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¹ **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.

² **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

Table of Contents

Glossary	III
1. Executive summary	1
2. Study context and project aims	2
3. Overview of case study research	4
3.1 Local case studies	5
4. Local integration of migrants	7
4.1 Local conditions for migrant arrival	7
4.1.1 Local histories of migration	8
4.1.2 Local resources and opportunities	11
4.1.3 (Dis)connected local and national scales	12
4.2 Settings for encounter.....	14
4.2.1 Encounters in micro-publics	14
4.2.2 Role of institutions	16
4.3 Local social networks.....	17
5. Conclusions	18
6. Bibliography	20

Glossary

Local Population:	Refers to the residents of a city or a region, used interchangeably with <i>host society</i> . This term does not exclude migrants of people with migration background, yet aims at including individuals who are living in that local area and participates into the everyday life.
Stakeholders:	An expert involved in particular organisation, institution or project. The term often overlaps with local population.
Young migrant:	We refer to individuals aged 15-29.
Asylum Seeker:	A person who has applied for protection under the UN Convention and a final decision has not yet been taken (including those who are at different appeal stages).
Refugee:	A person given leave to remain as a result of a process which began with a claim and/or assessment for protection under the UN Convention. This includes people receiving the following statuses: Refugee Status, Humanitarian Protection, Discretionary Leave, Exceptional Leave to Remain and Indefinite Leave to Remain.
Third Country national (TCN):	In this project we are researching the experiences of young migrants residing in the European Economic Area (EEA), including the EU and the United Kingdom after Brexit, who originally hold citizenship from countries outside of this context; these countries are commonly referred to as 'Third Countries' and their citizens as 'Third Country nationals'.
Unaccompanied minor:	Within the context of the EU, this means a minor who arrives on the territory of an EU Member unaccompanied by the adult responsible for them by law or by the practice of the EU Member State concerned, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person; or who is left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the EU Member State.
Undocumented migrant:	A person who does not have a valid immigration status either through entering the country they are in without permission, or because they entered under another status and have stayed beyond the period of time allowed.
Third sector:	This term is inclusive of civil society and non-governmental organisations and associations.
Policy Makers:	Political actors involved in formulating policies.

1. Executive summary

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 be facilitated, what barriers exist, and how they can be overcome.

The main aim of this report is to highlight **the role of the local** as a setting for migrant arrival and integration, where access to resources and local participation is constantly being negotiated between **migrants and the local population**.

The findings presented here are based on qualitative empirical research in 18 selected case study localities in 9 European countries (England/UK, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania and Sweden) between mid-2020 and mid-2021. It draws on **interviews with 265 stakeholders** involved in migration or integration matters.

The following summarizes the key findings:

- Localities provide **distinct opportunity structures** for migrant integration, which 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 similar based on statistical indicators.
- For **young vulnerable migrants** the local context is of particular importance. The livelihoods of this group are often particularly embedded locally. Depending on the context, their status of transition between educational systems and the labour market may be seen as a potential or challenge.
- These local opportunity structures 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.
- **Policy approaches and service provision** vary considerable between countries and case studies. We find ‘thick’ structures and a wide range of 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 the local level. There is 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.

- Stakeholders emphasised the importance of interactions between local populations and migrants to reduce prejudices and conflict. For facilitating such **encounters** particular local spaces are of particular importance for young migrants.
- In addition to the spaces for encounter, the ability to establish **local social networks** is an important part of migrant integration. Across Europe, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to restrict the opportunities for such encounters.
- To understand differences between places using a **comparative research** approach allows for identifying possible variations between urban and rural areas, between economically thriving and struggling regions, those with growing or declining populations or between places with a high or low share of migrants.

2. Study context and project aims

Unprecedented mobility between countries in the previous decades has led observers to speak of an “age of migration” (de Haas et al., 2019) characterised by a diversity of flows of different types of migrants between countries. Migration has had and continues to have a significant impact on changing demographics across Europe, albeit with pronounced regional variations.

