

**KU LEUVEN**

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**RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR  
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# **TOWARDS EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MENTORING PRACTICES FOR MIGRANT NEWCOMERS**

**A research-informed and practitioner-approved  
good practice guide**

Michelle Crijns & Peter De Cuyper



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This publication offers inspiration for organisations and/or local governments that would like to set up a mentoring programme. While our focus is specifically on the development of social mentoring programmes in which a mentor (volunteer) is matched with a migrant newcomer, this publication can also serve as a guide for mentoring programmes aimed at different target groups. This publication is also a starting point from which further insights and knowledge about ‘what works’ in social mentoring for newcomers will be built up gradually.

Social mentoring for newcomers is a new and emerging type of mentoring that has particularly gained in popularity in the wake of the European ‘refugee crisis’. While social participation is considered a key dimension of successful migrant integration, host countries often prioritise the labour market integration of newcomers. To address the need for social participation initiatives, social mentoring programmes for newcomers have proliferated in many migrant-receiving countries in recent years. They are known by a multitude of names including ‘buddy programmes’, ‘parrainage’, ‘mentoring’, and ‘Patenschaften’. While initially driven by civil society, this intervention has become increasingly institutionalised in some European countries, as exemplified by its prominent role in Flemish integration policy, where it will become a formal part of migrant integration policies (Reidsma & De Cuyper, 2021).

As a new and barely studied field, good practices of social mentoring for newcomers are largely unknown or anecdotal. While a meta-analysis of mentoring programmes shows that mentoring programmes are generally effective, the effects are limited in size (Eby et al., 2007; Dekker et al., 2013). In some instances, there may even be negative effects (see e.g. Rhodes, 2002). As such, it is argued that the final design of the programme – or how one develops mentoring in practice – will, to a large extent, determine its effects (Escudero, 2018). These findings also apply to social mentoring programmes, which is why it is important to systematically develop knowledge and expertise about ‘what works’ within social mentoring. By doing so, a high-quality programme can be provided to beneficiaries.

Building knowledge and expertise about ‘what works’ was one of the guiding principles of the AMIF project ORIENT8, which brings together HIVA-KU Leuven, Beyond the Horizon ISSG, the Municipality of Mechelen (Belgium), the Municipality of Nikaia-Rentis (Greece), and the Municipality of Sala (Sweden).

With the shared aim of developing high-quality and effective social mentoring for newcomers, the partners worked together on a number of outputs:

- An artificial intelligence-based matching tool: a tool which helps programme coordinators to match mentors and mentees using machine learning algorithms;
- A welcome app with information about the municipality that can be used during the mentoring relationship to help orientate the migrant newcomer;
- A guide with recommendations about how to set up a mentoring project based on the latest scientific insights, 10 Flemish case studies, and input from three pilot projects in the municipalities of Mechelen (Belgium), Nikaia-Rentis (Greece), and Sala (Sweden). It is this output that is covered in this publication.

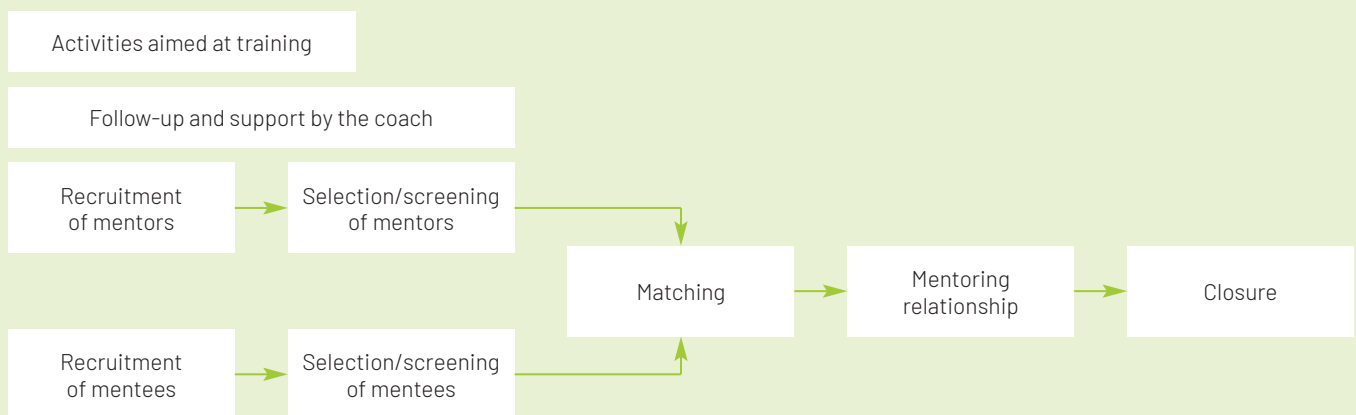
This publication is structured according to the mentoring process as described in figure 1.

For each of these components, we do the following:

- First, we examine which practices are considered (in)effective based on scientific research.
- Second, we discuss the experiences from practice and outline different modalities or modes of implementation. Case examples, tools and instruments are provided for illustrative purposes.
- Third, we offer a list of recommendations based on our findings in the previous two sections.

This publication is no ready-made manual for organising a social mentoring programme. After all, much depends on the local context and the intended purpose of the programme. What it does offer is suggestions and possible modalities that can help you set up or reflect on your mentoring programme as well as insights into what works and what does not. It is also not an end in itself but rather a starting point from which further insights and knowledge about ‘what works’ in social mentoring for newcomers will be built up gradually. To reflect this ongoing learning process, the guide will therefore be updated and enhanced regularly.

Figure 1. The mentoring proces



Source: De Cuyper e.a. (2022)



## 2

# DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MENTORING AND METHODOLOGY

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In this first chapter, we define the concept of 'social mentoring' and explain our methodology.

## 2.1 SOCIAL MENTORING FOR NEWCOMERS: A WORKING DEFINITION

As a starting point for our research, we first need to define and demarcate the concept of social mentoring for newcomers. While general definitions of mentoring offer a starting point, the unique challenges, objectives, and context of social mentoring for newcomers demand a definition that distinguishes it from other types of mentoring.

Even though there is no single definition of mentoring, one of the more traditional and generally applicable definitions defines mentoring as 'a transformative relationship in which an experienced person helps a less experienced person realise their personal and professional goals' (Kram, 1985; Levinson, 1978, in Yip & Kram, 2017, p. 88).

Many researchers have built and expanded on this definition, although some defining characteristics remain similar across the diverse range of definitions.

When looking at similar types of mentoring for inspiration, 'mentoring-to-work' for newcomers stands out. De Cuyper et al. (2019) identified seven 'building blocks' for migrant mentoring to work, which also provide useful insights for our research. The seven key attributes are:

1. The mentor has more knowledge and experience about a set objective than the mentee.
2. The mentoring relationship facilitates the growth of the mentee.
3. The mentoring relationship has an objective that is clear to both parties.
4. The relationship between the mentor and mentee is the active ingredient of mentoring and while not a goal itself, it is a pre-condition necessary to work towards other objectives.
5. The mentor and mentee voluntarily commit to the mentoring relationship.
6. While asymmetrical, the mentoring relationship is reciprocal in nature.
7. A third actor (organisation) facilitates and supervises the mentoring relationship.

Using the seven building blocks, De Cuyper et al. (2019, p. 117) arrive at the following definition of migrant mentoring to work:

**A person with more localised experience (mentor) provides guidance to a person with less experience (mentee), the objective of which is to support the mentee in making sustainable progress in his or her journey into the labour market. Both mentor and mentee voluntarily commit to this and establish contact on a regular basis. The relationship is initiated, facilitated, and supported by a third actor (organisation). While asymmetrical, the mentoring relationship is of a reciprocal nature.**

Through our research into social mentoring programmes for newcomers, we find that all seven attributes are supported by practitioners. Another interesting definition is the one used by Prieto-Flores & Feu Gelis (2018), who define social mentoring programmes as 'those programs that encourage new peer or group relationships with the aim of influencing the social inclusion of people who are at risk of social exclusion' (p. 151).

Taking these definitions, which are applicable to a similar target group (De Cuyper et al., 2019) and type of mentoring (Prieto-Flores & Feu Gelis, 2018), we can begin to formulate a definition for social mentoring for migrant newcomers. To distinguish the definition of social mentoring for newcomers from other forms of mentoring, we further specify its target groups (members of the host society and migrant newcomers) as well as its overarching goal (to support the social participation and integration of the mentee). In doing so, we arrive at the following (working) definition for social mentoring for newcomers:

**A person from the host society (mentor) provides guidance to a migrant newcomer (mentee), the objective of which is to support the social participation and integration of the mentee. Both mentor and mentee voluntarily commit to this and establish contact on a regular basis. The relationship is initiated, facilitated, and supported by a third actor (organisation). While asymmetrical, the mentoring relationship is of a reciprocal nature.**

## 2.2 METHODOLOGY

As noted previously, the field of social mentoring for newcomers is new and scientific research on effective practices is lacking. However, the mentoring process is similar for different kinds of mentoring.

Broadly speaking, each mentoring programme has the same structure with a variation in modalities. Concretely, we distinguish between the following components:

- **Recruitment** of mentors and mentees: this includes all activities aimed at guiding mentors and mentees to the mentoring programme;
- **Selection and screening** of mentors and mentees: during this step, mentors and mentees are assessed based on their eligibility for the programme and their characteristics and needs;
- **Matching** mentors and mentees: the process of determining the most suitable match for mentors and mentees;
- The actual **mentoring relationship** during which mentors and mentees engage in activities together at regular intervals and for a certain duration in order to achieve the objectives of the programme;
- **Closing**: the (formal) ending of the mentoring relationship and process;
- **Follow-up and support** for mentors and mentees throughout the mentoring process;
- **Training** for mentors and mentees to improve their mentoring relationship and its outcomes.

To write the guidelines, we started from these components and relied on several sources to get insights into effective practices within social mentoring for newcomers. As research on the topic is limited, we developed a 3-step approach, taking both practice-based and research-based evidence into account. As a first step, an extensive literature review was conducted. Secondly, we studied 10 Flemish social mentoring programmes to gain a better understanding of social mentoring in practice. Based on the literature review and the Flemish cases, recommendations were formulated. These recommendations and guidelines were subsequently implemented and tested in our three partner municipalities Sala (Sweden), Nikaia-Rentis (Greece), and Mechelen (Belgium). Their experiences and insights allowed us to further define and adjust the guidelines and recommendations, the result of which is the present publication.

### 2.2.1 Literature review

First, a literature review was conducted using keywords such as 'mentoring', 'social mentoring', 'migrant mentoring', 'refugee mentoring', 'intercultural mentoring', 'buddies', and 'mentor immigrants'. We then focused on mentoring journals such as the *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* to look for context-specific literature. Because there was little scientific research conducted within the field of social mentoring for migrants, the literature review was expanded to include influential research in other fields of mentoring (work, youth).

### 2.2.2 Case studies

As the research on social mentoring for newcomers is limited, we mainly had to rely on 'practice-based evidence'. This is 'evidence' based on experience practitioners have acquired in conducting social mentoring programmes. As a second step, we then studied 10 Flemish examples of social mentoring programmes for newcomers. Since we are interested in experiences concerning modalities, critical success factors and lessons learned, we only included initiatives with at least several years of experience to ensure that their input is sufficiently based on experience. We also tried to include a diverse range of initiatives to ensure the applicability of the guidelines to all three partner cities (Sala, Mechelen and Nikaia-Agios Ioannis Rentis) as well as the EU community at large.

The following criteria were taken into account:

- **The size of the municipality:** We ensured a diverse range of cities, ranging from the largest Flemish city of Ghent (>250,000) to the small city of Izegem (<30,000). This diversity in location and scale could prove useful in determining whether certain best practices are dependent on such contextual criteria. What works in a large city might not work or be critical to the success of an initiative in a small municipality, and vice versa.
- **Governance of the project:** Some of the cases are organised by a local government (Izegem), a government agency (Fedasil), an NGO (Halle Zonder Grenzen), or through a partnership between multiple actors (Compagnons Ostend).
- **Target group:** Even though we only included social mentoring initiatives for newcomers in our search, the target groups of the programmes still differed slightly and included newcomers in general (Hasselt, Leuven, Izegem), asylum seekers in reception centres (Fedasil, Samen Gentenaar, Tandem), and newcomer families (Tandem). Other cases direct their initiatives at vulnerable groups in general but specifically mention newcomers as one of their target groups (Compagnons).
- **Type of mentoring:** The type of mentoring may differ significantly, even within one initiative or mentoring relationship, depending on needs and challenges of individual newcomers. We identified several types of mentoring (which may overlap or coexist), such as mentoring focused on practical and administrative assistance, social activities, cultural activities, housing, learning the language, sports, and emotional support.
- **Matching practices:** Mentors and newcomers are typically matched based on common interests, but other factors, such as age, gender, language, attitudes, and preferences may be considered depending on the initiative. This last criterion was informed by the objectives of the Orient8 project. One of the goals of the project is the development of a smart matching tool. By including a range of initiatives with various matching methods and criteria, we will gain a better understanding of best practices and critical success factors for matching, which will help us improve our own matching tool.



Taking into account all these elements, the diversity of the selected initiatives will help us better understand what works for whom, where, when and why.

The ten selected Flemish cases are the following:

1. Fedasil (nationwide)
2. Thuis in Menen (TIM)
3. Samen Thuis in Hasselt
4. Buddy programme Leuven
5. Halle Zonder Grenzen
6. IN-Gent: Samen Gentenaar
7. IN-Gent: Tandem
8. Compagnons Ostend
9. Compagnons Bruges
10. Buddy programme Izegem

In total, we conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with 17 project coordinators and staff members, and 8 participants, between April and August of 2021. In our interviews with coordinators and staff, we asked exploratory questions about the different dimensions of the mentoring process and continued with more targeted questions to gather their insights on criteria found in the research literature. Additionally, we received and analysed relevant documents from each social mentoring programme. These included intake forms, recruitment materials, information brochures and leaflets, newsletters, grant applications, and materials for information and training sessions, some of which the researchers also attended. We then coded the data and conducted a thematic analysis in order to identify common themes and patterns.

In addition to our main data sources, we also gathered information from a 'learning network' which was set up in early 2021 to prepare for the introduction of a Flemish policy measure which seeks to strengthen newcomers' social networks and increase their participation in society through mentoring, internships, volunteering, and other similar initiatives. This policy measure was tested in 26 pilots. A learning network was set up in order to support the pilot projects and gather experiences and knowledge. For the guidelines, we consulted notes from three learning network meetings as well as experiences, insights, and documents shared with the researchers. The main purpose of this information was to examine if any modalities or modes of implementation were missing, cross-verify our findings, and supplement them where necessary.

### 2.2.3 Testing in 3 pilot projects

Based on our various data sources, we were able to formulate a set of recommendations for each phase of a social mentoring programme for newcomers. These recommendations were implemented by the three municipalities in our project. The recommendations are formulated to be both applicable in different contexts and specific enough to work in the contexts of our three partners. We held (online) evaluation workshops with the municipalities on a regular basis to discuss how the implementation was progressing. At the end of the project, a two-day workshop was held, which sought to address two main questions: (1) whether the guidelines had actually been implemented, and how they were implemented (process evaluation); and (2) whether they were effective in relation to the goals of the programme (evaluation of the effectiveness). Due to the COVID pandemic and the delays it caused in the programmes, the testing phase and the number of matches were limited. As a result, we have more information about the first phases of the mentoring process than about later phases. In addition, we do not have substantial data that can offer insights in terms of effectiveness, since few mentoring relationships had already concluded by the end of the Orient8 project. We did however gather some insights about the applicability of the guidelines and adapted them accordingly. The results of the evaluation approach and workshop can be found in a separate report (Reidsma & De Cuyper, 2023). Most of the experiences and findings did not differ from the Flemish cases. If other modalities, insights or modes of implementation emerged, we integrated them in our findings.

# 3

## RECRUITING MENTORS AND MENTEES

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**One of the first steps of any mentoring programme is the recruitment of its participants. In this chapter, we discuss elements relevant to recruitment, such as recruitment channels and methods as well as recruitment materials and the content of such materials. After briefly discussing the limited research that is available on the topic, we present experiences from practice and outline different modalities in terms of recruitment. Based on our findings, we conclude the chapter with a list of recommendations for the recruitment of mentors and mentees for social mentoring programmes for newcomers.**

### 3.1 ACCORDING TO THE LITERATURE

Research on recruitment strategies is limited and predominantly descriptive. While insights from literature can illustrate common practices, they do not provide sufficient evidence to ascertain the effectiveness of specific recruitment channels and strategies. Which type of recruitment works best will be largely determined by the context and goals of a mentoring programme. A few lessons can nevertheless be drawn. Existing quality labels within the broader field of mentoring, which are often supported by research, do emphasise the importance of accurate and realistic information about what the programme entails. Sanyal (2017) found that recruitment of mentees who do not fully understand the context and expectations of the programme can have a negative impact on the mentoring relationship and result in premature termination. The importance of collaboration with other organisations and networking is also emphasised in the literature (De Cuyper et al., 2021). Purkayashta & De Cuyper (2019) refer to this as a multi-stakeholder recruitment approach.

While there is a lack of research on recruitment methods, some studies do emphasise the importance of word-of-mouth recruitment. An evaluation of the Canadian Host program, which targeted newcomers, found that one-third of participants was recruited through word of mouth (CIC, 2010). An Australian study on the Given the Chance Project (Mestan, 2008), which focused on refugees, cited word of mouth as a key recruitment strategy. In general, volunteerism increases when people are directly asked to participate in a voluntary activity by someone they know. Such personal connections also help to create positive views of the organisation and activity (Furano et al., 1993; Stukas & Tanti, 2005; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). However, research suggests that programmes should use more than one recruitment method and ensure recruitment messages reach potential candidates on more than one occasion to be effective (MENTOR, 2015; Mestan, 2008).

### 3.2 IN PRACTICE

#### 3.2.1 Recruiting mentors

In the recruitment phase, we can distinguish between a number of elements, namely the actual **channels** through which a programme recruits its participants and the available methods that are used for this, the **materials** that programs use and the **message** that those materials convey. In this section, we provide an overview of such elements for the recruitment of mentors.

**Table 1. Mentor recruitment**

| CHANNELS AND METHODS   |
|--|
| Website of the project/organisation  |
| External websites, such as general volunteering websites                                     |
| Social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube  |
| Traditional media: newspapers, magazines, radio  |
| Internal recruitment (e.g. volunteers from other projects of the organisation)               |
| Retention of current mentors   |
| Other organisations: cities and municipalities, civil society and/or volunteer organisations |
| Word of mouth  |
| Targeted recruitment   |
| MATERIALS  |
| Brochures, posters and flyers  |
| Presentations  |
| Online promotional content: videos, photos, articles, social media posts                     |
| Newsletters  |

### 3.2.1.1 Channels and methods

In practice, social mentoring programmes for newcomers use a variety of recruitment channels and methods to recruit new mentors. Van Dooren and De Cuyper (2015) distinguish between passive and active recruitment. Passive recruitment occurs via the general marketing channels of a programme, such as its website, social media, and flyers, whereas active recruitment requires more direct action on the part of the organisation, such as giving a presentation or sharing information at an event. While some social mentoring programmes ask new candidates how they found or learned about the programme, this is not done on a structural basis and most programmes do not keep data on the most common and effective channels.

Nevertheless, several recruitment channels stand out among the programmes when it comes to the recruitment of mentors. Many volunteers find programmes 'by themselves', meaning they deliberately search for mentoring programmes for newcomers or similar volunteering opportunities by type of work and/or target group. This is where programmes can benefit significantly from their own as well as external channels, both online and elsewhere. Organisations advertise their mentoring programmes on their own website, social media and via materials such as brochures and flyers.

#### An example of a unique recruitment campaign

At the end of 2019, the mentoring programme in Leuven opted for a rather unique recruitment strategy. They distributed new year's cards with the message 'We wish you a buddy for 2020'. Similar messages were also shown on screens in city hall and in front of the city's university buildings. The campaign garnered a lot of attention and gave the programme a boost. Nowadays, they primarily rely on word-of-mouth advertising.

To increase their reach among the population, most programmes also advertise via external channels such as [UNHCR](#), [Give a Day, 11.11.11](#), and the [Flemish Center for Volunteering](#). Recruitment via traditional channels such as newspapers, magazines, and radio are less common but still used by some, especially in smaller municipalities.

Mentoring programmes that are organised by local governments or larger organisations also regularly benefit from internal recruitment where volunteers transfer between programmes of the same organisation or agency. Wellknown and established organisers can thus benefit from an already existing network and volunteer base to build and expand their mentoring programme.

