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<sup>1</sup> **Type** (in consistence with the Description of the Action):

- R: Document, report (excluding the periodic and final reports)
- DEM: Demonstrator, pilot, prototype, plan designs
- DEC: Websites, patents filing, press & media actions, videos, etc.
- OTHER: Software, technical diagram, etc.

<sup>2</sup> **Dissemination level** (in consistence with the Description of the Action):

- PU: Public, fully open, e.g. web
- CO: Confidential, restricted under conditions set out in the Model Grant Agreement
- CI: Classified, information as referred to in Commission Decision 2001/844/EC

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## Executive Summary

The integration of migrants in the European Union is an ongoing process of concern for policy-makers, practitioners, non-governmental organisations and scholars. The project “EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions” (MIMY) studies the integration of young vulnerable migrants in European societies. In particular it is interested in understanding how this is facilitated, what barriers exist, and how they can be over-come.

In addition to broader processes originating on higher scales, migration and integration are highly contextualised processes at the local level. MIMY has thus put the local at the core of its research approach to gain further insights into how migration and integration are played out on the ground. Within the MIMY project, Work Package 6 (WP6) “Assessing the critical role of the local population” thus addresses the question in how far the local shapes the liquid integration of migrants.

Resulting from this work, this working paper conceptualises the local as an important setting for migrant integration, addresses how access to resources and local participation is being negotiated between migrants and the local population, analyses the role of the local population and outlines how the local population can be involved in integrating migrant youth and improving their everyday livelihoods. Empirically, it builds on research carried out in 18 selected case study localities in 9 European countries (England/UK, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania and Sweden). Primarily it builds on interviews with 265 stakeholders involved in migration or integration matters and 152 biographical-narrative interviews with non-migrant youth.

The report is aimed at stakeholders active in the fields of migration and integration such as policy makers at different levels (EU, national, regional, local) who aim at fostering inclusive integration policies for diverse societies and who are particularly concerned with the integration of young groups of migrants (i.e., migration policy, youth and social services); practitioners who engage with migrants and young vulnerable migrants in particular (i.e., social workers, NGO staff, counsellors); researchers who study the factors facilitating and impeding the integration of young vulnerable migrants, especially those interested in and/or engaged in comparative cross-national analysis; and wider civil society to improve the knowledge about migrant integration as well as increasing the potential for civic engagement of migrants and non-migrants.

The report outlines several aspects about how the local is of relevance for the integration of young vulnerable migrants:

- The lives of young people in general and young vulnerable migrants in particular are predominantly local (while of course not downplaying the importance of i.e. transnational ties).
- The phase of youth is associated with making experiences, which are to a significant degree shaped locally, and thus forge attachment to place and people and a sense of belonging (sometimes in contrast to the national level).
- The local context provides certain opportunity structures, which shape in how far young vulnerable migrants are able to access critical resources such housing, education or employment as well as in how far they are able to participate in different social domains. Different local outcomes of migrant integration indicate that integration trajectories are shaped by specific local contexts.

- The local population – albeit a difficult to grasp group – is a significant factor in local migrant integration, as shown for example by attitudes towards migrants, regional voting behaviour and local migration discourses.
- Social interaction predominantly still takes place locally. Cohesive communities are a result of encounters between different groups, including migrants and non-migrants. This includes facilitating interactions between different groups, while recognising the critical role of existing migrant communities in places.
- The networks, services and infrastructures provided by migrants themselves, both individually, through migrant communities or migrant self-organisations, need to be regarded as an asset by local policy-makers and practitioners.

## 1. Introduction

The project “EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions” (MIMY) studies the integration of young vulnerable migrants in European societies. In particular, it is interested in understanding how this is facilitated, what barriers exist, and how they can be overcome.<sup>3</sup>

### *Why the local matters*

Clearly, migration is shaped by a range of broader conditions, such as political, economic and environmental processes, policies by different levels of governments or the unequal global and regional distribution of wealth and development. Only to mention a few major events, the unprecedented arrival of refugees (2014-16), the Brexit (2019) as well as the COVID-19 pandemic (since 2020) all had an impact on international migration flows as well as the liquid integration (Skrobanek et al., 2020) of migrants in European arrival societies.

In addition to these, research has increasingly pointed out that migration and integration are highly contextualised processes. Yet, the role of the specific spatial context – or for our purposes here, the “local” – on these processes continues to remain somewhat unclear. This makes the “local” similarly an important and a rather fuzzy concept. While it adds further insights into how migration and integration are played out on the ground, it also increases complexity, as local contexts can vary considerably and because quantifying their impact remains a rather difficult task.

The relevance of the local becomes particularly clear when local policies, practices and discourses vary from or even contradict for example the national scale, for example when local migrant infrastructures of care, solidarities and support work against national rhetoric. The wider rationale of the relevance of the local is addressed in chapter 2.1.

### *Aim of this paper*

Within the MIMY project, Work Package 6 (WP6) “Assessing the critical role of the local population” addresses the question in how far the local shapes the liquid integration of migrants. To contribute to this overarching aim, the working paper addresses the following objectives:

- To provide a conceptual understanding about the role of the local as a setting for migrant arrival and integration.
- To understand how access to resources and local participation is constantly being negotiated between migrants and the local population(s).

