for their participation, to explain that it was the end of data collection, and to say goodbye.
All research participants were presented with a folder that included two certificates of participation (one from Trinity College Dublin, see example in Image 4.15 and one from the gatekeeper NGO) and a collage of photos with a personalised thank you message. One of the young people was also provided with the transcript of their interview, which he had requested as he wanted to use it for a personal writing project which he hopes to publish in the future. Additionally, to support the young people to continue to engage with future projects, they were provided with several resources (supplied by the Council of Europe Youth Department) such as training manuals on human rights education, discrimination and hate speech. All participants were also informed that I could provide them with letters of recommendation and would be available at a distance if they needed any further support.
4.5.9.3. **Follow up**

Before leaving France, I explained to the participants that they could make contact with me at any time (albeit at a distance) if they wished to stay in touch subsequent to the end of the data collection process. Since leaving France, all 12 participants have contacted me, to varying extents, often on several occasions.97

While I was happy to continue to support participants at a distance informally, I was also aware that some needed further face-to-face assistance. Therefore, having discussed and reflected on options with the young people and with one of the gatekeeper organisations, I set up a local pilot project and managed it at a distance with the support of local volunteers. This project matched separated young people with a volunteer ‘Buddy’ and aimed to facilitate an expansion of support networks to assist the study’s participants and other separated young people to access services and

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96 Some of the certificate in this example has been blacked out to ensure anonymity remains as event details may lead to the identification of participating young people.
97 Participants sometimes contacted me to ask for support with various procedures and services; others phoned or messaged me to ask how I was and to check in; and participants sometimes phoned to give me good news. This contact did diminish as time passed.
manage various administrative procedures. In addition to providing support to other separated young people, this project also supported a smoother exit from the field by reducing (some) participants' reliance on my support.98

Two follow-up group meetings were conducted between Phases 3 and 4 – the first, an informal meeting locally, held in October 2019, and the second, a meeting at a policy conference on youth and migration in Brussels, in February 2020. I also met with several young people individually during my follow-up visit in October 2019. Image 4.15 illustrates the young people’s participation in the policy conference.99

During Phase 4, I conducted several follow-up meetings, meeting 10 of the 12 young people, some on several occasions. Following this, I continued to seek opportunities for the young people to meet and stay involved, however, no further follow-ups have been conducted to date (November 2023).

Image 4.15 Photos from follow up international policy conference

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the study's epistemological foundations and methodological approach, which recognised the young people’s active role in the construction of the meanings and realities of their lives. These principles also align with my commitment to local knowledge construction, meaningful

98 The project ran for several months with three young people who had engaged in the research (those who had solicited my support the most) availing of the ‘Buddy’ supports offered.
99 I had planned to conduct one follow-up visit at least once per semester upon leaving the field until the end of the PhD. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic these follow up visits were paused for several months. During this time, I continued to keep in contact with the young people over social media (WhatsApp group and Facebook messenger), by text message and with telephone calls.
participation and participant-centred research (Krimerman, 2001 p. 16). Combining a youth-centric approach with alongside notions of community mobilisation (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014d), the study’s PAR approach has dialogue and collective engagement at its core (Morrow, 1994a). This approach demonstrated the importance of involving young people in the generation of knowledge about their lives and experiences. The young people contributed enormously to the research and also appeared to benefit from the research process in that they developed friendships, and gained expertise in several areas, including filmmaking, story writing, communication skills, and project management skills. They also had opportunities to participate in international events where they could meet other young people and get exposure to high-level authorities (e.g., members of the Council of Europe).

Aware of my positionality within the research process, the study was guided by the ethical principles developed in the SER grid; namely, mutual respect, solidarity and trust, love, authenticity and transparency, rigour and conscientiousness, inclusiveness and social justice. The use of the Structured Ethical Reflection framework (SER), alongside the formal institutional ethical application approval process, was important to the successful implementation of the study. This framework provided a conscientious and value-orientated approach, underscoring the study’s commitment to maintaining the highest possible ethical standards and ensuring that the needs of the young people remained at the core of the research. Through this SER process of reflexivity and reflectivity, I grew immensely, both at a personal level and as a researcher, gaining valuable competencies in how to navigate challenging, complex situations and also learning more about my own flaws, limitations and, crucially, the power I have held in the research process.

The study’s design and implementation involved a participant-led approach, with recruitment carried out with the help of a gatekeeper and through my own established personal local networks. Despite fluctuations in participant engagement over the course of the study, the research became more participant-led over the four phases of data collection. Data analysis was incorporated into the research process in an iterative, participatory process of dialogue and action, with thematic analysis guiding the process. The PAR approach adopted for the study ensured a nuanced, ethical, and reflexive research process and enhanced the validity of the study by prioritising the perspectives and experiences of the young people. The following three chapters present the findings of the study.
5. EXPERIENCES OF CARE: ENTITLEMENTS, EXCLUSION, AND IMPACT

Far too often, the personal experiences and human faces of migration are hidden behind statistical data that serve to dehumanise, leading migrants to be perceived as “automata, animals and zombies” (Papastergiadis, 2009, p.173). To support readers’ understanding of the lived experience of the study’s young people, this chapter, first and foremost, introduces the study’s participants as people. This introduction to the research participants, which draws heavily on our interactions over a significant period, aims to bring the data to life and to pay a small tribute to the contribution and dedication of each young person. The chapter then examines participants’ experiences of the age assessment process with Child Welfare Services and the border police, who were tasked with establishing their entitlement to care. The challenges that many encountered because of their exclusion from care are then examined. Following this, demonstrations of agency on the part of young people are explored in the context of the myriad of structural constraints they confronted. The chapter concludes by examining the impact of the early care experiences of the young people on their transition outcomes, focusing in particular on their legal status, education, work and income, and their housing situations.

5.1. Introducing the Study’s Young People

As outlined in Chapter 4, this PAR project involved the participation of 12 young people during the fieldwork phase, which commenced in November 2018 and ended with a member checking exercise in January 2021. All of the young people except SMD, who was assigned a code because he was not available to participate in the member check, chose a pseudonym. The pseudonyms of the young people, alongside a photo (with their faces blurred to protect their identities), are presented in Image 5.1. No photographs of SMD or Amadou Camara were available, so a clipart image was used instead to represent these young people in Image 5.1.

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100 Two young people joined the project at the outset of the data collection process but decided to cease participation before the end of fieldwork. One of these young people did not participate in any of the sessions while the other joined for one workshop and consented to his data being used for the study.

101 No photographs of SMD or Amadou Camara were available, so a clipart image was used instead to represent these young people in Image 5.1.
Bintou, one of the first young people to engage with the research, was enthusiastic about the research project from the outset. Although being the only female participant in the group, she held her own, often taking the lead in the group project. Having fled her country to escape forced marriage and violence, Bintou arrived in the Nord alone and faced significant ongoing challenges in accessing care and formal support. Despite this, she remained strong and focused on her goals, also working hard to promote and defend the rights of marginalised youth. She aspired to become “an intellectual woman” and hoped to work in a job that would defend the rights of marginalised women and young people.

*Image 5.1 Participants names and photos*

"I always fight for change and I make a lot of effort … It’s that I try to be, in fact, I am not perfect, but I, eh, try to give my maximum of myself, so that my dreams are realised. Even if not all my dreams come true but even a few …"
What are your dreams?

I want to be an intellectual. An intellectual woman. Seen by the whole world.

Image 5.2 Bintou helping to cook at one of the informal group meetings

Ababahadi was also involved in the research from the outset of the data collection process. He worked very long hours in an apprenticeship (often over 60 hours per week) and, for this reason, could only join two of the group meetings. Instead, he participated in an interview and we met informally on a regular basis to maintain contact in relation to the project and to share news. Ababahadi demonstrated strong determination, always staying focused on his goals and striving to move forward even when confronted with challenges. For example, despite struggling with long working hours and what he considered to be exploitative working conditions, he completed his apprenticeship and was awarded a diploma. With a strong sense of social justice, Ababahadi advocated for individuals or groups who he felt were subjected to discrimination and exploitation. He longed to reunite with his siblings.

Cedric was similarly always ready to take a stand against discrimination and injustice, speaking openly and strongly for social justice, his rights, and the rights of other marginalised young people. Since turning 18 years old, he had been negatively impacted by immigration controls and consequently faced daily struggles. From the outset and despite the difficulties he confronted, Cedric maintained active participation in the group project. Even with the lack of clarity as to when his residency status would be resolved as it “has no rhyme or reason, neither a beginning nor an end”, he remained optimistic that he would become regularised and finally live a “peaceful life”.

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I am confident that, the lawyer, she will do all that she can [to secure his residence permit] so that I can finally walk peacefully and so that I can finally start a job tranquilly so that I can have, em, a peaceful life, you know, it's not easy, it's not easy every day. But I hold my head high, I stand tall, as I said, I am optimistic.

Dinoh was another constant group participant. He demonstrated an ability to see the bigger picture, often providing detailed summaries and verbal analyses of our discussions. Heavily engaged with the local community and many local NGOs, Dinoh often supported other young people to navigate complex legal procedures. He loved sports and was very creative. After completing his schooling, he hoped to get a university diploma.

Image 5.3 Dinoh presenting for an NGO at a local event

Also creative, Coulibaly enjoyed music, theatre, and filmmaking. Constantly on the go, Coulibaly had many hobbies and an extensive network of friends. A steady member of the group from the start, Coulibaly was a strong advocate and support for other separated young people who confronted difficulties. Coulibaly hoped to gain more stability in his life.
The softly-spoken Lasso Doumbia was highly regarded by all group members. While he remained silent at times during group meetings, he listened carefully and tended to share his thoughts only when he felt he had something important to say. Lasso is a passionate athlete, heavily involved with a community from his country of origin; representing them, for example, at different sporting events. While we did not meet informally on a regular basis, he was very committed to the group project and, through a series of small but meaningful gestures, often demonstrated the value he placed on our relationship. For example, when I visited for one follow up meeting that he could not attend due to other commitments, he looked for different opportunities to meet with me, offering to travel a significant distance, so that we could catch up, even for five minutes. In the future, Lasso hoped to stay in France, work and have a family.

Manssachy and Oury joined the group a little later than the other participants (in Phase 2) but quickly became active and instrumental members. Both had developed tight-knit social relationships with friends and volunteers whom they met after they arrived in France. Oury loved watching football and he worked extremely hard to achieve good results in school. Manssachy was also very focused on school and enjoyed the gym and gardening. Both were also involved in volunteering activities. Oury, for instance, volunteered on intercultural projects while Manssachy volunteered on educational and environmental projects. In the future, Oury hoped to have “a good job, have a normal life you know, filled with happiness”. Manssachy told “my objective, is this, it’s to help people who don’t have the means [to support themselves]”. 

Image 5.4 Coulibaly posing in front of a European Union flag before he presented at an international event
The remaining research participant was not able to attend many of the group meetings owing to various constraints. Diouma, for instance, lived quite a distance from where we met as a group and only joined for two meetings. However, we often met informally and he completed an interview. During the time we spent together, Diouma demonstrated through his commitment to work, sport, and studies that he is a very reliable, hardworking young person. He had clear objectives that he consistently worked to achieve. He held a strong religious conviction and loved sport. Despite sometimes being unable to dedicate time to training, he aspired to become a famous sports star. Another young person, MDO, joined the research project at the same time as Diouma but also lived in a different town and had a very busy schedule, which led him to decide to cease engagement with the research early in Phase 1.102

Three participants did not participate in the group project, preferring to only complete an individual interview. SMD lived a considerable distance from where the group meetings were held so we instead met informally. SMD enjoyed visiting new places, going out and spending time with his friends. In the future, he hoped to remain in France, work, get married, have a house and one day invite some of his family members to visit him. SMD also told me that he dreams of travelling.

*I will go to America or to Spain, I will go there for 15 days with my wife and my child, we will take a hotel, go out on the beach, go out in the town, look at photos, look at photos, so then I would return, if I return,*

102 MDO is not included in the twelve core research participants since not enough was known about his situation because he withdrew from the study after a short period of time.
Amadou Camara could not participate in the group meetings due to other commitments. However, we met informally on a number of occasions, and he was always interested to hear about how the project was advancing. Shy when we first met, as Amadou became more comfortable in my company, he quickly opened up and became more talkative. An avid sportsman and cook, he was very self-aware, often working on his personal growth. Active in his community, he frequently used his skills to support others. For example, he would regularly help out at his local sports clubs. He hoped to get his BTS (Brevet Technicien Supérieur) [vocational diploma], secure stable employment and become independent.

The final young person to join the research project was Siaka Tanga, who demonstrated impressive cooking skills (see Image 5.6). With many complex administrative procedures to navigate, Siaka Tanga was unavailable to join the group meetings. However, in addition to completing an interview, we frequently met informally. Siaka Tanga loved school and hoped to one day reach the highest level in his profession. Although homeless and facing much uncertainty in terms of the future, Siaka Tanga was extremely involved in community life and local organisations and was always ready to provide advice to others who confronted similar difficulties.

103 To ensure anonymity, his profession has not been shared.
will be examined in considerable detail throughout the remainder of the thesis. The following sections focus on their early lives in France, particularly on their efforts to build an understanding of their experiences of accessing care and their exclusion from care, and the relevance of both for the transition to adulthood.

5.2. Establishing Entitlement to Care

Most of the young people arrived in France having travelled through the Mediterranean and across Europe, typically through Italy or Spain, though a small number arrived by plane with a tourist visa. All were aged 15-17 years when they arrived at the Département of the Nord, and, upon arrival, presented to Child Welfare Services as unaccompanied minors. Ababahadi described his understanding of the age assessment process and the procedural differences applied to young people depending on their age at the point of arriving in the Nord.

*In fact, um, the procedures in France depend on your situation, they depend on your age. The first thing is, when, when you're 17 years old, or 16, or 15, or even 14, the procedures are not the same. Those who are 15 to 16, they have the same procedures, and those who are 16 to 17 have the same, um, procedure. So, the first thing is ... (clicks tongue). When you arrive in France alone as a minor at the age of 15, um, you go directly to the police, and it's the police who should send you to a shelter right away. If you're 17, you go through an evaluation process, which means you go through an evaluation service, and that's where they will assess you for about four hours, and they will send the document to the Département of the Nord who is responsible for unaccompanied minor youths. After the response comes from there [the Département] to whether you are accepted or not. If you are not recognised [legally] as a [an unaccompanied] minor, you can appeal to the court.*

Prior to making the journey, some had established contact with individuals in the Nord through their social networks (for example, through friends they met along the journey) who were able to provide information on available services. More typically, young people were orientated to relevant services by individuals they encountered upon arriving, predominantly other migrant youth who were ‘hanging around’ in the train station.
5.2.1. The age assessment process

When a child arrives in France without a parent(s) or a legal or customary caregiver(s), they must undergo a series of age-related assessments before they can formally enter into State care. During his interview, Ababahadi described how unaccompanied minors typically present to the authorities and access care.

The first thing is that the [age] evaluation service is directly connected to the Département of the Nord, which is responsible for unaccompanied minors’ situations. The second thing is, before going to see the Département of the Nord which is in charge of minors, you go directly to the evaluation service. In the evaluation service, they will assess you. It’s them who create a report [which goes] directly to the Département, stating whether you are a minor or not. It’s from there that the Département of the Nord makes its decision. They say, “Okay, now we need to, we need to provide accommodation [for the unaccompanied minor]". Only the Département is authorised to provide housing and education for unaccompanied minor children.

When young people arrived at the Nord, they presented to Child Welfare Services, as described by Ababahadi above, where their documentation was reviewed including, for example, their birth certificate (or a photocopy) and they were given an appointment day and time for their age assessment interview, which typically occurred a few days later. During the age assessment interview, the young people were asked a range of questions. Manssachy described this as including: “How did you come here? What is your age? What date did you leave your country? How many months, weeks or days did it take you to arrive? Did you pay? How did you pay? Do you have family or no family? Do you have any relationships with people here? What did you come to do here? Why didn’t you choose another country? Where were you before France? Why did you stay in [name of European country]? When did you arrive in France?”.

Most young people described a litany of questions and an interview structure where questions were asked without adequate context or explanation, which meant that many found it difficult to provide accurate and meaningful responses. They were not permitted to provide input into and, typically, were not provided with a copy of the

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104 They may be offered short term solutions while they are under evaluation.
assessment report. This led some to feel that they had a lack of control over their own narrative and its interpretation by the individual who was completing the assessment. Some who had limited French language capabilities reported misunderstandings and miscommunication, which left them feeling overwhelmed and powerless. Lasso Doumbia highlighted many of these challenges, as well as the power imbalance he experienced, during his age assessment interview when he was assessed by two adults. He described the impact of this intimidating setting, which contributed to him feeling powerless and potentially affected the quality and accuracy of his responses during the interview.

No, because it's ... at the level of your interview. When you first arrive in France, even if you can speak French, you've just arrived, and you don't understand many things people say to you. The thing is, when you arrive at [the name of the evaluation service for unaccompanied minors], there are things you say, but your accent may not allow you to express yourself the way you want, and the person you're talking to does not understand you. He might write things that you never said and, eh, sometimes it's not entirely their fault, but ... with your accent ... It's after, when you sit down and read the report that they have written, even though you never said those things. And sometimes also when you're all alone with someone and you're a minor, you are with an adult [during the age assessment interview], two adults sometimes. They arrive, one asks a question, the other asks a question. At a certain point you, um, you lose focus ... (taps the table with fingers) You can't concentrate. Because you've just arrived, and the French that is spoken here is ... It's so fast. Sometimes there are things they say that you don't understand, but you want to answer them. And then there are those at [the name of the evaluation service for unaccompanied minors] who, when you ask them to repeat a question, they say, "Ah no," and ask why. You've just arrived, and there are dialects, [that] even if you speak French [you don't understand]. That's what gets a lot of people into trouble ...

Overall, the age assessment interview was described in negative terms by a majority of the young people who, as Manssachy explained, often felt that “they [the examiners] judge you”. Several young people felt poorly treated during the age assessment
interview, feeling humiliated and unable to express themselves. SMD, for example, described feeling “harassed” during his interview.

And then, when I arrived there [at the age assessment interview], I encountered a man and this man started talking to me, and then ... he interrogated me! (Speaking more energetically). He said (imitating someone shouting), "How come? How are you dressed like that?" "Why?". So, yeah, he harassed me, he really harassed me. (Continuing the dialogue with this man, maintaining an aggressive tone), "What are you doing here? You come (stutters) what do you want to do? How old are you? And is it true? No, that's not your age. Tell me your real age". I explained to him and then he said, "No, Mr. [name of SMD], where have you been, where do you come from in [the name of the country of origin], where have you been, who helped you?"... But he harassed me! Harassed!

Ababahadi characterised the objectives of the age assessment examinations as categorising the young people based on their circumstances or age. Several others also explained that their narratives did not conform to certain normative expectations associated with being a ‘mineur non accompagné’ (MNA) [unaccompanied minor] and that they were consequently not granted this status and therefore excluded from accessing care. For example, although Cedric was eventually granted status as an unaccompanied minor, he had been initially informed by assessors that “we cannot recognise you as a minor because you are not a minor” because they felt that he did not present with some of the expected ‘vulnerability’ traits of an unaccompanied minor. Dinoh similarly told of examiners seeking out certain features or markers to support their assessment of him. He explained that, when his narrative did not fit with their perceptions of life in his country of origin, they became sceptical about the truthfulness of his account. Dinoh’s status as an unaccompanied minor had been rejected on the grounds that he did not conform to their assumptions about unaccompanied minors who arrived from his country.

And the reason you were not confirmed in the first instance ... Did they tell you the reasons why they said no?

Yes, yes, yes, there's always ... a rule. They said, "You speak French well so the level of education you declared is ... doubtful." I said that French is a language, after all, and in my home country, there are
people who have never been to school but speak French. So, in my head, on the day they said, "Yeah, you speak French well, so, your level of education makes us doubt", I thought, "Oh, they forgot that, at home, even in my administrative systems, we speak French … They might have forgotten, or they pretend not to know that [name of the home country] was colonised by France for several years. And maybe it surprises them that I speak French, maybe, I don't know. Or maybe they're doing it on purpose.

Considering such experiences, it is perhaps unsurprising that, during interview, Dinoh described the term ‘mineur non accompagné’ (MNA) [unaccompanied minor] as pejorative and stigmatising.

I find them [the words] pejorative, stigmatising, and they, they categorise people, in fact. These are words that categorise people, and I don't find them, I don't find these words nice. It's stigmatising.

Most others also felt that the term ‘MNA’ had negative connotations. Bintou suggested that the categorisation of separated young people as ‘MNA’ reinforced an ‘us and them’ mentality.

Okay, and we are talking about unaccompanied minors [MNA]. How, for you, how do you define it, when you think of the wording, what comes into your head?

That I am a foreigner. I am not French. I am another person, it’s like that they see us. Just that we are a void, we are an empty space, you know. And that’s how they take care of us.

Consequently, while recognising the importance of gaining recognition as an unaccompanied minor in France in terms of providing access to care and other formal supports, most of the young people objected to being pigeon-holed and othered by the label of ‘MNA’, with some, such as Oury, opting to conceal their status as an unaccompanied minor.

I don't really like it when they say that [I am an unaccompanied minor], actually (silence). For me, a minor is a minor, "unaccompanied" or "isolated," you see, "isolated," it's a bit, it's a bit strange. But well, we're used to it, they call us that, or they call us "migrants, migrants". For
me, what seemed strange to me [is that] I hear it [these terms] a lot here, you know. Yes. But here, it's everywhere, you see, "how old are you, where are you from, what's your origin, things like that" (in a weary tone).

Do you prefer not to use it [the term MNA]?

Yes.

Young people’s early interactions with the child protection structures, particularly during the age assessment process, continued to be remembered as difficult by a large number, many of whom also frequently demonstrated distress (for example, changes in intonation, fidgeting, lack of eye contact) as they recounted their experiences. Furthermore, these interactions negatively impacted young people’s perceptions of Child Welfare Services (ASE) and other institutional (State or Département) structures, often leading them to adopt cautious and suspicious perspectives on these services and interventions.

5.2.2. Interacting with border police

After the age assessment interview, most of the young people were asked to present to the border police. Typically, their interaction with border police involved verifying documents and giving their fingerprints. Some young people were also subjected to medical tests that were used to verify their age, despite widespread critique of the use of such methods (Frechon and Marquet, 2017; Mission Mineurs Non Accompagnés, 2018). When Coulibaly, for example, presented to border police to verify his identity documents, an error was found in his documents, and he was taken for a medical examination without giving his consent. He was deemed to be 18 years old and the police rejected his claim as an unaccompanied minor, placing him in custody and confiscating his documents. Consequently, he was homeless and without care for a four-month period despite later being confirmed by the court as an unaccompanied minor. Coulibaly’s account of his interactions with the police describes the emotional distress and upset he experienced. His speaking voice and tone became strained as he recounted his experiences, highlighting their lingering impact and also strongly suggesting that the encounter was traumatic.

When I went to the police, a policeman told me there was a spelling mistake on my paper so they couldn't recognise it as an authentic document. From there they, eh, asked me if I had any health problems
in my family, or if I had any health problems or had surgery before. I said "No". They said, "Well, we'll go to the hospital to check if there's an illness, for example, if there is a transmissible disease" because I come from a different State, and that isn't the same as here. There could be problems and all so they will go to see if I am in good health. Once the verification is done and the police confirm that I have no problems, I could move, eh, normally …

So, we went to the hospital, and eh, I didn't understand what was happening. The police and the doctors came in (scratches his arm), they asked me to place my hand on a machine. I did it. And then a doctor measured my height, weighed me, and checked my teeth. Eh, voila. I still didn't understand what was going on. They didn't tell me what was happening. For me, we were checking if I was in good health and all … After we went outside … And they [police] said, "Well sir, we are, we are here to verify your age". They never told me what would happen. For me, we were verifying if I was in good health … They didn't tell me [that before], they told me, "We are here to verify your age and the papers [identity documents] that you claimed are yours, aren't yours because the doctor gave you an age of 18, while you said that you are sixteen … So, eh, "You are a liar, sir, the doctors who saw you are competent and know how to do their job. Eh voila, you are a liar" … After the police brought me to the station and after they put me in custody, I stayed for six hours. They let me out and confiscated my papers. I didn't get them back.

Coulibaly's experience demonstrates his vulnerability and limited agency in his interactions with the border police and in what subsequently unfolded. Firstly, at the point of presenting voluntarily to the police, Coulibaly had no control over the error they identified or the questions they posed about the authenticity of his documents, which then prompted further investigation. The medical examination and age verification process were conducted without his informed consent and in the absence of an explanation of the potential consequences of his participation in such tests. Throughout the process, Coulibaly clearly did not fully understand what was happening. Overall, he was unable to prevent the confiscation of his identity documents and was not able to respond to the accusations made against him.
Many of the young people had heard stories, typically recounted by other youth or volunteers, about similar traumatic experiences faced by separated youth at the point of presenting to border police. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a large number told of their sense of anguish and fear prior to interacting with the police. Oury, for instance, refused to return to border police alone to obtain his assessment results because of the negative accounts of other young people.

*I had, I had heard too many things, supposedly, “Yeah, they detain people, they make you sign papers that if you sign, they repatriate you blah blah blah”, and that's why I was scared …

Who is saying all these things?

*Well, young people, you know. Young people who say, “Yeah, over there, there's such and such a person in detention, they're going to repatriate you”, even if it's not true, but there are always rumours, you see? … It's not official, but you hear things like that all the time. And it's scary.*

Oury’s fears about the power of immigration authorities and the police stemmed, initially, from the rumours he had heard. This reinforced his perception of their authority, for example, related to people being detained and forced to sign documents that could lead to repatriation. These rumours, which were spread primarily by separated young people, were often based on hearsay rather than official information, where a lack of information, transparency, and clarity about the power and role of the border police fuelled uncertainty and fear. Oury’s experience demonstrates the significant impact that rumours and shared stories had in shaping individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards immigration authorities and their potential to complicate the already challenging experiences faced by separated youth.

The fear arising from the perceived power of the border police led some young people to refuse to present to them and a number therefore confronted significant challenges and delays in accessing care. When Bintou, for instance, refused to present to the border police, the evaluation service rejected her claim as an unaccompanied minor: “They kicked me out [of the reception centre]. And it's there that I, I spent the night in front of the reception centre”. She subsequently experienced significant delays in accessing care while she waited to appeal the negative age assessment decision by the Child Welfare Services (Bintou was later granted status as an unaccompanied
minor). Bintou’s experience suggests that she was penalised for not cooperating with the age assessment process, which meant that she could not access care for some time. A small number of others reported similar experiences. For example, Cedric attributed his negative age assessment outcome from his evaluators to the fact that “I contested what they had said to me”. This decision had direct repercussions on his access to care in that, despite the border police confirming that his identity documents were authentic, Cedric was forced to spend “five months on the street” until he was granted status as an unaccompanied minor on appeal.

These accounts from the young people, as well as the experience of Coulibaly, described earlier in this chapter, demonstrate the frequent errors in the age assessment process, where the majority of their claims for status as an unaccompanied minor were later overturned by the court of appeal. Following an age assessment process, the study’s young people were legally recognised as either unaccompanied minors or not and fell into one of the following three categories:

- The young person was assessed and confirmed by the Département as an unaccompanied minor in the first instance (two male participants);
- The young person was assessed, and their application for status as an unaccompanied minor was rejected but later appealed in the children’s court, which legally recognised the young person as an unaccompanied minor (seven participants, including one female and six males); or
- The young person was assessed, their application for status as an unaccompanied minor was rejected and they lodged an appeal to the children’s court but ‘aged-out’ (turned 18 years) before the appeal was granted (three male participants).

That a majority of the young people were granted legal status as an unaccompanied minor on appeal suggests that there were valid reasons and evidence supporting their status as unaccompanied minors, which may not have been adequately considered during the initial assessments. This raises questions about the accuracy and consistency of the assessment.

5.3. Exclusion from Care

The findings presented in the previous section highlight the challenges confronted by young people in establishing their entitlement to care. They also demonstrate a number
of sometimes-significant consequences for the young people’s safety and wellbeing and their ability to access essential care and Child Welfare Services. These consequences were directly related to the assessment decision and continued to impact their subsequent experiences in France, both up to and after they turned 18 years. This section examines the challenges faced by the young people in accessing care.

5.3.1. Lack of care before age assessment outcome

When a young person presents to services in France that have responsibility for evaluating their status as unaccompanied minors, they are legally entitled to temporary protection for a period of five days (Gourévitch, 2018). Despite this, many of the study’s young people, particularly those who arrived at age 16 or older, confronted early and sometimes prolonged exclusion from care due to the limited availability of placements in overburdened services.

All apart from one young person experienced homelessness during this time. A small number, such as Diouma, explained that "I figured it out on my own, I didn't have a place to sleep, it was shit". More typically, however, young people were informed that “there is no accommodation for you but you must go to sleep in a [makeshift camp] to wait for your evaluation” (Cedric) and were provided with directions to the camp in the form of a sketched map. Dinoth had spent several months in a makeshift camp.

When I arrived at the service that welcomed me [age assessment service], who should have given me shelter, it was the address of this [camp] that they gave me. And in this [camp], it meant sleeping in tents. There were a lot of people, there were about 100 people. There were around 100. There were those who had, who had been there six months, eh, and a year for others.

Those young people who were orientated to the makeshift camp, where some subsequently spent prolonged periods with no care or housing options, described their shock and disappointment about the ‘solution’ proposed to them by Child Welfare Services.

I left the child protection structure; they didn't even give me anything. No blankets or anything. They only gave me the card [map] for, for [name of a camp], and they told me to go to [name of NGO] if I wanted to wash and all that. Yeah, I thought it was accommodation. It's when I
went to the place at [name of a camp], I saw that it wasn't accommodation … And then there are the tents there where you'll spend the night, you need people who can give you a place too. Because if you don't have a tent, you can't sleep. You have to ask people if there is space in the tents; you sleep with them … I didn't expect a camp at all. When I got there, of course, I was a bit, I don't know what word am I going to use? I was a bit disappointed when I arrived at the [camp]. (Amadou Camara, interview).

Reports on similar camps across the Département of the Nord have reported the conditions as lacking protection for unaccompanied minors (Boček, 2016), with the sanitary situation described as “a literal catastrophe and deteriorates from month to month and from year to year”. This places young people at risk of traumatic injuries, infectious diseases, and mental illness (UNICEF, 2016) (During fieldwork, I visited a local makeshift camp with some of the young people which allowed me to observe and photograph the living conditions in that camp. The following is an excerpt from a journal entry in October 2018 which was written after the visit.105

Key issues in the camp included difficulties sleeping, poor sanitation, poor physical health, noise, lack of food, mental health issues, such as loss of memory for some, heightened stress, agitation, worry, upset, and headaches. People also mentioned the poor conditions giving them rashes that they find when they wake up. Many people I talked to about the situation just said, “You can see for yourself how bad it is. Have a look around, what can I say?” … There were already approximately 130 people there and more people were arriving every day. Sanitation is almost non-existent … the smells, the noise, the lack of dignity … with many sleeping in tents without blankets.

105 The camp I visited was not where the young people had stayed, which had since been evacuated. However, the conditions in the camp visited during data collection period illustrate the kinds of living situations experienced by some of the study’s young people.
Despite the appalling conditions, the camps offered a community of peers and volunteers, which provided much-needed informal supports, such as those from family, friends, and members of the community, as well as access to necessities such as food, water, clothing, blankets, information, and education. Some young people, such as Manssachy, met volunteers in the camp who later took them into their homes and
became, for all practical purposes, a quasi-foster family (which will be referred to hereafter as ‘volunteer foster families’), often providing them with long-term support and ‘family-like’ relationships.\textsuperscript{106}

\begin{quote}
I met people there; it has been three years almost … The [camp], eh, it was difficult for us, it was difficult but there were good people … They said, “Okay come and do your homework here”. I said, “Okay, thanks” … [Later] They said to me, “Ah he, he is serious” and said, “Come stay with us” … When I went inside there, I cried! I cried and cried, I said, “Oh what a beautiful life”. I said, “Oh thank, you thank, you thank you” … I forgot my suffering!
\end{quote}

During the time in these camps, several young people were subjected to evacuations by the police, which they experienced as violent and traumatic in a number of ways. Firstly, the large police presence that surrounded an evacuation operation was both daunting and frightening. Secondly, although most young people in the camps gained access to a long-awaited care placement because of the evacuations, these placements were located in other towns, leaving them isolated from their support networks and schools. This led some to return to the original town in search of what they considered to be more viable options. During evacuations, a small number experienced a traumatising rejection by the care structures that they expected to provide care and support but, instead, found themselves once again without a formal care solution.

\begin{quote}
On the fifth day, they evacuated the [camp], and in the morning, I had gone to [name of NGO] to take a shower and everything. When I arrived, the [camp] had already been evacuated. When it was evacuated, they brought the people to a building next to [name of NGO]. I, I went there, I told them that I had been there [in the camp] but had gone to [NGO to take a shower], but they didn't want to hear it (voice softer). (Amadou Camara, interview).
\end{quote}

Overall, despite the young people’s entitlement to care before they received an age assessment outcome, a majority found themselves without protection, often in high-risk

\textsuperscript{106} Note, in certain cases, including for Manssachy, the ‘volunteer’ foster family registered formally with the authorities, however in other cases they did not. In most cases, the young people did not divulge if the (former) foster families were formally registered with authorities or not. Examples of these types of foster arrangements are described in Section 1.5.
situations of homelessness, and dependent on the goodwill of local volunteers and other separated young people.

5.3.2. Disparities in the provision of care due to age assessment outcome

The entitlements of unaccompanied children until they reach the age of 18 years include housing supports, education and training, support with administrative procedures and socio-professional integration (Beddiar, 2019; Laurant, 2014) (see Chapter 1 for further detail). Ababahadi described these entitlements.

After you are confirmed [granted legal status as an unaccompanied minor] in normal conditions, ehh, if you are confirmed, you must get a [care] placement. At the level of, of the law. They will house you. After you are housed, normally, you must be registered in school. And [they] give you food, shelter, clothe you, give you … what you want, and that’s it.

However, disparities in accessing care were evident, which varied depending on the outcome of the young people’s age assessment. For example, participants who were granted status as unaccompanied minors in the first instance were taken into care relatively quickly compared to those who were granted minority status after an appeal and faced a far more protracted process. For example, Oury was confirmed as an unaccompanied minor within one month of his age assessment interview and placed in residential care.

I went, I did my interview and all, after it was a few days, I believe it was, I believe it [the confirmation of unaccompanied minority status] came a month later. It doesn’t come on the same day. It was a month after. After me, I think for me, things moved fast, it went fast and [they went] well too. Because there, they found me residential care in [name of town], there where I had been.

Young people whose application was rejected were no longer entitled to any formal care services, even while awaiting the result of the appeal of a negative decision in the children’s court. Thus, when an application was rejected, the young people found themselves, in practical terms, aged out of care unless (and until) they won their appeal and were later granted minority status. The seven young people who were not confirmed as unaccompanied minors in the first instance but were granted an appeal
did not have access to any Child Welfare Services during the appeals process. As a result, these participants were homeless until, and often after, their appeal was dealt with in the children’s court. This left them almost entirely dependent on their informal support networks and a small number of NGOs and community groups who had limited targeted supports available for young people in such situations, as described by SMD below. Although such informal supports were critical in filling gaps in young people’s care, the potential risks and dangers of such informal, unregulated care solutions (such as child trafficking and exploitation) should be noted.

They were organised, the people from the [name of community group], they would bring food to us, they brought a lot of food. So, even when it was cold, they would come and give towels, coats, shoes, they gave us a lot of tents to stay in there ... I remember this very well because they helped us ... If we wanted to explain something, [that] we are there, that we have a little problem, voila, we explained to them, they helped us, they advised us all the time on how to live in France, voila. (SMD, interview).

For those who were not granted status as unaccompanied minors in the first instance, ten in total, long wait times and delays with the age assessment processes and administrative procedures, for example, passport applications, led to other complications, particularly for those who had entered the age assessment process close to their 18th birthday. When a young person turns 18 years before a children’s court overturns a negative age assessment decision, the young people effectively age out into an undocumented status and must search for an alternative pathway to legal status. The delays and constraints associated with the bureaucratic processes resulted in two participants turning 18 years before their age assessment appeal was completed, which meant that they aged-out without legal status. For example, the legal documents that Siaka Tanga needed to advance his appeal were delayed and he turned 18 years before the appeal was completed, leaving him undocumented and without any formal supports.

It's all that which blocked [my application]. The consulate closed during the war for two weeks. That's why they [the court] gave me a rejection because I couldn't justify my documents. I didn't file an appeal because I had already turned 18 ... I had all my papers. When I was at the court, they asked for the justification [a document], but the consulate was closed. I couldn't do it on time.
With the control over legal status and access to services in the hands of the administrative bodies and legal processes, powerless in the face of delays and negative decisions, Siaka never gained access to care, had no support in preparing for the transition to majority status, and was unable to access aftercare supports at the age of 18 years.

Despite their entitlement to care, most young people who were confirmed as unaccompanied minors after appeal, particularly those who arrived in France at the age of 16 or older, faced further prolonged exclusion from the care system based on factors outside of their control. This included limited care placements due to pressures on the system associated with the large number of unaccompanied minors arriving. For example, following six months spent without any formal supports before being legally recognised as an unaccompanied minor, Dinoh then waited for a further six months before being taken into care. During this time, he slept rough for several months, surviving in a makeshift migrant camp, until a volunteer offered to informally house him, thereby taking on the role of his volunteer foster parent.107

Amadou Camara also experienced barriers to access to care due to a lack of available care placements and was offered temporary emergency accommodation by a local NGO until he finally was placed in ‘container’ accommodation108 in another town.

> When I did the evaluation and I had it [was legally recognised as an unaccompanied minor], I wasn’t placed [in care] because, when I called the Département, they were busy. I rang the [Département] every week. When I rang, they said the same thing, that there weren’t any places or, eh, they proposed nothing, in fact. They just said that there weren’t places. Luckily, me, I was, I was at [name of temporary emergency accommodation run by an NGO]. I signed a contract with them, a contract of four months …

> With [name of the NGO]? To stay there?

> Yeah, it was over there. I stayed there like that … I, I never had a placement with the Département, except at [name of town] when

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107 Examples of these types of foster arrangements are described in Section 1.5.
108 Container-based accommodation solutions, which are often modified to serve as basic living units, have been used as an alternative to makeshift camps to address the housing needs of migrants in the Northern France.
[name of facility] was opened. It was in emergency housing accommodation. It wasn’t great. It, it was in a furnished container.

The containers described by Amadou had been also used by the French authorities as housing solutions in several camps across Northern France, including ‘The Jungle’ in Calais, despite being condemned as inappropriate for separated and unaccompanied children by UNICEF (UNICEF France, 2016). Image 5.9 below is an example of such containers.

Image 5.9 Examples of types of container camps used to house migrant populations in Calais

Source: Metro News (2016).

