

## **INCh**

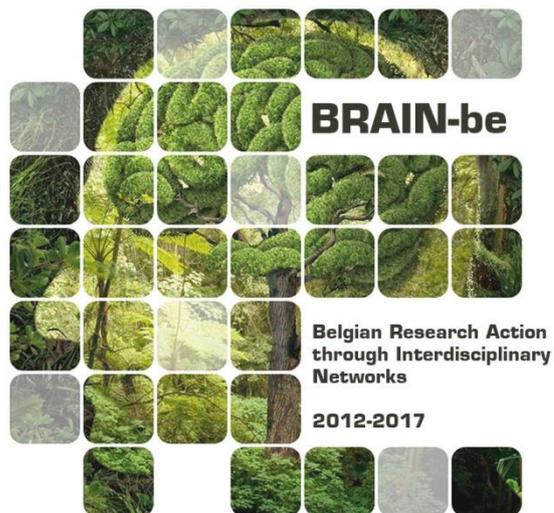
**Integrated networks to combat child poverty: a mixed methods research on network governance and perspectives of policy makers, social workers and families in poverty**

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NETWORK PROJECT

## INCh

**Integrated networks to combat child poverty: a mixed methods research on network governance and perspectives of policy makers, social workers and families in poverty**

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## FINAL REPORT

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this research, we zoom in on twenty local networks that are installed in the fight against child poverty of which nine are located in Flanders, eight in Wallonia and three in Brussels. We look into the network governance, the network structures and the organization of these networks. We also gain insight into the experiences and perspectives of families in poverty, policy makers and social workers when collaborating in these networks. We conduct in-depth interviews with social workers, families in poverty, policy makers, network coordinators and network partners as well as participant observations. Our results indicate that there is a large amount of vertical complexity within these networks and that the role that the network coordinator adopts should be adapted to the different characteristics of the network. On the other hand, we also find that networks can include or exclude families in poverty even more and that networks too often develop child-oriented services while they should focus more on family-oriented strategies. Our study provides recommendations on macro, meso and micro-level.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2016, 17,8% of the children in Belgium were at risk of poverty (Eurostat, 2016). When we look at the regional numbers, we find that 12,82% of the children aged 0 to 3 years old in Flanders grew up in deprived families (Kind & Gezin, 2016). In Wallonia and Brussels, the number of children (0-17) living at risk of poverty substantially increased between 2006 and 2014 from 19,2% to 20,4% in Wallonia as well as from 30,5% to 39,7% in Brussels (Child and Juvenile Poverty Report, Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles). Because of the persistence of the child poverty rate we can observe a growing consensus on various policy levels (EU, Federal and Regional) to prioritize child poverty. One of the difficulties for policy and practice in the fight against child poverty is the historical and actual fragmentation of services and policies. In everyday practice, many efforts have been made to overcome issues of fragmentation by organizing integrated networks to provide services to the vulnerable target group of families with young children in poverty. In this research we investigate how networks at the local level can be deployed to combat child poverty.

One of the main reasons for the persistence of the high number of children living in poverty is the complexity of the phenomenon. We observe that child poverty cannot be reduced to the issue of income deprivation of parents. Child poverty also has causes and implications on the level of education, housing, health, social participation and social capital. In academic literature, such an issue is described as a *wicked problem* (Rittel & Webber, 1973). This implies that the eradication of child poverty should be the responsibility of different policy levels.

In order to deal with these 'wicked problems', service organizations often need to engage in networks (O'Toole 1997; Provan & Milward, 2001; Provan & Milward, 1995). The broad range of resources and expertise provided by these networks is indispensable in order to deal with the complex needs of diverse beneficiary groups. In this project, we focus on how local networks among service organizations can be established to support families in poverty.

Provan and Milward (2001) define networks as 'service delivery vehicles' providing value to a population confronted with varying needs, in ways that could not be achieved by a single organization. Important challenges of these networks are situated at the level of the network and at the client level. At the level of the network, an important task of network governance is to establish a level of network integration among the differentiation of network actors (Lorsch & Lockwood, 1968; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Raeymaeckers & Kenis, 2016). Networks need the expertise of different service agencies to deal with the multidimensional issues of their vulnerable target groups. At the same time, integration among this differentiated set of network actors is indispensable in order to fulfil the collective goals of the network.

At the client-level network integration refers to the extent to which the services provided by the network are responsive toward the client's multiple needs on various life domains. In the field of child poverty the issue of fragmentation and integration will become increasingly

important when we take into account the demographic prognoses on the growing numbers of young children in poverty, especially in urban areas.

However, despite the emerging need for integrated networks to combat child poverty, few scientific research has been conducted on this matter. Some knowledge is available on how these networks must be organized to respond to the complex needs of diverse families with young children, including families in poverty. These studies, however, show that networks not always lead to better results (Rosenheck, et al., 1998; Provan & Milward, 1995). We therefore argue that research on the functioning and perception of these networks is necessary. In this research we provide an in-depth approach on the integrative mechanism of these networks. The main questions of this research are formulated as follows:

1. How are integrated networks of service organizations providing support to poor families organized?
2. What kind of social work practices of in- and exclusion appear within these integrated networks?
3. How do policy representatives and social workers perceive these networks?
4. How do families in poverty experience these networks?

We answer these questions by researching twenty local networks that focus on combating child poverty in Belgium, of which nine are located in Flanders, eight in Wallonia and three in Brussels. In the first work package, we take a broad qualitative and quantitative perspective to focus on network governance and collaboration. We do this by taking the perceptions of the different network actors into account. Besides this, we also unravel the structures that exist in these different networks. In this work package, we try to give insight into different governance strategies that can be used in governing the network and how these networks can benefit from these different governance structures.

In a second work package, we investigate the perspectives of local policymakers, social workers and families with children in poverty. We look into how local actors shape these collaborations and which meaning they assign to this. In this perspective, it is important to analyze the logics and definitions that are used in building these networks. The interpretations and shapes of these networks and the dynamics that locally arise, will probably influence the relations between the organizations and the parents. In dialogue with families in poverty, we construct what qualitative services can contain and we explore if those services are perceived as responsive and supportive.

## 2. STATE OF THE ART AND OBJECTIVES

### 2.1. The struggle against (child) poverty: a search for social justice

Poverty is a complex and multi-dimensional problem, and consists of a cumulative lack of both material and immaterial resources (Lister, 2004; Ridge & Wright, 2008; Dean, 2015). This definition highlights several aspects. With reference to the lack of material resources, the lack of income is considered a core characteristic of the complex problem of poverty (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Atkinson, Cantillon, Marlier & Nolan, 2002). The lack of immaterial resources refers to what Raeymaeckers et al. (2017: 25) call “*a network of social exclusions that extends over several domains of the individual and collective life. It hinders people in poverty of living a life that is characterized by human dignity. This gap is generated in society and cannot be overcome individually*”. Processes of social exclusion and marginalisation can take place on several life domains, such as education, employment, housing, health care, and leisure time. This definition, however, points out that poverty is perceived as a violation of human rights and a striking social injustice in the international realm (Lister, 2004; Dean, 2015), since people in poverty experience a gap between their life and a life that is characterized by human dignity. The concept of human dignity in the poverty discussion was put forward, amongst others, by Nussbaum (2012), who highlights several human capabilities such as life in general, physical health and integrity, but also the possibility to imagine, play, make emotional connections, etc. These capabilities should be redeemed in order to live a life characterized by human dignity.

However, poverty remains a complex and stubborn social problem, or as already mentioned above, a *wicked issue* (De Corte et al., 2016), which requires that welfare states continue to accept their public responsibility in the development of anti-poverty strategies that are established according to a social justice orientation (Boone, Roets & Roose, 2018). In the decades after the second World War, this search for humane and socially just societies resulted in the constitution of social welfare states in Europe, based on the principles of citizenship and rights (Lister, 2004; Dean, 2015). Originally, welfare states critically pursued a constitutive rights-based notion of a mutual solidarity and collective responsibility in securing the rights of citizens, being rooted in the idea of social security and protection (Dean, 2015). These principles imply that poverty cannot be reduced to an individual problem, but is perceived as a structural societal problem that asks for social policies that contribute to a systematic redistribution of resources and power in their efforts to reduce rather than create and reproduce social inequalities (Ridge & Wright, 2008).

In the consideration of child poverty, combating child poverty can therefore only be significant when it is embedded in such a broad social welfare approach (McKeown, Haase & Pratschke, 2014; Schiettecat, Roets & Vandenbroeck, 2015). According to this approach, it is vital to acknowledge that the well-being of children in poverty is predominantly affected by the socio-economic background of the households in which those children are born. In Western societies, children are always economically dependent on adults in the economic unit of the household in which they live (Lister, 2006). Therefore the well-being and welfare rights of parents and children are intertwined (Schiettecat *et al.*, 2015), as poor children are

always children of poor families (Mestrum, 2011). For example, because the available family's resources have an influence on both the well-being of children and parents (McKeown, Haase & Pratschke, 2014), the household income is an important factor shaping the living conditions of both parents and children in different life domains (Main, 2014). Next to redistributive policies, ensuring a high quality of welfare provision for both parents and children is crucial to mediate the negative effects of poverty (Vandenbroeck, 2013; Lazzari, 2014; Rochford, Doherty & Owens, 2014; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004).

## **2.2. Contemporary challenges in the struggle against (child) poverty**

Although European welfare states still aim to protect, promote and secure the fulfilment of citizenship and rights by a variety of means, we identify two contemporary and interrelated challenges in the struggle against (child) poverty that are highly relevant to our study.

### **2.2.1. A shifting normative value orientation**

During the last decades, it can be argued that European welfare states experience pressure in social and economic terms (Lorenz, 2007). The dependency of citizens on the social welfare system (e.g. in the case of poverty or unemployment), for example, has been considered as a vital social risk for the economic stability of welfare states (Gray, 2013). Following these developments, prevailing social welfare paradigms are revised and redefined (Beck, 1992; Williams, 1999; Rosanvallon, 2000; Van Lancker, 2013). It has been argued that current social policy developments show that the normative value orientation of welfare states is under pressure (Lorenz, 2016). Whereas the political and democratic values of equality and solidarity were originally fully embraced in Western democracies and resulted in welfare state arrangements that materialised redistribution and social protection rationales (Biesta et al., 2013), European welfare states gradually shift their focus (Cantillon, 2011; Schiettecat et al., 2014).

A recent body of research suggests that this growing pressure on the welfare state results in the idea that public responsibility for the welfare of citizens should be directed towards the local authority level (resulting in a de-centralisation of public responsibilities) and towards the private responsibility of the individual, his/her natural social networks (such as the family) and the community/civil society (Richter & Andresen, 2012; Dean, 2015). While many governments actively attempt to roll back the state, the underlying rationale entails that public responsibility should be at least rebalanced with, and even transferred to, individual service users, their families and communities, and the local authority level (Jordan & Drakeford, 2012; Devisch, 2014; Dean, 2015).

In the discourse concerning child poverty, policies are currently influenced by a social investment paradigm that focuses on the development of the child (later outcomes, academic achievement, etc.) to break the cycle of poverty (Gray, 2013). This focus on early interventions is often preferred over more structural dimensions of inequality, as political consensus is more easily gained for policies targeting the early years rather than for redistributive or protective measures (Morabito, Vandenbroeck & Roose, 2013). Empirical

evidence has registered the negative and long-lasting impact of child poverty on health, emotional, cognitive and social outcomes of children (Sell, Zlotnick, Noonan & Rubin, 2010; Moore, Redd, Burkhauser, Mbwana, & Collins, 2009). The economic argument for investing in young and disadvantaged children mainly rests on the return on investment at the level of the broader society (Lister, 2003). Some policies or programs also view caregivers and parents as targets of intervention, assuming that they are responsible for the situation of the child and the whole family (Anthony, King & Austin, 2011; Huston, Duncan, McLoyd, Crosby, Ripke, Weisner & Elred, 2005). In its most extreme expression, these ideas might echo a binary welfare state distinction between 'good' and deserving children versus 'bad' and undeserving parents (see Villadson, 2007).

### 2.2.2. Historical fragmentation of welfare services

As mentioned above, (child) poverty is a complex and multi-dimensional problem. Therefore, one of the main challenges in combating (child) poverty and striving for high quality of social service provision is the fragmentation of services (Allen, 2003; Provan & Sebastian, 1998). This is not only the case for families in poverty, but fragmentation of services affects all families. Several dimensions mark this fragmentation:

- **Sectoral** segregation: services often specialize in one single area (education, parent support, child care, financial problems, housing, etc.), yet families do not necessarily perceive these areas as separate 'needs' especially in the case of families living in poverty. Although specialist services can add to the quality of provision, it has to be acknowledged that needs related to health, housing, employment etc. are interlinked (Lister, 2004; Broadhead, Meleady, & Delgado, 2008).
- **Age** segregation: Needs and wants from adults are often considered as separate and different from children's needs and rights, resulting in separately designed services which reinforces sectoral segregation.
- **Subgroup** or **target group** segregation: results in the creation of services that address specific subgroups, such as single mothers, migrants, families in poverty, families with a child with special needs, etc. (see Mkandawire, 2005) and assumes that certain demographic characteristics correspond with certain needs. Empirical evidence seems to question this assumption as a largescale study dismisses that needs are largely affected by demographic variables (Vandenbroeck, Bouverne-De Bie & Bradt, 2010).
- **Policy** segregation: services can be governed at local, regional and state levels, making cooperation between services that are governed on different levels a real challenge (Statham, 2011). The segregation of policy levels, like OCMW/CPAS and other local (social) policy makers, contribute to the fragmentation of services and support related to child poverty.
- **Organizational** segregation: in some regions services are separated in government-led provision, NGO's or faith-based organizations and voluntary or community led services and integration may mean collaboration between private and public partners (OECD, 2001).

## 2.3. Networks and network governance

To overcome these problems, local and inter-organizational networks are installed to integrate the service delivery. Researchers and practitioners increasingly emphasize the importance of these networks that join efforts of a large variety of service organizations to address the complex problems of vulnerable target groups. In our study, we focus on the emphasis of both the Federal and Regional government to form local networks to integrate the service delivery to the target group of families with young children in poverty.

### 2.3.1 Networks?

The underlying idea of inter-organizational networking is the belief that networking stimulates collaboration between different organizations and sectors. These networks are formed to integrate the joined efforts of a wide variety of service organizations. In their seminal article Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) introduced differentiation and integration as the key challenges for the functioning of modern organizations. They emphasize that the more differentiated an organization is, the more integrated its parts must be in order to perform effectively. A similar reasoning can be applied to networks of service organizations as these networks also struggle with the tension of differentiation and integration. On the one hand, networks need to consist of a certain level of diversity in order to deal with the wicked issues that welfare recipients struggle with. Also, in order to overcome the above mentioned fragmentation of services, different sectors, policy levels, organizations etc. need to be included. On the other hand, these different levels and organizations need to integrate into one well-functioning network. The main challenge of these networks is thus to achieve '*unity in effort*' (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Buck, et al., 2011). In order to achieve this unity in effort, networks need to be governed properly. In the following paragraphs, we elaborate on the concept of networks and on the importance of network governance in order to reach the above mentioned levels of integration.

The concept of 'networks' however, can have very different meanings. For this reason, we find it important to start with an unambiguous definition of this concept. Provan and Milward (2001: 416) define networks as "*service delivery vehicles providing value to a population confronted with varying needs, in ways that could not be achieved by a single organization*". By doing so, these networks can increase the responsiveness and quality of mainstream services towards vulnerable families.

A first important characteristic of networks is that they "*develop and exist because of the interdependency between actors*" (Kickert & Klijn, 1997: 31). Networks are sets of interconnected actors that, in order to achieve their individual goals and the network goals, call upon each other's resources and expertise. A second characteristic of networks is that they focus on achieving certain goals. In the eradication of child poverty, networks of service organizations develop services and activities to battle poverty in an integrated way that aligns with the complex needs of vulnerable target groups. The added value of these networks is that they realize coordination and align the activities and entities that keep on functioning autonomously, but who cannot handle these wicked issues independently (Sorensen & Torfing 2009; Isett et al., 2011). By working together, different synergies are possible, gaps in

provided services can be filled and overlap can be avoided (Vangen & Huxham, 2013). Thirdly, Hertting & Vedung (2012: 31) argument that, in order to achieve and enhance this interdependence and to align different activities, entities and expertise, structures should be set in place. These structures are what Provan & Kenis call 'network governance', and will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

### 2.3.2 Network governance

Network governance has recently been introduced and studied as a possible integration mechanism for networks (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Kenis & Provan, 2009). Provan and Kenis (2008) identified three different forms of network governance: lead-organization governance; network administrative organization (NAO); and shared participant governance. This typology has been widely used as a conceptual framework to study inter-organizational service networks.

In a *shared participant-governed network*, the network participants themselves govern the network. This means that decision-making is shared, the network depends on the involvement and commitment of all and acts collectively. This also means that the network participants have the final responsibility for the network activities, and they have to manage the internal and external relations of the network (Provan & Kenis, 2008). The power in these networks is supposed to be symmetrical, even when there are differences in organizational size, available resources and performance. These types of networks act collectively and the members all represent the network together as a whole (Provan & Kenis, 2008).

In the literature, researchers most often describe or investigate cases with a centralized type of network governance such as lead organization governed networks and network administrative organizations (Span et al., 2012; Provan & Milward, 1995; Graddy & Chen, 2006; Human & Provan, 2000; Provan & Sebastian, 1998; Lemieux-Charles et al., 2005). The basic idea of the Network Administrative Organization-model is that a "*separate administrative entity is set up specifically to govern the network and its activities*" (Provan & Kenis, 2008, p. 236). An NAO is not a network member that provides services to a target group. Instead, the NAO is established with the exclusive purpose of network governance. This NAO can consist of only one individual or it can be an organization that consists of a director, staff, etc. (Provan & Kenis, 2008). This type of coordination is highly centralized and brokered and it can have considerable influence in the decision making process or it can focus solely on the administrative functioning of the network.

Thirdly, in a *lead organization-governed network*, as the term clearly indicates, there is a member organization that governs the network. This organization provides services to the target group but also has the responsibility to govern the collaboration in the network. All activities and key decisions are coordinated through and by this lead organization. The lead organization is occupied with the administration of the network and/or facilitates the activities of member organizations in the network to achieve network goals. This type of governance is also highly centralized and brokered (Provan & Kenis, 2008).

For this research we zoom in on this last governance form, as networks that are installed by the government to deal with wicked societal issues such as poverty, social exclusion etc., are often lead organization networks. In the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels network reality, the local government receives funding for installing local networks to combat child poverty, which makes them the leading organization. The networks in our study consist of local public and nonprofit organizations that provide services to people in their community. The public center for social welfare (OCMW/CPAS) often acts as the lead organization and is responsible for the network's governance.

An important task of network governance is to establish a certain level of network integration among the differentiation of network actors (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Raeymaeckers & Kenis, 2016). Networks need the expertise of a large differentiation of service agencies to deal with the complex problems of their vulnerable target groups. At the same time, integration among this differentiated set of network actors is indispensable in order to fulfill the collective goals of the network. In lead organization networks, the lead organization typically appoints a network coordinator to assist in the governance of the network. An important challenge for this coordinator is to integrate the joined efforts of a variety of service organizations (Rosenheck et al., 1998; Provan and Milward, 1995; Author's Own, 2016) and to create a unity in effort (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Buck, et al., 2011). Hence, the coordinator is considered as an important governing actor in these networks (Provan and Kenis, 2008; Edelenbos, Buuren and Klijn, 2013). In the next paragraph we focus on different types of governance roles that leading organizations and coordinators can adopt to govern a network.

### 2.3.3 Governance roles

As Provan & Kenis (2008: 230) put it, "*a critical role for governance is to monitor and control the behavior of management, who are hired to preside over the day-to-day activities*". These network coordinators, who are hired by the lead organization, adopt a central role in the governance of the network. Klijn et al. (2010: 1065) follow Gage & Mandell (1990), Kickert et al. (1997) and Agranoff & McGuire (2001) in their argument that for a network, '*a satisfactory outcome is often impossible without network management*'.

Several researchers, such as Mandell (2001), Kickert et al. (1997) and Agranoff & McGuire (2003) have been interested in the roles that network coordinators can adopt in coordinating a network. These governance roles represent different positions towards the network partners and the leading organization. Rethemeyer (2005) is arguably the first to lay bare the top-down – bottom-up continuum that exists regarding the roles that network coordinators can adopt in coordinating a network. The research of Span et al. (2012) is the first translation of this finding into a framework of three different governance roles that can be placed on this continuum: the commissioner, the co-producer and the facilitator.

At the top-down end of the continuum, the network coordinator adopts the role of commissioner. The coordination of the network is clearly located within the power of the network coordinator. The network coordinator makes unilateral decisions, which limits the

input opportunities of the partners. Also, the network coordinator has the main responsibility and has to be able to account for the actions of the network.

At the other end of the continuum, the network coordinator can adopt the role of facilitator. His or her main goal is to facilitate the collaboration between the different network partners without intervening in the decision making process. Here, the network coordinator's main job is to set up the meetings and support the collaboration, while the final decisions are being made by the network partners. These partners also have the main responsibility and take account for the actions of the network.

Situated between the top-down and bottom-up extremes, is the role of co-producer. Here, the network coordinator and the network partners strive for a balanced collaboration, in which the network coordinator is seen as an equal partner alongside the other partners in the network. The decisions are made collectively, taking all actors, the network coordinator included, into account. Consequently, the ultimate responsibility rests with all network partners and the network coordinator, who all have to be able to take account for the network.

## **2.4. Pitfalls of integration**

According to Kodner (2009) integration should be the key of the improvement of services and forms the best answer to the needs of poor families. According to Oliver, Mooney & Statham (2010) there is no possibility to show a causal relationship between positive outcomes for families and children and the provision of integrated services. In order to get a sense of how integration can or cannot be helpful to parents, we need to find out what contributes to these perceived benefits and what does not.

### **2.4.1 Sharing information**

Sharing information is mentioned as an essential aspect of integration, as it can be an aim as well as an outcome (Oliver, Mooney & Statham, 2010). Some clients want providers to know their history and care plan without having to repeat information (Walker et al., 2013). They indicate that it prevents receiving conflicting information, that often brings frustration and duplication of effort as a result. People do notice if information is not shared with other providers (Walker et al., 2013). On the other hand, people are not always aware of the fact that personal information is shared. Difficulties arise when networks are established in sharing information of clients. Multidisciplinary procedures and dialogues often lack ethical and privacy related legislation (Busch, Van Stel, De Leeuw, Melhuish & Schrijvers, 2013). Professionals are constrained to share important client information with other professionals while it remains unclear who is in charge of and responsible for confidential information, and this influences the quality of multi-disciplinary practices (Busch et al., 2013). The exchange of information takes place in formal procedures as well as informally (Frost, 2005). The way in which information is shared and reported is an important issue to consider as the flux of information can be difficult to control, especially in a movement towards integration. Do parents still have the possibility to tell their story to different agencies themselves or is their story told for them?