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<sup>3</sup> The often-normative connotation of the concept ‘integration’ has received substantial criticism by scholars and stakeholders. A main critique is that it allocates the responsibility for integration mostly to the migrants, rather than opening up for a wider discussion about the interplay of migrants and local populations (e.g. Meissner/Heil, 2020; Schinkel, 2018; Dahinden, 2016). While agreeing with the many pitfalls of the use of the term, we follow the argumentation of Spencer and Charsley (2021) who propose to continue using it. The concept of liquid integration is an empirical hypothesis (Skrobanek et al., 2020), and conceptualises it as a contingent, possibly transformative process of change, in which individual adjustment also triggers institutional adjustment.

- To understand how the role of the local population – such as non-migrant youth, as the peers for the target group of young vulnerable migrants – within the process of liquid integration.
- To outline how local population(s) can be involved in integrating migrant youth and improving their everyday livelihoods.

*What is this report drawing from?*

As the final deliverable of the work package, this working paper brings together the insights gained from the work on all tasks of WP6. This working paper thus builds on the following already submitted deliverables<sup>4</sup>:

No.	Title	Responsible MIMY partner	Empirical material
D6.1	Report about the conceptualisation of the local population(s)	ILS	
D6.2	Report about methodologies for studying the local population(s)	ILS	
D6.3	Report on the role of local population(s) in case studies	ILS	Stakeholders
D6.4	Methodological paper on biographical-narrative interviews	HAWK	
D6.5	Report on non-migrant youth's perceptions and attitudes towards integration, vulnerability and resilience	HAWK	Non-migrants

The empirical work was conducted in 18 selected case study localities in 9 European countries (England/UK, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania and Sweden) (see Fig. 1). This working paper primarily builds on two sources of qualitative empirical material: First, interviews conducted between mid-2020 and mid-2021 with 265 stakeholders involved in migration or integration matters (see D6.3); and second, 152 biographical-narrative interviews conducted between late 2020 and early 2022 with non-migrant youth (see D6.5).

Furthermore, it provides the basis for exchange and identification of synergies across other WPs, in particular with WPs 4, 5 and 7. In addition to the material produced as part of the work on WP6, it also builds on the insights from selected reports from other partners:

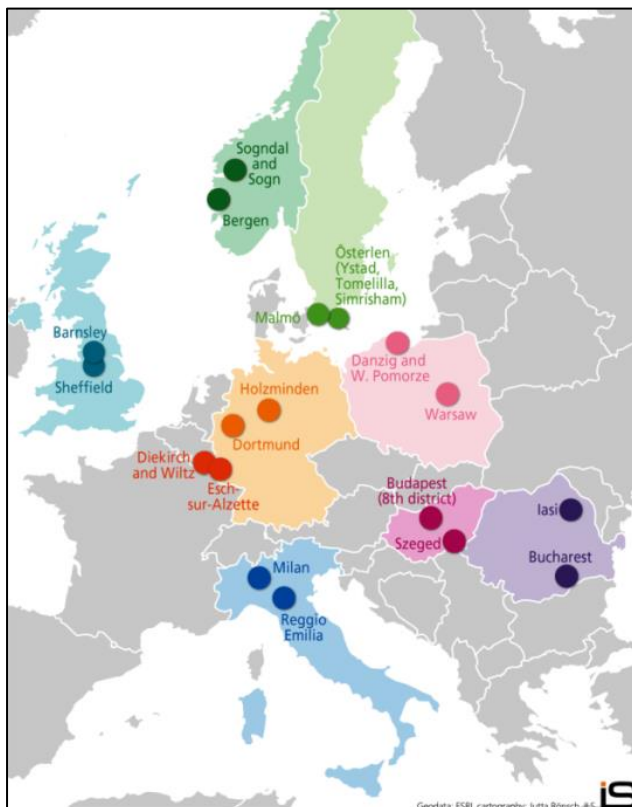
No.	Title	Responsible Partner	Empirical material
D4.2	Local reports and final report on vulnerability and resilience of groups of young migrants in condition of vulnerability	UCSC	Young vulnerable migrants
D5.4	Report on learning lessons from the past	USFD	Established migrants; Peer researchers
D5.5	Cross-national synthesis of findings	USFD	Stakeholders; (Peer researchers)

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the Working Paper whenever referring to or building on material elaborated on elsewhere in the MIMY project, we indicate the number of the deliverable (i.e. D6.2) to indicate its origin. The full reference for these deliverables can be found in the list of references.

## Outline of the Working Paper

The Working Paper first provides a short rationale for studying the local through case study research as a setting for migrant arrival and integration (Ch. 2). The following chapter outlines the role of the local population (Ch. 3). The empirical basis on which this paper builds on is presented in the next two chapters. Whereas chapter 4 focusses on the role of place for the integration of young vulnerable migrants; chapter 5 outlines how the local population is involved in this process. The main findings are summarised in chapter 6, which also outlines what policy-makers and other actors involved in the field of integration/migration can take away from these findings.

FIG. 1: MAP OF 18 CASE STUDIES



## 2. Rationale for studying the local

### 2.1 Why should researchers and stakeholders engage with the local context?

Researchers have increasingly pointed out the relevance of scales below the European and national levels for integration processes (e.g. Glick Schiller/Çağlar, 2011; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017; Bühr, 2018). Concerning such sub-national levels, particular attention is given to the local level, where the process of migration, the agency of migrants and their contribution to reshaping European societies become tangible. Localities contribute to the context of integration that young vulnerable migrants encounter, thus contributing to both the conditions of vulnerability and resilience within that group.