Typically, young people were excluded from care due to a lack of supply and high demand; however, a small number were excluded by individuals working in the child protection system. For example, after 12 months of waiting to be recognised as an unaccompanied minor and coping “thanks to the NGOs and volunteers”, Coulibaly was excluded from care after his appeal was granted due to limited placements. While he awaited the offer of a care placement and following an extended period of homelessness, Coulibaly joined a peaceful protest to assert his right to receive care. However, this display of agency gave rise to significant repercussions when he was finally granted a place in a residential care setting. When he arrived to take his place in the residential centre, a staff member who had seen him protesting refused to accept him into the residential centre, which meant that was homeless for further a month and a half until an alternative placement became available.

The social worker who knew me as one of the young people who was there [protesting] to demand housing told me, “No, no, it won’t be possible”, and that the spot they had, they would give it to someone
else because I participated in a protest which had disrupted their work. So, she let, she let me go. Me, I thought at the start that it was just to scare me, to show me that, voila, she could take the decision today to put me on the street, [show me] how she could put me out. But really, [I thought] that she wouldn't do it. I thought it was a threat and, after she, she let me go. The whole day, I thought that I would get a call to come back, that in the end, they could still accommodate me. But that was two weeks after my confirmation [where I was granted legal status as an unaccompanied minor on appeal] and I waited for a month and a half for the Département to find another placement for me.

Did the social worker have the right to refuse you?

Well, yes, that's what she said, she has the right. But me, I don't know if she has the right or not. I don't know. In the end, she did it, whether she had the right or not, she still refused me housing all the same. So, me, I waited for [another] a month and a half. After the Département found another place for me.

Coulibaly’s situation might be reasonably understood as the social worker penalising him because she considered him to display undesirable behaviours and perceived him as not conforming to expected standards. Researchers have previously argued that policy and service responses to unaccompanied minors in France are underpinned by negative assumptions, for example, assumptions related to the notion that unaccompanied youth are deviant or delinquent (Crombé, 2019; Frigoli and Immelé, 2010). Coulibaly’s account also demonstrates the power that those working within institutional structures had to influence and, in his case, disrupt separated young people’s access to care.

5.3.3. Demonstrations of ‘constrained’ agency

Exclusion from care left many in a prolonged period of ‘waithood’; almost entirely powerless in the face of Département authorities’ decisions about their futures in France. Despite the structural constraints they confronted, a large number of the young people took measures to progress their future goals and these initiatives also impacted their transition experiences.

For example, SMD experienced long-term exclusion from care as well as homelessness, which continued for three months after being confirmed as an
unaccompanied minor on appeal: “We [the Département] confirmed [granted legal status as an unaccompanied minor] you three months ago ... But we haven’t found a placement yet”. Feeling distraught by the lack of care solutions, and having consulted with friends, SMD felt that the best option was to relinquish his status as an unaccompanied minor and all related entitlements and seek an alternative pathway to regularisation. He applied for international protection\textsuperscript{109}, which he was subsequently granted on the third appeal.

It is important to note that because he had little or no grasp of the French language upon arrival, the stated age on his international protection application was incorrect and this error meant that there was a large discrepancy (of 20 years) between his stated and real date of birth. SMD was told by his lawyer that the error could not be corrected.

\begin{flushleft}
I made a mistake, I was born in \textit{[birth year]}, because it’s the same \textit{[birth year]} and \textit{[birth year he gave on his asylum application]}, it’s the same. I made a mistake there. Because at this time, I had problems speaking French so I made a mistake.
\end{flushleft}

While the age difference created several challenges for him, including difficulties in accessing employment due to many years that were unaccounted for on his CV, SMD stated that he did not mind, rather “the most important is the paper [refugee status]”.\textsuperscript{110} His situation demonstrates the gaps in service provision, the precarity he faced on arrival to France and the impact that his early experiences in France had on his life later on. SMD’s ability to choose a new direction and seek out different solutions in the face of structural constraints constitutes a demonstration of ‘constrained’ agency. While others in a similar situation focused on gaining access to care based on their status as unaccompanied minors, SMD sought to take control of his situation. This led him to abandon all entitlements associated with this legal status. SMD was the only participant who held refugee status at the time of the interviews.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{109} In France, the asylum system is managed by the prefecture (a state institution) while the child protection system is decentralised to the Département authorities. Despite increased efforts by the French government to improve collaboration between the two institutions (as outlined in Chapter 1), interaction between the systems remains limited.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{110} The complexity of SMD’s situation did not become apparent until during the interview, and his participation in the study provides important insights into the factors influencing the lived experiences of separated youth. Having presented as an unaccompanied minor on arrival to the Nord, SMD also had faced the same issues as the others upon arrival and experienced several transitions along his pathway to international protection.
\end{flushright}
In SMD’s case – notwithstanding the risks and complexities – personal resourcefulness in seeking change could be considered to have paid off in that he gained refugee status. Others, however, experienced negative repercussions when they acted with the aim of advancing their situations, which in turn adversely impacted their transition experiences. For example, young people who were not taken into care directly once they were legally recognised by the Département as unaccompanied minors (seven in total) were entitled to compensation in the form of a one-off payment from the authorities.111 With the support of their lawyer, a small number of these young people took a case against the Département to access this compensation; however, one participant, Lasso Doumbia, reported that taking such a case against the Département backfired. The courts had found that Lasso Doumbia was entitled to compensation from the Département but the Département told him that “they could not pay it”. Several months later, and just two months before his 18th birthday, although Lasso Doumbia had been confirmed as an unaccompanied minor after appeal and had been formally placed in care, the Département authorities subsequently launched a counter-appeal with the children’s court to have his unaccompanied minor claim rejected. Lasso Doumbia interpreted the counter-appeal as a strategy used by the Département to avoid paying the compensation he was entitled to receive.

*I was confirmed [legally recognised as an unaccompanied minor], and they placed me in a residential centre. After that, as I was confirmed by the judge, the Département would have to provide for me all the time [that I was without a care placement]. Because when you’re confirmed, if you’re not housed, they should pay certain amounts. Now, the Département should pay those amounts, [but] now they told me that they couldn’t pay it. They summoned me in for a hearing as well. There were only, eh, 2 months, 2 months before I turned 18. They summoned me to [name of the court] saying that the paperwork I had brought was no good, that there was a problem. But I knew that it was, it was to avoid paying the amounts [of money].

During the counter-appeal, the court requested that Lasso Doumbia provide a passport as proof of his age. However, due to limited funds, delays with passport processing times and the fact that the final court date fell after his 18th birthday, Lasso Doumbia

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111 Several cases have been taken, and won, by unaccompanied minors against Départements in France. Examples include: Case 1703632 and Order of the 23rd of May 2017 (Harang, 2017) and State Council, Interim Judge 12th May 2014, number 375956 (Conseil d’État, 2014).
had turned 18 years before the case was settled. He had therefore aged-out before his status as an unaccompanied minor could be reinstated, leaving him without compensation, any access to formal aftercare supports or a clear pathway to residency.

So, they decided [that I had to] to go to the embassy to get a passport. Now, by the time I went to get the passport, and got to court, I was already past my 18th birthday. Before that, when I left [name of the court], they told me I couldn't stay in the residential centre that I had been in … It was very, very complicated at this time.

This section has highlighted the various constraints, related in particular to institutional barriers, that the young people faced in accessing care. As demonstrated, the young people were persistent in their attempts to (re)gain control of their situations and in asserting their rights and entitlements. Despite the lack of formal care available to them, most were able to carve out informal supports through NGOs and volunteers, echoing the findings documented in earlier research, which has highlighted the key role of non-State supports in the lives of separated children (Smyth, et al., 2015). For many, informal support structures, community groups and NGOs provided temporary housing solutions. For example, providing emergency homelessness accommodation or volunteer foster homes, to those who faced the prospect of homelessness.

5.4. The Impact of Early Care Experiences on Young People’s Transition Outcomes

Throughout the data collection period, the participating young people were at different stages of the transition to adulthood in terms of regularisation, their participation in education and/or the labour market and their housing situations. The data presented in this section is drawn primarily from the individual interviews since all participants engaged in the interview process. The interview data included detailed accounts of the young people’s situations at a specific moment in time, spanning April to June 2019. A summary outline of the young people’s situations at the time of the interview can be found in Table 5.1. Data from the member check (conducted in January 2021) is also included where relevant. This involved the participation of 10 young people (all apart
from Bintou and SMD, and examined both change and continuity in the lives of the young people since June 2019.

Table 5.1 An overview of the young people’s situations at the time of their interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Young person</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Legal status as unaccompanied minor (MNA) granted</th>
<th>Residency</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Education/Employment</th>
<th>In receipt of State financial supports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ababahadi</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes, after appeal</td>
<td>Temporary permit</td>
<td>Private rental accommodation</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amadou Camara</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes, after appeal</td>
<td>Residence permit receipt</td>
<td>Foster family</td>
<td>Professional Baccalaureate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bintou</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Yes, after appeal</td>
<td>Residence permit receipt</td>
<td>Insecure housing</td>
<td>Professional Baccalaureate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedric</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes, after appeal</td>
<td>Undocumented</td>
<td>Insecure housing</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coulibaly</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes, after appeal</td>
<td>Residence permit receipt</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinoh</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes after appeal</td>
<td>Temporary permit</td>
<td>Private rental accommodation</td>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diouma</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes, in the first instance</td>
<td>Temporary permit</td>
<td>Supported temporary</td>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>accommodation (FJT)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Young Workers Accommodation]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasso Doumbia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undocumented</td>
<td>Foster family</td>
<td>Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP) [Vocational Aptitude Certificate]</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bintou completed a follow up meeting but, due to time constraints, did not complete the member check, in other words, she did not comment on the interpretation of the results. SMD was not available to complete the member check in January 2021 and, for this reason, 2021 data are not available for SMD.

112
5.4.1. Residency

All participants who had not been legally recognised as unaccompanied minors were undocumented at the time of the interview while the two who had been confirmed as unaccompanied minors in the first instance had temporary residence permits. Those who were confirmed after an appeal had a variety of different statuses, ranging from undocumented to refugee status. One young person had been granted a temporary residency permit, one a student permit, one had been granted international protection, while one was undocumented. Four young people had a residence permit receipt and were waiting, typically for extended periods, for their residence permit to be issued.

Reflecting the findings of previous research on unaccompanied young people in France (Frechon and Marquet, 2017; Martini, 2014; see Chapter 1), various conditions impacted young people’s eligibility for residency permits, including the age at which a minor was taken into care, proof of ‘insertion’ into French society (for instance, through employment and volunteering, learning the language), and their demonstrable efforts in regards to education (for example, strong school records (results, attendance)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Young person</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Legal status as unaccompanied minor (MNA) granted</th>
<th>Residency</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Education/Employment</th>
<th>In receipt of State financial supports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manssachy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undocumented</td>
<td>Foster family</td>
<td>CAP [Vocational Aptitude Certificate]</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oury</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes, in the first instance</td>
<td>Temporary permit</td>
<td>Supported temporary accommodation (FJT) [Young Workers Accommodation]</td>
<td>CAP [Vocational Aptitude Certificate]</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siaka Tanga</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undocumented</td>
<td>Insecure housing</td>
<td>CAP [Vocational Aptitude Certificate]</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMD</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes, after appeal</td>
<td>Beneficiary of international protection</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1 summarises the young people’s legal statuses and their age upon entry to care, illustrating their various pathways to regularisation.

Table 5.2 Legal status of young people at the time of their interview, categorised according to the age at which they entered care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age entered care</th>
<th>Number of young people</th>
<th>Legal status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Undocumented (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Residency Application Receipt (2), Temporary Workers Permit (3), Undocumented (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in care when aged-out</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Residence Application Receipt (1), Refugee (1), Undocumented (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Temporary Permit (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, young people who had accessed care on or after their 16th birthday had, at the time of the interview, a range of different statuses. Two of the young people, Bintou and Coulibaly, were awaiting the outcome of their residency application. At the time of the interview, Bintou had her residency application receipt\(^{113}\) for a temporary worker permit but had been waiting for almost one year for her residence permit to be issued. The residency application receipt did not allow Bintou to work, which meant that she had no source of income. She explained how she managed financially: “Ah I get by with the help that the good people give me. That’s all, otherwise it’s complicated. It’s really very complicated.”

Coulibaly, on the other hand, had been granted a student permit which ran for the academic year until June 2019 and, therefore, terminated three months before the beginning of the next school year. It was not possible to renew the permit without confirmation of Coulibaly’s enrolment in school, which could not be available until the beginning of the school term the following September. This created a bureaucratic dilemma for Coulibaly, and, at the time of the interview, he was trying to find a solution with the help of his lawyer to ensure that he would have a residence permit before the onset of a new academic year. His situation demonstrates the complexities of immigration policies and the implications for separated young people. Coulibaly

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\(^{113}\) This ‘récépissé’ [residency application receipt] is a temporary document issued to those who have applied for a residence permit while their application is being processed. The document serves as proof that the person has applied for a residence permit and allows them to remain in France legally during the processing period. The specific rules and requirements depend on the type of permit applied for and the Prefecture processing the application.
explained that, during that time, he had “no residence application receipt, no residence permit, nothing” and went on to describe the precarity of the “really difficult situation” he was living with.

*But [to] live like a, eh, student in France or even an employee, at some point to renew your residence permit, you aren’t sure to get it. So, this is the problem … It is not really, you aren’t really at home. At any moment, you could have a rupture in your residence permit and you are obliged to go home [to your country of origin].*

When we met again in early 2021, Coulibaly’s situation had stabilised and, despite still holding a temporary worker permit, he had secured a permanent job, was confident that he would not experience any further problems with residence permits and was planning to apply for French citizenship. However, Coulibaly reiterated the negative impact of the precarity of his residence permit during the previous number of months, particularly after finishing school when, if he had not secured the permanent employment contract, he would have risked becoming undocumented.

Regarding the other young people who completed a member check in 2021, two undocumented young people remained without a residence permit but one had secured a residency permit receipt and was waiting for his permit to be issued. Five young people at the member check who had a permit still had a similar temporary residency status, and one young person had become undocumented.

### 5.4.2. Education, employment and housing

Consistent with the findings of Frechon and Marquet’s (2017) research on the care and protection of unaccompanied minors in France (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2), which demonstrated that the majority of unaccompanied minors were orientated to professional programmes, all of this study’s young people were directed towards a vocational educational stream. The young people reported several reasons for this. Firstly, when some were not granted status as unaccompanied minors following the age assessment interview, they were supported by local community groups and volunteers to find private schools that would accept them. However, the young people were constrained by the discretion of the school, which meant that they had to accept the option offered to them, as described by Bintou.

*In the beginning, I didn’t want to study business; I wanted to do management or accounting. But considering my situation, I wasn’t*
[legally] recognised [as an unaccompanied minor], and there was no high school that wanted to accept me, so I accepted what was offered to me … I didn't have a choice, and I also didn't want to just stay at home doing nothing. So, it was best that I did something.

Secondly, even when young people were legally recognised as unaccompanied minors and entitled to access education, they still faced challenges of access to their chosen courses, with some explaining that they were informed that there was “a lack of places in general education schools” (Dinoh) or, in Diouma's case, although “the social workers looked for schools, they were difficult to find”. Resultingly, many had no choice but to enrol in a vocational education course, which in some cases was not their preferred educational path. This also made it more challenging for most to access third-level education, although a small number hoped to progress to university, including Bintou who changed her course because she aspired to progress to higher-level study.

The training I could have, if I continued with a Bac Pro Commerce [vocational Baccalauréat in business]114 in apprenticeship, I could not have followed the BTS [Brevet de Technicien Supérieur or an "Advanced Technician's Certificate" in English]115, I would not have been really trained for a BTS.

So, you couldn’t go much further [with this course]?

No, for the higher-level studies, no.

At the time of the interview, one young person had completed the Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP) [Certificate of Professional Competence]116, five were enrolled in a CAP programme, four were completing their professional Baccalauréate (Bac Pro) and one, SMD, was enrolled in a language course provided by the ‘Pole Emploi’, the French public employment service that provides advice and supports for jobseekers. Table 5.2, which presents the young people’s education and employment situations at

114 A Professional Baccalauréate (Bac Pro) is a vocational qualification within the French education system which takes three years to complete and provides specialised education and training across a range of vocational professions such as hospitality, electronics, mechanics, and electronics, focusing on practical skills and knowledge relevant to the field.
115 A BTS is a two-year post-secondary vocational education program designed to provide students with specialised skills and knowledge, in subjects such as business and technology. This qualification can also lead to further education at the university level.
116 Typically, a two-year programme, the CAP is a vocational qualification centring on practical skills and knowledge in a specific trade or profession that offers hands-on training and education in a range of areas, including technical trades and the service sector.
the time of the interview, demonstrates that five had secured an apprenticeship contract. A further six were unemployed and most of these young people were not studying or did not have a formal educational qualification beyond a CAP diploma. Two of the young people had secured a summer job while one was completing an unpaid internship at the time of the interview.

Table 5.3 Education and employment situations of the young people at the time of the interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Number of young people</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bac Pro</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Apprenticeship (2), Student informal job/employed (1), Summer job/internship (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bac Pro/ CAP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Apprenticeship (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP ongoing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Apprenticeship (2), Unemployed (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP completed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unemployed (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other training programmes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unemployed (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2021, at the member check, most of their situations had changed somewhat, with four young people’s employment situation having improved: two had permanent job contracts and two had secured a ‘BTS alternance’, which meant that they split their time between school and the workplace. Three young people’s employment situation remained the same, and one went from having an apprenticeship to being unemployed and seeking work. One young person, Siaka Tanga, had secured an ‘alternance’ however, due to his legal status he told that he could not continue with it at the time of the member check.

Concerning education, two young people had completed their schooling while six had progressed to a higher level of study, one of them to a university course.

The housing insecurity experienced by the study’s young people was highlighted earlier in this Chapter, with almost all having experienced homelessness either shortly or immediately after arriving to the Nord. Their circumstances changed over time and, at the time of the interview, the young people lived in a range of housing situations, although a majority resided in supported lodgings or precarious housing. Table 5.3 provides an overview of the housing situations of the young people at the time of the interview.
interview, categorised according to the outcome of their age assessment, which had a
discernible impact on their housing.

**Table 5.4 The young people’s housing situations, categorised by age assessment outcome**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome of Age Assessment</th>
<th>Number of Young People</th>
<th>Housing at the time of the Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Granted status as a UAM in the first instance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Supported temporary accommodation (Foyer des Jeunes Travailleurs (FJT)) [Young Workers Accommodation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granted status as a UAM after appeal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Volunteer foster family (1), Insecure housing (2), Social housing (2), Private rental accommodation (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Volunteer foster family (2), Insecure housing (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two young people, Diouma and Oury, who had been legally recognised as unaccompanied minors in the first instance (i.e., after the first age assessment interview and without having to go through an appeals process), were living in 'Foyer Jeune Travailleur' (FJT) [Young Workers Residence], which is a form of temporary supported accommodation provided by NGOs. These centres provide leases to young people, aged 16 to 30 years, for up to two years if they fall into the following categories: are working, participating in an internship, completing an apprenticeship, studying, or seeking employment (Direction de l'information légale et administrative, 2020). Social workers are usually attached to the accommodation who, as Diouma who was living in an FJT explained, provided help and support aimed at ensuring that young people can transition successfully out of this temporary accommodation. In January 2021, Diouma had moved into a private apartment, but Oury remained in temporary supported accommodation.

Those who had been legally recognised as unaccompanied minors after an appeal reported a range of housing situations at the time of the interview: two had secured social housing,117 two were living in private apartments, two resided in insecure housing.

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117 A young person can benefit from social housing if they have a valid residence permit, rent the housing as a principle resident and have limited resources. More information available (in French) from: [https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F869](https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F869).
while one remained with his foster family. Two of the three young people who had not been legally recognised as unaccompanied minors were in foster care. One young person was roofless, dependent on his friends and social networks for a place to sleep. All, three in total, who continued to live with their voluntary foster families had met these foster families through their informal social networks and had been staying with them before turning 18 years. The two young people who were residing in insecure housing at the time of the interview were staying either with friends or in informal accommodation. Bintou was housed by a friend who she met at one of the local NGOs.

I didn’t meet her today, but I met her since, eh, when I was at [an informal shelter managed by religious organisations]. She told me, “Yes, if you need, you can come stay with me” … When I turned 18, I called her and explained [my situation to] her. She told me, “No problem, for you, it’s like whatever you want. Whenever you want, eh you’re welcome here”. So that’s how I joined her. Everything is going very well, and she doesn’t bother me. Really, everything is going well, you know.

Siaka Tanga was informally housed by a local parish in temporary emergency accommodation for almost two years but, since he was legally classified as homeless and entitled to State homelessness supports, he contacted governmental homelessness services daily to seek formal housing assistance. He was also in the process of gathering information to launch a case against the State to claim his right to housing. Cedric, who was roofless, was in a particularly precarious situation in that he relied on friends for accommodation and had to move frequently between the homes of friends and acquaintances.

The young people who had been confirmed as unaccompanied minors in the first instance fared better in terms of education, housing, employment, and legal status. The situation was far more mixed for those who were granted minority status after appeal in that a majority faced challenges related to their legal status at one point or another after turning 18 years.

For a majority, data collected during member checks indicated that the situations of the young people in education progressed positively between 2019 and 2021. However, the legal status of most did not change, apart from one young person who was waiting

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118 Note, not all of these foster care placements were legally recognised as such by the state.
for a residence permit to be issued and another who became undocumented. Similarly, most young people’s housing situation had not significantly changed as illustrated in Table 5.4. However, one young person had transitioned from living with a foster family to an FJT and one from a situation of rooflessness to an emergency FJT. It is worth noting here that while FJTs provided useful transitional accommodation to the young people, according to the European typology of homelessness and housing exclusion, FJTs are still considered to be situations of ‘houselessness’ (Feantsa, n.d.). There were mixed experiences of employment, with the work situations of some remaining unchanged and others having progressed to ‘alternance’ or permanent employment contracts. 119

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing situation</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure housing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private apartment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social housing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FJT [Young workers accommodation]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.5. Conclusion

As documented in this chapter, the young people confronted a host of structural challenges after their arrival to the Nord which impacted their entitlements and their access to care and protection. The structure and nature of the age assessment interview they were obliged to undergo and the lack of available care places created strong barriers to access to care, which had multiple negative ramifications for their sense of security. Similar to the findings of previous research (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018; Jamet and Keravel, 2017), exclusion

119 A permanent employment contract ("Contrat à Durée Indéterminée," (CDI) in France is a standard employment contract which provides long-term and indefinite employment. These contracts are beneficial as they provide job security, with termination only possible under specific circumstances defined by labour laws.
from care meant that a large number of young people were forced to rely on informal supports. This led most to experience homelessness at some point. Additionally, exclusion from care continued to have an impact on the young people in that those who did not access care immediately often faced ongoing precarity.

The categorisation of young people during the age assessment process rendered them significantly lacking power by insisting that they conform to what the authorities expected of an unaccompanied minor. In practical terms, those who did not conform to these expectations were initially refused unaccompanied minor status and thereby deemed ‘undeserving’ of care. Although most were subsequently granted legal recognition on appeal, their initial categorisation as undeserving led some to strongly reject the assumptions and representations associated with the term ‘unaccompanied minor’ (Wernesjö, 2020). Despite wishing to be legally recognised as unaccompanied minors, many therefore preferred to conceal their status as an unaccompanied minor.

Although mechanisms of ‘power over’ were demonstrated through the constraints of institutional structures, the findings also support the work of Foucault on micro-forms of power which, he argues, can “sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximising its effectiveness” (Foucault, 1980b p. 72). The micro-interactions between the young people and those working within institutional structures were visible, present both within the age assessment interview and in their pursuant interactions with authority figures. A power imbalance was strongly apparent in young people’s interactions with social workers and border police, with decisions made about their lives over which they were unable to exert control. In many of these interactions, the young people experienced a lack of information and they felt judged, humiliated, and afraid. This sense of apprehension and fear was sometimes fuelled by the stories told by others, including their peers and volunteers, who frequently spoke in very negative terms about the power exerted by the authority figures they encountered.

Despite the myriad of constraints that they confronted, the young people actively sought solutions, often through their informal support networks or local community groups and NGOs. Despite their lack of power, most found ways in which to exercise ‘constrained’ agency, although at times such efforts did have adverse consequences for some. The following chapter examines the young people’s understanding of the transition to adulthood, their experiences of preparing for the transition, and the housing and care ruptures that accompanied their journeys.
6. UNDERSTANDING, PREPARING, AND EXPERIENCING THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the study's young people and examined their entitlements and access to care after their arrival in the Nord. The impact of these early experiences in the Nord on their transitions to adulthood, including those related to their legal status, education, employment, and housing, was also examined. This chapter focuses on young people’s perspectives on the transition to adulthood and their experiences of preparing for this transition. The analysis presented in this chapter draws on data from the study’s individual interviews, focus group sessions, field notes and observations made during Phases 1-4 of the data collection process. This included individual and group meetings with participants, group activities and member checks.

This chapter begins by examining young people’s understanding of the term ‘adulthood’ and explores their perspectives on the term ‘transition to adulthood’. Secondly, young people’s experiences of preparing for the transition to adulthood are examined, with a strong focus on the extent to which they felt equipped for the process of leaving care. Following this, an analysis of the experience of approaching the age of 18 years or ‘official’ adulthood, which emerged as a critical juncture in the lives of the vast majority, is presented.

6.2. Understanding ‘Adulthood’: Young People’s Perspectives

Rather than imposing pre-conceived notions of adulthood or, indeed, the transition to adulthood, the participatory research process focused on empowering the study's young participants to explore and articulate their own understandings of these terms. During the interview, research participants were asked to share their understandings of ‘being an adult’ and what they associated with the term ‘adulthood’. Overall, their narratives demonstrated parallels with Arnett’s (2000; 2007b) definition of ‘emerging adulthood’ which, as discussed in Chapter 3, emphasises an extended transitional period associated with accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions and becoming financially independent. For example, all participants linked adulthood with a greater need to be responsible and gaining independence. A large number also articulated maturity, in the sense of taking responsibility for oneself and,
for others, as an important characteristic of adulthood. A smaller number associated adulthood with turning 18, also suggesting that there were positive and negative aspects of reaching adulthood.

While jokingly noting the difficulties that young people may face – particularly related to leaving care – Dinoh placed strong emphasis on the freedom of no longer having to depend on, or take instruction from, individuals in positions of authority.

When we say, “You are [an] adult” … Yes, you are big, you are 18 years old, you are autonomous. You can do, eh, whatever you want. Except if it’s forbidden by the law of course … Yeah. But it also means that you have some problems! (Laughs) … because you are no longer in care, you are an adult, you are responsible for yourself. But it also is a good thing because you can tell yourself, “I don’t need to ask anyone for help, I don’t need to hold out my hand to ask, I don’t ask anyone if I must … if I must take this to eat or not”, you know?

Coulibaly felt that adulthood should not be simply demarcated by age, suggesting that it is better described as an outlook that recognises that “you are aware of taking responsibility for yourself”.

Amadou Camara felt that adulthood was, in many ways, an age-related marker but also a juncture associated with being “responsible” and “independent”.

For me, an adult is … is someone who is responsible. Responsible, independent. You turn 18, you transition from being a minor to a legal adult. You might not necessarily be an adult immediately; you still exhibit some behaviours, uh, of a minor, and also you come from a country where things are not the same. Being an adult is someone who is responsible, independent … it’s someone who is responsible.

All of the young people felt that adulthood – and reaching ‘institutional’ adulthood– was complicated and challenging, often describing the task of dealing with problems, feelings of isolation, and a lack of support. Additionally, despite associating adulthood with autonomy, several stressed the importance of, and the need for, continued support after turning 18.

I think we should always be, well, accompanied, you know? I think we should always have a follow up. But voila, that’s how it is. You’re of
legal age, you're supposed to do everything on your own (taps the table with his fingers). It's like that … When you're 18 years old, you're called an adult, of legal age. But when you're mature in your head, it means that, because people confuse the adult with experience. Do you understand? Someone who's mature in their head, they might be 22 years old, 23 years old, but they, they don't think. They're like a child (Ababahadi, Interview 1).

During the member check, which was undertaken during Phase 4 (January 2021) and conducted with 10 of the study’s participants, I explained my interpretation of the term ‘adulthood’ based on an analysis of the data from Phases 1, 2 and 3. Adulthood for separated young people, I suggested, appeared to include three key pillars (as demonstrated in Image 6.1): first, being mature; second, being responsible; third, feeling or becoming autonomous or independent.

Image 6.1 Researcher interpretation of adulthood following analysis of Phase 1-3 data, as presented to Dino during his member check

I then explained that it also seemed clear from the data that supportive relationships were viewed by them as critically important. During the member check, some young people, including Coulibaly, concurred and shared that despite the importance of formal support, after turning 18 years, they frequently found themselves having to manage alone, even if they could avail of certain supports.

Coulibaly said that it is you alone in your destiny, that there aren't formal supports, that young people don't have support after turning 18 years. He said there should be formal supports until at least 21 years and that there is a lack of information available about what supports
can be accessed by the young people. While NGOs are there to provide certain supports, there really is a need for more information about them; for example, details on what organisation can meet what need because the young people often do not know where to start with this and have no idea where to go. He explained that while services are provided by the Mayor’s Office, young people are often not aware of them. He advised that, at the point of transitioning to adulthood, formal support is needed from a team or social worker, for example. Coulibaly told me that he wasn’t aware if any such support existed. (Journal entry from member check, 15 January 2021).

During the member check, Amadou Camara similarly recommended that separated young people from residential care should be provided with continuity of care upon turning 18, akin to the support he received from his foster family.

Amadou said that he felt independent after he continued to live with his foster family after the age of 18 but also felt supported by them, explaining the crucial importance of this support. He said would not have had the same support if he had been in residential care and suggested that the formal supports provided to young people as they become adults should broadly correspond with what is provided in a family context rather than the young person suddenly being seen as independent and not needing further support. (Journal entry, 15 January 2021).

All ten participants agreed that adulthood comprised three central aspects – maturity, responsibility, and independence/autonomy – but also stressed the crucial importance of supportive relationships in adulthood. Upon questioning participants as to whether age was more important than these three factors, a majority felt that age and adulthood should be seen as distinct from each other.

To better contextualise and understand young people’s transition experiences, the following two sections examine their definitions and understandings of the transition to adulthood, examining if they felt that the transition is an easily definable phase in their lives, with clear start and end points.
6.2.1. A starting point for the transition to adulthood?

During the second focus group session held during Phase 1 of the study, five participants discussed their understanding of the transition to adulthood for separated young people in France. The vast majority associated ‘becoming an adult’ with ruptures in care provision and formal support on reaching the age of 18 years. As they sought to conceptualise the transition to adulthood, in keeping with what is often found in the literature on unaccompanied children’s transition from care (see Chapter 2), they immediately began to discuss the difficulties associated with ageing out of care. The following excerpt from a focus group illustrates this.

*Cedric:* For me, I went through my transition, eh, I had to be ready about six months before, and I wasn’t even ready six months before, because you have things that get stuck. Later, you can have things that get stuck because you, you're not making progress, you see what I mean? School or whatever ...

*Bintou:* Yeah. Me, because for me, when you say that to me, it’s like, it’s kind of, eh, the beginning of the applications and paperwork already, you know?

*Cedric:* Voila, yeah.

*Bintou:* It’s like you, because they say, yeah, six months before you are going to ask for the paperwork and all …

*Cedric:* There’s a lot of processing, there’s, yes, the paperwork. And six months before, there is housing that you already have to find ...

*Bintou:* Yeah.

*Cedric:* You have to gather all the necessary documents to go to the prefecture\textsuperscript{121}, voila. So, eh, and they tell you, uh, that everything can happen six months before. There’s a lot of things that happen.

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\textsuperscript{120} Importantly, I did not provide any definitions but rather supported the young people to build their own definitions based on what the transition to adulthood signified for them.

\textsuperscript{121} As described in Chapter 1, the prefecture (préfecture in French) serves as the headquarters for the Département’s administrative and governmental functions, including coordinating and issuing residency permits.
Bintou: And even the social workers are already threatening you (raises her voice to be heard). On the day of your birthday, you have to leave (mockingly sniggers).

Cedric: There are a lot of things that happen, a lot of things happening (pause) during this transition. So, eh, for me, I lived through it six months before. And six months after, I experienced the same problem.

Dinoh: Oh, it's true that the stress begins, uh, six months before turning legal age.

While in this discussion the young people identified the starting point of transition to adulthood as beginning approximately six months before the age of 18 years. Later discussions demonstrated complexity surrounding the perceived start point of the transition, with participants agreeing that the term is difficult to define because it is intertwined with a range of processes and procedures.

In the first instance, young people defined the transition to adulthood with reference to the administrative processes associated with applying for a residence permit, which typically began approximately six months before turning 18 years old. This ‘legal transition’ was framed by them as strongly connected to administrative, legal, and bureaucratic procedures and consequently understood as typically beginning approximately six months before reaching 18 years. The interview data similarly demonstrated that the initiation of particular administrative procedures, namely the residency application, was a process that signalled the starting point of the transition to adulthood.

However, it also became apparent during the focus group discussion that the transition to adulthood extended beyond a legal transition. For example, later in the conversation, Coulibaly suggested that there was no fixed starting point for the transition to adulthood; instead, framing the transition as contingent on individual experiences and circumstances. He therefore suggested that the transition to adulthood began once a young person was placed in care.

Thinking about it carefully, I think that the transition in itself can begin from the moment you are placed in residential care.

Other focus group participants agreed with Coulibaly, with a number explaining that prior to being placed in care, a separated young person is primarily focused on
accessing care. For this reason, participants said that they cannot begin to think about the transition to adulthood until they have accessed care but “once you are in residential care, all that you have to do is to be ready, to get ready to reach legal adulthood” (Cedric).

Reinforcing the focus group data, the in-depth interviews confirmed that the perceived starting point of the transition to adulthood was multifaceted. While age was a defining legal feature, in reality, the contingency of fulfilling the criteria for obtaining a residence permit – which included demonstrating diligence at school and having relevant documentation such as a passport – created a psychological burden that often marked the beginning of the transition as Dinoh explained.

"Ah, the transition. It starts at 18 years old, on paper. But mentally, and psychologically, it doesn’t start at 18, it starts well before. Yes, because already they’ll start asking you ... The social workers will begin asking you if you’ve found any options for where you’ll go at 18. They’ll start asking you these questions well before you turn 18. And if necessary, what you also need to do is, before 18, you need to start the procedures, you need to apply for a residence permit. This too, this needs to be done before 18, the residence permit application. Yes. If you, you’re not diligent at school, and they need the attendance certificate ... They need the attendance certificate, they need, you know, report cards, report cards, and all. So, you need to look for all that before 18. And so, if you have bad grades, you know it’s going to be tough because they’ll tell you yeah... (small laugh) You see?

And you, were you starting to feel stressed six months before? How were you?

Yes, I started to feel stressed when I had to find ... I knew I needed my passport, and I didn’t have my passport, and I was thinking, thinking about my passport. I was calling the embassy to get updates. That’s when it started stressing me out. And ... it, it starts there, in fact.

Overall, the data suggest that, for young people, the start point of the transition to adulthood had a number of dimensions. While age was a clear legal marker, the stress associated with the obligations placed on them to regularise their situations began long
before the age of 18 years, meaning that they were essentially ushered towards adulthood at an accelerated rate.

6.2.2. Reaching adulthood

While research participants struggled to identify a clear starting point for the transition to adulthood, focus group participants agreed that the transition continues until a separated young person becomes ‘autonomous’ or ‘independent’. Image 6.2 summarises the following understanding of the transition to adulthood, which was agreed in the second focus group (Session 2A):

*The transition to adulthood begins six months before 18 years, but is not always a fixed moment in time, sometimes starting earlier, for example, from the moment you are placed in care. The transition to adulthood finishes when you are autonomous.*

Image 6.2 An excerpt from focus group flip chart sheet defining the transition to adulthood, Focus Group Meeting Session 2A.

This consensus emerged following a lengthy discussion about the formal supports available to them, including their need for financial supports, including the ‘EVA’ [Entrée dans la Vie Adulte (Entering into Adult Life)] allowance after turning 18 years (outlined in Section 1.7.2). Focus group participants argued passionately and agreed that, until such a point when a young person can fully sustain themselves financially, they have not concluded the transition to adulthood.

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122 The Entrée dans la Vie Adulte (EVA) [Entry into Adult Life], funded by the Département of the Nord provides young people who have been in the child protection system with tailored support to help them become independent after reaching the age of 18 years.
Although Cedric felt that the end of the transition was linked to securing a resident permit, other focus group participants disagreed, arguing that even if a separated young person secures a residence permit, they may not yet be completely independent. When interviewed subsequently, Cedric described the transition as only relevant to an individual who, like him, had to deal with significant difficulties with regularisation.

Before 18 years. From when you are on French territory, prepare your transition (hits the table with his fingers). If you are a [unaccompanied] minor, prepare your transition. In other words, do everything you can to get regularised. Because if you are regularised, you can find a job. You don’t know what you will know [experience]. You will learn about the stages that we call the transition. But if you are not regularised, it's normal [that] it’s you that you will be thinking about the transition. It is the word transition, in fact, it should not take place because normally someone who has arrived and does everything to work well, we should just regularise him with a residence permit … But the word transition is for the person who is in the shit … If you start to think about the transition, know that you are not regularised. Know that you can’t work.

Cedric’s statement strongly suggests young people’s legal status impacted their experiences and understandings of the transition to adulthood, a perspective also articulated by most other young people during the interview. At the time of his interview, Cedric had not secured a residence permit and was living with a great deal of precarity as he moved in and out of undocumented status. Others, such as Bintou, who despite facing precarity associated with a lengthy wait for her residence permit, had not been undocumented and explained that there was a continued need for support beyond legal status. In other words, obtaining a residence permit did not mark the point of reaching adulthood.

But eh, me, in my situation, I'm still in school, I'm not working. Right now, I have my residence permit receipt, I'm still waiting for my card [residence permit] and when I have my card, how will I pay my rent? I'm still in school. How are you supposed to eat? If you don’t have EVA [social welfare support], how can you satisfy your needs, it's, it's impossible.
Other participants suggested that reaching adulthood was either contingent on each individual’s personal circumstances or, alternatively, was open-ended, as demonstrated in Coulibaly’s account below. This narrative also demonstrates the perceived impact of becoming an adult, not only on a person’s legal status but also on their emotional wellbeing: the transition signified “tranquility” for Coulibaly and a sense of having control of his situation. However, as his account illustrates, obtaining residency symbolised a critical moment in the transition to adulthood.

Bah, in fact, there is no end [to the transition]. From the moment where you can say that you are tranquil, it is when you have obtained your residence permit and a small job. And when you can create your own [social] network. And when you have friends. You can, eh, say yeah now I am tranquil. But otherwise, if you don’t have your residence permit that’s, eh, that is annoying … you can’t work, legally you haven’t the right to move around … and eh you don’t know what to do in fact. You don’t know what to do. Sometimes this pushes you to go and ask for asylum because you have waited too long for your application, eh, and sometimes the asylum application doesn't work either … And you don’t know what to do. What can you say but, “yeah I wait”. The only thing that you can say, can do, is you say to yourself, “I have to wait for a response, I wait”. It drives you crazy.