For Europe, the year 2015 with the substantial rise in refugee arrivals marks a turning point in this trajectory and giving rise to a notion of migration “crisis” (Jeandesboz/Pallister-Wilkins, 2016). Related to this is the rise of populist, anti-immigrant and EU-critical political parties across Europe (Dijkstra et al., 2018). In 2020, the Brexit marks another important event, as well as the re-emergence of tighter migration regimes at both national and EU levels. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has further interrupted migration flows towards Europe and between European countries (e.g. O’Brien/Eger, 2020).

This section outlines how the research conducted through the MIMY project contributes to understanding the local integration of young vulnerable migrants in European societies. Section 3 presents the empirical material that was used for this report. It also provides details about the case study areas. Section 4 contains the main findings of this research. In particular it focusses on the role of the local, on the relevant settings for encounters between migrants and the local population, and on opportunities for establishing local social networks. The report closes with a conclusion and outlines how the findings presented here will benefit from upcoming research of the MIMY project.

Contribution of MIMY research

The main objective of the MIMY project (“EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions”) is to explore the integration trajectories of vulnerable young migrants who are third country nationals. The main research question of MIMY is:

“How to support the liquid integration processes of young migrants in vulnerable conditions in Europe to increase social and economic benefits of and for migrants?”

MIMY thus analyses the factors that influence migrant arrival and integration into European societies. It focuses on the integration of young migrants in vulnerable conditions, which is of particular relevance for European regions:

- Migrant integration is a multifaceted, open-ended process that involves migrants and non-migrants. The long-term ‘success’ of European societies is related to this process of ‘liquid integration’ (see also MIMY Deliverable 5.2).³
- While clearly related to and shaped by broader frames and processes, *the local* nonetheless constitutes the level where migration ‘takes place’ and is being negotiated between migrants and the local population (e.g. Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017; Glick Schiller/Caglar, 2011).⁴
- For regions characterised by ageing populations and labour market shortages they provide a potential pool of talent, which is just on the verge of making the transition between education and employment. Their inflow may contribute to the revival of shrinking regions characterised by economic decline and demographic imbalances.
- As a level of analysis, the local is particularly illuminating when examining how access to resources such as housing, employment, education, or services is negotiated and managed.
- The interactions between migrants and non-migrants play out locally; they can also contribute to (new) social formations and differentiations, vulnerabilities and resilience.

The local: where migration ‘takes place’

³ The often normative connotation of the concept ‘integration’ has received substantial criticism by scholars and stakeholders. A main reason being 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 (for recent critiques see for example Meissner/Heil, 2020; Schinkel, 2018; or Dahinden, 2016). While agreeing with the many pitfalls of the use of the term, we follow the argumentation of Spencer/Charsley (2021) who propose to continue using it.

⁴ The term local population is somewhat arbitrary but still useful for the purposes of the project. We adopt an inclusive and non-essentialising understanding, which means regarding everyone as part of the local population who resides in a place for at least one year (see internal deliverables 6.1 and 6.2).

Aim and audience

Building on empirical data collected in 9 European countries, this report will draw attention to variations and similarities between the attitudes of local populations, their impact on migrant youth experiences and how these might influence integration practices. In doing so the report explores the different local approaches towards migrants and discusses the role of the local population in terms of the integration of young vulnerable migrants.

The report is aimed at stakeholders active in the fields of migration and integration:

- for 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);
- for practitioners who engage with migrants and young vulnerable migrants in particular (i.e. social workers, NGO staff, counsellors);
- for 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;
- for the wider civil society to improve the knowledge about migrant integration as well as increasing the potential for civic engagement of migrants and non-migrants.

3. Overview of case study research

This report draws on interviews with “local stakeholders”. These interviews constituted the first empirical step of the MIMY project involving primary data collection after delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The methodological approach of this empirical task is summarised in Box 1.