It is at the neighbourhood and municipal level that integration is articulated through the everyday practices, materialities and interdependencies of actors and institutions (Humphris, 2019). It is the level where migrants and local populations encounter, as well as negotiate access to resources such as housing, work, education, social services and networks. In this respect it is also a key site for encountering and possibly contesting bordering practices and regimes. These complex interactions take place in different local settings. In addition, the local is an important level where policies with regard to migration and integration are implemented, where services are provided and infrastructures maintained.

Within the multi-level analysis of MIMY, considerable analytical significance is given to the local level as a site of potential solidarity, inclusion, new collectives and care, but also as a site of antagonism, exclusion and neighbourhood/group conflict. This focus is reflected in the selection of two case study locations in each of the nine participating partner countries. Different aspects of place shape the capacity of localities for integration, including migration histories (e.g. super-diverse vs. places largely unaffected by migration), economic path dependencies (e.g. old-industrial vs. knowledge economy), insertion into global flows and networks, and policy-making (e.g. Sanctuary Cities, diversity approaches or skills strategies). In order to understand the role of localities we have conducted a literature review to look at the contextual (e.g. infrastructures), compositional (e.g. population characteristics) and collective (e.g. identities) aspects.

## **2.2 How the local relates to MIMY concepts**

Vulnerability and resilience as concepts have entered into everyday and policy language and have become increasingly hard to grasp. Within MIMY, vulnerability is conceptualised as multidimensional, thus including both structural and individual dimensions (Gilodi et al., 2022). There is an overlap with the concept of risk, also within migration research, approximately translating into certain groups – such as for example migrants – being more susceptible to negative influences. The ability to cope with such external shocks or challenges within the context of migration can be understood as resilience, thus combining the individual resources and capacities (of migrants) to cope with adversity (see also D6.5).

Resilience, on its turn, also presents a long history of a continuous proliferation of evolving and diverse theoretical conceptualizations. Aligned with the liquid integration approach that was adopted within MIMY and taking into account a multiscale structural perspective to the factors that may impact resilient processes, resilience was also conceptualized according to a multisystem perspective, as the “capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully through multisystem processes to challenges that threaten system function, survival, or development” (Masten et al., 2021, p.521). Such a perspective allows taking into consideration resilience factors at play at multiple levels, from the personal to broader contextual spheres. Here we will particularly focus on the local context of integration of migrant youths.

The question here is in how far and in what ways places and spatial contexts are also shaping the vulnerability or resilience of migrants. If taking the “local” approach seriously, this means understanding how the local can contribute to an individual’s resilience or reduce their individual vulnerabilities. Or, how it can accentuate vulnerabilities. For young vulnerable migrants, the local context is of particular importance since the livelihoods of this group are particularly embedded locally.

### 2.3 The local as connected, constituted over time and idiosyncratic

MIMY stresses the relevance of the local as an important level where integration “takes place” – where it is negotiated, managed, contested and resisted. Nonetheless, as a level of analysis there are admittedly several pitfalls such as the difficulty to propose a definition of the local that goes beyond merely using administrative boundaries. It means different things in different contexts – the street, the neighbourhood, the village, and so on. Studies often conflate different geographical levels of analysis, which blurs the scalar dimensions of migrant integration (these points are further elaborated on in D6.2).

We follow an approach developed initially by Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2011) – resonating with the work of Hall et al. (2016) on ‘migrant infrastructures’, which see migrants as constitutive agents in the relative positioning of cities and highlight the relationship between the agency of migrants, and the processes of urban restructuring and rescaling. Such conceptualisation corresponds with the notion of ‘positionality’, which Sheppard (2002: 308) defines “as a way of capturing the shifting, asymmetric, and path-dependent ways in which the futures of places depend on their interdependencies with other places” thus stressing the connectivity of places across space and time. This attends to the way in which places are (re-)made and understood in relation to other places (Massey, 2008).

Across Europe, the socio-economic trajectories (or pathways) of regions are uneven, with pronounced disparities between core and peripheral regions. Older industrial regions, for example, that are subject to profound economic restructuring are usually disadvantaged due to historic path dependencies, or ‘uneven development’ (Martin/Sunley, 2006; Christopherson et al., 2010; Birch et al., 2010).

The spatial context thus shapes the differentiation of specific ‘opportunity structures’ (Glick Schiller/Çağlar, 2011) or ‘conditions of possibility’ (Sheppard, 2002: 319) available to migrants (and non-migrants) in localities, thus capturing the different factors that influence the incorporation of migrants at the local level. A range of empirical studies has since illustrated that apparently ‘similar’ local contexts with regard to economic, social or political characteristics can produce quite different outcomes with regard to the ability of migrants to gain access to resources, carve out a space for themselves and ultimately become full citizens of local societies.

These opportunity structures tied to place are shaped by a range of different contextual, compositional and collective factors (e.g. Platts-Fowler/Robinson, 2015; Jaworsky et al., 2012; Hickman/Mai, 2015). These differences contribute to the capacity of localities for integration.