Coulibaly’s account demonstrates the liminality of daily life in the absence of a secure residence status, which left young people stuck in a prolonged static period. Profound uncertainty during the wait period for a residence permit prevented young people from advancing in education and employment and created housing insecurity (see sections 6.4 and 7.2 for a more detailed discussion).

The young people’s accounts reveal the intricate and nuanced nature of the journey to adulthood, resonating with critiques put forth by Wyn (2004), who challenges conventional age-related notions of adulthood and understandings of it in terms of an ‘arrival’. Overall, for the study’s young people, obtaining a residence permit was – both materially and symbolically – a key marker of progressing towards adulthood. This echoes the findings of Chase (2020) - the absence of a secure legal status stifled their capacity for independence and personal growth. Moreover, the challenges that separated youth confronted during their transition to adulthood appear to be diverse, extending beyond securing residency, highlighting the importance of preparation for the transition from care at 18 years, a topic that is elaborated in the following section.
6.3. Preparing for the Transition to Adulthood

During individual interviews and focus group discussions – as well as during informal meetings and field visits – the matter of preparation for the transition to adulthood was consistently raised by the young people. Based on an analysis of relevant data from the three phases of data collection (described in Chapter 4) three core themes emerged which help to extend understanding of their preparedness for the implications and reality of turning 18 years. These are:

1) The lack of support available during this preparatory phase;
2) Young people’s agency in seeking out solutions to the issues they were likely to confront on turning 18 years;
3) The need to prepare for the administrative changes they would likely face at 18 years, namely, the need to prepare the residency application.

In the Council of Europe handbook for front-line professionals, ‘Life Projects for Unaccompanied Migrant Minors’, Drammeh (2010) emphasises the importance of care planning in supporting integration and ensuring that the best interests of unaccompanied young people are met as they transition out of care. The current study’s interview data highlight perceived deficits within existing care structures designed to support preparation for leaving care; in fact, formal, structured care planning appeared not to be available to the study’s young people.

A number of young people who had lived in a residential care setting felt that they had only very limited support when preparing for the transition to adulthood and were instead pressured by staff to prepare to leave care and to find their own solutions. The pressure from the staff, who were perceived by several participants as constantly emphasising the urgency of finding new accommodation, appeared to be linked with their concern that the young people would no longer have access to care upon reaching the age of 18 years. Although staff members may have viewed this pressure as supportive, helpful, or necessary in terms of alerting young people to systems-level constraints, it was generally viewed negatively by young people. For example, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Bintou perceived this pressure as a threat from social workers: “And even the social workers are already threatening you (raises her voice to be heard). On the day of your birthday, you have to leave (mockingly sniggers).”
Bintou later explained that apart from feeling pressured by the staff to prepare documents for her residence permit application\textsuperscript{123} for the prefecture, no support was available to her, either in preparing this application or in finding housing. In terms of sourcing and accessing housing post-care, she explained that her social worker suggested that she call the ‘115 number’, which is a telephone line designated for requesting emergency accommodation for those who are over the age of 18 years and homeless.\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{Before you turned 18, did you have any plans or a program about what you were going to do after turning 18?}

\textit{Nothing. Absolutely nothing.}

\textit{Did you have a chance to talk to anyone about your 18th birthday?}

\textit{No.}

Do you know why? Did they never try to discuss it with you?

\textit{No, well, they just said they had to prepare your file, your file has to be sent to the prefecture, end of story.}

And is there support for housing?

\textit{No, no, no. They tell you to call 115.}

And 115 is for emergency housing?

\textit{Yes, for emergency.}

So, if I understand, there wasn't really any support?

\textit{No, no, no. There wasn't.}

Did you expect that?

\textsuperscript{123} Bintou explained that this application must include a birth certificate, passport, and a range of other documents required for a resident permit application.

\textsuperscript{124} Minors under the age of 18 years cannot access emergency accommodation as access to emergency accommodation of this nature is not permitted for young people under the age of 18 years (Sénat, 2017).
No, I didn’t expect it at all. I thought that after, until I had a [housing] situation sorted out, they could take care of me, but that wasn't the case.

Dinoh similarly described preparation as primarily linked to pressures from social workers, who repeatedly asked him if he had found a solution as to where he would go upon reaching the age of 18 years. He told that he had navigated complex administrative procedures “all alone”, with “no one” to support him and would have benefited from formal support from a social worker to help him to understand many of the administrative procedures.

So, when you move from minority to [institutional] adulthood, it’s tough, these procedures. You receive letters, sometimes you don't understand [them], you have to go in person. And, to go there, sometimes you’re working, so you have to ask for a day or a morning off from your employer. But then you have to make up for it. You have to make up for the hours, so it's ...

And are there people who help with that? Who are there for you, to help you understand these documents?

No one. No one.

You're on your own?

All alone. All alone, yes. Like a grown-up (laughter). For me, most of the time I ask people who are close or ... generally, my foster family.

And formally, there's no social worker?

No, there isn't. There isn't, not for me.

Ah, do you think, you would like to have a bit more, something formal, do you think there's a need for it?

Yes, yes, I would like to have that. I would really like that. It would have helped me. It would have really helped me to understand certain procedures.
A number of other young people described pressures placed upon them by social workers to secure employment contracts to ensure that they would be able to support themselves post-care. However, some young people, such as Ababahadi, felt that they were pushed into careers that they did not choose.

*My job, it wasn't my choice. It was chosen by the social workers ... because when I turned 18, I didn't know if I would have an apprenticeship contract. They [the social workers] offered it to me. Instead of being abandoned on the street like what I lived through [before], I preferred to sign a contract, undergo a two-year training. Lose two years, do training instead of being abandoned on the street.*

Combined with pressure from social workers to find solutions independently, the absence of support, was difficult for young people and very often perceived very negatively by them. Dino explained that, because of the pressures placed upon him by social workers to leave his residential care setting, he decided to cut contact with them: “I didn’t want to be stressed all the time and for them to say, ‘You must leave, you must leave’.”

Cedric felt differently about this pressure, explaining that for him, it had benefits that prepared him for the realities and challenges of life as an adult in France.

*I think that, yes, on one hand, they [social workers] always prepared me, they always prepared me for what I am living. For what I am living now, they prepared me for that.*

And how did they prepare you for that? What did they do?

*By telling me, ehh, seeing as I always asked a lot of questions, they told me that we will tell you openly that this is life in France. They explained it to me. They told me that sometimes even for a real French person who lives in the territory, it isn’t easy and then you know that they are trying to, they are trying to do everything not to welcome this population. Bah, they clearly told me. Yes, the social workers told me that. They told me, “Honestly even the budget that we have for you isn’t enough. Even us, we are complaining”.*

Cedric’s account also demonstrates the structural limitations faced by the social workers in the provision of care for separated young people. This issue was also
highlighted by Fiquet’s (2016) study of unaccompanied minors and youth in the North of France, which particularly drew attention to the repeated exclusion of unaccompanied minors from care in the Département of the Nord.

Other young people who had been placed in residential care explained that, while social workers told them who to contact when, for example, seeking accommodation, it was the responsibility of each young person to “go everywhere” and find solutions independently. This demonstrated expectations of self-reliance and independence on the part of the young people. Oury, for example, was told by a social worker that supporting the young people to stabilise their situation after the age of 18 did not fall within a social worker’s remit or responsibilities. He felt strongly that if the young person cannot find their own solutions, they will quickly find themselves with nowhere to go.

They tell you that it’s not their job. I saw people at their 18th birthday, the day of their birthday, being kicked out, outside. Yeah. Even if they had nowhere to go, they had, they had nowhere to go (Oury picks up a plastic paper in his hand and plays with it nervously).

And what do they do?

Finally, they find themselves outside [homeless], there are those who find themselves outside [homeless] (continues to play with paper nervously).

There was a clear lack of structured care planning to support young people as they prepared for the transition out of care. However, Diouma and a small number of others reported that support was provided to young people by staff in some residential care structures, explaining that it was not “always difficult” for unaccompanied young people in these care settings. Two young people acknowledged the support provided by social workers who, as Cedric put it, “always helped” to prepare them for leaving residential care.

Those young people who were not yet legally recognised by authorities as unaccompanied minors during the months leading up to their 18th birthday experienced enormous pressure to have their status as unaccompanied minors confirmed. For some, this did not transpire, despite feeling that they were doing their best to prepare with minimal or no support. Consequently, they transitioned to undocumented status at
the age of 18 years, having received little to no preparation for the challenges they were likely to confront. Siaka Tanga, for example, began to prepare for his transition to adulthood a few months before turning 18 years, reaching out to various NGOs, his lawyer, and staff working for the Département. Despite his efforts, he was not granted legal status and aged out to an irregular immigration status.

Did you plan for your transition before 18 years?

Yes, I had submitted my EVA [financial allowance] application, found accommodation, a job, a contract. I had prepared everything beforehand and then the residence permit. I had everything prepared. However, not everything was approved at the government level. I got the job but not the legal status.

Gaps in formal support during the transition out of care were often filled by young people’s informal support networks, which in many cases provided crucial practical and emotional support during the ageing out-of-care process. Dinoh, for example, reached out for assistance and advice to volunteers and a foster family member who had previously provided him with accommodation and care and who he described as “the most important person to him”.

Local organisations, churches and migrant-led groups were also identified by young people as providing important supports, at times offering informal solutions to a housing need, supporting them to find educational and language courses, and directing them to other services. A local community group, for example, acted as guarantor for Ababahadi, enabling him to secure accommodation at the age of 18 years.

Well, I went through organisations, as I told you, like I said earlier, you have to go through organisations to integrate in France. So, I went through organisations; they were the ones who were guarantors for my rent.

Did they find the house for you?

Yeah. Yeah. Actually, I went through the organisations and well, at the beginning, I had difficulties finding housing because, in France, they often talk about a rent guarantor. And we foreigners don’t have a guarantor here because those who live all alone don’t have a guarantor. Even if you have papers, they will ask for a rent guarantor.
So, I tried several times … So, I was stuck in a mess and, eh, after I tried once, I went to see an organisation. I won't mention the organisation's name. So, eh, now I explained my situation to the organisation, and they asked me to fill out all the paperwork, which I did. Then, they tried to do what they could for me.

Continuity of care has been demonstrated to have implications for separated young people's wellbeing and mental health (Zijlstra, 2018; Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh, 2015). The importance of continuity of care emerged strongly from the young people's stories and reported experiences, with differences evident among youth who lived in foster care compared to those in residential care settings. While all faced uncertainty associated with the ramifications of turning 18 years, those who resided in residential care settings and those who had not been confirmed as unaccompanied minors by the Département confronted additional challenges related to the relative absence of continuity they experienced compared to their peers who lived in foster care settings. Amadou Camara, for example, perceived his situation to be easier and more desirable because he was with a family rather than living in a residential care setting.

*The social workers, they tell you to leave the apartment even if you have nowhere to go. You have to leave the apartment if you are 18 years … Me, I knew that … (silence) I didn't have a problem at this level there, because my family, they told me that I could stay as long as I want and I wasn't, eh, I wasn't obliged to put myself under pressure because I had turned 18 and all. They, they reassured me that, even when I had my majority [when I turned 18 years], they wouldn't, they wouldn't put me out and all. And… and I knew that, according to me, my worry was to be regularised, to continue my studies. And that was my concern.*

Consistent with much of the empirical literature on separated young people's transition to adulthood (see Chapter 2), data from all phases of this research strongly suggest that uncertainty about the future was a major stressor for all the study's young people as they approached the age of 18. During Phase 1 of the research, the young people prepared a presentation for a local event on integration and a member of the group was chosen to present the key challenges identified by them as separated young people as they transitioned to adulthood. This presentation drew strong attention to stresses related to various impending milestones, such as leaving care and residence permit decisions, that separated youth typically confront. The presentation also
highlighted the mental health challenges and uncertainty experienced by separated young people resulting from the impending housing and care ruptures facing them at age 18. Image 6.3 illustrates some of the points raised in the presentation.

Image 6.3 Presentation at local event and example of a slide

The interview data also uncovered strong feelings of worry and stress experienced by young people as they approached their 18th birthday. The anxieties associated with having to find a new place to live were particularly apparent among those who lived in residential care, who reported significant pressure to source and secure new accommodation. Bintou explained how she felt as she approached her 18th birthday:

Stressed ... It was the moment that I was the most stressed. But [I mean] really stressed, stressed to death. Because I asked myself what I would do after I blew out my 18 candles. Where would I go? How would I manage? And what would I do? It was complicated.

Uncertainty related to leaving care negatively impacted the wellbeing and mental health of those who lived in residential care. Feeling preoccupied and often “completely elsewhere” as he contemplated what lay ahead – as well as the prospect of leaving friends behind – Cedric told that he could not sleep because he constantly worried about his housing situation and the threat of becoming homeless.

125 Translation of slide. Title: “What is waiting for me now that I am a majeur [18 years]. Reflection cloud: There long live the war. Here, long live the street’.
Before, when you were 18, did you think a lot about the fact that you had to leave or what was going to happen?

Yes. Before I turned 18, I thought about it [leaving the residential centre], but I kept wondering where I would go. All that, and I talked with a friend who told me that I could come [to stay with her] but before that, there were days when I couldn't sleep anymore, you see, I was overthinking about where I would go. There were days when I was, I'd wake up, I was completely elsewhere, and all that, thinking about where I would go. Bah yeah. When you spend time, you live with people and all, and then, then tomorrow morning they start telling you that you're going to leave, you start asking yourself where you'll even go. Especially when you know that you, you don't know where you're going. So, well, I started thinking about it, and when I found the solution, I said, "Well, there you go. I'll stop thinking about it."

And how did you feel after [leaving]? Was it still stressful, or was it a bit better?

Honestly, I felt a little down because I left people that I had lived with for two years; we were already like a family and all that. So, I felt bad, but we kept in touch. We'd call each other, like, "Yeah, are you okay and all that," you know.

Echoing the findings of previous research (Allsopp and Chase, 2017; Chase, 2013), the lack of certainty surrounding residency at age 18 had a significant negative impact on young people’s mental health and wellbeing. Uncertainty about their legal status was also identified by all participants as a major stressor. In addition to the insecurities surrounding the impending decision about his legal status, Dinoh explained during his interview that there were additional stresses arising from the need to amass all the necessary documents for the residence permit application, including securing a passport, which was often a lengthy process. Overall, the process of applying for residency left the young people feeling a lack of control over their lives and futures and with a fear of losing everything or, in Oury’s words, “finish[ing] at zero”.

Um, well yes, you know, I was thinking, fuck, would I ... I was afraid of ... you know, going through a year and a half of struggling and then not
having any papers. I thought, "Wow", and then not having the card, you know?

Ah, on your 18th birthday, you mean?

Exactly. I thought, well no, that's all I had in my mind, "Will it work, nananan?". You see, it's a bit tough too. Imagine spending a year and a half in a residential centre, dealing with people getting on your nerves, issues all the time, fights, and all that, and then it's over, it ends up with zero, you know? That's all I had in my mind (speaks quietly in this paragraph).

While the young people endeavoured to prepare for the future as they approached the age of 18, a large number found themselves facing challenges for which they felt unprepared. Overall, the data strongly suggests that, despite some young people having positive experiences of support in preparing to leave residential care, a majority experienced a lack of care planning. Most were reliant on their personal resources and informal support networks when preparing for the transition out of care. Additionally, several who had been in residential care experienced pressure from social workers to find post-care solutions. Additional pressures were experienced in relation to legal status in that some young people felt the urgency of confirming their status as unaccompanied minors before turning 18. Others experienced a heavy administrative burden associated with their residency application, with the uncertainty of aging-out into a legal void generating high levels of stress, which negatively impacted their mental health. Thus, gaps in services and initiatives aimed at preparing young people for the transition to adulthood were very evident, leaving many seeking solutions largely alone and without access to formal support.

6.4. Care and Housing Ruptures

As discussed in Chapter 3, the youth transitions literature frequently focuses on critical moments and junctures in the lives of young people as they transition to adulthood. The previous chapter documented the care experiences of the study’s young people following their arrival in the Nord and the impact of these experiences on their lives after reaching the age of 18 years. While these care experiences shaped their realities in a variety of ways, the 18th birthday emerged as a critical juncture. The events that unfolded in and/or around the time of the 18th birthday, particularly those related to care and housing, impacted their transition experiences. This section examines young
people’s accounts of (limited) aftercare support and the housing ruptures they experienced at age 18.

6.4.1. Limited aftercare supports

A number of young people reported that there were some State-funded services where they could access help post-care.\(^{126}\) However, while valuing such aftercare services, almost all highlighted the dearth of formal support available after a separated young person turns 18 years.

In terms of the young adult’s contract, ‘EVA’ (Entrée dans la Vie d’Adulte) [Enter into Adult Life], which aimed to prepare young people for the passage to adulthood was available to those living in care and to care leavers aged between 16 and 21 years (Conseil National de la Protection de l’Enfance, 2023) (see Section 1.7.2 for more details). However, only two participants received financial support from the Département under an EVA contract. As demonstrated in Table 6.1, which presents the young people’s legal status and their source of income, a majority did not have a secure income, even when they had secured residency, and many relied on their informal or formal networks for financial support. That being said, three young people were gaining an income through an apprenticeship contract.

Table 6.1 Participants’ sources of income, by their legal status at time of interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Status</th>
<th>Source of Income</th>
<th>Number of Young People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Unemployment Benefit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Permit</td>
<td>Apprenticeship (1), EVA Contract (2)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Worker Permit</td>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency Application Receipt</td>
<td>Informal Support Network (2)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented</td>
<td>Informal Support Network (2), Apprenticeship (1), Informal Work (1)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{126}\) These supports included the EVA allowance, outlined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5, and certain supports were also available to young people who moved into a ‘Foyer Jeune Travailleur’ (FJT) [Young Workers Residence], which provide temporary accommodation (furnished and unfurnished individual units with communal living spaces) to young workers or those doing apprenticeships who are in in precarious situations, who live alone and are aged between 16 and 25 years. Some FJT also are available for students and young people seeking work. The length of stay is one month and can be renewed (Action-Sociale, 2023).
Focus group participants stressed the burden imposed by the frequent renewal system that was necessary to maintain access to the EVA allowance, explaining that this allowance was issued on a three-month basis, after which a new application must be made: “After your initial three-month EVA period is over, you have to apply for a three-month renewal. And after the three-month renewal, you have to apply for a six-month renewal” (Dinoh).

In addition to the challenges associated with the renewal system, there were several constraining conditions in terms of accessing and renewing EVA supports, as highlighted by Oury, who had an EVA contract.

**Ah, it’s [accessing EVA] complicated. It’s necessary, it’s necessary to show your result slips [from school], something that proves you are still in school, that you are good, [that] you want to really study. Otherwise, they can stop it [payment] at any time. And it’s every three months to renew.**

Okay, and is it complicated to renew?

**Hum, yeah, its complicated because they can say, “No, your averages [school results] have fallen or you don’t go anymore or you have blah blah blah” … There are those who feel obliged to study just to get EVA.**

Amadou Camara, who also received the EVA payment, described further challenges related to payment and contract delays, which left him financially reliant on his foster family for several months after his 18th birthday. In 2021, when we met for the follow-up, Oury’s and Amadou’s EVA payments had been terminated because both had secured apprenticeships.

A number of the young people faced additional challenges related to the breakdown of the relationship with their social worker. An undocumented young person, Cedric, who had been allocated the EVA allowance after turning 18 years, explained that to continue to receive the EVA allowance he had to meet a social worker from time to time who “verified that your money arrives”. However, Cedric felt that the social worker was not providing any genuine support to him and, instead, merely wished to monitor his behaviour, also communicating that he was solely responsible for himself.
She said that it was me who was responsible for what I was doing, that for them to give me 350 euros to live on for the whole month, I had to come and see her to keep her informed. I saw it as an obligation, meaning that if I didn't come to see her they would cut off my allowance. But she had already told me the first time we met, "You're responsible for what you do". "So, if I'm responsible [for myself], why do I have to see you?" ... She had told me, "I'm just here to make sure your money comes in" ... Well, I told her, "... What do you want to see me for? To tell you where I sleep?" Basically, I saw it as if it was like I was obliged to do that. Voila, it was as if I wasn't free ... That's how I saw it, as if, in order to receive 350 euros, I had to come and practically beg.

Cedric’s account demonstrates his frustration and confusion, which stemmed from a disconnect between his expectations and those of his social worker. While Cedric expected support, the social worker expected him to be self-reliant and independent and considered that their role was to merely monitor his situation and financial allocation. His account also highlights the risk of relationship breakdown between social workers and young people, who were wholly reliant on financial assistance and, at times, constrained by the requirements imposed on them by formal support systems. In Cedric’s case, after the relationship with his social worker broke down, he lost access to financial supports six months after turning 18 years old, leaving him in a precarious financial situation. This outcome highlights the power dynamic between the young person and the aftercare support systems, where financial assistance depended on meeting specific requirements.

She [the social worker] told me that I am responsible for myself, seeing as she told me that, I said, "If I'm responsible for what I do, I don't see why I should call you anymore". Well, we were up against each other from there. Then she said to me, "Don't forget that it's thanks to me that you'll receive your young person allowance". I said to her, "Well, you're not helping me at all, why is it that thanks to you that I'll receive my allowance?" She said, "Because that's how it is". I said, "Well, that's fine, I don't owe you any explanations so. I don't owe you any information on my life because you've already made it clear that I have to manage it everything all alone". So, we argued again and all, and then they stopped my youth allowance because I told her that.
In Cedric’s case, the rupture in his aftercare supports arose primarily from his perception of the support systems as largely counterproductive, which has led him to challenge his social worker. The aftercare system, from Cedric’s perspective, resulted in setbacks in both his education and his regularisation; he felt distracted from his schoolwork, had no money to pay for food or his transport to school and was therefore forced to steal to survive. He subsequently received a deportation order and was placed in detention for several weeks, finally dropping out of school. During the interview, Cedric explained that he believed that he had no option but to resort to “dangerous situations” to sustain himself financially and felt disregarded by the Child Welfare Services. His account highlights the financial instability and challenges faced by young people who find themselves without aftercare support services that are expected to provide a safety net. Cedric’s experience, which he recounted with underlying tones of frustration, disillusionment, and resignation, suggests that he felt abandoned by the authorities, who he felt were neglecting their responsibilities towards him.

Regarding money, its volunteers, it’s me, its volunteers. I do what I can, I get myself in the shit, I get into dangerous situations but it’s how it is. I think it’s the only option I have. If I had another option, if I had a better option, I would have taken it. But I don’t have a better option, I am obliged to, to do odd jobs. To get by in the shit, as best I can. They know it. They know, they know all of this, but they don’t care, they don’t care anyway.

Who, who doesn’t care?

The, the authorities who are supposed to make sure that integration goes well. I, I had training, I was in the child protection services and now here I am on the streets. It’s a sad reality but it’s true.

For those who did not have access to formal aftercare support, they had to find an income stream from elsewhere. Three of the young people earned an income from an apprenticeship in the construction industry but indicated that they found it challenging to make ends meet. Having an apprenticeship deemed them ineligible for the EVA supports. They were expected to finance all of their everyday needs with the income earned from their apprenticeships.
While supports were theoretically available to young people through Foyer Jeune Travailleur (FJT) (see footnote 126), some, such as Diouma who was living in an FJT, experienced difficulties in accessing certain supports.

_I asked the social workers for that [for support], they told me that you don’t need that because you are with the Département. I asked because, to integrate well, to have assistance as well, all that, but they told me that you work, you don’t need assistance. Thankfully, I had work. Work saved me, it did a lot for me._

NGOs provided some supports but these typically targeted youth under the age of 18 years. Siaka Tanga explained that, despite the importance of having access to support during the transition to adulthood, young people often found themselves navigating numerous processes, procedures and upheavals alone.

_And did you have support during the transition?_

_Well, listen, it decreases, you have but certain supports stop. A lot of organisations help only minors._

Consequently, as the young people aged out of residential care, many reached out to their informal networks, who often provided help or solutions. For example, Dinoh’s employer offered him housing and helped him to move when he turned 18 years. Oury’s friends offered him a temporary place to stay, which he said prevented him from becoming homeless.

Among the four young people who were undocumented at the time of their interview, all but one had no, or very limited, income and were therefore heavily reliant on financial support from NGOs and their informal support networks, including for example their foster family, local community groups or volunteers. Siaka depended on small payments from friends for undertaking odd jobs such as house sitting and on food provided by a local NGO.

_I don’t have money. When I look after their house [friends], they give me money. I don’t ask for it. Sometimes I go to the NGO to ask for_

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127 Coulibaly was in a different situation as he was renewing his permit and therefore continued in his apprenticeship during this time and therefore had an income through his apprenticeship contract.
food. But [name of soup kitchen] is closed for the summer, otherwise there is [name of another NGO] but they don’t provide much. If I don’t have anything to eat, I send a text for help. It’s the people housing us who buy food.

While young people were grateful for any available supports, some like Lasso Doumbia explained that they felt uncomfortable with this level of dependence on their informal support network.

FinancaiLy, well if I need something, I tell them, they [people in his informal support network] give it to me. There’s no problem with that but, for me, it makes me uncomfortable. To always have to, even if you want something, you have to ask someone, you have to. It makes me a bit uneasy. But they still give it to me [what he asks], without saying anything, it’s like, um, (swallows) they give it to me like as if I were their child.

Young people who remained in their foster care placement (whether a voluntary or a formal foster arrangement) did not face the same level of precarity as that experienced by those who lived in a residential care setting. Consequently, the transition period around the time of their 18th birthdays was reasonably fluid because their foster families continued to provide emotional, practical, and housing support, often long after they turned 18 years. These young people did not experience housing precarity and availed of continued support from their foster families. In fact, they tended to depict reaching their 18th birthday as a celebration and a welcome distraction from other challenges, which typically related to their legal status in France.

On the day I turned 18, all those people gathered for me to wish me a happy birthday, and even my school … I even cried (smiles, laughs), I cried and all (smiles), and it was a day that, a day I won’t forget. And it was a good moment for me (emotion in the voice) … It was also a day that helped me forget a bit about, eh, the [administrative] procedures, these days like that also helped me let go a little (Amadou Camara, interview).

Although grateful to their foster families, these young people longed for housing independence. Amadou, for instance, hoped to move out of the home of his foster family once he finished school and secured employment. Mansacchy had also
remained with his foster family after turning 18 and explained that while he was content to live with his foster family, he did not feel ‘at home’. He hoped to move out and become independently housed in the future.

_Ah, oh no it's not necessarily my home. It's, it's … Yeah, it’s, it’s someone’s home._

You think you will stay here for the next few months, one year?

_A few months, but I don’t believe I will stay here for one year. I don’t know, you never know._

When we met in January 2021, Manssachy was actively seeking accommodation but was still living with his foster family.

Overall, at the point of turning 18 years, the formal supports available to young people, particularly for those who were leaving a residential care setting, were extremely limited. As the data presented demonstrates, there was a sharp reduction in, or absence of, formal support, either from State services or NGOs following young people’s legal categorisation as ‘adults’. While the EVA allowance and the FJTs were perceived as valuable by young people, limitations were identified, including the frequent renewal system (EVA), difficulty accessing certain supports in FJTs, and a lack of other (practical or emotional) follow-up supports beyond financial support. While young people who lived in foster care confronted less precarity due to continuity in their care placements, those living in residential settings faced an accelerated transition to adulthood, with ruptures in care often occurring almost immediately or within a few weeks of turning 18 years.

During the member check, conducted in 2021, the financial situations of many of the young people had changed. None were accessing the EVA allowance and six of the ten young people had become financially independent, meaning that they were largely self-sufficient. However, two remained dependent on their foster families for financial support, one was accessing unemployment benefits, and one young person described his financial situation as “complicated”.

6.4.2. Housing ruptures

Particularly among those who had lived in a residential care setting, the transition to adulthood was accelerated since they were almost immediately expected to live
independently in the absence of many of their previous care supports. Some young people were given (albeit very limited) additional time to move out of their care setting and to find a solution to their housing and other needs. Oury, for instance, had his placement extended briefly because he had not secured alternative accommodation by the date of his 18th birthday.

Normally, I should have left the day of my birthday, but seeing as it was the [date of birthday] it’s in the middle of winter and … I called the social assistants and all and they called the residence, the Manager. They told him, “You can’t put this young person out, it is the middle of winter, he hasn’t found a place, you must keep him for the moment”. Eh, so I had applied to everywhere, in the residences that are for 18-year-old young people and all. After they [social workers] gave me seven extra days.

After turning 18, a number of these young people found themselves living in short-term or precarious housing situations, such as staying temporarily with a friend (see Chapter Five for more details). The following journal entry from 7 November 2018 highlights the housing precarity that Cedric faced after he turned 18 years.

Cedric discussed at length the different situations that he has found himself in – living on the street, staying with different girlfriends who threw him out and he had nowhere to go, or who cheated on him, and so on. He told me that he had been in residential care and, when he turned 18, got “thrown out”. He had also experienced homelessness and had stayed in the [makeshift camp] before gaining status as an unaccompanied minor.

Often, young people found temporary housing solutions (such as staying with friends) and, while some lived in precarious situations, all avoided sleeping rough after leaving care. A large number were strongly aware of the looming crisis confronting them at the age of 18 if they could not find a solution, as Ababahadi explained.

After turning 18, if you have been fortunate enough to be well integrated in France, you apply to the prefecture [for a residence permit]. And, if you’re not fortunate enough to have a paper [document], then they’re going to kick you out [of residential care].
And what happens after that? How do you manage if you're out?

You, you go back, onto, onto the street like the others.

Those who lived with friends – essentially in situations of hidden or concealed homelessness – often became quite dependent on their social support networks. For example, Cedric's situation, described in the journal entry above, continued long after he reached the age of 18 years. He continued to rely on friends for housing but, at a moment’s notice, could be asked to leave.

*It's thanks to him [friend] that I joined the house share, so I'm close with him because as time goes by, as the days pass, I see that he and I, eh, he and I are close.*

Ah, okay. Have you been there for a long time?

*I've been there for about 2 or 3 months. Before that, I was with another friend who hosted me, who hosted me at his place in [name of the neighbourhood], so I stayed there for six months.*

Six months. Okay. Was it your choice to leave, or did you want to go somewhere else?

*Ugh, it wasn't, it wasn't my choice to leave, but I think I needed to, to pursue another path. I needed to continue on my journey. My journey wasn't over yet. So, there came a moment, it was a moment when he was done, so he did what needed to be done, he supported me for those six months and all, and then I had to leave. Another person had to take over, you know.*

Young people who were not confirmed as unaccompanied minors by the Département experienced a premature transition to adulthood. This began when their claim for status as unaccompanied minors was rejected, leaving them with few or no care supports and facing housing insecurity or homelessness. These young people were wholly dependent on supports provided by local NGOs, community organisations and/or their social networks. They often had trouble in accessing State emergency accommodation. Siaka Tanga's account provides considerable insight into his struggle to access emergency homelessness accommodation.
I applied for DALO\textsuperscript{128} and was recognised as a priority for emergency accommodation.

So, did you get accommodation through DALO then?

No, they didn’t give it to me … I started calling 115 [the emergency homeless hotline]. I have a lot of call records, more than 200 times. I called every day; they told me there was no space.

How do you feel about all of this?

I feel bad, traumatised. But I have no choice; I’m forced to call every day. When I was a minor, I didn’t have the right to call, but they told me when I turned 18 they would house me, but that has changed. I call, but they tell me there’s no space, there’s no space. Since February, I’m 18 years old, still no space.

As documented in Chapter 5, the majority of the young people had experienced housing precarity, often linked to their care pathways upon arrival. Gaps in formal support meant that young people confronted multiple challenges of access to housing. The absence of a legal guardian also created difficulties in that they could not rely on any person who might be willing to act as a financial guarantor in their search for housing. While, in theory, some housing options, such as FJT [Young Workers Residence], were open to the young people, there were conditions – particularly associated with their legal status – attached to their eligibility for these housing solutions. These effectively excluded a considerable number from even submitting applications to these service structures. Diouma’s situation at age 18 illustrates his exclusion from FJT services, which resulted in his entry into emergency homelessness accommodation.

\textit{When I left the apartment service [where he was housed before 18 years], they placed me in 115 [emergency homelessness accommodation]. In fact, at 18 years old, they sent me to a 115 room.}

\textsuperscript{128} The DALO ‘Droit au Logement Opposable’ [Right to Enforceable Housing] law from 5th March 2007 guarantees the right to housing for anyone who, residing in France in a stable and regular manner, is unable to access suitable housing or maintain themselves in it. There is a related ‘DALO’ procedure to request housing. More information (in French) available at: https://www.nord.gouv.fr/Actions-de-l-Etat/Solidarite-hebergement-logement-politique-de-la-ville-et-renovation-urbaine/Logement/Le-Droit-au-logement-opposable-DALO.
Before [in the residential care centre], I could come in whenever I wanted but when they sent me to 115, an emergency shelter, there, you woke up at 6am, you were obliged to wake up at 6 am, but you couldn’t leave until 8am, 8:20. You had to do sports and cleaning. There, we returned at 6:30pm. We couldn’t go out again; you see, it was like a prison … There were bums, addicts, smokers, so it wasn’t easy. That’s how it was, oh yes. Afterwards, I stayed there for six months, it’s a long time!

Some young people, such as Dinoh, described further constraints in accessing housing even after securing a residence permit. These were associated with limited financial aid, a lack of employment opportunities and the absence of a person who could act as a guarantor.

And so, for you, does the transition end as soon as you have the residence permit?

No, it doesn’t end when you have papers [residence permit]. You can have papers, but you’re 18 years old, you have papers, where will you go? If you don’t have an apprenticeship contract, you can’t go to, you can’t go and rent a place from a private landlord; you need a representative, you need a guarantor, and you don’t have a guarantor, you don’t have anyone. So, you’re 18 years old, but you no longer have a representative, you, you don’t know anyone, and so … [You don’t have] anyone [around you] who wants to be a guarantor, who can be a guarantor, and you can’t rent a place without a guarantor.

During their interviews, many young people, including Ababahadi, described heightened levels of stress and worry as they approached their 18th birthday and these anxieties were strongly related to the question of where they would live after they aged-out of care.

On the day of my 18th birthday, I was too stressed because when I entered the residence centre, I didn’t have the chance to, to take time in the centre. I only spent seven months there. And the day of my birthday, I was really overwhelmed, I was afraid because they often tell us that, “Yeah, we’ll put you out the day of your birthday”, you see? So, eh, it wasn’t good (speaks softly)".
Housing ruptures impacted young people’s access to education, employment and their financial situations. Some, for example, reported that, after turning 18, they had lengthy commutes to their schools and jobs. Bintou encountered numerous challenges, which included meeting her basic needs when she had to relocate to another town where she had no social connections or informal support to rely on.

Yes, it’s because I was in [name of new town], and I was already living in an apartment … And I was no longer being supported by the Département, so I had to cope myself so I could eat and clothe myself and all. And in [name of new town] I already didn’t know anyone …

Overall, housing ruptures had significant negative impacts on young people’s lives, as illustrated in the text of a presentation given by a group of the study’s young people at a local event during Phase 1 of the study.

Turning 18 … It is a period of stress, and a lot of young people get depressed. Many people find themselves homeless. We ask ourselves lots of questions – should we stay on the street or go back to our countries?

While no young person had slept rough after leaving care, their housing situations were often temporary. A considerable number had experienced high levels of precarity, including having lived in stations of hidden homelessness where they did not have housing security. All of the young people were acutely aware of the risks associated with ageing out of care without a housing solution. This in turn to negatively impacted their physical and mental health as well as their ability to engage with education, the labour market and the community more generally.

6.5. Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter demonstrates that the perceived start point of the transition to adulthood had several dimensions; and while age was a clear legal marker, the stress associated with the requirement to regularise their situations began long before the age of 18. This meant that the study’s young people were parachuted towards adulthood at an accelerated rate like that documented by other research on separated youth (Gimeno-Monterde et al., 2021; Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018) and on care leavers more generally (Courtney and Thoburn, 2011; Stein, 2005, 2006a; 2014; Webb et al., 2017).
Despite the perceived relevance of age, specifically the age of 18 years, in denoting the start point of the transition to adulthood, no particular age was perceived as a marker of reaching adulthood. There was, however, strong agreement about the challenges experienced at the juncture of reaching ‘institutional’ adulthood (i.e., 18 years). Notably, ruptures in care provision and formal support, the withdrawal of support, and pressures associated with securing their immigration status negatively impacted the young people’s ability to advance toward adulthood.

In addition to these challenges, the young people’s transition experiences were negatively impacted by the lack or absence of support available to them. This corresponds with some studies that have stressing the importance of continued support after leaving care (Syed and Mitchell, 2013; Söderqvist et al., 2015). Reimagining the journey to adulthood through a lens that captures the challenges experienced by the study’s young people aligns with an emerging body of literature that calls for novel transition frameworks that emphasise continual interdependencies (Wood, 2017) and acknowledge the complexities of young people’s experiences as they transition to adulthood (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014).

Despite the emphasis placed in the literature on the need for formal preparation for the legal transition to adulthood among care-experienced youth (Drammeh, 2010), formal care planning was largely absent for the majority of the study’s young people. Instead, many – particularly those who lived in residential care settings – experienced pressure from social workers to move on and to source alternative accommodation independently. This pressure could be perhaps interpreted, at least in part, as the young people being subjected to a process of individualisation (see Chapter 3) in that the onus to find housing solutions was placed firmly on them. This meant they were responsible if they did not succeed in securing housing post-care.

Consistent with the findings of recent research on separated children (Zijlstra, 2018; Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh, 2015), the importance of continuity of care emerged strongly from the young people’s narratives. As documented, the benefits of continuity in care were experienced by those young people who lived in foster care settings. However, for others, care ruptures and limited formal supports, particularly upon reaching the age of 18 years, negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing (Chase, 2020).

Despite the challenges encountered by young people as they transitioned from care, the findings also highlight their capacity, strengths and proactive attitudes when seeking solutions and attempting to overcome challenges (Omland and Andenas,
2018; Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Sulimani-Aidan, 2016). The following chapter, which examines the everyday lives of the study’s young people beyond 18 years, including the challenges they encountered and their coping strategies, provides further insights into the strategies used by them as they navigated the transition to adulthood.
7. NAVIGATING ‘INSTITUTIONAL’ ADULTHOOD: LIFE BEYOND AGE 18

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter examined the young people’s perspectives on and understandings of the notion or concept of ‘transition to adulthood’ and also documented their experiences of preparing to leave care at the age of 18 years. The ruptures experienced by them – in relation to care and housing – upon reaching ‘institutional’ adulthood were also detailed. Drawing on data from the study’s individual interviews, focus groups, field notes and the observational notes made during Phases 1-4 of the data collection process, this chapter focuses on the young people’s lives after turning 18 years. It starts by charting their daily life experiences, highlighting the day-to-day precarity and liminality that marked their everyday realities. The chapter then examines participants’ experiences of individual, interpersonal and institutional discrimination, which had significant negative impacts on their lives. The chapter concludes with an exploration of how the young people navigated the challenges they confronted, with a particular focus on their coping mechanisms, including their expression and sharing of emotions, the importance of having clear objectives, the role of supportive relationships, and their use of social media for maintaining connections.