Box 1: Stakeholder Selection

The research design for the stakeholder interviews was prepared jointly with USFD and based on a mapping of relevant services in each of the case study localities. The resulting list formed the basis for the selection of suitable interview partners. Wherever possible, stakeholders with a specific focus of their work on migrant youth were selected. The interview guideline and list of codes for the analysis were developed in an inductive manner, through continuous communication and discussion with partners. After conducting and transcribing the foreseen number of around 15 interviews, partners coded the interviews using guidance provided by ILS and USFD. The final step for partners was to draft their case study analysis based on a template also created by ILS and USFD to facilitate cross-national analysis. This template also included a section for comparing their two national case studies in each country as well as allowing for own critical reflection of the empirical results. This report is based on the analysis across all country templates submitted by MIMY partners.

Between September 2020 and May 2021, the MIMY scientific partners conducted – either online or face-to-face – a total of 244 interviews with 265 stakeholders in each of the nine countries (see Fig. 1).

244 interviews with local stakeholders

Fig. 1: Number of Stakeholder Interviews per country

England/UK	35
Germany	25 (26)
Hungary	23
Italy	31
Luxembourg	28 (41)
Norway	22
Poland	39 (45)
Romania	13 (14)
Sweden	28
Total	244 (265)

(in brackets: number of interviewees)

The local stakeholders comprised a diverse group of persons who are directly active in the fields of migrant integration and/or youth services (i.e. social workers, NGO co-workers, language teachers, planners), as well other actors who are indirectly active in these fields (i.e. school principals, counsellors).

Almost two thirds of the interviewees were female (162). More than a quarter of the interviewees had a migration background, but this share was considerably higher in more established migrant destinations (i.e. Dortmund or Malmö). About ten percent of the interviewees were young people themselves. With regard to institutions, most interviewees (173) worked for different kinds of NGOs active directly or indirectly in the field of migrant integration. The remainder worked either for public sector organisations (60) or government (32).

The interview guide comprised questions covering a range of topics within the fields of migration and integration. For this report, the predominant analytical focus lies at the intersection between migrants and the local population in terms of attitudes, encounters, relations and experiences.

3.1 Local case studies

An important component of the research is the analysis of local case studies. With this place-sensitive approach we aim at teasing out local idiosyncrasies. Their main aim of zooming in on the local level is to⁵:

- illustrate the diversity of integration outcomes for young vulnerable migrants across Europe;
- differentiate similarities and differences between localities;

⁵ See guidance on international comparative research developed at ILS (2018).