However, some programmes may opt to supplement their regular recruitment channels with more targeted recruitment methods. A targeted approach can be particularly useful when an organisation wishes to diversify their mentor pool, recruit volunteers with specific skill sets or backgrounds, or recruit a mentor with a particular mentee in mind (i.e. recruiting on a case-by-case basis).

#### Targeted recruitment in practice

The coordinator of the mentoring programme in Izegem calls local schools to ask for the contact information of teachers who are retiring that same year in the hopes of recruiting them as mentors.

One of the ORIENT8 project partners, the municipality of Nikaia-Rentis in Greece, targeted their recruitment at students. Their motivations for doing so were multiple:

- Students are (mostly) young, highly motivated and open to learn and gain new experiences such as mentoring a newcomer and participating in training sessions;
- Students were expected to have more spare time to devote to the mentoring programme than other potential mentor groups;
- Involving students would allow the programme to disseminate the methodology, values and principles of ORIENT8 to a large network;
- By participating in the programme, young people would learn from each other through group training sessions, build a small community in which they could share ideas, thoughts and experiences, and enrich their experience with methodologies and ideas that would benefit them in their future (professional) development.

The mentoring programme team approached universities by sending emails and had meetings with professors and internship coordinators. They, in turn, informed their students and sent lists with interested candidates to the programme. The programme then contacted these candidates individually and scheduled group meetings with them in order to offer additional information and start the mentor training course. The targeted recruitment approach used by the mentoring programme in Nikaia-Rentis proved successful, with about 80% of all participating volunteers having been recruited from this targeted student pool.

Once a mentoring programme has become more well-known among the local population, word-of-mouth advertising often becomes an important recruitment channel. While interested candidates may find a programme via this channel, programmes do strongly suggest combining word-of-mouth recruitment with other recruitment channels and strategies.



According to one coordinator, relying too much on passive recruitment such as word-of-mouth can create a false sense of security that could harm recruitment efforts over time as programmes start to neglect innovation, fall behind competing programmes, and lose some of their name recognition among new generations and hitherto untapped groups in the local community.

**Keeping up with the times**

When Compagnons started in 2016, their first few info sessions would often attract 60 to 70 attendees, with about 50 of them immediately signing up for the programme during the event. Over time, as the novelty wore off and the number of local projects targeted at newcomers increased, it became more and more difficult to attract new mentors. To breathe new life into the program, coordinators recently overhauled their entire approach. They improved their internal organisation, changed the structure of the programme, and updated their lay-out in hopes of attracting a new and younger group of volunteers. While such tasks are usually not high on the list of a coordinator’s responsibilities and priorities, it can be necessary to ensure the durability of a programme.

While new programmes benefit from their novelty as people flock to what is new, fresh, and exciting, retention of mentors becomes an important recruitment strategy the longer a programme is operative. By retaining their mentors, programmes can build a reliable pool of volunteers and help to improve the longevity of their programme.

### 3.2.1.2 Materials and message

In addition to the channels and methods that facilitate the recruitment of mentors, it is also important to pay attention to the message that is conveyed to potential candidates via such channels. Programmes often use flyers, posters, brochures, newsletters, and online content such as videos and social media posts to recruit mentors. One element that many programmes emphasise is that the materials that programmes use for recruitment do not merely provide a promotional message but also set expectations early on. Coordinators especially stress the importance of clearly defining the role of a mentor and what is - and, importantly, what is not - expected from them during the mentoring relationship with a mentee. Due to the novelty of ‘social mentoring’ in many countries, our international pilot projects stress the importance of introducing this concept first in order to ensure successful subsequent participant recruitment.

Multiple mentoring organisations furthermore recommend using mentor testimonials that highlight the added value as well as the difficulties or limitations of mentoring. By having (former) participants talk about their own experiences, potential candidates can get a better ‘feel’ for the programme and the role they will be expected to fulfil. Visual tools such as video testimonials are also helpful to draw attention to the programme and make it stand out from its competitors.

**UNHCR recruitment campaign**

To promote social mentoring projects in Belgium, UNHCR published several [video testimonials](#) in which mentors and mentees talk about their experience with social mentoring as part of a larger recruitment campaign. According to Samen Gentenaar, one of the programmes that [participated](#) in the recruitment campaign, this was a wonderful opportunity for them which boosted their programme once the videos went viral on social media.

**Testimonials**

The mentoring programme in Leuven provides a video testimonial on its own [website](#) in which a duo talks about their experiences and the benefits of participating in the programme. Similarly, Fedasil offers written [mentor testimonials](#) on their mentor recruitment page, as does [Halle](#).

**Examples of other recruitment materials**

[Fedasil ‘word buddy’ flyers](#)  
[City of Leuven: ‘We wish you a buddy’](#)

## Case Tandem

Tandem is a social mentoring programme in Ghent, Belgium, that matches newcomer families with mentors. The mentor speaks Dutch and the mother tongue or other language spoken by the family. Together, they will engage in recreational activities for a period of six months and get to know organisations in the city of Ghent whose services match the needs of the family. To recruit families, Tandem works together with referrers. Their cooperation follows a number of successive steps:

1. The referrer contacts Tandem when they want to register a family for the mentoring programme.
2. The programme coordinator provides the referrer with an intake form and the promo video of the programme.
3. The referrer shows the promo video to the family, fills in the intake form – preferably together with the family – and sends it back.
4. The coordinator decides whether the newcomers can participate based on the programme's participation criteria, which are:
  - They are a family.
  - The family lives in Ghent, their living situation is stable.
  - The family is intrinsically motivated to participate in the mentoring programme.
  - The family can commit themselves to do activities with the mentor twice a month for 6 months.
  - The family is willing to participate in group activities and training sessions.
  - The family agrees with the arrangements made by the organisation with the mentor and the family.
  - The family agrees with the objectives of Tandem and respects the framework.
  - The family is willing to sign the organisation's privacy policy document during the start-up meeting.
5. The coordinator reports the decision back to the referrer. There are three possible scenarios:
  - **The family can participate immediately.** If the family complies with all the participation criteria and a mentor is available, the family can start their process at Tandem. The coordinator will contact the referrer, the mentor, and the family to schedule a first meeting.
  - **The family cannot participate in Tandem.** The coordinator contacts the referrer and explains why the family cannot participate.
  - **The family is placed on the waiting list.** If the family can participate but there is no mentor available, they will be placed on the waiting list. The coordinator will start looking for a mentor. As soon as a mentor is available, the coordinator will contact the referrer and the family.
6. If the family qualifies and a mentor is available, the coordinator schedules a first meeting with the mentor, the family, and the referrer.
7. Ideally, the mentor and the family are given some time to consider the match and, if they want to move forward, are invited for a final start-up meeting.



### 3.2.2 Recruiting mentees

There are numerous strategies for the recruitment of mentees, many of which are similar to the approaches used for mentor recruitment. Again, a distinction can be made between active and passive forms of recruitment (Van Dooren and De Cuyper, 2015). While it is difficult to make conclusive statements about the effectiveness of a specific recruitment strategy, some mentee recruitment strategies are decidedly more common and favoured among social mentoring programmes.

**Table 2. Mentee recruitment**

| CHANNELS AND METHODS   |
|--|
| Website of the project/organisation  |
| Social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube  |
| Traditional media: newspapers, magazines, radio  |
| Internal recruitment (e.g. via other services/projects of the mentoring organisation)  |
| Partnerships and referrals from other organisations and service providers: social worker, language and civic integration teachers, schools, public employment services, Public Centres for Social Welfare (Belgium), integration services, asylum centres, cities and municipalities |
| Active information dissemination (e.g. giving presentations in language classes)   |
| Word of mouth  |
| MATERIALS  |
| Brochures, posters and flyers  |
| Presentations  |
| Online promotional content: videos, photos, articles   |
| Newsletters  |

#### 3.2.2.1 Channels and methods

While mentor recruitment relies significantly on channels such as (social) media and word of mouth, mentee recruitment tends to be more characterised by partnerships and referrals. As recent immigrants, potential mentees may not have the social network, language skills or familiarity with local media to learn about social mentoring programmes via the channels that are commonly used to attract mentors. They are, however, usually in contact with practitioners and service providers, particularly during the early stages of arrival and integration. Most social mentoring programmes that target newcomers thus initiate informal partnerships with organisations and other service providers that are regularly in contact with the intended target group of the mentoring programme. Common examples of such partners include social workers, language and civic integration teachers, schools, public employment services, Public Centres for Social Welfare (Belgium), integration agencies and services, and asylum centres.

#### Recruitment: a mentee's perspective

'I heard about it from other refugees in the beginning, but I didn't know what it was all about. I asked my social worker and they explained it all and after that, I signed up. At that point, I had just received refugee status, ended up in [city] and I did not have enough friends. I wanted someone to help me with schoolwork et cetera. I heard from someone else that the mentor helped them with their driver's license. This was not the case for me, but I immediately got the sense that it wasn't just about that but also about doing things together, going on a city trip, doing a hobby together. So, what I wanted was to match with someone who already lived in [city] and follow them a bit to find my way.'

To recruit mentees via such organisations and services, mentoring programmes need to inform their partners of the specificities of the mentoring programme and make agreements about who can be referred to the programme, ask permission to distribute flyers, brochures, and posters at the premises of the partner organisation, and send information about the programme to employees of the organisation or service. By relying on such information, partners are able to refer suitable potential mentees to the mentoring programme.

Even though cooperating with external partners is one of the most common channels for the recruitment of newcomer mentees, it does come with its own challenges. By relying on others for referrals, programmes lose some control over the recruitment process. Coordinators identified various challenges that are common in partnership-based recruitment, such as insufficient communication between partners, and sporadic and/or unsuitable referrals. This last problem usually occurs because partners are not sufficiently informed or knowledgeable about the selection and participation criteria of the mentoring programme, refer newcomers for needs that require professional assistance rather than volunteer services, or refer people without informing them (properly) what they are signing up for. Most mentoring programme coordinators, for example, recalled intake interviews with candidates who clearly lacked a basic understanding of the programme and its objectives and/or did not appear motivated to commit to a mentoring relationship.

Such challenges have spurred changes in the partnership-based recruitment strategies of mentoring organisations. One programme chose to prioritise referrals from second language teachers, since the latter appeared more familiar with the individual needs and suitability of their newcomer pupils than their social workers. To improve communication between the mentoring organisation and its partners and to ensure partners convey correct and up-to-date information to the target group and refer suitable candidates to the programme, another programme introduced annual meetings with its main partners.

During these meetings, they give a presentation in which they reiterate the purpose of the mentoring programme, the target group, participation criteria, the role of the mentor, the structure of the programme, and any other relevant information or updates referrers need to be aware of. By learning from common challenges and introducing small changes to their recruitment strategy, programmes can significantly reduce the screening and selection needs during the next phase of the mentoring programme.

#### How to ensure candidates are motivated and willing

The social mentoring programme of the municipality of Leuven asks its referrers to obtain permission from a potential candidate before referring them to the mentoring programme and initiating the application process.

#### Improving the quality of referrals

Tandem developed an 'information flow' document for its partners, which covers topics such as the goals of the programme, the role of the mentor, participation criteria, an overview of the mentoring process, and what is expected from the referrer. The document is regularly updated and shared with partners to ensure optimal cooperation and referral.

While programmes often rely on external partners for their recruitment of mentees, they may also adopt more active recruitment methods, such as presenting the mentoring programme in a language class for newcomers. A significant benefit of this approach is the direct communication between programme staff and the target group during the recruitment phase, which takes away some of the risks associated with referrals. Nevertheless, time constraints make this a less popular recruitment strategy among mentoring programmes.

Several mentoring organisations note that once a programme has become better known among the target group and other organisations and a growing number of mentees have participated, word-of-mouth advertising can take over from other recruitment channels. This is particularly the case when a mentoring programme is organised by a well-known organisation or service provider such as a municipality, a local agency for integration, or an established non-profit organisation. Most newcomers will become familiar with such organisations and agencies upon or soon after arrival and might even benefit from other services and programmes they offer.

If newcomers are interested in the mentoring programme, they will thus often apply out of their own volition or can be easily identified and recruited through internal recruitment channels of the organisation or agency. It is nevertheless emphasised that word-of-mouth advertising should never be the only channel, as not every mentee benefits from an extensive social network and it is exactly these more isolated individuals who could significantly benefit from a social mentor.

### 3.2.2.2 Materials and message

Materials that are often used for the recruitment of mentees include flyers, posters, brochures, presentations, and online content, such as social media posts, videos, and other visuals. The main concerns that social mentoring programmes must take into account when developing recruitment materials for mentees are the language and communication style. Similar to mentor recruitment materials, the goal of the mentoring relationship and the role of the mentor and mentee must be explained. Programmes may, however, choose to simplify the language slightly for mentees, explain certain terms they might not be familiar with (such as 'buddy', a term typically used for social mentors in Flanders but relatively unfamiliar to many newcomers), and/or offer materials in multiple languages. Visual materials, such as photos, videos and other images, can also draw more attention to the programme than written materials and can help bridge a language barrier. An added benefit is that such materials can be used by referrers to help explain the programme to potential candidates.

#### Recruitment flyers for mentees

For inspiration, we refer to the [Tandem flyer](#) and the [Samen Gentenaar flyer](#).

#### An example from Ghent

Tandem asks its referrers to show [a promotional video](#) to interested newcomers before referring them to the mentoring programme to ensure candidates are properly informed. The video is only 1 minute long and available in Somali, Pashtu, Farsi, and Arabic.

### 3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above, the following recommendations can be formulated:

- Programmes should use the recruitment channels that are most suitable for their target group and context. It is recommended that programmes use a variety of recruitment channels to attract a diverse pool of candidates and improve the sustainability of the programme.
  - For mentees it is recommended to invest in partnerships, referrals and an active outreach and recruitment strategy (e.g. language classes);
  - For mentors a strategy including (social) media is recommended.
- Once programmes gain more familiarity among the local population, word of mouth can partly take over from other recruitment channels. However, it is important that programmes do not rely on this as the only channel, as not every mentee has an extensive social network.
- Programmes should develop a variety of promotional materials that are made readily available to the target group and referrers, online and/or via physical materials such as posters, flyers, and brochures. Promotional materials should be updated and redistributed when needed.
- If programmes (want to) use referrals as one of their recruitment strategies, they should:
  - Maintain (informal) partnerships with other organisations and services who are in contact with the target group(s) of the program;
  - Ask referrers to inform potential candidates about the programme, show them promotional materials, and obtain their permission to initiate the application process;
  - Keep referrers informed about the programme and communicate any changes to its participation or selection criteria or other key aspects of the programme in a timely manner;
  - Provide referrers with promotional materials to attract the target group and help them explain the programme to interested candidates before referring them to the programme;
  - Supplement referrals with other recruitment strategies to effectively reach the intended target group.
- Programmes should use simple, visual tools, clear language, and translation tools to explain the purpose of social mentoring, the specificities of the programme, and the role of the mentor and mentee to ensure participants enter the programme with appropriate expectations.



# 4

## SCREENING AND SELECTING MENTORS AND MENTEES

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**After the recruitment of potential mentors and mentees, programmes will have to screen and select candidates to ensure participants are a good fit for the programme. When it comes to screening and selection, a distinction can be made between the selection criteria and the actual method of screening and selection. We will discuss both in this chapter. After briefly discussing the limited research that is available on the topic, we present experiences from practice. Based on our findings, we conclude the chapter with a list of recommendations.**

## 4.1 ACCORDING TO THE LITERATURE

Successful screening of candidates lays the foundation for a successful match and can significantly reduce the likelihood of problems in the mentoring relationship (Bradshaw & Haddock, 1998; DuBois et al., 2002). While there is a lack of literature on the screening and selection of mentors and mentees, particularly when it comes to social mentoring and/or mentoring for newcomers, research on other types of mentoring, such as mentoring to work and youth mentoring, provides some relevant insights.

In a literature and 'best practices' review conducted in the framework of the Memore project (2019), Purkayastha and De Cuyper conclude that a clear formulation of screening criteria for both mentors and mentees is important for the success of a mentoring to work programme for two reasons. First, clear criteria ensure that only a specific group of the population is targeted. Second, by being aware that there is a link between certain criteria and successful outcomes, a programme can better ensure the success of the mentoring relationship and the programme in general. To promote a successful outcome, Purkayastha and De Cuyper (2019) point out that the screening criteria should be closely aligned with the objectives of the mentoring programme.

When determining whether a potential volunteer will be a good fit for the mentoring programme, Van Robaeys & Lyssens-Danneboom (2016) found that almost 60% of the programmes in their evaluation research on mentoring programmes in Flanders use a desired potential volunteer 'profile' based on a set of selection criteria. They found that programmes commonly use criteria such as age (usually 18+), personal stability and resilience, an open attitude - particularly in terms of diversity and difference - and commitment (availability, willingness to participate in training, openness to feedback and follow-up) to the programme. According to Van Dooren and De Cuyper (2015), a mentee's motivation is one of the most important factors in a successful relationship and thus a crucial participation criterion. Additionally, Behnia (2007) found that organisations that offer social mentoring programmes in Australia, Canada, England and the United States considered the motivation of potential mentors to be an important screening and selection criterion. The importance of both mentee and mentor motivation is further underscored by Van 't Hoog et al. (2012).

In addition to motivation, many authors emphasise the importance of taking participants' expectations into consideration during the screening and selection phase. In his study on effective mentors and mentees, Sanyal (2017) notes that mentees who enter a mentoring programme without fully understanding the context and expectations of the programme are detrimental to its success. Madia and Lutz (2004) studied Big Brothers/Big Sisters programmes and found that a discrepancy between a mentor's initial expectations of the mentoring relationship and their actual post-match experiences can significantly influence the relationship. Mentors with high negative discrepancies between their expectations and experiences reported less relationship depth, were less likely to report that they 'liked' their mentees and were less likely to express an interest to remain in the relationship (Madia & Lutz, 2004). According to the authors, these findings underline the importance of assessing - and, if needed, adjusting - candidates' expectations.

To set realistic expectations early on, MENTOR (2015) suggests providing prospective candidates with written eligibility criteria. By adequately describing the requirements, rewards and challenges of mentoring, programmes can avoid unfulfilled expectations and unsuccessful relationships. However, unrealistic expectations might be cause for dismissal, as Van Robaeys and Lyssens-Danneboom (2016) found. A mismatch between the expectations of a mentor and the programme was an important reason for rejecting certain candidates during the screening and selection process of the mentoring programmes they studied.

In terms of the actual method of screening, research primarily focuses on (the benefits of) personal intake interviews. To check whether candidates are suitable to participate in the mentoring programme, Van Robaeys and Lyssens-Danneboom (2016) found that the vast majority (89%) of programmes opt for an oral interview. Similarly, a guide by Foreningen Nydansker (2017) based on the experiences of three mentoring programmes for highly skilled refugees recommends using a combination of intake forms and (telephone) interviews during the screening phase. Van Dooren and De Cuyper (2015) have identified several benefits of face-to-face intake interviews for both mentees and mentors: (1) they allow for more detailed information about the needs and wishes of the candidate to be obtained; (2) they can give insight into a candidate's personality; (3) they make it easier to gauge the motivation and drive of a candidate; and (4) a candidate's expectations can be checked and adjusted if needed. Especially the last two benefits are crucial for a mentoring relationship to be successful and to avoid frustration and drop-out.

## 4.2 IN PRACTICE

### 4.2.1 Screening and selecting mentors

When it comes to screening and selecting mentors, we make a distinction between the selection criteria used by the mentoring programme and the actual method of screening and selection.

#### 4.2.1.1 Selection criteria

Programmes must screen potential mentors to determine if they are a good fit for the mentoring programme. To do so, they rely on a set of selection criteria. In the following table, we have listed some of the most common criteria for the selection of mentors in social mentoring programmes for newcomers.

**Table 3. Mentor selection criteria**

|   |
|---|
| Expectations  |
| Personality characteristics                         |
| Motivation  |
| Age   |
| Language skills                                     |
| Place of residence                                  |
| Availability and ability to commit to the programme |

Selection criteria can be diverse. They are informed by the objectives of the mentoring programme, the profile of the mentee(s), and the way in which a mentor and mentee will be matched. Since social mentoring relationships are relatively informal, participation criteria tend to be less strict than in many other types of mentoring programmes. Criteria can range from a minimum age to having the right expectations. Below are some practical examples of the most common selection criteria.

#### Selecting by age

Programmes typically have a minimum age requirement, with 18+ being the most common. While younger people can mentor, this usually falls outside the scope of social mentoring programmes for newcomers, which tend to focus on adults.