Two key processes can be identified when analysing interactions between migrants, the local level and local population. First, economic pathways, which mean that places undergo different trajectories with regard to their economic development comprising phases of growth, decline and restructuring. These then shape the opportunity structures and available resources as well as the likelihood of the local population to be more or less open towards newcomers. Second, migration histories, which explain who arrived under what conditions in different periods. The evolution of migration to places over time thus shapes different migrant populations in different localities, also evident in the socio-demographic profiles of the MIMY case study localities. These processes then shape how different actors at the local level react to or engage with migrants:

- *Local population*: being key to the understanding of the local level, the important role of the local population is further addressed in the next chapter.

- *Policy-makers*: Are policy-makers implementing specific approaches aimed at migrant integration? Are they targeting specific groups? How far are migrants regarded as part of the ‘local population’? An example for this is the emergence of urban border spaces, where migration regulation is increasingly being implemented at the local level, yet also leaving substantial leeway of how to implement it locally (Fauser, 2017).
- *Political representatives*: Are migration and integration politicised topics in the local political landscape? What is the role of anti-immigrant and populist parties? These issues have received considerable attention more recently through the work on “left-behind places”, where decline and disinvestment may have resulted in rather hostile reception contexts for migrants (e.g. Dijkstra et al., 2020), although others have warned against such statements (Antonucci et al., 2017). The recent 2022 elections in Italy and Sweden also point to the role of anti-immigrant sentiment within relatively successful political strategies.
- *Civil society actors*: what is the role of local intermediaries, organisations engaging in the migration/integration field such as migrant self-organisations and others? How are they situated in the wider local migration governance landscape? (Hinger, 2016).
- *Media*: how are migrants framed within the local/regional media? Here, authors have highlighted the relationship between the general tone or tendency of local media discourses and the characteristics of that place (e.g. Barbehön/Münch, 2016).

### 3. Role of the local population

With regard to the incorporation of migrants, Portes and Böröcz (1989) outlined the roles of governments, the host society and ethnic communities. Following this theorization, WP6 further investigates the role of the local population concerning the integration of young migrants in vulnerable conditions. Apart from the institutional dimension of the government, both, host society and ethnic community can be understood as jointly forming the ‘local population’. In other words, with local population, we refer to the receiving society at the local level. On the other hand, there is no consensus in scientific scholarship on understanding and defining the term “local population” and in particular about who is part of the local population (and who is not) (see also D6.1). A review of studies gathered by partners for their national contexts shows that the notion of the local population can have different meanings in different settings.

For the purpose of finding common analytical ground, within the MIMY project we postulate that the local population is composed of everyone residing in a particular place for at least one year, thus comprising both non-migrants and migrants (D6.1, D6.2). This way, we adopt an inclusive and non-essentialising understanding. Such a conceptualisation “localises” or “grounds” migrants some time after their arrival, by acknowledging the temporal nature of integration processes and avoiding the usage of dichotomies based on nationality/citizenship, cultural factors or social status of migrants.

We must note however that in several national contexts, studies take on a narrower lens and only included those who are nationals or who are born in the respective case-study country, thus excluding migrants per se from the local population (see D6.2). This is often a reflection of the migration history

of a particular place and the actual share of migrants among the overall population. Yet, the danger is, of course, to fall into the trap of using over-simplistic dichotomies, such as “us vs. them”, “insider vs. outsider”, or “local population vs. migrants”. Such dichotomies artificially produce in- and outgroup categories, which do not represent migration-related complexity. We acknowledge here that following our broader understanding also means that the term local population is somewhat arbitrary; but as we argue nonetheless useful for the purposes of the project.

In the MIMY project, the local population is represented empirically by the group of non-migrant vulnerable youth (D6.5). Local non-migrant youth are the peers of migrant youth, and face similar challenges associated with their transitional life phase – like their migrant peers – are experiencing vulnerabilities in areas such as labour market access, education, health, civil rights, social welfare or housing. They are also representatives of local societies and thus have their own views on the topics of migration and integration. For the project, the group is constituted of young adults aged between 18 and 29 years residing in the case study localities for at least 24 months, and who usually do not have own migration experiences but may be born to parents who migrated (D6.5).

Quantitative studies have provided substantial understanding around the attitudes towards migrants as well as their views on diversity and multiculturalism. Quantitative studies on the national level are mostly based on national-level surveys that also feed into the main relevant cross-European data sets, particularly ESS and EVS (see D6.2). Studies based on quantitative survey data generally find that the individual characteristics of respondents (i.e. age, gender or ethnicity), their social status (i.e. income, level of education) and their personal beliefs (i.e. voting behaviour) are important factors that explain their attitudes towards migrants to varying degrees (e.g. Raijman et al., 2003). While these studies can cover the main societal trends quite well, they often fail in explaining how exactly the integration of migrants works.

Three strands of literature are helpful for further conceptualising the interaction between migrants and the local population.

*Identities, belonging, attachment:* Belonging is a potentially useful concept to understand who is related (to a place) in what ways. Belonging comprises a linkage between the individual sense of belonging (to a group or place) and the more structural politics of belonging (in a setting). The latter influence who under which circumstances can be part of a society (for example by granting citizenship or other rights) and through practices of ‘everyday bordering’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006) work to construct both spatial and physical boundaries on who is accepted. These borders are created through both bottom-up, popular discourse and hegemonic policy discourse on immigration (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). Social processes such as nation-building, ethnic discrimination and hetero-normativity, which ‘locate’ identities within relations of power, thus need to be (critically) centred in understanding migration and local belonging.