## 2.4.2 The network as a panopticon

The formation of a network in order to work in a joined-up way can arise from different drivers as mentioned earlier. According to Allen (2003) there are two dominant drivers in policy and practice, namely the pursuit of filling the gaps and reducing the overlaps in welfare provision resulting from a lack of coordination and overcoming a separate (sectoral) approach to multidimensional problems. Clients appreciate that providers help to facilitate additional support and make connections with other services and with alternative resources, based in the broader community (e.g. transportation) (Walker et al., 2013). The integration of services tends to lower the threshold for parents towards other services, especially when they are located under the same roof. Professionals indicate that clients disappear less quickly from the radar (Busch et al., 2013). The finding that people stay more easily under the supervision of services is important to acknowledge. Allen (2003) warns, however, that a joined-up approach can imply that a holistic practice can become very controlling. A better coordination between actors means a narrower monitoring of people, which can result in a reduction of freedom. An integrated approach may limit parent's choices in shopping around services (Jefferis & Smith, 2002; Allen 2003). From a governance perspective this may be effective, but this is not necessarily the case from a parent's perspective, as it can imply that service users cannot dissociate themselves from the web that is formed by the network. Is integration perceived as enhanced control and a loss of autonomy?

## 2.4.3 Continuity

An important aspect of integrating care is continuity, the sense of continuous familiarity involving in a longitudinal relationship, over time and setting. It is desirable that the network of services is responsive to the clients' preferences and needs. Professionals confirm that multidisciplinary working promotes the continuity of care (Busch et al., 2013). Besides continuity over services, continuity over time is an important concept in the strive to integration and in formulating an appropriate response to poverty. When children grow up, they experience several transitions during their lives. The transition from home to childcare, from childcare to pre-school, from pre-school to primary school and next to transitions during the educational trajectories, also transitions to the workforce and adulthood. The transition of young children starting school is of great importance. Transitions represent risks but also opportunities as they are periods of change. It is important to work with the different actors (parents, caregivers, schools,...) that are involved in these periods and that these transitions are supported (Rochford, Doherty & Owens, 2014).

Even if services are supposed to integrate, some continue to act and think as detached and lack the sense of working together within a higher multidisciplinary structure. Professional tasks and competences may be adjusted in order to be responsive to the client's needs and serve an integrated answer. Social workers from the Parent and Child Centres (PCC's) in Amsterdam indicate their fear that if this multidisciplinary structure expands to much, it will establish a new fragmentation of services (Busch et al., 2013). It is also more likely that workload will rise, although there is mixed evidence on the impact of integrated working (Oliver, Mooney & Statham, 2010). Abbot et al. (2005) point out that several authors believe

that multi-agency working generates better coordination of existing provision, but on the other hand generates no new services that can be more responsive to the family's needs.

#### 2.4.4 Forming connections

The complex relation between the needs of parents and the compliance of professionals is important to consider in constructing a vision on the delivery of services (Abrahamsson & Samarasinghe, 2013). Not only is the quality of interactions between parents and staff important, this also applies to children and staff. Children made more progress when the staff was responsive to their needs (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004). Parents indicate that it is of importance that the family is seen and treated as a unit and not as separate individuals with separate needs (Abbott, Watson & Townsley, 2005). It is therefore important that services offered by different organizations are tuned well.

Research on the professional discourse shows that there is a consensus that integrated working can lead to greater understanding of different roles of different partners, but also brings a greater confusion about identities (Atkinson et al., 2007). Successful clustering of many health and social care services across different sectors creates a mutual goal and vision that reflects the commitment of different participating organizations (Curry et al., 2013). This can be helpful in shaping one's own role and profile as an actor in the network. But does an integrated service also create integrated responsibilities and an integrated commitment concerning a family's situation?

#### 2.4.5 Capturing complexity

To target better outcomes for vulnerable children and families there are some conflicting tendencies that integrated working needs to accommodate. These tendencies derive from the bureaucratic urge to rationalize and predict versus the refusal of complex social problems and realities being rationalized (Hood, 2014). Both tendencies will not exclude each other and a balance need to be found in policy and practice. The recognition and awareness that this tension will be specific to all acts of the concerned stakeholders is import for dealing with this conflicting trends.

*“The current approach to integration in children's services, driven by managerial models and concerned primarily with risk and accountability has arguably given too little thought to the unpredictable dynamics that beset complex casework. In doing so, many of the so-called ‘integrated’ processes and tools in use today may be hindering professional expertise just when it is needed the most.”* (Hood, 2014, 39).

When managing complexity, we can question if this in practice refers to managing the organizational level (structure) or managing the individual level (client) or both. What are the possible drivers of this and to whom or what is complexity attributed? What can networks grasp that could not be grasped if we did not work in an integrated way? When provision is renewed and restructured to get a better answer to this complexity, does this also mean that the offer better fits the social reality of the client and will be more responsive?

Considering the broad diversity that integration of services and networking may include, it is relevant to examine how local actors actually shape local networks against child poverty and study if these local network constructions contribute to the quality of social service delivery experienced by families in poverty.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research context**

This interdisciplinary research generally combines two research traditions: governance theory and social work research. In order to answer the above mentioned research questions, we divide the research in two work packages. In the first work package, we investigate how networks are organized and how they can be structured. Besides this, we zoom in on the governance of these networks. In doing so, we investigate integration at the organizational level. We investigate local networks that are organized among service organizations providing services to families with young children that aim at including families in poverty. In the Flemish, Brussels and Walloon region we focus on a total of 20 local network cases of service providers playing a role in parent support and combating child poverty. The research activities developed in the second work package of the INCh project represent a qualitative research approach on a selection of five relevant cases aiming at gaining in-depth insights in the meaning making of local policy makers, social workers and families in poverty.

This research led to a profound understanding of the functioning of the networks and service delivery in our study and how people perceive this. This second work package also looked at the potential match or mismatch between the meaning making of policy makers, social workers and users about the services delivered by the network. We explored perspectives, experiences and a deeper understanding of the meaning making of people which lead to their engagement, in qualitative interpretative research. The research took place on different levels which led to a combination of different approaches and methods.

##### **3.1.1 Selection of the cases**

In what follows, we zoom in on how the different networks were selected. As already mentioned above, the first work package researched twenty networks, while the second work package focused on five of these twenty networks. In what follows, we first elaborate on the selection procedure of work package one, after which we elaborate on the selection procedure of work package two.

###### *3.1.1.1 Work Package 1*

In a first phase, we made an overview of the local networks that existed in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. In order to get the most complete and extensive list, we contacted the Federal, Flemish and Walloon government and assembled the networks that were established over the last years. In total, we collected more than 225 networks that were funded by the

Federal, Flemish or Walloon government. These networks have the common assignment to combat child poverty on a local level, but show large variation in terms of target population, network partners and network actions.

We decided to conduct a purposive sampling method (Yin, 2014) to focus our qualitative analysis on a limited selection of relevant cases that would allow us to meet our research aim. We follow Bryman (2008) and Yin (2014) stating that this sampling method allows the researchers to better understand the social processes in a given context. As our aim is not to generalize findings, but to understand the process of network coordination, we argue that this sampling method will advance our understanding on the extent to which different types of coordinators are able to establish goal consensus (Yin, 2014).

The selection of the cases is based on several motivations. They have to fit the four inclusion criteria that were determined for this research. Within these similarities we also look for diversity between the cases by adding four diversity criteria. The cases were selected in the second half of 2014. The selected networks are geographically spread over Belgium and by consequence, were funded by different national and regional governments.

The following inclusion criteria should be met in order to be eligible to be part of the selected cases. First, the public centre for social welfare (OCMW/CPAS) has to be one of the network actors. Due to the way local networks are funded in Belgium, the public centre for social welfare is often encouraged to become the leading applicant and is therefore often one of the leading organizations in the network. Also, the public centre for social welfare is present in every municipality and is the most established welfare organization on the local level. In a context of combating (child) poverty, it is important to take into account this network partner, who also provides material support in the local community.

Second, the networks, as well as the organizations that are part of the network, have to work with parents and children in poverty. By including this criterion, we exclude all networks that work exclusively with adults without involving the children in the network process.

A third criterion to which the selected networks have to comply, is that they have to consist of a set of autonomous non-profit service organizations. This means that they cannot merge into one single, new organization which is the network. The collaboration between independent organizations is the key of the network.

A fourth and last criterion that was included, regards the child poverty rate in the municipality. This rate has to be higher than average to be part of the selection. The child poverty rates in Flanders are published by the Flemish childcare organization 'Kind & Gezin' (Child & Family), the municipalities that rated a score of 4 out of 7 or more on the child deprivation scale were selected. A similar scale was used for Brussels and Wallonia networks. According to the last publication of the Walloon Institute of Prospective and Research Studies "IWEPS" that has described the so-called poverty areas in Wallonia and Brussels, researchers have selected networks in those areas.

Next to the inclusion criteria, it was important to create a diverse sample of networks that were studied. In addition, the following diversity criteria were constructed:

- Networks in urban areas and networks in rural areas, including networks in neighbourhoods within cities or networks spread over several communities
- Size (number of organizations in the network)
- Historical embedding (instead of age of the network): the extent to which the different partners have a history of working together.
- Sectoral diversity: The networks can focus on a certain domain (for example health and education), as long as the total of different networks focuses on a range of domains.

Subsequently, and based on the purposive sampling method (Yin, 2014), twenty networks were selected and considered relevant for the research in work package 1.

#### *3.1.1.2 Work Package 2*

From that pool of twenty cases, five were selected to study in depth in work package 2. To select the cases from this sample, 3 additional criteria were added:

- Looking for interesting practices and interventions that are developed in the network.
- Local actors are willing to collaborate in a more intensive study (open to participative observation, interviews, providing help in contacting families and partners)
- The actors from the network intervene with a purpose to offer support for families, which enables us to question parents in poverty about how they experience the actions taken from the network.

### 3.1.2 Description of cases

#### *3.1.2.1 Work Package 1*

The following table gives an overview of the selected research cases for work package 1, the number of coordinators and partners, the sectors that are represented in the network, the target group of the network and the type of service that is provided.

Network	Number of coordinators (interviewed)	Number of partners (interviewed)	Represented sectors	Target group	Type of provided services
<b>A</b>	2 (2)	6 (6)	4 Welfare Health Parenting support Poverty organization	Families with children in poverty in the municipality	Long-term support trajectories for families in poverty, parent support groups and poverty awareness trainings for professionals
<b>B</b>	2 (2)	13 (8)	3 Welfare Health Education	All families with children in the municipality, with a special focus on families in poverty	Meeting and getting to know the other local actors and creating common initiatives for the target group
<b>C</b>	2 (2)	30 (10)	5 Welfare Health Education Parenting support Leisure	All families with children in the municipality, with a special focus on families in poverty	Creating an accessible and adjusted entrance to the local services, and creating a platform in order to make recommendations towards the federal government

<b>D</b>	1 (2)	25 (7)	6 Welfare Youth Parenting support Health Education Housing	All families with children in the municipality, with a special focus on families in poverty	Developing parental support for families in poverty, through playful activities such as baby massage or book reading support
<b>E</b>	2 (3)	40 (8)	3 Welfare Education Culture	All families living in poverty, with a special focus on poverty area in the municipality	Social support for families and networking to avoid services fragmentation, to offer a broader response
<b>F</b>	1 (1)	15 (10)	5 Welfare Health Education Parenting support Culture	Families with children in poverty in the municipality	Events and information sessions for professionals and target group
<b>G</b>	2 (2)	10 (9)	6 Welfare Health	All families with children in the municipality, with a special focus on families in poverty	Courses for target group and material support through the network's second hand store

			<p>Education</p> <p>Parenting support</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Poverty organization</p>		
H	1 (1)	26 (10)	<p>5</p> <p>Welfare</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Education</p> <p>Parenting support</p> <p>Culture</p>	Families with children in poverty in the municipality	Meeting and getting to know the other local actors and facilitating and optimizing the referral system
I	2 (2)	10 (7)	<p>3</p> <p>Welfare</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Parenting support</p>	Families with children in poverty in the municipality	The creation of a pool of family coaches who offer long term support trajectories on several domains
J	2 (2)	23 (13)	<p>5</p> <p>Welfare</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Education</p> <p>Parenting support</p> <p>Culture</p>	Families with small children in poverty in the municipality	Getting to know the different local actors and creating a platform in order to make recommendations towards the federal government

K	1 (1)	22 (12)	4 Welfare Education Parenting support Poverty organization	Families with children in poverty in the municipality	Information exchange between -, and information sessions for professionals with a focus on making the bridge between welfare and education
L	1 (1)	10 (5)	4 Welfare Health Education Parenting support	Families with children in poverty in the municipality	Getting to know the different local actors and exchanging information
M	1 (1)	17 (13)	4 Welfare Health Education Parenting support	All families with children in the municipality, with a special focus on families in poverty	Getting to know the different local actors and initiating several common projects for the target group

N	2 (2)	44 (10)	5 Welfare Health Education Parenting support Culture	All families with children in the municipality, with a special focus on families in poverty	Improving the visibility and the accessibility of the local services, improving the referral system, getting to know the different local actors and creating common projects
O	2 (2)	20 (6)	3 Welfare Education Childcare	All families with children in the municipality, with a special focus on families in poverty	Creating activities for families in poverty focusing on the issue of healthy alimentation
P	3 (3)	40 (8)	4 Welfare Childcare Education Culture	All families with children in the municipality, with a special focus on families in poverty	Getting to know the different local actors and exchanging information
Q	1 (2)	15 (8)	4 Welfare Education Teenager support Childcare	All children and teenagers (0-16) in the municipality, with a special focus on child poverty	Getting to know the different local actors and exchanging information. Developing concrete projects that target teenagers and school issues

R	3 (2)	10 (6)	3 Welfare Education Health	All families with children in the municipality, with a special focus on families in poverty	Developing concrete projects for families in poverty, with a specific focus on healthy alimentation and education
S	1 (4)	20 (10)	4 Teenager support Welfare Education Health	All children and teenagers (0-16) in the municipality, with a special focus on child poverty	Getting to know the different local actors and exchanging information. Developing concrete projects that target teenagers and school issues
T	2 (5)	15 (6)	4 Childcare Welfare Teenager support Parenting support	All children (0-3) in the municipality, targeting vulnerable families	Providing childcare services in the municipality and developing parental support activities.

Table I: Overview of the selected research cases

### 3.1.2.2 Work Package 2

In what follows, we describe the five research cases that were selected for Work package 2.

#### **Network A**

This network is built around individual support trajectories for families in poverty who have at least one child between 0 and 3 years old. In addition the network also organizes monthly meetings with parents. The needs of the participating families are the starting point of the trajectory. Also a mini rights research is used to check whether parents get all the rights/benefits they are entitled to on many different life domains (for example housing, employment, leisure time, education, income and mobility). The partners are OCMW, Kind & Gezin, CKG, CAW, Welzijnsschakels and Lus vzw. The network is coordinated by the OCMW and a family support worker is assigned to coordinate the individual trajectories. The network has an interesting construction, because it operates at different levels. At a micro level, the network partners have case discussions on individual families and situations that may include making decisions, divide tasks and evaluate support and goals. On the level of the steering committee, the different organizations are all represented, but decisions are made for the network as a whole.

#### **Network B**

This municipality is located in a rural area, although it also has to deal with features and problems that are found in larger cities, including high numbers of ethnic minorities, high unemployment, low average income, high residential density, and so on. This makes it an interesting context to look at as a first case because the number of local actors, as well as the budget, is more limited, compared to larger cities. Several projects were being launched in the municipality. Next to the funds received by former Flemish minister of poverty reduction I. Former Flemish Minister for poverty reduction Lieten that lead to the development of a local network against child poverty, there was a project of VOS (Vlaams Overleg Straathoekwerk) funded by the National Lottery that also supports the establishment of the network. They additionally received funds for the development of a 'House of the Child', that focuses on the provision of parenting support. Due to the three projects, the network itself was thematically centred around combating (child) poverty and preventive parenting support. By creating a 'House of the Child', the network aims to provide a physical meeting place and contact point for families with children in the municipality. The network consists of many network partners (at the start 60 individual members) from sectors such as education, (preventive) parenting support, leisure time, health care and welfare. Network interventions such as play and meeting moments for parents and children, information moments, consultations, and trajectories for pregnant woman are offered to all families in the municipality.

#### **Network C**

Network C represents a project wherein partners from education and welfare work strongly together in the school context. The project is mainly organized in schools that have a vulnerable school population (high rate of poor families). The project started from the experience that they receive many complex questions of parents and children in poverty that goes broader than the educational context. Problems like homelessness, administration,

jurisdiction, work-related problems and debts confronted the school actors with question that were difficult to manage. In this project, a welfare actor of the public center for social welfare (OCMW), comes to the school to help and support the school actors with the problems they are confronted with. In this way, also material questions are picked up from the beginning, when these problems are discovered at school. The coordination of the project is mainly done by the OCMW, but the steering committee is represented by the 'House of the Child'. In this steering committee, three local policy makers are included from education, welfare and poverty reduction. The project aims to intensify the link between education and welfare on different levels with the goal to combat (child) poverty.

### **Network D**

The network develops and supports day-care for children and especially children that are living in vulnerable families. The aim is to develop childcare services in rural areas where poor families often experience difficulties to access that service, due to for example lack of income and mobility. In order to deal with problems related to income and mobility that families face, the network offers affordable and mobile day-care services within 15 communities (mainly rurals) and targets vulnerable parents that are involved in welfare-to-work programs. For two decades, the main structure that coordinates the network has a long ground experience of networking with local policy makers and social workers that are involved in child poverty reduction strategies. The costs of childcare service facilities such as the local and expenses are subsidised at each community scale, whether the city or another structure. The region supports nursery nurses wages through a welfare-to-work programmes subsidies. Besides, the network provides, with the assistance of one specialised partner, parenting support through activities mostly educational and cultural workshops.

### **Network E**

The network gathers 20 to 30 local partners from various domains as youth, education, welfare and poverty. The coordinator and the partners focus the network on youth and related problems such as bullying, harassment, early school leaving and parenthood. On one side the coordinator develops basic networking by gathering almost every local structures. On the other side, a restrain group of partners and the coordinator develops close partnerships with schools to offer à more in-depth approach to the target group. Originally, the network started with the idea that joined-up working could slower down the impact of services fragmentation and offers a broader support for teenagers. For instance, the last project that the network developed was the « bullying project », which consisted in developing educational workshops, lead by social workers in colleges. The workshops took place in 12 different first-grade classes, gathering around 200 students and their teachers. The coordinator and its structure are key actors in the community for two decades.

## 3.2 Data collection

### 3.2.1 Work Package 1

How are integrated networks of service organizations providing support to poor families organized? In order to answer this first research question, we conducted qualitative interviews with the network coordinators and network partners of the twenty networks that were selected.

The first step in the data collection process was to interview the network coordinators. By interviewing these coordinators first, we were able to get insight into the general network structure and we got an overview of the network partners that were engaged in the network. We used a semi-structured questionnaire, which included questions about the general structure of the network and the role that the coordinator adopted in the network. Besides this, the questionnaire also zoomed in on specific aspects of the network, such as the network goals, the vision of the network, the financial situation, the division of responsibility within the network, the evaluation and monitoring of the network, etc.

The second step was to interview the network partners that are engaged in the network. We first asked the coordinator to point out the organizations he or she had the most contact with. In addition, we also contacted organizations that were not pointed out by the coordinator to avoid potential bias. We then started to interview members of these organizations by using a similar semi-structured questionnaire. In these interviews, we focused more on the perceptions that the network partners had on the way the network was organized and governed by the leading organization and the network coordinator. These questionnaires also focus on how the network goals and the vision of the network were established, on who controls the financial situation of the network, who is responsible for the functioning, the monitoring and the evaluation of the network. The respondents were asked to illustrate their findings with examples of real-life situations and discussions during the network meetings.

Table II shows the number of coordinators and network partners that were interviewed.

Table II: Overview of the number of conducted interviews for Work package 1

Network	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
Network partners	6	1 3	3 0	2 5	4 0	1 5	1 0	2 6	1 0	2 3	2 2	1 0	1 7	4 4	2 0	4 0	1 5	1 0	2 0	7
Interviewed network partners	6	8	1 0	7	8	1 0	9	1 0	7	1 3	1 2	5	2 3	1 0	6	8	8	6	1 0	1 5
Coordinators	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	2	2	2
Interviewed coordinators	2	2	2	2	3	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	3	2	2	4	5

### 3.2.2 Work Package 2

In the second work package we wanted to find an answer to three research questions:

- Which social work practices in integrated networks create processes of inclusion and exclusion?
- How do local policy makers and social workers experience these networks
- How do families in poverty experience these networks?

Therefore, we used different methods of data collection on three different levels: the political level, social work level and client level. The researchers also attempted to capture the dynamics between the levels.

#### *3.2.2.1 The political level*

The data collection that is performed on this level, is mainly used to get more background information on the local and social policy context where the network is situated in. It may also provide a better understanding of the specific experiences of social workers participating in the network and experiences of parents. We performed a document analysis and qualitative interviews with local policy makers to gather our data.

##### *Document analysis*

From the start of the research we collected and documented the local policies regarding networking and integration of services in the combat against child poverty. These documents include policy papers, local project proposals, vision statements of sectors and departments concerned, etc. In this way, the researchers can familiarize themselves with the local political context of each municipality and have a better understanding of the context where the local network is embedded in.

##### *Semi-structured interviews*

We used qualitative interviews to question what is actually happening in practice. The interviews were planned with key local social policy makers while using a snowball sampling strategy (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). We give an example of subjects that were discussed:

- What is the conceptualization of child poverty and the vision on combating poverty
- How do policy makers articulate the political agenda and the electoral time schedule with the struggle against poverty?
- What is the place of the user in the development of the public policies?

### *3.2.2.2 The social services level*

On this level, we wanted to gain a better insight into the networks functioning and how social workers experience this and reflect on this. Therefore, we made use of participative observations during network activities and individual interviews.