7.2. Challenges Confronted in Daily Life

The everyday activities and experiences of the young people varied somewhat depending on their situations, particularly in terms of their legal status and where they resided or had resided before reaching the age of 18 years. In general, residential care leavers’ experiences were different to those young people who had been placed in foster care and those who were not recognised by the authorities as unaccompanied minors before turning 18 years. All young people were very active in terms, for example, of attending school, completing homework, studying, working (in internships, apprenticeships, summer jobs, and so on) or seeking employment. However, as separated youth, they had added tasks that non-migrant or Indigenous care-leaving youth would not normally have to attend to, such as dealing with various administrative procedures associated with making applications for residency, financial assistance (EVA allowance), and/or social housing. Most young people also had to deal with several challenges at the juncture of turning 18 years, many of which were summarised
by Coulibaly, who placed a strong emphasis on the struggle of surviving without secure accommodation or legal status. His narrative paints a poignant picture of the multifaceted nature of challenges that separated youth encountered, demonstrating the harmful impact of broader structural forces on their daily realities.

*Sometimes we find ourselves outside, abandoned, all alone, no friends, no plans, nothing at all. And sometimes, not even a residence permit. And so, there, it’s, eh, a very, very hard life because, eh, firstly, we don’t have financial means. We couldn’t work when we don’t have a residence permit. And how do we survive? So that’s where it gets complicated. Sometimes there are young people who, eh, leave because they think, “I stayed until 18, I didn’t get a residence permit, I got nothing, I can’t do anything”. If you’re in school, sometimes there are young people who can be supported by schools, by, eh, organisations so that they can continue their schooling, their training (takes a breath), but sometimes that’s not enough. The school can help, but not everything. For example, school can help you pay for your tuition. All the textbooks, but it can’t provide you with housing, for example … And sometimes we have friends who live in homeless settings but who still go to school every morning. And that’s something very, very difficult as well. You wake up in the morning, sometimes you haven’t slept well, you’re tired.*

While the situations of a small number of young people remained relatively constant or unchanged, most described changes concerning many aspects of their daily lives between Phases 3 (2019) and 4 (2021) of the study. These young people often described longer days at school and/or work, changes in their work and/or study routines, and positive changes in their housing situations (see Chapter 5 for details), and typically feeling more content about their situations.

*I feel very good, happy with my situation. There has been a lot of evolution (Amadou Camara, Member check survey, 15 January 2021).*

During the member check, the young people also discussed the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives, with some describing greater social isolation because of pandemic-related restrictions and “not investing a lot in social relations” (Dinoh, member check survey 10 January 2021). The following journal entries from member checks with Coulibaly and Diouma during Phase 4 describe the interruption
that the pandemic had on their recreational, social and leisure activities. For example, the ability to participate in collaborative activities, as well as changes to their daily routines. Despite this, both young people used adaptive coping strategies, with Coulibaly continuing to play music, albeit alone, and Diouma focusing on work.

_Coulibaly said he has continued to play music but not with others anymore, particularly due to COVID restrictions (Coulibaly, Journal on member check, 15 January 2021)._ 

_Diouma explained that since the beginning of the pandemic, his life is very calm, mainly taken up with work and not much else. He said that he misses sports because the gyms are closed (Diouma, Journal on member check, 9 January 2021)._ 

On the other hand, Oury, who was living in a Foyer des Jeunes Travailleurs [Young Workers Residence], explained that there had been continued opportunities for social interaction in the centre during the COVID-19 lockdowns and was grateful to have resided there for that reason. Other pandemic-related issues were also raised during the member check, including difficulties in securing and renewing employment contracts, delays in administrative processes, and challenges with finding housing. On the other hand, some young people had their residence permits renewed automatically during the pandemic and, therefore, enjoyed greater stability compared to earlier Phases of the research.

Overall, the young people placed a strong emphasis on the importance of education and employment, often discussing the benefits of going to school or work because participation provided them with future opportunities, fostered a sense of belonging and integration into French society, and supported them to achieve personal and professional goals (Vidal de Haymes, et al., 2018; Bitzi and Landolt, 2017; Miller, 2013). Nevertheless, most faced challenges related to work and school, often associated with long commutes and/or lengthy working hours. Ababahadi, for example, was expected to work very long hours in his previous apprenticeship, which he described as exploitative, stating that “sometimes they treat me like a monkey, a slave”. He continued:

_Because today, the bosses, they benefit from our situations, just for exploiting us, making us work … For example, if we sign a contract of 35 hours per week and they work us 70 hours per week. So, eh, its_
catastrophic, it’s a lot. Before, I did 66 hours per week. They didn’t pay, that is why I stopped.

Ababahadi’s narrative illustrates the kinds of power imbalances that many of the young people experienced in their everyday interactions with employers and others. This power imbalance meant that Ababahadi was vulnerable to exploitation and unfair treatment. His decision to cease employment might be viewed as a display of resistance linked to a felt need on his part to assert his rights. Other challenges, which are explored in the following subsection, were associated with the precarity of the young people’s everyday situations, which also impacted their schooling, employment situations, housing and recreational activities.

7.2.1. Everyday precarity and liminality

Throughout the data collection process, the everyday precarity and uncertainty of the young people’s lives – frequently linked to complex bureaucratic processes and procedures – became increasingly apparent. For example, as the study unfolded, most of the young people moved into and out of different residency statuses, often waiting for lengthy periods to receive their residence permits, while a number were undocumented at one time or another. Administrative procedures impacted almost all aspects of their lives and the officials overseeing these procedures essentially acted as ‘gatekeepers’ in that they determined young people’s access to employment, education and housing, and their ability to engage in social and leisure activities. Some depicted their experiences of these ‘daily hassles’ as producing a mix of extreme highs and lows, which negatively affected their mental health, supporting findings documented in previous studies that have documented the mental health difficulties experienced by unaccompanied minors (for example, Keles et al., 2017; see Chapter 2). This experience of life as in a constant state of flux is exemplified in the following account by Cedric.

At the moment, my everyday life, I can say that, eh, it is on a bridge. That’s to say that it goes up, it goes down. It goes up, it goes down. Already I am searching for a job, it isn’t working. Secondly, my situation, my administrative situation is not completely finished so I find myself between the prefecture and all that. So, that is my life. It goes up, it goes down. It is like a rope.
Echoing the findings of earlier research highlighting the challenges stemming from the uncertain legal status of unaccompanied minors (Chase, 2020; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017), the often-lengthy administrative processes, particularly those associated with residency applications, forced many of the study’s young people into a period of liminality or ‘waithood’ as they anticipated a decision on their residence status. During this time, the young people did not feel that they had control over their lives and, for a number, a negative decision ushered a period of greater precarity and crisis, in that they were categorised as ‘undeserving’, became increasingly marginalised, and lost their entitlements to a range of rights, such as access to education, employment and formal supports. These moments of ‘waithood’ persisted for several weeks or months and, in some cases, endured for years. As told by Dinoh, ‘waithood’ was difficult to manage because of the uncertainty of now knowing what lay ahead, demonstrating his limited control over the present, much less the future.

And how were the experiences of all these procedures? Was it difficult, was it easy to handle?

It was difficult to handle, too stressful. Too stressful ... You think about one thing for several years, it hurts, you know. You have to think about it all the time and when there are appointments, you don't know how it's going to go ... How it's going to happen, what they're going to tell you, so, you, you keep asking yourself questions every night ... You apply for the residence permit, and you wonder, "How are they going to respond to me? Positive? Negative? Will they ask me for other documents that I can't obtain?". You just can't stop thinking about it, you know.

This structural power of institutions had a far-reaching impact on the young people’s access to certain rights. Exclusion from the labour market, for example, was common during this period of waithood as many found themselves struggling to secure employment because of issues and setbacks related to their residence permits, including long waits, rejections, or residence permits being granted without authorisation to work. Siaka Tanga explained during his interview that he had been refused his permit and was waiting for a further response from the prefecture. As a consequence, although he had received a job offer, he could not take up employment.
I'm waiting for the response from the prefecture, and if not [received], on Saturday, I'm going to [name of an NGO] if there isn't [a response]. I had a job offer, but I can't sign it. If it doesn't work, you're stuck ... I feel a bit sad because I applied for my residence permit, and they refused me. It's sad how they treat people; they don't want to give me a permit. I'm a bit sad about that. Normally, if I had signed my contract, I wouldn't have needed [State] assistance. I'm in the shit ... It's complicated all this.

These young people often struggled to survive and were essentially stuck in a period of imposed 'waithood', during which they had limited financial means and were at the mercy of administrative decision-makers. A small number who had not secured legal status in France were deemed ‘undeserving’ and risked deportation, which in turn exacerbated their feelings of marginalisation and exclusion and hindered their employment opportunities. For example, Cedric, who lived through an extended period of ‘waithood’ related to ongoing regularisation challenges, which forced him to survive by working in informal “small jobs”, described the negative impact that receiving a deportation order had on his ability to access the labour market. In this account, deportation orders, which can be considered a display of structural power, can be seen to shape Cedric's choices and behaviours in that he appears to have internalised discourses of exclusion and undesirability. This is evident in his reference to the potential for youth in his situation to become involved in illegal activity to survive. Cedric does not specifically mention the working conditions in informal work. However, it is reasonable to suggest that structural barriers to legal employment may also leave separated young people more vulnerable to exploitation in informal or ‘shadow’ economies.

I underwent training, I have a diploma. And then, I applied to many places ... But honestly when you explain your situation and all to an employer ... I applied when I had the OQTF [Order to Leave French Territory, deportation order]. I wasn't regularised, I had nothing, but when you explain your situation to an employer, they, they get worried. They wonder what's going to happen with you. For them, it's as if you, you must bring in problems today and tomorrow ... If you let them roam the streets, they learn a lot of things. Later, you'll say, "Yeah, it's always the same people doing this". Well, what do you expect them to do when they're on the streets? That's how it is. If you take a guy who
has just arrived and presents himself to you, you regularise him, you put him in training. I think that when he completes the training, he gets up in the morning, goes to training, and then goes to work. But if you leave him on the streets for two, three, five years, well, the streets will have taught him a lot of things. Then, don't come and complain that he's lazy.

And you mentioned that people learn a lot on the streets. Have you learned a lot of things yourself?

Yes, I've learned a lot of things on the street, eh. I've learned to slack off, I've learned to hide from the police, I've learned, I've picked up so many things. I've learned a lot of things.

Bintou, whose situation was less precarious, was nonetheless negatively impacted by prolonged delays and had waited for one year for her residence permit to be issued, with only a residency application receipt of temporary work granted during this time. However, this residency application receipt stated that she was not authorised to work. This had a significant impact on her ability to manage on a daily basis and she wondered, “How am I supposed to survive? How am I supposed to live?”. These long waits for and rejections of residence permits also impacted young people’s entitlements to social protection benefits and supports such as ‘Universal Complementary Health Coverage’ [La ‘Complémentaire Santé Solidaire’ (previously the CMU-C)], or benefits under CAF (Family Allowance Funds) (for example, the housing aid (Aide au Logement (APL)) and the ‘Active Youth Solidarity Allowance’ (RSA Jeune Actif)). Dinoh explained the importance of residency because, without it, there was limited access to many services and supports.

The CAF, with all types of residence permits, you can get it.

And can you get it with a residence permit receipt?

129 This ‘récépissé’ [residency application receipt] described in Footnote 113.
130 Those however who had not secured residency, under certain conditions were entitled to State Medical Aid (Aide Médicale de l’État, AME). More information available on the health supports (in French) at: https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/cmu-c-acs-css and https://www.complementaire-sante-solidaire.gouv.fr/.
132 More information available in French at: https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F286/personnalisation/resultat?lang=andquest0=0andquest1=1andquest2=0andquest3=0andquest
No, a receipt doesn’t work. You need to have the residence permit, your card. If you don't have your card, you don't have it. If you have a residence permit, you have rights.

Additionally, for some, access to education was impacted by the uncertainty of their residence status. The irregular status of Siaka Tanga, for example, led to job loss and his exclusion from education. Siaka Tanga’s experience points to the systemic forces that can create exclusion for those in an irregular situation. This highlights the interconnectedness of, and intersections between, the structural challenges that separated young people encounter. Viewed through the lens of structural power, these experiences also demonstrate that legal, educational, and economic structures intersect and contribute to the reinforcement of inequality since those who secure legal status have better opportunities of access to education and employment.

Overall, uncertain legal status, whether related to long waits or residency application refusals, created further precarity as well as barriers to integration for many of the study’s young people. It particularly restricted their labour market participation and access to education and also negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing.

7.2.2. Experiences of discrimination and injustice

During their interview, nine of the 12 research participants reported experiences of discrimination in a range of settings, including in healthcare settings, the workplace, school and in the prefecture. Reports of discrimination fell into two main categories: first, discrimination experienced in the context of their interactions with people in everyday life (interpersonal discrimination/racism) and, second, discrimination experienced when interacting with institutional structures (institutional discrimination/racism).

Three young people discussed racist and/or prejudicial comments made by individuals about them in their everyday social interactions in a range of contexts, including in school, the workplace and in their everyday encounters with strangers. For example, SMD described negative perceptions of Africans that he had overheard such as, “They are Africans who just arrived, they don’t even wash themselves”. Ababahadi told of experiences of discrimination in the workplace, which he said was “because of the difference in skin [colour]”. He felt that discrimination led separated young people having to work in exploitative, substandard working conditions. For some young people, discrimination was ongoing. However, perceived past injustices and
discrimination related, for example, to lengthy and complex administrative procedures, remained painful memories for several young people and impacted their ongoing perceptions of these structures. Past experiences of perceived discrimination by institutional structures led to enduring feelings of being judged, being considered ‘different’ or feeling that their perspectives and situations were not recognised. These experiences are suggested to align with Fricker’s (2007) conceptualisation of epistemic injustice. First, the sense of judgement and ‘otherness’ that they experienced are arguably consistent with notions of testimonial injustice in that, if perceived as ‘outsiders’ and non-conforming, their perspectives and potential contributions may be discounted. This in turn risks further marginalisation. Second, their feelings of not being recognised or validated, which stemmed from previous experiences of discrimination within institutional structures, may prevent them from fully expressing themselves or having their perspectives and experiences included in broader discourses. This is suggested to link closely to conceptualisations of hermeneutical injustice.

A number of young people reported continued discrimination in their interactions with administrative processes after they turned 18 years. Cedric, for instance, experienced discrimination in the prefecture when an error was made on his residence permit. To resolve the error, he was told to bring new passport photographs, despite the prefecture already having several of his photographs on file. When Cedric refused to leave until they corrected the error and explained that he could not afford to pay for additional photographs (as he had no source of income), a staff member suggested to him that he “go and beg”. Micro-power interactions such as these reinforced the structural power imbalances embedded within the administrative procedures charged with processing young people’s residency applications. In Cedric’s case, this incident, which occurred during Phase 2 of the research and he revisited repeatedly during our meetings, had a particularly negative impact as demonstrated in the following excerpt from his interview.

I have a thing that marked me so much (he taps the table with his fingers), that left me with a mark (he taps the table with his fingers), that shocked me (he taps the table with his fingers) … This perturbed me, all this. Me, I believed [before], I don’t believe in anything anymore. I believe in no values. There are no values. There are no more. No, no, no I don’t believe in that anymore. Me, you respect me, I respect you. You don’t respect me; I don’t respect you. That’s me, it is like that. Voila. You respect, me I respect you. You don’t respect me,
there is no value, I don’t believe in anything, nothing at all … Frankly, for me, it’s eh, for me, I understood what she [the staff member he encountered at the prefecture] was hiding. Because it is nice and all, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”, it is beautiful words. But when you know that you aren’t equal, there is no liberty, there is not all of that and we make you believe that on posters and all but … voila what. For me, I understood what is hidden.

Others also described experiences of discrimination and prejudice as impacting their worldview and wellbeing, as well as their perceptions of French society. Manssachy, for example, described the fear that separated young people frequently have of “white people”, which he linked to the negative perceptions that ‘white people’ have of immigrants.

_Bah us, we are afraid, in the camp all the time we hear, “Immigrant or eh shouting [at us]”. In fact, we are afraid of the white people._

Perceived injustices were also found to impact some young people’s outlook and attitudes. For instance, an observable shift in the perspective and mindset of Siaka Tanga emerged between his Phase 3 interview and the Phase 4-member check. During his interview in June 2019, despite having confronted a myriad of challenges related to housing and the regularisation of his legal status, Siaka Tanga was excited about the future and about life in general, describing his school- and work-related aspirations and expressing enthusiasm about his imagined life in France.

_I've been here for two years. I didn't know how to read or write. This year, if I succeed, I'll have three diplomas! This year, I took this diploma (shows Diplôme d'études en langue française’ (DELF) diploma). Next year, I'll have four – the CAP, DELF B1 (shows it again). That's four in total – two professional and two in French. Next year, I'll tackle this – (shows the photo of the BAC Pro diploma). With the CAP in [my home country], I can even open a [name of business]! Even in France, I will be able to apply for citizenship. July 2nd is the_

133 ‘Diplôme d'études en langue française’ (DELF) is an internationally recognised French language proficiency certification awarded by the French Ministry of Education. The DELF exams assess a person's language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and they are available at various proficiency levels, from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient). More information available at: https://www.france-education-international.fr/en/diplome/delf-tout-public?langue=en
CAP results day. If I pass, I’m going to celebrate! For two years, I’ve suffered; I’ve slept outside, and I’ve eaten poorly. With the diploma, I’m going to celebrate! I’ll be happy because I’ll have a diploma. I never imagined it … When I could go to school, I worked. I attended two high schools [at the same time] – I got two diplomas. I got A2 [result, level of French language acquired]; I couldn't have imagined it! If I get B1 [next highest French language level], I'll jump for joy (very excited and happy, jumping in his seat). Right now, I have a lot of problems, but with this, I’ll be happy. I never had the chance to go to school ... I don't know if I'll succeed or not, but I have two [diplomas] (happy, jumping off and on his seat, laughing) … It's a big year for me.

However, during the member check in January 2021, it quickly became apparent that his outlook had changed quite radically. Due to structural constraints, which he framed as injustices, and having lost his employment and access to education, Siaka Tanga appeared to have lost hope and resigned to the fact that his situation would not improve despite his earlier relentless attempts to move forward. His anger and loss of hope, as illustrated in the following journal entry, are important reminders of the profound impact of injustices on the psychological wellbeing of separated young people.

Although Siaka Tanga met all the conditions necessary for a residence permit and, despite the court of appeal ordering his regularisation, the prefecture refused for a second time and he must now begin a second appeal process. When he talked about his situation, he was clearly distressed and angry - quivering, raising his voice, which broke on occasion, and making strong hand gestures. He explained that he did not understand the constant refusal of his application for residency and felt that the prefecture was looking for reasons to refuse granting him legal status, saying: “They’re hunting me out, they’re giving me a hard time”. His anger seemed rooted in the perceived injustice of the situation, and his diminishing sense of hope. After being in France for more than four years, he explained that he cannot envision how, even with a residence permit, things will improve; that even if he is granted the permit, his struggles will continue. Siaka Tanga blamed the French administrative structures and systems, explaining that they have done
nothing but create obstacles in his life, blocking him from progressing.

(Journal entry from member check, 10th January 2021).

The shift in Siaka Tanga’s attitude suggested a “diminished and powerless identity laid on [him]” where he “exhibited withdrawal from the agentic behavior of aiming to make a change in [his life]” (Korkiamäki and Gilligan, 2020, p. 5). The anger, distress and frustration expressed by him was mirrored in the account of another young person. Throughout the data collection process, Cedric sometimes openly expressed anger and was resistant to authority figures and government structures, which he felt were “against him”. He reiterated these feelings during the member check.

*Cedric discussed the institutional structures, such as the prefecture, and how everything is done by these structures to make life as difficult as possible for separated young people. He felt that while in France, he would never be considered ... He also described how the various administrative systems block separated young people; stating that no matter what their legal status, even if naturalised, for instance, they will never be considered the in the same way as other young people or fully accepted. (Journal entry from member check, 13th January 2021).*

A clear shift was evident in Cedric’s outlook over the course of the study. His anger and resistance stemmed from what he perceived as systemic bias or prejudice against him, which he believed undermined his credibility and sense of identity. His belief that he will never be fully accepted highlights a testimonial injustice in that his perspectives and experiences were not afforded due recognition or consideration, leading him to experience a deep sense of exclusion. His observation that, irrespective of their legal status, separated young people will not be considered the same or fully accepted in French society, points to a hermeneutical gap that perpetuates a sense of otherness. This is linked to a failure within administrative systems to recognise the diverse experiences and identities of separated youth. The attitudinal and emotional shifts described by Siaka Tanga and Cedric point strongly to the potential detrimental impacts that perceived injustices of structural power can have on separated young people. These impacts extend far beyond the various effects on their daily lives or even their futures and also penetrate their attitudes, outlook and behaviours. These findings mirror some of the results of Wernesjö’s (2020) Swedish study of unaccompanied youth, which suggest that discourses and negative categorisations shape the lives of unaccompanied young people and their ability to exert agency.
Other young people reacted differently to experiences of discrimination and injustice, with some demonstrating resistance to such encounters. For example, on the one hand, Bintou described accepting discriminatory behaviour as part of “everyday life”: “We take that upon ourselves, you know, we accept it (discrimination) like that. I, for sure, have been a victim of it but that's how it is, we take it upon ourselves and just accept it. It's everyday life”. Here, a normalisation of discrimination is evident in that the discriminatory encounters are so common that they are viewed as part and parcel of everyday life. However, although stating that she “accepts” discrimination, Bintou had also taken concrete, deliberate action to stand up and defend herself. She demonstrates agency through resistance in an attempt to counter discriminatory behaviour. Bintou told that, on one occasion, a staff member in a healthcare setting spoke to her with intolerance because she missed an appointment the previous day. Bintou's response resulted in the staff member apologising and offering her money to cover her transport costs.

I showed her my scar, I told her, “I am here, not because it is easy here but because I really want to study. Maybe I could be a nurse, I could be a doctor, I could be an intellectual one day. But I am living a life that I myself didn't choose”. I said, “So if I didn't come (to the appointment) it is because I couldn't. I had to pay five euros, if I don't pay five euros, I will get a fine of 50 euros. Where will I get 50 euros to pay a fine? I really can't I am sorry”. [The woman replied:] “I am sorry, I didn't know it was like that”. I said, “Of course before judging you must know”.

Bintou's oscillation between acceptance and resistance reflects the challenges she encountered in navigating a range of power dynamics. Her acceptance could be suggested to have stemmed from her recognition of structural inequalities and her active resistance was perhaps a refusal to be subjugated by discriminatory practices.

Many of the young people encountered perceived injustices and discrimination, whether on a personal or institutional level. These experiences were observed to have varying, yet predominantly negative, effects on their psychological wellbeing, sense of belonging in society and on their broader view of the world. Their experiences are suggested to align closely with Foucault's conceptualisations of power in that both the structural and the microphysics of power arguably had a visible impact on their lives. Here, the ripple effect of certain micro-interactions is clearly important in understanding the far reach of ‘power over’ the young people. To a considerable extent, the notion of
epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) captures the discrimination and perceived injustices experienced by the study’s young people, which in turn fuelled feelings of powerlessness. Despite this, a considerable number of examples provided by the participants demonstrated their resistance to such power plays and their strong attempts to counter discrimination.

7.3. Coping and Support during Difficult Times

The findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated that before turning 18 years and as they reached ‘institutional adulthood’, the young people typically confronted extended periods of stress and uncertainty. The previous sections in this chapter also discuss some of the difficulties encountered by separated young people after the age of 18, again demonstrating the impact of structural constraints, such as those related to legal status, on their lives. Consistent with the findings of previous research on unaccompanied youth (DeMott et al., 2017; Sarkadi et al., 2018; Seglem, et al., 2014; Smid, et al., 2011), the difficulties encountered by this study’s young people during the transition to adulthood negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing. Several described a range of mental health issues, including bouts or periods of depression, which stemmed from stress and worry. Ababahadi described “mental struggles”, which he attributed to new hardships, the absence of family support, isolation, and the fact that he was homeless.

Illness here, for Africans, is their mental health (speaking slowly). Because when you’re stressed, you will become mentally unwell. Someone who's stressed is not in the right state of mind. There will be mental health issues, and there are depressions that push them to fall ill each time. Because, in my home country, those who are there, I can say that they have never spent a night outside; they live with their parents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. Even if the parents aren’t alive, they have a family [there] every day. So, if things aren't going well on one side, you can go to your uncle’s place for a meal. Now, when you arrive in Europe, in Europe, it's every man for himself, and God for all. So, if I don't know you, I'm not interested. It's not my problem. Yeah, you understand, right? So, they find themselves homeless, and that’s where, you know, it's related to... mental issues.

I see. And you? Have you experienced suffering in this regard?
Well, I've had mental struggles. I've been to the hospital several times because of it. I've had depression, em, all of that. I've gone through the same things as others ... Because I often had crisis episodes ... when I had depression. Because, for me, my life, as I explained to you, I had never experienced suffering in my life. So, here I am, eh ... homeless. And I find myself in a tough situation. I fell ill. Whenever I close my eyes, I see my past. So, um, that's it (serious tone, speaking softly).

Despite the mental health challenges experienced by a majority, they demonstrated purposeful agency as well as strength and resilience in the face of the adversities they encountered (Carlson, et al., 2012; Korkiamäki and Gilligan, 2020; Lekkai, 2020). As the findings presented in the following section highlight, the young people were not passive actors but, rather, actively fought for their survival, demonstrating the capacity to develop resilience and coping mechanisms (Omland and Andenas, 2018; Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Vervliet, et al., 2015).

7.3.1. Keeping busy and (not) expressing difficult emotions

As the young people progressed beyond the age of 18 years, most became increasingly busy with personal, administrative, social, educational and economic activities. The following Journal entry noted that although they were aware of the importance of being involved in activities that would support their integration in France, they found this difficult because of the need to balance a greater number of responsibilities and challenges post-18 years with other aspects of their personal lives such as meeting social and personal obligations.

The young people are always very busy with one thing or another and this busyness has become more apparent since they turned 18. Most told me that, prior to turning 18 they had tried to make the time to be involved in activities that could potentially support their integration. However, they explained that as they transitioned to adulthood life has become busier as they endeavour to navigate a range of administrative processes, manage their school and/or work situations, often studying or working late into the evenings, while also trying to maintain their friendships, living situations, and so on. (Journal entry, 27th January 2019).
Despite the pressures of negotiating various demands, remaining active and involved was a priority for the young people who, in addition to work and school, enthusiastically participated in a range of leisure activities typical of youth of a similar age, including sports, reading, listening to music, socialising, watching movies, playing video games, and spending time with friends and peers (as illustrated in Image 10.1, for example) and intimate partners. Keeping busy can serve as an important coping mechanism and was perceived by participants as important in helping to mitigate stress and as providing support networks and purposeful ways of spending time (Sirriyeh, 2018). Coulibaly, for example, described the importance of finding a love for something or someone when seeking to cope with and overcome life’s challenges.

*On arriving here, I realised that, in fact, I used to think that, um ... loving each other was either your parents, and maybe you could have a girlfriend whom you like ... But, as it turns out, I've had a breakthrough. I've met many people with whom we love each other so much. It's love, that's all there is to it. It's love that you have for anyone or anything, it can be alcohol, it can be music, it can be nature, it can be friends. It's something that makes us ... live, that allows us to be happy in life. When you're with people you like or things you like, you say, “Wow”, you don't think about the bad things, you don't think about what's impossible, you don't think about negative things.*

**Image 7.1 Some of the young people hanging out and playing table football together**

Many of the young people also volunteered in various community and/or migrant-led groups that advocated for migrant rights and/or participated in gardening and sports clubs and were strongly invested and passionate about these activities. Often enthusiastically describing their roles in these groups as giving them a sense of
purpose, which in turn fostered resilience and self-determination, these roles also provided valued integration opportunities by, for example, allowing to spend time with locals. During interview, Dinoh described the personal benefits of his involvement in volunteering.

*Well, I work, I go to school, and I play soccer. And I write. I write, and I'm also involved in community life. Well, not, not on a regular basis, but I go to certain organisations, to, well, to spend time, to, in any case, to avoid just staying idle. These are organisations that help migrants and I've been through that. So, that's the reason that motivated me to get involved with these organisations.*

As mentioned in Dinoh’s account, the young people’s leisure activities supported them to avoid idleness and boredom. In this sense, purposeful involvement in activities provided much-needed distraction from the challenges they faced while also bolstering their coping strategies. Ababahadi explained his perspective on the importance of such coping mechanisms in protecting against boredom, which he felt can contribute to poor mental health.

*In life, it's patience. In life … it's, it's courage. So, if there's something bothering you, something that's pushing you into depression, pick up a book … or if you have a sweetheart, give her a call, talk about your future together. And engage in activities that occupy your mind with how you'll see your future tomorrow. Or, if you have friends, go play sports, football, table tennis, badminton, all that. You understand? Because when you're alone, you'll get bored. When you get bored, you'll get depressed. If you're feeling depressed, well, you need to go do sports or something that helps you forget your thoughts.*

Several others discussed the importance of such distractions in providing relief from, or moving past, challenging circumstances. Coulibaly, for instance, was proactively involved in a number of activities that helped to distract him from feeling isolated and alone.

*Whenever I'm alone, I tell myself, “No, I'm not doing well, I need to find friends, I need to do something”. Actually, I really avoid being alone. Any proposals for activities etc. that I could have, as soon as I'm available and have free time, I participate. That's how I could make*
new acquaintances, that's how I could pass the time without realising it, that's how I made it to the finish line of obtaining a residence permit ... But it wasn't easy, it wasn't easy.

Others described distractions as their main coping mechanism; used, in Cedric’s words, as a way to “defend myself”.

When don't I feel well? Honestly, what I do is, I see friends, I make music, that's it. I see friends, I listen to music, and then I try not to think about it. Even though, at times, it lingers and all, but I struggle against it too. That's how I defend myself.

Others, however, preferred to find ways to express their emotions and feelings. For example, a number had become involved in creative activities such as drawing and painting (see Image 10.2 of a young person’s drawing of one of his attempts at crossing the Mediterranean Sea), drama clubs and writing groups, where they found ways to express themselves and share past experiences, including their journeys to France. Writing helped Dinoh to deal with several emotions, including upset and feeling “deeply touched”, while simultaneously helping him “to vent, to unburden myself”.

When things aren't going well ... I write (soft laugh). When I'm upset, I write. When I'm touched deeply, I write. To relax, to vent, to unburden myself.

Image 7.2 Example of a young person’s drawing illustrating his third attempt at crossing the Mediterranean Sea
Consistent with previous European-based research on unaccompanied children and young people (Dybadahl et al., 2021; Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010), prayer was described by some as an important conduit for emotional expression and coping. Indeed, spirituality was found to occupy an important place in the everyday lives of many of the young people. For Diouma, like other Muslim youth, prayer was an integrated part of his daily routine.

**What do you do to overcome difficult moments?**

*I pray, ah yes, it helps me … It takes away stress, I am always okay [after], I forget the bad stuff, it eases my heart, it’s settling. I can think about other things to find my way and keep moving forward.*

Religious beliefs and practices also supported some young people, particularly during difficult periods. For Oury, being a Muslim embodied gratitude and the belief that everything happens for a reason.

*I have beliefs, eh, in our culture, we are, we are told that everything that happens to you has a reason, you know. We say that you thank God for every little thing. You thank God because it could have been worse. You, you could cry because you lost your phone or your, your car got stolen, and you imagine that others are crying because they lost their son or something even more precious, you see … I grew up like this. We may not all have the same way of seeing things but, in our culture, whatever happens to you, everything that happens to you, you’re told to "Rejoice and tell yourself that it could have been worse", you see. So, eh … I believe on this side, it's about religion.*

Like Oury, many others articulated a positive outlook, though not necessarily related to a particular religion or culture. These accounts demonstrate remarkable resilience during times of hardship, an ability to stay focused on their objectives, and their hope that difficult times would pass and that things would eventually change. Diouma, for instance, felt it was important to focus on aspects of life – such education – that were within his control and “can make things progress”.

*If you are struggling, you think a lot, you find solutions. It depends on your courage and motivation, what you want to do.*
7.3.2. Aspirations and ‘imagined futures’

The study’s young people exhibited a strong sense of agency, indicating that they had the ‘power to’ shape their lives and the “ability to imagine alternative possibilities and critically reflect and evaluate individual habits based on current circumstances” (Smith, 2017 p. 158), with the aspirations articulated by them revealing their ability to reconstruct and reimagine life’s meaning and meanings in their own lives. Most stressed the importance of having an objective or goal in life; something to work towards for the future. The young people often articulated their hopes and dreams for their ‘imagined futures’ (Smith, 2017) as well as their conscious and deliberate efforts to strive towards the achievement of these goals.

While the hopes and aspirations described by the young people were diverse and often multi-layered, they were typically associated with a desire to become autonomous; wanting to continue and complete further study (such as a BTS, a Baccalaureate or third-level studies), find a job, and become financially self-sufficient and independent, for example, or setting up their own business or renting a home without any supports. Some aspired to have a family and children, which did transpire for a number after data collection ended, with one young person becoming a father, a second due to become a father and a third getting engaged to be married. The three quotes below from Diouma, Oury and SMD describe their hopes and aspirations for the future, which are within a spectrum of what is routinely considered to be ‘normal’ or ‘typical’.

I want to do many things, it’s difficult at first, but it depends a lot on money. I would like to have my own business (Diouma, interview).

Well, first, I want to get my Bac. Then, a good job, have a, um, normal life, filled with happiness (Oury, interview).

In my life, I prefer to get a good job, so after that, I’ll get married, stay in France, work very well. I’ll invite my mother and send for her to come see me. Finally, I’ll travel there and see how my mother is. As for my life, I prefer to work well and then stay at home with my wife and child. We’ll go out, do things ... I want a calm life ... holidays ... We’ll

134 Following the study, as of March 2023, three young people were fathers, and two young people had been married (traditional marriage, rather than legal). Please note that information was not available on all young people.

135 ‘Bac’ refers to the Baccalauréat, a national examination and diploma that French students take at the end of their secondary education.
stay at a hotel, go to the beach, explore the city, take pictures, and then when I return, my child will go to school, my wife, she'll go to work, and I'll go back to work. I'll stay at home in the evenings, I'll have contact with my friends and my mother, my family. We'll get in touch through the internet, tac tac tac. (SMD, interview).

Supporting previous literature on the role of schools and the education system in supporting separated youth (Vidal de Haymes, et al., 2018), the young people, 10 in total, who were attending school or employed (typically in apprenticeships), considered education and employment to be of critical importance. They felt that it provided them with crucial future opportunities and hope for the future, as well as enabling them to achieve personal and professional goals such as succeeding in their Baccalaureate and supporting their integration into French society. Aligning with previous research on young refugees, which has demonstrated their strong motivation and positive future expectations despite the challenges they encounter (Lynnebakke and Pastoor, 2020), education was perceived by this study’s young people as providing them with a daily purpose and a sense of future direction as they navigated the transition to adulthood. Several described the educational achievements – good grades, the award of diplomas or being top in the class – to which they aspired. Very often they explained these alongside the myriad of challenges that could negatively impact such achievements.

Many of the young people demonstrated an unwavering focus on their dreams, often sacrificing activities such as going out with friends or having an intimate relationship in order to progress their goals. Even when unexpected setbacks came their way, many demonstrated the ability to critically reflect on their situations and worked hard to adapt; often seeking alternative ways to move forward, even when confronted with structural constraints (Chase, 2020). Bintou’s account demonstrates strong agency, resolve and determination in terms of achieving her objectives and goals.

I already have a specific objective; I have a purpose. I have (takes a deep breath) many things to accomplish. I have a dream that I want to make a reality, and I tell myself that I really can't let it slip away ... I'm here to study; that's why I give it my all. I've sacrificed everything to study and I will study and I will complete my master's degree. I will become an intellectual in France or else in my home country, that's

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136 The French Baccalaureate (often referred to simply as the "bac") is the national secondary school diploma and the end-of-school exam in France.
what I dream of … I'm trying to, well, I'm not perfect, but I'm trying to make the give the maximum of myself. So that, that my dreams come true. Even if not all of my dreams come true, at least some of them.

Others similarly described “being serious” and focused on their goals as central to achieving their personal objectives and, like Ababahadi, acknowledged the educational opportunities they had been able to avail of since arriving in France. Ababahadi’s account also describes symbiotic interaction between the State structures and his performance in school: since he can access school, he feels the need to make an effort and perform well.

There are sayings in our culture when we talk about washing your back, you also wash your stomach. It means that if the State helps you go to school, you need to be serious. So, it's your right to go to school and make an effort, that's it … Because in France, even if you're the smartest person in the world, if you don't make an effort, you'll always be left behind by others. So, make the extra effort. And refrain from doing anything reckless. Be serious and stay serious.

Relatedly, as young people articulated their personal goals, they also demonstrated an awareness of the importance of these goals – and their achievement – to their ability to overcome many of the structural constraints that had shaped their lives since arriving in France (Chase, 2020). Oury, for example, explained during the member check that having a clear objective is crucial to securing a residence permit. The following Journal entry, written on the 17th of January 2021, documents Oury’s perspectives on the need to perform to a high standard to ensure that his profile meets the expectations of the prefecture’s requirements.

Oury told that having an objective was important since the prefecture asks for school examination results and so on. He explained that, at age 17, he got his residence permit because he had an objective and had aimed to achieve a clear goal. He said that the prefecture also looks at attendance and teachers’ reports and remarks, which must be positive because, otherwise, it is very difficult to secure a residence permit with the prefecture. Oury felt that much hinged on being focused on an objective and that, if a separated young person does not have a clear objective, gaining a residence permit would be invariably jeopardised.
Despite the young people’s commitment their personal goals, institutional systems hindered and, at times, blocked their ability to advance towards these objectives. Coulibaly explained the importance of having clear goals in the context of a “system” that does not assist him or others in achieving their goals.

> For the future, I tell myself, well, maybe I’ll succeed, I’ll make it. I never think that it will ever work. (Speaking softly) I always tell myself to keep the future in mind, the fact that everything is possible. At the same time, it’s like a bicycle that’s rolling, we want to move forward. We, we also have difficulties, eh, like if there’s a stick in the spokes. You see, the system, the administrative procedures and all that, for me, it’s like a child being born where we say, certain people are your friends, they’re your parents, and certain people are the witches trying to kill you. So, that’s how I take things. The system, administrative procedures, and all that. It’s not the system that helps us reach our goal, in fact. You need to know what you really want in your life and how to achieve it. Sometimes it’s not easy to figure out how.