While the minimum age requirement for mentees is not always strictly applied, the age requirement for mentors usually is, to ensure candidates have the maturity and experience needed to be a good mentor to a newcomer.

#### Selection criteria in practice

In an official volunteer vacancy for mentors, Thuis in Menen describes its ideal mentor as follows:

- Someone who is motivated
- Available for half a day once a week
- Has basic knowledge of English or French
- Is open to other cultures
- Can deal with the context of an asylum seeker in a healthy way
- Able to keep a distance
- Has a positive attitude and likes to share this with others

#### Selection criteria in practice

Compagnons Bruges expects the following from its mentors (you can read their mentor vacancy [here](#)):

- You are sociable and have a healthy dose of empathy
- You like to show people around your city
- You have a feel for diversity and want to get to work with our superdiverse community
- You have time (about twice a month) and feel like sharing your free time with someone
- You live in Bruges and know the city well
- You speak Dutch



While speaking the local language is a basic selection criterion for mentoring programmes, the required level of comprehension can differ based on the goals of the programme.

**An alternative approach**

Tandem is a social mentoring programme that matches newcomer families with ex-newcomers as well as people with a migration background who speak the same language in addition to (some level of) Dutch. ‘Personally, I think it is an added value for both the organisation and the participating families that the mentors are persons with a migration background who themselves have often gone through an integration process. Because of this, the mentors have insights, experiences, and are often able to assess the reality and the needs of the participating families.’

Criteria that are more difficult to screen for than age or language but are deemed particularly important by mentoring programmes include a candidate’s expectations, personality, and motivation. In terms of expectations, programmes stress the importance of ensuring that a potential mentor’s expectations align with the expectations and objectives of the programme and the mentees.

During the screening and selection phase, programmes often have a certain ‘profile’ in mind which illustrates their ideal (or at least preferable) mentor. In terms of personality, characteristics that are typically desired include being social, having patience, being supportive, taking initiative, and showing an openness to diversity.

By sharing a detailed mentor profile via official recruitment channels and clearly communicating the selection criteria, candidates can already decide for themselves if they are the right fit for the programme. There is thus a phase of self-selection that precedes the screening and selection carried out by the programme. In this way, while most candidates who are screened and selected comply with basic criteria such as age and language, programmes can still filter out candidates based on other factors, such as the previously mentioned expectations and personality characteristics.

**What to look for in a mentor**

One of the coordinators of the mentoring programme of Fedasil, the Belgian federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers, looks for someone who:

- is enthusiastic and eager to get started
- has social skills, can keep a conversation going and can make others feel at ease
- has the right (not too high!) expectations
- is flexible, patient and shows perseverance to make the mentoring relationship work

**Finding the right mentor**

According to one of the coordinators of Compagnons, to be a good mentor ‘you have to be open to diversity and be able to deal with it because there are also cultural differences, the way you meet up with people is sometimes different, sometimes not everything is clear in messages or on the phone, or there is miscommunication, misunderstanding. You can’t let yourself get derailed too easily.’

**Filtering out paternalism in the selection phase**

One of the main concerns that several coordinators seek to reduce through screening and selection is paternalistic behaviour of mentors. Rather than attempting to correct paternalistic mentoring approaches during a mentor-mentee relationship, some organisations seek to tackle it early on. To illustrate: during their intake, candidates might place an overwhelming emphasis on newcomers’ language acquisition and integration so as not to be ‘a burden on society’. According to one coordinator, it is usually best to exclude such candidates in this phase to retain the integrity of the programme and prevent potential conflict later on in the mentoring process.

**4.2.1.2 Selection procedure**

Social mentoring programmes for newcomers have several different selection methods at their disposal. We will discuss the most common ones.

**Table 4. Mentor selection methods**

|                               |
|-------------------------------|
| (Online) intake form          |
| Face-to-face intake interview |
| Intake by phone or video call |
| Group info session            |

An (online) intake form is by far the most common screening and selection method used by social mentoring programmes for newcomers.

**Intake forms: some examples**

Almost every mentoring programme we interviewed for this report uses an intake form to screen and select potential mentors. For practical examples, please consult the intake forms used by Compagnons, Fedasil, Budd’lz (Izegem), Leuven municipality, and Thuis in Menen.

### What to include on an intake form

While there is some differentiation between intake forms, they typically include questions about:

- Personal details: name, gender, contact information, age, marital status, and children
- Language skills
- Education and profession
- Hobbies and interests
- Motivation
- Availability
- Preferences (type of mentoring/assistance/activities, mentee profile)

While an intake form is the most prevalent screening method among mentoring programmes, organisations typically want to see and speak to a candidate before accepting them into their programme. Intake forms are thus usually combined with a second screening method. Most programmes prefer an individual face-to-face intake interview over interviews by phone or video call, as it allows for easier communication and helps them get a better 'feel' of a candidate. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced most programmes to seek temporary alternatives, such as intakes by phone, video call, and other novel methods like 'walking intakes'.

### Creative alternatives during the pandemic

COVID-19 restrictions forced Compagnons Bruges to look for an alternative intake format. Instead of meeting candidates for an intake interview at the office of their organisation FMDO, the coordinator invited them for a one-hour 'walking intake'. During their walk, the coordinator kept the questions on the intake form in the back of their mind and once back at the office, noted down all relevant information. According to the coordinator, changing the setting of the intake to something as informal and 'active' as walking allows for more interesting conversations. Candidates often share information that they would not mention in a more formal office setting or might not even consider important for the coordinator to know but are very telling and useful for screening and matching.

While most programmes opt for individual (face-to-face, online or phone) intakes, an alternative, such as group info and intake sessions, could reduce the time spent on individual intakes, thus making it a particularly attractive method for large-scale mentoring programmes. A group session is usually held at regular intervals, communicated to potential mentors, and advertised via a programme's recruitment channels. It may replace or supplement other intake methods, such as individual intakes, and is often accompanied by individual intake forms, which are available during or after the info session.

### Group info session

One of the mentoring programmes of Fedasil, the Belgian federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers, organises an info session for potential mentors. The coordinator explains: 'It takes about 1.5 hours. We tell them a little about the reception centre, how a reception centre works, then about the mentoring work itself, so about activities they can do together, our expectations, expectations that they may have towards our centre, how it is organised, [...] and then there are always a few mentors who share their experiences. That is always the nicest thing of course. We always try to have three mentors who talk about their experience and answer questions. [...] I find the info session to be of great value because it gives a lot of information beforehand. The mentors who were present at the info session are much better informed, also partly because of those testimonies. Because of those testimonies, they also learn about possible obstacles they might have to deal with as a mentor. As a result, they do not start with false expectations.'

Regardless of whether social mentoring programmes opt for individual intakes or group sessions, the screening and selection phase provides an opportunity to not only learn about the candidate but also make sure they know what they are signing up for. Intakes thus have two main purposes. During an intake, organisations will enquire about the candidate's motivations, expectations, background, and preferences while also discussing the structure and objectives of the programmes and setting the right expectations. To explain what is and what is not expected of them, mentors are sometimes provided with a simple frame of reference that explains their role as a mentor, such as the one used by IN-Gent's Tandem programme:

#### A MENTOR IS...

A person who does (fun) leisure activities with the family

A person who introduces the family to new places and organisations in the city and helps them find their way around Ghent

A person who passes on requests for help to the project coordinator

#### A MENTOR IS NOT...

A Dutch teacher

A person who fills out administrative documents

A social worker or counsellor

A person who will look for housing, employment, ...

While organisations can and often do provide the same information during a group session as they would during an individual intake, a group session allows for more creative approaches such as involving current or former mentors of the programme. The concrete examples, personal experience, and exchange between former or current mentors and new prospective mentors enhance understanding and create a community feeling among volunteers.

If the screening determines that a candidate is unsuitable as a mentor for the programme but suitable for mentoring or volunteering in general, they may be referred to other types of volunteering.

#### Referring ineligible candidates

The programme of the municipality of Leuven expects its mentors to be general support figures who can offer support in various areas of life. If a candidate is primarily interested in assisting a newcomer with finding employment or housing, the programme refers them to other, more targeted mentoring programmes that are active in the same region.

## Case: Leuven

The social mentoring programme in Leuven, Belgium, is organised by the Diversity and Equal Opportunities office of the city of Leuven. Every few months, they organise an info session for interested volunteers. Attending the info session is a prerequisite for becoming a mentor.

During the info session, the coordinators discuss:

- The context and goals of the mentoring programme;
- The trajectory of a refugee, including the journey, arrival, asylum process, and integration;
- The newcomer profile;
- The mentor profile, including participation criteria, expectations, and the role of mentor;
- The organisation of the mentoring programme, with an explanation of each step of the mentoring process;
- The support available to the mentor, including training, activities, and support and follow-up by the coordinator.

During the info session, the coordinators show videos of mentors and mentees of the programme to illustrate what mentors do in practice. If possible, they also invite a former mentor to the info session so they can share their personal experience and candidates can ask questions. According to the coordinator, visual tools and concrete examples improve candidates' understanding of the programme and help with setting the right expectations.

In the past, the coordinators organised one-on-one intakes with volunteers, but due to the success of the programme, individual talks are no longer feasible. Benefits of the group info session are that it requires less time, there is more exchange between volunteers, and attendees usually ask more questions. A drawback is that the coordinator does not have an opportunity to talk with each prospective mentor. The matching is thus primarily based on the information provided on the candidate's intake form.



## 4.2.2 Screening and selecting mentees

When it comes to the screening and selection of mentees, we again make a distinction between the selection criteria that are used by the social mentoring programme and the actual method of screening and selection.

### 4.2.2.1 Selection criteria

In the following table, we have listed the most common criteria that are used by programmes to select newcomer mentees.

**Table 5. Mentee selection criteria**

|  |
|--|
| Language skills  |
| Age  |
| Place of residence   |
| Immigration status   |
| Motivation   |
| Expectations   |
| Availability and ability to commit to the programme                  |
| Absence of more immediate needs that require professional assistance |

The exact criteria that social mentoring programmes for newcomers use differ depending on their objectives, target group and structure of the programme. We offer an example from practice:

#### Selection criteria in practice

According to Samen Gentenaar, programmes should 'clearly define the target group before the start. If a candidate is excluded from the programme, you can refer to the pre-established criteria'. The target group of Samen Gentenaar is defined as follows:

- At least 18 years old
- Willing to commit to the programme for six months and meet at least twice a month
- Endorses the programme objectives with an emphasis on leisure experiences
- Mental capacity to bring the mentoring relationship to a successful conclusion
- Basic knowledge of Dutch (no formal proof needed but we expect a minimum level of fluency that is roughly equivalent to level A2 (oral).

While the criteria – and how strictly they are applied – clearly differ from programme to programme, several selection criteria are especially common. A certain level of language comprehension is usually expected, although programmes differ in how they apply this criterion depending on their objectives. Some expect a minimum level of Dutch (often A2), while others merely look for any language that allows them, and a mentor, to communicate with a mentee (usually English or French in the Belgian context).

Programmes that see learning the language as one of the main objectives of social mentoring will usually refrain from using secondary languages such as English and may apply minimum host country language requirements more strictly to facilitate language learning. However, in general, language requirements are usually not strictly enforced (or even tested), but rather assessed on a case-by-case basis.

#### Selection criteria in practice

Compagnons Bruges explains how they apply their language criterion in practice: 'For us, the biggest requirement is that it has to be someone with whom we can communicate. I have already done intake interviews in French, English and Spanish, but we also had someone tell us a potential mentee could only speak Arabic. Then I cannot have a conversation with that person, and I cannot find a mentor because my mentors, or most of them at least, do not speak Arabic either. So then we usually ask them to wait another month or two so they can improve their language skills. We are not going to be super strict with the language, but we must be able to communicate.'

#### Selection criteria (or the lack thereof) in practice

As previously mentioned, Tandem is a mentoring programme that matches newcomer families with ex-newcomers who speak the same language as well as (some level of) Dutch. Mentees are not excluded because of their language skills. If a suitable mentor is not immediately available, the coordinator will attempt to actively recruit one who speaks the same language as the mentee, whatever language that may be.

The importance of the newcomer's immigration status usually depends on who organises or finances the mentoring programme. Many programmes are either organised or subsidised by the (local) government and are not allowed to accept undocumented newcomers into the programme. Those that are organised and financed by a non-profit tend to have more leeway and often choose to accept anyone who needs assistance, regardless of their immigration status.

Coordinators furthermore emphasise the importance of screening for motivation and expectations. Candidates are often recruited via other organisations and services. While social mentoring programmes expect such (informal) partners to inform newcomers and receive permission before referring them, experience shows that referrers such as the mentee's social worker are sometimes more enthusiastic about the programme than the mentees themselves. For most mentoring programmes, this is cause for rejecting an application. They expect intrinsic motivation from both mentors and mentees and consider it a necessity for a successful mentoring relationship.

**A question of intrinsic motivation**

'I will also invite these newcomers to have a conversation, which sometimes shows that they do not take part based on their own request but that they are being directed a little, that the social worker says "you have to do that because...", but it is also on a voluntary basis for our newcomers, and we must not forget that. It cannot be an obligation in the context of some agreement or contract you have concluded with the social worker, that cannot be part of it. It is voluntary work, but it is on a voluntary basis for **both** sides. If a newcomer immediately says "actually, I don't want to, but I have to", then I say "actually, you don't have to." (This in Menen)

The screening and selection phase also offers opportunities to ensure that potential mentees effectively understand the participation requirements and benefits of the programme. Depending on the recruitment channel, newcomers may have missed out on key information or been incorrectly informed about the programme by referrers or through word of mouth. When their expectations do not match or go far beyond the objectives of the programme, there will normally be an attempt by the organisation to manage their expectations. If this does not prove fruitful, their application will usually be rejected and, if possible, referred to other organisations or services. Alternatively, programmes could suggest delaying their entrance to the programme until other, more urgent matters, are resolved or their language skills have been further developed. See, for example, Compagnons Bruges' previously mentioned approach of asking some newcomers to wait one or two additional months to improve their language skills before reapplying.

**How to reject a candidate**

The coordinator of Samen Gentenaar explains how they deal with candidates who have incorrect and/or too many expectations: 'I think at that point it's super important to deliver the message why someone can't participate in an honest but human way. Because someone has the courage to take the step to want to participate and then they are not even allowed, that's terrible right? As long as I keep realising what impact that has on the person, I think I'll be able to get the message across. And indeed, start looking for alternatives [...] and refer them to the right person and figure out how they got to me. If that is via a social worker, for example, we'll have a talk with them.'

**4.2.2.2 Selection procedure**

To screen potential mentees, programmes can make use of a number of screening methods. The table below summarises their most commonly used options.

**Table 6. Mentee selection methods**

|                               |
|-------------------------------|
| (Online) intake form          |
| Face-to-face intake interview |
| Intake by phone or video call |
| Group info session            |

An (online) intake form is the most common method used by social mentoring programmes to screen and select newcomers.

**Intake forms: some examples**

Almost every mentoring programme we interviewed for this report uses an intake form to screen and select their mentee candidates. For practical examples, please consult the intake forms used by [Compagnons](#), [Budd'iz \(Izegem\)](#), and the [municipality of Leuven](#).

**What to include on an intake form**

While there is some differentiation between intake forms, they typically include questions about:

- Personal details: name, gender, contact information, age, marital status, and children
- Details of the referrer: name, connection, contact information
- Language skills
- Education and profession
- Current living situation (housing, employment, education, social contacts, etc.)
- Hobbies and interests
- Motivation
- Availability
- Needs/expectations (type of mentoring/assistance/ activities)
- Preferences (e.g. gender of the mentor)

Intake forms are usually combined with a second screening method. Similar to the mentor screening process, this typically involves a one-on-one interview, although COVID-19 forced most programmes to seek alternative methods, such as video call intakes. While individual intake interviews are common, they are less common for mentee screening than for mentor screening.

The social mentoring programme organised by the municipality of Leuven, for example, does not meet its mentees until the first meeting with the mentor and mentee. They base their screening, selection and even matching solely on the information they obtain via the intake form and any additional information they receive from a referrer.

An alternative method that similarly alleviates some of the time and resource constraints that many social mentoring programmes struggle with is a group information session. While such sessions provide an opportunity to inform candidates about the programme, they are usually accompanied by individual intake forms or interviews in order to obtain the personal information that is needed to screen and select each individual candidate.

#### An example from practice

Once Samen Gentenaar has enough candidates on its waiting list, they schedule an information and intake session. Potential mentors and mentees attend the same session. The session is structured as follows:

- Welcome (with snack and drink)
- General information (vision and mission of IN-Gent (the organisation), objectives, and structure of Samen Gentenaar, criteria for participation)
- Group discussion about motivation and expectations
- Individual intake: intake forms are completed with the help of a member of staff

One of the main challenges at this stage of the mentoring process is adequately informing the mentee about the purpose of the programme and the role of the mentor. Setting expectations of what to expect – and importantly, what not to expect – is a crucial part of the first meeting, whether that is in person, via video call, or during a group information session. Coordinators suggest keeping the information as short and concise as possible. They usually explain the programme and the role of the mentor with a few keywords and opposites that are easy to understand, even if the mentee has a limited understanding of the language.

One programme explains mentoring to mentees as follows:

#### A MENTOR IS...

- A friend, a sympathetic ear
- Someone to do activities with
- Someone to practice Dutch with

#### A MENTOR IS NOT...

- A private tutor
- A romantic partner
- A social assistant

To ensure that newcomers understand what they are signing up for by becoming a mentee, several programmes use visual tools and translated materials.

#### Example from practice

The coordinator of Tandem uses a variety of tools to communicate with prospective mentees during their intake. To ensure that candidates have the right expectations and understanding of the programme, the coordinator may use Google Translate, hand gestures, a PowerPoint presentation or other visuals to explain common activities that mentors and mentees can do together, e.g. by showing photos of people shopping, doing groceries, at the playground, etc. The [introductory videos](#) on the website of the project are another useful tool and are available in multiple languages.



## 4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above, the following recommendations can be formulated:

- Programmes should have clear participation criteria that align with the objectives of the programme. Some of the most common criteria that programmes use, and that we recommend, are:
  - For mentors: motivation, expectations, personality, age, language skills, place of residence, and availability and ability to commit to the programme.
  - For mentees: motivation, expectations, language skills, age, place of residence, immigration status, availability, ability to commit to the programme, and absence of more immediate needs that require professional assistance.
- Programmes should schedule one-on-one intake interviews with potential candidates and document their information on an intake form.
- Programmes should ensure that candidates are properly informed about the programme during the screening and selection phase. This includes basic information about the mentoring programme, such as:
  - Information on the mentoring programme. General information on the aim, target audience, intensity, duration, phases and practices.
  - What is mentoring? Description, explanation and basics of mentoring.
  - What is a mentor? (Appropriate) expectations, responsibilities and benefits of a mentor.
  - What is a mentee? Expectations, responsibilities and benefits of a mentee.
  - What is the role of the coordinator? What is the assistance that can be expected?
- This information can be provided during the one-on-one intakes or during information sessions. If programmes organise group info sessions, they should require candidates to attend one session before they can enter into a mentoring relationship.
- If programmes opt for group info sessions, they should invite former or current mentors to the sessions to share their experiences, set the right expectations, and answer questions.
- When informing candidates, programmes should make sure the information is easy to understand, available in multiple languages or easy to translate, and supported by visual tools.
- Programmes should pay special attention to their rejection approach and refer ineligible candidates to other volunteer programmes or services if possible.

# 5

## MATCHING

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**A good match is often considered one of the most important prerequisites for effective mentoring. We can distinguish two crucial elements of matching: the matching criteria and the matching procedure or method of matching. We will first discuss extant research on the topic, after which we will elaborate on these two elements of matching (criteria and procedure) successively. We will conclude with a list of recommendations.**

## 5.1 ACCORDING TO THE LITERATURE

Matching mentors and mentees is one of the most important steps within the mentoring process to ensure a successful mentor-mentee relationship and an effective outcome (Van 't Hoog et al., 2012; Allen et al., 2009; Uytterlinde et al., 2009). While a good match can result in a successful mentoring relationship and positive outcomes, a mismatch can significantly lessen the benefits of mentoring or even be harmful, with participants reporting stress and intentions to terminate the mentoring relationship (Eby & Allen, 2002). One of the most important questions for mentoring programmes is therefore which matching criteria contribute to a successful mentoring relationship. Studies on matching for newcomers are, however, still limited.