#### *Participant observation*

The researchers participated during network meetings and activities. These included: case discussions, large network meetings, meetings with parents and between parents, steering committee, etc. In this way we gained a more in-depth insight in the actual functioning, interventions and dynamics of the network. These observations started after the selection of the cases and continued during the course of the project. The spread over time allowed us to see changes and evolutions in the networks.

#### *Semi-structured interviews*

Next to the participant observation, we performed in-depth interviews with social workers and social welfare actors who are involved in the network, using a snowball sampling strategy (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Noy, 2007). To have a better understanding of the goals, purposes and solutions that are mentioned by the actors in the network, we also questioned what the underlying definitions are of the social problem(s) that form the basis and rationale of the network (for example poverty, child poverty, fragmentation, bad parenting, ...). We give an example of subjects discussed during the interviews:

- What is their vision on and definition of families in poverty What kind of contacts do they maintain with them?
- How do they describe the needs and concerns of people in poverty?
- Information sharing: matters concerning the (lack of) ethical and privacy related legislation in networks. Information sharing as an opening or as a barrier?
- Does a network establish a shared engagement and a shared responsibility?
- Dealing with complexity: trying to get a grip on complex situations in order to make them susceptible to intervention, without reducing the complex social reality of families in poverty.

### *3.2.2.3 The level of families in poverty situations*

In this part of the study we questioned parents about how they experience the interventions of the network and if they considered this supportive. Creating interaction between the results of the three research questions allowed us to confront the perspectives of social workers and policy makers with the perspectives of families in poverty. The insights that we have gained in the first two sections can help us understand and relate certain visions, problems, solutions and experiences of people in poverty.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

In a broad sense we wanted to look at how parents experience these networks and its interventions. We examined what is supportive and valuable for parents and what works for parents or what can make a difference for them. We wanted to discover if and in what way their contact to the network changed the situation of their family. We give an example of possible subjects:

- What are specific/non-specific needs of this target group?
- What are the reasons why families appeal or don't appeal to a service/organization?
- What is the relation between families and services/organizations.

Table III: Overview of interviews and participant observation

Network	A	B	C	D	E
Interviews local policy makers	5	6	5	3	3
Participant observation	10	13	18	8	15
Interviews social workers	8 + 1 focus group	8	7	10 + 1 focus group	15 + 2 focus group
Interviews parents	11 + 1 focus group	4 + 8 (exploratory)	2	6	17

### 3.2.3 Ethical considerations

In the report, we choose not to disclose the names of the cases and respondents. We did this to protect the networks and municipalities that participated and also to protect the participants within the networks. During the study we ensured our respondents that their identity and information was confidential and that the data would be used in an anonymized way. It would be problematic if within the municipalities and networks respondents could see from each other who said what. The research proposal was approved by the ethical committee of the university and informed consents were used.

### 3.3 Strategies of data analysis

#### 3.3.1 Work Package 1

After the interviews were fully transcribed, we used NVivo-software for open coding, followed by a process of axial coding (Berg, 1989). In this last phase, the different open codes were grouped into categories and subcategories, based on the research of Span et al., (2012a). We made a distinction between the codes that were gathered from the interviews with the coordinators and the codes that were collected from the interviews with the network partners.

To enhance the face validity of our data gathering process and the research in general, we introduced some additional measures. By doing this, we want to make sure that our research measures reflect what they intend to measure (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). First, a codebook was developed in close collaboration between the two researchers who work on this project. The codebook was updated after each interview that was analyzed and after every step in the coding process. This resulted in a codebook that is straightforward and unambiguous.

Another aspect that enhanced face validity is the number of interviews that was conducted in each research case. By doing so, we answer to the *two hats problem* that is identified by Milward (2017). In researching a network, we should not only question the network coordinator or one network partner. The source of data should contain a number of coordinators or partners to get a more nuanced view of the collaboration. Otherwise, we face a problem with the unit of analysis and the extrapolation of the data. To prevent this, we selected a large number of network partners and when possible more than one network coordinators in each network, and we made sure that the selected respondents reflected the diversity of the network. We pursued a good balance between the perceptions of the network coordinators and the network partners.

#### 3.3.2 Work Package 2

In order to handle the inevitable dilemma between describing the rich individual case knowledge, the “thick of what is going on” (ibid) and the necessity to draw generalisable conclusions, the researchers from Ghent and Liège shared common perspectives on the individual cases. Thus we conceptualised them as individual, free standing, but related (Urban, 2007). By asking similar questions (without expecting similar answers) we were able to construct a “structural equivalence” (Burt, 1982) allowing us to develop a shared framework to analyze diverse findings.

We analyzed the data through a qualitative content analysis. Hsieh & Shannon (2005: 1278) define this as ‘a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systemic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns’. Qualitative content analysis takes in a holistic approach to grasp the complexity of what is studied, but at the same time tries to deal with this complexity by gradually reducing it (Kohlbacher, 2006). It is used as a sense-making effort that attempts to systematically

analyze and identify core consistencies and meanings in qualitative research material (Patton, 2002). To analyze the data of the participant observation of the meetings of the local networks, a conventional approach to content analysis was performed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The observations and field notes that were taken during the network's meetings and activities were used and scrutinized to seek for general dynamics and discussion points in the different networks. It was used to describe what is actually going on in the networks, allowing the categories and names for the categories to flow from the data; 'researchers immerse themselves in the data to allow new insights to emerge, also described as inductive category development' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1279). This analysis offered the researchers an in-depth understanding of the main categories - in our case, network dynamics and discussions - that emerged during the meetings of the local networks. In a second stage of the process of data analysis, a directed approach to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was applied to analyze the interviews with policy makers, social workers and parents. A directed approach mainly serves to refine, extend, and enrich existing research insights: 'the goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework (...) this has been referred to as deductive category application' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1281). This approach We used concrete findings and fields of tension that emerge from the scientific literature. These can serve as a guideline for our interview questions, and as an analytical frame to analyze the interviews. This process of data analysis, in which we persistently triangulated different data sources (observations and qualitative interviews), allowed us to compare, validate and cross-check our research findings. The validity and reliability of our research findings was also established through the prolonged engagement of the researchers, peer debriefing, and careful consideration in our research team (Morse et al., 2002).

## 4. SCIENTIFIC RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Results

#### 4.1.1 Research question 1: Governance and organization of networks

In what follows, we answer the first research question: *'How are integrated networks of service organizations providing support to poor families organized?'* Because of the width of this question and the general focus on network governance that occurs throughout the whole of this first research work package, we will answer this question in three levels. First of all, we unravel the governance structures that we observe in the networks by zooming in on the vertical complexity that occurs in all of these networks. Secondly, we focus on the governance role that the coordinators of these networks adopt in governing the networks and we connect this to the perceived functioning of the network. Thirdly, we zoom in on how the coordinator searches for consensus and how these different governance roles influence the level of consensus. For this last aspect, we zoom in on three of the twenty research cases, and research them more in depth.

##### 4.1.1.1 Governance structures within networks

A first important finding is the fact that all of our selected networks are governed by one mode of network governance as put forward in the widely used framework of Provan & Kenis (2008). They identified three different forms of network governance: lead-organization governance; network administrative organization (NAO); and shared participant governance.

We found that all of our networks are governed by a lead organization, which is most often the OCMW/CPAS or the municipality. One of the main reasons that networks that are installed by the government to deal with wicked societal issues such as poverty, social exclusion etc., are often lead organization networks, is the way in which they are funded. In the Flemish, Brussels and Walloon network reality, the local government often receives funding to install local networks to combat child poverty, which makes them the leading organization.

While Provan & Kenis (2008) present the lead organization governed network as a network consisting of a lead organization and network partners, the empirical findings of our study show that within this type of network governance, different subtypes emerge. In all of our cases, the lead organization has initiated the network and manages the financial means of the network. Officially, the lead organization has the mandate to make all decisions about the functioning of the network, the goals of the network and the specific actions the network develops to attain the goals. We however notice that in all of our networks the lead organization has established different layers of vertical complexity to include the perspective and expertise of network partners in the decision-making process. We distinguish between three possible entities, a coordinator, a steering committee and workgroups among network partners.

Secondly, we identify the factors that explain why networks develop these governance structures. As a network consists of different actors with different needs, preferences and

different access to resources, they often pursue very different goals (Balsler & McClusky, 2005) and their expectations towards the network can be different. In what follows, we discuss these three vertical layers and link several explaining factors to the occurrence of these structures.

### *Network coordinator*

Our findings show that in all networks, the lead organization appoints a network coordinator to be responsible for the coordination tasks. Even though Kenis & Provan (2008) consider the lead organization as the main governing body in the network, we argue that it is appropriate to make a distinction between the lead organization and the coordinator who is often affiliated to this lead organization.

Most respondents in our networks found that the coordinator was a very, if not the most important person in the network. Several respondents saw this person as the captain or the centrepiece of the network, who is in charge of the practical organization and who also gives substance to the network. The coordinators are responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the network. In most of our networks coordinators facilitate interactions among member organizations, formulate the goals of the networks, decide which actions must be organized to fulfil the goals of the networks and are in charge of the execution of network decisions.

In most networks the connection between the network coordinator and the lead-organization is very close. Network coordinators discuss all major aspects of network goals, actions, conflicts and how the financial means are spent with the lead organization. In almost all networks all decisions with financial implications must be ratified by the leading organization. We however argue that most network coordinators do not act as a subordinate of the leading organization. They fulfil a very important mediating role in the network. This mediating role allows the network coordinators to restore the power balance between network partners and lead organization in the network. In several cases the network partners were afraid that unequal distribution of power could result in a network where all decisions were made by the leading agency. This made it difficult for them to get involved in a network where this leading organization was in control and had all decision-making power. For this reason, the member organizations perceive the coordinator as a more independent network actor that could mediate between network partners and the leading agency. The network coordinators make sure that the perspective of network partners is taken into account when decisions are ratified by the lead organization. By doing so, a more inclusive decision-making process could be restored. This finding is illustrated in the following quotes where the coordinator confirms her mediating role between the network actors and the leading agency:

*“There is a lot of weighing and mediating. Partner A wants this, partner B wants something else. The municipality and the public centre for social welfare have their own vision and I am caught in between and I try to get everyone moving in the same direction.” (Coordinator Network C)*

*“Difficulties and frustrations had occurred between the public centre for social welfare [leading organization] and the municipality, and after a difficult meeting the partners said ‘someone has to lead this network and make decisions’. That’s when the coordinator was hired. So in the beginning, there was no coordinator, but after a while we felt the need for a coordinator.”* (Coordinator Network B)

The abovementioned finding on the mediating role of network coordinators was confirmed in networks showing a more advanced level of complexity where multiple coordinators are hired. In some of our networks the lead organization hired a second or even a third coordinator and established a clear division of tasks between these coordinators. In several networks, the first coordinator is occupied with the external legitimacy of the network and the contacts with the leading organization. He or she is occupied with tasks such as applying for funding, the financial management and the communication to the leading organization. The second and in some cases even the third coordinator is more often hired to manage the internal network affairs and takes care of the internal legitimacy of the network (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Human & Provan, 2001), such as the connections between the different network partners and the coordination of the network activities. He or she is often the day-to-day, more approachable focal point of the network, both towards the network partners and the target population.

*“At first, the first coordinator chaired the meetings and I [the second coordinator] took on the role of the coordinator for the families and for the parent meetings. [...] At first, she did the meetings and I did the more practical implementation. Now, I help with chairing the meeting as well.”* (Second coordinator Network A)

An important finding is that in these networks the additional coordinators were also perceived by the network actors as a way to gain participation in the decision-making procedure of the network. In the previous paragraphs, we already discussed this related to the presence of a first coordinator. In some networks a second coordinator is even hired to resolve disputes between the leading organization and network partners and their target groups. Several respondents from member organizations experienced that some families in poverty have bad experiences with the leading organizations. In this case, a second coordinator, who has direct contact with the target group and functions as a approachable contact person, might overcome these conflicts or tensions as he or she is often less directly connected to the leading organization and maintains a close contact with the target group.

### *Steering committee*

Next to a coordinator, the presence of a steering committee is a second layer of the vertical complexity of the network. This steering committee consists of representatives from a variety of partner organizations and is mostly chaired by the coordinator(s). In most of our networks the coordinator facilitates the discussions among members of the steering committee and communicates the decisions and input of the steering committee towards the leading organization and the workgroups (which will be discussed below).

In most networks this steering committee consists of network actors with a high level of commitment to the network (Milward & Provan, 2006) who are able to invest more time in the network. The following network partner voluntarily chose to be more involved in a steering committee of partners who get together more often than the entire network.

*“There’s a small group that gets together more frequently. From the beginning we were aware of the fact that we had limited time. So we really had to decide what we wanted to do and what we wanted to achieve. And we chose that we wanted to do something about it [the problem of child poverty].”* (Partner Network F)

In other networks the members of the steering committee are those partners that were already involved from the start of the network. They helped the coordinator to determine a common starting point or consensus concerning the vision and objectives of the network.

*“I think the steering committee is very important. Starting with a small group and exploring if we could find a common vision, common goals. We wrote everything down. [...] We did this exercise to be sure that we all agreed about how the network was going to take shape and how we were going to work together. [...] That way, we were sure that we were all going to stay part of the network.”* (Coordinator Network J)

The network partners in the steering committee invest more in the network in terms of time and energy than the network partners that are not participating in the steering committee. In most cases, the network partners in the steering committee are working more actively on the theoretical side of the network development and activities. More specifically, they make decisions upon the vision and goals of the network. This means that they discuss what they define as ‘poverty’ and how this issue should be approached. The steering committee often also adopts the role of spokesman towards higher administrations to signal issues and shortcomings.

*“The discussion in the steering committees is much more related to the content: how are we going to organize the network, which themes are we going to discuss during the next meeting, which trainings would be interesting for the network partners. These things are discussed in the steering committee, as this group is much more manageable and workable than the 32 partners all together.”* (Coordinator Network B)

In line with the abovementioned findings that explain why a coordinator is often hired, we found that an important reason for the appearance of a steering committee is the absence of trust towards the lead organization. Most of the respondents felt the need to install a steering committee from the moment they suspected that the leading organization would make decisions without consulting the network partners. Our respondents emphasize that a steering committee allows the members to have more frequent meetings with each other but also with the lead-organization. The committee members are more frequently present during network meetings and are often more actively supporting the development of the network. The high intensity of network meetings therefore allows the network partners to influence the

decision making process in the network, and to raise concerns more directly towards the lead-organization.

*“There’s distrust between the voluntary and the institutional organizations, which is sometimes justified. Sometimes, the leading organization says ‘we want this, we decide the hour, the date, etc.’. And then we have to say ‘no, we don’t accept that’. Now, we make the decisions together.”* (Partner Network J)

### Workgroups

A third layer in the vertical complexity of a network refers to the division of network actors into various workgroups. These workgroups only appears in networks with a very advanced level of vertical complexity. These workgroups can be considered as a group coordination method in the network. The workgroups differ from the steering committee because they are mainly organized as a preparatory brainstorm on specific issues, after which the steering committee makes the final decision. These workgroups are also used to prepare the implementation of the decisions made by the steering committee in the network. Within these workgroups the network partners often focus on one theme, project, action or goal identified by the whole network or by the steering committee.

*“There are different workgroups with different theme’s. One of them is a workgroup about playing with children and encountering other parents trough this, in which different organizations got together that were all involved in these topics. They discussed if a common label might be developed.”* (Partner Network B)

Related to the previous findings, we found that the number of network partners influences the occurrence of workgroups. When the number of network partners is high, networks tend to have more difficulties to involve everyone equally and partners often feel less included. A way to deal with this, is to divide the network in smaller workgroups, in which the partners focus on one specific goal or project. The workgroups were thus used to increase the involvement of the network actors by creating a platform for discussion on a specific topic. The members of these groups are in most cases selected based on the expertise that is necessary to tackle the issue the workgroup is dealing with. We already stated that the networks of our study consist of a large variety of network organizations, with a large variation of expertise. For example, some network partners focus on the needs of small children, others have more experience in working with adolescents or parents. Through the creation of workgroups consisting of a limited selection of network actors specialized in one single topic or issue, the network partners can find ‘their place’ in the network. Some of the respondents express this finding by emphasizing that they feel more involved when collaborating in smaller subnetworks of *“like-minded people”*. The interviews showed that these kinds of working arrangements make them feel more indispensable as they can provide and discuss their expertise more exclusively.

*“So we made the workgroups keeping in mind the different needs of the partners. We had a group with the teachers, the school principals, the pedagogical supporters. And*

*at a given moment in time I was like, how are we going to tackle the issues? So we created subgroups to be well aware of what was going on in the schools, what is going on in the homework-support-groups, etc.” (Leading organization Network K)*

*“I really like the discussions that we have in the workgroups. It permits us to open up and to explain our problems. And also, it’s easier to search for solutions in these workgroups.” (Partner Network K)*

### Conclusion: Vertical layers as a mechanisms of integration

Lead organization networks of human service organizations prove to be more complex than originally put forward by Provan and Kenis (2008). Based on our research, we can put forth three different types of lead organization governed networks. Type 1 is a network with a limited vertical complexity. This network only hired a network coordinator. There are no steering committees and workgroups present in this type of network. Type 2 is a network with an average level of vertical complexity. In these networks the vertical complexity consists of a network coordinator and a steering committee. Type 3 is characterized by a very advanced level of vertical complexity. In these networks a second or even a third network coordinator is hired. These networks also often consist of a steering committee and different workgroups among network actors.

Figure I: Vertical network structure



These structures appear to have an important function within the network. We find that, by installing a steering committee, a workgroup or by hiring a coordinator, the opportunity for the network partners to provide input, increases.

When a network coordinator is hired to manage the network, we find that he or she act as a broker between the lead organization and the network partners. On the one hand, the coordinator can provide a forum for input for the network partners, of which the results can be translated towards the lead organization. On the other hand, the coordinator can translate the demands and wishes from the lead organization to the network partners in a way that

they better understand and can relate to. We consider a coordinator as a broker who encourages partners to provide input and feel integrated in the network process.

By installing a steering committee, the members who are highly engaged in the network have the opportunity to provide input, which enhances the integration of these network partners within the network. The members of these steering committees are often able to provide input on the network goals, the vision of the network (e.g. developing a shared definition on child poverty, the direction the network should head for, etc.), and are often consulted before or during the decision making process.

By subdividing the network partners in different workgroups, they are able to provide more input on specific themes or network matters. Workgroups can focus on specific network actions or they can zoom in on the different manifestations of child poverty. Our research reveals that the members of these workgroups feel more included and they feel as if their voice is being heard. When partners feel as if their input is taken into consideration, this increases the level of integration of the network. We can conclude that these workgroups can be installed to increase the commitment of network actors in the network.

It is important to add meaning and understanding to the structures that emerge in order to understand why one network is different from another (Milward, 2017). As Provan & Kenis (2008: 230) define governance as *“the use of institutions and structures of authority and collaboration to allocate resources and to coordinate and control joint action across the network as a whole”*, we can conclude that the three types of lead organization networks that we discerned coordinate and control the joint actions differently. Based on the previous findings, we were able to provide some explanations for the fact that some lead organization networks are structured and governed differently than others.

We find that, when a network is characterized by a large number of network partners, the occurrence of vertical structures can enhance the ability of the different network partners to provide input. These input possibilities are enhanced by the installation of a coordinator who can steer the network and provide input opportunities for all partners during network meetings. By installing a steering committee, the large group of partners can be split up between more engaged partners who invest more time and have more say in the network and the other network partners who are often less interested to invest a significant amount of time but who do want to be part of the network. Thirdly, workgroups can subdivide the large amount of network partners in different smaller groups. The smaller size of these groups makes that the partners find it easier to provide input. These three levels of the vertical structure can enhance the level of integration as the network partners feel more included and have more opportunities to come to a common vision and a unity of purpose (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

Besides this, we find that the diversity among network partners also has an influence on the level of integration that is reached through the installation of vertical structures. Here, we draw back on the trade-off between differentiation and integration that Lawrence & Lorsch (1967) put forward. In this discussion, differentiation is the extent to which network partners

are different from each other and come from different sectoral backgrounds. Milward (2017) and Lawrence & Lorsch (1967) point out that differentiated networks can achieve higher levels of integration by installing organizational mechanisms such as network coordinators, committees and (work)groups. Our research confirms these ideas within networks governed by a lead organization. The creation of vertical layers of input can enhance the integration of network partners, which can enhance the occurrence of shared beliefs, common values and norms, and a unity of purpose (Milward, 2017).

We can conclude that, by installing these different vertical governance mechanisms, networks aim to provide a balance between differentiation and integration. This vertical complexity allows for a diverse set of network actors to deal with the wicked issues that the target group is struggling with. On the other hand, subdividing the network in different steering committees and workgroups, can enhance the integration of a diverse set of network partners, as they have more opportunities to provide input. Following Kenis & Provan (2009), we can thus say that the structure of a network has consequences for what a network can actually achieve.

#### *4.1.1.2 Governance roles and the legitimacy, accountability and accordance of the network*

In the following paragraphs, we zoom in on the different governance roles that network coordinators can adopt in the governance of networks of service organizations. We draw on the research by Span et al. (2012) who developed a framework of three different governance roles that can be placed on a top-down - bottom-up continuum: the commissioner, the co-producer and the facilitator.

At the top-down end of the continuum, the network coordinator adopts the role of commissioner. In this case, the different network partners have limited input opportunities and unilateral decisions are being made by the network coordinator. The network coordinator also has the main responsibility and has to be able to account for the actions of the network.

At the other end of the continuum, the network coordinator can adopt the role of facilitator. His or her main goal is to facilitate the collaboration between the different network partners without intervening in the decision making process. Here, the partners have the main responsibility and take account for the actions of the network.

Situated between the top-down and bottom-up extremes, is the role of co-producer. Here, the decisions are made collectively, taking all actors, the network coordinator included, into account. Consequently, the ultimate responsibility rests with all network partners and the network coordinator, who all have to be able to take account for the network.

A first important finding is that the three governance roles are all represented in the different networks. Some network coordinators adopt the role of facilitator, some the role of co-producer, and others the role of commissioner. Table IV gives an overview of the governance roles in the researched networks.