The ‘power over’ that limited the ability of many to progress towards adulthood described by Coulibaly meant that young people had to find “new ways of ‘being’ and ‘doing’” to reclaim (some) control over their circumstances (Chase, 2020 p. 452), often adopting different approaches to dealing with the structural boundaries placed on their aspirations. For example, young people were often encouraged to choose an educational course which enabled them to become self-sufficient and financially independent quickly but, in many cases, did not correspond with their own aspirations. Lasso Doumbia, for instance, demonstrated the “ability to imagine alternative possibilities and critically reflect and evaluate individual habits based on current circumstances” (Smith, 2018 p. 158) in that, although he had previously aspired to become an accountant, he now felt that he needed to alter his objectives because of financial constraints.

> I wanted to do accounting … As I was quite strong in math but … It required a lot of education, starting from middle school, then high school, and university.

> I see, and here [in France] it’s not possible?
Well, here it's possible, but it's about the financing. You have to start from middle school, then high school, and university. You can't ask someone to pay for all that, while you [also] need to eat, and you have to pay for clothing, you have to do things ... During all that time, you can't. If you don't have good support.

Most of the young people managed to navigate new routes and directions and maintained a largely positive outlook despite the challenges faced. This positive outlook was maintained by most and, during the Phase 4 member checks conducted in January 2021.

**Although some expressed anxiety about the future, most explained that they “always had hope” and articulated their clear, positive goals for the future, stating that they “would not abandon until the end” (Journal from member check with Lasso Doumbia, 12 January 2021).**

Despite this, data from Phases 2, 3 and 4 of the study suggest that a small number of young people had lost hope for the future. These young people appeared to resign themselves to the “diminished and powerless identity laid on them” (Korkiamäki and Gilligan, 2020, p. 6) due to the institutional impediments that limited their efforts to progress towards their goals. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, two young people, Siaka Tanga and Cedric, had largely lost their hope for the future because of the perceived injustices associated with the structural constraints they constantly confronted.

Cedric’s experience described in the excerpt below demonstrates the profound negative impact that receiving a deportation order had on both his life trajectory and in shaping his identity. He did not understand why he had been issued with a deportation order because he felt that he had been conforming to the authorities’ expectations. His detention, which he experienced as injustice, shaped his outlook.

*They sent me an OQTF ['Obligation de Quitter le Territoire Français' (OQTF) - an order to leave French territory]. Why? I'm in school, I'm in training, and then I receive an OQTF. Well, what do you [the prefecture] want? What can I do now? What should I say, what should I think? I don't know. But I think it really affected me. It completely changed everything. It messed up my whole life. Honestly, I, for the first year, I did nothing. Because I received an OQTF and that*
demoralised me. It distracted me, it really disturbed me ... Afterward, I had to go to the detention centre and all that. It has messed up my life a lot. And honestly, I, I'm not the same, I don't have the same motivation as I did a long time ago when I first arrived. I don't have that anymore. Today, I just tell myself, 'It's okay, I'm taking it as it comes.'

During the member check, conducted some 18 months later, Cedric told that, "We are without hope" while Siaka Tanga explained that "I have no hope, I am sorry but at the moment, I haven't any hope".

The young people had many, often very clear, aspirations and hopes for the future, with education typically perceived as crucial to achieving these goals. Despite the clarity of their aspirations, they were adaptable if a changed direction was required. Nevertheless, structural constraints negatively impacted their ability to progress towards their ‘imagined futures’; in some cases, contributing to profound disillusionment and the loss of hope.

### 7.3.3. The role of social relationships

After reaching the age of 18, the young people’s social networks and their supportive and trusted relationships continued to occupy a central place in their lives and were also critical to their wellbeing, with the data strongly suggesting that the young people were “embedded in meaningful relationships and communities” (Paulsen and Berg, 2016 p. 125). The role of social supports in bolstering their coping strategies was acknowledged by very many, supporting previous research that has highlighted the positive impact that social interactions and interpersonal relationships have on the psychological wellbeing of separated and unaccompanied youth (for example, Rodriguez and Dobler, 2021; The ISMU Foundation, 2019).

Most of the young people had a network of people that they considered to be important in their lives, be it (former) foster families, intimate relationships, friendships made with other young people of the same nationality, peers and teachers in school, colleagues and employers in work, their lawyers (many had a lawyer who represented them at one point or another since arriving in France and who continued to provide them with legal advice and support), members of the local community, and people they met through sporting and voluntary activities. During a peer interview with Dinoh, Bintou talked about the importance of these supports, particularly in the context of the struggles she faced.
Dinoh: And... how would you describe France, today? (pause) With everything it has given you?

Bintou: Bah, frankly, I- I- [in] France, France, fortunately there are good people. Because me, I say I am super happy to meet the people around me who today still make up my friends, who are always there for me. And it was them who gave me strength, it was that that permitted me to exist today where I am. Otherwise eh ... France, I can say that, frankly, it’s a struggle. It’s a struggle …

A majority described the continued importance of school in their lives, which enabled them to build social connections and promoted a sense of belonging (Bitzi and Landolt, 2017; Miller, 2013). Manssachy was an undocumented separated young person who had accessed private schooling with the support of his voluntary foster family, migrant-led organisations and volunteers. He explained the positive impact that school had on his life, not only because of all he was learning but also because school provided a safe space for him to have positive social interactions.

I really like school. I enjoy being there. The school, where I am now, really interests me. I love the people there, I love, eh, all my teachers who are over there. A lot of teachers over there, actually, are very, very nice. I can't lie about that. I had difficulties, I'll tell you, I had difficulties before coming here. I couldn't even write my name, I couldn't speak. In fact, I only knew three words in French: ‘Bonjour, ça va, comment tu vas.’ I love it. I've met a lot of really kind people at school as well. I thank them, and I want to thank everyone.

One young person, Coulibaly, described his close relationships with social workers from the residential centre where he lived before aging-out of care, demonstrating the value of relationships that are built within institutional settings that extend beyond the formal role of a professional (ISMU Foundation, 2019).

These are people [social workers] that I continue to visit and say hello to, and they often reach out to me for artistic projects because I've been quite involved in artistic projects. Thanks to them, they knew I was in the artistic field, involved in music and all that, and as soon as they saw an opportunity, they contacted me right away. Really, these people have become like family to me, and they often contact me for
projects involving young people from residential care, asking if I'm interested in participating etcetera.

Additionally, several young people had maintained contact with some of the individuals (such as volunteers and lawyers) and migrant-led groups who had initially supported them after arriving in France (further detail about these supports is provided in Chapter 5). Coulibaly had remained a volunteer with one of the migrant-led groups which was comprised of young people who had experienced similar issues and situations when they arrived and described the group as “like a family”. Others had built strong relationships with volunteers who had supported them when they arrived. For example, Bintou included a former volunteer in her social network map describing this person as very close.

*She was my math teacher when I was at [informal housing managed by religious organisations], when I left, when they kicked me out of residential care. So, I met [name of volunteer] there; she gave me math lessons. And she took me in like her own daughter. All the support, advice, and everything (takes a breath). Uh, she’s a kind person.*

Similar to findings documented by Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh (2018) in their study of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in England and Ireland, this study’s young people developed family-like connections and were essentially ‘doing’ family with people who they considered to be close to them. Participation in family practices such as cooking, eating and marking special occasions together, was particularly apparent among young people, such as Manssachy and Amadou Camara, who lived with foster families. During visits to Manssachy’s home, for instance, I observed that he participated in daily tasks such as food preparation and cooking with his foster family, whom he referred to as his “parents”. Manssachy’s foster family provided critical support, on both practical and emotional levels; for example, by encouraging him with his studies and providing support when he experienced difficulties with regularising his legal status. Manssachy explained that he wanted to reciprocate by doing what he could to help in his foster family home.

*If they help me, it is what I must do too, and I will do that. If there isn’t something to eat, I will cook and we eat. And, bah, I will cook, I will cook as eh they wanted and eh bah (taping his hands), that’s all. It is good. I love it. It is a family.*
While family-like practices were not as prominent among those who lived in residential care and among those who had never accessed formal care, many of these young people described family-like bonds and routines with people with whom they had previously lived or who had supported them in the past (former foster carers, former teachers, volunteers, and so on). Oury, for instance, had a close relationship with a volunteer whom he met when he arrived in the Nord. His family regularly invited him to family events and day trips and also ensured that he had food for the week ahead.

She brings me to her home – we go for a weekend to her parent’s house, her parents are so kind, at [name of town]. She calls me all the time. And since, there [points to his fridge], there I have two of her bowls there, so when I go to her place, she always gives me something to bring back. She cooks, she gives me something to bring back, I say no!

Interestingly, family-like practices also began to develop among the participants in this research, particularly in the context of the group project undertaken during Phase 2 of the study. As time passed, the young people increasingly referred to the group as “la mifa” [the family] and we developed a routine of cooking, eating, hanging out together and celebrating special events, such as birthdays (illustrated in Image 10.4), in ways that could perhaps be considered ‘family-like’.

Image 7.3 A young person cutting a birthday cake during an informal group meeting

Over the duration of the PAR project, the young people also began to emotionally support each other. The journal entry from 31st January 2019 below describes an informal group meeting that took place during Phase 2 when Cedric was visibly upset. His upset stemmed from the uncertainty he had experienced during long waits and the negative decision he had received on his legal status. When the young people present
saw that Cedric was distressed, they comforted him, telling him repeatedly that “we are a family”, and explaining that he was not alone in confronting challenges.

Cedric talked a lot about his situation with us. He said he couldn’t take it [the challenges faced] anymore and continually said, “I am tired, I can’t take it anymore in France”, appearing to have lost hope that his situation would improve. The other young people at the meeting responded by repeatedly saying, “We are a family” and “We are here to support you”.

The young people also provided practical support to each. For example, when Coulibaly moved house in the Spring of 2019, several of the participating young people helped him to settle into his new home (see Image 7.5).

Image 7.4 A participant helping another with installing shelves after he moved house.

Although social relationships were frequently described as key supports, isolation and loneliness were feelings that marked the everyday realities of many of the young people. Ababahadi, for example, described loneliness as “giving him depression”, saying that he spent long periods alone even though his girlfriend provided some support.

At the moment, I spend, eh, my time all alone at home (mouth noise) because, eh, I see that life now is, eh ... it disgusts me now. And honestly, I'm not well. I'm not feeling good in my own skin, so eh, I'm dealing with ... instead of holding grudges, getting into arguments with people, I'm obliged to stay in my own corner. That's all.

Okay, so, you mostly spend your time here?

At home. After work, I'm at home, I don't go out.
Other young people, such as Bintou, also described feeling very alone and missing family. During one informal group meeting, she took me aside and explained that she felt very upset because she was missing her mother. Sometime later, during the member check exercise, she described how difficult the past year had been following her mother’s death.

Bintou said that she is lost without her mother, that she was her only person, her rock ... She said that she had no more motivation. (Journal entry from Member Check 21 January 2021).

Bintou also explained that the sadness she experienced during the period following her mother’s death was exacerbated by the realisation that some individuals whom she considered to be her friends did not visit or support her, leaving her feeling disappointed and hurt. Others, on the other hand – people whom she did not know well – had supported her by visiting and providing financial support.

7.3.4. Reaching out for support or keeping feelings private?

There is considerable evidence that unaccompanied minors are a high-risk group for mental illness and emotional problems (Derluyn, 2012; Hodes, et al., 2008; Meyer DeMott et al., 2017). One-third of the study’s young people reported that they had engaged with mental health service professionals, particularly psychologists, at some time. For most, however, access to mental health support was poor. Oury, for example, did finally gain access to mental health support, at a point when he felt he no longer needed help.

I think I had an appointment on [date] in June. I went there, but afterward, it's the first time they prescribed me a psychologist or a psychiatrist. For me, I believe it's not ... I feel good now, I don't need it. At the time when I needed it, I didn't get it. It wasn't offered to me.

Some young people reached out to their wider social network, such as to NGOs, (former) foster families, their lawyers, volunteers, community groups, peers, friends, and girlfriends to assist them in dealing with challenges. Reaching out to others suggests that the young people recognised their needs and took proactive steps to address them, indicating agency.

There are people, families, and organisations who help me overcome difficulties. I walk to seek help from organisations, I spend my time
talking about my difficulties and looking for people [to help]. (Siaka Tanga, interview).

Many of the young people were willing to contact a person or people who they felt might be willing to help. However, they demonstrated a thoughtful and deliberate approach to seeking support, also careful about whom they disclosed their feelings. For example, while Bintou reached out, at times, to others for support with practical matters, she preferred to keep her feelings and emotions to herself, only sharing when difficulties “get to a critical stage … [But] I don’t ask everybody”. Another young person, Coulibaly, who had a wide circle of people in his informal support network, similarly only confided in a select few. Their careful consideration about with whom to share their feelings and concerns points to their strategic management of vulnerability, suggesting that some only selectively revealed their emotions to maintain a sense of control over the information they shared.

[If] I have a problem of, eh, distress or, well, whatever it may be, I know who I can talk to, who I can call on the phone to explain today’s difficulties. And there are some people I can’t talk to about it, it’s not everyone you can go to and talk about your life. After all, these are people we’ve become attached to, that we can tell everything to.

For a number, the non-disclosure of feelings and difficulties was strongly connected to their lack of trust in others.

It’s hard to trust ... Because I’m someone who’s hiding for the moment. I see a lot of people, we laugh, and then we play, and that’s it. We can call each other, but we don’t talk about our daily lives. That’s our private life, we don’t discuss it … It’s only my mother who, if I have problems or if I need advice, I call my mother. (Lasso Doumbia, interview).

Many young people did not trust service providers and preferred to manage challenges personally rather than through any formal support mechanisms. Others, such as Diouma, felt that reaching out to formal support services was futile since they perceived staff as unable to provide necessary support. Such strategies might, at least in part, explain the young people’s ability to stand on their own two feet.
Even if you talk to someone [in formal services], it doesn’t get anywhere. Nobody can help you with what you need, it’s them [the staff in services] who can fast track things in your file, it’s them that have fun with it. But you don’t know what to do, they don’t tell you the truth. (Diouma, interview).

For some, a preference for dealing with problems privately was related to personal characteristics and preferences. Amadou Camara, for instance, who explained that “I isolate myself, all alone … I try to forget”, described his coping mechanism as “always being my way of being … I was always like that; I was always reserved”. However, he described making a conscious effort to change, trying to reach out to people, including close friends and his foster family, when he felt worried or anxious.

Two young people preferred to deal with problems privately. Ababahadi, for instance, articulated a preference for coping alone despite stating that he was “not well”. His account suggests that not sharing meant that he could preserve personal boundaries and feel less vulnerable.

At the moment, I spend my time all alone at home. (Mouth noise) Because, em, I see that life now is, um, it disgusts me now. And honestly, I’m not well. I’m not okay in my skin, so I’m processing that … instead of being pissed off, yelled at by people, I’m forced to stay in my corner. That’s it … I am not used to sharing about my life. When I am in difficulty, you won’t see that I am in difficulty, you won’t feel it. I don’t like saying that, “Yes I am in trouble”, I won’t say it.

Another young person, Manssachy, suggested that coping independently or alone was culturally different to what is typically found in French society, where “they [the French] like to talk to people”, seeking to share their troubles and problems, which Manssachy said “I don’t like a lot”, preferring to “keep it [my problem] to myself”. Interestingly, during the member check, he described a shift in his willingness to open up to others: “It’s changed, I have a lot of relationships with people. I talk to people about my problems”. This suggests that he had altered or adapted his coping strategies, possibly having become more comfortable with sharing his problems with trusted individuals.

Overall, the young people’s agency was evident in the coping strategies they deployed and, in the decisions, made by them about whether or not to confide in others, which
were sometimes subject to change over time. They also actively made choices about their preferred coping strategies, which they also adapted over time.

7.3.5. Maintaining continuity: The role of social media

The use of social media as a means of maintaining connections and communicating with their peers became strongly apparent during Phases 1 and 2 of the study. For example, when the young people developed the group agreement together during Phase 1, the creation of a WhatsApp group was proposed as a means of maintaining contact and sharing information. However, the function of social media extended beyond this, with its use acting as an important coping strategy for many, particularly when they faced challenging times, as described by Ababahadi.

If there wasn’t social media, 80% of foreigners in Europe would be crazy. Because, for example, today you would get bored. And being alone in the house, you don’t have anyone, you have nobody to talk to. So, you are obliged to connect to your things, the videos, the things on whatever on social media. To release your thoughts. So, eh, if there wasn’t the internet, many people would fall sick.

Social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook also provided an economically sustainable means of maintaining contact with family and friends outside of France and played an important role in linking young people with others from their past lives, particularly those from their countries of origin. Amadou Camara explained, for example, that he used Facebook Messenger to call his immediate family members, particularly his mother, as it allowed him to talk to her without bringing about financial strain.

[I] send them [his sister and mother] photos, yeah, and they even talk to my French family here. My mother, she has even talked to them – she talked to my family on video call, Facetime, they have already talked, it went very well. I send her photos sometimes even if I don’t like taking photos (laughs).

Some young people did not discuss their families or parents while others were estranged from or had fragile relationships with some family members. However, consistent with the findings of Söderqvist’s (2014) study of former unaccompanied youth in Sweden, which demonstrated the benefits derived from transnational activities, transnational relationships, which were maintained through social media platforms,
provided many of the young people with ongoing critical support, acting as an important protective factor in coping with the adversities and challenges they encountered in their daily lives. Mothers, in particular, occupied an ongoing and important place in the lives of many of the young people and provided crucial emotional support and advice. Several mentioned their regular contact with their mothers via social media channels. During his in-depth interview, Amadou Camara was asked to choose a card that represented how he was feeling at the end of the interview. He explained that he chose the card in Image 7.6 because it represented his mother and her care for him on his journey to France and her continued support.

For me, the woman [in Image 7.6] represents my mother who was back in our home country while I made the journey. She was worried about me and all. And now, here I am, and everything is going well. I am on the right path to fulfil my mother's wish, who always advised me to continue my studies.

Image 7.5 Dixit Card Image chosen by Amadou Camara to represent his mother

Two of the young people introduced me to their mothers via WhatsApp. The following journal entry excerpt from 21 February 2019, which was written after I shared news about Coulibaly’s participation in the research project with his mother, demonstrates her continued role in his life.

Coulibaly talks to his mother every day at least. They are very close … He asked me to leave a message for his mother on WhatsApp so that “she would be proud”. He was very happy about this message and said later that she was delighted when she listened to the message, which he had translated for her.
Friends made on the journey to France remained important sources of support for some young people and, in a few cases, such as for Amadou Camara, it was apparent that these friends had become closer than some family members, despite not seeing each other often.

'It’s in [border town in a Western African country] that we met, we met there as we had the same smuggler, we did the journey together, they are from the same nationality as well. We were five from [country of origin], we did the journey together, we were very close, we didn’t separate because (his voice trembles) … the route there, you can’t do it alone. … We helped each other a lot and since then, when we talk to each other. There are even some who, when I was in Italy, they talked to my mother, we were that close … Until now we talk, we talk, get news from each other, even if it’s over the telephone.

These transnational relationships were crucial for maintaining continuity in support for many young people, with important figures from the past demonstrating their ongoing importance and influence in the young people’s present realities.

However, despite the support provided by transnational relationships that were maintained through social media platforms, some young people chose not to divulge their problems to loved ones in their home countries; instead, concealing their worries and difficulties to shield them from anxiety or worry. As Oury explained, “I don’t want them [his family] to feel bad, especially my mother”. Lasso Doumbia was also concerned about causing stress in his mother, recognising that some of the realities of the daily lives of separated young people may be too difficult for their mothers to cope with.

We can’t tell them [mothers] everything. If you, ahh, in the situation that you live, eh … maybe no mother, mother of a family can accept that her son crosses difficult moments at a certain point.

Other young people preferred to omit details about their current situations in their communications with family and friends in their countries of origin due to a perceived lack of understanding on their part about the reality of life in France. Cedric explained, for example, that he preferred to maintain a certain distance from family members in his country of origin because “they won’t understand, they can’t understand” what he has been through or what life is like for him now. Instead, he developed friendships in
France that he could lean on and had become ‘like family’. Coulibaly similarly told that he found it easier to talk to his friends in France than friends in his country of origin because “these people [in France] understand the system here”, explaining that:

I can’t call them [family/ friends in his country of origin] to tell them in this moment, I am in difficulty, I can’t work because I don’t have a residence permit. For them, “What is a residence permit?”. At home, you can work whether you have a residence permit or not. So, voila, in fact, there are things that we share, [and] there are things that we don’t share because they are not able to understand them.

Whatever the reason for a young person’s preferring not to divulge their challenges, worries and difficulties, this strategy may risk experiences of isolation, which could in turn negatively impact their mental health. Supportive relationships in their host countries are important for separated young people, especially in helping them feel comfortable and safe enough to seek support so that they can become “embedded in meaningful relationships and communities” (Paulsen and Berg, 2016, p.125).

### 7.4. Conclusion

The findings documented in this chapter provide several important insights into the young people’s everyday lives after they turned 18 years, a point when they were forced to ‘become adults’ well ahead of their same-aged peers who did not have care experience and who had not arrived in France as unaccompanied children. As documented, the situations of a considerable number of the young people progressed positively over the research period, even in the context of unexpected difficulties related, for example, to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, and similar to findings of previous research (such as Allsopp and Chase, 2017), the daily realities of the young people were marked by past and also continued structural constraints; punctuated by periods of ‘waithood’, uncertainty and precarity, linked primarily to legal and administrative procedures, which exerted significant power and control over their lives. As examples of structural ‘power over’, these constraints impacted the young people’s wellbeing and mental health as well as their access to a range of critical supports. These structural constraints also at times exacerbated their sense of exclusion and marginalisation that dominated their lives. In addition to structural power, demonstrations of the ‘micro-physics of power’ (Foucault, 1980b) were also found in the lives of a considerable number of participants, demonstrating the interplay of different forces of power in their lives.
Everyday experiences of discrimination and perceived injustices were encountered in institutional settings as well as in everyday interpersonal interactions. Although sometimes 'normalised' by the young people, past and ongoing experiences of this kind had a continued negative impact on most (Wernesjö, 2020). They led to lasting feelings of 'otherness' and had detrimental effects on the outlook of some participants, with evidence that several began to internalise the powerlessness that defined many aspects of their lives (Korkiamäki and Gilligan, 2020). Feelings 'invalidated', 'judged' and treated like 'outsiders' because of discrimination are reminiscent of Fricker’s (2007) notion of ‘epistemic injustice’. These experiences left them feeling devalued, they limited their agency and ability to express themselves and be acknowledged and represented within society’s broader structures.

Despite the various challenges and constraints that marked the young people’s realities and limited the choices and opportunities available to them, a large number demonstrated strong coping mechanisms, with many exhibiting unwavering resilience as they made conscious efforts to grow and develop in the face of adversity. As documented, the young people displayed their agency by consciously adapting to their circumstances and, in the everyday, their realities arguably often could be considered typical of any young person.

The young people exhibited resilience and a range of coping mechanisms, including keeping busy and staying active, suppressing and also expressing their emotions, and finding sanctuary in religious practice and creative activities. Most therefore demonstrated an “ability to imagine alternative possibilities and critically reflect and evaluate individual habits based on current circumstances” (Smith, 2017 p. 158). They also had clear objectives and the ability to carve out alternative paths when confronted with structural constraints (Chase, 2020). Despite this, the ongoing structural barriers they encountered had a damaging effect, with some articulating a sense of resignation to their lack of power and of having lost hope and the ability to ‘imagine’ a brighter future.

While a small number of young people experienced continued isolation and loneliness, social supports were central in the daily lives of most. Supportive social relationships were often formed in settings such as school and the workplace, but also early after their arrival to the Nord, and acted as important everyday protective factors for the young people. Some of the relationships that the young people developed demonstrated strong, ‘family-like’ connections (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018). Despite the social supports available to the young people, as well as the formal mental
health supports that some had accessed, many were slow to reach out for support and cautious about disclosing their feelings to others. This careful consideration regarding whom to reach out to demonstrates their agency and is also suggestive of their strategic management of vulnerability. Overall, the young people demonstrated ‘constrained agency’ as they journeyed towards adulthood (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014), needing to navigate and adapt to various challenges and barriers in order to progress towards their goals and objectives.

Finally, this chapter’s findings demonstrate the importance of maintaining transnational relationships with loved ones from their country of origin and with those with whom they met on their journeys to France (Rodriguez and Dobler, 2021; Söderqvist, 2014). While some young people preferred to censor the information, they disclosed to loved ones in their home countries about life in France, these relationships nonetheless provided crucial support in their lives, influencing their present realities, and also bolstering their sense of resilience and agency.
8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1. Introduction

This thesis set out to examine separated young people’s lived experiences and perspectives on the transition to adulthood in Northern France. As discussed in Chapter Two, a large body of research has documented both the vulnerabilities and resilience of separated children and youth, alongside a burgeoning interest in their transition to adulthood. In recent years, the transition to adulthood of separated children and youth has become a policy priority at a European level (Stapleton, et al., 2023), as demonstrated, for instance, by the adoption of the Recommendation on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood CM/Rec(2019)4 by the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe in April 2019 and the range of subsequent actions that aim to support its promotion and implementation.137

Despite growing policy and research attention to the experiences of separated young people, there is a paucity of research that incorporates, much less foregrounds, the perspectives of separated young people. Furthermore, relatively little is known about their experiences or perspectives as they transition to adulthood, or about the circumstances that impact their transition experiences. There is a dearth of qualitative research on this population, likely related to the fact that separated children and youth are so often categorised by their ‘inscribed vulnerability’ and designated a ‘hard-to-reach’ population. Even fewer studies have invited separated children and youth to play an active role in research on their lives.

Aiming to provide detailed insight into the lives of separated young people, this research has generated deep understandings on their lived experiences and of perspectives on their situations. The critical stance underpinning the study situates their lives within the broader societal context. Building on the existing literature on separated young people’s resilience and vulnerability, this research has uncovered separated young people’s complex and nuanced journeys to adulthood, highlighting

137 Details on some of the most recent actions can be found at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/special-representative-secretary-general-migration-refugees/-/turning-18-with-confidence-supporting-migrant-and-refugee-children-in-transition-to-adulthood.
how separated youth navigate the various constraints that impact their lives and their transitions to adulthood.

Using a participatory action research (PAR) approach underpinned by a critical stance and conducted in Northern France, this study sought to examine separated young people’s lived experiences of and perspectives on the transition to adulthood. The research explicitly aimed to support the participating young people to become actively involved in the research process and to articulate and/or convey their experiences, viewpoints and reflections through other diverse youth-centred methods such as short films, written stories, in-depth interviews and focus groups. Importantly, in addition to providing a platform for young people to share their stories and viewpoints, the study supported them to engage in ‘social action’ that worked to raise awareness about the lives of separated youth (see Chapter 4).

An investigation of the mechanisms of power was central to this PAR study, both methodologically and theoretically. The methodological approach aimed to examine the interplay of power, drawing on the works of Fricker, Freire, and Foucault, among others, to address potential power dynamics between the researcher and the research participants. This innovative approach demonstrates the possibilities of moving away from deficit-centred research; instead, valuing and supporting young people as experts ‘knowers’ about their own realities. The use of various creative, adaptable, and youth-centred methods provides valuable insights into avenues for inclusive, participant-centred research with marginalised populations. By prioritising power dynamics throughout the research process, a participant-centred approach was achieved, with numerous lessons offered for navigating ethical challenges. This research has also provided crucial insights into improving one’s own research practice when working with marginalised groups.

The study’s approach was grounded in a theoretical framework that combined concepts of non-linear youth transitions with a Foucauldian perspective on both structural and micro-relations of power. This framework significantly advances theoretical understandings of separated young people. Departing from traditional depictions of youth transitions as linear stages, this research embraced a more nuanced perspective, integrating critical moments in the everyday lives of the study’s participants and uncovering frequently overlooked ‘in-between’ periods, which are crucial to understanding their journeys to adulthood. By grounding the study in Foucauldian conceptualisations of power, new insights have been generated into how societal power structures shape the transition experiences of separated young people.
Beyond exploring the interplay of structure and agency, the research also provides a deeper understanding of the impact of micro-level power dynamics on their lives. Moreover, the theoretical and methodological foundations, which are deeply rooted in a critical investigation of power, offer innovative approaches to researching marginalised groups such as separated young people. These foundations not only enrich academic discourse but also underscore the importance of maintaining ethical integrity and participant-centeredness throughout the research process.

In this final chapter, the findings of the study are synthesised and discussed in relation to the theoretical and conceptual lenses of youth transitions, ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ and considers how the findings extend understanding of how separated youth navigate the transitions to adulthood. The chapter then discusses the study’s limitations and outlines possible directions for future research. It concludes by discussing the policy and practice implications arising from the study’s findings.

8.2. Methodological Reflections and Insights

As documented in Chapter 1, most of the empirical literature on separated children and young people has focused either on the perspectives of service providers, typically through qualitative research approaches, or on the psychological wellbeing of separated children using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. To address a clear gap in the research literature, this thesis adopted a youth-centred, participatory approach underpinned by a critical epistemology to better understand how separated youth navigate and make sense of their lives as they transition to adulthood. By prioritising the lived experiences of the young people, this research provides valuable insights into their perspectives and realities during the transition to adulthood as well as the forces that shape their lives.

The critical realist stance used in this study sought not only to understand what was happening but why, by considering the broader context of the intersecting power forces that shape the lives of separated young people. A different ontological stance, such as constructivism, for instance, may have focused on the subjective interpretations and meanings participants assigned to their experiences. However, the critical stance went a step further, seeking to also explore the underlying mechanisms and structures that influence their lived realities. Being critical required a rigorous approach to praxis during every step of the research process whereby the young people’s lived experiences and realities were situated in the wider political context in order to identify how power plays arose in their lives (Ledwin, 2007). Founded on principles of mutual
respect, solidarity and trust, and inclusiveness, among others, the PAR approach thus sought to identify and challenge the drivers of oppressive mechanisms and unequal power relations through a collaborative process of change (Ledwin, 2007).

Committed to retaining faith with the underlying critical stance of the study at every stage, the use of PAR in a study that adopts a theoretical lens that aims to investigate the dynamics of power in the lives of separated youth brings the study full circle. Not only did it interrogate, from a theoretical perspective, the role of power in the young people’s lives as they progress towards adulthood, but also acknowledges and attempts to mitigate the potential power differentials that can transpire during the research process. The study’s findings demonstrate that separated young people are discriminated against in their capacity as ‘knowers’ in society (Fricker, 2007; see Chapter 4) in that their perspectives are not afforded credibility or viewed as legitimate. The participatory, youth-centred orientation of the study therefore aimed to re-establish a degree of epistemic justice (Fricker, 1997), with meaning- and knowledge-making central to the research process. The research design also supported the young people to exert their agency by, for example, advocating for change to certain policies while also seeking to address some forms of structural power. Beginning with the everyday realities of the young people, the research was a mutual process of discovery wherein both the young people and I contributed to the expansion of each other’s knowledge (Ledwin, 2007). Rooted in dialogue and committed to collective action for social change, it was important for me to “be as open to change as the “subjects” are encouraged to be – only they are now more like co-researchers than conventional subjects” (Rowan, 1981, p. 97 in Ledwin, 2007).

The PAR approach included method triangulation (through the combined use of in-depth interviews, focus groups, informal meetings with journaling and memos, outputs from social actions) across four phases of data collection. This approach facilitated a youth-led process and supported a detailed exploration of the young people’s perspectives on, and lived experiences of, the transition to adulthood. The results of the research were then brought into the public realm with the aim of ‘giving voice’ to the experiences and perspectives of the study’s young people.

The focus group sessions conducted during Phase 1 supported the emergence of preliminary themes, providing a space for the young people to take ownership of the

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138 ‘Knowers’ are understood to be those who engage in the process of knowing, understanding, and acquiring knowledge
project and develop a number of social actions. Within this space – in the language of critical realism – the ‘real’ and material consequences of French migration and child protection policy and legislation on their transition experiences could be interrogated. The social actions, which continued into Phase 2 of the research, were also central to the PAR approach in that they enabled cycles of action and reflection to unfold. During these phases, the young people identified constraints in their lives, critically reflected on their situations and developed actions that sought to challenge the obstacles and limitations they confronted, all of which can be considered a process of ‘conscientisation’ (Freire, 2005a; Crotty, 1998). Through this process, the young people demonstrated a collective sense of ‘constrained’ agency. For example, in the group project they chose to focus on creating awareness for their situations as they recognised that, while they could critically reflect on their situations and take actions against certain structures in their lives, they were confined to the extent that they could mobilise change. Additionally, in their engagement with the research process, for example, through the development of social actions, they also challenged and sought to resist some of the power imbalances and injustices that impacted their lives. The PAR process also facilitated the development of a supportive, safe space where they could share positive experiences and develop supportive relationships which, on many occasions, provided a protective shield against some of the challenges encountered by them.

The informal group and one-to-one meetings enabled “other ways of observing, knowing, and appreciating the lived experience of another” (O’Neill and Roberts, 2019, p.77) while also empowering the young people to participate in the research process in their own way. The individual interviews, on the other hand, ensured that there was adequate time and space to explore more complex, sensitive issues in depth whilst also remaining true to the PAR approach by integrating youth-centred and creative techniques such as social network mapping, a Dixit image card activity, the choice of a song, and so on. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, these varied, flexible methods helped to further develop trust and rapport with the young people and also encouraged them to take the lead and feel comfortable throughout the research process. Furthermore, the approach supported a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the study’s young people through the incremental development of a rich picture of their lives as they progressed towards adulthood.

In keeping with by the SER model outlined in Chapter 4, it is important to reflect on the challenges associated with conducting a PAR PhD study of this kind with a largely
hidden and marginalised population of separated young people. Throughout the PhD, I frequently struggled when confronted at times with some of the complex challenges that accompanied the data collection process. On a practical level, the COVID-19 pandemic limited my ability to conduct further follow-up meetings and delayed the member check phase of the research. Pandemic-related restrictions also limited the number and range of events available to the young people and interrupted the group dynamic and momentum to a considerable extent.

Despite this, as detailed in Chapter 4, some young people continued to maintain contact with each other. I also continued to alert the young people to opportunities to participate in various events. In 2023, for instance, one young person was due to join me at an international launch event of a Council of Europe output on young refugees’ transition to adulthood but could not make it because an unexpected personal issue arose.

Although the young people were eager to engage with the research and appeared to derive benefits from participating over a considerable period, it is perhaps an overstretch to expect that they would benefit from this PAR study in the longer term (Kaukko, 2015). Indeed, when defining the objective of their participatory group project during Phase 1 of the research, the young people demonstrated a keen awareness of how much, but also how little, they could realistically achieve in terms of affecting change, even in the short term. However, as outlined in Chapter 4, they did gain tangible benefits in terms of, for example, the social relationships they built. The research process also provided opportunities for mutual learning and enabled the young people to share feelings, perspectives, and experiences, both with each other and the wider public. The research process therefore supported them to “release what is in your heart” (Diouma) and, by valuing and respecting their knowledge, viewpoints and experiences, made steps towards addressing epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007).

8.3. Insights into the Transition to Adulthood

As highlighted in earlier chapters of this thesis, there is a paucity of research on the transition to adulthood of separated youth, particularly research in which participation young people play an active role in the research process. Guided in large part by non-linear conceptualisations of youth transitions that seek a more complex understanding of these journeys (Wood, 2017), this thesis mobilised a novel lens to investigate separated young people’s lived experiences and their perspectives on the transition to adulthood.
8.3.1. What were the young people’s understandings of the transition to adulthood?

Chapter 2 discussed the various terms used to categorise separated children. However, rather than imposing pre-conceived understandings of what it means to transition to and reach adulthood, this research endeavoured to explore the young people’s own understandings of these terms and their significance to them. Overall, the young people’s understandings of ‘adulthood’ echoed Arnett’s (2000, 2007b) concept of ‘emerging adulthood’ in that they associated adulthood with gaining independence, taking responsibility, and reaching maturity. Despite this, echoing the findings of several studies of separated children outlined in Chapter 2 (Sirriyeh and Ni Raghallaigh, 2018; Söderqvist 2017, 2015, 2014; McDonald, 2016; Qin et al., 2015) continued supportive relationships were also considered crucial supports during adulthood. This demonstrates the importance of ‘interdependence’ in adulthood, whereby young people ‘yo-yo’ between seeking independence and support (Paulsen and Berg, 2016). It also highlights the significance of spaces that facilitate separated young people to become “embedded in meaningful relationships and communities” (Paulsen and Berg, 2016, p. 125).

Adulthood was associated with age-related markers for only a small number of participants who specifically linked it to turning 18 years and the associated rupture in care and support at this time. Practically all the young people stressed the importance of continued formal support\(^{139}\) at 18 years and beyond. Nevertheless, they frequently experienced limited support upon reaching ‘institutional adulthood’ which, as documented in previous research (Chase, 2020), was linked to amplified uncertainty and precarity.

The start and end points of the transition to adulthood were understood by them to have several dimensions, however, and were overwhelmingly linked to structural constraints and barriers. Age was a key marker of the start of the transition to adulthood and was linked strongly to the legal transitions that occurred at 18 years which meant that separated youth had to initiate new administrative procedures, such as residency applications. However, the start point of the transition was found to be more nuanced than this and to extend beyond the legal transition. For example, for

\(^{139}\) As outlined in Chapter 1, formal supports are understood to be targeted and mainstream services and structures provided by professional agencies with paid staff, including state-run and those run by NGOs, designed to meet the need of the separated children and youth. https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_What_Works_in_Family_Support.pdf
some young people, it was linked to access to care while others associated the start point with psychological burdens related to the need to conform to the normative, administrative, and legal conditions necessary to secure a residence permit. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, young people’s understandings of adulthood were connected strongly with the notions of interdependence, responsibility, and maturity. However, securing legal status was, both symbolically and materially, a central marker of progression towards adulthood, with significant impacts on their daily lives and psychological wellbeing (Chase, 2020).

8.3.2. What were their experiences of reaching ‘institutional’ adulthood?

Overall, the journey to adulthood for the separated young people in this study was intricate, complex, and nuanced, supporting earlier research that has critiqued conventional age-related notions of adulthood (Wyn, 2004). Consistent with the findings of previous research on separated children and youth, the study’s young people encountered a myriad of challenges as they transitioned to adulthood. These included a lack of stable and standardised care (Gimeno Monterde, 2021) and, in particular, the loss of rights upon reaching ‘institutional adulthood’. Overall, while it was clear that the young people endeavoured to become autonomous, self-sufficient, successful adults, ‘politically induced precarity’ (Chase, 2020 p.440) characterised the lived realities of the study’s young people at the age of 18 years. This precarity was strongly associated with the uncertainty of their legal status and a lack of formal support, which negatively impacted the wellbeing of many and stifled, at least in the immediate term, their ability to build a future, become independent and grow.

The legal limbo and related uncertainties associated with this period left many dealing with prolonged moments of ‘waithood’, which was a source of considerable stress in their lives. The possibility of aging out into ‘illegality’ at age 18 negatively affected the young people’s mental health and wellbeing, creating heightened stress, distress and worry as they approached their 18th birthdays. These feelings were further exacerbated by the lack of preparation for this next stage of their lives. The young people also experienced prolonged uncertainty after turning 18 years. For example, for a small number of undocumented young people, the fact that they had received a deportation order [OQTF] impacted their transition outcomes in that they experienced greater challenges with continuing in education and accessing employment and housing. Additionally, and perhaps most worryingly, the prolonged liminality that these young people experienced negatively impacted their outlook on life and their objectives.
and hopes for their futures. In this context, the research also advances understandings of the consequences for young people who do not secure legal status at 18 years, highlighting the range of difficulties encountered by them if they age out into irregularity, which can include poor psychological wellbeing, mental and physical health and, from a State perspective, a completely disenfranchised population of youth.