*Transnationality and social encounters:* Individual migration histories of the local population and their possible transnational networks assist us to understand the relations between migrants and the local population. The attitudes of the local population towards migrants also depend upon whether they themselves had migration experiences (D6.2). While this can be a personal experience of migration which leads to positive attitudes towards migrants (Callens et al., 2014), direct or interpersonal contact with migrants – for example through social encounters in everyday life – can, both, reduce discriminatory behaviours against them and reduce the likelihood that migrants are perceived as a threat while

in general reinforcing positive beliefs towards migrants (e.g., Pettigrew, 1998, Meuleman et al., 2020; Green et al., 2020).

*Urban citizenship:* The availability of resources such as housing, employment, education, or social services and access to them are a key factor in shaping the relationship between the local population and migrants. The distribution or access to these resources often indicates who is regarded as entitled to them; yet such everyday negotiations and struggles over resources may also be contested through bottom-up processes. Depending on the scarcity of resources at the local level and socio-economic characteristics of the local population, conflicts may occur, which eventually influence the relationship between migrants and the local population. D5.4 illustrated how the attitudes towards migrants are related to the reasons for migration, relating to perceptions of who deserves or is entitled to these resources (Borelli, 2020). While in some cases, local populations engaged with early-wave-refugees in a welcoming manner, in other cases, migrants did not encounter such positive reception contexts. The positive (or negative) difference that local populations can make, yet also the selectivity associated to their attitudes are important for understanding migrant-non-migrant relations at the local level. The concept of urban citizenship, which takes such resource-focussed discourses further, comprising non-material rights around being a full member of the local society (e.g. Bauböck, 2003; Lemanski, 2019, Varsanyi, 2020) is a potential conceptualisation for taking such interactions further.

## **4. Place as setting for migrant integration**

### **4.1 Time as a component of the migrant integration process in places**

Migration flows have resulted in variations in migrant populations in different places. The migration histories of places reflect different flows – which result from socio-economic and political contexts (e.g. EU enlargement). On a time-axis, countries as well as cities and regions have received migrations flows in different periods, ranging from more established to more recent migrant destinations

Apart from the legacy of colonialism in some countries, these flows are often framed by particular migrant policies (e.g. guestworkers in Germany) but also related to broader political-historic events such as Brexit. In general, a longer history of migration suggests longer-term interactions and engagements with migrants. The composition of the local population with regard to migrants – or its diversity with regard to migration – is also expected to shape local attitudes and practices towards migrants as well as reflect back on local policy-making. Yet, local opportunities for migrants also evolve over time, with more recent refugees in Germany for example benefitting from services that were established during earlier periods.

Such local migration trajectories result in distinct demographic compositions of the local population, which may then shape their attitudes (see below) towards migrants. Within cities, certain neighbourhoods, mostly of working-class origin, have emerged as arrival neighbourhoods or those with a high share of population with a migration history. Within the case study locations of the MIMY Project, Nordstadt in Dortmund, Burngreave in Sheffield and Årstad in Bergen are typical examples of such arrival neighbourhoods (D6.3).

The empirical work with migrants and stakeholders shows however that in larger cities with a higher share of migrants, people are not necessarily more open towards migrants. Interviews with stakeholders in Milan or Warsaw for example, indicate a lower tolerance towards migrants compared to smaller second case studies. In the Bergen neighbourhood of Årstad, xenophobic incidents were reported (D6.3). Elsewhere stakeholders also stated that residing in the same neighbourhood did often not result in meaningful social interaction. Examples for such peaceful cohabitation, albeit without affectionate closeness are the neighbourhoods of Nordstadt (Dortmund) or Møhlenpris (Bergen) (D6.3).

The empirical work with migrants and stakeholders also reveals the relevance of time from the individual perspective of the integration process. Young vulnerable migrants as well as the peer researchers who were involved in the research process of the project itself often used temporal categories when referring to their individual process of “integrating” in a local society.

The relationship between vulnerabilities and time is highlighted in D4.2, which also emphasises the critical role of experiences during the transition to adulthood. While at the same time facing increasing responsibilities, young vulnerable migrants often remain powerless when facing the workings of bureaucracies or aiming at entering different social domains. Several respondents described this process as a slow process that was characterised by periods of waiting and uncertainty, which had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Examples for this include problems with administrative requirements regarding paperwork, lack of exchange with peers and general feeling of being on one’s own or difficulties of making first or next steps when trying to take up education or employment. When the solutions to specific problems were perceived as outside of their individual power, young migrants faced the challenge of overcoming their vulnerabilities and articulated a sense of youth suspended, or life on hold.

The empirical material illustrates how these temporal aspects of integration are also related to the local context. Local administrations whether municipal or offices of national organisations (e.g. job-centre in Germany) have their own intrinsic logics of dealing with their “clientele”. Some studies have highlighted how regional cultures for example shape institutions from within, even if these are technically not local. In this respect more contested access to resources would arguably also result in more difficult encounters with administrations at the local level, as for example illustrated by the Dortmund case study. In general, it is likely that specific institutional policies around diversity or intercultural openness are also shaped by the level of cosmopolitanism of specific localities and the overall diversity found in the local population.