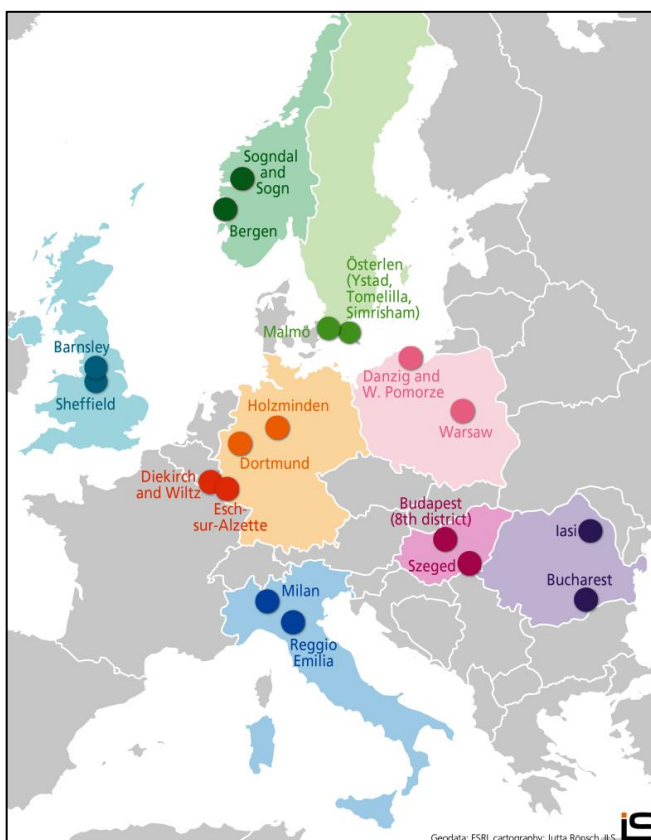


- identify those factors that have an immediate effect on the everyday lives and practices of migrants as well as their access to resources;
- showcase specific local findings that are of more general interest for policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders elsewhere.

For the MIMY project 2 case study localities in each of the 9 countries of the participating partners were selected (see Fig. 2). While not representative for migration and integration processes across Europe or within their respective national contexts, the 18 case studies nonetheless provide a rich overview of different arrival contexts for migrants across Europe and highlight interesting local constellations with regard to migrants, actors and the local population.⁶

Local case studies:
18 distinct migrant
reception contexts

Fig. 2: Map of 18 case study areas



The majority of case studies are cities; eleven of these have more than 100,000 and six over 500,000 inhabitants. Among the cities, three are capital cities (Budapest⁷, Bucharest and

⁶ The empirical work of the MIMY project has been and continues to be affected by the restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the selected case studies were chosen for pragmatic reasons, allowing partners to carry out their empirical work under these given circumstances. They do however.

⁷ The Budapest case study is the 8th district of the city.

Warsaw) and one is an important economic centre (Milan). Among the further cities are three larger (Dortmund, Sheffield, Gdansk) and two smaller (Barnsley, Esch-sur-Alzette) older-industrial cities undergoing economic restructuring. The remaining cities are mainly regional centres (Bergen, Reggio Emilia) within their respective national contexts, three out of these located close to or at national borders (Szeged, Iasi, Malmö). The remaining five case studies are (semi)rural or suburban municipalities (Österlen, Diekirch/Wiltz, Holzminden, Sogndal).

With regard to migration, several case studies have a long history of migration (e.g. Sheffield, Esch-sur-Alzette, Dortmund, Malmö), while the Eastern European, as well as the more rural case studies, have become migrant destinations more recently for a variety of reasons (e.g. asylum seekers, university students, labour migrants).

The uniqueness of each case study location thus provides a ground for comparison that allows us to understand the interactions of and the dynamics behind migrant integration. The comparative analysis of the in-depth research of each case study location illustrates potential results in terms of distinctions between – among other categories – the rural vs. urban, centre vs. periphery, established vs. emerging migrant destinations.

4. Local integration of migrants

This section presents findings from across the 18 MIMY case study areas. The focus lies on ‘the local’, how local constellations of reception for young vulnerable migrants are negotiated and which factors are most prominent in shaping these.⁸

The section is divided into three sub-sections that examine different aspects of migrant integration. The first sub-section (4.1) highlights how the circumstances of and conditions of migrant arrival and integration are related to the respective local context. Places have their own economic, social, political histories producing different local opportunity structures. The second sub-section (4.2) focusses on the specific settings that allow for everyday encounters between migrants and the local population. This includes physical spaces as well as institutional settings, both of which are of particular importance for young vulnerable migrants. The final sub-section (4.3) examines the role of local social networks for the integration of young vulnerable migrants.

4.1 Local conditions for migrant arrival

Migrants arrive in places that vary considerably with regard to opportunities, migrant histories and their particular embedding within local/national/supra-national connections or scales (Glick Schiller/Caglar, 2011):

- *Migrant histories* mean to what degree, for how long and by whom local contexts have been continuously transformed through migration. The composition of the local

⁸ The quotes in this section highlight specific aspects. For the purpose of readability and comprehension the quotes are sometimes shortened (indicated by [...]). The content was never changed.

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 [see 4.1.1].