Extant literature offers some insights into the best matching criteria, although results are mostly limited to youth mentoring, student mentoring, and mentoring at work. Matching criteria that have been discussed extensively are sociodemographic characteristics, such as gender, age, race, and ethnicity. However, conclusions on their effectiveness as matching criteria differ. While some research has shown that sociodemographic similarities such as ethnicity, race, and gender contribute to longer and more successful mentoring relationships (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; McKeen & Bujaki, 2007; Raposa et al., 2019), other research finds no correlation (Eby et al., 2013) or only for some sociodemographic characteristics and mentoring outcomes (Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Lankau et al., 2005; Neuwirth & Wahl, 2017).

In addition to sociodemographic characteristics, research on matching criteria has focused on so-called 'deep-level' characteristics, such as personality, interests, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Eby et al., 2013; Madia & Lutz, 2004; Menges, 2016). In comparison with more surface-level characteristics, such as gender and race, deep-level similarities demonstrate stronger positive effects on the mentoring relationship. Deep-level similarities have been found to positively influence perceptions of support and the quality of the relationship (Eby et al., 2013; Menges, 2016), programme satisfaction and effectiveness of the programme (Neuwirth & Wahl, 2017), and mentors' intention to remain in the mentoring relationship (Madia & Lutz, 2004). For example, research by Neuwirth and Wahl (2017), in which they studied the impact of an Austrian mentoring-to-work programme for migrants, found no relation between objective similarity in the sociodemographic background (sex, age, country of birth and vocational background) of mentors and mentees and the programme's evaluation. Perceptions of subjective similarity did result in better evaluations. Career functions, psychosocial functions, programme satisfaction, quality of the training, and effectiveness of the programme were all evaluated more positively the more similar mentees perceived themselves to be to their mentors.

Similarly, research by Eby et al. (2013) shows that surface-level similarity (gender, race) is not associated with mentees' perceptions of instrumental and psychosocial support or relationship quality, whereas deep-level similarity (attitudes, beliefs, values, personality) has a strong positive influence on such perceptions, especially in terms of psychosocial support and relationship quality. Menges (2016, 116-8) assessed the impact of personality similarities on the mentoring support received and found that similarities in openness to experience - 'intellectual curiosity, creativity, imagination, open-mindedness, and attentiveness to emotions' - and conscientiousness - 'a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and be organised, task-focused and persistent' - improved the psychosocial support mentees received. Similarities in extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism had no effect.

Some research has also tried to determine the importance of practical considerations, such as geographical location and time availability, for the mentoring relationship. According to Eby et al. (2013), interaction frequency strongly correlates with mentees' perceptions of relationship quality, especially in terms of psychosocial support. Other studies have further confirmed the importance of considering geographical location and time availability during the matching process (Eby & Lockwood, 2005), with Cox (2005) even arguing that, through the careful selection and training of mentors, organisations will have no need for matching criteria other than location and availability.



Research on the matching process and methods is underdeveloped. In terms of the general approach to matching, Blake-Beard et al. (2007) have identified three common options:

1. **Administrator-assigned matching:** programme administrators match mentors and mentees based on their own judgment and programme criteria, with little to no input from participants;
2. **Choice-based matching:** mentors and mentees choose their partner, either through one-sided or mutual selection;
3. **Assessment-based matching:** mentors and mentees are matched with the help of assessment tools, e.g. the smart matching tool developed by ORIENT8.

The involvement of mentors and mentees in the matching process is a recurring topic of discussion. Blake-Beard et al. (2007) observed substantial differences between matches in which some choice was allowed compared to those determined by an administrator. Benefits of allowing input from mentors and mentees include greater commitment to the relationship, more willingness to spend time together, greater ability to work through conflict, greater access to mentoring partners, and increased interest in maintaining the relationship after the formal conclusion of the mentoring programme. Allen et al. (2006) found that mentors' and mentees' input in the matching process positively influence the perceived programme effectiveness, mentor commitment, and programme understanding. The positive influence of including participants in the matching process is also emphasised by Drew et al. (2020), who found that mentors who believe their preferences were considered during the matching process, were less likely to feel that they would be better matched with someone else and were therefore more committed to maintaining their current mentoring relationship. The importance of soliciting input from mentees and mentors in the matching process has been further substantiated by Menges (2016), Purkayastha, D. & De Cuyper, P. (2019), and Wanberg et al. (2003).

## 5.2 IN PRACTICE

### 5.2.1 Matching criteria

While most of the literature on matching criteria focuses on mentoring at work programmes or youth mentoring, social mentoring programmes for newcomers often adopt similar criteria. The table below lists the most common matching criteria used by such programmes.

**Table 7. Matching criteria**

|   |
|---|
| Mentee's needs/goals/expectations           |
| Mentor's offer and expectations             |
| Mentor's skills and professional background |
| Mentor's knowledge                          |
| Interests and hobbies                       |
| Language skills                             |
| Availability and time commitment            |
| Geographical location                       |
| Age   |
| Gender                                      |
| Family                                      |
| Attitudes/preferences                       |
| Personality                                 |

Some of, if not the most important matching criteria identified by programmes are the **needs, goals, and expectations of the mentee**. In the context of social mentoring for newcomers, these might be learning the language, getting to know the city, expanding their social network, receiving administrative and practical assistance (e.g. help with official documents, access to services or finding housing), or doing leisure activities. Programmes recommend spending adequate time mapping out a mentee's needs, goals, and expectations to ensure the best possible match.

**Matching by needs**

'When the Public Centre for Social Welfare has a client who is new to the city and needs a mentor, we look at it together: what are the needs and how can we best meet them?' (Coordinator Budd'iz)

**An example from practice**

'During the intake, I already check, for example, if it is about leisure time, if there are children, and if so, what they would like to do. And I check whether there is a link with a mentor and whether they can play a role in this need. For example, we have a play and meeting space in the city for children up to four years old, and the parents can go there, but for many asylum seekers and refugees, there is a barrier to go there. The mentor can then, for example, go with them.' (Halle)

**An example from practice**

To get a clear picture of a candidate’s needs, goals, and expectations, Compagnons Ostend has included the following multiple-choice question on its intake form:

Why do you want to participate in Compagnons?

- I want to meet new people
- I want to speak Dutch more often
- I would like to get to know the city better
- I want to do more in my spare time
- Other

To do so, they rely on information obtained during the screening and selection phase. Additionally, some coordinators will consult a mentee’s referrer to gain an even better understanding of their individual needs. Having a good understanding of such needs can help programmes in their assistance to the mentor, who can be informed of the needs of the mentee before the start of the mentoring relationship and can, if necessary, be given concrete tools, such as relevant training sessions.

To match the mentee on the basis of their needs, goals and expectations, coordinators also consider the **mentor’s offer**, i.e. what the mentor is willing to do and/or help with, and their expectations of the programme and the mentoring relationship. Most mentoring programmes suggest different mentoring options or ask mentors what they would (not) like to help the mentee with during the screening and selection phase.

**Mentoring options in practice**

Budd’lz differentiates between different types of mentors:

1. Welcome mentor
2. Housing mentor
3. General mentor
4. Language mentor
5. Leisure mentor
6. Other

During their intake, mentees can indicate what type of mentor they are looking for, while mentors can select the type of mentor they would like to be. Based on these answers, the coordinator makes a first selection of possible matches.

Programmes that do not make such a clear distinction between different types of mentoring still take the needs, expectations and offer of their candidates into consideration, although the importance of these matching criteria also depends on how clearly defined the needs of the mentee and the offer of the mentor are.

If a mentee’s needs are very specific – for example, if they need help looking for housing – ensuring a good fit between the needs of the mentee and the offer of the mentor is necessary to avoid conflict, loss of interest, and dissatisfaction with the mentoring programme. If a mentee’s needs are so general that they can be matched with almost any mentor, other matching criteria become more important. The importance of these matching criteria is thus dependent on the specificity with which participants define their needs, expectations, and offer.

**General vs. specific matches**

‘Very simply put, we have two groups of people, either it’s super specific or it’s people I can match with anyone. “I like to hike, I like to bike, I like to go to the museum, I like to go for a drink.” To me, those are pretty much the “all-rounders”. Those are easy to match. I also really like it when you find a very specific match. Right now, a newcomer and a long-term resident who both like to climb are participating in the programme. So that immediately took off. I already got a message today that they’re going climbing in the Ardennes this Saturday.’ (Samen Gentenaar)

In addition to the mentor’s offer and expectations, every programme considers the **skills and professional background of the mentor**. While social mentoring programmes for newcomers are not meant to facilitate the labour market integration of newcomers, certain skills or professional backgrounds could still be beneficial to the mentoring relationship. One mentor’s background in special needs education, for example, made it easier for her to communicate with mentees with very limited or no understanding of the local language. While the mentor’s skills, professional background and knowledge are often grouped together in the academic literature, knowledge unrelated to one’s profession could prove very useful in the context of social mentoring. Some mentors may know a lot about the local housing market, schools and services for children (because they themselves have children of the same age, for example), local sports facilities, or clubs and associations. Such knowledge, while not professional in nature, can be very useful for social mentoring and is taken into account by such programmes whenever relevant.

In a programme’s pursuit of a good match, deep-level factors, such as interests and hobbies, can often be decisive. Every social mentoring programme takes interests and hobbies into consideration. Mentors and mentees with similar interests and hobbies are expected to connect more easily than those who do not share interests and hobbies. When a mentor and mentee cannot talk at length (yet) due to a language barrier, having a hobby such as biking or painting in common can facilitate their relationship and allow for informal language learning while being active or engaged in something they both enjoy.

### Matching by hobbies and interests

A few years ago, the coordinator of the mentoring programme in Halle matched a couple of newcomers who are both painters with a mentor who is 'super artistically inclined and an art restorer professionally'. According to the coordinator, 'a mentor like that is the best because you have a common interest'. The mentor and mentees are still in touch to this day.

### Matching by hobbies and interests

The coordinator of Compagnons Bruges found a match 'and thought it was such a beautiful match because they both like to read, both like to be in nature, one is a writer, likes going to the theatre, and the other performs in the theatre, and both are the same age. So I thought "That's a perfect match. They are most likely going to read books and then talk about them together during their walks."'

Most programmes take the **language skills** of mentors and mentees into consideration when matching. For mentoring to be effective, a mentor and mentee need to be able to communicate with each other. While some programmes expect duos to communicate in the local language to facilitate the mentee's language learning, mentees are often only at a basic level of understanding when they start their mentoring relationship. Some programmes will therefore prioritise relationship building and allow for matching based on other shared languages, such as English or French. If programmes prioritise language learning, matching based on a shared language may be disadvantageous since mentees may not develop their local language skills if they can easily communicate with their mentor in another language. The importance programmes assign to this criterion is therefore dependent on the goals of the programme, though almost all social mentoring programmes do take it into consideration.

The majority of programmes also consider participants' **availability and time commitment** in the matching process. Regular meetings are necessary for a successful mentoring relationship. Some mentees will also require more assistance than others.

### Matching by availability

To illustrate, Compagnons' intake forms include the following questions related to availability and time commitment:

- When can you (usually) make time?
- During the day/in the evening/at the weekend/during the week/no preference
- How much time can you/do you want to spend on mentoring?
- Are there periods when you are less available?

To ensure that they receive the assistance they need and the mentor does not become overwhelmed, it is useful to know when participants are available and how much of their time they want to commit to the programme.

While this can be difficult for participants to know ahead of time, it helps programmes significantly to have at least some idea of their availability. With this knowledge, programmes can, for example, avoid matching mentors with very busy lives who only have limited time each week with mentees who require a lot of support and assistance. Matching participants with conflicting agendas and expectations in terms of commitment will most likely result in an unfulfilling mentoring relationship or even conflict. Mentees who require more assistance are thus often matched with retirees or people working part-time jobs.

A few programmes also take the **geographical location** of mentors and mentees into consideration during the matching procedure. Geographical proximity is conducive to more frequent interactions, which in turn help foster a better relationship. Living far away from each other is not only difficult in terms of travel time and transportation, but also impacts the extent to which the mentor can help the mentee. If the mentor is not familiar with the locality where the mentee lives, they might not be able to guide them to relevant services, clubs and associations, leisure activities, schools, et cetera.

The relevance of these criteria depends on several factors. Since some programmes already exclude participants who live in a different city or municipality during the recruitment and selection phase, it might be unnecessary to consider geographical location during matching. The need for this criterion also depends on the size of the city in which the programme operates. If the mentoring programme is active in a small municipality and only accepts participants from that municipality, location will most likely be an unnecessary criterion to consider at the matching stage. If a programme is available to participants from a multitude of municipalities or a large city, location-based matching could be more relevant.

While location is usually taken into consideration to avoid matching people who live too far away from each other, one coordinator argued that the reverse could also be relevant. Matching two people who live very close, for example in the same street, might be unwelcome. Participants might want to avoid unannounced house calls and keep some distance between their mentoring relationship and their private life. However, another programme accidentally matched two people who lived next to each other without problems. To safeguard participants' personal boundaries, programmes can ask for participants' approval before matching.



### Matching neighbours

When the coordinator of Samen Gentenaar matched A and J, she did not know they lived right next door to each other, and neither did they. While their match was based on common interests, their proximity contributed to the development of their relationship. Their story was captured for ['Day of the Neighbours'](#).

Other common criteria that most programmes consider are **age, gender, and family situation**.

### Matching by age

The coordinator of the social mentoring programme in Halle matched two young newcomers with a young mentor in the assumption that this similarity in age would benefit their mentoring relationship. More practically, a young mentor was expected to be able to help with particular needs, such as arranging subscriptions for Internet and phones, better than an older mentor who may be less familiar with such matters.

Matching based on gender can be difficult, with many programmes having a large pool of male newcomers and female volunteers. In some cases, programmes might still try to refrain from matching people of different genders. For example, after matches between some male mentees and female mentors failed due to the mentees' traditional gender customs, including restrictions on male-female interactions, several programmes became more hesitant to match men from specific countries with female mentors. A mentoring programme that also caters to under-age mentees usually avoids matching young female mentees with single male mentors, but if a male mentor has a family who will also be involved in the mentoring, they might be considered a potential match. In general, coordinators seem to prefer matching people of the same gender, although such decisions are often based on assumptions and the previously mentioned 'gut feeling'.

While there is no mention of matching based on candidates' 'family situation' in the literature, almost all programmes adopt it as a criterion, especially if a mentee has children. The expectation is that a mentor who also has children will be better able to assist with tutoring, communication with the school, arranging childcare support or other services, or figuring out local arrangements for afterschool care and children's activities, while also providing opportunities for the mentee's children to meet more native speakers and other children.

### Matching by family situation

'In the intake we do ask about age and whether they have a family and about hobbies, both with the mentor and with the newcomer, to see if there is a link. For example, I had a conversation about two months ago with a family of newcomers with two children, a boy and a girl, of 7 and 10. And right after that I met someone, a teacher in secondary education, who was exactly the same age as the couple and also had three children, with the two youngest being about the same age as the newcomers' two children. [...] So the first meeting went smoothly, and they immediately agreed to meet up a few times to take the children for a walk so they could play together in the park. So those are the things you look for.' (Samen Thuis in Hasselt).

Even though programmes can use their own judgment when applying criteria such as age, gender, or family, their matching decisions are usually informed by participants' preferences. While limited candidate pools usually make it impossible to take every preference into account, programmes try to take them into consideration as much as possible. Some mentees may, for example, indicate that they do not want to be matched with someone of a different gender or someone too different or similar in age. Mentees with children may prefer a mentor with children so they can do family activities together. It is, however, always important to gauge why someone has a certain preference. Do people deliberately ask for someone of the opposite gender because they are looking for a relationship and think a mentoring programme can help them with this? If a mentee would like to be matched with a mentor with children, why is that important to them and their needs and goals? If someone is looking for a person of the same gender, is this non-negotiable or simply a preference?

Programmes will usually try to ascertain participants' **attitudes and preferences** during their intake. If there are cultural, religious, or personal reasons why someone would not want to be matched with someone of a different gender, age, or sexuality, programmes will take this into account during matching. Though this information is never asked directly or via intake forms, programmes can take it into consideration if it comes up in conversation. For example, if a programme coordinator realises a mentee is very conservative, they might refrain from matching them with a mentor who they know identifies as LGBTQ+.

While programmes often struggle to define the relevance of participants' **personality** to the matching decision, some of them do mention it as a criterion. Nevertheless, their understanding and application of the criterion remains somewhat superficial. Programmes that take personality into account might, for example, match quiet mentees with more open, extroverted mentors to avoid a lack of communication or initiative.

### Matching by personality

The coordinator of Fedasil Kapellen tells us the following: “what I take into account for example is: how does that person come across? Is it someone very easy-going? Very sociable? Yes, then we can place them with a more timid person. But if it’s someone who does not ask a lot of questions or talk, we will try to place them with a more talkative person.”

While matching criteria are used by every mentoring programme, the importance of coordinators’ ‘gut feeling’ should not be underestimated. Almost every coordinator either explicitly mentioned this gut feeling or referred to their professional experience, arguing they sometimes simply ‘felt’ or ‘knew’ that two people would make a good match. A coordinator might meet a mentee during their intake and immediately know who they want to match them with, without properly considering all the matching criteria officially used by the programme. This gut feeling is difficult if not impossible to capture by matching criteria and no matter how many criteria programmes adopt, a coordinator’s experience and gut feeling will likely continue to play an important role in matching.

Even if matches are based on matching criteria and/or the coordinator’s gut feeling, there is no guarantee that they will work in practice. Many coordinators stress that it is sometimes impossible to know why one match works and another fails. A successful mentoring relationship is in part determined by the ‘connection’ between mentor and mentee. While matching criteria and the coordinator’s gut feeling can attempt to account for all the different characteristics and circumstances that might make two people connect, fully understanding why some people get along and others do not remains a challenge.

## 5.2.2 Matching procedure

### 5.2.2.1 Matching approach

While the academic literature on mentoring identifies several approaches to matching, social mentoring programmes mostly adopt the same matching procedure, **administrator-assigned matching**, in which the matching is done by the programme coordinator or other staff. Since most social mentoring programmes are small-scale programmes with a limited pool of mentors and mentees, matching is usually not an elaborate and rigidly structured process. Due to the small number of possible candidates, coordinators cannot use all, or even most, of the matching criteria available to them on paper.

Instead, participants might be matched because they have a common interest, such as climbing, or because they both have children, or because the mentee prefers to be matched with a man and there is only one male mentor available. In practice, matching is often as simple as that. Being able to take multiple criteria into consideration for each match is a luxury that many small social mentoring programmes simply do not have.

### An example from practice

The coordinator of Samen Gentenaar, one of the larger social mentoring programmes included in our research, used to do the matching of mentors and mentees with the help of Excel, but recently decided to supplement this with a more visual and hands-on approach. Nowadays, she draws up a small card for each candidate with some of their key information, such as age, language skills, preferences, and interests. By using physical cards, she can quickly get a sense of a new group of candidates and arrange and rearrange them to find the best matches. Even just the act of making the cards, seeing them in front of her, and moving them around helps her to memorise candidates and find connections.

For most programmes, even this simple approach is more elaborate than necessary. Sometimes, a coordinator will do an intake interview with a mentee and immediately know which mentor to match them with. This could be because they recognise a common interest or a need that they know one of their mentors can help with. If the choice is less obvious, there might be a few possible candidates to choose from, but even then, coordinators might easily exclude some because of conflicting time schedules or mentors’ unwillingness to offer specific assistance that the mentee needs, such as help finding housing. With a limited pool of options, there is often hardly a matching ‘process’ to speak of.

An alternative to administrator-assigned matching that some programmes expressed interest in is a **choice-based matching approach**, such as ‘speed dating’. This matching procedure is more common among mentoring-to-work programmes and involves a speed dating event in which mentors and mentees can meet each other. Afterwards, they are asked to provide a list of preferences, which the programme then consults to find the right match. One mentoring-to-work programme that uses this matching strategy does influence the speed dating event somewhat by deciding who will ‘date’ who based on several criteria, such as level of education and geographical location. While some social mentoring programmes have considered a speed dating approach, none have implemented it.

### ‘Speed dating’ as an option?

When Compagnons Ostend updated its entire mentoring programme in 2020, they initially set out to introduce a speed dating approach to matching. However, after considering it some more, they decided to stick by their tried and tested approach of administrator-assigned matching. Why? To organise speed dates, it would have been necessary to have a sufficiently large group of mentors and mentees ready for matching at the same time. In reality, candidates apply and enter the programme throughout the year, and some would have had to wait for months until a speed dating matching event before being able to participate in the programme.