Consistent with the findings of Chase’s (2020) research on Afghan unaccompanied young people in the UK, some of the study’s young people became more vulnerable at 18 years when they were leaving, or after they had left, care due to changes to their legal entitlements, which in turn led to ruptures in housing and care. Heightened vulnerability during this period was also linked to the lack of formal care planning available to many of the young people, which left them preparing for and navigating various aspects of the transition with limited or, in some cases, no formal support. For this reason, young people relied on their informal support networks140 and also showed displays of agency, taking on strong personal initiative in order to overcome the various challenges and barriers they confronted. Additionally, in line with findings of other research (EMN, 2022b), this study’s findings strongly suggest that available post-care supports, such as aftercare provisions (namely the EVA allowance), were very often inadequate.

The need to maintain a continuity in care was thus found to be crucial for separated young people’s positive transition experiences and for their mental health. This finding corresponds with previous research that has demonstrated the benefits of the provision of continued supports such as a period of aftercare, psychological supports and care planning (EMN, 2022b; Zijlstra, 2018; Ni Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh, 2015; Drammeh, 2010). However, the current study’s findings underscore the importance of separated youth securing legal status as unaccompanied minors at the earliest possible juncture. As documented in Chapter 5, young people who had been granted status as an unaccompanied minor in the first instance fared far better in terms of education, housing, employment, and residency, while the situation was a great deal more mixed among those who were either refused status or only granted minority status after appeal.

140 As described in Chapter 1, informal supports include those from family, friends, and members of the community.
8.3.3. Did the type of care accessed impact transition experiences?

Residential and semi-autonomous care settings tend to be favoured for older (aged 16+) separated and unaccompanied youth who arrive in France and also in Ireland (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018; Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh, 2017). Nonetheless, the findings of this study suggest that separated young people who lived in foster care tended to have ‘smoother’ transitions to adulthood compared to those who resided in other forms of care (Hasson III, 2021). This was because turning 18 years did not lead to significant or drastic ruptures for young people who lived in these settings. Additionally, foster care placements were more likely to support the development of ‘family-like’ relationships (Morgan, 2022) as well as continuity of support post-18 years, even among those young people who no longer lived with their foster families.

Among young people who lived in residential care facilities, a majority did not have access to consistent emotional or psychosocial support from their social workers. This may be because social workers may themselves encounter institutional constraints and normative practices linked to keeping a clinical, ‘professional’ approach, such as keeping a professional distance (De Graeve, 2016), or because the provision of emotional support is not considered to be within the remit of their role (Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh, 2017). Yet, despite the lack of formal emotional support, many of the young people who lived in other care arrangements such as in a residential care setting described having ‘family-like’ bonds with individuals in their informal social relationships, such as volunteers and other separated young people. Indeed, the PAR research process itself became an example of an informal safe, supportive network where such relationships could flourish.

In contrast to other research on separated youth (Williams 2018; Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh, 2017), there was no evidence that young people in foster care placements experienced significant challenges. It is perhaps noteworthy that, in all cases, the foster care placements of the study’s young people began on an informal ‘voluntary’ basis; that is, they were provided informally by families outside of child protection structures. Further research is needed to better understand the effects of such measures, including any potential benefits or risks for young people who are living in such settings.

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141 See section 1.5 for an outline of these types of care arrangements.
Overall, the findings concur with those documented in previous research, which considers foster care to be the most appropriate means of meeting the needs of unaccompanied minors (Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh, 2017). It also supports previous studies that point to the negative impact of residential care settings on young people’s mental health and psychological wellbeing (Zijlstra, 2018; Derluyn, 2018; Kalverboer et al., 2017).

8.3.4. What type of transition did the young people experience?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, and similar to previous research with care leavers (Webb et al., 2017; Courtney and Thoburn, 2011; Stein 2005, 2006a, 2014) as well as the research base on separated youth (Gimeno Monterde et al., 2021; Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018), this study’s young people expressed a compressed and accelerated transition to adulthood. They were typically unprepared and were severely lacking in guidance and support, particularly as they turned 18 years.

As documented in Chapters 2 and 3, a significant body of youth transitions research has drawn attention to the significant role of ‘critical moments’ in the lives of young people, including marginalised youth. This study’s findings similarly suggest there were specific moments that negatively impacted the lives of many of the study’s young people. These moments included early experiences subsequent to their arrival to France, including the outcome of the initial age assessment, which in turn impacted their ability to access to care and supports. The moment young people gained access to care also emerged as a significant turning point because only subsequent to their accessing care could they begin to contemplate and prepare for legal adulthood. Some later experiences in France can also be considered as critical moments in that they significantly impacted young people’s daily life experiences and facilitated or, alternatively, hindered their ability to progress towards adulthood. These moments included turning 18 and the ruptures in housing and care that some experienced at that juncture as well as the moment of securing a residence permit, which meant that their situations stabilised significantly, at least in the short term. For two young people, receiving an ‘OQTF’ [deportation order] was a critical moment that impeded their ability to progress towards adulthood and thwarted their ability to plan for the future. The period preceding and experiences during these critical moments were always stressful and invariably negatively impacted young people’s psychological wellbeing and mental health (Keles et al., 2017).
Despite the importance of these critical moments in shaping the lived realities of the young people as they progressed towards adulthood, the finding of this study do not support conceptualisations of young people’s transition to adulthood within which change is understood solely in terms of a sequence of discontinuous events (Hall et al., 2009) where the transition is fully “linearized”, without life or movement in between these moments (Ingold, 2007). The critical moments that impacted the transition experiences of the study’s young people did not generally transpire suddenly or unexpectedly but were rather the culmination of an unfolding sequence of events that transpired over time.

Prolonged, ongoing everyday experiences of uncertainty and precarity within which young people did not know what even the immediate future might look like, as well as negative daily experiences of discrimination and perceived injustices, negatively impacted their lived realities as they navigated the transition to adulthood. Consistent with findings documented in other studies (Ehntholt et al., 2018; Sarkadi et al., 2018; Crock, 2013; Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008; Ní Raghallaigh, 2007), this study’s separated young people's experiences of, and interactions with, structural constraints within their host country produced heightened emotional stress in many cases. On the other hand, their everyday interactions, available support systems, and coping mechanisms bolstered their ability to overcome challenges, providing much-needed respite from the hardships they encountered in their daily lives. Therefore, the transition to adulthood for these young people should be understood not only in terms of critical moments but also in relation to the ordinary, everyday life that occurs ‘in-between’ these periods. The transition experiences of the study’s young people are therefore better characterised as 'wayfaring' (Wood, 2017; Ingold 2007), within which the critical moments and ruptures coexist with their daily hassles and ordinary, everyday experiences.

The use of the ‘wayfaring’ metaphor to conceptualise the young people’s transitions to adulthood provides “opportunities to analyse ruptures, critical moments and turning points, not so much as isolated events, but rather as part of broader processes and courses of events which also carry with them a great deal of continuity and not just change” where every critical moment was both one of continuity and change (Wood, 2017 p. 1184). The junctures often termed ‘breaks’, ‘turning points’, ‘ruptures’ and ‘critical moments’ in the youth transitions literature suggest that change occurs as a sequence of discontinuous events (Hall et al., 2009), similar to the ‘dotted line’ described by Ingold (2007), which maps a succession of events. An alternative
understanding is that when life stories are told, the moments ‘in between’ can be overlooked. However, while these moments may be less memorable, the young people were not static during these ‘in-between’ moments (Hall et al., 2009) and were, instead, actively seeking ways to move forward with their lives.

While youth transitions research tends to favour sudden, rapid, spectacular change over creeping, ordinary change (Wood, 2017), by conceptualising separated young people’s transitions as wayfaring lines of life it is possible to acknowledge the moments ‘in-between’ alongside the twists and turns in the everyday lives of separated youth. The ‘wayfaring’ metaphor therefore supports an examination of critical events as well as ‘unspectacular’ everyday occurrences, recognising an interplay between key moments and more ordinary life experiences (Hall et al., 2009). Image 8.1 illustrates this ‘wayfaring’ transition to adulthood, which was endorsed (validated) by 10 of the study’s young people during the member checks conducted in January 2021 when we discussed how their life and transition experiences might be visually represented.

**Image 8.1 A conceptualisation of the transition to adulthood experienced by the study’s young people**

![Image of wayfaring transition to adulthood](image)

8.4. **Insights into Displays of Power in the Young People’s Lives**

While there is a paucity of research on separated young people's transitions to adulthood, even less is known about the role of power and its impact on their lives. This thesis drew on Foucault’s conceptualisation of power to examine the power dynamics at work in the lives of the study’s young people.
8.4.1. Did ‘power over’ shape the young people's transition experiences?

Through a Foucauldian lens, less apparent forms of power (also termed 'potential' power) were found to shape the lived realities and everyday experiences of the study's young people, with certain elements of the Panopticon also evident in their lives. Foucault (1995, p. 201) describes the effects of the Panopticon as instilling "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" in an individual (Foucault, 1995 p. 201). In a perfect state, the actual exercise of power is thus rendered unnecessary. The Panopticon concept includes three aspects – individuality, examination, and visibility – all of which the research findings suggest have presented at one stage or another in the young people’s lives since their arrival in the Nord. According to Foucault (1995), through these three elements of the Panopticon, an individual becomes both an effect and an object of power (as discussed in detail in Chapter 4). This section discusses how ‘power over’ manifest in the lives of the young people.

Although the age assessment process might be considered to be a mechanism by which an unaccompanied minor can be afforded the right to a range of supports and protections, according to Foucault, rights can be conceptualised as agents of domination (Foucault, 1980). Through such a lens, it is possible to better understand not only the positive aspects of rights, such as gaining access to a range of services and supports, but also the conditionalities surrounding such entitlements. As documented in this study, these included exclusion from care following a negative age assessment result (with only those granted status as an unaccompanied minor ['mineur non accompagné' (MNA)] having entitlements), ruptures in care at age 18 (as child protection rights ceased at institutional adulthood), and irregularity after 18 years (due to the conditions required to obtain residency).

The age assessment can be understood as 'an examination'; the first Panopticon effect, within which each young person is categorised as a ‘case’ and measured, described, judged, and compared with other separated youth. While the findings indicate that the age assessment itself can be viewed as a platform in which power was exerted over the young people, microforms of power were also displayed in the interactions between the young people and officials during the age assessment interview. For example, many experienced the aggressive tones of officials when interviewed by them and the lack of explanation of, or context surrounding, many of the questions posed frequently left young people feeling judged and even harassed. These
behaviours and interactions, coined by Foucault ‘the microphysics of power’, can be considered forced relations that may even “sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximising its effectiveness” (Foucault, 1980 p 72).

Individualisation was also apparent in the age assessment process where a young person was categorised (or not) as a MNA [unaccompanied minor], a describable and analysable object within a comparative system (Foucault, 1995). Here, a decision was made as to whether a young person was either ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’ of legal status as an MNA through a subjective and socially constructed evaluation of key features, traits and markers, and calculations of the gaps and differences between the young people (Foucault, 1995). Through this system, the young people could also be ‘classified’ and, for example, ‘excluded’ from formal child protection structures that provide care and supports.

Power differentials arising from the age assessment interview were further reinforced by young people’s interactions with the border police who were charged with verifying their identity documents, and sometimes requested young people to undergo physical age assessments. They feared the power of the border police and the negative outcomes that could potentially result from their interactions with them. Through the age assessment (‘examination’), the young people were categorised into ‘cases’ and “carefully fabricated” in the social order, an effect and object of structural power (Foucault, 1977, p. 333-34).

8.4.2. The influence of the Panopticon effect on young people’s early experiences in the Nord

The lack of control that the young people felt they could exert over their lives owing to the decisions made about their lives during their early experiences in the Nord had both short- and longer-term impacts on their lives. In the short term, the lack of information available to them during the age assessment process, including from child protection services and border police, limited their ability to feel or exert control because they frequently did not know what lay ahead. Limited information and misinformation also reinforced the potential power differentials arising from both the perceived power of the border police and young people’s interactions with them. There was a prevailing sense of distrust and fear around the border police, in that their perceived power and also, in some cases, the actual power they enacted over young people was consistently experienced in extremely negative terms.
In addition, initial classifications of the young people through the label of MNA encouraged conformity, leaving those who did not conform excluded from care and formal supports, with many experiencing homelessness for extended periods of time. For example, when young people were perceived as nonconforming and uncooperative by, for example, refusing to attend a border police appointment or contesting questions asked during the age assessment process, they risked drastic consequences such as exclusion from care. Most young people were excluded from care following a negative, first instance age assessment decision which left many without formal supports or care until or if their appeal of this decision was permitted and they were legally granted status as MNA. These findings support earlier critiques of the age assessment procedures for their failure “to accommodate the [unaccompanied] young people’s actual needs”, placing them at risk of precarity (De Graeve, 2017 p. 80) and creating divisive categorisations of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ young people (Kenny and Loughry, 2018).

It is important to note that seven young people were granted status as MNA after appeal and after having spent significant periods excluded from care. During this time, these young people lived in a legal and psychological limbo, facing a situation of ‘waithood’ without formal supports until their appeal was granted. As a result, these young people found themselves, for all practical purposes, ‘aged-out’ into ‘illegality’; a period of disorientation as they found themselves navigating several legal and administrative restrictions (Gonzales, 2011). This placed them at serious risk of harm and left them entirely dependent on their informal support networks. While the legal limbo of separated young people after they turn 18 years has been documented in previous research (Mooten and Rosenstock-Armie, 2006), this study’s identification of this earlier legal limbo provides new understandings of the lived experiences of separated youth and the often-drastic implications that ‘illegality’ has on their wellbeing and later transition experiences, with prolonged precarity frequently permeating their everyday lives. These early experiences in France also led many to harbour a deep-rooted distrust and suspicion of all institutional structures.

Here, we see both evidence of and the impact of the ‘individuality’ characteristic of the Panopticon, where separated young people are essentially forced to feel responsible and accountable for their fate. Arguably, the authority’s focus on their individual failings and ‘deservingness’ obscured and ignored the role of structures in shaping their realities. It is perhaps unsurprising that many young people rejected the term MNA [unaccompanied minor] for its negative connotations, for reinforcing binaries of
‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ and for creating a stigmatising, pejorative ‘us and them’ mentality.

8.4.3. The continued influence of the Panopticon on young people’s lives

The young people described feeling overwhelmed, powerless and lacking control and feeling judged and humiliated during the age assessment procedure. There was evidence that, in the longer-term, their interactions with officials during this process impacted on the construction of their identities in that they may have “internalise[d] views held by the dominant society” (Eberhardt, 2018. p 71). The process of determining entitlement(s) to care through such procedures left many young people, in practical terms, excluded and rejected from society and without formal support, because their ‘stories’ and responses were perceived by officials as not conforming to that of the typical MNA. Foucault’s (1980) claim that rights exert power and go beyond established rules to influence practice, resonates in the case of these separated young people where the age assessment process reflects such power dynamics.

The young people’s initial confusion and feelings of injustice and suspicion about the age assessment process were frequently identified in the later experiences of a number as they progressed towards adulthood; in, for example, their descriptions of their experiences of continued injustice and discrimination and their often-acute awareness of the powerful influence of those structural forces that shaped their lives. These findings suggest that early experiences of perceived injustice, exclusion and judgement may have a longer-term impact on young people’s perception of the host society, its structures and the actors operating within them. The young people’s recurring experiences of feeling judged, disbelieved, and silenced since their arrival in the Nord, as well as the lack of support and power imbalances experienced, suggest that the young people were affected by what Fricker (2007) terms ‘epistemic injustice’, which can create secondary harms and “obstacles to their ability to resist their social positions” (Eberhardt, 2018. p 70). Additionally, it could be asserted that a power dynamic characterised by the concept of the Panopticon effect was at play in this case, whereby the actual exercise of power was unnecessary since the young people had a heightened state of consciousness which assured the automatic functioning of power (Foucault, 1995).

While the young people often seemed aware of the structural forms of power in their lives and the conditionalities that shaped their realities, their experiences suggest that
there was an overwhelming focus on the part of the authorities on young people’s personal failings or non-conformity. Similar to findings of other youth transition research, which has found challenges related to categories of ‘at-risk’ and non-conforming young people (Wyn, 2014), the young people who were deemed to be ‘undeserving’ or outside of the ‘norm’ were largely rejected from society and often had limited access to education, employment, or support services; some were even threatened with deportation. The ‘individualisation’ of these young people essentially rendered them accountable for their actions and fate. These processes of ‘individualisation’ also had a damaging impact on their identities and risked their internalisation of discourses of blame, exclusion and vulnerability, making young people more vulnerable to believing that others perceived them as undesirable (Eberhardt, 2018).

Additionally, the granting of legal status to a young person, be it status as an unaccompanied minor or residency status, was invariably linked with certain conditionalities, features and measurements and with their profile fitting or matching particular markers. It can therefore be argued to have individualised each young person to a ‘case’, central to the individuality characteristic of the Panopticon. Such effects therefore continued long past the age assessment process and into the young people’s later experiences in that they demonstrated a strong awareness of the conditionalities placed on their residence permits. Their acute awareness of these conditionalities, which impacted their access to certain supports, including aftercare supports, meant that some felt the need to constantly demonstrate or prove that they were compliant and conformed to the expected standards to meet the conditions of being granted a residence permit. For example, they had to ensure that they had good reports from school, including good grades and attendance, or risk severe negative repercussions such as irregularity. Such conditionalities might be reasonably asserted to reinforce the potential power exerted by State structures over the young people through ongoing scrutiny of their actions and lives, which can be considered to align with the Panopticon characteristic of ‘visibility’. Some young people who felt subject to observation and monitoring by social workers, for example, to determine whether they met the requirements for financial support, illustrate the Panopticon element of ‘visibility’. While these young people are on the margins of society and largely invisible, the Panopticon sheds light on this very particular way of reducing them to ‘inmates’ of this system (Foucault, 1995).
8.4.4. Were displays of ‘power to’ demonstrated by the young people?

Many of the findings may paint a stark picture of the lives and experiences of the study’s young people and it would be perhaps tempting to focus only on deficits or deficiencies, as is often the case within research on separated children (see, for example, Sarkadi et al., 2018). This research did not focus on experiences prior to the young people’s arrival in France, largely due to a concern about the risk of re-traumatisation (see Chapter 4). However, it is evident that the young people’s early experiences in France and their interactions with institutional power structures and those who worked within them impacted the young people’s later experiences and their pathways as they progressed towards adulthood.

While these factors were important in shaping the lives of the young people, the findings of this research support critiques of a vulnerability-centred ‘deficit approach’ in the conduct of research on separated children (Bilotta and Denov, 2017; Horgan and Ni Raghallaigh, 2017; Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010), demonstrating that separated young people can also be vehicles of power. Individual and interpersonal factors were found to have an impact on the transition experiences of the study’s young people, with many demonstrating displays of ‘constrained’ agency.

This ‘constrained’ agency was bounded by the often invisible, social structures and power relations that impacted the young people’s lives (Brady and Gilligan, 2018). Nevertheless, even during moments which could be, at first glance, perhaps misunderstood as stationary, life progressed, even if in very small ways. The young people’s attempts to advance and grow were sometimes demonstrated through acts of resistance against the structural barriers they encountered, although this too was often constrained to some extent. During the early stages of the participatory group project in Phase 1, for example, participants chose to focus on creating awareness of the challenges they faced. They acknowledged that they would experience difficulties in realising immediate change to the systems constraining them but also felt that raising awareness would be an effective way to highlight the need for change despite the constraints they confronted. This PAR process created opportunities for active citizenship and resistance on the young people’s terms rather than the terms of authorities, which so frequently required obedience and compliance, leading to feelings of disempowerment rather than fostering ‘empowered agency’ (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). While some young people demonstrated agency through resistance, others
exerted agency through more mundane, discrete actions, such as by simply continuing to find even small ways to advance towards the achievement of future goals.

These findings demonstrate that while separated young people’s ‘power to’ may be restricted by structures and micro-power interactions, an element of choice is possible even if choices are constrained by these wider power relations (Lynch, 2014). This ‘bounded’ or ‘constrained’ agency (Brady and Gilligan, 2018; Coffey and Farrugia, 2014; Lynch, 2014), a middle ground between structure and agency, recognises the duality of the concepts and provides a powerful lens with which to understand how power can manifest and shape the lives of separated youth.

‘Power over’ dynamics impacted the agency of a small number of young people who appeared to become resigned to their subordinate positions in the face of structural constraints such as discrimination and perceived injustices, exhibiting certain elements of Fricker’s (2007) notion of epistemic injustice (see Chapter 4). Despite this, the findings support a burgeoning literature that has examined the resilience of separated children and youth (Horgan and Ni Raghallaigh, 2017; Sulimani-Aidan, 2016; Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010) and challenge static representations of the vulnerability of separated youth (Horgan and Ni Raghallaigh, 2017). The research demonstrates that the young people had attributes that strengthened their resilience and their ability to respond to the adversities they encountered. Several protective factors were also found, such as personal attributes, including self-reliance, perseverance, optimism, a sense of purpose and goal orientation (Lekkai, 2020; Peña et al., 2018). Other protective factors included meaningful, supportive relationships, spirituality, and opportunities available or created by them, to fulfil their future life projects (Tachtler, et al., 2020; Vervliet, et al., 2015; Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Mels, et al., 2008).

8.4.5. Intrapersonal protective factors and coping mechanisms

In line with the findings of previous research in Europe, the study’s young people played an active role in their own survival and were capable of developing resilience and coping mechanisms (Omland and Andenas, 2018; Vervliet, et al., 2015; Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010), showing displays of purposeful agency and strength, and an ability to survive against the odds (Korkiamäki and Gilligan, 2020; Lekkai, 2020; Carlson, et al., 2012). Many of their coping mechanisms such as hanging out, playing sports, prayer and spirituality can considered to be adaptive coping strategies (Cardoso, 2018) and there was little evidence that they used maladaptive coping strategies. For instance, while some young people demonstrated forms of escapism
such as avoidance and the nondisclosure of feelings, they were aware of their use of these strategies and their reasons for using them were often associated with their distrust of others.

Consistent with the findings of Korkiamäki and Gilligan’s (2020) Finnish study of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors, some young people demonstrated purposeful agency in the form of resistance, including both resigning themselves to and resisting certain manifestations of structural power. Unfortunately, at times, acts of resistance had adverse effects for young people because they were viewed unfavourably by some authority figures. Here, their limited agency and power was strongly apparent. For example, even when some endeavoured to assert their agency through demonstrations of resistance, their actions were frequently deemed to diverge from or oppose prevailing norms. These young people were then often subjected to further ostracism and experienced many setbacks in the pursuit of their personal goals. While it is not possible to draw clear-cut conclusions about the reasons why some young people enacted one display of agency over another, the consequences may explain why some opted to resign themselves rather than react. Previous research on the effects of the Panopticon on unaccompanied youth suggests that resignation may transpire as an active attempt to adapt and submit to certain forms of power to cope and survive (Chase, 2009).

The study’s young people also displayed high levels of motivation and determination, particularly in terms of their pursuit of educational qualifications, with most articulating positive future aspirations despite the myriad of challenges they confronted. This finding corresponds with previous research on the educational pursuits of refugees (Lynnebakke and Pastoor, 2020). However, a chasm was strongly apparent between the aspirations of some young people and the realities of their lives (Morrice, 2019 p.402) in that they were significantly constrained by external structures that limited their ability to access a number of educational and professional pathways. Nevertheless, the young people continued to strive towards their personal goals despite frequently having to reconfigure these due to the constrained options available to them.

The findings demonstrate that the study’s young people struggled with and resisted ‘power over’ dynamics in their lives, both in the form of structural power and micro-relations of power. However, despite their limited power and exposure to distressing situations or events such as receiving a deportation order, being placed in detention or experiencing homelessness, most pressed forward, even if at times in very ordinary ways. Thus, in Foucauldian terms, by conceptualising power relations in the young
people’s lives as an ongoing struggle where one cannot lose because the battle never truly ends (Lynch, 2014), it is possible to remain hopeful because of the possibility that things may improve and challenges may be overcome.

8.4.6. Interpersonal protective factors

In keeping with the findings of previous research on separated youth (Sirriyeh, 2018), social networks, hobbies and interests were found to be crucial aspects of the daily lives of the study’s young people in that they provided a purposeful way of spending time. These social relationships and activities, which provided purposeful ways for the young people to spend their time and build such support networks, have been suggested to enhance self-esteem and therefore bolster separated young people’s ability to cope with the challenges they are likely to face as they transition to adulthood (Sirriyeh, 2018).

As demonstrated in previous research (Rodriguez and Dobler, 2021), social networks and relationships – with volunteers, local community members, and peers – emerged as important protective factors in terms of bolstering young people’s ability to cope with challenges and supporting them to enact agency. The young people developed positive relationships in a range of settings such as schools, churches and community/migrant-led groups. Transnational relationships, such as those maintained with family members in their countries of origin, as well as friendships made during the course of the journey to France, also provided ongoing support and encouragement to many of the young people.

Although the importance of social connections emerged very strongly from the young people’s accounts, some preferred not to rely on these connections for too much support (Dybadahl et al., 2021). Their reasons for this included distrust, a fear of burdening loved ones with additional worries, and a belief that not all individuals would or could understand their situations.

Finally, there are evident benefits of young people’s engagement with school, education and employment in providing them with spaces where they could build supportive relationships (Bitzi and Landolt, 2017; Miller, 2013) and carve out avenues that enabled them to progress toward their ‘imagined futures’ (Chase, 2020). Despite this, further research is required to understand the nature of the support available more fully to young people in these settings and how these spaces help them to navigate the transition to adulthood.
8.5. Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Like other research of this kind, the current PAR investigation of the experiences and perspectives of separated youth as they transition to adulthood in the Département of the Nord in France has limitations that warrant comment.

This PAR study has provided an in-depth exploration of the lives and experiences of separated young people as they progress towards adulthood and has generated a nuanced understanding of what it means to be a separated young person in the Nord. However, as a small-scale, contextually- and time-bounded study, the findings are not generalisable to separated young people in France or even to those in the Département itself. While the research has uncovered experiences that can influence the transition to adulthood, it cannot make claims about how common these experiences are among the broader population of separated youth. Furthermore, it cannot speak to, for example, the extent to which separated young people in the Nord participate in education or employment. This study was concerned with experience and meaning-making – which are clearly important in revealing how the young people navigate and give significance to their lived experiences. It would be useful to complement research of this kind with data arising from larger, quantitative studies in order to shed further light on the impact of administrative procedures (such as age assessment, particularly regarding the initial interview and appeal processes), the age at which a young person enters into care, housing and education on their later transition outcomes related to educational achievement, employment, access to aftercare and residence status.

Circumstances for separated youth in the Nord were dynamic and constantly shifting owing to policy and legislative change since the research commenced. Changes in the global geopolitical context, including the war in Ukraine, have also significantly influenced migration flows and migration policy across Europe. Circumstances in France and the Nord therefore continue to evolve. Therefore, the conduct of a study of this kind in a number of years could uncover very different findings.

On a similar note, this study is cross-sectional in design, capturing, for the most part, the perspectives and circumstances of the study’s young people at one moment in time. As emphasised throughout this thesis, life could change rapidly for the study’s young people. Upon completion of the final phase of the study (the Phase 4 member checks), it became increasingly clear that the young people’s transition experiences were far from ‘complete’; rather, their lives continued to ‘wayfare’ towards adulthood.
Additionally, shortly after the data collection process was complete, I learned that one young man had become a father while two others had been married. Given the paucity of research on the family and related transitions of separated youth, longitudinal studies that aim to follow these young people over time would support a better understanding of other milestones such as marriage and parenthood, which are very present in the mainstream youth studies literature (Williamson and Côté, 2022).

While much of the existing European and Irish research on this population focuses on unaccompanied minors and youth in the international protection system (EMN, 2018), this research provides novel insights into the different types of status that young people may seek, with only one of 12 having applied for international protection. Further research that aims to examine the legal pathways of separated young people outside the international protection system as they transition to adulthood would be beneficial. Comparative research that examines other regions in France would also provide a much-needed understanding of the extent to which the experiences and perspectives documented in this thesis are relevant to separated youth in other Départements.

Despite the clear benefits of PAR, there are several critiques of the approach, particularly in the conduct of research with young people (see Chapter 4). This research attempted to tackle these potential shortfalls of PAR by integrating a critical examination of different aspects of power, namely, the manipulation of knowledge; power in social relations and; structural forms of power. For example, through a process of critical reflection on the various constraints in the young people’s lives, within which the young people acknowledged the limits of their own power but also the opportunities to transform their situations. This process led to ‘theory-in-action’ which encouraged change (Kaukko and Fertig, 2016), supporting the participants to collectively act against real and apparent injustices by creating social actions aimed at changing or influencing any negative consequences (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022; Kemmis and Nixon, 2015).

This study’s methodological approach provides guidance for future PAR research involving migrant youth, particularly in terms of how to support young people to learn from and take ownership of many aspects of the research process. In addition to taking on leadership roles during the research process, the study’s young people had opportunities to display agency through their engagement in social actions and their participation in public events. In more practical terms, the young people’s involvement in the research process and various social actions and events enabled them to demonstrate to employers and immigration administrative bodies (for example, the
prefecture) that they were actively contributing to French society in positive ways. Several young people later leveraged these experiences and the certificates of participation and letters of recommendation that were provided during the research process to advance their personal goals. For example, one undocumented young person used the evidence of his involvement in the research project to successfully defend his right to remain in France and request regularisation in court. Importantly, however, despite these positive outcomes of the research process, it is important to stress that it is difficult to truly measure the benefits of PAR for young people, particularly in the longer term.

Throughout the research process, which extended over a relatively lengthy period, I was acutely aware that my privilege and power in the process could not be eradicated, even if my personal value systems rejected oppressive systems and hierarchical practices (Janes, 2016). From the outset, I made attempts to consciously acknowledge the often unclear structural and micro-forms of power as they surfaced during the conduct of the research through a process of reflexivity and reflectivity guided by the Structured Ethical Reflection (SER) framework (Stapleton and Mayock, 2022). While this process can provide important learnings for future research, it was not possible to mitigate against many power dynamics at play outside of the research process. For example, the study’s young people had significant involvement in much of the research process and despite efforts to ensure continued involvement from the offset. Nonetheless, I ultimately held the power to continue or stop the research project and often had a privileged position that afforded opportunities that were not within the reach of the young people (such as academic conferences and formal meetings with gatekeepers). There were also aspects of the research process that were managed solely by me. For example, early in the research process where the need to secure ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee at Trinity College Dublin limited the young people’s involvement in the early stages of the study’s design. Again later, when for practical reasons related to the modalities of conducting a PhD, the write-up and final stages of the data analysis phase were conducted without the young people’s direct involvement.

Other limitations should also be acknowledged. While I would argue that the comprehensiveness of the interpretation, transcription and translation process is one of the strengths of the study, there are limitations associated with the requirement to translate and the fact that the thesis is written in English. Additionally, despite the various measures taken to mitigate misinterpretation, including the essence of the PhD
research approach which endeavoured to be youth-led, a limitation also relates to the fact that, although I am fluent in French, I am not a native French speaker, nor a native speaker in any of the mother tongues of the study’s participants.

8.6. Policy and Practice Recommendations

Governments and policymakers increasingly recognise and value of qualitative research for its ability to answer questions related to complex and challenging social problems (Glynn 2019, Neale et al. 2012). Indeed, over the past 12 months in Ireland, there have been calls for qualitative research on migration issues, including separated children and youth. At a European level, attention to separated young people’s transition to adulthood has grown quite dramatically since this PhD research was initiated. The past 12 months have seen the introduction of a number of measures targeting separated children and young people, including the establishment of the EU Network for Children’s Rights in 2022 as part of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child adopted in 2021, and the Council of Europe Recommendation’s CM/Rec(2022)22 on human rights principles and guidelines on age assessment in the context of migration adopted in December 2022. As described in Chapter 1, there have also been national-level policy developments in France, with new legislation introduced incorporating targeted measures on the transition to adulthood. A solid evidence base is critical to informing such policies and in supporting their implementation at national, regional and local levels. The findings of this thesis have several important policy and practice implications.

The wider literature on unaccompanied children and youth has shown that structures and procedures fail to recognise the diversity of this group and, instead, tend to homogenise them based on predefined categorisations such as age or legal status (Kauhanen and Kaukko, 2020). This thesis has demonstrated that separated young people are unique individuals with different life histories, backgrounds, and country contexts who, in most cases, are subjected to a range of constraining power over imbalances. Therefore, attempts to squeeze or force all separated young people into

142 Most recently the Empowering People in Care (EPIC) tender for research on experiences of state care amongst unaccompanied minors in Ireland. Available at: https://www.epiconline.ie/research-tender-experiences-of-state-care-amongst-unaccompanied-minors/


144 More details available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680a96350#showSearch Box=0
the same, inflexible procedures are problematic (Kauhanen and Kaukko, 2020). It is important to deconstruct these limiting structures and tackle the biases and presuppositions that frequently underpin prevailing discourses on separated young people.

There is also an urgent need to recognise and provide spaces that aim to foster the strengths, capabilities and resilience of separated youth and also place them at the centre of decisions that define their lives (Kauhanen and Kaukko, 2020). These spaces should be supportive, youth-centred environments where the young people have opportunities to share their experiences and also access a range of supports. Providing young people with safe spaces, for example, in the youth work sector, where they can interact with authorities less formally may diminish the effects of power imbalances and also assist in identifying ways to address discrimination and perceived injustices. Such spaces should provide young people with opportunities to ask questions, share knowledge and information and build supportive relationships. In the longer term, these spaces could also serve to inform policy and practice by challenging underlying assumptions about the types of interventions and supports deemed most appropriate by incorporating young people’s perspectives in the development and future planning of policy and practice initiatives (Eberhardt, 2018).

Notwithstanding the benefits and importance of the creation of youth-centred spaces, there is an urgent need for practitioners, such as social workers, border police and administrative staff, to be supported in developing an understanding of the influence of micro-power dynamics in shaping the futures of separated youth, as well as the impact of their privilege and power on the lives and experiences of separated youth.

Consistent with the findings of a small but growing body of research on the transitions of separated and unaccompanied youth (Chase, 2020, 2009; Sarkadi et al., 2018; Ehntholt et al., 2018; Crock, 2013; Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008; Ní Raghallaigh, 2007), the findings of this research draw sharp attention to the negative impact of structural constraints on the young people’s wellbeing and their ability to progress towards adulthood. Consequently, policy and legislation must focus on removing these structural constraints (Chase, 2020). First, it is important that young people who present to Child Welfare Services as unaccompanied minors gain access to care at the earliest possible juncture. Revising the age assessment process and increasing the number of available care placements would go some way towards ensuring that young people who are entitled to care are not excluded for any period. Secondly, while access to care is essential, the findings of this study also underscore the need to open up
opportunities for access to education for separated young people who are undergoing appeals processes related to their legal status as MNAs. Further research is needed to understand the extent to which MNAs who are denied legal status in the first instance are later granted this status. However, the findings demonstrate that there are young people in such circumstances who do not have access to several rights for prolonged periods. To ensure positive future outcomes, it is therefore critical to ensure that these young people do not have long breaks or gaps in their education and to find courses that match their personal objectives for the future (Jamet and Keravel, 2017). A first step in this direction would be to build on already developed initiatives by, for example, building and learning from the initiatives undertaken by private schools which have been demonstrated to play a key role in supporting separated young people to access education. By avoiding gaps in education, separated young people will arguably be better equipped to successfully integrate into French society.

Finally, in terms of acknowledging the need for a continuity of care and support in separated young people’s lives, there is an urgent need to develop more inclusive, holistic and realistic understandings of adulthood that shift from age-related understandings of adulthood. These age-related notions of adulthood lead to housing and care ruptures at age 18 which in turn generate huge challenges for young people. Additionally, the lengthy and often prolonged processes and procedures associated with gaining legal status result in extended experiences of uncertainty and precarity (Chase, 2020). While deep, structural policy changes may be slow and challenging to implement, the findings of this study highlight the need for ongoing, formal wrap-around supports for separated youth. These supports must continue post-care, include an individualised care plan that is revised regularly post-care and focus on developing a longer-term supportive scaffolding for each young person.

The new legislation introduced in 2022, as detailed in Chapter 1 signals a positive shift towards addressing some of the challenges encountered by unaccompanied young people in France. It seeks, for example, to improve crucial provisions for the shelter, assessment, and transition to adulthood of separated youth. These measures, if fully implemented, could significantly address several of the structural constraints shaping these young people’s transition experiences. However, as outlined in Section 1.7.2, an evaluation of the implementation of the provision suggests that persistent gaps remain, underscoring the need for continued attention and increased efforts to address the unique and complex needs of separated young people in France (Conseil d’Orientation des Politiques de Jeunesse and Conseil National de la Protection de l’Enfance, 2023).
8.7. Concluding Remarks

Based in Northern France, this research has provided detailed insights into separated young people’s complex and accelerated transitions to adulthood, also documenting the nuances of the dynamics of power that impacted their lives along their journeys to adulthood. The transitions navigated by the young people were multifaceted. However, the legal transition emerged – both materially and symbolically – as significantly influencing their transitions to adulthood.

Viewed through a Foucauldian lens – centred on the Panopticon and the microphysics of power – power over emerged as significantly shaping the lives of the study’s young people and as simultaneously casting them to the margins of society for extended periods without access to care or other basic rights of access to housing and education. Equally, the study’s findings demonstrate that separated young people were not passive victims and, instead, continued to press forward, displaying power to despite the range of constraints they confronted.

This PAR study has generated a robust understanding of the lived experiences of separated youth as they transition to adulthood and the structural forces that shaped their lives. The study’s findings strongly suggest that policy and practice need to shift the focus from age-related notions of adulthood as a destination and aim to support separated young people to mature into responsible, interdependent adults. A continuum of support is required to enable separated young people to progress along a ‘wayfaring’ journey towards adulthood, maintained until they feel equipped to navigate the demands of adulthood independently.
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APPENDIX A. LITERATURE SEARCH STRATEGY

The majority of the literature search was conducted on the Trinity library search in October and November 2017 and April and May 2018 using the search terms outlined in Table A below. This search was reinforced by a search of EBSCOhost, ERIC and Web of Science. Restricted to English and French, this search strategy aimed to collect publications (articles, book chapters) that centred on separated young people’s transition to adulthood. A similar search in French was conducted from September to October 2018 on the humanities and social science database Cairn.info. The exclusion criteria aimed to avoid research on the transition to adulthood of other young people, such as the majority youth or those in care, results on accompanied children and youth, and family reunification. Following a review of abstracts, when a publication was not deemed to be relevant to the study, it was excluded.