Table IV: Governance roles in the researched networks

Network	Governance role (based on Span et al., 2012)
A	Commissioner
B	Co-producer
C	Co-producer
D	Facilitator
E	Commissioner
F	Facilitator
G	Commissioner
H	Commissioner
I	Commissioner
J	Facilitator
K	Co-producer
L	Commissioner
M	Facilitator
N	Co-producer
O	Commissioner
P	Commissioner
Q	Co-producer
R	Commissioner
S	Co-producer
T	Commissioner

We find that the governance role that is adopted by the coordinator is often determined by this leading organization. In other networks on the other hand, the governance role is the result of the expectations of the network partners and the experience of the network coordinator. In the following paragraphs, we zoom in on the perceptions of the different network partners on these different governance roles. More precisely, our results show that by adopting the most appropriate governance role, network coordinators should be able to increase legitimacy, accountability and accordance within the network (Skelcher et al.,

2008). We evaluate how the network can achieve higher levels of legitimacy, accountability and accordance in using different governance roles that are better adjusted to the network characteristics.

### *Legitimacy in the network*

First of all, we zoom in on the first component that is put forward by Skelcher et al. (2008) and Voets et al. (2008), legitimacy. We focus on informal legitimacy, which is the extent to which partners act supportive towards the functioning of the network (Skelcher et al., 2008; in Voets et al., 2008). Provan & Milward (2001: 416) define this criterion as “*member commitment to network goals*”.

We describe a committed network partner as a partner that finds it worthwhile to invest in the relations that they build within the network and that is concerned with the future of the network (based on Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Moorman, Zaltman & Deshpande, 1992). We identified four criteria that explain the commitment of network partners: the perceived added value for the network partners, the time that partners can invest in the network, the mandate and lastly the continuity of the network partners. These determinants influence the commitment of the network partners, but also influence one another.

### *Perceived added value*

The partners that join a network also keep on their daily duties in their own organization, which often remains the most important aspect of their job responsibilities. The network is often perceived as a side track in which the organization wants to invest for certain reasons. We find that the commitment of the partner is dependent upon the perceived or experienced added value that the network generates.

Our results show that if network partners expect or experience that the network activities generate a significant added value in terms of better services towards their own target group and positive effects for their own organization, that they will prioritize and have more commitment towards the network, which enhances informal legitimacy. In other words, they have a lot to gain from a well-functioning network. These partners want to make an effort and contribute to the network, they want to provide input and have a say in the network.

Partners who experience a significant added value from the network for their own organization, want to be involved in the decision making process, they want their input to be heard and taken into account in the development of the network. In one of the networks, we find that the network partners show a high level of commitment due to the added value that they experience in their network.

*“The network focuses on children from 0 to 36 months, which also has a practical advantage for us. [...] How do we recruit members for our own organization? 150 children are being born each year in our municipality. [...] We are all volunteers, a lot of people work during the day, so it’s too big of a job to try to visit all these families.”*  
(Partner Network G)

This partner experiences a significant added value in that the network has the capacity to contact these families. This participating organization does not have the capacity to do this amount of work, as they only work with volunteers who have too little time to contact all the families in the municipality. The organization benefits from the work that the network takes on and they thus experience a high level of added value as a result of their involvement in the network. This partner goes on to say that the network coordinator adopts a coproducing role, which he confirms is the good way to work.

*“It’s not a one-way street, she doesn’t steer everything. She manages things, but the partners get a lot of say in the collaboration. And that is the best way according to me, I don’t see how we could improve this”* (Partner Network G)

This partner experiences a high level of added value for his own organization, which has a positive influence on the commitment that they have towards the network. As they are committed and excited about this collaboration, they want to be able to provide input. A coproducing network coordinator is able to deal with this situation best as this governance role allows for partners and the network coordinator to make decisions together, with equal input opportunities. In this case, a coproducing governance role will lead to the highest level of legitimacy in the network as the partners feel involved and can provide the input that they want.

In other networks, we found that the partners did not always perceive the network activities as a significant contribution to their own network. The incentives for participation in these networks are very diverse, ranging from ‘being obliged to participate’ to ‘because it’s the right thing to do’. The partners that are involved for these reasons but do not really invest time in the network, can be labelled as ‘free riders’. They are part of the network, but they do not show a lot of involvement and they do not actively contribute to the collaboration, which has a negative impact on the informal legitimacy. We found that in one of the networks, the partners are not convinced of the possible added value of the network for their own organization. Because of this, they do not prioritize the network and some partners have dropped out. Other partners do not leave the network because they think that dropping out would send out the wrong signal, i.e. that collaboration and networking is not important.

These low levels of commitment and informal legitimacy imply that the partners are not interested nor involved in the network. As they do not provide much input, the network coordinator has to steer and guide the network more directly in order to make things happen in the network. We find that when these network– against all odds – achieve certain goals or are able to provide output, the network partners will become more committed towards the network which enhances the internal legitimacy. Because of this reason, in networks where the partners initially experience less added value for their own organizations, a commissioner role will be more suited. This top down governance role implies that the network coordinator has the ability to make decisions without having to ask for permission with the network partners. This will allow for the network to grow and move forward, without being dependent upon the input of the network partners. As the partners who initially were not committed generally experience more added value once the necessary actions are set

up and the network grows thanks to the efforts of the commissioner network coordinator, the internal legitimacy will increase.

The experience of added value for their own organizations, enhances the level of internal legitimacy that network partners experience (Human & Provan, 2000). They state that as long as the network partners “*find value in their membership, they will provide resources and support*” (Human & Provan, 2000: 361).

We can conclude that a governance role as commissioner leads to higher levels of legitimacy if the network partners initially do not experience high levels of added value. On the other hand, if partners do experience high levels of added value, a governance role as co-producer will lead to higher levels of legitimacy as this allows for the network partners to actively participate in the network.

### *Time that partners can invest in the network*

We find that the time that partners can invest in the network influences the commitment that they have towards the network. The extent to which partners have got the necessary time to get involved in the network activities and thus show high or low levels of commitment is connected to which governance role lead to higher levels of internal legitimacy. The following paragraphs explain this observation more in detail.

We observe this mechanism very clearly in some of the selected networks where the partners do not have a lot of time to invest in the network. These organizations do not have or provide the necessary time to actively get involved in the network and be present in all the network meetings. Because of this lack of time, the partners cannot take on network tasks and cannot engage fully in the network. The network coordinator of one of the networks illustrates that the partners in her network do not have a lot of time to spare for the network. She explains that she often has to take charge in order for the network to move forwards.

*“A lot of people are overburdened in their position, and the collaboration asks for extra efforts, and that’s where it often goes wrong.”*

This insight was also supported by the findings in a network where the network coordinator initially adopted a facilitating role. Early on in the network process, she realized that the partners did not have a lot of time to invest in the network. Because of this lack of time and the lack of a steering governance role, the network did not progress the way it should have. The network coordinator then decided to adopt a more steering role so that decisions could be made and the network could be steered in the right direction.

In these networks, the network coordinator adopts a commissioner role as the partners do not have the time to actively get involved in the decision-making process. This lack of time is compensated by the network coordinator who adopts a steering role and has the ability to make decisions. The network coordinators and the network partners perceived this commissioner role as the most accurate role to cope with this unequal possibility to invest time in the network. We could thus say, based on the insights of the network coordinators

and the network partners, that a facilitating role would, in this case, not lead to high levels of legitimacy as the network would not be able to move forward.

Provan & Kenis (2008) state that network partners that are actively involved in the decision making process and experience a high level of legitimacy, invest more time in the network. By making this connection between legitimacy and time investment, we can also link this to the governance roles that network coordinators can adopt. We can conclude that a governance role as commissioner is more appropriate if the network partners do not have a lot of time to invest in the network, as the network coordinator will have to activate the network and keep it going. If however, partners have enough time to spare, a governance role as co-producer or a facilitator is more appropriate as the partners are able to provide the necessary input and show initiative.

### *Mandated or voluntary network partners*

Whether the network partners are mandated or voluntarily involved in the network also has an impact on the commitment that they show towards the network. We distinguish between three different types of partners: the voluntary partners, the mandated partners and the partners who get paid to be part of the network. First of all, the partners who voluntarily become engaged in the network, are the partners who do not get any financial compensation and are not obliged to become a member. A second type are the partners who are obliged to be present in the network. In some of the networks in Flanders called 'The House of the child', the health and welfare organization 'Child & Family' has to be present in order to get the required funding. The third type of partners are the partners who are paid to be involved in the network. These partners offer a type of service or expertise which makes that they get hired by the network. In one of the selected networks for example, an organization is hired whose main goal is to establish a project and to provide counselling in the development of the network. Because of the financial dependency, these organizations are obliged to be present at the network meetings.

We observe that network partners who are voluntarily involved in the network and who are not financially dependent upon the network have a different relationship towards the network coordinator compared to mandated and obligatory partners. These voluntary partners are free to leave the network at any point in time as they do not have any dependency relationships towards the network coordinator or the network in general. The commitment or engagement of these partners is not bound by financial or mandated obligations. In one of the networks, we found some difficulties between the network coordinator and the network partners, who demanded more say and participation in the decision making process of the network. These partners clearly state that their engagement is voluntarily, that there are no financial leverages that oblige them to invest time in the network, which makes these partners more independent. Because of this independency, they are able to end the collaboration at any point in time if the network coordinator does not involve them in the decision making process. We observe that a coproducing or facilitating governance role is able to enhance the experienced internal legitimacy of these voluntary network partners.

Towards the mandated or the payed partners, the network coordinator has to adopt a different governance role in order to enhance the internal legitimacy of the network. We observe that the mandated or payed partners have a different relationship with the network coordinator, as they are more dependent upon the collaboration. In this relationship, the network coordinator acts as an employer, which means that he or she often adopts a more steering role. As these partners get paid for their services or their presence in the network is mandatory, both parties often expect that the network coordinator takes the lead and makes most decisions. Besides this, we observe that these mandated or payed partners have less space to negotiate another governance relationship towards the network coordinator when they are not satisfied with the governance, as they do not have the opportunity to put the collaboration on hold without losing anything. We can conclude that this employer-employee relationship translates best into a commissioner governance role.

In these findings, we can draw parallels with the research by Kenis & Provan (2009) who distinguish between mandated and voluntary networks and make the connection with internal and external legitimacy. In our research cases, we find a mixture of mandated and voluntary partners within the same network. When we put this research by Kenis & Provan (2009) next to our findings, we find a difference between the role that the network coordinator can adopt towards these different partners. Towards mandatory and payed partners, a commissioner governance role appears to lead to higher levels of legitimacy. The commissioner delimits the network activities and decides on the tasks that have to be executed. Towards voluntary partners on the other hand, who are not financially depend upon the network, a facilitating or coproducing governance role leads to higher levels of legitimacy within the network. These partners have the liberty to demand more say and input opportunities and often force the network coordinator into a more bottom-up governance role that reflects the more equal relations between the different network actors.

### *Continuity of the network partners*

The commitment of the network partners is also influenced by their more or less stable presence. The nonprofit welfare sector is characterized by a high level of turn over. Network partners are often confronted with unstable working conditions due to reorganizations, declining subsidies (which leads to less available hours and layoffs), burnout, etc. This however does not benefit the long-term stability of the network. This results into a situation in which the delegation that is present during the network meetings, changes very frequently, which has a negative impact on the network continuity. Because of the high level of personnel turnover, it is difficult to always sent the same employee to the network meetings or to even sent an employee at all. This in turn leads to less integrated interactions and contacts, which has implications for the ownership, the involvement and the connectedness that the partners have towards the network.

We notice that in networks with limited continuity, the network coordinator cannot rely upon the knowledge, experience and expertise of the more vested partners. Our interviews show that due to the high turnover of personnel, the network meetings tend to be more chaotic and unclear. The different network partners do not know each other as well and are not aware of

the decisions that were already made and the planned network activities. A commissioner role appears to be the most appropriate role in order to deal with this unawareness and the lack of alignment among the partners. This network coordinator can combine the necessary expertise, can introduce different partners to each other and can provide the necessary stability in the decision making process. One of the network partners emphasizes that the network turnover is very high, which has an influence on the functioning of the network.

*“The hardest part is to keep on motivating people and after a while, it becomes clear who is motivated in what area. Some of them drop out after a while, other do see the added value.”*

Provan and Kenis (2008) emphasize the importance of continuity or stability among the network partners as they state that *“stability is critical for maintaining legitimacy, both inside and outside the network”* (Provan & Kenis, 2008: 244). When, however, a network is not able to reach this limited continuity, a network coordinator who adopts a commissioner role appears to deal with this situation best, and thus leads to higher levels of legitimacy.

In networks that are characterized by a high level of continuity are more stable. The network partners in these networks often show a higher level of commitment, know each other better and are more able to make decisions together. The network coordinator can make use of the more stable presence of expertise, which means that the network can function without a very steering network coordinator. Here, a facilitating or coproducing governance role appears to lead to higher levels of legitimacy among these stable network partners, as they feel involved and respected.

We can conclude that a governance role as commissioner leads to higher levels of process legitimacy if the network lacks continuity among the network partners. When, however, the network is characterized by high levels of continuity, a facilitating or coproducing governance role will lead to higher levels of legitimacy.

### *Legitimacy and the different governance roles*

We find that when a network experiences low levels of commitment (i.e. little added value, little time to invest in the network, mandatory or payed presence and little continuity), a commissioner governance role leads to higher levels of legitimacy. The fact that the network partners in these kinds of networks are less committed requires a network coordinator who makes the necessary decisions for the network to move forward and does not get stuck in indecisiveness.

On the other hand, when networks experience high levels of commitment (i.e. significant added value, more time to invest in the network, voluntary presence and more continuity), a coproducing or facilitating role leads to higher levels of legitimacy. Here, the network partners want to make the decisions together, without having to rely on the network coordinator in this process.

### *Accordance within the network*

The second component that is defined by Skelcher et al. (2008) is accordance. This component covers the consent giving process within the network, or as we operationalize it, the level of consensus that exists among the network partners. A network can consist of very diverse partners who have different target groups, who are more generalist or specialist, who are active in different sectors, etc. This diversity can cause differences in opinion when it comes to making decisions. The more diverse the network, the bigger the differences between the different network partners generally are and the harder it becomes to make decisions that are based on consensus.

In a network that is characterized by a large diversity of network partners, we found that the initial facilitating role that the network coordinator adopted, did not match up to this diversity. In this network, different sectors were represented, the partners spoke two different languages (Dutch and French) and furthermore, we found a lot of different insights and priorities. Because of these differences, a facilitating governance role was perceived as too loose and non-binding, and did not lead to a consensus regarding the vision, goals and future direction of the network. The network coordinator in this network picked up on this lack of direction, and decided to adopt a governance role as commissioner.

*“The advantage [of the network] was that everyone was able to collaborate and that the partners didn’t feel absorbed by the big structure of [the public center for social welfare]. The disadvantage was that it was difficult to manage because at a certain moment, decisions had to be made to make sure that the network progresses. At some moment, someone has to say ‘we’re going to do it that way, and you’re going to participate’. They warned me that trying to be democratic was going to be difficult, and it’s true.”* (Network coordinator)

This role leads to a higher level of accordance in this diverse setting in order to make the necessary decisions. By taking control and by making these decisions, the network can move forward, which is also appreciated by the network partners. In this case however, it is important to mention that this network coordinator does not provide a lot of feedback regarding the decisions that were made. Because of this, the partners are not well aware of the actions that the network undertakes.

In another network, the diversity among the network partners is much smaller, which makes it easier to reach a consensus. The partners in this network, who perceive it much easier to get to this consensus, are more actively involved and communicate more constructively. In this case, a facilitating or coproducing role leads to higher levels of accordance. In this case, the network coordinator will ought it possible to come to a consensus and will stimulate more input from the network partners. Because of this, the network coordinator does not feel obliged to adopt a commissioner role.

We can conclude that the level of consensus that exists between the network partners, has an influence on which governance roles is best suited for the network. When the partners

are very diverse and it is hard to reach a consensus, the highest levels of accordance will be reached by adopting a commissioner governance role as the network coordinator has the possibility to step up and search for a consensus him- or herself.

When however, there is not much network diversity and the partners are able to reach a consensus fairly easily, a facilitating or coproducing governance role will lead to higher levels of accordance. In this case, the network partners make the decisions themselves as it is easier to reach consensus. The network coordinator has to support this process, but does not have to intervene too much or adopt a steering role.

### *Accountability within the network*

The third component that is defined by Skelcher et al. (2008) is accountability. When different organizations collaborate in a network, the question of who is held accountable and who takes accountability over the network, is often a central concern. Edwards & Hulme (1996: 967) describe accountability as “*the means by which individuals and organizations report to a recognized authority and are held responsible for their actions*”. Several mechanisms for accountability can be installed in networks, such as feedback loops between network partners and the network coordinator, evaluation sessions, etc. (Voets et al., 2012). We show that the extent to which network actors perceive that the leading organizations must be held accountable for its actions is related to the history of collaboration that the network partners, the network coordinator and the leading organization have together.

Our analysis shows that in some of selected networks, the network partners had had several negative experiences in collaborating with the leading organization. Because of these previous bad experiences, the network partners distrust the leading organization. They presume that this leading organization will prioritize its own interests instead of the general network interests and that it will appropriate the network successes as its own successes. The network coordinator is often perceived as the puppet who is appointed by the leading organization and who executes the demands of this leading organization. This negatively experienced history of collaboration leads to a situation in which the network partners do not feel comfortable with a commissioner governance role that is perceived as being inflicted by the leading organization. In these networks the respondents emphasize that the leading organizations should adopt a facilitating role which will increase the extent to which the network actors are able to hold the leading agency accountable for its actions. In the following quote one of our respondents expresses his concern about the PCSW being the leading agency.

*“That’s always the question. Why is it the public center for social welfare who is occupied with the formation of the network? What are you going to take from us, what are you going to steal?”* (Network partner)

In this case, the network actors express their desire for the network coordinator to adopt a more participative governance role. The installation of a facilitating or coproducing network coordinator can be seen as a mechanism to enhance the accountability within the network.

When the partners feel as if they have to hold the leading organization accountable for its action, as the history of trust is not perceived as positive, they ask for more participation and control mechanisms, in which case a facilitating or coproducing governance role is the most appropriate role to achieve this.

In another network, the history of collaboration was more positive. Here, there was a long informal collaborative history between the leading organization and several of the network partners. These partners indicate that their trust towards the leading organization has increased over the years. Because this positive history of collaboration, the partners accept that the network coordinator, who is appointed by the leading organization, adopts a role as commissioner. In this network the network partners allow the leading agency to take decisions without consulting the network. They also point out that this governance role is most appropriate for their network. In these networks, the overall accountability is high, as the network partners feel that the leading organization takes responsibility and is being held accountable for the network actions and activities.

We can conclude that when the relationship or history of collaboration is not perceived as positive, a governance role as facilitator or co-producer will lead to higher levels of accountability. The network partners would not accept a more steering governance role, out of fear that the leading organization – that they do not trust - would have too much power without taking accountability for the network. The installation of a facilitating network coordinator can be seen as a mechanism to enhance the accountability.

When, however, a network has a positive history of collaboration, we can say that a governance role as commissioner will lead to the necessary levels of accountability as the partners have enough trust towards the network coordinator and the leading organization that they will make the right decisions.

#### *4.1.1.3 Governance and looking for consensus*

One of the key challenges for networks of non-profit service organizations and public agencies is to establish an integrated network among a differentiated set of service agencies (Provan and Kenis, 2008; Raeymaeckers, 2016). Following earlier studies we argue that a crucial step in creating an integrated network is to find consensus among network actors on the goal of the network (Van der Ven, 1976; Provan and Kenis, 2008). However, we argue that the creation of consensus on a common goal is a very challenging task. As non-profit organizations have their own individual goals to fulfil, tensions can arise when the network does not take these individual goals into account. Network governance should therefore look for ways to create consensus among a set of network goals, taking into consideration the individual goals of the organizations participating in the network. In what follows, we zoom in on the governance roles that network coordinators can adopt in the search for a network consensus by analyzing how goal consensus can be reached in three networks that were governed by a leading organization (Provan and Kenis, 2008). We follow literature showing that the coordinator affiliated to the leading agency can adopt different roles while coordinating the network (Span et al., 2012a), often situated on a continuum between bottom-up and top-down. The typology of Span et al. (2012a) was used to analyze the

governance roles adopted in our three network cases and how different types of network coordinators established network consensus. We made a distinction between a facilitator, a co-producer and a commissioner.

*Network F: the facilitator*

This network was initially governed by a facilitating coordinator. This means that the coordinator was very reluctant to intervene during the goal-setting process. Her initial aim was to support the network actors to formulate the network goals by themselves. Our interviews however show that during the goal-setting process the coordinator decided to make a shift from a facilitating role towards a commissioner role. An important reason for this shift is the lack of consensus among partners on the overall goals of the network. The coordinator emphasizes that the differentiation of network partners resulting in different views on the joint network goals made it impossible to establish consensus on the network goals. Each organization had its own idea of the goals that should be prioritized in the network. Some of the organizations wanted to focus on pedagogical support, others on health prevention, others wanted to create a garden for children to work in while others wanted to focus on schooling.

*“Each organization has its own insights and approach, there were a lot of different ideas in the beginning. There were times when I said to my superior: ‘how is it possible that you got them all together and that they hired me?’ [...], the ideas are so different.” (Coordinator network F)*

The coordinator stated that she was not able to establish a consensus when adopting a facilitating role. As a result she decided to ‘*push through*’, meaning that she started taking decisions without consulting the whole network. This resulted in a focus on one particular project, ‘Kids day’, an event that was organized to bring parents, children and local organizations together by organizing workshops and other activities on one location in the municipality during one day. It was the coordinator who made the decision to focus on this project at the expense of other ideas that were formulated by the partners.

Because the coordinator experienced many difficulties to establish consensus on the network goals, she discussed many issues with the representative of the public center for social welfare, the leading organization of the network. The coordinator emphasized that during these discussions decisions were often made beforehand, which led to a biased decision making process in which the coordinator and the leading agency had more influence on the development of the network goals compared to others. This led to a situation in which the network partners did not support the decisions that were being made, as they were often not involved in the decision making process.

*“There are things that I suggested of which [my boss of the public center for social welfare] said ‘no, that’s not going to happen’. [...] So yes, in that way the public center for social welfare has more say, because my boss works at the public center for social welfare.” (Coordinator network F)*

The coordinator thus admits that many decisions concerning the network goals are already being made behind the scenes. This situation followed from two developments. First, the coordinator experienced a lack of goal-consensus among the partners, which led to the coordinator taking control over the situation, as she felt that the network was heading nowhere without her guidance. Second, the leading public agency has a lot of influence behind the scenes, which led to the fact that a number of ideas and proposals were already dismissed before they were even on the table. We can therefore state that the leading agency pushes the facilitating coordinator to become a commissioner.