- *Opportunities* can be understood as a) the availability and access to resources, for example jobs, housing, education/training or specific services and infrastructures, and b) the more general possibility for migrants to participate in different domains of local life, for example civic or political engagement, social networks, or specific communities [see 4.1.2].
- *Scalar embedding* refers to the role that the locality plays within larger scales like the national or supra-national scales such as the EU. In particular it focusses on the relationship between different scales [see 4.1.3].

These three factors are of particular relevance for understanding different outcomes of migrant integration within different reception contexts.

4.1.1 Local histories of migration

National migration histories and the positioning of the country as a sending, transit or receiving context affect migrants' perspective on the stay. Romania and Hungary were regarded as transit countries by stakeholders. With tighter migration controls and the re-nationalisation of migration policies however, migrants may be stuck in a prolonged transit situation. In reception contexts such as Sweden or Germany, being able to stay was mentioned as crucial:

"If people always think about going back, they cannot achieve anything here. They need to focus their mental resources on achieving things here and staying, instead of thinking of going back all the time, this is the biggest reason for failure here, even in the workplace. We are not in transit, we need to establish ourselves here in order to succeed. So while many of the youth here succeeded in establishing themselves, there are others who always thought of going back." (S32, Malmö/Sweden, NGO founder)

"It is about getting to stay, that influences oneself to engage in something new and to arrive. And - how should I say - to integrate oneself." (S12, Dortmund/Germany, NGO worker)

Narrowing in on the local, places across Europe differ considerably with regard to the composition of their population. Migration in addition to other denominators like age, gender or social status is an important characteristic of local demographic profiles. The share of migrants among the local population varies from super diversity (Meissner/Vertovec, 2016; Nicholls/Uitermark, 2016) in some economically dynamic metropolitan regions (i.e. London, Paris, Amsterdam or Frankfurt) to more peripheral locations with struggling economies, where the migrant population is small. As seen above, the 18 case studies of the MIMY project also fall into different demographic categories (Ch. 3).

In larger cities with established migrant populations (Dortmund, Malmö, Sheffield), we find pronounced socio-spatial patterns with regard to migration. Three types of neighbourhoods or districts are typical in these areas:

- Traditional working-class districts, which have evolved into ‘arrival neighbourhoods’ for migrants (i.e. Nordstadt in Dortmund, Burngreave in Sheffield or Årstad in Bergen).
- Inner-city neighbourhoods with a mixed population with regard to socio-economic status and relatively high shares of migrants, and that are sometimes characterised by gentrification (i.e. Möllevången in Malmö or Møhlenpris in Bergen)
- Residential areas – often with large housing estates – located on the urban fringes (i.e. Selinunte in Milan, Rosengård in Malmö or Darnall in Sheffield)

For Bergen, a stakeholder highlighted how the socio-economic profile of particular city neighbourhoods is reflected in spatially specific perceptions and attitudes towards migrants:

“There are indications that attitudes towards migrants vary. Take Møhlenpris [neighbourhood of Bergen] for example, where you have a high number of academics and of migrants. Here it looks like we live together, but we live parallel. We are kind to each other, but do not have a lot to do with each other either. [...] But in the Årstad district, where there are many migrants, some people are very xenophobic and hostile. [...] they have problems themselves and feel that they fight over scarce goods.” (S16, Bergen/Norway, coordinator of youth care services)

This interviewee highlights how everyday diversity and encounters are being widely accepted in a diverse inner-city neighbourhood in Bergen. Yet such tolerance is not necessarily translated into actual interactions. He contrasts this with a working-class district with a high share of migrant residents, where open hostility towards migrants by non-migrant residents is quite pronounced. Narratives of either neighbourhood coexistence without meaningful interaction, or open neighbourhood conflict were also prevalent among stakeholders in other cities as well (e.g. Dortmund and Milan below). In order to engage with such “negotiations of difference”, Meissner and Heil (2020) use the concept of “convivial disintegration”, which emphasises relational practices, power asymmetries and materialities.