Table A Terms for literature search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>Key terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaccompanied/separated young people</td>
<td>(Unaccompanied minor* OR (separated child*) OR (refugee child*) OR (mineur* non accompagné*) OR (mineur* isolé* étranger*) OR (migrant child*) OR (unaccompanied you*) OR (separated you*) OR (immigrant child*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to adulthood/supports</td>
<td>(ag<em>ing out) OR (age</em> out) OR (leav* care) OR (CADA) OR (CAO) OR (transition) AND (Independen*) OR (adulthood) OR (autonomy*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration</td>
<td>(Refugee*) OR (Migrant*) OR (Displaced) OR (Asylum seek*) OR (international protection) OR (legal status) OR (residency) OR (Clandestine) OR (Undocumented) OR (illegal immigrant*) OR (irregular)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>(Services) OR (support) OR (resources) OR (difficult*) OR (challeng*) OR (obstacl*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>(Family reunification) AND (accompanied child*) AND (accompanied minor*) AND (second generation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peer-reviewed qualitative and/or participatory studies on the transition experiences of separated children/young were prioritised. Due to the paucity of research on the area, a specific literature review was not deemed appropriate, with a general narrative review of the literature instead pursued. A total of 781 articles were identified initially, with 188 documents saved. Three alerts were subsequently set up via Google Scholar and TCD library to send emails of new citations that matched the following criteria: (“unaccompanied minor” or “unaccompanied child* or “unaccompanied young pe*” or

145 CAO : Centre d’Accueil et d’Orientation [Welcome and orientation centre (service for MNA)].
146 CADA: Centre d’accueil pour demandeurs d’asile [Residential centre for asylum seekers]
"separated "young pe*" or "separated child* or "mineur* non accompagné* OR mineur* isolé* étranger") AND ("transition" or "ag* out" or "adulthood"). An alert system was also set up on Cairn.info seeking to ensure that the French literature was not overlooked. This alert system provided updates on authors, articles and reviews marked as followed and weekly recommendations based on previously read articles. A large number of additional articles were collected by tracking certain authors who published regularly in the field and following up on reference lists and recommendations. As a result, over 500 more publications were reviewed over the following number of years.
# APPENDIX B. SEVEN CORE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mutual Respect</th>
<th>Respect the beliefs, viewpoints and limitations of the other without judgment, embracing the differences and similarities between us.</th>
<th>Give each person the liberty and space to express themselves.</th>
<th>Respect the other people and stakeholders involved in the research process and expect to be respected in return.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity and trust</td>
<td>Support and stay loyal to each other.</td>
<td>Aim to ensure that everyone has the space to be themselves in the process.</td>
<td>Build trust and keep confidentiality of all parties involved in the research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Focus on being human, kind and caring for each other.</td>
<td>Be compassionate and empathetic throughout the research process.</td>
<td>Focus on actively listening to each other’s needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity and transparency</td>
<td>Focus on being upfront and real with each other.</td>
<td>Be transparent about oneself and the different aspects of the research process.</td>
<td>Stay true to oneself and one’s values during the study. In other words, maintain integrity while ensuring not to undermine or oppress another person or their values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigour and conscientiousness</td>
<td>Work to uphold the highest level of quality throughout the research process.</td>
<td>Be prudent and careful to ensure that the research process, and data gathered, is in line with the overall aims of the study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>Develop a democratic inclusive and participant-centred research process which promotes self-determination and equality.</td>
<td>The entire research process will aim to promote meaningful participation and engagement among all those implicated.</td>
<td>The research process will be flexible and adapted to meet the needs of all involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>Work together to fight against social injustice through critical thinking and reflection, collaboration, and action.</td>
<td>Begin to fight for social justice within the research process and within ourselves, then look outward towards what we can do to fight social injustice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX C. INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE

French original version:

Arrivant à la Majorité :

Les expériences des jeunes séparés de la transition à la majorité.

L'étude parle de qui ?

L'étude se focalise sur les jeunes séparés (enfants et adolescents qui arrivent en France/ Irlande sans leurs parents ou leurs garants) qui :

- Ont, maintenant, entre 18 et 24 ans ;
- Sont arrivés sans leurs parents ou garants, en Irlande ou en France avec 18 ans ;
- Ont habité dans des familles d'accueil ou des foyers pour au moins 6 mois avant qu'ils aient 18 ans.

Avant votre décision de participer, veuillez considérer les informations au-dessous et poser des questions si quelque chose n'est pas clair ou si vous avez besoin d'autres informations.

Qui suis-je, et de quoi parle l'étude ?

- Je suis une étudiante en thèse à l'Ecole de Travail Social et la Politique Social à Trinity College Dublin, Irlande.
- La recherche fera partie intégrante de la thèse (un rapport académique).
- Ma recherche est financée par le Gouvernement d'Irlande avec une bourse doctorale.
- J'aimerais apprendre de vos expériences de la transition à la majorité. En d'autres mots, j'aimerais comprendre si vos expériences ont changé quand vous étiez arrivés à 18 ans, et si oui, comment.
- Je vous invite à participer à cette étude parce que vous étiez dans une famille d'accueil ou un foyer, et vous avez maintenant 18 ans ou plus. Par conséquence, je vous vois en tant qu’expert sur ce sujet.
- J'aimerais surtout travailler avec vous pour comprendre vos expériences de la transition à 18 ans et si vous avez eu des challenges pendant ou après cette période.

Qui peut participer dans cette recherche ?

Vous êtes éligible à participer dans cette étude si vous : 
Si vous n’êtes pas à l’aise avec un sujet, vous n’êtes pas obligés de répondre aux questions.

Votre vie privée et vos décisions seront respectées à tout moment.

Vous aurez aussi l’opportunité de dessiner, écrire ou faire la cartographie pendant l’entretien. Le matériel vous sera fourni pendant l’entretien.

**De quoi consiste le projet de groupe ?**

- Vous êtes aussi invités à participer à un **projet de groupe**. Encore une fois, vous n’êtes pas obligés de participer, c’est votre choix.

- D’autres jeunes participeront au projet de groupe avec vous. Vous êtes invités à contribuer et partager avec ces jeunes un projet lié à la transition à la majorité, en d’autres mots, vos expériences à votre arrivée à 18 ans.

- L’objectif de ce projet est de vous donner l’opportunité de créer votre propre partie de la recherche avec d’autres jeunes dans une situation similaire de vous.

- Pendant ce projet, je soutiendrai le groupe pour construire votre propre projet sur la transition à 18 ans.

- Le projet sera aussi créatif que le groupe souhaiterait. Nous pouvons faire des activités amusantes, y compris, des jeux, l’art, la musique, la danse, l’écriture, les récits, la cartographie, etc.

- De plus, vous êtes invités à parler et à analyser les méthodes et les résultats de ce projet de groupe. Cela veut dire que vous auriez la possibilité de contribuer à la recherche pendant le processus de collecte et l’analyse des données.

- Vous, avec les autres membres de groupe, déciderez du résultat final de projet.

- Si vous décidez de participer au projet de groupe, vous auriez l’opportunité de partager les résultats avec une publicité plus large. L’objectif est de vous donner la possibilité de partager vos connaissances et vos expériences dans la façon que vous pensez la plus appropriée et représentative de votre travail.

- Ensemble, avec mon soutien, le groupe décidera la meilleure façon de partager et de promouvoir le travail, toujours avec la confirmation que le groupe restera anonyme.
Si vous souhaitez toujours participer à un projet local et informer d'autres personnes de votre point de vue, cela peut être une bonne occasion.

Si vous acceptez de participer à un entretien, cela ne signifie pas qu'il faut participer au projet de groupe.

Le projet de groupe est volontaire et vous n'êtes pas obligés de participer.

Comment nous organiserons le projet de groupe ?

- J'aimerais organiser des ateliers hebdomadaires, pendant environ trois mois. Cependant, j'adapterai les ateliers à vos disponibilités et les disponibilités du groupe.

- Dans les ateliers, avec mon soutien, vous créerez un projet de groupe sur le sujet de la transition à la majorité.

- Ensemble, nous déciderons de la durée de chaque atelier, combien de jours durera l'atelier, et l'objectif du projet.

- Vous êtes invités à participer aux ateliers que vous souhaitez. Si vous souhaitez de faire seulement l'entretien c'est aussi très bien.

Pour vous donner un exemple, l'information ci-dessous est pour le premier atelier qui a pour but de nous aider à faire connaissance et à créer une ambiance confortable et conviviale :

1. Nous commencerons avec une activité amusante destinée à 'briser la glace' du groupe.

2. Puis, nous nous focaliserons sur la création d'une équipe et la construction d'une ambiance conviviale pour nous aider d'être à l'aise ensemble dans le groupe.

3. Nous parlerons des idées que nous avons pour faire un projet, les espoirs, et les objectifs, mais aussi les parties logistiques du projet (le lieu, l'horaire, la durée de l'atelier...).

4. Nous finirons avec une activité fun et un gouter avant de faire une évaluation de cet atelier et nos sentiments.

L'espace ‘Chill out’

- Pendant chaque atelier, il y aura un espace ‘chill out’ où vous pouvez aller pour prendre une pause. Les matériaux (les magazines, des stylos, des feuilles, les matériaux de dessiner, etc.) seront disponibles dans l'espace.
• Nous ne parlerons pas des problèmes sensibles pendant le projet de groupe. Cependant, si vous vous sentez stressés ou malheureux, ou si vous êtes juste fatigués et vous avez besoin d’une pause, vous êtes invités à arrêter l’activité ou prendre une pause dans l’espace de ‘chill out’ sans vous justifier à quelqu’un.

Est-ce que je peux changer mon avis si je ne veux plus participer ?

Oui. Vous pouvez changer votre avis à n’importe quel moment de l’étude : avant, pendant ou après l’entretien et/ou avant, pendant ou après le projet de groupe.

• Il n’y aura pas des conséquences négatives si vous changez votre avis.

• Vous avez le droit d’arrêter de participer à tout moment sans donner une raison. Personne ne sera gênée.

• Vous avez aussi le droit de refuser de répondre à une question et de refuser de participer à une partie du projet de groupe. Personne ne vous arrêtera ni demandera pourquoi.

Est-ce que ce que je dis est confidentiel ?

Oui. Tout ce que vous dites reste confidentiel.

• La chercheuse ne peut pas dévoiler à une tierce personne ce que vous avez dit dans l’entretien. Cela veut dire que tout ce dont nous parlons ne sera pas répété à quelqu’un sauf si ce que vous dites peut créer un risque pour vous ou quelqu’un d’autre. Si cela arrive, nous en parlerons ensemble avant d’en parler à quelqu’un d’autre.

• La confidentialité sera aussi une priorité pendant le projet de groupe. Cependant, je ne peux que demander aux autres participants de garder la confidentialité, mais je ne peux pas la garantir.

Les enregistrements et les matériels créés

Avec votre accord, l’entretien sera enregistré pour m’aider à bien analyser votre histoire. Les enregistrements seront aussi faits pendant le projet de groupe, mais seulement si tout le monde donne son accord.

• L’enregistrement m’aidera à suivre notre conversation pour que je puisse le saisir plus tard pour l’analyse.

• L’enregistrement peut s’arrêter à tout moment si vous ne souhaitez pas enregistrer une partie de l’entretien.
Les matériels que vous créez pendant l’entretien et le projet de groupe seront inclus dans l’étude, sauf si vous m’indiquez que vous n’êtes pas d’accord.

Tous matériels, enregistrements et entretiens saisis, seront gardés dans un lieu sécurisé, sur un ordinateur sécurisé et détruit cinq ans après l’évaluation de cette recherche.

Votre identité restera anonyme sur tous les rapports de résultats. Pour cela, nous changerons votre nom et nous déguiserons les détails qui peuvent dévoiler votre identité ou l’identité de quelqu’un dont vous parlez.

**Est-ce qu’il y a des bénéfices ou des risques si je participe ?**

L’objectif de cette étude est de communiquer la recherche et les résultats aux décideurs politiques, politiciens, praticiens, fournisseurs de services et aux autres chercheurs travaillant dans ce sujet. Cependant, je ne peux pas garantir qu’il y aura des changements grâce à cette recherche.

Dans des études similaires, des participants ont confié avoir eu du plaisir à participer à ce genre de recherche.

- Vous aurez l’opportunité de créer votre propre projet local pendant cette étude. Les jeunes qui ont participé à des projets de groupes similaires ont reporté que le projet à les apporté des nouvelles capacités et connaissances.

Je n’anticipe pas des problèmes, ni de résultats négatifs de cette étude. Pourtant, il est possible que l’entretien ou les activités pendant le projet de groupe fasse revenir des sentiments ou souvenirs difficiles.

- Si vous avez des sentiments ou des souvenirs difficiles, vous serez invités à changer de sujet, prendre une pause ou arrêter l’entretien ou atelier. Vous avez le droit de quitter l’étude quand vous le voulez, et si vous décidez d’arrêter, votre décision sera respectée.

- Je vous donnerai une liste des soutiens et des organisations qui vous aideront si jamais vous avez des difficultés ou des sentiments désagréables.

- Finalement, comme expliqué ci-dessus, je ferai tout ce que je peux pour garder votre anonymat dans l’étude, cependant, il est possible que quelqu’un apprenne que vous avez participé.
Qu’est-ce qu’on fait avec l’information vous donnez ?

- Les extraits anonymes et les matériaux produits pourront être cités dans une thèse doctorale (un rapport académique), dans des présentations, y compris, des colloques, des conférences, des séminaires, etc., ou dans des articles publiés, des livres, ou des rapports, qui peuvent créer des résultats pour la recherche.

- Les noms réels et les informations qui peuvent vous identifier, ou identifier des personnes connues par vous, ne seront pas utilisés. En d’autres termes, je ferai tout ce que je peux pour garantir que personne ne saura que vous participez à cette étude.

- Il vous sera offert une copie de la thèse et un rapport qui résume l’étude quand la recherche sera terminée.

Pourquoi c’est important d’entendre votre histoire ?

- Quand vous partagez vos expériences et vos connaissances, d’autres personnes peuvent entendre votre point de vue.

- Le projet de groupe vous donne l’occasion de faire une action locale et directe à votre façon.

- Nous croyons que vous êtes un expert et que vous pouvez aider d’autres personnes à comprendre la vie des jeunes séparés et leur transition à la majorité.

- Nous espérons que nous pouvons montrer aux autres qu’il est important de donner une opportunité aux jeunes comme vous de partager vos connaissances et expériences.

- Nous souhaitons que l’information aide à améliorer la vie des jeunes qui seront dans une situation similaire que votre dans l’avenir.
Nous vous remercions sincèrement d’avoir pris le temps à lire ce document et d’avoir considéré votre participation à l’étude.

Coordonnées de la Chercheuse
Vous pouvez contacter la chercheuse à :
Amy Stapleton (Doctorante) :
+338XXX (France) +3538XXX (Irlande) OU amstaple@tcd.ie
Vous pouvez aussi contacter :
Dr. Paula Mayock (Directrice académique) :
+3538XXX (Irlande) OU pmayock@tcd.ie
English translation:

Aging-Out:

Experiences of Separated Children’s Transition to Adulthood

Who is the study about?

This study is about separated children (children and teenagers who arrived in Ireland/France without their parents, legal guardians or families) who:

- Are now aged between 18 and 24 years old;
- Arrived in Ireland or France before aged 18 years without their parents or guardians;
- Lived in foster families or residential home for at least 6 months before they turned 18.

Before deciding if you would like to participate, please consider the information below and ask any questions if you want more information or if something is not very clear.

Who am I and what is this study about?

- I am a PhD research student in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.
- The research will be written into a PhD thesis (i.e. an academic report).
- My research is funded by the Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme.
- I am interested in learning about your experiences of the transition to adulthood. In other words, I would like to understand if your experiences changed once you reached the age of 18 years and, if they did, how.
- I am inviting you to participate because you spent time with a foster family or in a residential and are now aged 18 years or over. I, therefore, see you as an expert on this topic.
- I would particularly like to work directly with you to understand your experiences of the transition at 18 years and any challenges that you may have faced either during or after that time.

Who can participate in the research?

You are eligible to participate in this study if you:

- Are aged between 18 and 24 years;
- Have arrived in Ireland or France before the age of 18 without your parents or guardians;
- Lived in foster families or residential centre for at least 6 months before turning 18 years;
- Feel comfortable communicating in English or French.
What happens if you decide to participate?

- You will be invited to participate in one individual interview and one group project.

**TAKING PART IS COMPLETELY YOUR CHOICE, YOU DO NOT HAVE TO PARTICIPATE.**

What happens during the interview?

- If you agree to take part in the study, I will interview you at a time and a place that suits you.

  - The interview will take around 60 minutes and will start with the researcher asking you to tell your 'life story' since you arrived in Ireland or France.

What else will we talk about during the interview?

During the interview, we will talk about the following types of issues:

| ➢ Life since arriving in Ireland/France | ➢ The different services you have been in contact with |
| ➢ School, training and work experiences | ➢ The impact of the legal procedures on your situation |
| ➢ The transition process | ➢ Your experience of the aftercare system |
| ➢ Relationships and social support | ➢ Hopes for the future |

- You do not have to answer questions on any topic that you do not feel happy to talk about.

- Your privacy and decisions will be respected at all times.

- You will also be given the opportunity to draw, write or map different aspects of the interview. Materials will be provided to you during the interviews for this purpose.

What does the group project involve?

- You will also be invited to take part in one group project. Again, participation is your choice and you do not have to participate.

- This group project will involve you participating with other young people. You will be invited to share and contribute with other young people in the study on a project related to the transition to adulthood, i.e. turning eighteen.

- This project aims to give you the opportunity to develop your own part of the research with other young people in a similar situation to you.

- **During this project, I will support you and the others in the group to develop your own project on the transition to adulthood for separated children.**
• The project can be as creative as you and the others in the group wish. We can do fun activities, such as games, art, music, dance, writing, storytelling, mapping, etc.

• You will also be invited to discuss and to analyse the methods and the results of the group project. This means that you will have the opportunity to contribute to the research as it is being collected and analysed.

• You, with the group members, will decide on the final outcome of the project.

• If you decide to participate in the group project, you will have the opportunity to share the results of the group project to a wider audience. The aim of this is to give you an opportunity to share your knowledge and experiences in the way that you feel is most appropriate and representative of your work.

• Together, with my support, the group will decide on the best way to share and promote their work, while all the time ensuring that the final distribution of the work maintains the group’s anonymity.

• If you have ever wanted to get involved in a local group project and inform others about your point of view, this could be a good opportunity.

If you agree to participate in the interview this does not mean you have to participate in the group project. This group project is completely voluntary, and you do not have to participate.

**How will the group project be organised?**

• I would like to organise weekly workshops over a three-month period. However, I will work around your availability and what suits you and the rest of the group.

  • In these workshops, with my support, you will develop a group project on the topic.

• Together, we will decide on the length of each workshop, how many days we want to run it for and the aim of the project.

• You are invited to attend as many workshops as you wish, if you prefer to do only an interview that is also perfectly fine.

To give you an example, below is the information for the first workshop which aims for us to get to know each other and develop a safe, comfortable atmosphere:
1. We will begin with an icebreaker—a fun activity to get everyone moving and together as a group.

2. Then we will focus on building a team and creating a 'safe' atmosphere to make sure that you and everyone in the group are comfortable together.

3. We will discuss the ideas we have for developing the project, the hopes and what we aim to achieve, as well as the logistical aspects of the project (the space we are working in, time, length of workshop...).

4. We will then finish off with a fun activity and a snack before evaluating the first workshop and how we feel.

The 'Chill out zone'

- During each workshop, there will be a 'chill out zone' where you can go at any time to relax and take a break. Materials such as magazines, stationery, drawing materials, etc. will be available in the chill out zone.

- Sensitive issues will not be discussed during the group project. However, if you do feel any distress or upset, or if you just are tired and need a break, you will be welcome to stop or take a break and go to the chill out zone without needing to justify this to anyone.

Can I change my mind about taking part?

Yes. You can change your mind at any point of the study: before, during or after the interview, and/or before, during or after any point of the group project.

- There will be no negative repercussions if you change your mind.

- You have the right to stop participating at any point without giving a reason. Nobody will mind.

- You also have the right to refuse to answer a question or participate in a certain aspect of the group project. Nobody will stop you or ask you why.

Is what you say private?

Yes. Anything you say is completely confidential.

- The researcher cannot tell anyone else what you have said in the interview. This means that whatever we talk about in the interview will not be repeated to anyone else unless something is a risk of harm to you or another person.

- Confidentiality will also a priority in the group sessions. But I can only ask that other participants maintain confidentiality, but I cannot guarantee it.
Audio recording and materials created

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to help me to record your story properly. Audio recordings also will be taken during the group sessions, if you and other members of the group sessions are happy with being recorded.

- The audio recording will make sure that I can keep track of what we both say and so that they can be typed up afterwards for analysis.

- The recording can be stopped or paused at any point if you do not want any part of the interview recorded.

- Any materials developed during the interview or group project will be used for the study unless you state that you do not want them to be included.

- All materials, recordings and typed up interviews will be stored in a secure location on a secure computer and destroyed five years after the research has been examined. (i.e. September 2026).

- Your identity will remain anonymous in any reporting of the results. This will be done by changing your name and disguising any details of the interview and of your participation in group activities which may reveal your identity or the identity of the people you speak about.

Are there any benefits or risks to my participation?

The aim of this study is to communicate this research and the results to policymakers, practitioners, service providers, and other researchers working in this area. But I cannot guarantee that any changes will be made because of this research.

- In other similar studies, participants have highlighted their enjoyment in participating in such studies and you will have the opportunity to create your own local project during this study.

- Young people who have participated in similar participatory group projects have reported learning new skills and gaining new knowledge during the process.

I do not anticipate anything negative results from this study. But it is possible that the interview or activities during the group project may bring up difficult feelings or memories.
• If this arises you are welcome to change the topic, take a break or stop the interview or workshop completely. You can leave the research at any time and that decision will be respected.

• There will be a contact list of supports given to you in case you do experience any difficult or unpleasant feelings.

• Finally, as mentioned above, although I will do everything in my power to ensure that nobody finds out that you have been involved in the study, it is possible that someone learns that you have taken part.

What happens to the information you give?

• Disguised extracts and material from my interview and group activities may be quoted in a PhD thesis (an academic report), in presentations including conferences, seminars etc., and in published papers, articles, books and/or reports that may be generated from the research findings.

• Real names will not be used and any information that might identify you or anyone known to you will not be used. In other words, I will do all I can to ensure that nobody will know that you participated in the study.

• You will be offered a copy of the PhD and a summary report of the study when the research is finished.

Why is hearing your story important?

• Sharing your experiences and knowledge means that you have a chance to get your opinion and story heard.

• The group project means that you can take some direct local action on this topic in your own way.

• We believe that you are experts and you can help people to understand what life is like for separated children after the age of eighteen.

• We also hope that we can show others how important it is to give space to young people like you to share your knowledge and expertise.

• We hope that this information will help to improve the lives of young people in a similar situation in the future.
Thank you kindly for taking the time to read this and for considering participating in the study.

Researcher’s Contact Details

You can contact the researcher on:

Amy Stapleton (PhD Researcher) +35387XXX (Ireland) / +336XXX (France) OR amslaple@lcd.ie

You can also contact:

Dr. Paula Mayock (Academic supervisor) +3531XXX OR pmayock@lcd.ie
APPENDIX D. CONSENT FORMS FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Original version in French

Arrivant à la Majorité :

Les expériences des jeunes séparés de la transition à la majorité.

Formulaire de consentement

Ecrire N (pour non) ou O (pour oui) dans chaque boîte au-dessous

Je, .................................................., accepte volontairement de participer à cette étude de recherche.

☐ Je comprends que même si je veux participer maintenant, je peux arrêter quand je veux, ou je peux refuser de répondre aux questions sans me justifier, et sans conséquence.

☐ Les détails de l'étude ont été expliqués en format écrit et j'ai eu l'opportunité de demander des questions sur l'étude.

☐ Je comprends que ma participation signifie un entretien, et, si cela m'intéresse, un projet collectif (avec plusieurs activités en groupe).

☐ Je comprends que je peux faire arrêter l'usage de l'information de mon entretien et/ou de ma participation dans les activités de groupe jusqu'à deux semaines après l'entretien/activity de groupe. Si je choisis cela, les matériaux et les informations seraient effacés.

☐ Je comprends que je n'aurai pas de bénéfices directs si je participe à cette recherche.

☐ J'accepte d'être enregistrés pendant mon entretien.

☐ J'accepte d'être enregistré pendant les activités en groupe si je participe à ces activités.

☐ J'accepte que, sauf si je change mon avis plus tard, tout ce qui est produit (les matériaux des ateliers, par exemple les dessins, les programmes, les cartographies...) des entretiens et des activités en groupe peut être utilisé pour cet étude.
Je comprends que toutes les informations données au cours de cette étude seront confidentielles, et ne seront pas répétées à quelqu’un d’autre sauf s’il existe un risque de dommage à ma personne ou à d’autres personnes. Je aussi comprends que la chercheuse peut demander aux autres participants de garder la confidentialité mais qu’elle ne peut pas la garantir.

Je comprends que je resterai anonyme quand les résultats seront communiqués. Pour garantir mon anonymat, mon nom et les détails qui peuvent m’identifier ou identifier les personnes dont je parle seront changés.

Je comprends que les informations données et matériels créés pendant mon entretien et les activités de groupe, peuvent être cités dans une thèse, des présentations (y compris des colloques, des conférences, des séminaires, etc.) et dans des articles académiques, des journaux, des livres et/ou des rapports.

Je comprends que si je dis à la chercheuse que j’ai un risque de dommage ou quelqu’un d’autre a un risque de dommage, elle sera obligée de signaler aux autorités concernées. Elle en parlera avec moi avant, mais elle sera obligée de signaler la situation même sans mon accord.

Je comprends que les formulaires de consentement signés, les originaux des enregistrements et des autres matériels produits pendant l’entretien/les activités groupes seront gardés sur un disque dur sécurisé et dans un ordinateur protégé d’un mot de passe et/ou dans un classeur verrouillé dans un bureau verrouillé jusqu’à ce que le diplôme de doctorat soit attribué.

Je comprends que la transcription de mon entretien (l’entretien saisi à la machine) et les matériels des activités de groupe sans les informations permettant de m’identifier seront gardées pour une durée de cinq ans après que l’étude de recherche soit terminée.

Je comprends que conformément aux lois sur la liberté de l’information j’ai le droit d’accéder à l’information que j’ai fournie à n’importe quel moment pendant la période de stockage (expliquée ci-dessus).
Je comprends que je peux contacter toutes les personnes impliquées dans cette recherche pour avoir des clarifications et des informations supplémentaires.

Je comprends les critères pour participer à cette recherche et je confirme que je suis d'accord d'y participer.

Pour confirmer votre niveau de participation, veuillez écrire N (pour non) ou O (pour oui) dans CHAQUE boîte au-dessous.

☐ J'accepte volontairement de participer à un entretien.

☐ De plus, j'accepte volontairement de participer au projet de groupe.

Si vous souhaitez participer au projet de groupe, veuillez indiquer des allergies alimentaires ou tout autres éléments que vous auriez :

________________________________________________________

Signature de participant ___________________________ Date ____________

Le participant/la participante donne son consentement informé et volontaire pour participer à cette étude.

________________________________________________________

Signature de chercheur ___________________________ Date ____________

Coordonnées de la chercheuse

Vous pouvez contacter la chercheuse à :

Amy Stapleton (Doctorante) :
+336XXX (France)/ +3538XXX (Irlande)
OU am staple@tcd.ie

Vous pouvez aussi contacter :

Dr. Paula Mayock (Directrice académique) :
+3538XXX (Irlande)
OU pmayock@tcd.ie
English translation of participant consent forms

Aging-Out:

Experiences of Separated Children’s Transition to Adulthood

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Please write N (for no) or Y (for yes) in EACH box below.

I……………………………………………. voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

☐ I understand that even if I agree to take part now, I can stop at any time or refuse to answer any question without explaining myself, and without any consequences.

☐ I have had the details of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

☐ I understand that my involvement includes one interview, and one group project (involving several group activities) if I am interested.

☐ I understand that I can stop the use of information from my interview and/or my involvement in group activities within two weeks after the interview/group activity. If I choose to do this, the material and information will be deleted.

☐ I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

☐ I agree with my interview being audio-recorded.

☐ I agree with being audio-recorded during group activities if I participate in them.

☐ I agree that, unless I change my mind later, any resources (materials from activities such as artwork, project plans, maps, photographs etc.) from the interviews and group activities can be used for this study.

☐ I understand that all the information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially and will not be repeated to other people unless there is a risk of harm to me or another person. I also understand that the researcher can only ask other participants to keep confidentiality but cannot guarantee it.
I understand that in any reporting on the results of this research my identity will stay anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview, and of my participation in group activities, which may reveal my identity or the identity of the people I speak about.

I understand that disguised extracts and material from my interview and group activities may be quoted in a dissertation, any presentations including conferences, seminars etc., and in published papers, articles, books and/or reports that may be developed from the research.

I understand that if I tell the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

I understand that signed consent forms, original audio recordings and other materials produced during the interview/group activities will be kept on a secure hard drive and a password-protected computer and/or in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office until the doctoral degree is conferred.

I understand that a transcript of my interview (i.e., the typed-out interview) and materials from the group activities in which all identifying information has been removed will be kept for five years after the completion of the research.

I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage (as specified above).

I understand that I am free to contact the research team to seek further clarification and information.

I understand the criteria for participating in this research and I confirm my eligibility to participate.

To confirm your level of participation, please write N (for no) or Y (for yes) in EACH box below.

I voluntarily agree to participate in one interview.

I also voluntarily agree to participate in the group project.
If you wish to participate in the group project, please indicate any allergies or food intolerances that you may have: ________________________________

Signature of participant ___________________________  Date ____________

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher ___________________________  Date ____________

**Researcher’s Contact Details**

*You can contact the researcher on:*

Amy Stapleton (PhD Researcher)
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You can also contact:

Dr. Paula Mayock (Academic supervisor)
+353XXX (Ireland) OR pmayock@tcd.ie
# APPENDIX E. AN OVERVIEW OF THE STEP-BY-STEP DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REVIEW PROCESS IN PHASE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Led by</th>
<th>Timelining</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>PAR Group project Session 1</td>
<td>Data gathering</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Saturday Week 1 Session 1 November 2018</td>
<td>Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>Audio, rich pictures/charts, text</td>
<td>Process outputs</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Week 2/3 November 2018</td>
<td>Researcher’s home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of key themes 1</td>
<td>Themes 1</td>
<td>Synthesise</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Week 2/3 November 2018</td>
<td>Researcher’s home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review process</td>
<td>PAR Group project session 2a</td>
<td>Review, adapt and refine methods chosen</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Ongoing during Phase 2</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interpret, confirm and refine the themes from PAR Group session 1</td>
<td>Co-management</td>
<td>Saturday Week 3 Session 2a November 2018</td>
<td>Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>PAR Group project Session 2b</td>
<td>Data gathering</td>
<td>Co-management</td>
<td>Saturday Week 3 Session 2b November 2018</td>
<td>Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>Audio, rich pictures/charts, text</td>
<td>Process outputs</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Week 4/5 November and December 2018</td>
<td>Researcher’s home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of key themes 2</td>
<td>Themes 2</td>
<td>Synthesise</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Week 4/5 November and December 2018</td>
<td>Researcher’s home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review process</td>
<td>PAR Group project session 3a</td>
<td>Review, adapt and refine methods chosen</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Ongoing during Phase 2</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interpret, confirm and refine the themes from PAR Group session 2</td>
<td>Co-management</td>
<td>Saturday Week 5 Session 3a December 2018</td>
<td>Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>PAR Group project Session 3b</td>
<td>Data gathering</td>
<td>Co-management</td>
<td>Saturday Week 5 Session 2b December 2018</td>
<td>Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>Audio, rich pictures/charts, text</td>
<td>Process outputs</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Week 6-10 December 2018</td>
<td>Researcher’s home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of key themes 3</td>
<td>Themes 3</td>
<td>Synthesise</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Week 6-10 December 2018</td>
<td>Researcher’s home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes 3</td>
<td>Synthesise</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Week 6-10 December 2018</td>
<td>Researcher’s home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review process</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final review of Phase 1</td>
<td>Review, adapt and refine methods chosen</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Ongoing during Phase 2</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review, interpret and refine the themes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Week 11-15 December 2018 to January 2019</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX F. AN OVERVIEW OF THE STEP-BY-STEP DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REVIEW PROCESS IN PHASE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outputs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development of key themes 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review process</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development of key themes 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review process</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX G. AN OVERVIEW OF THE STEP-BY-STEP DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REVIEW PROCESS IN PHASE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>What?</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Led by?</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection</strong></td>
<td>12 individual in-depth interviews</td>
<td>Interview conducted with each young person</td>
<td>Young people</td>
<td>April to July 2019</td>
<td>In the young people’s homes, in a park, in local libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher journal and case summaries</td>
<td>Self-reflection of journal with entries coded and categories created using NVivo</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>January to June 2019</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio files from interviews (but also other audio files from focus groups and social actions)</td>
<td>Audio files from the interviews (as well as focus groups and two social actions) were transcribed and then checked and verified by the researcher</td>
<td>NGO staff and researcher</td>
<td>September 2019 to June 2020</td>
<td>Researcher’s home, NGO staff office/home. Coordinated between both online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcription</strong></td>
<td>Themes found within transcriptions</td>
<td>Synthesis, coding and categorisation of transcribed data</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Ongoing, iterative process from August 2019 to January 2021</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review themes from Phase 1, 2 and 3</td>
<td>Interpret and refine the themes from Phase 1, 2 and 3</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Ongoing process from August 2019 to September 2023</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refine and reviewing of themes and key concepts from Phase 1, 2 and 3 with research participants</td>
<td>Participatory analysis and reviewing with the young people in one-to-one meetings</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>January 2021 (During member check in Phase 4)</td>
<td>In the young people’s homes, in parks, in coffee shops, in a train station. (Note typically these meetings were held outside due to the Covid-19 pandemic).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H. AN OVERVIEW OF THE STEP-BY-STEP DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REVIEW PROCESS IN PHASE 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 4</th>
<th>What?</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Led by?</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection</strong></td>
<td>10 member checks</td>
<td>One-to-one meeting conducted with each young person to follow up on changes in their lives since Phase 3 (not audio recorded)</td>
<td>Young people</td>
<td>January 2021</td>
<td>In the young people’s homes, in parks, in coffee shops, in a train station.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outputs</strong></td>
<td>Researcher journal and one page summary of change in situation</td>
<td>Self-reflection of journal with entries coded and categories created using NVivo Coding and analysis of summaries using Excel.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>January 2021 to September 2023</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development of key themes</strong></td>
<td>Themes from the member check</td>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>January 2021 to September 2023</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review process</strong></td>
<td>Review themes from Phase 1, 2, 3 and 4</td>
<td>Interpret and refine the themes from all phases</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Ongoing process from January 2021 to September 2023</td>
<td>Researcher’s home/office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I. AN EXAMPLE OF A PRELIMINARY THEMATIC ANALYSIS PROCESS

An example of codes identified in timelines from three participant timelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Future work, friendship, relationships, study/training</td>
<td>Journey, transition countries, family (mentions: 2), origin country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hopes, NGO worker, school, girlfriend</td>
<td>Journey, status and documentation issues (proof, mentions: 5), police (mentions: 3), legal aspects (lawyer, judge), health (sickness, care), housing situation, deportation threat, financial issues, basic needs (food), lack of choices, illegal activity, detention, no parents, lack of hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Meets different people, gets own apartment, housing independence, now things are up and down but stabilising</td>
<td>Arrival in France - homelessness, breaks up with his girlfriend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overarching categories from preliminary analysis of timelines drawn in Focus Group, Session 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships/ Friendships</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopes/ Future</td>
<td>Country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overarching categories from preliminary analysis of audio files from Focus Group, Session 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships/ Friendships</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges confronted in daily life (including legal systems)</td>
<td>Country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adapting to France</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Flip chart image to present these themes to the research participants (Focus Group, Session 2)

Preliminary drafts of key thematic areas identified from Focus Group Session 1 following refinement of themes with participants

| The Importance of social relationships as the young people transition to adulthood
| Young people face challenges linked to legal system(s) (residency, age assessment, etc.)
| The positive role of school and work for supporting the transition to adulthood but barriers to access
| Integration/social inclusion is a challenging, multi-faceted process with many barriers
| A continued, prolonged impact of experiences/relationships from country of origin, the journey to France and from early experiences in France

Expansion of key preliminary themes identified from Focus Group, Session 1 and their link to the Research Questions (RQ)

| The Importance of Social Relationships in Transitioning to Adulthood
| - The role of friendships, romantic relationships, and support networks in the young people’s lives. | - RQ2/3
| Challenges Linked to Legal Systems
| - Focuses on issues related to residency, age assessment, documentation, and interactions with police, social workers, administrative staff, etc. | - RQ2/3
| The Role of Education and Employment in Transitioning to Adulthood
| - Highlights the positive impact of school and work on the transition to adulthood, while addressing barriers to access these opportunities. | - RQ2/3
| Barriers to Integration and Social Inclusion
| - Explores the multifaceted and challenging nature of social inclusion/integration, including the obstacles faced by the young people. | - RQ2/3
APPENDIX J. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Guide d’entretien
Les Expériences des Jeunes Séparés de la Transition à la Majorité

1. La vie quotidienne
2. Les conditions d’hébergement
3. L’intégration et l’identité
4. Le soutien social et les relations entre personnes
5. Les procédures
6. La prise en charge et le suivi
7. La transition vers l’âge adulte
8. L’éducation et l’emploi
9. La santé
10. Résilience
11. Le Futur
Guide d’entretien

Les expériences des jeunes séparés de la transition à la majorité

La vie quotidien

- Peux-tu me dire quelque chose sur ta vie en ce moment ? (Où habites-vous, la vie quotidienne, des choses comme ça) (N’interrompe pas).
- Avec qui passes-tu la plupart de ton temps ? Qu’est-ce que vous aimeriez faire ensemble ?
- Est-ce que tu dors beaucoup ?

Probe : Les loisirs, la musique, le bénévolat, les réseaux sociaux

CONDITION DE VIE

- Est-ce que tu peux me dire quelque chose sur où tu habites actuellement ?

Probe : gouts et aversions et des choses on aimerait changer
  - Est-ce que tu habites avec quelqu’un ?
  - Est-ce que tu te sens chez toi là-bas ?
  - Comment tu te sens en sécurité où tu habites en ce moment ?
  - Pour revenir à chez toi, quand tu entends les mots ‘chez moi’ qu’est-ce qui te vient en tête ?
- Est-ce que tu peux me dire quelque chose sur où tu as habité depuis ton arrivé en France ?

Probe : déménagements depuis arrivé en France, depuis 18 ans et les soutiens avec ces déménagements

- Je suis juste en train de me poser des questions sur tes 18 ans. Est-ce que tu peux me dire quelque chose sur où tu habites depuis tes 18 ans ?
  - Te souviens-tu des enjeux ou des changements ?
- As-tu vécu des difficultés avec ton logement ou des risques de le perdre ? (L’accès, difficultés financières, logement inadapté, la transition à 18 ans, etc. ?)