Our analysis of network F shows that when the partners in a network are very differentiated and not acquainted with one another, and when a common goal cannot be established, a facilitating coordinator, in order to achieve the network goals, should take some control and will naturally shift more towards the role of commissioner. In this case both the leading agency and the coordinator decided that a facilitating role is not the best way to establish consensus among network partners. The network actors were unable to formulate a consensus on which goals the network had to pursue. Most of the decisions were made by the representative of the leading agency and the coordinator.

#### *Network K: the co-producer*

In network K, the coordinator adopts a co-producing role. The coordinator emphasizes that decisions have to be made in close collaboration between the network actors and the leading agency. More specifically, it was the coordinator's conviction that she had to set the goals together with the partners and that these goals had to be based on the needs of everybody involved, including the needs of the leading public agency (OCMW/CPAS). This participative goal setting process in which all voices are heard is an important characteristic of a coproducing coordinator (Span et al., 2012). This coordinator wants to involve all network partners in the formulation of the network goals, including the leading agency in the formulation of the network goals.

The coordinator's first task was to guide the process of defining the network goals. She initiated the process by visiting and questioning many partners about their problems and needs. The network partners also gained the opportunity to formulate suggestions about the network goals. This process was confirmed by all network actors:

*"Yes, we have been consulted. They came to us to ask questions, as well as to the others. Afterwards they presented us the result of all these questions and this allowed us to see that we are not the only ones with problems. It allowed us to put words on our problems in order to further create a project together to solve them."*  
(Partner network K)

In a next step the coordinator analyzed this information and presented the results of the discussions on a meeting with the entire network. As a result, the entire network including all network partners and the leading agency formulated and approved a set of network goals.

The first set of goals of network K focused on a better knowledge and awareness of organizations and initiatives in the municipality to improve referrals from one organization to another. Next, the network also focused on sensitizing personnel of schools in order to treat children in poverty in a better and more respectful way. In contrast with network F, the initial co-producer role adopted by the coordinator has not changed over time. She sticks to her co-producer role, which is often described by the partners as bottom-up, open, participative, efficient and decisive.

*“She is a super catalytic converter for all our reflections and our ideas. She succeeds at linking everything and at making really good synthesis of what we say. She synthesises and at the same time it is hyper participative. It is [...] very open in fact. It is not at all directive, really not at all.”* (Partner network K)

We conclude that the co-producing coordinator was actively involved in establishing a goal consensus with every actor in the network. She organized one-on-one discussions with every individual network actor and presented the results of these discussions at a meeting with the entire network. In a final step she guided the entire network in making a well-informed decision on the network goals. As a result, all actors, including the leading agency, have the feeling of being involved and of having a role to play in the realization of these goals. The good result of the co-producing governance role can however be explained by the lack of conflicts among network partners. Our results show that in comparison with network F, the coordinator experienced less variation among network actors on which goals the networks should pursue. Moreover, all respondents of network K emphasized that few difficulties were encountered in finding goal consensus. As a result, an agreement was easily established on the network goals. This again contrasts the results of network F where the network coordinator experienced many difficulties to reconcile the varying views among network actors.

#### *Network G: the commissioner*

In network G where the coordinator adopts a commissioner role, an extra coordinator was hired who partially took over some of the tasks as the network started to develop and expand. When we zoom in on the actual formulation of the network goals in network G, we find that in this case, the network goals were largely determined by the coordinators, who came also up with the majority of ideas for specific actions and projects. The main goal of this network is to reach the target group – families with children with a specific focus on families in poverty – more effectively, and to create more awareness and collaboration in the fragmented landscape of organizations focusing on poverty reduction in their municipality.

Our analysis shows that the coordinators emphasize that it is impossible to get each network partner involved to discuss every detail and to get each partner involved in every step of the goal-setting process, as this leads to inefficient decision-making. The main reason is that in this network the partners show a high level of differentiation. The coordinators of network G emphasize that they encounter a high level of variation among network partners concerning their preferences regarding the network goals. This finding contrasts the result of network K

where our respondents experience a very low level of variation among network actors concerning their views on the network goals. The coordinators of network G therefore emphasize that open discussions about the network goals amongst the diverse range of partners would therefore be very difficult. As every partner has its own wishes and demands, the coordinator and partners emphasize that it is more efficient to limit the level of participation of the partners. This strategy was applied by the network coordinators to avoid conflicts during the goal-setting process. They felt that, because of this lack of agreement on joint network goals, an open discussion could lead to conflicts among partners. This conflict could, according to the coordinators, negatively influence the functioning of the network.

*“We prepare something in advance. There’s no use in getting all the partners together to say ‘tell us, tell us, what do you want, what’s possible?’, [...] and that it finally turns out that what they want/propose is budgetary not possible. That’s not how it’s supposed to go, you want to get somewhere [...], but there’s no point in investing time in something and then saying ‘no, it’s not possible.’”* (Coordinator network G)

For this reason, the coordinators first formulated some general ideas about the goals that the network, according to them, should pursue. In a second step they had one-on-one discussions with all network actors on the ideas that were formulated by themselves. Using the information they gathered during these discussions they did some minor adjustments on their initial ideas about the network goals. Finally, the decision about the final set of network goals were made by the network coordinators and the network partners were then informed about this decision on a meeting with the entire network. We conclude that in contrast with network K where the decisions on the final network goals are made by all network actors including the leading agency, the network goals of network G were largely determined by the coordinators. By doing so, the coordinators try to find a balance between getting partners actively involved and working in a way that feels efficient, without losing grip on the network and without losing the ability to make unilateral decisions if necessary.

Our analysis shows that network partners are satisfied about the way the goals are determined in the network. They agreed to the fact that the coordinator has the opportunity to invest more time in the network and hence can effectuate more ideas and think more about the implications and the practical elaboration of network projects and initiatives. Both the network partners and the coordinator emphasize that this is the best way to achieve the network goals most effectively.

*“You’ve got your own projects, you’ve got a lot of work with that, and to also make time for totally different projects [...], that’s just too much to ask, we couldn’t do that. And that’s why I think it’s very good, they make proposals and you can give feedback on that. We think that’s fine, and then you can get involved ‘we can do this, we can do that’, and that’s different for every organization.”* (Partner network G)

We conclude that the coordinators in this network adopt a commissioner role. Special emphasis should be put on the fact that, despite the presence of more than one coordinator, the power to set the network goals is still primarily situated at the coordination level, admittedly divided between the different coordinators. Towards the network as a whole, the coordinators adopt a commissioner role, which is broadly accepted by the different network partners as this improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the network.

#### *Governance roles and striving for consensus*

In these last paragraphs, we zoomed in on the extent to which each of the governance roles (Span et al., 2012) is able to establish a consensus on the common goal of the network. Our qualitative research provides two important guidelines for the governance of public-nonprofit networks.

First, our study indicates that in networks with a large diversity of network actors and where a consensus is difficult to establish, a facilitating network coordinator does not perform well. In these networks a more steering type of governance role clearly performs better. Our finding therefore contrasts the proposition of Span et al. (2012), who state that in complex networks a facilitator is the most effective governance role. This finding is illustrated in network F. The coordinator of this network emphasizes that in this network, a facilitating role was impossible to maintain. The network is not able to make a decision based on a consensus among network partners. The coordinator therefore decides to adopt a more leading role as a commissioner to overcome the differences and to establish a shared set of network goals. In the views of network actors and network coordinators the diversity among network actors plays an important role in determining the role of the coordinator. The higher the level of diversity among network partners, the more difficult it will be to find a consensus. We however find that consensus can be established when a commissioner governs a network consisting of a very diverse set of non-profit organizations. In network G both partners and network coordinators positively evaluate the way the network goals are established. We more specifically show that the network partners stress the advantages of a commissioner in terms of efficiency. These findings clearly show that in highly differentiated networks a commissioner is necessary when trying to find a consensus on the common goal. In network K the results show that our respondents perceive less conflict and tensions than the respondents of network F. As a result, the co-producer experiences few difficulties to establish goal consensus among network actors. All partners agree on the network goals and have the feeling of being involved in the formulation and realization of the common network goal. According to these results we argue that in networks where actors and coordinators perceive few differences among partners on the common goal, a co-producing coordinator will be able to establish goal consensus.

Second, we emphasize that the participation of network actors in the formulation of network goals is essential when trying to establish goal consensus. Interestingly, the positive result of both types of governance roles in networks K and G (co-producer and commissioner) can be explained by the practice of synthesis, which was conducted in both networks. In his highly influential work on brokerage, Burt (2004) emphasized the important role of synthesis by

brokers in a network. According to Burt (2004), synthesis reduces conflicts among different network actors when brokers use the information they gather from different parts of the network to create new ideas. In networks K and G the coordinators created a synthesis on network goals using the information they gathered during the one-on-one discussions with different network actors. Network coordinators synthesized the information and formulated the network goals which they then discussed with all the network actors. In case F where the network was governed by a facilitator, the coordinator was also involved in one-on-one discussions but was very reluctant to make a synthesis on the network goals. The final decisions about the network goals were made in close collaboration with the leading organization, without consulting the network actors. As a result, participants were less satisfied with the final decision on the goals of the network.

#### 4.1.2 Research question 2: Social work practices of inclusion and exclusion

This question is an important one to consider, especially in relation to networks who aim to combat (child) poverty. In our research, we encountered several fields of tension in the network that have an influence on the in- and exclusion of (potential) service users. The participant observation during network meetings and activities showed valuable discussions between social workers about the network's choices and interventions and how the network partners related this to the position of families. Qualitative interviews with network partners were used as a complementary data source to capture these networks discussions and added a personal reflection of the network members.

##### *Universal versus selective provision*

This field of tension deals with the discussion about the target group and the question whether the network should serve welfare recipients in universal or selective ways: who benefits and who should benefit? Selectivity refers to the creation of criteria that determine whether welfare recipients have the right to a certain welfare state intervention, and entails a categorization (division) between those who deserve this and those who do not meet specific conditions that give access to social service provision (Villadsen, 2007; Maesele, 2012). This strategy, often in conditional ways, aims to direct public resources towards the most disadvantaged to maximize equality (Martin, 2010). A universal approach implies that all families have the right to make use of support that is provided, without conditions (Martin, 2010; Brady & Burroway, 2012). In the different networks, we observed how the network actors try to connect both poles of selective or universal principles and practices. Our cases show that both approaches are used for different strategies and goals that evolve in dynamic ways over time.

One of the networks starts from a selective approach by targeting families in poverty. In this case, a social worker starts by systematically examining whether the family has been able to make use of all their rights, and this short investigation is structurally implemented at the beginning of each individual trajectory. However, this instrument is only used for a limited number of families (in this case 40), which raises questions about the accessibility of the network. Still, it is effective in reaching poor families and realizing their rights on many

different life domains. The network also develops a strategy to broaden this selective approach into a universal approach, since signals and problems that were discovered by implementing the examination of rights are dealt with on a broader local policy level. In this way, other members of the local community who are not included directly in the network activities may also benefit from the network. For example, the lack of social housing for larger families was presented to a local council where local housing policies were developed to tackle this problem. The impact of the network, therefore, goes beyond the selective approach where every citizen can potentially benefit from the network activities.

Other networks started from a rather universal approach that was initially used as a strategy to include vulnerable parents in the network. One network's objective was to promote accessibility and affordability for poor families in a newly created childcare facility. Even though this is formulated as an aim, the network stated that they faced difficulties in reaching these families. This finding was perceived as deeply problematic by some of the network actors. In this network, a partner suggested developing a new strategy to overcome this problem, namely using a selective approach instead of a universal approach to fulfill the objectives of the network. Another partner also reflected on this problem and mentioned that in some ways, inequalities in the child care system are reproduced, due to the fact that the facility doesn't reach the target group which they are supposed to reach from the beginning. This partner therefore seems to suggest that the network, due to the non-participation of vulnerable parents, reproduces processes of social exclusion. Network members claim that the realization of welfare rights and redistribution of means becomes problematic. To prevent the exclusion of vulnerable families, the network decides to create an income-related system in their childcare facility to increase the affordability of their services and decrease the threshold for poor families. As they argue, "*we have to make sure that stronger families don't oppress the vulnerable ones*" (own translation). The network still defends a universal approach as they aim to serve a socially diverse group and avoid stigmatization.

Another network also started from a universalist approach, by creating a 'House of the Child' as a low-threshold provision to enable all families with children to contact all other welfare organizations of the network. Still, the network struggled to reach vulnerable parents, and the network coordinator made this repeatedly explicit during the network meetings. The inequality of use was not only seen as a problem of non-participation, but also as an issue of assigning the means of the network. A partner of the network defended a more targeted approach to tackle child poverty and challenged this universalist approach. This person contested: "*Are the funds that are acquired for combating poverty actually used for this group in particular? Or do all the resources and benefits go to families who do not live in poverty?*" (own translation). This discussion was also raised in another network meeting, and the principle of proportionality was mentioned to defend the idea that the budget should also benefit the well-being of families in poverty. Nevertheless, the coordinator of the network stated that: "*It should not become a House of the "problem" Child instead of a House of the Child*", to underpin the argument that a selective and targeted approach would create a

stigmatizing label. The selective approach might paradoxically produce an inaccessibility for all families, and more particularly might scare families in poverty.

### *Instrumental versus life world oriented approaches*

In order to develop high quality provision for families by dealing with fragmentation and sectoral segregation, some authors argue that the well-being and concerns of parents and children in poverty situations need to be considered as multi-dimensional, with reference to providing material as well as immaterial support including issues of health, housing, employment, and education (Lister, 2004; Allen, 2003; Broadhead *et al.*, 2008). The networks in our study made different choices in providing resources to parents and children: some were taking into account the aspirations, life worlds, and concerns of parents and children in poverty situations (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009). Others developed welfare services in more instrumental ways, meaning that the outcomes of the interventions were defined beforehand by the social workers, without consulting the families about their definition of problems and solutions (Roose *et al.* 2013).

Some networks choose to start from the needs of each individual family served as the starting point of interventions and actions. The support offered was developed on the basis of dialogue and negotiation about the questions and needs of the family. Consequently, on many occasions material as well as immaterial resources were provided, and many different life domains were covered, acknowledging the multi-dimensionality and complexity of the problems of trying to realize welfare rights on several life domains, including housing, childcare, employment, and allowances. Multi-dimensionality served as a precondition to be included in the network. This may indicate that a more instrumental and conditional approach may be prior to the life world oriented approach. In another example, the networks aimed to be a new gateway for families in relaying questions from parents to social work organizations. Additional attention was paid to the inclusion of poor families in newly developed parent support initiatives. Yet, defining the needs of families in instrumental ways (i.e., their need for parent support) may have contributed to their exclusion, as the network faced difficulties in reaching poor families. For example, the coordinator told the partners that she received 33 questions, mostly from parents who don't live in poverty, that were mainly educational and relational in nature. One could wonder if the instrumental definition of concerns (as primarily educational) created this problem, in cases when poor families did not consider their problem as educational or relational, but as material in nature. Structural dimensions of combating poverty, like housing and employment, were indeed not included domains of action in this network.

Yet another network started from a street corner work approach to reach vulnerable citizens. The importance of outreach was stressed by the partners and coordinator as *"it helps our provision to understand the needs of our potential users"* (own translation). Even though this was the explicit starting point, according to the coordinator, the strategy changed - due to financial reasons - from a multi-dimensional approach to a specific mission, life domain, and target group. At present, the interventions are mainly situated in domains of youth and school (to prevent early school leaving and bullying). This resulted in the fact that some of

the network partners did not and could not fully commit anymore to deal with other life domains, even when these issues seemed to be vital for the families involved. One partner formulated this as follows: *“If we don’t start over the whole process, we cannot be sure that we are not excluding some families according to the fact that we do not engage in a more in-depth analysis of what is at stake”* (own translation). The switch to a focus on youth and school also led to a disengagement of partners who did not work in these specific fields, as they were aware that this evolution would exclude people.

### *Family-oriented versus child-oriented strategies*

Eradicating child poverty figured prominently on the social policy agenda. Government strategies accordingly invested in ensuring that policies and services improve children’s lives, and a wide range of welfare practices have consequently been developed. However, poor children are always children of poor parents (Mestrum, 2011; Schiettecat et al., 2016), because the well-being of children is intrinsically affected by the poverty situation and socio-economic circumstances and resources of the households in which children live (Lindquist and Lindquist 2012). In this sense, realizing children’s rights in poverty situations is always interrelated with a progressive and proactive realization of the welfare rights of their parents (see Ife & Morley, 2002). This field of tension influences the rationales, strategies and actions that are directed towards families and children. Even though the wellbeing of the child was the starting point of these networks, different practices were developed within and across the networks in relation to the family as a whole.

In some of our interviews with local policy makers, a social investment paradigm was present in (child) poverty reduction strategies. Children, in this vein, were considered as potentially worthwhile and beneficial social investments. This was argued because of the higher potential of breaking the cycle of poverty if the interventions were targeted towards young children. The problem was framed as a problem of inequality and interventions aimed at closing the gap between the rich and the poor at a young age, to prevent children from falling behind in school and in participation in leisure time activities. Also one of the coordinators stated that this might have a bigger return to society and that children will get more experiences to build on. For another actor, a focus on talent development appeared to be one of the drivers to invest in children. One of the welfare actors explained that it was a matter of following the political and scientific discourse in his choice to target young children and even claimed that targeting, for example, a 14-year-old would not make a difference in the effort to break the cycle of poverty. In this way, the needs of older children and also of parents were not taken into account, and so they risked exclusion from the network’s focus.

The focus on children may equally well be used as a strategy to include all family members. Some of the network actors argued that it is less stigmatizing if the well-being of the child serves as a starting point for interventions. They argue that parents don’t have to feel targeted because they are poor. A local welfare actor argued that the child represents the key to the other family members, because they would be more willing to cooperate with services in general when interventions were concerned with the child. This strategy was used to include all family members. In one of the network is having a child aged between 0

and 3 years old an explicit precondition of being included. While this policy choice directly targets children, the actions taken by the network partners affected the well-being of all family members, because structural dimensions like housing, employment, social support, financial support, etc., impacted on the family as a whole. Policy makers from this network stated that it was crucial to include the context of the child, because children who grow up in a family in poverty experience fewer chances and increased exclusion in multiple life domains.

In one of the networks we saw that a change in staff also changed the support that was offered over time. The original aim of the network was to provide a multi-dimensional approach, including childcare and parent support by pediatric nurses and social workers. After a while, the team evolved and consisted predominantly of pediatric nurses (instead of social workers). The network therefore gradually focused more on childcare than on parenting support, even though they received questions from parents that deal with very complex and difficult situations.

### *Support versus control*

In all of the networks, network members reflect on how families perceive the network in relation to the controlling and supporting roles of network actors. Although this often occurs unintentionally, they are aware of the fact that the network itself and the practices of sharing information have an influence on the types of families that feel comfortable with the network and, consequently, rely on the network for support. There are elements that suggest that the reasons for the, often unintentional, exclusion of certain families can be situated in the construction of the network and particularly in the overall fear and distrust of families in poverty with regard to social services as such may also play a significant role. The network seems to intensify this experience of the families, given that they are aware that the network partners share information about them. The inherent distrust of families, however, is also something that is being recognized as a relevant and legitimate issue. In this example, the interconnectivity between network partners leads to a certain fear, and a mother refused the support of the network because of the possible involvement of one organization that brings back bad memories of past experiences:

*There was a mother that said: "I have, from childhood, been institutionalized and have had bad experiences with social services." And then, you have to explain how the network operates: "We collaborate with Kind & Gezin [Child & Family] and with CAW [Centre for general welfare work] if necessary". And she totally panicked about CAW. Then, I told her that it was also possible to do it without CAW, that we were not going to involve this organization if she didn't want it and ensured her that we only work on a voluntary basis.*

The fear of families, as the reason why they refuse interventions of the network members, may also be legitimate in the context of interventions that lead to the out-of-home placement of their children by child welfare and protection services. Families in poverty that engage in an individual support trajectory of the network are described as families that have nothing to

hide and do not distrust the services. One of the coordinators described this dynamic as a, however problematic, “natural selection” of the participants in the networks. Some network partners discuss this issue during one of the meetings:

*One of the partners opens the discussion: “Families that have a lot to hide will not participate in a trajectory like this. They don’t want anyone close to them and prefer a more distant approach”. Another network partner replies: “We had a couple of families like that, and after four months, they just fled and moved out.” The overall consensus emerges that this happens not because of the network as such but because social work is coming too close and gets to know too much about the situation of the families.*

#### 4.1.3 Research question 3: Experiences of social workers

Our qualitative study also focuses on the perspective and experiences of network coordinators and social workers that participate in the network. This perspective does not only include their personal view on the functioning of the network and collaboration between partners, but also refers and reflect to supporting parents and children in poverty. In addition, we devoted many attention to the use and exchange of private information of parents, because the evolution towards inter-organizational networks brings some challenges along.

##### *Informational function*

The networks all seem to fulfil a strong informational function. The network structure, as well as the more personal bond between partners seems to benefit the exchange of information and professional knowledge about the offer of (local) social provision. Having regular meetings between actors and organizations from different sectors, is evaluated as an added value, because of their access to what is called a reliable and fast source of information. It is also experienced as important to have a low threshold and personal contact to take contact more easily. The possibility to communicate on a personal level also helps in finding the right solution or making the right decision. In our research we found that there exists a difference between knowing the offer of the organization and knowing the professional who provides this support. Of course, this dimension makes the functioning of the network more organic. The informational function cannot be reduced to having access to a database, but it brings a personal and relational dimension in the process of supporting families. Bringing together the knowledge of different partners may also help in knowing what families are entitled to. The direct contact between partners may also facilitate the provision of support for families, lead to a quicker answer and taking action. Having a contact point as a social worker, brings a gain in time compared to having to seek the right information yourself. This gain in time is supportive for social workers, but indirectly also for families. The information that is delivered is direct and already adjusted to the specific case and information. The network partners experiences that information is also fragmented and that it takes too many time if they need to gather all the information themselves. Having a contact person that is available and that works on a multi-dimensional basis is experienced as a strong element in the network, in particular for professionals that take care of the (initial) contact with families. It is argued that

knowing the offer better helps making referrals which are also better oriented according families specific needs. The range in which social workers are used to make referrals is also enlarged for this reason. The social workers that function as a contact point for families say that they don't need to do everything in their own. Still, these we need to question if these low threshold (accessible) contacts between partners also reflect low threshold contacts towards clients? The communication between the partners and bringing different perspectives together may also avoid tunnel vision.