### The matching approach in Leuven

The social mentoring programme of the municipality of Leuven, one of the larger programmes in Flanders, experimented with a matching approach that allowed significant (but one-sided) input from candidates before COVID-19 restrictions forced them to abandon the approach. During an info session for mentors, they anonymously displayed information about mentees. Mentors could read the information and indicate their preferred matches on their intake form. By using this approach, the programme not only involved the mentors in the matching process, but also relieved programme staff of some of the work involved in matching. In the future, the programme would also like to involve the mentee more in the matching process.

While almost none of the other mentoring programmes allow such direct involvement of candidates in the matching process, they usually do allow some input, though the extent of this input differs from programme to programme. The preferences that participants can usually indicate during the screening and selection phase already give them some influence in the matching process. Once a programme has found a match, they will contact the participants via phone or email to invite them to their first meeting. Some programmes will first contact the mentor to share some information about their potential mentee. At this time, the mentor can give their input and can choose to accept or decline the match. If the mentor accepts, the mentor or the programme will contact the mentee to schedule a first meeting. While some programmes identify a need for more mentee involvement in the matching process, in practice, mentees are usually not asked for input before the first meeting.

### An example from practice

Once the programme in Leuven has found a match, they 'send a long email to the mentor, only to the mentor and the referrer of the newcomer, with all the information of the newcomer, so: who is the newcomer, what does he do, what did he do in his home country, what languages does he speak, what level of Dutch does he have, what support would he like, who are his friends, does he have a large network, is he socially isolated, what is his financial situation? So we put all the necessary information in the email and ask, "does this seem like a possible match to you?" They may say no, they may say yes. If the answer is yes, they may continue with the contact and the next steps, which I then explain in the email. If the answer is no, they can still ask for another match. And then we also put in some questions that they may use when they contact the newcomer: who am I? From whom did I get your contact information? When are you available? Can we go to the coordinator at that time? In that first email, I also give the times that I am available in my schedule that same week, or the week after. They can make an appointment together and then they usually visit me at the office, and we move on to the official matching.'

### An example from practice

Samen Gentenaar does not give their mentors and mentees time to accept or deny a match before the first meeting between the duo. Instead, the coordinator invites them to a collective event where all the mentors and mentees will meet for the first time and find out who they are matched with. According to the coordinator, even if given the option, participants will usually not decline a match prior to this meeting, and if they do, it would most likely be for the wrong reasons, for example due to assumptions and prejudgments. It is important that their participants instead trust the matchmaker and (are willing to) allow their mentoring relationship to grow naturally over time.

### 5.2.2.2 Continuous vs. periodical matching

In addition to the matching approaches discussed in the previous section, programmes can opt for continuous or periodical matching. Usually, this depends on how their programme is structured. Some programmes have specific periods of mentoring, e.g. a group of mentor-mentee duos who all start in January and participate for a certain number of months, after which a new group of duos will start, and so on. Alternatively, some programmes allow mentoring relationships to start at any time. In this second approach, there is no collective group of mentors and mentees who all start and end their participation in the programme at the same time. These two different approaches also influence the matching process that precedes them. Programmes with a periodical mentoring approach have to recruit and match candidates before a specific date so they can participate in the next mentoring period. They will thus have a group of mentors and mentees available for each matching period (e.g. twice a year) within which they will match participants with each other. Programmes with a continuous mentoring approach recruit and match candidates on a rolling basis. While they are not bound by a deadline, they will usually have fewer candidates available at a given time than periodical programmes. A continuous matching and mentoring approach is especially common for programmes in small municipalities which struggle to assemble a participant group large enough for periodical matching and a collective start date.

While both options have benefits and drawbacks depending on the context, target group and goals of a programme, the most important challenge is finding a way to match in a timely manner. Regardless of the approach, most coordinators stress the importance of matching within a few weeks after a candidate's intake. For programmes with a periodical approach, this is typically achieved by only recruiting people in the time (e.g. several weeks) leading up to a new mentoring period, so that the recruitment, screening and selection, matching, and start of the mentoring period follow each other rapidly.



While the lack of a deadline can give programmes with a continuous structure more leeway to look for a good fit over a longer period of time, coordinators emphasise there is no such thing as a 'perfect match', and programmes should not delay matching people in hopes of finding a better match. Matches that seem perfect on paper often do not work out, and vice versa. Rather than leaving participants waiting for months, which often leads to frustration and a loss of interest, most programmes try to find the best match within the pool of candidates that are available at a given time. If a candidate has specific preferences, for example in terms of gender, and there are no candidates that fit those preferences, programmes often propose an alternative match which the candidate can still refuse if they would rather wait for someone who matches their preferences better.

#### Practical insights from Nikaia-Rentis

Matching in a timely manner can be particularly challenging for new programmes which still have to build their pool of candidates. The municipality of Nikaia-Rentis opted for periodical matching and first recruited its mentors, followed by its mentees. While they were recruiting their mentees, some mentors had already left the programme due to the waiting time. Their advice to other new mentoring programmes is to keep the mentoring group involved by sending relevant articles and keep them up to date concerning the developments in the project. The expectation of actually meeting the potential mentees keeps the mentors motivated.

#### Example from practice

'What I do now is match faster. I used to wait until the perfect match, but I don't do that anymore. When people come to us for an intake interview, I want them to be helped as quickly as possible, but only if I have a good feeling about it.'  
(Samen Thuis in Hasselt)

### 5.2.3 Rematching

Once participants have been matched, they might still choose to reject the match after the first meeting or terminate the relationship after some time. If one or both participants want to terminate their mentoring relationship, the programme will usually schedule a meeting or talk to them over the phone to discuss the termination. Unless there is a reason to exclude participants from the programme based on their behaviour during their terminated relationship, programmes will typically attempt to recover candidates. Participants have usually been informed about a rematch option during the recruitment and/or screening and selection phase. Those that realise early on in the mentoring relationship that the relationship is not going to work out usually want to be rematched. Those that terminate their relationship due to a conflict might not. According to one of the programme coordinators, a negative experience can be very decisive and make the participants not only want to quit the mentoring relationship but their association with the programme in general. A key challenge for programmes is to prevent this and retain suitable participants even after an initial match fails. Depending on the structure of the programme (continuous or periodical), participants who want to be rematched will either be (1) rematched immediately or as soon as there is a new match available; or (2) matched when the next official mentoring period starts.

## 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Programmes should use matching criteria that align with their objectives. Common criteria include: (1) the mentee's needs, goals, and expectations; (2) the mentor's offer and expectations; (3) the mentor's skills and professional background; (4) the mentor's general knowledge; (5) interests and hobbies; (6) language skills; (7) availability and time commitment; (8) geographical location; (9) age; (10) gender; (11) family; (12) attitudes and preferences; and (13) personality.
- Programmes should decide which criteria are most important for their programme and/or each candidate and prioritise those when it is not possible to use all criteria.
- Programmes should ask participants about their matching preferences and take them into consideration as much as possible.
- Programmes should prioritise matching in a timely manner over finding a 'perfect' match. Preferably, programmes should match candidates within a few weeks after their intake.
- Programmes should inform candidates if there is no (immediate) match available and let them decide if they would like to accept an alternative match that does not entirely fit their preferences or wait for a better match.
- Programmes should offer a rematch if a mentoring relationship ends prematurely, unless the reason for termination is cause for excluding someone from the mentoring programme entirely.

# 6

## THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP AND CLOSURE

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**In the previous chapters, we discussed the process leading up to a mentoring relationship. In this chapter, we will discuss what such a relationship entails, including elements such as the start, duration, and frequency of meetings, the activities that mentors and mentees do together, and the factors that make or break a relationship, such as trust and reciprocity. After discussing extant literature on these topics and our findings from practice, we will conclude with a set of recommendations to get the most out of a mentoring relationship.**

## 6.1 ACCORDING TO THE LITERATURE

In the literature, two of the critical constituent elements of any successful mentoring relationship are its duration and its intensity (i.e. contact frequency). Research about those elements is mostly found in literature on youth mentoring, student mentoring and workplace mentoring. Generally speaking, longer-term relationships are found to have more benefits for mentees than shorter-term relationships (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Uytterlinde et al., 2009). Eby et al. (2013) found that mentees in longer relationships perceived greater psychosocial support and relationship quality, although relationship duration was less strongly associated with instrumental support. According to Grossman and Rhodes (2002), the impact of mentoring increases as the relationship develops. In their research on the effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships, they found that youth who were in relationships that lasted a year or longer reported significant improvements in academic, psychosocial, and behavioural outcomes. The shorter a relationship lasted, the smaller the effects.

Van der Tier and Potting (2015) even argue that a mentoring relationship of less than a year will show little to no effects. According to Griffiths et al. (2009), shorter mentoring durations may not allow enough time for the development of the relationship and trust between the duo. This can affect the extent to which the mentee benefits from long-lasting effects associated with mentoring, such as increased confidence, self-esteem, and awareness of and access to support services. Nevertheless, programmes with more targeted and limited goals, which is the case for most migrant mentoring programmes, have been able to achieve significant results with relationships of a shorter duration (MENTOR, 2015).

Perhaps even more important than a relationship's duration is the frequency of contact between its members. Frequent and meaningful interactions are a recognised characteristic of high-quality relationships (Kram, 1985). According to Eby et al. (2013), interaction frequency is associated with mentees' perceptions of instrumental support, psychosocial support and relationship quality. In their evaluation of a co-housing mentoring programme in Antwerp, Mahieu et al. (2019) found that the amount of contact between duos had a significant effect on (perceived) integration outcomes, such as overall Dutch language skills, frequency of Dutch usage, institutional knowledge of Flanders/Belgium, and understanding of Flemish/Belgian habits. The authors suggest that mentees who had more contact with their mentor gained more skills and knowledge that could facilitate their participation in Belgian society. The importance of regular and frequent contact between mentor and mentee is further emphasised by Bagnoli and Estache (2019), Bayer et al. (2015), Haggard et al. (2011), Lankau et al. (2005), and Menges (2016).

In their research on youth mentoring, Keller et al. (2020) found that more favourable mentoring outcomes were achieved when participants balanced relationally oriented activities with goal-oriented, instrumental activities. Programmes can support their duos by, for example, providing a list with activity suggestions, which is associated with longer average relationship durations and better match retention (MENTOR, 2015). According to Miller (2007), programmes that provide monthly activity calendars, offer tickets to events, and/or offer opportunities to participate in structured events usually have better outcomes.

Successful, long-term mentoring relationships are characterised by trust, authenticity, empathy, collaboration, and companionship (Lester et al., 2019; MENTOR, 2015; Spencer, 2006). Relationships that are perceived as such by mentees result in better outcomes than other relationships. To sustain the relationship, both parties need to be invested and committed to the match (Rhodes, 2002, Spencer et al., 2020). Karcher et al. (2010) found that the quality of a mentoring relationship is significantly higher in mentor-mentee duos that make decisions collaboratively rather than unilaterally.

It is this mutuality that is thought to contribute to a close, interpersonal bond. Lester et al. (2019) found that mentors and mentees in youth mentoring programmes understand mutuality as (1) shared relational excitement, or a willingness by both participants to invest in the relationship; and (2) experiential empathy, or the process through which mentors connect with, advise, and normalise the experiences of their mentees by sharing their own experiences. The interpersonal connection that develops because of such mutuality can, in turn, contribute to positive mentoring outcomes.

To provide closure at the end of the mentoring relationship, it is recommended that programmes communicate closure policies and procedures to both parties over the course of the relationship (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). Early termination can have negative consequences for the mentee, especially if the relationship ends abruptly or due to conflict (Rhodes, 2002). Even if the relationship lasts throughout its intended duration, a formal conclusion procedure is necessary to allow each party to the mentoring relationship an opportunity to reflect on and process the relationship, discuss its impact, offer suggestions for programme improvement, and prevent negative emotional outcomes (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014; Spencer et al., 2014).

## 6.2 IN PRACTICE

### 6.2.1 Start, duration and frequency of a mentoring relationship

#### 6.2.1.1 The first meeting

Once the match has been finalised and the mentor and mentee have agreed to meet, programmes will schedule a first meeting. Some coordinators are present during this meeting, while others choose to stay only for a while to get the conversation going and then give the mentor and mentee the opportunity to get to know each other by themselves. Some programmes also involve the social worker in the meeting, especially if they referred the mentee to the mentoring programme. If another professional referred the mentee to the programme, they might be asked to attend as well, though involving social workers or (other) referrers in the first meeting is difficult in terms of scheduling, so it tends to be rather the exception than the rule. Similarly, it can even be challenging to get the mentor, mentee and programme coordinator together in one room. While one of our project partners, the municipality of Mechelen, preferred face-to-face meetings, it also offered the option of online (Zoom) meetings when scheduling proved too difficult.

#### Recommendation from practice

The municipality of Nikaia-Rentis stressed that the programme coordinator should be present at the first meeting between a mentor and mentee. The meeting provides a good opportunity to remind participants of the objectives of the programme and the agreement they are entering into while also offering another opportunity to manage expectations. According to the programme, it also gave everyone a sense of security that everyone involved was present at the first meeting.

The first meeting is an opportunity for the mentor and mentee to get to know each other and get their mentoring relationship off the ground, but it is also an occasion for the coordinator to reiterate or further inform them about the programme, expectations, and other important information. Coordinators usually explain why they matched the mentor and mentee during this meeting. They may refer to a common interest or a specific need of the mentee that the mentor will be able to help with. Another important element of this first meeting is to delineate the role of the mentor: what can they do – and not do – for the mentee?

#### An example from practice

'I first start with "do you know why you're here today?" I start with that and then they say "yes, yes, yes". I say: "but can you explain to me in your own words: what is a buddy?" And then that stops and it's like "hmm... someone who helps?" [Laughs]. So then the ice is broken and then I go on maybe in their own language, use a lot of words from their own language, usually I also speak a little bit of Arabic. And I also go over five aspects using my fingers. I always say [using fingers to indicate each point]: a buddy is (1) someone who is a volunteer, who works for free. It's very important to mention this. Some think they really work for me, they say "they work for [name of coordinator], for the city, so they are paid to help me", while that is not the case at all. (2) A buddy has a family and friends. (3) A buddy also works. (4) A buddy also has a hobby. So, they do all kinds of things. And then I say: (5) they have a little bit of time every week to help someone, they have a good heart, don't they? And then they really laugh like "wow, this person has so many things going on and yet they have some time for me". So, what does that mean? That the appointments are very important to that person because of all those other things, that they also include you, they also give you an hour or two a week to learn Dutch, to create a friendship with you, to go on walks with you, to cycle with you... [...] You really need to have this feeling of: this person is going to walk out of here and they will know: this is a person who is going to help me.' (Leuven)

Both participants should leave knowing exactly what is expected of them and when they should ask for help from the coordinator or request a referral for professional assistance. This is especially important for programmes that do not interview mentors and/or mentees individually before the first meeting, but even those who have already had individual interviews often use this meeting to repeat the key information one more time before the mentoring begins.

### A coordinator's perspective

'This is not about friendship for me. Does it turn into a friendship? Then that's great, but I can't guarantee that. I think people have to step into it with a kind of trust that something can grow out of it, but I can't accept that someone says at first glance: no, this isn't it. And if you give someone a reflection period of 5 days, what are you going to think about? About what someone looks like? I don't want to go along with that. Just let it grow and have a bit of trust in me. If it's truly wrong, then that will become evident, but it rarely does.'  
(Coordinator)

### A mentee's perspective

'In the beginning, you are just automatically matched to your mentor and then your six months officially start. I would like it if you first had a meeting between the two persons and then can decide "do I want to continue with this mentor?", because when I was [at the collective event] there were some mentors that I really didn't want to be paired with. I think that is the case for everyone. There were so many people, it is also an exciting moment: who is going to be your mentor? But there are also certain people with whom I really don't feel comfortable. I don't think it's a bad idea to let those two people have a conversation and then let them decide.'

Programmes stress the importance of scheduling the next meeting between the mentor and mentee during this first meeting. If this is not done immediately, participants might never schedule another meeting, whether due to fear on the part of the mentee or for other reasons. But if you sit them down together and decide there and then 'next week on Wednesday, at 2 o'clock, you will meet each other in this park...', it works much better. One of the pilot cases however encountered some rather practical difficulties when implementing this guideline: one or both did not bring their agenda, did not know when they would return from holidays, etc. In Nikaia-Rentis, they therefore worked with a time frame in which the mentor calls the mentee within three or four days to schedule a meeting.

Some programmes give the mentor and mentee an opportunity to consider the match based on the first meeting and let the coordinator know whether they want to move forward with the mentoring relationship. In practice, participants usually agree on the spot that they want to start their mentoring relationship together. This, of course, leaves little opportunity to refuse the matching as this would require rejecting someone to their face, but according to coordinators, participants hardly ever reject the other person this early on the relationship.

According to one coordinator, participants should not even be given the option to refuse a match at this stage. Their programme has a unique first meeting in which not only the matched mentor and mentee are brought together, but all mentors and mentees are invited. Everyone is introduced to each other, after which they receive some identifying image, such as an animal, and then they have to find their match in the crowd by approaching others. Such a collective and participatory event can contribute to a sense of community among participants and set the stage for more engagement during the mentoring period, e.g. in group activities or peer learning sessions. It does not, however, leave much room to decline the match, a deliberate choice that the coordinator justifies as follows, though not everyone agrees:

### 6.2.1.2 Duration and frequency

While some social mentoring programmes have a clearly defined duration and concluding event or meeting, others choose to leave the duration open-ended. This second approach is sometimes favoured because the process of integration is long and newcomers' needs and requests for assistance cannot usually be resolved in only a few months' time. Not having a fixed end date could also facilitate the development of a more casual and natural friendship.

According to several coordinators who prefer a fixed end date, not having one comes with its own difficulties. Entering a commitment with no predetermined duration could discourage some mentors who do not want to sign up for a potentially long-lasting commitment. An example are students who will move away once they graduate but could still be great mentors for several months.

Once a duo has been matched, they might not develop a relationship worth maintaining in the long term, or they might run into problems, or perhaps simply lose touch after a while. Having a clearly defined duration and closing moment can then also offer some relief and a nice way to wrap things up without having to deliberately ask the coordinator to terminate the relationship or letting the relationship fizzle out over time.



In terms of follow-up, a predetermined duration is also straight-forward. Coordinators offer assistance and follow-up for that duration and if duos want to maintain their relationship afterwards, they can do so, but not within the context of the mentoring programme. Not having a conclusion can complicate the follow-up. When do you stop contacting the duo? Continuing to offer assistance and follow-up for years, for example, is not only inefficient but also takes away time that could be used to match and follow-up on other duos. Nevertheless, some, often small-scale, programmes do keep in touch with old mentors, though this is usually in a more informal and irregular manner than in the first few months of the mentoring relationship.

Another benefit of a predetermined mentoring duration is that mentors who finalise their mentoring relationship can, with their consent, be recovered and matched with a new mentee. This not only eases the coordinator's task of constantly having to find new mentors, but also opens the programme to more and more newcomers.

#### An example from practice

'The first three years we mainly worked as follows: every time someone joined, we considered them, did the intake, the matching... but we noticed that we often lost the overview, it was very difficult in terms of follow-up, to know when, where, etc. So there was not really a good system. So with Compagnons 2.0 we looked at that properly and now we work with a new group every 3 months, a new set-up, and there is an end, namely after 6 months. We did that because we noticed during intervision sessions with mentors that it was sometimes difficult for them that there was no end, especially if things did not go as well or if the contact was reduced after some time. So now we say to the mentors and mentees: look, a trajectory of 6 months during which you are a duo, then there is a kind of farewell reception and then of course they choose whether they want to continue. For the matchings where it goes well, we know that it will continue naturally because they have become friends or "family". And the ones for whom it did not go so well can wrap it up in a nice way, which is very important for mentors, also if you want to recover them for example.'

Programmes with a predetermined duration usually set it at six months. After those six months, some will officially terminate the mentoring relationship, although those duos who want to continue their relationship can of course do so, but without the assistance of the programme. For some programmes, six months is a guideline that, while generally adhered to, can be extended for a shorter period of one or two months if participants indicate a continuing need for mentoring. Other programmes offer extensions of six months. If duos want to continue their relationship after six months, they can extend it for another six months, during which they will continue as before and receive assistance from the programme if needed and participate in organised activities.

While some programmes leave the decision on contact frequency entirely up to the participants, most programmes set at least some minimum expectations. Mentors and mentees are typically expected to meet at least twice a month. The exact frequency, day and time of meeting, location, and activity is to be decided by the mentor and mentee.