“There is always a coexistence between many people. I’d say a peaceful coexistence, but not really togetherness. So the groups actually stay among themselves. And it makes, I would say, living together in one neighbourhood more difficult.” (S09, Dortmund/Germany, NGO worker)

Similar variations between urban neighbourhoods are common in many cities across Europe. The example shows that the interaction between the more established local population and more recent migrants is place-specific. In order to understand local variations, it is useful to look beyond such broader distinctions. Comparative research shows that even places that are quite similar with regard to population composition, migrant histories and economic trajectories can produce different outcomes with regard to the opportunities for migrant integration (e.g. Jaworsky et al., 2012; Hickman/Mai, 2015; Platts-Fowler/Robinson, 2015).

Several interviewees made reference to the share of migrants in an area as a factor influencing the attitudes towards migrants. More negative attitudes or open hostility, were for example reported for some urban neighbourhoods with a high share of migrants. Hostilities were however also reported from case studies like rural Holzminden with a relatively low share of migrants:

Explaining local variations in migrant reception

Attitudes towards migrants: Does the demographic composition matter?

“So where there are no foreigners, people are the most xenophobic. [...] on the one hand there are those who are perhaps not so tolerant due to their age, and on the other hand there is the different cultural background.” (S10, Holzminden/Germany, counsellor)

This suggests that the actual size of the migrant population in a particular place may be less decisive for local attitudes than is indicated by larger panel studies (e.g. Gorodzeisky/Semyonov, 2020).

Attitudes towards migrants vary over time. Following the ideas behind the concept of “liquid integration” used in the MIMY project (Skrobanek et al., 2020), it is helpful to understand the role of time with regard to attitudes and practices towards migrants for a local context as fluid. Dynamic processes of exchange and negotiation between migrants and the local population affect place-specific migration trajectories. In several cases, interviewees mentioned specific events as turning points in these trajectories. A prominent example was the increase in refugee arrivals around the year 2015, which produced ambivalent responses. On the hand – as for example mentioned in the two German case studies – it resulted in a moment of solidarity and an unprecedented rise in civic engagement and volunteer work. On the other hand it also resulted in increasing local hostilities towards migrants, in particular with regard to Islamophobia.

Local migration trajectories allow for change over time

“The discourse in our society has become more hostile. [...] It is now more common to say negative things about ethnic minorities. [...] If you are for example Muslim many problematic aspects become ascribed to you [...] and the attitudes towards Islam have become more hostile.” (S16, Bergen/Norway, coordinator of youth care services)

Such shifts in attitudes over time are not only related to broader global processes but also influenced by national political discourses. With the rise of right-wing populist political parties throughout Europe in recent years, anti-immigrant, EU-sceptic and nationalistic discourses have become more widespread. This was particularly, though not exclusively, mentioned by stakeholders in the Hungarian and Polish case studies.

“The attitude of Poles has shifted in the last 5 years; from an open attitude to a closed attitude, created by the government.” (S09, Pomorze/Poland, NGO working with migrants)

4.1.2 Local resources and opportunities

Access to resources is an important factor shaping the relationship between migrants and the local population. A real or perceived scarcity of resources such as housing, training, jobs or services is likely to produce more contested local interactions.

When resources are scarce, migrant/non-migrant interactions often more contested

“Like if an area has got cramped housing, they've got people who are unemployed [...] and they feel neglected already and don't feel supported. [...] Well, they are hardly going to support somebody else who's coming into the area and being welcomed with open arms. And they are going to feel like, you know, hostile towards the community.” (S01, Sheffield/UK, independent language educator)

This resonates with similar statements from Milan and Warsaw, where according to interviewees, locals perceive migrants as “those who steal the jobs of locals” (S11, Milan/Italy, reception center volunteer).