### *Continuity*

As already mentioned in the theme above, partners feel more comfortable with contacting each other. In addition, network partners find it important that also families have an available professional to contact. In some networks, families and partners have the same contact point, that has a central viewpoint on the families situations, the performed interventions and support. In these cases, the network support worker takes on an active role in connecting families and network members. Still, this connection takes place on an individual (micro) level, but there is no reorganization in the services that are involved. The provision of social services remains categorical which could lead to breaking points in continuity. It is important that the networks stay conscious of this and they carefully look after the continuation of formal and/or information networks that are formed around families. A contact with a new service could always represent a possible breaking point and important moment of transition must be supported (e.g. going from child care to preschool). The importance of having a contact person is already mentioned, but being dependent of one person is tricky, also for the continuity of the network and support. It is not clear if parents will have a back-up if this function/person falls away. We also noticed that network partners may reinforce this dependency by constantly referring to this person. We must acknowledge that striving for continuity is not a only mechanical construction, because it also concerns continuity in trust. Another finding is that partners keep more easily in touch with each other through the network, so it is easier for them to monitor and control what families do. Partners also try to facilitate the contact between them and the network partners. They will for example stimulate parents to take or accept contact with other networks members or suggest to allow a visit at home. This paves the way for the network partners to get in contact with the family. So, continuity between partners and services, also questions continuity in personal information of families. Is continuity in information desirable? The social workers from the network experience a tension between letting parents start with a clean slate (discontinuity in information) or trying to work on a preventive basis (continuity in information). Some of them state that it would be a shame to lose the information that is gathered, particularly because social workers have made an effort to collect it.

### *No gaps, no overlaps*

The network members experience that social support isn't always well coordinated and that it is difficult to know which support is offered to parents and children and which is not. They dislike not being aware of doing double work and not knowing about work that nobody does. Many actors also preferred having a clear division in tasks and responsibilities ("who does

what?") in trying to avoid gaps and overlaps. Case discussions are an example that shows the possibility for social workers to monitor each other and to see if they fulfilled their specific task. For some of the partners, these case discussion also served as a good reminder of their to do's and it raised their attention for families. This process of dividing tasks is also often coordinated by a case manager. We question if it is desirable if only one person has the overview? If it is wrong or too time consuming to have an overlap in responsibility? And if this risks to fragment care again, but in a better organized way? One of the coordinators expects some flexibility in working areas, that organizations find a common ground, a space that overlaps a little bit, without taking over the whole domain of the other. One of the partners experiences that in practice partners don't always cross their own boundaries. He states that the common interest needs to come more to the forefront without having to compete with each other. The example is given of a debt problem that is experienced by many organizations in the municipality, but they seem to fail to work together and tackle it. In the search for avoiding gaps and overlaps, we question if it is still possible to make it a shared problem with a shared approach and solution.

In some of the networks, partners found it important to discover where there is overlap in the network. In this way, they tried to prevent 'shopping' and wanted to know where families asked the same questions in order to avoid creating a parallel trajectory next to the 'regular' (existing) way that parents need to go. Therein it is noticeable that the organizational logic takes over the client perspective. We question if it is necessary to follow the regular way, certainly when families do not receive the support they are in need of? One of the coordinators even told that this shopping only concerns parents who dare to say something and don't feel the thresholds of social organizations.

#### *Networks are sometimes insufficient*

Partners notice that not all resources are available and accessible. Networks are not only about the alignment of the existing offer of social provision. Sometimes, social workers have the feeling that they don't have the tools and means to help families in a proper way. These structural gaps are faced when network partners do the effort to work together, but notice that working together is not the only solution to support families. Examples are a lack of affordable and qualitative housing, discrimination on the labor market, conditionality of social rights and long waiting lists. The network may have an important function in creating an overview of the (un)availability of resources for families to depend on. One of the network partners explains it is important to make a division between reaching families and making families feel supported. It is also questioned by some partners how far the local network can go and what is too big to deal with? Some of the network partners problematize the fact that in the network there is no attention for the needs and perspective of parents. They criticize that there is no direct participation of families. They feel that the network should better think and reflect about what the poor families in the community need and take this as a starting point for actions and interventions. If those needs are discovered, then efforts can be more targeted. This could also help in steering the vision of the network according to a partner. The study shows that social workers situated the problem of poverty on many different life domains (financial problems, housing, administration, employment, social, emotional,

isolation). The child is often seen as the gateway to intervene and take action, particularly because of the label of child poverty in those networks, but many of the partners are convinced that it is important to look at the broader context. Interventions to tackle (child) poverty must also address material and immaterial needs of the family as a whole. Many of the partners state that the link with the public center for social welfare (OCMW/CPAS) must be strong enough to tackle child poverty and stress the importance of the financial component. They state that a good collaboration between the municipality and the public center for social welfare is important and that both need to be able to strive for common goals and actions in the fight against (child) poverty.

### *Getting involved*

In the network, it is seen as important that partners know what is expected of them, that there is good communication, openness, clarity and transparency. There were partners giving the example that they weren't involved in writing the project proposal, but were only asked to sign the document when it was already finished. They also value being invited and involved in the evaluation or adjustment process of the network. Partners expect the network's staff/coordinator to take initiative to involve and engage them. In one network in particular, it was clear that partners didn't really know what they are expected to do in the network. They state that the network's coordinator expects them to join the network meetings, exchange their thoughts and receive information. One of the network partners thinks the network doesn't expect true commitment and engagement. They evaluate this as a shortcoming and which may cause a lack of action by the network partners. In this network, also the main goals of the network are not known by the partners. Some of them complain about other partners (non-volunteers) for not doing enough and get frustrated. Lastly, it is noticeable that the network's coordinator performs or organizes many network interventions and actions themselves, sometimes without support of other partners. As mentioned in the previous theme, this could be very tough for the coordinator if the effort and involvement of other partners is hard to find. The coordinators and or staff members that are hired by the project's subsidies are very central in the network. Many of the partners think the network would lose its power and become very vulnerable if this person would be gone. By consequence, the project's grant is very important for the networks in order to realize what these networks do now.

### *Beyond the individual level*

The network partners reflected on the structure of the network and noticed that there is a difference between working on the individual level or on a more structural level (for the community as a whole). Partners, from all the networks, seem to address that the network is sometimes too focused on supporting individual needs and questions of families and not enough effort is put to the structural and organizational level. It is a difficult balance to find according to some of the partners and it could also be seen as a tension between realizing a result on a short term versus long term basis. There is not always an agreement about who should bear the responsibility for the structural work. Some of the partners see this as the responsibility of policy makers (beyond the local level), others see this also as a

responsibility of the local network to work with these structural barriers, even though this is not evident. One of the partners said it was necessary to be more alarmed about the situation of families in poverty and that the network needs to make policy makers more aware of this. One of the coordinators argued that it was more easy to jump in the concrete and individual support, but that one needs to be attentive and make time for lifting the interventions and actions to a higher and more universal level. Of course both approaches on the individual and collective level interact with each other and provide a complementary input. Some of the partners state that networking is more than making the right referrals and getting a better overview of the existing social provision, but to critically examine if this is sufficient and to reflect on the existing structures, gaps and thresholds.

### *A supportive local policy*

The way the network is formed and functions is also dependent on the local social policy. In this paragraph we describe what makes a supportive context for those networks to work in and may also benefit the support towards families in poverty. First of all, we see that the willingness to collaborate is not only situated in the local network, but also in the local municipality. It is helpful if different policy domains are structurally connected to each other. In one of the municipalities, the local policy makers and network coordinators state that the client perspective is used as a starting point for the changes that are made and collaborating initiatives that are taken. It is also supportive if the local policy is willing to take on a directing role and takes the responsibility to connect organizations and knowledge in order to collectivize problems. Local policy makers taking this responsibility may lead to the creation of a strong local social policy. The connections between different life domains are done by the network partners and coordinators, but is also administrative and spatial. The local policy instruments could also benefit from feedback of the network partners if these are not well adjusted to the needs of families (for example administrative difficulties). This is also a way of bringing in the perspective of the client. When child poverty is defined and approached as a multi-dimensional problem that consists of a lack of material and immaterial resources and is horizontally embedded in all local policy areas. Many of the actors also state that the policy on poverty should go broader than targeting clients of the public center for social welfare and reach all citizens in the community that need it. Lastly, it is seen as valuable that there is attention for how families (don't) find their way in the community when they look for support. More specifically, this concerns having low threshold contact points where citizens can go with questions concerning their welfare. These contact points could function as a starting point for further support and assistance and could result in a faster detection of family's needs.

### *Exchanging private information*

Exchanging private information in inter-organizational networks may be tricky because different partners are involved with different backgrounds, positions and purposes. The network partners all poses a unique assemblage of private information about the family. There is no clear shared (common) formal protocol and each actor refers to their own organizational background. Above that, it is not always clear for the partners how the

coordinator or network support worker has to deal with secret information/professional secrecy.

### Legitimacy to act

According to some of the network actors, their legitimacy to act and intervene in families' situations depends on the question of whether information is obtained formally or informally. Sometimes, practitioners are already (unintentionally) informally aware of private information, without the family knowing this. Social workers experience this as a difficulty, because they feel it is inappropriate to take action. We illustrate this by an example, which shows that the possibility for social workers to take action depends on the parents' willingness to open up about their story. As a strategy, the network partners rely on the actor who is formally aware of the information to encourage the parent to give their permission to share it. In this example, the nurse asks the coordinator to convince the mother to talk to her about what she is experiencing so that the nurse can support the family:

*For example, the mother tells Charlotte [the coordinator]: "I'm pregnant", but she doesn't say anything to me. She's not obliged to tell it to me, but in the meantime, we have a problem. She's pregnant, and maybe we need to install some further support for her. But I can't say anything, because she didn't tell it to me, you see? ... Mostly, I ask Charlotte: "Ask her if you can tell me?"*

Striving for transparency, in this case, trying to make formal what has been informally communicated between partners, is used as a way to legitimize interventions from the network based on confidential information. In another case, the coordinator first tells the partners that the mother will explain the problem, but only a few moments later, she explains the problem herself. She shares with the group that this mother lost her child at five months of pregnancy. The nurse asks:

*"Would she [the mother] tell it to me? I'll see if she starts to talk about it herself or not. She doesn't know that I know it, so I can't start talking about the issue myself. I will go on a house visit."*

It is clear that the house visit is an intentional strategy of the nurse to formally obtain this information for herself, so that she can work on these concerns together with the mother. In this way, the sharing of information in the network's case discussion may provoke an extra intervention by the nurse, in trying to provide extra support for the mother, even when the mother did not spontaneously share her story and did not ask for extra support.

As another example, the network coordinator tells a partner: *"I may have come across some things, that I'd better not have heard."* In this example, the information does not come from the family itself, but from a school teacher (who is not a network member). The information, which indicates domestic violence, causes a dilemma: *"What should we do with that? How can we intervene when we shouldn't have known this already?"* In the past, the mother had told the network actors that everything was all right, but this new story seemed to be consistent with the partners' impression that recently, it had become harder to reach the

family. As a solution, the network coordinator tried to encourage the teacher from the school who had shared this private information to do something about it and to take action: “So we asked, *is it possible to discuss with the family that you told this to us? Because otherwise, we cannot do anything*”. Again, the information seems to only give the network partners the power to intervene when it is transparent to the families that they are aware of the confidential information. The coordinator of the network explains how she would react in the future:

*Since we had that one situation, we say clearly: “Did the family give you permission to tell this, because otherwise we can’t do anything with it”. We would rather not hear it, than to know it without having the possibility to do something with it.*

In situations in which the network members have a duty to report information about social fraud or abuse, it is noticeable that being explicit about the kind of information you (do not) want to receive formally or informally could prevent difficult situations, particularly in relation to families. One actor argued that it is wise to be transparent about one’s own position and obligations towards parents and children. He states that it is important to respond to and think about these matters in advance as a practitioner, because once the information is communicated, it could have severe consequences for the family:

*You can’t say: “You may tell it to me”, only to say afterwards: “Oh, but you shouldn’t have told me that”. Be honest and check out for yourself if you have a duty of professional secrecy or not. And if you don’t have it, you should act like they do in those American police series: “Madam, I’m arresting you and know that all you say could be used against you”.*

An extra complexity to the search for legitimacy is added, because the networks have no shared formal protocol on the exchange of private information. Social workers tend to refer to their own organizational backgrounds and rules when it comes to professional secrecy, but they do not always enable them to make judgements on how to deal with private information in a network. In this process, some social workers state that consulting families and asking for their permission serves as a good point of reference and as a way to legitimize the exchange of confidential information. In that way, there is a constant process of negotiation about what is private and what is not.

### *Deserving versus undeserving families*

The interplay between regulation and discretion in dealing with private information also influences families’ realization of welfare rights, because they are affected by the conceptualizations of deserving versus undeserving families. Information may serve as an instrument for the realization of social rights, but also as an instrument to prevent support. It is clear that formal criteria and conditions, as well as the personal visions of the social workers, strongly influence the way in which private information is handled. The normative framework of the individual social workers, which is made explicit during the network’s meetings, has an influence on the interventions that are performed towards families, but

when they are the subject of discussion, the interventions can be adjusted and critiqued by the network partners, who may judge and act from another framework. For example, a social worker from the public center for social welfare found out that a mother who depends on a welfare allowance gave her teenage daughter 70 euro as monthly pocket money. The social worker argued that this mother spoiled her daughter and that the pocket money should be reduced. According to her, 30 euro a month should be enough: *“They go to McDonalds, and those are expensive burgers. My children don’t get that much pocket money.”* She clearly disapproved of the spending pattern of the mother and argued that therefore the mother did not need a reduced rate for child care for her little son, which implies a strong financial consequence for the family. In this example, it is noticeable that the vision and judgement of that individual social worker has an influence on how a family is treated and expresses a form of conditionality that separates deserving from undeserving families. The other members of the network who participated in the case discussion did not resist the decision not to assign the reduced rate for childcare. However, the coordinator rejected the decision and claimed the reduced childcare rate for the mother. In this example, it is clear that the different individual perspectives and frameworks of the partners may clash. Eventually, the mother was allowed the reduced childcare rate because the situation was the subject of discussion in the network, and therefore, the initial decision to refuse support could be rejected. Such network discussions are valuable, according to some of the partners, because they enable reflection and the receipt of feedback on how they judge families or situations. Later, in an interview, the coordinator asserted that providing support should not be dependent of the individual frames of reference, but refers to what is universally and structurally captured as social rights:

*No, there shouldn’t be too much discussion about that. She [the mother] has the right to it, end of discussion. If you think that she has the right to it or not, that doesn’t matter. ... You can’t say: “she deserves this and that”; then, you cannot treat everybody in the same way.*

As the coordinator indicated, the network may serve as an instrument to transcend the individual normative frameworks in trying to create a more equal treatment of families. But in relation to realizing social rights, a difficulty emerges that relates to whether the network partners are allowed to exchange private information and to what extent this is desirable. In a context in which rights are more bound to formal criteria and conditions, families need to prove their eligibility in order to claim their rights. In a network, the need to formally prove your eligibility for support as a client creates pressure on professional secrecy. One respondent proposed that the network partners need to trust each other’s word and judgement to provide support for the parent, without doing a social investigation. The following example concerns a school that is not allowed to share the personal information of families with a public center for social welfare on which they financially depend to provide warm meals for their children. The school wants to provide meals for poor children, without having to show formal proof, such as the identities of the children in need, in order to obtain a refund for the meals:

*We shouldn't say that it concerns family X, Y and Z. No. "We have ten children like this and now you [public center for social welfare] have to trust me that I, as a school principal, will take care of the fact that those ten children will get their warm meal." ... Without a social inquiry: "You need to trust me".*

An emerging ethical debate relates to the question of whether we need to transcend professional secrecy (and the right to privacy) for people "in need" if professional secrecy blocks the provision of support and the realization of welfare rights. An informal approach relying on trust, without giving the other partners formal proof and information, can be used as a strategy to find a way around (the violation of) professional secrecy and privacy in order to realize the social rights of families. Nevertheless, if decisions are based on trust and on the judgement (the individual normative framework) of the social worker, rather than on formal proof and criteria (social investigation), this approach risks being more dependent on goodwill and charity. In such an approach, parents will not be in a position to claim their rights, which may also contribute to the unequal treatment of poor families (deserving vs undeserving). Other professionals are in favour of performing a social inquiry, because relying on the judgement of a social worker could make it easier for families to cheat or could make it easier to suspect families of cheating. Some actors mentioned that in a small municipality, one cannot prevent others from questioning the families' needs:

*"What? Are you giving the child from that family hot meals? You are crazy, he [the father] works and makes good money, he's fooling you! ... They've done a cruise on the Nile."*

#### *From individual to collective action*

In the national legislation, as well as in the networks, no new formal regulation on information sharing practices has been implemented. Some partners claimed that this makes it difficult to work together. For example, when there is a debt problem in a family, often, several organizations (i.e. child care and school) are confronted with the same problem. These network members argue that the problem should be handled together, but on the condition that the sharing of information between the partners that face the same problem of a family is allowed. An actor explains the need for a concrete solution in practice, where discussions about real life situations need to be possible. According to him, abstract solutions would not solve the problem, at least not quickly enough to provide support for the families and to realize their rights. In addition, another network member explained that the sharing of information between partners is necessary to change situations and to take action: *"If you are not going to talk about it, then not much is going to happen with it, right?"* It seems that the problem is shared, but the interventions and solutions are not. There appears to be less confidence that individual social workers will take sufficient action or will provide a sufficient solution than if these actions and solutions were shared by the network. Although professional secrecy is formally regulated, a social worker stated that these boundaries are flexible and need to be pushed further to solve the problem: *"There are some lines you cannot cross, but you always have some space to play. Playing safe does not solve the problem. You need to bend the rule, but you never know where you going to end".* He

indicated that this necessary form of discretion is a risk. As a strategy, anonymous case discussions are also used in one network. Although, in a small community, according to the social workers, it appears that anonymity in case discussions is not always possible, especially when multiple actors are involved with one family. A situation may sound so familiar that anonymity is not ensured. However, this fact is ignored by the partners, and the lack of anonymity is not openly acknowledged in the group:

*They are telling stories, and they didn't say one name. And then I think: "You are talking about that household." And then you listen a bit more and think: "Absolutely sure that it's about them". But that isn't said and that's not necessary, I think... Because eventually, everyone who sits there has to deal with the duty of professional secrecy and privacy of the people with whom they work.*

Sharing information with other professionals who are also bound to the duty of professional secrecy is considered less problematic by most of the network members, even if they all have different backgrounds, goals and purposes. The information that is 'anonymously' exchanged about a family may not be helpful to work with on an individual basis, because social workers recognize that they cannot act or intervene based on this information (see the first theme, *legitimacy to act*). Some of the actors stated that their duty of professional secrecy does not allow them to talk about this in the network, even if the different network partners know that they are working with the same family. The following example shows different interpretations of what is considered private information. A family support worker replies to a question of the coordinator about a mother they both support, yet her colleague seems to disapprove of her decision to reveal it:

*The coordinator asked: "Did Sarah already give birth?" and then I, well, then I said: "Yes". But I didn't know if it was a girl or a boy, I just... I just heard she gave birth. And then my colleague said: "But you have a duty of professional confidentiality!" Then I told her: "Yes, but the coordinator also supports Sarah and knew that she would be giving birth any time soon."*

Case discussions such as this one allow individual signals and problems on a micro level to be gathered and addressed in more structural ways on a meso or macro level. In one of the networks, housing problems are, for example, dealt with as a structural social problem, because poor housing is a problem that is shared by many families. The (problem of the) realization of social rights is consequently debated on a local policy level. The strategy of trying to search for the structural dimensions in problems is a way to collectivize that does not have to deal with the impossibility of sharing private information on an individual level and does not risk violating the right to privacy.

### *Craving control and handling uncertainty*

Whereas social work services and social workers often struggle with a lack of control over families, others radically embrace uncertainty in the ways they develop strategies in the network. In particular, when families are difficult to contact and not willing to open up,

network partners explain they interpret this distance as a need for more and intensive support and guidance. In a specific case discussion, the network coordinator, a welfare worker and a nurse express their worries because they do not succeed in reaching a certain family, particularly because the family no longer wants to receive support. Moreover, the family moved out, and the network partners did not know its new address. The discussion circles around the question of whether it is legal to trace their new home address in the national register. They are concerned about the father's irresponsible behavior in deliberately breaking the contact and refusing any meddling in his family situation. The partners discuss their observation that the child has bruises, and they assume that the justifications being offered were not consistent and credible and suspect the father of being responsible for abusing the child. Having this said in the group and having all of the arguments displayed, they state that they do not want to leave the situation as it is, based on arguments such as "Emergency breaks the law?" and "If we can get in again, then we can move on". The "we" in the last sentence is important to note because it implies that the social workers want to proceed, even if doing so is against the will of the family/father, and they prioritize their own craving for control. Participation of families is voluntary, but if there are concerns of abuse than participation may become more coercive.

Our research findings, however, also indicate that the collective concern in networks not only can evolve into a controlling approach but also enables networks to embrace uncertainty when they act. Although an increasing control and monitoring mechanism emerges, the joint efforts may also result in an extra sensitivity for the difficulties that parents may experience. In this example, a nurse hears from another partner that a certain mother isn't doing well, which stimulates her to ask the mother how she feels and wants to provide extra attention and support:

*When a partner of the network says: "Oh yes, Helen [a mother] didn't go to work those times". Then you think like: hmm, maybe she feels a bit down or maybe she is struggling with something? I'm going to focus on that next time I see her, asking: how do you feel about going to work, and would you prefer staying with the children instead of taking them to daycare?*

Here, the moments of consultation between the different network members challenge the diversity of services and social workers to handle the pressures of social policy imperatives and the range of managerial and procedural measures that aim to regulate social work practices. The role of the coordinator in this process seems crucial when this coordinator takes a fierce stance in reminding the network members of the principles of social justice and the realization of welfare rights. As one of the network partners explains:

*We get together and look at: "What did we already realize, where do we still need to focus?". I think that's very important, that someone is in charge of this. Every service has its busy periods, and then, there are things that you don't dwell on in a family, like looking after their rights. "Oh, we still need to do this!" Well, that's important for me, that you know someone keeps an eye on it, keeps it going.*

Although many network actors work under great time pressure due to performance-driven management systems and managerial policy values, for example, the joint moments of consultation enable a more open-minded search process and attention to the concerns of families when they engage in a collective effort to realize support for families.