## 4.2 Localities and the question of entitlement

The local attitudes towards migrants are, of course, strongly shaped by processes outside of the local realm (e.g. rise of populist, anti-immigrant parties; rising EU scepticism; COVID-19 or the war in Ukraine). Nonetheless, studies show that right-wing parties for example are usually more successful in struggling regions. More open discourses with regard to migration – including skills debates, welcoming initiatives, the Sanctuary City movement or a general embracing of diverse urban societies – are however more likely to be found in regions less affected by decline, where access to resources is less contested, albeit excluding the domain of housing.

With regard to the role of the local, several themes emerge from the research. Stakeholders have varying understandings of “integration”. Three main approaches can be identified: integration as assimilation; integration as a two-way process; and more progressive approaches which reject dominant discourses. Following the above around the role of place, we argue that approaches with regard to migration/integration are informed by local/regional discourses and thus localised. There are however stark variations with regard to the localisation of integration discourses. In the absence of national-level policies, localities can play an important role with regard to the tasks around migrant integration (as shown by the Budapest case study). The installation of local integration councils, efforts to gain access to supra-local funding or the establishment of a network of actors in these fields are examples of different approaches that may be pursued by local administrations. The structures that migrants encounter locally are often also “far from liquid” (D5.5). The power of local actors to shape local integration narratives and approaches varies, sometimes providing a counter to a hostile regime at the national level.

These discourses around migration and integration of migrants and young vulnerable migrants in particular are linked with the question around entitlement. Here entitlement can mean the question around access to different social domains such as housing, work, education or specific services, and how this is constantly being negotiated but also contested by migrants, the local population, the media and political actors. In Germany, there is for example a high demand for, both, skilled and unskilled workers, reducing the potential for conflict on the labour market. When resources are scarce, migrant-non-migrant interactions are often more contested. Sometimes the local constellation of access to these domains and infrastructures as well as the more general ability for local civic or political participation are labelled as opportunity structures.

It may also mean a more general understanding including broader human rights as proposed by the debates around urban citizenship (e.g. Bauböck, 2003). If we think of “citizenship as legal status, citizenship as a bundle of rights and entitlements, and citizenship as a sense of identity and belonging” (Jayal, 2013, p. 2), then clearly obtaining rights and developing identifications are inherently locally situated and build upon a “sense of place” (Massey, 1994) (see D5.5). Understood in such a way, localities may provide – even under less advantageous conditions on the national level – the basis for new forms of (local) belonging and identity.

In addition, these discourses around entitlement are linked with the question around “otherness”, or who is perceived as “the other” (see D6.5). Here, the production of the (migrant) other may indicate both the potentially artificial formation of a mainstream group whether based on citizenship, ethnicity or other factors and a sign for a process of exclusion. The question around who should receive support, may for example be characterised by a socio-ethnic hierarchisation of different migrant groups and thus bear discriminatory practices.

Often, contact between groups is an important element for reducing such artificially created divides between in and out-groups. Social interactions between migrants and local populations were regarded as very important by both migrants and stakeholders as they would reduce prejudices and hostilities towards migrants and foster the process of becoming increasingly immersed in local societies. The possibility of encounters was mentioned, particularly by stakeholders, as key for building connections (see section below). Language was regarded as highly relevant across all case studies. Stakeholders mostly saw the need of migrants to learn the local language and thus providing access to language courses. The young vulnerable migrants also acknowledged the key importance of language, while also noting that language acquisition in itself did not guarantee success in building local social networks or finding adequate employment for example. Nonetheless it should also be noted that for some case studies, lacking the language skills of the local population were also addressed as a relevant integration obstacle (e.g. case studies in Hungary). Placing the burden of language skills entirely on migrants is particularly problematic in cases where for example the local language is particularly difficult to learn or where a significant share of migrants did perceive of the current location as temporary, for example when seen as transitory on an onwards journey or for international students.

## **5. Local population and their involvement in migrant integration**

Integration of migrants plays out in different social arenas and may be varyingly characterised by conflict or the absence of it. Integration can thus be understood as a subtle process that “takes place” at the grassroots level (Messing/Sagvari, 2020), which makes it difficult to measure as the ways in which it is perceived by individuals shifts over time – meaning that with changing overarching circumstances the same process of liquid integration may be regarded differently or entail different dynamics.

### **5.1 Social interaction**

Everyday encounters and interactions between migrants and the local population are important components of the integration process (assuming that these interactions are friendly). Young vulnerable migrants often have a relatively localised sphere of interaction due to different monetary and other constraints.

For them interaction and building up local social networks increase a sense of belonging to people and place as well as their likelihood to participate. This includes building up both ties within and across one’s own community (weak and strong ties). Most interactions are however pre-disposed by existing social networks. Establishing local social networks is often a major challenge for migrants (Plöger/Becker, 2015).

At the beginning of the arrival process, migrants often rely on two sources of support. First, from local migrant support landscapes including welfare organisations or migrant-self organisations (i.e. language courses, educational options, housing, or targeted social services). Individual professionals within this migration support landscapes, such as social workers, civil society actors, or teachers are often



instrumental for addressing migrants' needs and contributing to their empowerment (Viola, et.al, 2018) as illustrated by the quote from a young male asylum seeker in Milano (Italy):

"If today I feel well, it's thanks to her [...] She helped me with documents, school, work, all. She made me meet a lot of people that helped me. Everything was born with her, and I can't forget her." (D4.2, pg. 39)

Second, support is received from more established migrants that provide information and facilitate (i.e. as intermediaries) access to housing, work or services. Social capital and networks through co-ethnic communities are often of crucial importance (Ryan et.al, 2008; Gericke et.al, 2018), both in terms of emotional support and accessing work or housing. The importance of such low threshold co-ethnic communities is illustrated by the following quote from a young migrant woman in Iasi (Romania):

"There is a community of migrants from the Republic of Moldova. There are some small communities, we help each other, there is somebody who understands your life, your roots." (D4.2, pg. 64)

For the group of young migrants, finding peers in similar situations and with similar backgrounds is particularly important in building collectives. Stakeholders and migrants alike pointed to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing restrictions on the ability of migrants to establish social contacts. During this time, isolation and loneliness were mentioned as individual problems, which affected young people's mental health.

An interesting outcome of receiving support from the local population is reciprocity. In several interviews from different case studies, young vulnerable migrants who had received assistance mentioned that they were themselves now using their experiences and knowledge to provide support for newcomers as mentioned by a young female migrant in Bergen (Norway):

"I really want to help others; especially the vulnerable. I want to help others who are in the same situation as I have been in." (D4.2, p.g 50)

This highlights the significance of transfer of information and other resources from earlier arrivals to newer migrants (Phillimore et. al, 2017). It also indicates a level of sustainability integral to the integration process through the establishment of support infrastructures within and possibly beyond communities (Yu et.al, 2020, p.5).

Stakeholders also pointed out that the lack of inter-group relationships and the exclusiveness of social networks made migrants isolated and more likely to fall back on ethnic networks (e.g. the use of army barracks and hotels to accommodate and confine asylum-seekers during COVID-19). This is particularly the case in less diverse, more peripheral and rural settings.

For young migrants, shared leisure activities with the local population are important to feel part of the host society and to connect with place. Such encounters facilitate the emergence of relationships between migrant youths and the members of the local population. A young refugee in one of the UK case studies for example highlighted how attending dance classes, visiting museums and exploring the local cultural scene provided important informal settings for encounters with local peers, thus opening up social interaction outside of more formal settings such as educational institutions or workplaces (D4.2).

For the local population, interactions are also likely to decrease prejudices (or even hostility) against migrants, which are often related to lack of contact, cultural distance or fear of competitors. For non-migrant youths, the research shows a high sense of belonging (and feeling at home), which are mostly attributed to social contacts “in place” (see D6.5). While young migrants are often still in a liquid process of “arriving”, in which time but also structural as well as individual factors play an important role, non-migrants did not have to question whether they had arrived and had usually established more profound links with people and place.

Stakeholders across the case studies mentioned their efforts in creating the occasions and settings for facilitating such interactions.

There is an ongoing debate about whether socio-spatial segregation for example within cities is a barrier to integration. While on the one hand, certain “arrival neighbourhoods” facilitate the arrival of migrants and their access to necessary infrastructures and networks. On the other hand, segregated neighbourhoods also reduce the potential for encounters and interaction across different communities. The latter is illustrated by the fieldwork in some of the smaller case study localities such as Österlen (Sweden) or Barnsley (England).

## **5.2 Settings facilitating encounters**

In addition to and contributing to the establishment of local social contacts, physical settings that facilitate casual or more formal encounters are important. Such settings can contribute to bridging the distance between groups. Furthermore, they may also increase the above mentioned likelihood of sharing information and thus facilitating access to services and institutions, networks, or jobs among others. Examples include (but are not restricted to) public spaces such as parks, sports sites or neighbourhood streets; public transport; semi-public spaces such as shopping zones or restaurants; youth centres or sports grounds run by clubs. Public spaces geared towards particular groups such as playgrounds were for example mentioned as facilitating social interactions between those with young children (D6.3).

Such settings have been conceptualised as micro-publics of everyday interaction (Amin, 2002: 960) - as they allow for transgressing group boundaries “interaction between different people can unfold” (Hans/Hanhörster, 2020: 81). Encounters in these spaces should not be romanticised however; they may be contested and conflict-laden, or associated with negative experiences for migrants. Often their use by one group restricts the use of other groups, for example of children or women.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the imposed restrictions have of course caused a significant decrease in the possibilities to use such settings and for meeting people. Apart from being more likely to contract the virus, ethnic minorities and migrants across Europe often reside in more crowded housing and are thus more dependent on public spaces. During the pandemic-related lockdowns in many European cities, the behaviour of young people in general became a topic of local discussions around the use of public space. Often these discussions carry a stigmatising connotation.

From a comparative perspective, the report on “Learning from the Past” (D5.4) showed how little the formal structures supported earlier migrants. In most case study locations, ethnic communities and third sector organisations – in the absence of state support – took over important tasks with regard to integration. More recently, with the exception of Hungary, states have established institutions and

programmes supporting newly arrived refugees and other migrants. Nonetheless, service provision and targeted support are still heavily dependent on the third sector.

In addition to service provision, third sector organisations also play an important role for facilitating encounters, especially in more xenophobic national contexts. Examples from the case studies include community cooking, camps for children, student clubs, festivals, urban gardening, language cafés and many more. Yet, stakeholders also point out barriers of access to sports clubs or cultural activities, which limit the social participation of migrants. In some cases, they criticised narrow criteria for selecting target groups for specific programmes. For example, a common complaint focused on migrants from only one country of origin, rather than a more comprehensive approach also including other migrants and non-migrants.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the cancellation of events and activities, the closure of community spaces, and/or the transition to online teaching, all of which limit the scope for everyday encounters with difference or otherness. Service providers in the fields of migrant integration have often shifted to online appointments too. Such procedures create a further barrier for accessibility, for example, where migrants do not have adequate access to digital devices or possess limited digital literacy.