#### An example from practice

'We ask for at least 6 months, which can then be extended with new blocks of 6 months. But we see in practice that many continue for a year or year and a half rather than stopping at 6 months. After 6 months you are only just getting started.'

Even though mentoring programmes set frequency expectations and communicate these expectations at the beginning of the mentoring period – usually during the intake session and/or first meeting between the mentor and mentee – the extent to which they check whether participants uphold such expectations varies. Two programmes require participants to communicate each meeting and activity to the programme. This is required to ensure that participants benefit from their involvement in the mentoring programme, but it also happens to be a convenient way to keep up with the duos and their contact frequency. When participants have not informed the programme about their activities and meetings in a while, the programme will contact them to enquire about their progress. Most other programmes choose not to check participants' contact frequency, often due to time constraints or because they do not want to impose too many restrictions and responsibilities on participants. Nevertheless, coordinators usually contact participants every so often via email or phone to check up on them, which can offer less formal opportunities to enquire about contact frequency, among other matters.

## 6.2.2 Activities during the mentoring relationship

The activities mentors and mentees engage in as part of their mentoring relationship vary depending on the goals of the mentoring programme and the goals, needs and interests of the mentor and mentee themselves. While some programmes restrict social mentoring to leisure activities, others allow for more all-round mentoring. The duos are usually given considerable freedom to decide the specific activities they want to do together, although many programmes offer suggestions via monthly emails, newsletters, or activity calendars.

**An example from practice**

All duos starting with Compagnons receive a WELCOME pack with information and free entrance tickets for three attractions/activities. They also receive a monthly activity calendar with inspiration for free or cheap activities to do together.

**An example from practice**

Every month, the programme in Leuven sends out a newsletter to current mentors with tips on how to be a good mentor, suggestions for activities and events and other useful information. ([example of a newsletter](#))

Based on our research, we can divide mentoring activities into two broad categories: leisure and assistance.

**Table 8. Mentoring activities**

|   |
|---|
| <b>LEISURE</b>  |
| Everyday activities: cooking, having dinner, going shopping, hanging out at home, walking the dog |
| Family activities: going to the playground, toy library, petting zoo                              |
| Cultural activities: museum, theatre, cinema, special events                                      |
| Active activities: walking, hiking, running, biking, swimming                                     |
| <b>ASSISTANCE</b>   |
| Administrative assistance: reading and translating letters, tax forms, making appointments        |
| Educational assistance: tutoring, helping with applications, language learning                    |
| Housing assistance: looking for housing, liaising between mentee and landlord                     |
| Employment assistance: looking for work opportunities, preparing for job interviews               |

Leisure activities include a wide range of activities that are commonly done among friends and acquaintances. Mentors often take mentees to discover places throughout the city, such as parks, museums, theatres, cinemas, libraries, and sports clubs. They can participate in creative activities or go to local events, but often duos engage in everyday activities. They will simply hang out together, cook together or for each other, eat at home or at a restaurant, have a drink, walk the dog, and go shopping. If a mentor and/or mentee have children, they often do activities together with the children, such as going to a playground or petting zoo or discovering the local toy library.

Sports are also a very common activity, either simply for leisure or because the mentee wants to learn a specific skill, such as swimming or biking. For example, one mentee wanted to learn how to swim, so the mentor taught him over a period of several months. They continue to swim together even now, three years later. Another mentor arranged a bike for their mentee, and they now meet twice a week to bike or run together. Some of the sports duos do together are walking, hiking, running, biking, swimming, climbing, and rollerblading. Working out together does not require constant communication which also makes it a convenient activity for those who do not (yet) share a common language.

Language acquisition is usually an integral part of a social mentoring programme. While some mentors and mentees may choose to approach this very deliberately by preparing for the mentee’s classes and exams, mentees usually improve their language skills by simply spending time with a native speaker and having opportunities to practice and ask questions while engaging in other activities. Since communication might be difficult in the beginning of the relationship due to language restrictions, doing something active, such as working out, is often preferable to meeting up for drinks, for example.

**An example from practice**

‘Certainly, the first few times, we do recommend doing an activity, because just sitting at the table together and talking is very difficult. But we also say: it is certainly not necessary to “make” time for your mentee, but try to involve the person in daily activities, in things you do anyway, so going to the store or cooking or going for a walk. [...] An example we give that does not require language is, if they meet at home, to sit together behind the computer and listen to Youtube. The mentee can have the mentor listen to music of their country or look on Google Earth where they come from, and they can tell them how they came to be here.’

In addition to doing leisure activities together, mentors may also help mentees with more practical concerns. As new inhabitants, mentees will usually need to arrange various types of assistance, services, and other necessities. Even if the focus of social mentoring is supposed to be on leisure activities, mentors will usually assist mentees with these tasks by sharing information, translating letters and other important documents, helping them with their taxes, and accompanying them to appointments with the municipality, doctor, school, etc.

Assistance may also include helping mentees look for housing and/or liaising between the mentee and their landlord, finding employment opportunities and preparing the mentee for job interviews, tutoring them or their children, and accompanying them to parent-teacher meetings, among others.

One of the mentors arranged a job interview for their mentee and accompanied them to the interview while another taught their mentee how to drive a car. These are far-reaching tasks and are often considered outside the realm of social mentoring but they are common in practice. Some coordinators allow these forms of assistance as long as both participants have no problem with the mentor providing assistance of this kind. Other programmes will intervene and refer the mentee to relevant professionals instead.

The relationship between a mentor and mentee develops over time, and so do the activities they engage in. Mentees often require more practical assistance in the beginning, but once those immediate needs are met, the relationship will usually shift towards leisure activities, with perhaps the occasional question or request for assistance if a new need arises for the mentee. One of the mentees, for example, required considerable study guidance at the beginning, from helping with homework and preparing for exams to scheduling. Over time, the mentee not only improved their knowledge of the local language, but also became more independent and confident in their abilities. Nowadays, the mentor and mentee are friends and primarily engage in leisure activities.

While many duos terminate their relationship at the end of the formal mentoring period, others continue their relationship as friends. Over time, they may even celebrate holidays together, go to each other's birthday parties, and go on trips together. In some exceptional cases, former mentors and mentees referred to each other as family.

#### **An example from practice**

'The experience with [mentee] was very fascinating, and it still is. It has evolved in the meantime. Now I don't consider him a refugee anymore, he's just a citizen of [city] and we do things together, we go out to eat or cook or play sports or go to the theatre. He's just one of my friends. We've also been on trips together. It doesn't necessarily have to be that way, but if it is, that's pretty cool.'

#### **An example from practice**

'We also tell the mentors it's not all doom and gloom of course, it's about going for a walk, about social interaction, to get to know each other's culture. We have mentoring couples who have been celebrating holidays together for years now, or who are invited to each other's birthday parties, who just cook together once a week, and that's all part of it. We also don't want to reduce the mentor to someone who just puts out the fires or fills in the gaps left by the professionals, nor do we want only those mentors who are going to solve the world's problems and who are only there for relief assistance. We always say: it's about connecting and getting to know people.'

### **6.2.3 Exchange based on equality and respect**

A mentor and mentee relationship is prone to asymmetry and paternalism. Even if programmes advocate for equality between mentor and mentee, truly achieving such equality is difficult, if not impossible.

While equality between participants may be difficult to achieve, coordinators emphasise that the relationship should not be entirely one-sided and should benefit both mentee and mentor. The benefits for the mentee are more obvious. They often improve their language skills, become more involved in their local community, and receive other practical support that helps them get settled in their new city. In addition to all the practical ways in which mentors assist mentees, mentees also benefit in more indirect ways. Through their mentoring relationship, they gain more confidence and become more independent. However, while the benefits for the mentee are more pronounced and emphasised by mentoring programmes, mentors also benefit from the relationship in a number of ways.

According to one mentor, their relationships with several mentees increased their empathic abilities. The mentor became more aware and knowledgeable about the struggles refugees face and developed a deeper sense of respect for people on the move. Almost all mentors expressed similar personal developments. While they were all supportive of refugees before their involvement in the mentoring programme, their relationship with the mentee had a significant influence on their thinking. Mentors became more vocal about immigration policy and diversity and would call out friends if they said something harmful or ignorant. They became more knowledgeable about the mentee's religion and developed more respect for religious differences. One creative mentor started incorporating themes of diversity, migration and belonging in their art.

Mentors also benefited in other ways. Mentees would show their appreciation and reciprocate by showing an interest in the lives of their mentors, cooking for them, and inviting them into their home. One of the mentors taught the daughter of the family she was mentoring how to ride a bike and swim, and when she was ill, the family would visit her and bring food to her door. Preparing food for the mentor was one of the main ways mentees showed their appreciation. Such signs of appreciation help the mentor feel valued and create a feeling of reciprocity and appreciation that can be difficult to achieve otherwise.

According to several coordinators, mentors and mentees, this reciprocity and mutual interest and respect are important characteristics of successful mentoring relationships.



### An example from practice

Another mentoring duo attributed their successful relationship not only to similar interests but also to a sense of mutual respect and interest in each other's lives. Their ability to have good conversations about almost any topic, including culture, religion, and politics, helped to create a strong and long-lasting bond. At the beginning, the mentee was still finding their place and figuring out how to practice their faith in a new country. Having a mentor who was very open to talk about such matters, who listened and asked questions without judgment, was exactly what the mentee needed at that time and set the stage for a friendship that is still strong, even three years after the official mentoring period.

### An example from practice

You can't know in advance who you will end up with, but what I think is very important is that those two people really respect each other. That is really the basis to build on. But on the other hand, they should also be very honest with each other and build a trustworthy relationship. For example, in my case, I can trust [mentor] in all aspects. [...] I would like to think a mentor is a person you can talk to about almost anything, that would be an ideal situation for me, that you have respect for each other and build a reliable relationship and are honest with each other. Everything else you can figure out later.' (Mentee)

### An example from practice

'You should be open to other cultures. [...] Not always saying: "yes, but in Belgium we do it like this." I said that a lot in the beginning until I thought, well that is actually discrimination, it's like saying we do it better. You need to get away from that idea a little bit.' (Mentor)

One important demonstration of reciprocity and mutual respect is the commitment participants have to the mentoring relationship. In situations where one participant was more committed than the other, the relationship was often terminated prematurely. After a mentee family failed to show up for their appointments with the mentor, did not cancel or apologise, and called the mentor late at night multiple times, the coordinator scheduled a meeting with all parties to discuss the relationship. When there were no improvements after two interventions, the mentor decided to put an end to the mentoring relationship. Without mutual appreciation and commitment, a mentoring relationship is bound to fail.

However, the mentor will usually have to take initiative, especially in the beginning of the relationship. They will have to schedule meetings with the mentee and suggest activities. While this may change as the relationship develops, coordinators often inform mentors before the mentoring commences that they will likely have to take initiative, and stress that this does not signal disinterest on the part of the mentee.

Not every mentee will feel comfortable enough to take the first step to contact the mentor. This may be due to cultural differences or because the mentor is a volunteer who already does a lot for them, and they might feel uncomfortable 'burdening' the mentor. This 'restraint' is not necessarily only related to cultural differences. Perhaps the mentee perceives a difference in social status or time availability. Not every mentee will have the confidence to take the first step right away.

### An example from practice

'Of course, in the initial period, we often see that the initiative comes mainly from the mentor [...], but as the relationship improves and when we see that it is going well, we also expect that the newcomer does not sit and wait but that they also dare to ask the mentor for help. [...] It goes well the moment that the newcomer asks some questions, takes pictures of questions they have, for example a letter they received, asking "Can you translate that for me?" So the more it comes from the newcomers' side, the better it goes. Because a mentor may think: "Does it always have to come from my side?"

When asked what is important for a match to succeed, one of the coordinators said the following:

### An example from practice

'If the mentor has the feeling that they can really mean something to the newcomer, that the newcomer trusts them and that they are also inviting towards the mentor. We have some mentors who are insecure in that respect and then you get those uncomfortable situations where the mentor sometimes asks: 'Does this newcomer actually like me?' And then they get a bit uncomfortable. So that feeling of trust or reassurance and some eagerness on the part of the newcomer, we see that this is really equality, because otherwise we sometimes have the case that mentors become very insecure or they start to do more than usual or they won't do their best anymore, so yes, that trust and reassurance.'

Even if a relationship is successful, there may still be times when one of the participants is asked or expected to do something they do not feel comfortable with. This could be a request from the mentee that the mentor does not want to or know how to solve, or a mentor who takes their mentoring too far. One coordinator recalled a situation in which a mentor became too involved and persistent, pressuring the mentee to study or work so much that they eventually stopped answering the mentor's messages.

The importance of setting and guarding boundaries is emphasised by all programme coordinators. In social mentoring programmes, problems with boundaries often arise when the mentor is expected to or willingly takes on responsibilities of professionals, such as the mentee's social worker. Programmes typically offer mentor training sessions on the topic of boundaries and discuss its importance during the intake and/or info session. Even though programmes can inform and support participants on setting and guarding their own boundaries, it is up to participants to decide what their boundaries are and to communicate them to their mentor/mentee if necessary. Coordinators can guide them on how to do this and can intervene when boundaries are crossed.

### 6.2.4 Concluding the mentoring relationship

Most programmes that adopt a periodical mentoring structure will organise an event to conclude each mentoring period, which may be an event for all mentors and mentees, a meeting with each mentoring duo, or a meeting with the mentor and/or mentee separately. Programmes without a predetermined mentoring duration and/or consistent follow-up may not have a final event or meeting, or will only organise it at the request of (one of) the participants.

Some programmes organise a collective event to wrap up a mentoring period. This works well for programmes that recruit and match participants for a specific period (e.g. January to June), so that a whole group of mentors and mentees start and end at the same time. For programmes with continuous recruitment and matching a collective closing event usually does not make sense, as duos will start and finish at various times. Usually, such programmes will have a talk with the mentor or the duo after the mentoring period to discuss their experience and possible points of improvement.

One of the programmes changed its approach after peer learning sessions with mentors revealed that it was sometimes difficult for mentors that there was no specific end or conclusion, especially when the mentoring was less successful, or the mentor and mentee lost touch after a while. Nowadays, the programme organises a closing event so that participants can properly wrap up the mentoring period and decide whether they want to continue their relationship and/or whether the mentor wants to mentor a new mentee. At the event, participants are also asked to share their opinion of the programme via evaluation forms. This not only contributes to the improvement of the mentoring programme but also provides another opportunity to hear from the mentees, who are usually not included in the follow-up, training, and peer learning. According to the coordinator, the evaluation forms also gave them some indication of the evolution of a mentee's written language skills.

This final event is also the perfect opportunity to thank mentors and mentees for their participation in the programme. This show of appreciation for participants, especially the volunteers (mentors), can contribute to the recovery of mentors and to the recruitment of new participants through word of mouth.

#### An example from practice

The mentoring programme in Leuven sent out cards to all their mentors to thank them for their commitment to the programme during the coronavirus pandemic. ([example](#))

#### An example from practice

Samen Gentenaar organises a group activity to wrap up each mentoring period. After a guided tour of the town hall, participants can evaluate the programme. When this was no longer possible due to COVID-19, they went on a group walk and had drinks. Participants were later emailed for their feedback. Mentors are always asked whether they want to continue in the programme.

#### An example from practice

According to the coordinator of Compagnons Ostend, 'A project stands or falls with its volunteers.' Because of that, 'You have to pamper them, you have to really appreciate them. And we think it is normal that every once in a while, they get a thank you, in words or in a different way, that they get the feeling that they are really appreciated, which also means you can keep them involved in the project more easily. And they will spread it to the outside world.'

Mentors and mentees can also terminate the mentoring relationship prematurely. In that case, they will usually contact the programme to discuss their request for termination. Some programmes choose not to spend too much time on such terminations, especially if the person has already made up their mind. They will discuss the matter by phone and leave it at that. Others will schedule a meeting with the mentor and/or mentee to discuss the reason for the premature termination, to receive their input on the programme, and, if relevant, to ask if the mentor wants to continue in the programme and/or if the mentee wants a new mentor.

## 6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above, the following recommendations can be formulated:

- Programmes should have a clearly defined mentoring duration which is based on the goals of the programme and can be adapted upon request. Six months is the most common duration among social mentoring programmes and is appropriate for most programmes.
- Programmes should set expectations in terms of contact frequency, taking the goals of the programme into account. However, a minimum contact frequency of twice a month is generally recommended.
- Programmes should schedule a first meeting with the mentor, mentee, and coordinator before the mentoring relationship starts. If the mentee was referred to the programme, it is an added value if the referrer can attend the meeting. It is recommended that first meetings take place face to face, but if this is not feasible, they could also be done via video call.
- Programmes should use this first meeting to reiterate the main objectives of the programme, their expectations, and the role of the mentor.
- Programmes should have duos schedule their next meeting during this first meeting or give the duos a basic time frame (a couple of days) in which they need to schedule their next meeting to prevent early drop-out.
- Programmes should give both participants an opportunity to decline the match after the first meeting.
- Programmes should let participants decide what activities they want to do but set expectations at the beginning of the relationship and provide an overview of acceptable (and unacceptable) activities. In addition, programmes could provide suggestions for activities, for example via a newsletter or activity calendar.
- Programmes may seek partnerships with local businesses and organisations to arrange free tickets or coupons for activities for their participants.
- Programmes should inform mentors that they will be expected to take initiative, especially at the beginning of the mentoring relationship, but that, over time, decisions should be made collaboratively.
- It is suggested programmes formally conclude each mentoring relationship. They may do this via an official closing event and/or by scheduling a final talk with the mentor and/or mentee.



## 7

# FOLLOW-UP AND ROLE OF THE COORDINATOR

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**While mentors and mentees have significant influence on the outcome, and ultimately the success of a mentoring relationship, the organisation of the mentoring programme also has an important role to play. In this chapter, we will delve deeper into the role of the coordinator and the support and follow-up that social mentoring organisations provide to their participants. After briefly discussing the limited literature on the topic, we will discuss our findings from practice, followed by a list of recommendations.**

## 7.1 ACCORDING TO THE LITERATURE

Programme staff and coordinators can have a significant impact on the success of individual mentoring relationships and the mentoring programme at large. In their study on formal mentoring schemes across the UK, Gannon and Washington (2019) found that programme coordinators undertake a diversity of activities, from planning the mentoring process, recruiting the pool of mentors, matching mentors and mentees, monitoring and supporting the mentoring relationships, and evaluating their own mentoring schemes to arranging and conducting training for participants, organising networking and other events, and bidding for funding.

Providing monitoring and support to mentoring duos is one of the primary responsibilities of programme staff and crucial to the success of a mentoring programme. Effective and regular monitoring and support by members of staff can contribute to greater mentor satisfaction within the mentoring relationship (Martin & Sifers, 2012), longer-lasting and stronger relationships, and more frequent meetings between mentors and mentees (Herrera et al., 2013; Herrera, 2007; Herrera et al., 2000).

In their study on youth mentoring, Herrera et al. (2013) found that most mentors who receive supportive phone calls from the mentoring programme consider these helpful in strengthening their mentoring relationship. Receiving consistent feedback from the programme could also impact mentors' feelings of self-efficacy, with greater self-efficacy resulting in higher satisfaction with the relationship, more frequent meetings with their mentees, fewer challenges in the mentoring relationship, more perceived benefits for mentees, and higher overall quality of the mentoring relationship (Karcher et al., 2005; Martin & Sifers, 2012; Parra et al., 2002).

In addition to providing support and monitoring, coordinators can promote participation in the programme and retention of volunteers by recognising and celebrating their achievements (Bayer et al., 2015). Culp and Schwartz (1998) found that volunteers consider informal, intrinsic rewards, such as thank-you notes and 'a pat on the back', more meaningful than formal, extrinsic rewards. The importance of follow-up and a good relationship between staff and mentors to the retention of mentors has also been reiterated in the literature (Behnia, 2007).

## 7.2 IN PRACTICE

### 7.2.1 Role and profile of the coordinator

Most of the coordinators of social mentoring programmes for newcomers tend to work alone due to the small scale and limited funds available for such programmes. Consequently, they take on a wide variety of roles and tasks. Our fieldwork shows that coordinators are usually responsible for developing the framework of the mentoring programme, recruiting new mentors and mentees, developing recruitment materials, liaising with partner organisations and other stakeholders, such as (potential) referrers, screening and selecting candidates, e.g. by interviewing each new candidate, matching mentors and mentees, supporting and following up with active participants, arranging training sessions, peer learning and group activities, organising a closing event and/or feedback opportunity, evaluating the programme and making improvements over time. Where a programme has additional members of staff or interns, the coordinator might also be responsible for general management duties.