*Using and misusing private information and trust*

A second field of tension can be situated as using and misusing information and trust. In this sense, one of the networks aims to make a clear separation between “controlling” and “supporting” network partners. To that end, only certain network partners are allowed to exchange confidential and private information that is acquired on the basis of the trust of the families. For example, the coordinator made a construction that blocks the exchange of private information between actors who give financial assistance and actors who only engage in providing immaterial resources. Whereas social workers who are in charge of providing financial assistance are bound by policy regulations and must control the family’s right to this assistance to avoid social fraud, family support workers will not share information about social fraud that could have negative financial consequences. They only find it legitimate to share this information with the coordinator who will not punish families:

*In fact, we may say everything to the coordinator, but we don’t tell everything to the social welfare worker. For example, when a mother says she’s single and we know after a home visit that a man lives there, that makes a difference in the financial situation... We don’t tell what people entrust us with because we have a duty to professional confidentiality at our home visits too.*

The family support workers note that they will not punish families if they commit financial fraud because they want to prioritize the families’ wellbeing and want to respect the confidence of the family and not scare it away. In their view, the information, and the exchange of it, only becomes damaging when it reaches the ears of a partner who will intervene with a punishment. By making this artificial separation, however, we observe that supportive social workers strongly underestimate their controlling effect on families in handling private information. Moreover, the network partners who officially have been designated a controlling function disagree with making this boundary in information exchange. They consider it unfair that the partners from the network would hide this sensitive or even damaging information from them, even if the family could lose their financial assistance. They clearly prioritize combating social fraud above keeping the trust of the family due to their attempt to embrace both individual and collective concerns in our society. In this example, their willingness to punish becomes clear:

**Welfare worker:** *I don’t think Peter [the coordinator] can keep it a secret, don’t misunderstand me. If Peter thinks that they live together, then he should report that to us. ... Ultimately, it’s not Peter who will withdraw the financial assistance or that income or extra support or whatever.*

**Interviewer:** *At that certain moment, is the trust from families in Peter lasting?*

**Welfare worker:** *Lasting. Maybe it's going to be damaged for a moment but not that badly.*

Simultaneously, they (mis)use the trust relationship that the family support workers have with the family to discover more private information. For them, a boundary between controlling and supporting actors is beneficial if the exchange in information between both is possible. It is interesting to observe that the network partners all presume that a clear distinction between controlling and supporting actors should be made but for very different reasons and both pushing the balance between support and control towards the other end of the spectrum. Nevertheless, the main problem here is that private information and trusting relationships with the families are used and abused without an explicit dialogue with the families about these matters, which refers to our third research finding.

### *Constructing families as subjects and objects of intervention*

In the networks, the level of transparency in the flow of private information varies widely. Some practitioners treat parents as subjects of intervention and remain loyal to the principle of transparency of their motives and of what they (will) do, whereas other practitioners approach the families as objects of intervention. In a first example, we observe that confidential information between network partners is being shared in a very subtle yet dubious manner. During a network meeting, the partners discuss that it is a pity that they are formally not allowed to receive any feedback after they have referred a family to a certain organization. A welfare worker suggests that to know whether the family actually followed this referral, they can use the code: *“Le Beaujolais nouveau est arrivé”* (The new Beaujolais has arrived), whereupon the entire group starts laughing. This shows that network partners actually have the desire to transmit confidential messages that travel in the network without the families being aware of this dynamic. In this way, they avoid the duty to professional secrecy, but also the right to privacy which creates a higher surveillance over families. When information is incomplete, only a small hint between network partners is enough to keep an extra eye on the family or to cause an extra intervention by a partner. On another occasion, the school is worried about the children in a certain family they suspect from having a drug problem and attempt to make use of another partner's knowledge and mandate (in this case the police) to verify their concern which causes an extra intervention:

*They [the school] know that we [the police] do unexpected house visits; they also know that we know things, especially concerning drugs and what the family is doing. So, yes, in that sense, we can approach the parents a bit easier.*

Thus, if the school does not dare to ask the parents themselves, it is enough to say to the police *“We are worried about that family”* to keep an eye on it and to perform an extra house visit. In this case, the family also remains unaware of who actually initiated this intervention and for what reason:

*If the school mentions it, that doesn't mean that we're going to say that it comes from the school. But, actually, we look into our own files: "Did we already go there in the past?" Or was there a violation before?". So, we work from there, to make sure that they still trust the school.*

Not being transparent is mainly used as a strategy to keep the trust of parents and to be able to support them. In this case, we observe the opposite effect occurring since another network actor, comes by to control the family. It is not an exchange of formal facts, but it is a worry that is expressed by the school which may lead to a serious intervention by the police and have major consequences for the parents and children. We observe that for families, it is often very unclear who works together with whom, and what occurs is out of their control and is possibly not supportive, but coercive.

In other situations, incomplete information and subtle signals are used, rather than displaying the entire stories. This arises from a caring logic: if too much information is spread to other partners, then some network actors believe this may be harmful. In a specific situation, for example, the care coordinator of the school is very cautious with the information that she notes in the child's personal record. A new child in the school suffered before from bullying and is afraid of going to school. The care coordinator expresses her concern to pay attention to the situation without coloring the image of the child in advance. For the wellbeing of the child, she is not fully transparent to the partners:

*If I'm going to write down everything I know and the teachers see this, no matter how you turn it, she is going to adapt a certain attitude. She is colored in her vision of that child in advance, and that is bad. The only thing I do say is: "Support socially and emotionally, keep an eye on him, don't lose him. Look at the context."*

The tricky issue of transparency regarding families is also at stake in relation to the network's meetings and moments of consultation. An informed consent is signed at the beginning of the trajectory in the network, but is further in the process no longer subject of discussion. There is a lack of systematic feedback to parents about what the actors of the network discussed together; thus, the network partners have doubts about the degree to which the parents are sufficiently well informed. Some members view this as a problem and want to change this:

*They know we have these moments of consultation, but recently, we wondered: "Shouldn't we go first to the parents to tell them: We are going to discuss this and that." Because many parents, when they agree to our network interventions, so much is said there, and they don't remember or don't pay attention. I think half of the people don't have a clue about what we are doing. And we thought recently: "Shouldn't we go to the parents or telephone them before we are going to have this discussion together? Or even letting them participate".*

These considerations raise important questions about the debate with families themselves. Making them part of the negotiations and making them aware of the flow of private

information in the network may be a strategy to consider. Additionally, for many of the network partners, asking for permission is still an important issue to consider, to give control back to the parents. Nevertheless, we observe in the networks that we study that this is strongly dependent on the individual practitioner's values.

#### 4.1.4 Research question 4: Experiences of families in poverty with young children

In this section, we discuss results from our interviews with parents. The themes could be seen as a gathering of supportive elements as experienced from the networks from the perspectives of parents. It is important to scrutinize this perspective in service delivery networks, because effectiveness at the organizational level does not always equalizes to effectiveness of networks on the level of the client who make use of these services (De Corte, Verschuere, & De Bie, 2016).

##### *Multi-dimensional social work: connecting material and immaterial resources*

Parents feel supported when they may rely on the network and network members with a broad range of concerns and questions. That is an important finding to consider, because needs on different life domains are not necessarily experienced as separated from each other (Lister, 2004; Allen, 2003; Broadhead et al., 2008). In network A for example, parents feel supported in parenting support, relational questions, administration, education, the realization of their rights (including financial benefits), legal advice and material support (e.g. baby bed). The interviews and focus group showed that this multi-dimensional approach creates an added value in the provision of social support for families with young children. In order to be responsive to the complex problem of child poverty, the network may provide an answer to parents that is not restricted to the offer of one professional or organization, but it involves the engagement and effort of multiple partners. Therefore, it is important to also work outside the structure of the own organization and think and act into the bigger structure of the network and multi-disciplinary context. Networks that engage in this multi-dimensional approach allows support in a diversity in needs and life domains of poor families. This contributes to a network that is able to adjust itself and be responsive to individual preferences. The multi-dimensional nature of the offered support was also strengthened when the projects served the needs of children and parents together (family as a whole). This will also lead to the possibility to combine material and immaterial support which could complement each other.

##### *Identification and label of interventions*

In the interviews with families, it was noticeable that the way in which the network's activities and interventions are characterized and labelled, may pre-structure the multi-dimensionality of the questions that were asked and concerns that were shared by families in poverty. We found two contrasting examples. In the first example, network partners state that the network should go broad, because combating poverty is a shared responsibility between services that provide material, social and emotional support. This network's interventions start explicitly from a multi-dimensional approach by using a rights research as an instrument to

support families and look at which welfare rights are not yet realized on different life domains (e.g. housing, child care, education, financial contributions and leisure time activities). The network's coordinator mentions two reasons why they chose this approach. Firstly, the rights research is important, because these families don't always get what they are entitled to and social workers have to put an extra effort to that. This network wants to discover what families are in need of and doesn't set a boundary to that. Most of the families in this network felt comfortable in a construction where they didn't need to categorize their questions and concerns. One parent experienced this approach strongly:

*It is like a Visa for us, you see? It fits every problem and that is thanks to the network. ... At the beginning [before they were in contact with the network] it was only the social assistant and us and that's it. But the network, that has no limits.*

In the other network, interventions towards families are focused on supporting them in the upbringing of their children (parenting support). Although the network partners represent sectors and services that go way beyond parenting support, this is not directly visible in concrete actions towards families. Besides that, the building where the activities for families take place is called 'House of the Child'. Some of the interviewed mothers therefore identified that the support of the network centers around the child and correspondingly the questions and concerns they would share, was connected to the child and parenting support. In one example, one of the network's partners invited a mother to come to a play and meeting moment that was organized by the network, because she had her little son with her: *"When she saw my little son, she said: "yes, you should come by once ... He is going to enjoy it."* In the interview, she links the network with small children and joins the meetings because she sees that her son enjoys them. She says she wouldn't go there for herself: *"If I hadn't my son, I don't think you go there. No I don't think so."* In an interview with two Turkish mothers, they had the same impression of the network. When we asked what kind of questions and concerns they would share with the network partners, we see they prestructured and categorized their questions and concerns. When we asked about support for other life domains, it was not something these mothers would consider asking because of that label: *"They say they only know it is for children and not for anything else."* Although the expertise and services of the network partners go way broader than parenting support, this was not reflected in the interventions towards families which (maybe unintentionally) gave another impression to families. The mothers told they would appreciate it if the network would make it more clear if the support and offer goes beyond parenting support and felt inhibited to ask this themselves.

### *Filling the gaps in social provision*

It is crucial that families receive the support that satisfies their needs. Networks could fulfill an important role in creating additional alternatives that are experienced as important by families (Walker et al., 2013). So next to uniting the existing offer of social services and making it more accessible for parents and children, there lies an important function in filling the gaps. Due to waiting lists, problems in communication, a mismatch in expectations or a lack of information, families struggle to get the support they need. This is particularly the

case when families are confronted with the conditionality of social rights. For example, families from Eastern European countries that live in Belgium aren't entitled to social support and the actors of the network members felt powerless. So although connections were made between partners, these families with young children could rely on any support, because they didn't had the right to it. The network euphoria too often assumes that all public social resources are available and accessible and that it is only a matter of coordinating what exists. It is very important to see the gaps in the network and provide a structural answer to that. The network must be aware of these processes of exclusion in order to tackle them.

Even though some of the networks made an effort to be responsive to diverse needs, there are some areas where they lack the power/decisiveness to make a substantial difference for families. The impact of these shortcomings is substantial in the lives of poor families. There are some basic needs that still aren't fulfilled, but of great importance in the combat against child poverty. A first big concern is the lack of affordable and qualitative housing. Many of the families indicate that they still face difficulties in finding a decent place to live. The effectiveness of the networks could definitely be improved on this domain. Parents indicate that there is little progress in the waiting list of social housing and little accessibility to the private housing market, despite their contact with the network. The local policy could take a leading role in striving for more affordable and qualitative housing, but the actual local impact on a long term is limited. In addition, families mention that it is difficult to find access to the labor market, even though contacts are made with employment agencies [VDAB, interim]. Particularly requirements(conditions) on language and qualification caused the need for extra training before one can enter a certain employment. But also the lack of a computer with internet, child care or affordable transportation blocks finding a job. Also the lack of financial means is a persistent problem for the families involved. For them, many problems could be avoided if they would have a bigger income. Networks that don't pay attention to these life domains, may fail to create a network that is able to combat child poverty.

#### *Continuity over time and services*

Continuity between social services is an important aim of networks to support families in periods of transition that may represent risks, but also opportunities (e.g. transition from child care to preschool). The networks are all attentive for creating a contact person/point for families. This person is able to gather and centralize questions and concerns of families, have an overview of different interventions towards families and coordinates support from different partners. Especially in networks that work on a strong and intensive individual basis with families, this person fulfills a very meaningful function for parents. For example within the individual trajectory of network A, parents could rely on one family support worker as their unique point of contact. Families stressed the importance of having someone who listens, is available and is there to count on. For these parents, the network equalizes to this contact person. But at the same time, this creates a big dependency for families. All the work, as well as the power to decide and intervene lies in the hands of one professional, which may be tricky. The professional that fulfills this function didn't feel good about the position and dependency of families. When she went on a holiday, many of the families waited to ask their questions until she returned to work and didn't ask them to other network

partners. This finding makes the network, but also the families and family support worker, vulnerable.

Continuity in time has the potential to make this contact person also someone parents can trust. Parents felt at ease with someone who knows and feels what the family needs and who can provide support on the long term. Getting to know the story of families may also have a preventive function. Some of the parents explained that it is easier to open up about a problem with someone they trust without having to be ashamed: *“That is what I love, that you can talk and tell you problem. That you talk with people that you trust. ... And that your problem will stay with them”*. Some parents say that if they couldn't have shared their problem, that it would only have turned worse. Having a person to talk to and trust is crucial:

*Families experience difficulties because they don't know with who they need to talk about it. But thanks to the network, when a problem emerges, we talk about it with them and that will really avoid problems in families.*

Creating a dialogue/space for open communication contributes to this feeling of trust. This finding stresses the importance of transparency and negotiation about the needs, offered support and the way private information is treated. These elements could be seen as conditions to share personal information in a sphere of trust. Continuity in time is therefore important for some families, when they encounter new questions and challenges. The availability of a frame of support could be supportive on the long term, even if families only need it at certain periods or moments in their lives. Also the multi-dimensionality of the networks may contribute to the experienced continuity, if network partners make an effort to adjust their offer to the needs of families. The network could also facilitate the contact between the network organizations and families for example by making a phone call, doing a referral or a mutual home visit.

#### *Transparency, trust and ownership in sharing private information*

Professional secrecy could be seen as a barrier, as well as a condition to make social support possible. Formal regulations on information sharing as well as trust in the way information is treated are both conditions for families to share their story to social workers. Some of the parents seem to trust how their information is treated by the network, even though they aren't completely aware of what happens. So even if this is not transparent, parents may agree on the sharing of information if they trust the social workers who are involved. There exists an emotional dimension next to the formal legal framework. In the research, we found that parents themselves sometimes filter the information that is told to professionals. In this case, they don't see the sharing of information as a problem, because they didn't categorize this information as secret. In many cases, parents allowed the sharing of information, but only in a professional context and between professionals. The goal to share their personal information must be used to help and support them. Parents valued the ownership and control of private information when they shared it with a professional. Sometimes parents felt that sharing information was necessary to get the support they needed. Being dependent of social services may lead to giving up privacy. In addition, many

parents were asked their permission if social workers wanted to share their information, but this is never free of power.

### *Realizing social rights*

In order to explore and realize social rights on different levels, it is important that parents are well informed about the offer and rights in the provision of services. Network A starts explicitly from a rights based approach and uses a mini rights research as an instrument to screen the rights and entitlements of parents and children in poverty situations. The informational function literally opens doors. Many of the interviews families from network A experienced to have contact with more (specialized) professionals/organizations than before they participated in the network. Some of those families were very isolated before they entered the project. Many parents experienced that without the interventions of the network, they would never know all their rights. These rights entail financial benefits, social reductions and allowances (e.g. for education and alimony), but also administrative conditions (subscription to social housing, child care, preschool, etc.). Many of the network partners noticed that families were under protected, which could lead to dangerous situations like the following example:

*The fire was within the living room and also in the bedroom and everything was on fire. And I didn't have an insurance. I didn't know: "What is an insurance?". Because, I'm not a long time in Belgium, I lived here for six and a half year and I never knew what an insurance was. And now I know. I have a family insurance and also a fire insurance.*

Parents explain it is important to inform them about their rights on a proactive, up to date and structural basis. However, some of the families of argued that they also felt dependent of the network partners to inform them. The intervention of the network made parents more conscious about the rights they could realize and they wanted to be sure they are well enough informed. Some of them didn't like the feeling of being dependent of the network partners and one mother felt a little betrayed when network partners did not inform her more proactive:

*I didn't ask a lot, but when I did, they said to me: 'Oh yes, it's true you have a right to it. However, they knew it and didn't say it to me. I heard it from someone else. ... Why didn't they tell me in the first place? Although, normally it's their job, but they don't do it.*

We discussed this finding with the network's coordinators and they decided to make the rights research an instrument were both parents and social workers are in charge and share the responsibility. The complete list was now handed over to parents, to lower the feeling of dependency. A nurse that visits many poor families admits that she didn't really had good idea about what families are entitled to or not and that she was just trying. She mentions the importance of working with someone that does the structured rights research with families and knows all about it.

Next to the informational function, also an advisory function is meaningful for parents. The orientation towards the right and best suited organizations for their specific needs and questions was considered supportive on the condition that this is not coercive. It was also appreciated that the network members made an effort to help realize their rights and that it was more seen as a shared responsibility. Some of the parents felt that they were helped quicker when the network partners contacted the social workers who needed to provide this support.

### *Connecting families*

Some of the networks chose to devote attention to making connections between parents (informal networks) and also between parents and network partners (formal networks). Some of the networks often organized sessions, mainly around educational themes with a moment for the children to play together. These interventions try to create an informational and emotional form of social support. Parents mention that it is enjoyable to hear from other parents which strategies they use when they encounter problems and hope to learn from them. It is also an opportunity to identify with other parents who face a similar situation as they do. They felt it was supportive to place their story in a broader context than their own family. Next to the informational function of these meeting moments between parents, these activities may also fulfill emotional social support, because of the possibility to meet with other parents. It were mostly mothers that participated and some of them were very isolated before. One of the mothers even experienced that meeting these other parents felt like having a small family. Having a structure to meet with other parents is important, but also feeling welcomed and included in the group. It gave a certain distraction from their daily routine and concerns as a parent. Although these contacts were seen as very meaningful, these meeting moments did not always create close friendships. So most of the parents had the feeling that they still needed to rely on professionals for support. The network could try to realize a complementary role where parents could be supported by formal as well as informal networks, for example for (occasional) child care. Also the organization of affordable family activities in group were highly appreciated by parents.

### *Outreach and having a contact person*

To avoid that poor families are under protected, an outreaching and proactive approach is desirable. Our research indicates that it is not easy for parents to get to the right services. The main reason for that could be situated in lacking a contact person and someone to rely on whenever there is a problem or question. Some parents told that they lived in a very vulnerable situation, before they came in touch with the network, particularly because many lacked the support of a social network of family and friends. Also the lack of knowledge about and trust in social services influenced their weak position. One woman told that she was afraid of showing to a professional that she had a really hard time, because she was scared of the possible consequences:

*I didn't know what kind of organization Kind & Gezin was. But I was afraid at that moment, because I thought I was going to lose my daughters. I wanted to say that I*

*didn't want them to come by, and when I thought that there was someone knocking at my door. It was the lady of Kind & Gezin. She found me and I cried. It was my birthday, I had my baby next to me, my other daughters were at school and I said: "I'm all alone. I don't know where to go at this moment".*

Some of the networks pay much attention to bringing families in poverty in contact with a broader network, with the help of an outreaching partner. In some networks this is mainly Kind & Gezin, and in others for example the school as parents and children come by every day. The organizations often function as first contact points with parents and children are a very important as starting points for other contacts and picking up signals. Also home visits were done by partners of the network. This is a more intrusive way of intervening which makes it is easier to look into a family's life and must be treated with care. If this home visit is done by a professional they trust, it is often experienced as nearby, less stressed and more personal. The network partners also acknowledge the attention for an outreaching approach towards vulnerable families and they see Kind & Gezin as the crucial actor to realize this. Our research revealed that the availability of having a contact person is very important to parents. The power of the network could also be situated as it gives families the feeling to be able to count on the network partners and the social services they represent. This involvement is also important in the attempt to work on a preventive basis. Most of the parents have the feeling that there is someone they can count on:

*"I also feel... Even when you are alone, it's not completely alone."*

It also has the potential to give parents more certainty and self-confidence. If parents trust the family support worker, they feel they can share their worries and problems. This also helps in crisis situations, when parents don't know what to do. The feeling of availability of support was also stimulated by the fact that professionals are easily reachable for families. Doing the effort to respectfully getting to know the families and understand their situation is very important in order to provide tailored support. The adjustment to the life world of parents and children is potentially more responsive. In the research we saw that having a meaningful and available contact persons plays a very important role, so this deserves much attention, also in the long term.

## **4.2 Recommendations**

In what follows, we discuss recommendations for further research, policy and practice. We structure the findings according to a differentiation between a commitment to pursue social justice and rights for citizens, including families in poverty situations and this on a macro-meso-micro level (see figure II). The macro-meso-micro level relates to how anti-poverty strategies should be developed in democratic ways in the relationship between the macro-level (social policies developed by the government), the meso-level (the local organizational and inter-organizational level, often coordinated by a network coordinator), and the micro-level (frontline social work and welfare actors in interaction with children and families in poverty situations). This requires both a top-down as well as a bottom-up approach in the realization of social rights. It could be argued that a multi-governance perspective is crucial in this matter, as policies of local and central governments should be aligned. The vertical level concerns the question of how anti-poverty strategies can be developed in the relationship between local social policy and the inter-organizational network, that is often coordinated by a network coordinator in working with local welfare actors of different organizations.

In what follows, we first situate a figure that represents our research insights, and then explain this further.