Overall, the regulations and interruptions of programmes or services also reduced the opportunities for participation and encounter. Yet, stakeholders highlighted the critical role of institutions for creating the opportunities for encounter and interaction between groups. The most important institutional settings are child care facilities, schools, training centres and work places because they provide the spaces for continuous encounter over a longer period of time.

## 6. Summary of lessons learnt from WP6

Although **the “local”** is often a slippery concept, we stress its relevance as an important level where integration “takes place”, is negotiated and managed. For young vulnerable migrants the local context is of particular importance. The livelihoods of this group are often particularly embedded locally. It is necessary to employ a critical perspective to unveil underlying power imbalances, relations, materialities and structures shaping integration at the local level. This points to the value of an intersectional lenses in understanding the different factors and their mutual relationships that contribute to the complex local landscape of migration and integration (or not).

Building on the processual character of **liquid-integration**, a temporal lens is necessary to understand the local level. It is crucial to acknowledge that the local is constantly made and re-made, shifting and subject to change over time and at different scales, with migration being one of a number of factors driving this dynamism.

As migration is a complex process, one WP6 finding suggests increasing scholarly efforts in overcoming simplistic dichotomies and the use of in- and outgroup categorisations when referring to migration, such as the narrow use of those holding citizenship or being born in a country against those who are not (us vs. them). The everyday life and migration itself consist of multi-faceted and complex processes

that cannot be reduced to such dualistic categorisations. MIMY thereby challenges such dichotomous thinking and captures the work this does in terms of ongoing classificatory struggles and their consequences.

Localities provide distinct **opportunity structures** for migrant integration that are shaped by local economic development paths and by migration histories. Thus, local contextual factors can result in significant variations between places, even when these appear to be similar based on statistical indicators. Depending on the local context, young vulnerable migrant's process of transition between educational systems and the labour market may be seen as assets or barriers. Identifying contextualised information (i.e., migration histories, opportunity structures) about the factors that shape migration and integration varies across different settings.

**Policy approaches and service provision** vary considerably between countries and case studies. We find 'thick' structures and a wide range of migrant infrastructures and services in several case studies, while there is much less such support in other cases. In case studies with a broad range of different government and non-government actors, exchanges between actors often allow for relatively quick and targeted responses to arising challenges (e.g. arrival of refugees around 2015, COVID pandemic). More substantial support systems are of particular importance for vulnerable young migrants, but may also raise questions about entitlement and access.

Local approaches with regard to migration and integration can differ from overarching national policies, for example when welcoming approaches are adopted locally within anti-integration regimes on the national level. Such **local-national (dis)connections** can highlight how the responsibilities of migrant vulnerabilities are being delegated to and dealt with at the local level. There is a certain leeway for place-specific approaches of migrant integration, albeit within certain limitations, particularly when decision-making with regard to social systems and welfare is allocated at the national level.

The local opportunity structures and service provision also shape **place-specific migrant populations** with regard to size and composition. Countries of origin, legal status, socio-economic status or age thus vary considerably. These characteristics then also influence local discussions around entitlement to resources, the focus of migration and integration approaches, and whether the attitudes towards migrants are more or less favourable.

For policy-makers and other stakeholders active in the migration-integration, designing and implementing policies and projects that are embedded in their specific local context and carve out approaches that are linked to broader policies and informed from other places yet closely linked to the characteristics of place are important. Following up on this, a few themes emerging from our research are of particular relevance:

- Informal and relaxed encounters tend to produce more meaningful interactions between local populations and migrants and thus contribute to reducing prejudices and conflict. Facilitating such encounters in local public spaces and other settings is an important feature of a diverse local society.
- Supporting migrants in their arrival process – apart from serving basic needs or administrative duties – should always comprise facilitating access to local social networks providing further practical or emotional support.

- Recognising and learning from invisible migrant infrastructures of care and need could provide a resource for policy-makers and practitioners to design more meaningful approaches.
- Public administrations as well as third sectors organisations need to find ways of dealing with young vulnerable migrants even under conditions of crisis (e.g. COVID-19).
- As migration is often a transitional, temporary and “liquid” process, stakeholders need to take into account that the lives of migrants do not stop outside of administrative boundaries, but are often extending in multiple transnational ways. Rather than understanding these connections as a problem, they are in fact often an important component of individual and community resilience and should be viewed as an asset rather than a barrier to belonging and integration.
- With regard to the ongoing demographic shifts in European societies, migrants are most likely the only option to counter increasing skills demands and provide a potential pool of talent, which however needs support when learning how to make use of their individual skills locally.
- Establishing a local culture of recognition of migrants and their contributions to local societies is of paramount importance. These contributions include engagement in voluntary work assisting newly arrive migrants during their process of settling in.
- Further cooperation between local, regional, national levels for place-specific solutions fosters the efficiency of local responses to integration challenges.
- Recognising the importance of key actors (social workers, teachers, ...) that individually foster the integration process is a keystone for successful integration and the creation of a sense of (local) belonging.

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