Qui :
  - Peux-tu me dire un peu plus sur ce que s’est passé et les difficultés tu as dû surmonter ?
  - N’as-tu jamais dormi dans un squat, foyers ou dans la rue depuis ton arrivé en France ?
  - C’était quand la dernière fois que tu t’es senti chez toi ?
  - Est-ce que tu aimerais m’en parler un peu plus ?
  - Est-ce que tu t’es senti sans abri en ce moment ?
- Est-ce que tu t’inquiètes pour le logement dans l’avenir, par exemple, dans les prochains 12 mois ?

Pour les participants qui habitent dans un appartement/ une maison/ avec une famille d’accueil

- Ça fait combien de temps que tu habites ici ?
- Est-ce que c’est le même endroit depuis ton arrivé ?
**Probe : déménagements depuis l'arrivée en France, depuis 18 ans et les soutiens avec ces déménagements**

- Comment as-tu trouvé l'hébergement ?
- Peux-tu me dire un peu plus sur comment c'est ?

**Pour les participants qui habitent dans des logements temporaires/ un foyer/ un hébergement**

- Alors, tu restes à XXX maintenant, c'est comment ? (Les choses aimées/ pas aimées ; des choses à changer)
- Depuis combien de temps es-tu là-bas ?

**Probe : déménagements depuis l'arrivée en France, depuis 18 ans et les soutiens avec ces déménagements**

**Probe : des règles, des amis, d'autres résidents, le propriétaire**

- Est-ce que tu te considères sans abris en ce moment ?
- Diras-tu que c'est chez toi ici ?
- Est-ce que tu t'es senti sans abri en ce moment ?
- Si tu déménages d'ici – est-ce que tu as des options ?

---

**INTEGRATION ET IDENTITÉ**

- On a parlé un peu de ta situation et ta vie en ce moment mais comment ça été quand tu es arrivé en France ? Est-ce que tu peux m'en parler un peu plus?
  - Quel âge avait tu ?

**Probe : impressions de l'endroit et la communauté quand ils sont arrivés (choqué/impressionné) et les changements dans leurs sentiments et réflexions depuis l'arrivée.**

- Diras-tu que ta vie a changé depuis tu es arrivé en France (mieux ou pire ?) ? Si oui, comment ?
- Et depuis tu as eu 18 ans ?

- Comment est l'endroit que tu habites en ce moment ? (Endroit, voisins, infrastructures etc.).
  - Te sens-tu comme faisant partie de la communauté là-bas ?
  - Oui : Qu'est-ce que te fait sentir comme ça ? Non : Pourquoi tu penses que tu n'en fais pas partie ?

- Est-ce que tu ne t'es jamais senti exclu de ta communauté ?
  - J'aimerais te poser des questions sur l'intégration.
- Premièrement, peux-tu me dire ce à quoi tu penses quand tu entends le mot 'intégration' ?
  - Tu te sens intégré ici ?
SOUTIEN SOCIAL ET RELATIONS

- J’aimerais t’inviter à dessiner les personnes qui tu considères être importantes dans ta vie.
  (Une cartographie de réseaux sociaux—si le participant ne veut pas dessiner ils peuvent utiliser des autocollants/écrire)
- Peux-tu me dire quelles sont les personnes le plus importantes ? Est-ce que tu peux me dire un peu sur votre relation ?
- Qui te connaît le mieux ?
Probe : confiance des autres, et les autres ont confiance en toi.

AMIS, PAIRS ET RELATIONS EN COUPLE
- Aimerais-tu me parler de tes amis, les personnes avec qui tu passes du temps, ou des personnes avec qui tu as des liens amicaux avec ? Ou peut-être un(e) petit(e) ami(e) ?
Probe : connaître des amis, les activités faits ensemble
- Est-ce que tu as quelqu’un sur qui tu peux t’appuyer quand tu as besoin d’aide ou de soutien ?
  (Meilleur ami)
- Est-ce que tu te tournerais vers autres jeunes si tu avais besoin de soutien ?
Probe : amis français, amis de pays d’origine.
- Dans une relation :
  - Pourras-tu me dire un peu sur la relation ? Comment ça se passe en ce moment ?
  - Penses-tu que ta compagne/ ton compagnon te soutient ?
  - Tu n’as jamais eu un moment difficile dans ta relation (ou dans tes relations précédents) ?
    Comment tu t’es senti pendant ce moment ?
Probe : le future, les différences des relations en France et dans le pays d’origine.

FAMILLE (attention – c’est un sujet sensible)
- Aimerais-tu parler un peu de ta famille ?
- Est-ce que tu es en contact avec des personnes de ta famille en ce moment ? (Régulièrement, type de contact, relation)
Probe : soutien de la famille, soutien donné à la famille.
- Est-ce que quelqu’un de ta famille connaît ta situation en France ? Qu’est-ce que vous leur avez dit sur la France ?
- As-tu de la famille en Europe ? Es-tu en contact avec eux ?

REFERANT
- A part tes parents, est-ce qu’il y a quelqu’un qui joue un rôle parental pour toi ?
  Oui : As-tu des contacts réguliers avec cette personne ? As-tu habité avec cette personne ?
- As-tu des personnes légalement responsables de toi en France ? En avais-tu dans la passée ?
  (Avant 18)
  Oui : quel était / qu’est-ce que c’est leur rôle ?
PRISE EN CHARGE

- As-tu quelqu’un qui te soutien en France ? Si tu as besoin de parler sur un problème personnel ou difficulté, qui tu parleras avec ?

Qui : Comment tu les as rencontrés ? Pourras-tu me dire comment ils te soutiennent ?

Probe : gestion des tâches administrative, diriger les systèmes de prise en charge.

- Est-ce qu’il y a des organisations ou des structures qui peuvent te soutenir ou soutenir d’autres jeunes dans ta situation ?

Oui : Probe : présence, accès, rôle et types de soutiens, changements de l’accès depuis 18 ans.

PROCÉDURES

J’aimerais mieux comprendre les procédures légales et variées, et les étapes que les jeunes séparés passent dès leurs arrivées jusqu’à quand ils sont considérés comme des adultes.

- Peux-tu me décrire les procédures variées que tu as dû passer depuis ton arrivé en France ? Peut-être les dessiner ou écrire une chronologie t’aidera ?

Probe : détermination d’âge, transition à l’âge adulte, EVA, titres de séjour, demande d’asile, OQTF, les appels.

Probe : la définition des MNA/ mineurs séparés. (Définition légal vs opinion personnelle).

○ Comment tu as trouvé des procédures différentes ? (Challenges, expériences positives).
○ Était-il facile de trouver les informations sur les procédures ? Comment tu as trouvé cette information ?
○ Quels sont les droits que tu as quand tu passes à travers de ces procédures ?
○ Est-ce que tu sais si des choses ont changé depuis que tu es passé par les procédures ? (Impact de la contexte politique, changements de la loi)

- As-tu des conseils concernant les procédures à donner à un jeune qui vient d’arriver en France ?
  ○ Et des recommandations pour les améliorer ou les changer ?

- Peux-tu me dire un peu sur les structures qui gèrent les procédures différentes ? Quel est leur rôle ?

Probe : EMA, organisations locales, département, préfecture, juge, PAF, avocat

○ Qu’est-ce que tu penses des différentes organisations ? (Positives/ négatives).

- Puis-je te demander ce que ton statut en France en ce moment (titre de séjour) ?

Probe : As-tu eu un titre de séjour quand tu as eu 18 ans ? Est-ce que tu pourrais m’expliquer le processus ?

○ Penses-tu que ton titre de séjour actual a un impact sur ta vie quotidienne ? (Accès aux services et aux soutiens) Et tes futurs choix ?
o Penses-tu que ton titre de séjour actuel a un impact sur ta vie quotidienne ? (Accès aux services et aux soutiens) Et tes futurs choix ?

o Sais-tu s’il y a des conditions mises sur les titres de séjours ?

o Penses-tu que d’autres jeunes qui arrivent en France seuls ont les mêmes opportunités pour avoir un titre de séjour ?

PRISE EN CHARGE ET SUIVI

Nous avons parlé un peu des procédures mais je voulais te demander un peu plus sur le système de prise en charge et les services.
- Peux-tu me décrire le système de prise en charge en France et comment ça marche ?
- Est-ce que tu as eu droit à une prise en charge quand tu es arrivé en France ?

Probe : changements de la prise en charge des étapes différentes, les expériences dans les services de la protection d’enfance.
- As-tu, ou avais-tu un travailleur social, assistant social ou éducateur ? Ou plus qu’une personne ?
  o Quel est leur rôle ?
  o Sont-ils faciles à parler avec ?
- Est un éducateur/travailleur social après tes 18 ans ? T’es-tu vu attribué quelqu’un ?
  Qui : Peux-tu me parler un peu d’eux ?

- Est-ce que tu peux me raconter un peu de tes expériences du suivi de tes 18 ans jusqu’à aujourd’hui ? Tu as eu quel soutien ?
  o Est-ce que tu t’attendais à des expériences comme ça ?
- Penses-tu que plus pouvait être fait pour te soutenir et t’aider ?
- As-tu des conseils pour des travailleurs/assistants sociaux ou des éducateurs qui soutiennent les jeunes séparés pendant leurs transitions à la majorité ?

LA TRANSITION VERS L’ÂGE ADULT

Nous avons parlé un peu de la prise en charge et des services mais j’aimerais comprendre un peu plus sur comment tu as trouvé la transition à la majorité ?
- Mais avant de commencer, pourrais-je te demander ce que tu penses être nécessaire pour être considéré comme une adulte ? (Ta définition d’adulte)
- Et la transition à la majorité ? Qu’est-ce que vient dans ta tête quand tu penses à la transition ?
  o Tu penses quelqu’un commence la transition à la majorité quand ? Et ils finissent cette transition quand ?
  o Penses-tu que tu as complété ta transition à la majorité ? En autre mots, tu te considères un adulte ?
C'était comment la transition à la majorité (impacts sur la transition, moments/événements clés)

Avant notre entretien, je t’ai demandé de choisir une chanson qui te fait penser au moment de ton anniversaire de 18 ans. Tu as pu trouver une chanson ?

Quoi : Aimerais-tu la jouer ? Pourras-tu me dire un peu sur pourquoi tu as choisi cette chanson et comment tu te sens quand tu l’écoutes ?

Est-ce que je peux te demander un peu plus sur le moment de ton anniversaire de 18 ans ?

- Pourrais-tu me dire ce que tu te souviens ?

Probe : A l’approche de ton anniversaire de 18 ans, tu te souviens comment tu t’es senti ?

Excité, inquiet] Pourrais-tu te souvenir ton anniversaire de 18 ans ? Qu’est-ce que tu as fait ce jour ?

- Avais-tu beaucoup pensé à ton anniversaire de 18 ans avant ?

Yes : Tu as commencé à y penser combien de temps avant ton anniversaire ?

- Est-ce que tu as discuté du fait que tu allais devenir majeur avec d’autres personnes (travailleurs sociaux, éducateurs, amis, etc.) ?
  - Tu étais conscient de ce qu’il fallait considérer quand tu deviens majeur ? (Éducation, emploi, etc.).
  - Tu as planifié des choses pour ta vie de majeur ? Tu as planifié toi-même ou d’autres personnes t’ont aidé de considérer tes options ?

Probe : planification de suivi, soutien financière

- Tu te sens différent depuis tu as eu 18 ans ? (Changement depuis majeur)

- As-tu des conseils pour d’autres jeunes dans une situation similaire quand ils sont en train de se préparer pour devenir majeur ?

EDUCATION ET EMPLOI

Si tu es d’accord, j’aimerais laisser le sujet de la transition à la majorité maintenant. Je veux parler des problèmes quotidiens, comme l’école, le travail et ta santé.

Peut-être nous pourrons commencer avec l’école ?

- Tu es à l’école / une formation / l’université en ce moment ? Ou est-ce que tu n’es jamais allé à l’école ici ?

Quoi : Pourrais-tu m’en parler un peu ? C’est comment ?


Pour ceux qui sont allés à l’école avant :
- Tu as fini la formation ? Sinon, pourras-tu m’expliquer pourquoi ? Aimeras-tu revenir et continuer ton éducation ?
- Comment tu as choisi tes études ? Est-ce qu’il y avait des choses qui ont influencé ton choix ?
- Pour ceux qui ne sont pas allés à l’école avant :
- Pourras-tu m’expliquer pourquoi tu n’es pas parti à l’école ? Tu aurais aimé y aller ?
- Aimeras-tu revenir et continuer ton éducation ?

- L’école et les formations sont important pour toi ? As-tu des ambitions concernant ton éducation ?
  - Tu penses que tu fais quelque chose qui est en lien avec tes objectifs de l’avenir ? Qu’est-ce que tu aimerais faire dans l’avenir ?
  - Quand tu considères ton éducation, est-ce qu’il y a des choses qui ont changé avant et après tu as eu 18 ans ?

Proba : Tout était la même chose à l’école après tes 18 ans ? Avois-tu les mêmes soutiennent/opportunités ?

- As-tu travaillé avant ?
- Tu travailles en ce moment ?

Oui :
- Pourrais-tu me dire un peu sur ce que tu fais ? (Type, les heures, où)
- Depuis combien de temps tu es dans ce boulot ?
- Comment tu as décidé de faire ce boulot ?
- Tu aimes ton boulot ? C’est comment ?
- Comment tu l’as obtenu ?
- Tes collègues sont comment ? Et ton patron ?
- Tu penses que tu vas quitter ce boulot ? Tu aimerais avoir quel boulot dans l’avenir ?
- Tu penses que tu gagnes assez pour vivre sans avoir besoin d’autres soutiens (états, organisations, etc.) ?

Non :
- Tu aimerais travailler ? Si oui, qu’est que t’empêche ?
- As-tu cherché le travail recensement ?
- Tu as trouvé difficile de chercher et postuler pour des bateaux ?
- As-tu des personnes ou des soutiens pour t’aider à chercher des bateaux ?
- Quels sorts de bateaux aimerais-tu avoir dans l’avenir ? Qu’est-ce que t’aidera de trouver un boulot ?

- Comment tu te débrouilles en termes des finances ? Tu as de soutien ?
  - Est-ce que ta situation financière a changé depuis tu es devenu majeur ?
  - Est-ce que l’argent t’inquiète en ce moment ? Et avant, dans le passé ?

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- Pourras-tu me dire comment est ta santé physique actuellement ?
- Est-ce que ta santé t’inquiète parfois ? Pourras-tu m’en parler un peu plus ?
- Avant, Est-ce que tu n’as jamais eu des problèmes de santé ?
- Et maintenant ? As-tu des problèmes de santé ?
**Probe : avant arrivé et après arrivé en France**

**Qui :** Tu es/ as reçu/ reçus des traitements ? Où ? Suivant ? Comment tu as trouvé / trouves des personnes donnant le traitement ? Est-ce qu’il y a des choses qui tu aimerais changer / améliorer sur le traitement tu as reçu/ reçus ?

- Pourras-tu me décrire le système de santé en France ?
**Probe : comment elle marche, les services disponibles en arrivant en France et après, les difficultés d’accéder aux services depuis l’arrivée**
- Tu as remarqué des changements dans les services de santé depuis tu as eu 18 ans ?

J’aiderais aussi mieux comprendre des autres services à ta disposition.

Pourrais-tu m’expliquer les services que tu as accédé à (maintenant ou avant) ? Tu peux faire une carte sur une feuille si cela t’aidera ?

**Probe : les fournisseurs, présence (régulier, le plus en contact avec, la dernière en contact avec).**
- Tu les trouves comment ? (Serviable, utile, facile à accéder, des fournisseurs évités)
- Pourras-tu dire que tu as une bonne relation avec une personne dans certains services ?
- (Une relation importante ?)
- Peux-tu recommander ces services aux autres jeunes dans ta situation ?
- Est-ce que tu peux penser à des améliorations qui pourrait être fait dans ces services ?

- Depuis tu as eu 18 ans, est-ce que les types de services à ta disposition ont changé ? Pourras-tu me dire quelque chose sur ces services ?

**Qui :** Pour apprendre à connaître ces services, c’est comment ? Est-ce qu’ils sont difficiles ou facile à comprendre ? As-tu des soutiens pour les accéder et interagir avec les services ?
- Est-ce que tu sais pour combien de temps tu pourras accéder aux différents services après tes 18 ans ? L’âge est un critère ?
Pour revenir à ta santé, est-ce que tu es d'accord si nous parlons un peu de la santé mentale – des
inquiétudes, le stress, les choses comme ça ?
- Si je peux demander, est-ce qu'il y a des choses qui t'inquiètent en ce moment ? (La vie en
général, le future)
- Tu diras que la vie est stressante pour toi ?
Oui : Qu'est-ce que tu rends stressé ? Comment tu gères ces émotions et sentiments ?
Non : Est-ce que tu as eu des moments stressant depuis ton arrivée en France ? Pourrais-tu m'en
parler un petit peu ?
- Est-ce que tu as remarqué des choses en particulier qui te rend particulièrement triste ou
abattu ?
- Est-ce que tu te n'es jamais senti déprimé ou abattu ?
Oui :
  - Est-ce que tu n'en as jamais parlé à quelqu'un ? (Amis, services, des professionnels)
Probe : déclencheur, traitement (médicament, psychologue, psychiatre), diagnostique
- Tu penses qu'il y avait des changements dans ta santé mentale (positif/ négatif) depuis que tu
es arrivé en France ? Et aussi avant ton arrivé en France et aujourd'hui ?
- Diras-tu que la vie est plus difficile ou moins difficile depuis que tu as eu 18 ans ? Tu pourras
m'expliquer ?

**RESILIENCE**

- Quand tu te sens triste ou abattu, est-ce qu'il y a des choses qui te fait sentir mieux ?
  - Est-ce que tu as l'impression que tu peux parler avec quelqu'un quand tu ne te sens pas
   bien ? (Oui ? Pour soutenir et aider ?)
  - Qu'est-ce que tu fais quand tu te sens stressé ou triste ?
  - Est-ce qu'il y a des choses que tu fais pour toi-même que tu penses t'aide de jour en jour

- Peux-tu penser à une situation difficile ou stressante que tu as dû affronter ?
  - Comment tu as pu gérer ?
  - Est-ce qu'il y avait quelque chose qui te faisait sentir mieux ?
  - Est-ce qu'il y avait quelqu'un qui t'aidait ?
  - Est-ce que tu fais la même chose quand tu dois affronter des situations difficiles ?

- Si tu rencontres un jeune qui affronte un moment difficile, tu le conseilleras de faire quoi pour
se faire sentir mieux ?
- Tu penses que ta culture de XXX t'a appris des choses pour gérer des émotions difficiles et le
stress ?
  - Tu as remarqué des différences dans la culture Française sur la gestion du stress et
difficultés ?
As-tu découvert des choses qui t'aident à gérer les difficultés ici en France ?

**LE FUTUR ET LA FIN**

Alors, pour finir, j'ai pensé qu'il serait bien de parler de l'avenir.
- Mais avant ça, est-ce que je pourrais te demander comment tu te sens dans ta vie en ce moment ?
  - Est-ce que tu diras que tu affrontes des challenges en ce moment, dans ta vie quotidienne ?
  - Est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose dans ta situation actuelle que tu aimerais changer ?
    Ou que tu trouves particulièrement difficile ?
- Et les choses positives, est-ce qu'il y a des bonnes choses dans ta vie en ce moment ?
  **Probe : Qu'est-ce dont tu as envie ou hâte à faire pendant la semaine ?**
- Est-ce qu'il y a des choses que tu aimerais voir avancer dans ta vie - n'importe quel côté – dans l'avenir ? (Futur besoins ou envies).
- Diras-tu qu'il y a des choses que tu as hâte de voir ou de faire dans l'avenir ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose que tu penses qui peux t'aider à avoir un meilleur avenir ?

- Avant de finir, j'aimerais te demander comment tu te sens, est-ce que tu aimerais choisir une carte qui représente comment sont tes sentiments sur l'entretien ? (Donner les cartes Dixit)
  Pourras-tu m'expliquer pourquoi tu as choisi cette carte ?
- Pourrais-je te demander s'il y a des choses que tu penses que je devrais demander, ou que je devrais changer ?
- Qu'est-ce que tu penses de ta participation à l'étude ? Tu penses que c'est utile ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a des choses qui le rendraient plus intéressant ou l'améliorer ?
- Je suis aussi en train de chercher d'autres jeunes pour y participer, connais-tu des personnes qui pourraient être intéressés ?
- Okaya, merci beaucoup ! Je pense qu'on a fini. Est-ce qu'il y a des choses que tu aimerais me demander ? Ou des choses tu penses qui pourraient être utile que tu aimerais ajouter ?

**APPENDIX**

1. **Pour les participants du projet de groupe :**

- S'il tu plait, choisis une carte qui représente tes sentiments concernant le projet ? (Donner les cartes Dixit) 
  - Comment tu as trouvé le projet de groupe ?
  - Est-ce qu'il y a des choses en particulier que tu as aime ou apprécié ?
  - Est des choses que tu n'as pas aimés ?
  - Comment était l'ambiance pendant les activités ? Et ta relation avec les autres membres du groupe ? (Changement de la relation depuis le début)
  - Est-ce qu'il y a des choses que tu aimerais changer ou qui pouvaient être améliorer ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose qui a limité ta participation ?
- Tu as appris quelque chose ?
- Comment tu trouves les actions faites ? (Événement, présentation, Malta, etc.) ?
- Aimerais-tu faire un autre projet similaire une autre fois ?
- Est-ce que tu as l’impression tu as contribué au projet de recherche global ? Ou à autres choses ? (La communauté, l’organisation etc.).
English translation of interview schedule

Interview Schedule:
Aging out: Separated Children’s Experiences of the Transition to Adulthood

1. Daily life
2. Living Conditions
3. Integration and identity
4. Social Supports & Relationships
5. Procedures
6. Care, aftercare and service provision
7. Aging out
8. Education and employment
9. Health
10. Resilience
11. Future
Interview Schedule

Aging out: Separated Children’s Experiences of the Transition to Adulthood

Daily Life

- Would you like to tell me a bit about your life at the moment – the area where you live, a bit about daily life, things like that? [DON’T INTERRUPT]
- Who do you spend most of your time with? What kind of things do you like to do together?
- Do you get out much?
  Probe on hobbies, music, volunteering and social media.

LIVING CONDITIONS

- Can you tell me a bit about where are you living now?
  Probe on likes, dislikes and things that would change
    ○ Are you living with anyone?
    ○ Do you feel at home where you are living now?
    ○ Do you feel safe where you live at the moment?
    ○ Just to go back to thinking about home – when you hear the word ‘home’ what comes into your mind?
- Can you tell me a little about where you have lived since you arrived in France?
  Probe on moves since arrival in France, since turning 18 and supports with any moves.
- I’m just wondering about when you were turning 18 - can you tell me about where you have been living since turning 18?
  ○ Do you remember any changes or challenges?
- Have you ever experienced problems with accommodation or at risk of losing your accommodation?
  (access, financial difficulties, unsuitable accommodation, transition at 18, etc?)
  If Yes:
    ○ Can you tell me a little more about what happened and the challenges that you faced?
    ○ Have you ever slept in a squat, hostel or slept rough since being in France?
    ○ When was the last time you felt at a home?
    ○ Can you tell me a bit more about this?
    ○ Would you say you felt homeless at that point?
- Do you ever worry about your future living situation, for example, your accommodation in the next 12 months?

For participants who are living in apartments/ housing/ foster families
- How long have you been staying there?
- Have you been in the same place since you arrived?

Probe on moves since arrival in France, since turning 18 and supports with any moves.
- How did you find this accommodation?
- Can you tell me a bit what is it like?

Probe on rules, friends, other people staying there, landlord
- Have you considered, or would you consider leaving your current lodgings?
For participants residing in Supported Temporary/Transitional Accommodation.
- So, you are staying in XXX now, what’s it like? (likes and dislike/ is there anything you would change)
- How long have you been staying there?

Probe on moves since arrival in France, since turning 18 and supports with any moves.
Probe on rules, friends, other people staying there
- Would you consider yourself homeless or without a home at the moment?
- Would you call this place your home?
- Have you ever considered yourself homeless or without a home?
- Moving from here – are there options?

INTEGRATION AND IDENTITY

- We talked a little bit about your living situation and your life now but how about when you arrived in France? Could you tell me a little bit about what it was like?
  - What age were you?

Probe on impression of area and community when arrived (shocked/impressed) and changes in feelings and thoughts since you first arrived?
- Would you say that your life has changed since you first arrived in France/Ireland? (improved/worsened) If yes, in what way?
- How about since you turned 18?

- What is the area in which you’re living now like? (place, neighbours, amenities etc.).
  - Do you feel like part of the community there?
  - **IF YES:** What makes you feel part of the community?  **IF NO:** Why do you think that is?
- Have you ever felt like excluded from your community?

I want to ask you a bit about integration.
- Firstly, can you tell me what you think of when you hear the word ‘integration’?
  - Do you feel integrated here?
  - Do you think that it is difficult to integrate here?

Social Supports and Relationships

- I would like to invite you to draw the people who you feel to be important to you. *(Social network mapping – if the participant doesn’t want to draw, they can use stickers/ write)*
  - Can you tell me who the most important people are? Can you tell me a little more about your relationship with them?
  - Who do you think knows you best?

Probe on trust: trusting others and being trusted.

FRIENDS, PEERS AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS
- Can you tell me about your friends, the people you spend time with here or the people you are friendly with? Or perhaps a girl/boyfriend?

Probe on getting to know them, activities together
- Do you have someone that you would rely on for support when you need help? (best friend?)
- Would you turn to other people your age if you needed any support?
  
  **Probe on Irish/French friends and on friends from country of origin.**

**RELATIONSHIPS**

- Do you mind me asking if you are in a relationship?
  
  **In a relationship:**
  - Could you tell me about the relationship? How is it going right now?
  - Do you think that your partner is supportive?
  - Have you ever gone through a difficult time in your relationship (or in previous relationships)? How did you feel during this time?

**Probe on future and differences in relationships in Ireland/France and country of origin.**

**FAMILY (beware of sensitive subject)**

- Would you like to talk a little about your family?
- Are you in touch with any of your family at the moment? (often, type of contact, relationship)

**Probe on support from family, support given to family**

- Do any of your family members know about your situation in Ireland/France? What have you told them about here?
- Do you have any family here in Europe? Do you have much contact with them?

**GUARDIAN**

- Apart from your parents, is there anyone who plays a parental role for you?
  - **Yes:** Do you have regular contact with this person? Have you lived with this person?
- Have you anybody who is legally responsible for you in France/Ireland? Did you in the past? (before 18)
  - **Yes:** What is/was their role?

**Probe: Do you have access to a lawyer? Have you ever needed to get support from them?**

**CARE STRUCTURES**

- Do you have someone who supports you here in Ireland/France? Who would you turn to if you need to talk about a personal problem or a challenge?
  - **Yes:** How did you meet them? Can you tell me what ways they support you?

**Probe on managing administrative tasks and navigating the systems.**

- Are there any organisations or structures that can support you or other young people in your situation?
  - **Yes:** Probe on attendance/access, role and types of supports, changes in access since 18

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**PROCEDURES**

I would like to better understand the different legal procedures and steps that separated young people go through from when they arrive in France/Ireland up to when they consider themselves adults.

- Would you be able to describe for me the different procedures that you had to go through since arriving in France? Perhaps it would help to draw or write a timeline?

**Probe (France) on age determination, transition to adulthood, EVA, residence permits, asylum, deportation orders, appeal process.**
Probe on the definition of unaccompanied/ separated minor (legal vs personal opinion).
- How did you find the different procedures? (challenges, positive experiences)
- Was it easy to get information about the different legal procedures in place? How did you go about finding this information?
- What are the different entitlements and rights you have when you go through these procedures?
- Do you know if anything has recently changed since you went through the procedures? (impact of political context, changes in law)
- Do you have any advice about the procedures to give to a young person arriving in France/ Ireland?
- How about any recommendations for improvements or changes?
- Could you tell me a little about the different structures in place for managing the different procedures? What is their role?

Probe on child protection service, local organisations, department, prefecture, judge, border police, lawyer
- What do you think of the different organisations? (positive and negative aspects)
- Would you mind me asking what is your current legal status in France/ Ireland?

Probe: Did you get a permit to stay here when you turned 18? Can you tell me about this process?
- Do you think that your current status affects your day to day life? (access to services or supports?) How about your future choices?
- Do you know if there are any conditions put on residence permits?
- Do you think that other young people who arrive in France/ Ireland alone have the same opportunities for getting a residence permit?

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CARE AND AFTERCARE

We have talked a little about procedures but I wanted to ask you a little more about the care system and services.
- Can you describe to me a little about the care system in France/ Ireland and how it works?
- Were you entitled to care when you arrived in France/ Ireland?

Probe on changes in care at different stages and experiences of the care system
- Do you or did you ever have a social care worker or a social worker? Or more than one?
  - What is their role?
  - Do you find them easy to talk to?
- How about an aftercare worker? Have you been allocated one?
  Yes: Can you tell me a little about them?

- Can you tell me about the experiences of aftercare you have had so far? What kind of support do they give you?
  - Were these experiences what you expected them to be?
  - Do you think that anything more could have been done to support and help you?
- Do you have any advice for social/care/aftercare workers who are supporting separated young people during the transition to adulthood?
AGING OUT

We have talked a little about care and services but I would like to understand a little bit more about how you found transitioning to adulthood.
- But before starting, can I ask you what you think is necessary to be considered an adult? (anything that defines an adult)
- And what about the transition to adulthood? What comes into your head when you think of transition to adulthood?
  - When do you think somebody starts the transition to adulthood? And how about when they finish it?
  - Do you think that you have completed your transition to adulthood? In other words, do you consider yourself to be an adult?
  - What has it been like turning 18 and moving to adulthood? (impact on transition, key moments/ events)

Before coming, I asked you to choose a song that reminds you of the time around your 18th birthday. Did you manage to find one?
Yes: Would you like to play it? Can you tell me a little bit about why you chose this song and how it makes you feel?
Is it okay if I ask you a bit more about the time around your 18th birthday?
- Can you tell me a little about what you remember of this time?

Probe: As your eighteenth birthday was getting closer, do you remember how you felt? (excited, worried?)
Can you remember your eighteenth birthday? What did you do that day?
- Was turning eighteen something you thought about before your eighteenth birthday?
  - Yes: How long before your eighteenth birthday did you start thinking about it?
- Did you ever discuss turning eighteen with others (social workers, key workers, friends, etc.)?
  - Were you aware of the different things to consider when turning eighteen? (Education, job, etc.)
  - Did you make any plans for life after turning eighteen? Did you do these yourself or did others help to work through the options with you?

Probe on aftercare planning and financial support
- Do you feel different since turning eighteen? (changes since turning 18)
- Have you any advice for other young people in similar situations for when they are preparing or when they have turn eighteen?

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

If it is okay with you, I would like to move away from the transition to adulthood now – I’d like us to talk about some everyday issues like school and work, and how your health is.
Maybe we could start with school?
- Are you in school/ any training/ third level education programmes at the moment? Or did you ever attend school here?
  - Yes: Can you tell me about it? What is it like for you?

Probe on schooling before arrival in France/ Ireland and impact of this, accessing school and supports, type of programme, relationship with teachers and other pupils, adjusting to school, and challenges.
For those who attended before:
  - Did you finish the programme? If not, can you tell me why not? Would you like to go back and continue education?
- How did you choose what to study? Did anything have any influence on your choice?
  For those who didn't attend before:
  - Can you tell me a bit more about why you didn't? Would you have liked to?
  - Would you like to go back and continue education?

- Is school and training important to you? Do you have any ambitions about your education?
  - Do you feel that you are doing something that has helped you with your future goals? What would you like to do in the future?
  - When considering education, was there anything that changed for you before and after turning eighteen?
  Probe: Was everything the same after turning eighteen in school? Did you have the same supports and opportunities?

- Have you ever worked before?
- Are you working now?
  Yes:
  - Can you tell me a little about what you do? (type, how many hours, where)
  - How long are you in the job?
  - How did you decide to do this job?
  - Do you enjoy the job, what is it like?
  - How did you get it?
  - What are your colleagues like? What about your boss?
  - Do you think that you will move on from the job? What type of job would you like in the future?
  - Do you feel that the job provides you with enough to live without the need for other supports (state, organisations etc)?
  No:
  - Would you like to be working? If so, what is preventing you?
  - Have you looked for work recently?
  - Have you found it difficult looking for and applying for jobs?
  - Have you had any supports to help you look for jobs?
  - What kind of job would you like to get in the future? What do you think would help you to get a job?

- How do you manage in terms of money? Do you have any support?
  - Has your financial situation changed in any way since turning eighteen?
  - Do you worry about money at the moment? Have you ever in the past?
  - Is there anyone that you feel you could go to if you were in financial difficulty?

**HEALTH**

- Would you mind telling me about your physical health is right now?
- Do you ever worry about your health? Can you tell me a little about this?
- Have you ever had health problems in the past? What about now? Do you have any health problems currently? Probe on before arrival in France/ Ireland and since arriving here
  Yes: What treatments do/did you get? Where? How often? How do/did you find the people giving you the treatment? Is/Was there anything you would like to improve on about the treatment you get/ have received?
- Can you describe to me the health care system here in France?

Probe on how it works, available services when arrive and later and challenges accessing since arrival
- Have you noticed any changes in health care since you turned eighteen?

I would also like to understand a little more about the other services available to you.
- Would you be able to tell me a little about the different services you have been accessing (now or before)?
  If it helps you are welcome to map them out on a piece of paper.

Probe on main providers, attendance (how often, most contact and most recent)
- How do you find them? (helpful, easy to access, any that are avoided).
- Would you say that you have a good relationship with a person in any service? (important relationship?)
- Would you recommend the services that you have attended to others?
- Can you think of any possible improvements that could be made within these services?

- Since turning eighteen, have the types of services available to you changed? Can you tell me a little bit about these services?
  Yes: What is it like getting to know the services? Are they easy or difficult to understand? Do you have any supports with accessing and interacting with the services?

Do you know how long you can access different services once turning eighteen? Is age a factor?

To come back to health, is it okay if we talk a little bit about mental health – worries, stress, anxiety and things like this?
- If you don’t mind me asking, is there anything that worries you right now? (life in general, future?)
- Would you say that life is stressful for you?
  Yes: What types of things make you feel stressed? How do you manage these feelings?
  No: Have you ever had stressful moments since arriving in France? Can you tell me a little about them?
- Have you ever noticed anything that made you feel particularly down or sad?
- Have you ever felt depressed or down?
  Yes:
  - Have you ever told anyone about this? (friends, services, health professional)

Probe on triggers, treatment (medication, psychologist, psychiatrist) and diagnoses
- Do you think that there has been any change in your mental health (positive or negative) since you arrived in Ireland/France? How about since before coming to Ireland/France and now?
- Would you say that life is easier or more difficult since you turned eighteen? Would you mind explaining a little bit?

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- When you feel down or sad, is there anything that makes you feel better?
  - Do you feel like you can tell somebody when you are not feeling good? (who to talk to when down and for support and help)
  - What do you do when you are feeling stressed or sad?
  - Is there anything that you do for yourself that you think helps you on a daily basis?
- Can you think about a challenging or stressful situation that you had to face?
  - How did you manage?
o Was there anything that made you feel better?
  o Was there anyone who helped you?
  o Do you do similar when you face difficult situations?

- If you met a young person who was facing a challenging time, what would you advise them to do to help themselves feel better?
- Has your culture from XXX taught you anything about dealing with difficult emotions and stress?
  o Have you noticed any differences with the French culture in dealing with stress and difficulties?
  o Have you discovered anything that has helped you to deal with difficulties here in France?

THE FUTURE AND FINISHING UP

So, to finish up, I thought it would be good to talk about the future.
- But before that, can I just ask how you feel about your life at the moment?
  - Would you say that you face any challenges at the moment, in your daily life?
    o Is there anything about your current situation that you would like to change? Or that you find particularly difficult?
  - How about the positive things, are there good things in your life right now?
    Probe: What kind of things would you say you most look forward to doing during the week?
- Are there things that you would like to see happening in your life — any aspect of it — in the future? (Encourage participant to talk about any future needs/desires here)
- Would you say that there are things you are looking forward to?
- Is there anything that you think might help you to have a better future?

- Before finishing up, I would just like to ask you how you are feeling, would you like to choose a card that represents how you feel about the interview? (Provide dixit cards) Can you tell me a little about why you chose this card?
- Can I ask if you think that there are any things I should ask or do differently? What do you think about your involvement in the study? Do you think it is useful? Is there anything that might make it more interesting or better?
- I am also looking for other young people to take part in the study, do you know anybody that you think might be interested?
- Okay, thank you so much. I think we are finished. Is there anything you would like to ask me about? Or anything you would like to add that you think would be useful?

APPENDIX

1. For participants in the group project:

- Please chose a card that represents how you feel about the project? (Provide dixit cards)
  o Can you tell me your thoughts about the group project?
  o Is there anything in particular that you liked or enjoyed?
  o Anything you did not like?
  o What was the atmosphere like during the activities? What was your relationship with the other members of the group? (change in relationships since the start)
  o Is there anything that you would change or that could be improved upon?

- Is there anything that limited your ability to participate?
- Is there anything that you learned?
- What do you think of the actions that we did (event, presentation, Malta, etc)?
- Would you like to do another similar project again?
- Do you feel that you have contributed to the overall research? Or to anything else (local community, organisation etc).
## APPENDIX K. MEMBER CHECK GUIDE

**Original version in French**

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<tr>
<th>AVANT</th>
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<td>Entretien :</td>
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<td>Hébergement :</td>
<td>Journée quotidienne :</td>
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Nous avons parlé de :

1. Comment tu te sens sur ta situation actuelle :

2. Des choses que tu aimerais changer :

3. Est-ce qu’il y a des choses qui ont changé depuis :

4. Les trois plus grands changements dans ta vie depuis :

5. Les choses qui sont restées les mêmes? :

6. Penses-tu que tu as changé depuis juillet 2019 ?

   Comment ? :

7. La transition à la majorité est finie ou pas :

8. Est-ce qu’il y a des changements dans la vie des MNAs au Nord depuis 07/2019 :

9. Tes espoirs pour l’avenir :

10. Inquiétudes pour l’avenir :

11. Ton expérience de la recherche globalement :

12. Qu’est ce que je devrais demander aux autres participants ?

13. Autres choses ?
Before:
- Interview:
- Age:
- Education:
- Employment:
- Housing:

Today:
- Age:
- Education:
- Employment:
- Financial situation:
- Daily life:

We spoke about:

- How do you feel about your current situation:
- Things you would like to change:
- Things that have changed since our interview:
- The three biggest changes since our interview:
- Things that have stayed the same:
- Do you think that you have changed since July 2019? If so, how:
- Is the transition to adulthood finished:
- Have there been changes in the lives of UAM in the Nord since July 2019:
- Your hopes for the future:
- Any worries for the future:
- Your overall experience of the research process:
- What should I ask the other young people:
- Anything else: