Title: Navigating social network deficits among migrant populations

Aim

This PhD project examines how migrants navigate the **deficits** created by their social networks, such as pressure, stigma, or misinformation, that may lead to **economic vulnerability**. It focuses on (a) when and why migrants *recognise* social network deficits as harmful and (b) which coping and navigation strategies migrants apply over time as a reaction to such network deficits.

Theoretical background

Research on migrants' social networks has predominantly focused on their supportive effects such as the social support networks can create for migrants' economic integration. Yet, social networks can also produce deficits – such as pressures, dependencies, and misinformation that undermine migrants' economic prospects. This project will be among the first to study such "dark sides" of migrants' social networks by examining how migrants navigate social network deficits.

First, drawing on **Cognitive Dissonance Theory,** the project departs from the idea that migrants may experience psychological discomfort when harmful actions by trusted network members conflict with the belief of being embedded in a supportive network. To reduce discomfort, migrants may **justify** deficit-producing behaviour (e.g., financial demands or harmful advice) and therefore not label it as negative—particularly when the deficit creator is close and trusted. One of the goals of this project is therefore to examine the extent and the conditions under which migrants recognize or even justify social network deficits.

Second, when migrants *do* recognise social network deficits as being negative, the question arises how migrants cope with and navigate these deficits. The project will build on action-theoretical perspectives and research on how migrants negotiate pressures within communities to identify and test the effects of potential navigation strategies. These may include **conforming** (playing along), ignoring the pressure or misinformation, or even adjust **network-dynamics**, including cutting ties or forming new ties as a reaction to deficits.

Research design

First, you will field a survey experiment in which respondents evaluate vignettes describing situations involving potential social network deficits. Vignettes will be designed randomly vary key dimensions such as the relationship to the deficit creator (e.g., family member vs colleague). Respondents will evaluate whether the described action is *negative* (recognition of a deficit) or *justified/neutral* (consistent with justification).

In a second step, you will conduct qualitative interviews across multiple migrant groups in the Netherlands to examine the lived experiences of how migrants recognise and navigate these social network deficits. Dutch language proficiency is therefore expected for this project. Sampling will be purposive and focused on economically vulnerable participants with a migration background.

Project

This project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant 'The shadow of migrants' social networks: Towards a new theory of how social networks can increase migrants' economic

vulnerability. In this project, you will work in a team together with 1 other PhD candidate and a postdoc, as well as other senior scholars in the field.

Literature:

Offer, S. (2021). Negative social ties: Prevalence and consequences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *47*(1), 177-196.

Van Kerckem, B Van de Putte, and P Stevens. 2014. "Pushing the Boundaries: Responses to Ethnic Conformity Pressure in Two Turkish Communities in Belgium." *Qualitative Sociology* 37(3): 277–300. doi:10.1007/S11133-014-9283-Y/TABLES/1.

Harrigan, N, and J Yap. 2017. "Avoidance in Negative Ties: Inhibiting Closure, Reciprocity, and Homophily." *Social Networks* 48: 126–41. doi:10.1016/J.SOCNET.2016.07.003.

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