### Coordinator responsibilities

When FMDO wanted to start a mentoring programme (now known as Compagnons) in Ostend, they posted a job vacancy for a project officer. According to the job description, the officer would be responsible for:

- General follow-up and development of the project
- Promotion and drafting of the promotional campaign of the project
- Point of contact for (potential) mentors
- Matching mentors and newcomers
- Developing support material and inspirational lists for activities for the mentors and mentees
- Organising intervision (peer learning) sessions for mentors
- Follow-up of mentors and mentees
- Follow-up with Public Centre for Social Welfare (main partner) and other partners in the framework of the project

### The ideal coordinator

The same job vacancy of FMDO also gives an insight into the ideal profile of a coordinator of a social mentoring programme for newcomers. According to FMDO, a coordinator should be someone who:

- Has a dynamic personality
- Can write well and has good communication and administrative skills
- Is a born networker
- Possesses strong organisational skills
- Is flexible
- Does not mind working evenings and weekends
- Preferably has a feel for diversity and knowledge of other languages
- Has at least a Bachelor's degree

## 7.2.2 Support and follow-up

In the previous chapters, we have already discussed several common tasks of a coordinator: recruitment of new mentors and mentees, screening and selection of candidates, and matching selected mentors and mentees. However, a match between a mentor and mentee does not signal the end of a coordinator's responsibilities. One of the most important tasks of a coordinator is supporting and following up with the participants of the mentoring programme.

While all programmes offer some level of support, the extent of this support can vary significantly, from closer to more distant. Close monitoring involves personal contact, is proactive, and occurs on a regular basis (e.g. monthly). When monitoring is more distant, contact may be via email, is more reactive in nature, and occurs sporadically. Social mentoring programmes differ significantly in their monitoring approach. Programmes that opt for more distant forms of follow-up usually do so because their resources are limited. Many coordinators prefer a close follow-up, even if they are currently unable to implement it themselves, although there are some who stress the personal responsibility of mentors and mentees and deliberately opt for a more distant follow-up.

### An example from practice

Samen Thuis in Hasselt is one of the programmes that deliberately opt for a more distant type of follow-up. They mainly see themselves as a mediator between newcomers and Belgians. The programme brings them into contact, but from then on, it is up to the participants to make it work: 'We give you a chance to meet each other and then it's up to you.'

While distant support may involve sending sporadic follow-up emails, coordinators who adopt this monitoring strategy will usually expect participants to contact them if they have a problem and/or need advice. We refer to this as a reactive follow-up approach.

Whether a more distant or closer type of follow-up influences the quality and success of a mentoring relationship is difficult to deduce from our results. This will require further research. A coordinator of a programme with a more distant follow-up did mention that they might not hear about problems in a relationship until the last moment, although this problem appears common among all programmes, including those with a closer follow-up. Nevertheless, following up with participants regularly can at least help coordinators learn about and address a problem before it becomes insurmountable.

A close follow-up can include both formal and informal moments of contact between the coordinator and the participant. One of the most common formal monitoring options is follow-up by telephone, which involves the coordinator contacting the participant(s) on a regular basis to enquire about the ongoing relationship as well as any difficulties and/or questions participants might have. Coordinators who use this follow-up strategy often primarily adopt it during the first few months of the relationship, after which they will likely stop or reduce the frequency of their follow-up, depending on how the relationship is progressing.



### Examples from practice

What constitutes 'regular' follow-up differs from programme to programme. Tandem, for example, calls mentors 7 to 10 days after the start of the mentoring relationship, organises a monthly (online) get-together for mentors, sends them an email with tips every 3 weeks and requires a message every time they meet with their mentee. Fedasil Kapellen, on the other hand, contacts participants after one month and after two months. After the second month, they contact them every two months until the end of the mentoring relationship.

Even those programmes that offer a close follow-up do not typically offer in-person, one-on-one support. Coordinators usually only see their participants one-on-one or as a duo when a problem arises. If one or both participants indicate that there is a conflict or problem, the coordinator will usually invite them to their office to discuss the matter and find a solution that works for both.

Other informal moments of contact often take place during programme activities, such as mentor training sessions, peer learning sessions, or group activities. Many programmes struggle to provide regular follow-ups for all individual participants due to limited resources, so group activities offer convenient opportunities to follow up with multiple participants at once. Organisations may also have other programmes or activities, such as a language café where newcomers can practice their language skills by talking to native speakers and other language learners in an informal setting. Other common opportunities for interaction include other informal language classes or learning opportunities, walk-in hours at the organisation, or other activities organised by the organisation but not exclusive to the mentoring programme. Such activities are usually accessible to anyone, voluntary, and organised on a regular basis (e.g. once a week or once a month). If the coordinator of the mentoring programme is present, such collective events provide opportunities for interaction and informal follow-up with participants of the mentoring programme. This is especially important in regard to the mentee. Most programmes focus their regular follow-up efforts on the mentor, so when they meet mentees at collective events, this provides a unique opportunity to get their input and perspective on the mentoring relationship.

A main shortcoming of social mentoring programmes is the limited to non-existent follow-up of mentees. According to most coordinators, this is primarily due to time constraints. They will rely on the mentor to pass on relevant information to the mentee and inform the coordinator if the mentee experiences problems or requires professional assistance. However, this one-sided follow-up could lead the coordinator to miss important information about the mentoring relationship and does not contribute to the equality between participants that social mentoring programmes often strive for.

### A mentee's perspective

'I have no contact with [the mentoring organisation]. They never told me there was a point of contact, for example in case something is wrong. I think that could also be a point of improvement: "If there is a problem, you can come to us." I have never heard that, they just matched me.'

## 7.2.3 Approachability and accessibility

To an extent, all programmes, even those with closer monitoring, will require participants to reach out to them in case of problems. Even with a regular follow-up, it can be difficult to remain up to date on all duos, especially for larger mentoring programmes. To get participants to contact the coordinator when a need arises, the programme and the coordinator should feel approachable and accessible. Most coordinators identify approachability and accessibility as some of the most important characteristics of a successful mentoring programme. Their monitoring approach (distant or close) had no influence on the importance they placed on being approachable and accessible to participants.

Approachability and accessibility relate both to the coordinator and the programme itself. Participants should feel comfortable contacting and talking to the coordinator, and the coordinator should be easy to reach and readily available for help and advice. Coordinators usually try to explain their role during the intake or first meeting with participants. During these early stages of the mentoring process, they will usually establish themselves as the go-to person for advice and support.

The mentoring programme's approachability and accessibility is largely determined by the atmosphere created by the coordinator and the organisation. One coordinator stressed the importance of creating an atmosphere that is easily distinguishable from the formal settings newcomers often find themselves in when they first arrive in a new city. When they visit the coordinator, it should not feel as though they are at their social worker's office or immigration service. Participants were free to walk into the office any time during working hours and could contact the coordinator at almost any time, even in the evening or during the weekend. The coordinator could be reached by phone, social media, and/or WhatsApp and participants had many opportunities to meet the coordinator and each other. According to one coordinator, creating this 'familial' atmosphere was more beneficial to mentors than any formal training session could ever be. The informal, accessible character of social mentoring is exactly what sets it apart from other programmes and forms of assistance. It is this informality and accessibility that many coordinators consider pivotal for a successful social mentoring programme.

### An example from practice

'We are always available to them. They know that we can be reached 24/7 to answer their questions. [...] And certainly before the pandemic, the mentors often dropped in on us. We encourage that, too, we say: "If you are in the neighbourhood, drop in. Let us know how it goes and not only when there are problems, but also when it's going well." We just like to be kept informed. There are some mentors who just drop by or give us a call to catch up. Only we still miss the newcomers' side of things, we really want to ask them how they experience their participation in the mentoring programme. I think that is the biggest shortcoming we have.' (Leuven)

### An example from practice

'The professional [programme coordinator] should be a clear and accessible point of contact during the mentoring process that a mentor and family go through. The coordinator follows up on requests for help from families if these can be followed up within the framework of the mentoring programme and/or the organisation, and/or refers them to the organisations which are competent for a specific matter. The professional is also available to support the mentor and should ensure that the context is appropriate and accessible so that the mentor can function and carry out the volunteer work properly. For example: clear use of language, customised training, communicating through tools that are user-friendly, providing information on activities that the mentor and family can participate in, etc.' (Tandem)

## 7.2.4 Coordination with professionals

Mentors in social mentoring programmes participate on a voluntary basis. Consequently, there are limits to what can be expected of them and what they should be allowed to do. A mentor is not supposed to replace the mentee's social worker and/or other professionals but works alongside and in addition to such professional forms of support. This is precisely because mentors can do what professionals cannot: spend quality time with the newcomer, accompany them to other organisations, sports clubs, and events, and offer small administrative and practical assistance, such as reading and translating letters.

Oftentimes, the assistance offered by mentors goes far beyond what is expected of them. Mentors will become involved in the mentee's search for housing, education and/or employment, or in some cases even in their asylum cases and communication with lawyers and other professionals.

While some programmes refrain from intervening in mentoring relationships when this happens and let participants decide how involved they want the mentor to be, most will step in if they think the mentor is taking on tasks that are supposed to be handled by professionals. Mentors may have good intention, but their lack of expert knowledge can have unintended and detrimental consequences. Examples include a mentor who gave the wrong advice to their mentee, which made them almost lose their immigration status, or a mentor who suggested to their mentee that they should refuse to pay their rental deposit.

While this is difficult to avoid entirely in practice, it can be significantly reduced by improving communication with both professionals and participants. One aspect of this is setting expectations at the start of the programme and clearly delineating what a mentor can and cannot do. This is preferably done in cooperation with, or at least with input from, the social worker and, if relevant, other professionals assisting the mentee, and communicated to both mentor and mentee. According to coordinators, ongoing communication with professionals is also important to ensure that they have the correct expectations of the programme and the mentor and will not delegate their own responsibilities to the mentor.

### An example from practice

'I recently had an intake session with a mentor and mentee, which took place in the Public Centre for Social Welfare itself with the presence of the social worker of the mentee; in that way, the mentor also knows the social worker, and they can exchange information with each other. For example, a social worker asked: "Would you like to go to the housing service together with the mentee?" So the tasks or role of the mentor are already defined, so that there is no double work. And it is also not the intention that the mentor becomes the social worker of the mentee, so, if possible, the social worker is present [during the first meeting].'

Failing to clearly delineate the tasks and role of the mentor may lead to conflict between the mentor and the professional, because either (1) the mentor thinks the professional is not doing enough for the mentee and relying too much on the mentor to offer assistance that goes beyond their voluntary commitment, or (2) the professional thinks the mentor is doing too much for the mentee and in doing so interferes with the work of the professional. Depending on the situation, the coordinator will then have to contact the mentor and/or the professional in hopes of resolving the conflict or incorrect allocation of responsibilities.

Another way to improve the coordination with and between the mentor and professionals is to stimulate communication between them early on in the mentoring process. Some programmes opt to have the mentor and referrer meet during the first meeting with the mentee, while others provide contact information and give the mentor the option of contacting the professional. At the same time, some programmes reason that coordination between the mentor and the professional implies that there should be responsibility-sharing, when in reality the mentor is only supposed to do leisure activities or offer small assistance, neither of which require coordination with professionals. According to them, mentors should not be burdened with unnecessary tasks and responsibilities that go far beyond their voluntary commitment to the mentoring programme.

### **7.2.5 After the mentoring relationship**

Once the mentoring relationship ends, most programmes will no longer offer support and follow-up. Mentors and mentees can, of course, choose to remain in touch. This is usually not explicitly discussed by the parties involved but is instead an organic progression of the relationship between the mentor and mentee. Most duos that continue their relationship after the formal conclusion do so because they have become friends.

Even if programmes no longer offer formal follow-up, they often continue to email former participants and invite them to events, unless participants request to be taken off the mailing list. Some programmes and organisations also offer other events and activities that former participants will frequent, which allows the coordinator to remain in touch with some of them. For example, one of the programmes organises a get-together once a month where former and current duos as well as the general public can interact. Another programme, which is organised by a non-profit organisation, observes and supports the transfer of volunteers within the organisation. While some of their volunteers may no longer be involved in the mentoring programme, they will still be active within the overarching organisation and therefore often continue to be in touch with the programme coordinator.

Programmes without a predetermined mentoring duration and end date will usually continue to provide support for as long as the relationship lasts. It should be noted, however, that programmes without a set duration are usually the same programmes that offer minimal support and follow-up in general. The support they do offer will usually lessen over time as the mentoring relationship either turns into friendship or dwindles until it stops altogether.

## Cases: Samen Gentenaar and Samen Thuis in Hasselt

The different approaches to support and follow-up can be illustrated by comparing two social mentoring programmes.

**Samen Gentenaar** is a social mentoring programme for newcomers in Ghent, Belgium. It is organised by INGent, a government agency that bears responsibility for the operational implementation of Flemish integration policy in the city of Ghent. Samen Gentenaar operates within a clear framework and structure and offers considerable support and follow-up to its participants.

While the programme has no fixed start dates, it usually starts three times a year for a duration of six months, with groups overlapping. Once the waiting list is long enough, the coordinator will schedule a collective info session. Attendance at the session is a requirement to participate in the programme. During the info session, the coordinator provides information about the programme and candidates can fill out an intake form. Once the coordinator has matched all mentors and mentees, they will be invited to a collective event where they will meet their match for the first time. During their mentoring relationship, duos are expected to meet at least twice a month and must communicate each activity they do to the coordinator via email. While this is an insurance requirement, it also allows for regular monitoring. Participants are also invited to intervisions, of which there are three during each mentoring period: one for mentors, one for mentees, and one mixed. In addition, the programme organises group activities, mentor trainings, and duos are invited to OPEN-BAR, a monthly meet-up of newcomers and long-time residents of Ghent. After six months, duos are invited to a collective closing event and asked to fill out an evaluation form. Support and follow-up cease after the event, although former duos will still be invited to OPEN-BAR.

**Samen Thuis in Hasselt** is a social mentoring programme for newcomers that is organised by Avansa Limburg. Avansa is a socio-cultural organisation with twelve other regional offices throughout Flanders and Brussels. Samen Thuis in Hasselt offers minimal support and follow-up and describes its approach as follows: 'We give you an opportunity to meet and then it's up to you.'

Interested candidates are invited to an individual intake interview with the programme coordinator. During this interview, they will be informed about the programme and asked about their motivation and other information necessary for screening and matching. The programme has no collective start event. Duos can start their mentoring relationship any time during the year. Once the coordinator has found a good match, the mentor and mentee will be invited for a first meeting. The coordinator attends the meeting for the first 15 minutes, asks the duo to schedule their next meeting, and then leaves them to get to know one another. Once the mentoring relationship starts, the coordinator takes a step back. They will follow-up with the duo after a month and at the end of the mentoring period, which is usually six months. Follow-up is done by phone. While a minimum meeting frequency of once a month is suggested, this is not monitored, and participants are expected to contact the programme if they need assistance. Mentors are informed about external training events but are not required to attend. While the programme used to organise intervisions, they stopped due to the low turnout. Starting next year, they will organise an annual group activity for all participants of the programme.



## 7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above, the following recommendations can be formulated:

- Programmes should offer proactive follow-up to both mentors and mentees at regular intervals to enquire about the progress of the relationship, any difficulties, and questions. Programmes should have at least one follow-up moment during the mentoring period. Follow-up can be in-person or via email, phone, etc.
- Mentors and mentees should know who to contact when they have questions or problems. This should be clearly communicated at the start of the mentoring relationship.
- Programmes should be accessible and easily approachable to all participants. The coordinator should be easy to reach and talk to and readily available for help and advice.
- Programmes should recognise the achievements of mentors so as to strengthen mentors' commitment to the programme and improve retention rates.
- In case of a conflict or need that needs handling before the relationship can continue, programmes should intervene and schedule a meeting with both or one of the participants of a mentoring relationship.
- Programmes should provide an opportunity for participants to offer feedback at the end of the mentoring period or when a relationship ends prematurely.
- Programmes may organise a final group activity to wrap up each mentoring period.





# 8

## TRAINING, PEER LEARNING AND GROUP ACTIVITIES

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**While the relationship between a mentor and mentee and the follow-up of that relationship by programme staff are central to any mentoring programme, most programmes also organise additional events and activities. Most commonly, these include (mentor) training sessions, peer learning sessions, and group activities. In this chapter, we will discuss all three in the same structure that we have maintained throughout this report: first, we will discuss the literature, followed by our findings from practice, and finally we will conclude with a list of recommendations based on the two previous sections.**

## 8.1 ACCORDING TO THE LITERATURE

Research on social mentoring programmes for newcomers is also very limited when it comes to mentor training, peer learning, or group activities. For this section, we will thus primarily rely on research that focuses on other types of mentoring.

According to Allen et al. (2006) and Neuwirth and Wahl (2017), the success of a mentoring programme is positively related to the presence of training programmes and their quality. Programmes with ongoing training show better mentoring outcomes for their mentees than programmes that do not offer training (DuBois et al., 2002). In their study of a community-based youth mentoring programme, Parra et al. (2002) found that mentors' perceived quality of training was a positive predictor of mentor efficacy ratings, which in turn showed a positive association with contact frequency, fewer relationship obstacles, and greater involvement in programme-relevant activities.

Allen et al. (2006) found that the hours spent in training related positively to psychosocial mentoring but were negatively associated with mentor-reported relationship quality and role modelling. The authors suggest that a greater investment in the mentoring programme through training may intrude too much into the busy schedules of mentors or disproportionately raise mentor expectations of the programme. Nevertheless, Martin and Sifers (2012) found that the amount of training is positively associated with mentor satisfaction with the mentoring relationship and with beneficial mentoring outcomes. According to Herrera et al. (2000), who studied school-based mentoring programmes for children, mentors who receive more than six hours of training develop the closest and most supportive relationships with their mentees, whereas mentors who receive two hours of training or less develop the least close relationships. However, Parra et al. (2002) note that even a limited amount of training can lead to better mentoring results.

Training should vary according to the stage of the mentoring process (Kupersmidt & Rhodes, 2013). Pre-match training has been shown to contribute to mentors' feelings of self-efficacy, which can, in turn, improve the quality of the mentoring relationship and the outcomes for the mentee (Karcher et al., 2005; Martin & Sifers, 2012). According to Allen et al. (2006), pre-match training can make the mentoring relationship more rewarding by identifying the objectives of the programme, the parameters of the relationship, and by establishing mutually agreed-upon expectations. By setting mutual expectations at the beginning of a mentoring relationship, programmes can contribute to mentor satisfaction and engagement and prevent early drop-out (Drew et al., 2020; Madia & Lutz, 2004). Post-match training can be useful once mentors have had some experience with mentoring and have specific questions or concerns. According to Strapp et al. (2014), post-match training could help mentors deal with setbacks and maintain or restore their commitment to the programme and the relationship.

In mentoring programmes for mentees with a migrant background, mentor competence in navigating cultural and other differences could contribute to more fruitful mentoring relationships (Reeves, 2017). Johnson-Bailey (2012) has identified several practices that can help mentors during their mentoring relationship with their mentee: (1) a willingness to extend beyond normal mentoring expectations; (2) an understanding of the psychological and social effects of racism; (3) cultural competence; (4) an understanding of the mentors' social identity; and (5) an acceptance of the risk and possible discomfort implicit in mentoring across racial lines. Cultural competency training and mentor-to-mentor contact have been shown to have a positive influence on mentor satisfaction and retention (MENTOR, 2015; Stukas and Tanti, 2005). Van 't Hoog et al. (2012) recommend mentor intervision or 'peer learning' as a good way for mentors to exchange tips and experiences on how to deal with cultural differences.



## 8.2 IN PRACTICE

### 8.2.1 Mentor training

Mentor training is a common feature of social mentoring programmes for newcomers. In practice, training may overlap with information sessions, such as those mentioned in chapter 4. However, training is more focused on certain topics, may take place before but also during the mentoring period, and may involve more practical exercises than general information sessions. There can be, however, some overlap with general information sessions, for example when they delve deeper into expectations and setting boundaries. In this chapter we will focus on training, not on information sessions.

#### 8.2.1.1 Training content

The table below lists the most common mentoring topics used by our case studies.

**Table 10. Mentor training topics**

|  |
|--|
| <b>GENERAL</b>                                 |
| Communication and clear language               |
| Setting boundaries                             |
| <b>PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC</b>                      |
| Social map of the city                         |
| Life in the reception centre                   |
| <b>ONE-OFFS</b>                                |
| Psychological well-being and needs of refugees |
| Public employment service                      |
| Volunteering during the coronavirus pandemic   |
| Public Centre for Social Welfare               |

One of the most common types of training offered by mentoring programmes focuses on communication and plain language, i.e. how to talk with a non-native speaker.