## Searching for a normative value orientation in local networks combating (child) poverty

Figure II: Searching for a normative value orientation in local networks combating (child) poverty

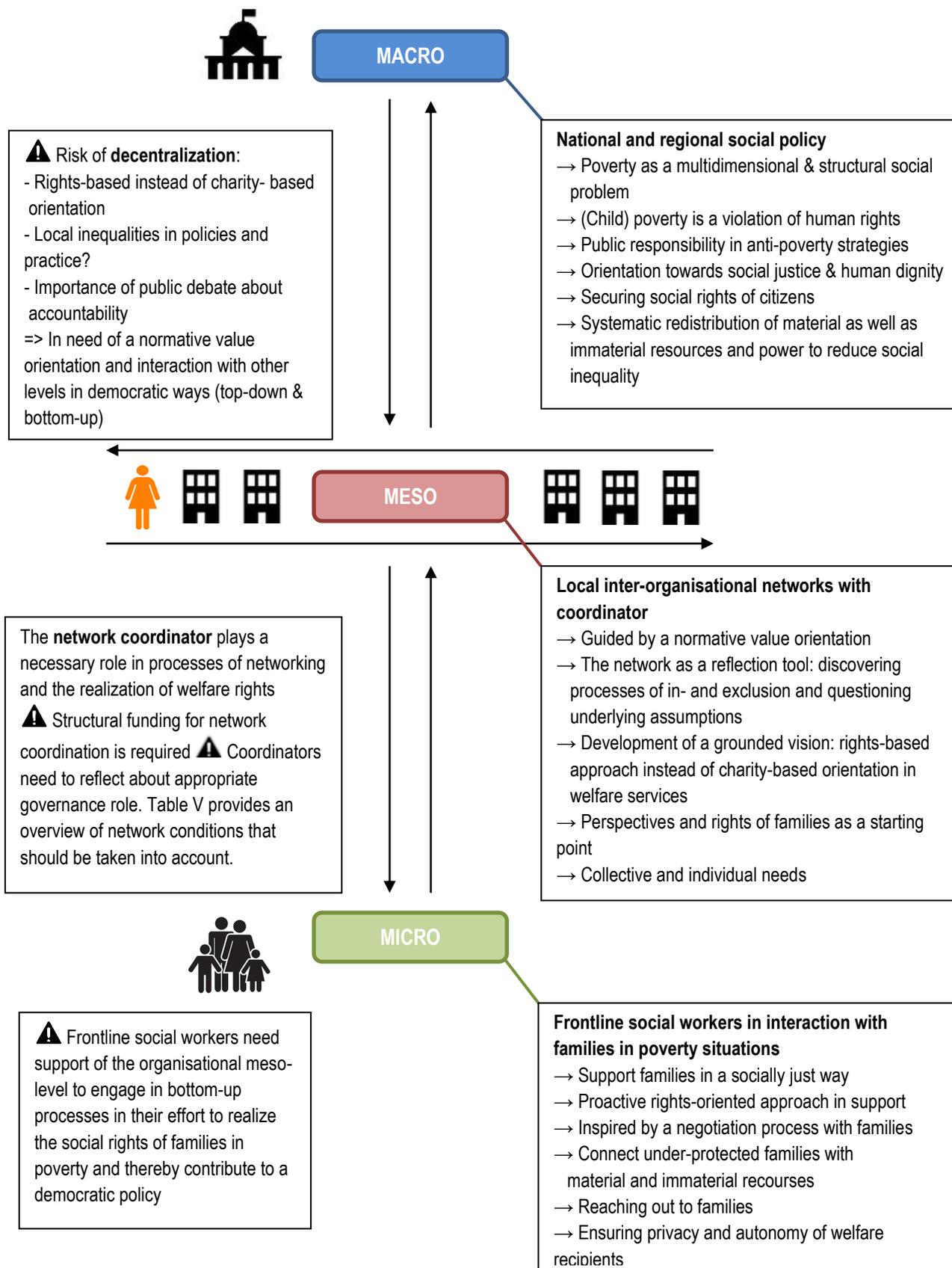


Table V: network conditions that need to be taken into account when coordinators reflect about the appropriate governance role (simplified findings)

<b>Network conditions</b>	<b>Governance role</b>
Commitment	Low commitment: Commissioner High commitment: Facilitator
Collaborative experience in the past	Positive: Commissioner Negative: Facilitator
Diversity of network actors	High diversity: Commissioner Low diversity: Facilitator
Mandated or voluntary partners	Voluntary: Facilitator Obligated: Commissioner
Continuity among network partners	Yes: Facilitator / Co-producer No: Commissioner

#### 4.2.1 Macro level

On a macro level, the commitment to develop anti-poverty strategies requires that welfare states continue to accept their public responsibility in the development of these strategies which are established according to a social justice orientation (Boone, Roets & Roose, 2018). As we have mentioned above, this commitment requires that welfare states critically pursue a constitutive rights-based notion of mutual solidarity and collective responsibility in securing the rights of citizens, being rooted in the idea of social security and social protection (Dean, 2015). These principles imply that poverty cannot be reduced to an individual problem, but that it is perceived as a structural societal problem that requires social policies that contribute to a systematic redistribution of resources and power in their efforts to reduce rather than create and reproduce social inequalities (Ridge & Wright, 2008).

To recapitulate, it is therefore important to situate the emphasis of the Flemish and Walloon as well as the national government on the development of local, inter-organizational networks in that search for social justice. The decentralization of public responsibilities to the local level (see Chandler, 2010) does not prevent the necessity of a continuous, democratic and public debate about situations of poverty, framed as a wicked issue and as a violation of human rights. The stimulation of inter-organizational networking therefore requires a normative value orientation; the realization of rights according to a social justice orientation requires the public responsibility of the welfare state to realize social justice and human dignity, and thus both a top-down as well as bottom-up commitment to do so.

In that respect, it requires that the national and regional government are aware of the fact that the decentralization of a public policy mandate to the local level can create social inequalities between local authorities, if there is no democratic and public debate and accountability of the locally developed policies and practices in interaction with the national or Flemish level. Conversely, the macro level should be held accountable for their decisions, actions and motivations in relation to the realization of social justice and human dignity. As

we have discussed, pursuing a broad rights-oriented rather than charity-based approach in social welfare policies and practices currently remains a key strategy (see Jacquet et al., forthcoming), and implies that the rights of children and parents in poverty situations are approached as intrinsically related (Lister, 2006). (Child) poverty is a multi-dimensional and complex problem and therefore it needs a multi-dimensional approach in anti-poverty strategies. In order to combat (child) poverty, it is necessary to combine material and immaterial support for families using an approach that takes into account multiple life domains, such as housing, employment, health and leisure time participation. Attention should go to ensuring qualitative social provision, also in stimulating inter-organizational networking.

Our research shows, however, that funding mechanisms on the national and Flemish government level can enable a rights-oriented provision of welfare services on the local level. Local inter-organizational networks are often funded on a temporary, project-oriented basis, which disrupts the long-term and complex work that needs to be established on the local level. Structural funding is, in that sense, necessary to guarantee the continuity of the coordination and implementation of local inter-organizational networks, to enable the development of a long-term and rights-oriented vision and practice on different policy levels.

#### 4.2.2 Meso level

In bigger and/or more diverse networks, our research shows that the presence of a vertical structure with a coordinator, a steering committee and workgroups enhances the rights-based orientation and effectiveness of the network. The network partners feel more involved and have more opportunities to provide input. A coordinator can strive for the network actors to be more involved in the network process. A steering committee can be installed to make sure that the more engaged partners are more actively involved in the development of the network. Besides this, the presence of workgroups can make sure that the large amount of partners is subdivided in smaller groups, which makes it easier for the partners to provide input.

Moreover, our research indicates several network characteristics that influence which role a coordinator should adopt to enhance the network process performance. A network in which all the members show high levels of engagement towards the network and who come to a consensus fairly easily, benefit most from a network coordinator who adopts a facilitating role. Networks that are characterized by low levels of engagement or where it is hard for the network partners to come to a consensus benefit more from a coordinator who adopts a top-down governance role. Besides this, we notice that the positive or negative history of collaboration and the presence of trust between the leading organization and the network partners influences the role that the coordinator should adopt. We find that, if the network is characterized by a negative history of collaboration and low levels of trust, a facilitating coordinator will lead to higher levels of process performance. On the other hand, if a network is characterized by a positive history of collaboration and high levels of trust, a top-down governance role appears to have a positive effect on the process performance. Since there is no ultimate governance role (Span et al., 2012b).

In networks that benefit from a top-down governance role, the process of synthesis contributes to the successful collaboration in the network. In this process, the network coordinator takes up the responsibility to meet with all of the network partners individually. In these contacts, the coordinator tries to map the expectations of the network partners and he or she explains what the network expects of them. In this process, the coordinator adopts the role of broker between the national as well as the local municipality, the network, the network partners, and parents and children in poverty situations. This requires an emphasis on a democratic and public debate that contributes to the bottom-up dynamic of realizing social rights of families in poverty situations. Based on this process of synthesis, the coordinator can, together with the network partners, come to a consensus concerning the rights-oriented vision and goals of the network, or new ideas could even arise.

Following the previous recommendation, we emphasize that the search for consensus should not be a goal in itself. Dissensus often emerges when concrete poverty situations come into the picture, as they trigger fundamental discussions on the question whether social rights are realized in democratic and socially just ways (Dean, 2015). As networks need to consist of a certain level of diversity in order for them to tackle the multi-dimensional problems that people in poverty struggle with, it is not easy to reach a consensus among this diversity (Raeymaeckers et al., 2017; Vermeiren, et al., 2017). Networks that are characterized by a lack of consensus, should be governed properly. The coordinator needs to take up the responsibility to deal with dissensus in productive ways, so that all the network members learn to deal with social injustice. In the search for a consensus on how to realize rights, the coordinator needs to take the diversity of perspectives of the network partners and families into account and engage in a democratic and public debate with policy makers (both on the local and national level). It is important to be open and clear about expectations towards each other (from the network coordinator towards the partners and from partners towards the network coordinator) and to stimulate good communication. Clearing out the expectations is particularly important if the network aims to create shared actions. Also, if there are no clear expectations, it is not possible to set clear responsibilities for the network members and coordinator.

In relation to the normative value orientation of local inter-organizational networks, Warin (2007) argues that inter-organizational networking often seems to be more concerned with papering over the cracks than with reconstructing the foundations. Provan (1997) asserts that it can even become an 'institutionalised myth'. In the context of this restructuring of child and family provisions in Flanders, the question particularly remains "*whether social work organisations question their own underlying assumptions and rationales rather than focusing on organizational reform*" (Roose, 2006, pp. 4–5). We argue that the development of a grounded vision is crucial, to avoid a depoliticizing of the public realm of our welfare arrangements. As such, the necessary public debate surrounding the social and political features of social work, relating to the part played by social structures and political forces in producing, amongst others, situations of poverty and social inequality, easily disappears (Roets et al., 2016; Raeymaeckers et al., 2017; Vermeiren, et al., 2017).

In our view, the challenge is to engage with a rights-based understanding of welfare settlements, such as child and family services, in which rights are constituted through the naming and claiming of needs and concerns of children and parents in poverty situations that need to be projected in the public forum of political debate, to “*the extent to which there can be resistance to social injustice and a basis for the negotiation of claims*” (Dean, 2013, p. 12). Taking the perspective of families is necessary as a starting point to develop shared goals. It could be helpful to start from this perspective that puts the rights and concerns of families prior to the needs of the (individual) partner organizations. This is also a useful starting point when partners do not find a common goal or consensus. It is a strategy to transcend the self-interest of organizations.

In that sense, we argue that coordinating and shaping the local inter-organizational network should be considered as a reflection tool for each of the organizations and frontline welfare actors involved, as well as for the inter-organizational network as a whole. We found that moments of consensus and dissensus are valuable and interesting to reflect about the network’s functioning. In addition it is important to know what the network covers and where the network falls short or is limited, since (potential) service users might fall through the cracks of local welfare provision. By bringing local partners together, the construction of the network could form an instrument where there is collectively thought and discussed about the support that is offered on a local level and to whom this is offered. Inter-organizational networking provides the possibility to work on the one hand with individual needs of parents and on the other hand to work on collective needs that are shared by a group of citizens in the community. In that sense, forming a network between local partners may lead to discovering the gaps and the overlaps in the supply and stimulating the creation of continuous support for families. So next to making the necessary services and resources available for families (for example child care, housing and employment), it is also important to make the supply accessible and to search for and overcome barriers.

#### 4.2.3 Micro level

To support families who are isolated and under-protected in a socially just way, Marston and McDonald (2012) assert that, while making an analysis of poverty situations and interrelated social problems, the role of the frontline social worker in the political sphere is about a political engagement towards social justice, acting as an interpreter and mediator for competing worldviews. Networks have the potential to make connections with families to bring them more easily into contact with formal and informal and material as well as immaterial sources of (social) support. In a context of poverty reduction, frontline social workers could play a significant role in supporting and informing families proactively. This is also crucial in relation to realizing social rights. Outreach practices seem significant in making connection with the concerns and life worlds of both children and parents in poverty situations. In that vein, gaining an in-depth understanding of the meaning-making and strategies of families, including both children and parents, in poverty situations seems crucial. The realization of rights requires that frontline social workers do not only try to understand the perspective of families in poverty situations in whether they experience the network and welfare actors’ interventions as supportive, but also interpret and negotiate with

the families whether their strategies of meaning-making are in line with a social justice orientation (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Roets, Roose & De Bie, 2013). Families might be alienated from what is socially just, and this requires a respectful negotiation and sometimes confrontation of mutual worldviews (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009). It is quite meaningful to create a process where these perspectives could be exchanged and discussed.

A good practice that we encountered in our research of network A, was the 'mini rights examination'. This mini rights examination lists all the rights of families on a checklist and covers life domains of income (financial rights), housing and environment, transportation and mobility, education, health and leisure time. This rights research includes the needs and concerns of children and parents together. Moreover, the instrument serves as a basis for the negotiation and dialogue with families. From the start of the individual trajectory, this list is checked and discussed together with parents, so they also become well-informed about their rights. The OCMW/CPAS is also legally bound to the realization of the right to human dignity (De Bie & Vandebussche, 2016), so relating to the OCMW/CPAS as a central public actor in combating (child) poverty, it could be very meaningful to integrate a rights research (as explained above) into the obliged social research that is performed if families want to receive support from the OCMW/CPAS. In this way, the controlling function may also be used as a lever for social protection and inclusion.

In that sense, attention for low threshold contact points in the community to get in contact with families might serve as an important strategy. By starting from a rights-oriented client perspective, the networks are better able to connect to the experienced needs and concerns of clients. When the focus and supply of networks are pre-structured, there is a risk that the meaning-making and life worlds of parents and children in poverty situations are discredited and dismissed which could fail to be responsive to a multi-dimensional problem such as (child) poverty. Taking the diverse concerns and unique situations of families as a starting point has more potential to provide support that is adjusted and responsive to what parents and children deem meaningful altogether.

In the development of responsive practices, however, taking care of privacy and professional secrecy in local networks is crucial. The field of tension between care and control is key in this challenge, since control can become a predominant approach in a local network leading to stereotypical thinking, conditionality and a lack of social support in the long run (see Van Haute et al., 2018; Jacquet et al. forthcoming). In a context of networking it is important to be transparent and to work in confidential ways to keep the trust of families and treat them with recognition and respect. Privacy must be respected and the information should be dealt with in an ethical and socially just manner. Anonymity needs to be treated with care, particularly in small municipalities. The autonomy and agency of families must be ensured in practices of exchanging private information, wherein attention should go to creating a dialogue with families.

## 5. DISSEMINATION AND VALORISATION

1. Peter Raeymaeckers has presented on a colloquium entitled 'Kinderen eerst: lokale overlegplatformen voor de preventie en opsporing van kinderarmoede' organized by the POD Maatschappelijke Integratie, 01/12/2015
2. Caroline Vermeiren has presented on Bindkracht (knowledge forum for OCMW/CPAS), 20/11/14 and Demos (spare time/cultural participation network), 05/06/15. And also presented the research on a collaborative doctoral course with students and professors of the University of Antwerp, the University of Ghent and the University of Liège, 05/05/15.
3. Nicolas Jacquet presented the INCH research project at the Conference « *Déclaration des Bourgmestres de lutte contre la pauvreté infantile* » organized by the S.P.P. Intégration Sociale. (2015)
4. Caroline Vermeiren and Peter Raeymaeckers have presented on the 44th ARNOVA conference in Chicago (18/11/2015-22/11/2015).
5. Peter Raeymaeckers, Caroline Vermeiren & Dorien Van Haute have presented at the VVSG workshop on local policy and child poverty (09/02/15) in Mechelen.
6. Dorien Van Haute presented a paper at the international congress of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (Barcelona, 7-10/09/15).
7. Caroline Vermeiren and Charlotte Noël presented their research during a guest class for master students in a course about innovations in social work, 22/03/16 Antwerp.
8. Nicolas Jacquet participated in the selection and revision board for the poverty yearbook (2016)
9. Caroline Vermeiren and Charlotte Noël presented the research design and methodology of their research for Ian Shaw, specialist in sociological social work, 03/05/16 Antwerp.
10. Nicolas Jacquet participated in the selection board for the call for projects of "Crésam" (referral centre of mental health care) and Cera Fondation (2016)
11. Peter Raeymaeckers, Charlotte Noël and Caroline Vermeiren have presented a paper at the 12th International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR). 'Between facilitator and commissioner: analyzing the role of the coordinator in nonprofit service networks', 27/6/2016 - 1/7/2016, Stockholm, Sweden.
12. Nicolas Jacquet participated in the group of pulses "Petite Enfance" (childness) for the "Plan de Prévention et de Promotion de la santé » in Wallonia, organized by « l'Appui en Promotion en Education pour la santé (Apes-ULiège) and supported by the cabinet of the minister Prévot (2016)
13. Charlotte Noël and Caroline Vermeiren presented the INCh research at the 'Dag van de Sociologie'. 9/06/16, Tilburg, Netherlands.
14. Charlotte Noël presented at a plenary session for DEMOS, 29/09/2016 Antwerp.
15. Nicolas Jacquet presented an article "new forms of poverty, what alternative?" at the 75 anniversary of "La Haute Ecole Libre Mosane" (October 2016)
16. Caroline Vermeiren presented at a plenary session for Huis van het Kind Turnhout, 6/12/16, Turnhout.

17. Dorien Van Haute presented a paper at the International Social Work and Society Academy (TiSSA) in Gent (19-25/08/16) named 'Effective integration by sharing information?': A critical study on local networks combating child poverty in Belgium.
18. Dorien Van Haute has presented the results of the interviews with families in Dilbeek for the council of OCMW Dilbeek (27/04/16).
19. Michel Vandebroek has presented the results of our research with families in Dilbeek at the conference "De Toekomst is Jong" van Kind & Gezin, Brussels (06/10/16).
20. Nicolas Jacquet presented his research during a course about poverty reduction strategies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, ULiège (March 2016-2017-2018)
21. Dorien Van Haute presented a paper on the European Social Work Conference in Aalborg, Denmark (April 2017).
22. Dorien Van Haute was part of the advisory board on a publication about 'Huis van het Kind' written by VBJK Gent (2017)
23. Caroline Vermeiren and Peter Raeymaeckers have presented on the 46th ARNOVA conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan (16/11/2017-18/11/2017).
24. Nicolas Jacquet has presented an abstract "*Theorising constructions of employability and processes of social disqualification towards children and parents in poverty situations: An exploration of the work of Robert Castel and Serge Paugam*" at the plenum session at TISSA Conference 2017 in Olsztyn, Poland (August 2017)
25. Dorien Van Haute presented the research findings on the stakeholders forum child poverty organized by OCMW Ghent.
26. Caroline Vermeiren & Peter Raeymaeckers have presented the Yearbook on Poverty & Social Exclusion 2017 in Antwerp (06/12/2017)
27. Dorien Van Haute and Caroline Vermeiren have presented at the Expoo congress in Antwerp (7/12/2017)
28. Nicolas Jacquet gave a lecture during a master class about migrations and poverty at the Faculty of Social Science (March 2018)
29. Peter Raeymaeckers talked about creating opportunities for people in poverty (Vlaams Instituut voor sportbeheer en recreatiebeleid) <http://www.isbvzw.be/nl/697/collections/662>
30. Michel Vandebroek did a keynote lecture on integrated services for families at the conference "Jong in de Buurt", organized by Kind en Gezin in Mechelen (24/04/2018)

## 6. PUBLICATIONS

1. Raeymaeckers, P., Noel, C., Boost, D., Vermeiren, C., Coene J., & Van Dam, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Tijd voor sociaal beleid: over armoedebestrijding op het lokale niveau*. Leuven: ACCO.
2. Raeymaeckers, P., Vermeiren, C., & Coene, J. (2018), Armoedebestrijding op het lokale niveau: 'governance' als democratische opdracht voor een lokaal bestuur. *CEDER: Christen Democratische reflecties*: 6(1), 66-79.
3. Raeymaeckers, P., Vermeiren, C., Noël, C., Van Puyvelde, S., & Willems, J. (2017). The governance of public-nonprofit service networks: a comparison between three types of governance roles. *Voluntas: international journal of voluntary and non-profit organizations*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9920-7>
4. Vermeiren, C., Raeymaeckers, P., Coene, J., Boost, D., Van Dam, S. (2017). *We creëren vandaag de armoede van morgen: aanbevelingen voor een krachtig lokaal sociaal beleid*. Sociaal.Net. Retrieved from <https://sociaal.net/opinie/we-creeren-vandaag-de-armoede-van-morgen/>
5. Vermeiren, C., Noël, C., Raeymaeckers, P. & Dierckx, D. (2017). Governance van netwerken ter bestrijding van kinderarmoede. Coördinatierollen in lokale netwerken. In: P. Raeymaeckers, C. Noël, D. Boost, C. Vermeiren, J. Coene & S. Van Dam (Eds.), *Tijd voor sociaal beleid. Armoedebestrijding op lokaal niveau* (pp.75-90). Leuven: ACCO.
6. Vermeiren, C., Raeymaeckers, P., & Beagles, J. E. (2018). The governance of lead organization networks: balancing efficiency and inclusiveness. Manuscript submitted for publication.
7. Van Haute, D., Roets, G., Baeck, I. & Vandenbroeck, M. (2017). Kinderarmoedebestrijding in de sociale beleidspraktijk: ervaringen van gezinnen in armoede. In P. Raeymaeckers, C. Noël, D. Boost, C. Vermeiren, J. Coene en S. Van Dam (Eds.), *Tijd voor sociaal beleid. Armoedebestrijding op lokaal niveau* (pp. 91-102). Leuven: ACCO.
8. Van Haute, D., Roets, G., Alasuutari, M., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2018). Managing the flow of private information on children and parents in poverty situations: creating a panoptic eye in inter-organisational networks? *Child & Family Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12433>

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