#### Training on communication and clear language

Most social mentoring programmes for newcomers in Flanders make use of the training offered by the [Agency for Integration and Civic Integration](#), particularly that on communicating accessibly with non-native speakers. The training covers the following:

- 10 tips on how to communicate with non-native speakers, supported by video material, photos, and illustrations
- Practice exercises in small groups
- Background information on language development, low literacy and illiteracy.

Another common training programme focuses on setting boundaries. Even though programmes discuss this topic during their info and/or intake sessions, they continue to be faced with situations in which participants' boundaries are not protected or respected. Offering a training session on this topic is supposed to provide additional tools for mentors and help them set their limits and practice self-care. Similarly, one of the programmes is considering offering training on the relationship with professionals to help mentors figure out where their responsibilities lie and when and how they should communicate effectively with the professionals assisting the mentee.

Some programmes offer programme-specific training sessions. One of the mentoring programmes is targeted at newcomers in reception centres. To inform mentors about the living situation and prospects of the mentees, they include information on daily life in the reception centre and the asylum system in the training. Another programme organises training on the social map of the city. In this mandatory training, mentors are informed about the professional and voluntary assistance available in the city, such as legal support, mental health clinics, housing support services, employment services, food banks, thrift stores, education, childcare, and leisure activities. Participants are also given a useful overview that they can consult every time their mentee has a question or need that they cannot directly answer.

#### Social map training

'Everyone has questions about the social map, but that's always such a monster, I think, a social map. It often changes, you may have websites but they're not up to date, that's not workable. So we have built our own social map from our own experience. We say very clearly "This is really just an illustration..." We also make it compulsory for them to receive the training so that they have something to hold on to, so that they have some orientation about the landscape in the city, which partners are most enquired about and/or have enough expertise according to us to assist this target group. They don't have to know the map by heart, but we do think it's important that they've heard of other organisations, that they know where to find their resources, that they can refer to that overview document and that they do put some effort into that as a mentor.' (Leuven)

In addition to these more common training sessions, programmes sometimes offer one-off sessions organised by external partners or to address a specific need that is communicated by mentors. Examples include a session with the public employment service, an information session about the Public Centre for Social Welfare, a session on the psychological well-being and needs of refugees, and a session on volunteering with newcomers during the coronavirus pandemic. Other common topics addressed in training sessions are empowerment and diversity.



Training sessions are most effective when they are interactive. Rather than simply sharing information, programmes try to engage mentors and give them opportunities to share their input and experience throughout the session. Alternating between providing information and moments of exchange tends to be most effective. Training sessions usually include case examples to get a discussion going about how to approach a situation or problem. The interaction between mentors that stems from this is an important part of the training and may also help to create a group feeling. To keep mentors engaged, training sessions usually include many different visuals, such as video clips, photos, and other images. Rather than explaining a topic, the coordinator or organiser of the training might show a video clip that illustrates the topic and ask the group to discuss it among themselves.

### 8.2.1.2 Organisation of the training

Social mentoring programmes usually offer training sessions to mentors, although their approach differs. One recurring point of consideration mentioned by programme coordinators is whether training should be voluntary or mandatory. In practice, participation is almost always voluntary, although some programmes require mentors to attend specific training, such as one programme which organises mandatory training on the social map of the city. In order to be a good mentor, the coordinators of the programme consider it necessary for mentors to know the various organisations and services throughout the city that could be beneficial to the mentee. However, in general, mentor trainings in social mentoring programmes are voluntary.

Most coordinators want to maintain the voluntary and informal character of their programmes and do not want to impose too many responsibilities and expectations on the mentors. Nevertheless, several coordinators referenced the Armen Tekort approach as an interesting alternative. Armen Tekort is a non-profit organisation that connects disadvantaged residents (mentees) with more advantaged residents (mentors) in order to lift them out of their disadvantaged position. Mentors are required to educate themselves through various types of training before they are matched to a disadvantaged person for a two-year mentoring period. Training is thus not only mandatory, but it also primarily takes place before the mentoring (and even the matching) starts. While several coordinators of social mentoring programmes for newcomers show interest in this approach, they prefer to maintain the more informal, accessible character of their programmes.

#### An example from practice

'Sometimes we have the feeling that we might not be there enough for our mentors, as in that it might be a bit too noncommittal. We have already thought about that a lot because, for example, you also have Armen Tekort, which is also a mentoring project, but it has quite a high threshold, because, to become a mentor, you must first follow a very long training course, followed by many interventions, so the guidance is very intensive. I think that is very interesting for the mentors, but it does make it a high threshold to become a mentor. And that might also put off many people. On the other hand, we think it is nice that we do not have such a high threshold and they have a lot of freedom, we want to maintain this low threshold to attract as many volunteers as possible, but that is a difficult balance.' (Fedasil Kapellen)

In most social mentoring programmes for newcomers, training is offered throughout the mentoring period. Some also incorporate some training elements into their info sessions or have one mandatory training session, such as the social map training, which is offered at the start of the mentoring period so that mentors can use the knowledge to improve their support to the mentee. According to one of the coordinators, requiring volunteers to participate in training becomes more difficult once they have started their mentoring relationship. By offering training sessions before the mentoring starts, programmes can easily make them obligatory for participation.

Since most of the training offered by social mentoring programmes is voluntary, the frequency is largely determined by the participants. Programmes usually offer several training options throughout the mentoring period. They will email a list of options to the mentors for which they can register if they are interested.

#### An example from practice

'We are still trying to figure out what you can ask your mentors to do, because they are volunteers and we don't want to bombard them with training and peer coaching and another meeting and another fun activity, because they already have their weekly or fortnightly meetings with their newcomer, so I find that a difficult balancing act. [...] We don't want to make it too hard, but of course you want them to do their mentoring work properly.'

Programmes either organise the training sessions themselves, promote training sessions offered by partners or other organisations, or use a combination of their own and external training. While one programme organises its own training session developed by the programme coordinator, discussing topics such as intercultural communication and life in the reception centre, several other programmes promote training sessions offered by the national Agency for Integration and Civic Integration or their municipality.

Promoting external training has its benefits. Developing training sessions requires a lot of time, which coordinators usually lack. Not having to devote time to developing training programmes also leaves more time for follow-up, which some coordinators consider more important to a successful mentoring programme than formal training. Training offered by external organisations also benefits from years of expertise and experience, something which cannot be rivalled by programme coordinators who, if they organise training, do so in addition to all their other responsibilities. With training offered by external organisations, participants may also interact with volunteers from other mentoring or volunteer programmes, which could broaden their horizons and lead to new insights that can benefit them in their own mentoring relationship.

One of the main benefits of developing your own training sessions is that the training is more programme-specific. Coordinators can directly address the concerns and questions of their volunteers and focus on the topics most relevant for their mentoring programme. Some training, such as the social map training, is so context- and programme-specific that no other organisation can develop it. When training is organised by the programme and only accessible to its own volunteers, it can also function as an informal follow-up moment. This provides another opportunity for the coordinator to hear from their volunteers and get a sense of how they are getting along. Since most mentors will usually hang around after the training and have a drink together, this also provides another opportunity for the mentors to interact and contributes to the community feeling that some programmes strive for.

#### **An example from practice**

'The advantage, in my opinion, is that if you keep it within your own programme, it can also be a meeting point where the mentors can see us again, where they can also meet mentors of other refugees, and so on. So if you keep it purely as training, I think you can open it up to other volunteer profiles as well, but we always like to make it a bit of a meeting, intervention, conversation moment as well, so that it doesn't have to be so demarcated. When we do the social map training, you always have mentors who hang around after the training, also on the screen. And that's quite nice, you are of course chatting digitally, but I think that is also what the mentors need most, perhaps even more than a training professional at the front giving his methods and information. Sometimes they just want to have a chat with another mentor or hear how it's been going. So we mainly focus on meetings and exchanges because there is a lot of expertise and experience within the group itself.' (Leuven)

In developing a mentor training programme, some coordinators suggest asking for input from mentors. What would they like to know more about? What do they struggle with? Mentor training sessions are to help the mentors in their mentoring relationship with the mentee. Instead of assuming what mentors need or should know, it is more efficient to ask them and adjust the training programme accordingly. This also helps to keep the mentors engaged since the topics are not only more interesting as they directly address their own concerns, but mentors also feel heard and included in the decision-making process, giving them a sense of agency.

#### **An example from practice**

'We want to work on a personal basis, because during the last discussion evening with the mentors, we asked them: "We are developing a training programme, which themes would you like to see addressed?" And while we were actually thinking of themes such as intercultural communication, they were thinking of knowing how a reception centre works, so just very concretely: what does a day here look like? So we will add that as well. We do want to work on a personal basis and at the request of the volunteers.' (Fedasil Kapellen)

While most programmes offer training sessions to their mentors, they do not provide similar learning opportunities for their mentees. Some are considering doing so in the future. Especially the training session on setting boundaries is considered equally relevant for both mentors and mentees. However, organising training sessions for mentees is considerably more challenging, since the group speaks a multitude of languages and has various levels of proficiency in the local language or in common languages such as English. To avoid such difficulties, most programmes choose to share the most relevant information for the mentee during the intake session as opposed to organising a separate training session.

## Case: Armen Tekort

Armen Tekort is a non-profit organisation in Antwerp, Belgium, that connects disadvantaged residents (mentees) with more advantaged residents (mentors) for a period of two years. The goal of the mentoring project is to lift mentees out of their disadvantaged position.

While multiple social mentoring programmes for newcomers express interest in Armen Tekort's approach to training and support, none have implemented similar approaches. Programmes do not want to overburden mentors with too many requirements and responsibilities and generally prefer to maintain the informal character of their programmes. Nevertheless, almost every coordinator referenced the organisation and looked to it for inspiration. It is thus an approach worth exploring.

Armen Tekort offers the following training and support to their mentors:

1. **E-learning:** The organisation offers ten online courses via a digital e-learning platform. Mentors can finish the courses at their own pace.
2. **Workshops:** Every learning module is matched to an interactive workshop with a focus on the acquisition of skills. Mentors have to complete the workshops before they can start their mentoring. Workshops are organised into four phases:
  - **Insight:** Mentors learn about disadvantaged people, explore the network of relevant organisations in Antwerp, and get to know the Armen Tekort coaches.
  - **Connection:** This phase focuses on the relationship between mentor and mentee. Mentors learn about their world view and biases and how they affect behaviour and thinking.
  - **Empowerment and networking:** Mentors learn about empowerment and three of its aspects: strengths, self-reliance, and connection to a network.
  - **Mentoring:** Together with an actor (who takes on the role of a mentee), a coach (a mentor who has finished a successful mentoring relationship), and an expert trainer, mentors practice the skills they have learned in the workshops.
3. **Intervisions:** Once the mentoring relationship starts, mentors participate in regular intervisions. Under the guidance of a professional coach, mentors reflect on issues they encounter in their mentoring relationship. According to the organisation, such sessions can create new insights and change attitudes among mentors.
4. **Knowledge database:** The e-learning platform used for the online courses also includes a knowledge database that mentors can use. This database includes a social map of Antwerp that lists all the organisations that the mentor can turn to with specific requests.

## 8.2.2 Peer learning

Most mentoring programmes organise peer learning sessions for mentors. While training is more formal and structured, peer learning takes place in a more informal setting and tends to be more focused on the immediate concerns and experiences of the mentors. However, in practice, training and peer learning sessions may overlap. Some programmes, for example, organise their own training sessions that allow for considerable interaction and peer learning, while others include training elements in their peer learning sessions.

To organise a peer learning session, programmes will usually send invitations to all active mentors. The frequency of peer learning sessions ranges from one session during the mentoring period (e.g. 6 months) to every month. Some programmes have a fixed schedule, while others organise a session when they recognise a need for it among their mentors. Participation is usually voluntary. Ideally, the peer learning session takes place in person, but during the coronavirus pandemic some programmes organised Zoom sessions. While online sessions are usually less popular among mentors than in-person sessions, they were appreciated during the pandemic as a way to share their experiences and talk with other mentors while in-person activities were cancelled.

Peer learning sessions can be approached in roughly two ways. In the first, some programmes approach peer learning sessions as very informal meetings or get-togethers where all attendees will be asked to share their recent experiences and possible problems, questions, and advice. The conversation is supposed to flow naturally without too much interference from the coordinator or other staff present. The second option is more common and requires a bit more organisation on the part of the coordinator. The session might have a theme, such as 'setting boundaries', that the exchange will focus on. The theme is usually one that many mentors struggle with and/or that the coordinator has received a lot of questions about recently. They might also directly ask for input from mentors to decide on the topic more collaboratively.

### An example from practice

When the COVID-19 restrictions came into place, Compagnons Ostend introduced a new peer learning system called 'buddy swap': 'With a group of 4-5 we do a Zoom session. If we hear that there's someone with a particular problem, for example "I have trouble setting boundaries", and we have heard that that's going super well for someone else, then we invite those 3 or those 4 people and then we have an intervision on that. [...] Before, that happened spontaneously during the group gatherings or activities, but now we thought it would be a good idea if we just put two people with the same problem together.'

Several coordinators stressed the importance of involving mentors in the agenda-setting process. If peer learning sessions are planned without enquiring (1) whether there is a need for it among mentors, and (2) what their needs and questions are, there is a considerable risk that mentors will not engage or not attend the session. If only a small group of mentors is interested in an exchange, or the coordinator notices that a few mentors struggle with a similar problem, they could opt to organise an exchange between those few mentors rather than with the whole group. One of the programmes refers mentors who struggle with a specific issue to another mentor who has previously dealt with the same issue and can offer some concrete guidance. This not only allows for more direct assistance, but it also alleviates the coordinator and contributes to a community feeling among volunteers.

During group peer learning sessions, some programmes use cases to illustrate specific situations and conflicts that may occur. These are real-life examples that mentors will be presented with. A case example used during one of the sessions is: 'Your mentee is joined by a friend. They have brought a stack of invoices. You refer to the social worker, but they keep insisting. Some of the invoices are already late. What do you do?' Usually, there is not one right answer but the conversation and exchange between attendees are what matters. By allowing candidates to share their views and discuss the best course of action, the programme can frame their expectations and set the stage for a successful mentoring relationship.

### Using case examples

The social mentoring programme of the municipality of Leuven uses several case examples, one of which is outlined here:

'You are the mentor of a Somali family: a father, mother and three children, and a fourth on the way. After a long family reunification procedure, they are finally back together. A lot still has to be arranged, especially for the children. The family has financial problems and lives in a small apartment in very bad condition. Apparently, they rent from a slumlord.'

Discuss in group:

- How do you approach this? What organisations do you and/or your newcomer look to for information or support?
- What if there is no immediate solution? How can you support your newcomer in the meantime, which organisations can you contact?

According to most social mentoring programmes, offering exchange opportunities between mentors can help to create a group feeling among participants of the programme and keep mentors motivated and committed to the programme. Mentors who are struggling in their mentoring relationship can vent and share their experience with like-minded people and receive advice. Even just hearing that others are struggling with the same issues can be comforting. Peer learning sessions also provide another informal follow-up opportunity for the coordinator.



**Benefits of peer learning**

A former mentor of Compagnons benefitted from peer learning sessions: 'You hear what other people are doing and you feel "I have the same problem" or "I have wondered about that too". You get the motivation and the drive also from the thought that: "Yes, we are all doing a bit of the same."'

**Benefits of peer learning**

'We see that a lot of mentors benefit from seeing each other, even if it is digitally; that a more experienced mentor says, "I always do it this way", that's a bit the idea of peer learning.' (Leuven)

**Involving participants in group activities**

According to a mentor, activities could be improved if active involvement from participants in the organisation of activities was encouraged: 'I think they could ask more from the group, e.g. "Does anyone feel like organising something?" And maybe that's an evening of bowling, someone who wants to give a cooking workshop, someone who plays djembe and wants to do something with that, or someone who is a member of a theatre group or dance company. That it could come more from the group so it's more diverse and less forced. [...] I think that's more important than sitting around a table with a whole group and each of you taking turns to say something. I understand the principle of it, but it doesn't provide much dynamism or highlights, so I think it would be more interesting if they left it open: "What do you want to do? Does anyone have an idea?" And then the programme finds a location and time and sends out the email, but you or a few people take care of the content.'

**8.2.3 Group activities**

In addition to training and peer learning sessions, most programmes organise at least one group activity per mentoring period or, where programmes do not have a set duration, at least once or twice a year. Group activities are different from training and peer learning in that they are usually available to all participants of the programme and are entirely casual in nature. Common examples include dinners, walks, creative activities, sports activities such as a football game, cultural activities such as going to the opera, a museum, a festival or a performance, going to the zoo, game nights, or participation in larger events such as World Refugee Day. Some programmes also promote activities organised by the municipality or other local organisations.

**Table 11. Common group activities**

|  |
|--|
| Leisure activities, e.g. dinners, game nights            |
| Family activities, e.g. going to the (petting) zoo       |
| Physical activities, e.g. going for a walk               |
| Cultural activities, e.g. going to the opera or a museum |
| Creative activities, e.g. wind painting                  |
| Special events, e.g. World Refugee Day                   |

While most group activities organised by mentoring programmes are informal leisure activities, some programmes also organise or invite participants to other activities, such as language cafés. These are often organised by the organisation or municipality and accessible to the general public. During such sessions, participants will talk with each other, sometimes aided by specific themes or questions. In general, such sessions are not frequented as much as other activities.

Involving participants in the organisation of activities is not only suggested by some participants but also encouraged by some coordinators. For example, one programme organised a Syrian night, with food, drinks and music, with the help of some of its mentees. Coordinators stress the importance of group activities as a means of stimulating a feeling of community among mentors and mentees and keeping people engaged in and committed to the programme. Involving participants in the organisation of activities could contribute to this even more.

Participation in group activities is encouraged but voluntary. Mentors and mentees are usually informed about activities at the beginning of their mentoring relationship, for example during their first meeting or info session, or they receive the information via email or an activity calendar. Most programmes allow participants to bring their family members to group activities.

While most programmes organise the group activities themselves, coordinators often struggle to maintain a reliable offering of activities due to time constraints. One of the mentoring programmes has tried to solve this by partnering with organisations who have more experience organising activities. They have teamed up with three organisations, a non-profit that organises activities focused on the local sea and coast, a museum which already organises many different group activities, and the local petting zoo. An added benefit in working with such organisations is that they all organise activities that both parents and children can participate in, an important criterion when trying to engage a large and diverse group of mentors and mentees.

Most programmes tend to focus on activities for all participants and activities specifically for mentors (training, peer learning), with activities specifically for newcomers being limited or non-existent.

## 8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Programmes should provide training for mentors. They can organise training sessions themselves and/or seek partnerships with organisations that offer relevant mentor or volunteer training sessions.
- Programmes should require mentors to attend pre-match training sessions on topics that the mentor should at least know about before starting their mentoring relationship. This includes basic information about the mentoring programme (see Chapter 3).
- Programmes should provide an additional selection of voluntary pre- or post-match training sessions for topics that could benefit mentors but are not pivotal to the success of the mentoring relationship.
- Programmes should communicate the available training sessions to mentors at the start of the mentoring period.
- Programmes should ensure that their training sessions are interactive, supported by visual tools and case studies, and offer concrete advice that the mentors can use in their own mentoring relationship.
- Programmes should organise regular peer learning sessions for mentors to exchange tips and experiences. Participation should be voluntary. Sessions can be either on- or offline, depending on mentor preferences.
- Programmes could organise voluntary group activities each mentoring period or year.

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Social mentoring for adult migrant newcomers is a new and emerging type of mentoring that has particularly gained in popularity in the wake of the European 'refugee crisis.' It is known by a multitude of names including 'buddy programs', 'parrainage', 'mentoring', 'patenschaften'...

As a new and barely studied field, good practices of social mentoring for newcomers are largely unknown or anecdotal. Yet, the design of a mentoring program will, to a large extent, determine its effects. This publication is developed to gain a better understanding of 'what works' within social mentoring for newcomers in order to ensure that newcomers can benefit from high quality and impactful mentoring. The publication starts from the state of the art related to the different steps in the mentoring process (recruiting, selection, matching, mentoring relationship, closure, training & follow up) and adds experiences and concrete examples from 10 good practices in Belgium. Based on these findings, recommendations were formulated, tested in three municipalities, and adjusted if needed.

This publication offers inspiration for organisations and/or local governments that would like to set up a mentoring programme. It is also a starting point from which knowledge and expertise about 'what works' within social mentoring for migrants can be systematically developed.



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