“It seems to me that the local community, unfortunately, very often reacts badly to foreigners and immigrants, because [local community members] only see a certain aspect of their presence. [...] Locals think that maybe migrants are taking a job from us, that they are not paying taxes or something else. There are a lot of stereotypes. Locals do not see that migrants also pay while living in a given district. After all, they do shopping, and are also part of that community.” (S34, Warsaw/Poland, NGO project manager)

As is the case historically across Europe, work and housing were mentioned across all case studies as an important arenas for integration, but also where conflict over resources is most visible. Labour market discrimination of migrants is common across European societies. For young people, experiences with discrimination or racism can constitute significant barriers:

“Yet, the labour market is almost closed to immigrants. Many try and apply for work and they experience not being called in for interviews.” (S13, Bergen/Norway, municipal advisor)

“It becomes apparent when you start sending CVs. [Candidates] with a less foreign sounding name [are more likely to] find a job. [...] Similarly, it is hard to find a flat in Dortmund now. When your name sounds Arabic or Turkish, it becomes even harder, so only certain areas are left for you to live, and this makes integration more difficult.” (S14, Dortmund/Germany, language teacher)

Under the current economic downturn in relation to the pandemic, the sectors of the economy hit hardest are often those with a high share of young migrants among the workforce, such as retail or hospitality, revealing the vulnerability of many.

“Moreover, as a rule of thumb, the employers get rid of foreigners, first” (S04, Budapest/Hungary, NGO social worker)

Evidence suggests the socio-economic insecurity of the residents in an area and a relative lack of adequate resources may culminate in hostility towards young migrants who can be perceived as competitors and as not (yet) entitled to these resources. This points towards the underlying social inequalities, which find their spatial expression in the segregation of different social groups (van Ham et al., 2021).

4.1.3 (Dis)connected local and national scales

Apart from opportunity structures and migrant histories, it also matters to migrants to what degree and in what ways a place is related to other spatial scales. The political, media and public discourses around migration and integration serve as an example.

“Now this is normal in all societies around the world, people do not like anything new. People are scared, which is natural. Not everyone accepts what is new, especially when there is a lot of negative promotion through the media, or racist entities which do not want this diversity in society. It views this diversity as a threat to society, and claims to own society, and that it should not change. I believe that the main barrier is the rejection of the host community of the new culture.” (S29, Malmö/Sweden, NGO founder)

In some cases – particularly in Hungary, Poland and Italy – we find striking differences between the local and national levels. Findings from the two Hungarian case studies illustrate this rupture between the local and national levels. At the level of the nation-state, an anti-immigration regime has continuously dismantled any support for integration policies. In relation to this, the overall portrayal of migrants by the mainstream Hungarian media is invariably negative. Both reinforce rather negative attitudes towards migrants among the local population (Messing/Sagvari, 2019).

Local approaches
can counteract
national processes

“[...] all of us who live in Hungary are somewhat racist, because we live in an environment where you can't be any different.” (S03, Budapest/Hungary, local government official)

Yet, in a few cases dominant overarching processes are sentiments not necessarily reproduced at the local level. Budapest's 8th district (Józsefváros) is among the most diverse local municipalities in a country which has a relatively low share of migrants. In this local municipality a more progressive local council based on a coalition of different groups was elected in 2019. Stakeholders related this political turning point at the local level with a shift from less welcoming towards more inclusive approaches.

“Earlier foreigners were stigmatized in the 8th district. I don't think that anybody from the municipality cared about them, just the contrary. They didn't want to have anything to do with them.” (S08, Budapest/Hungary, local administration)

In Szeged, a mid-sized provincial city in Hungary with a less diverse population, the local government was much more aligned to the overall national discourses. Yet due to its prestigious university as well as the importance of foreign manufacturing employers, the city has also adopted a welcoming approach, albeit with a much narrower focus on international students and higher-skilled staff at international companies. With less separation from the framing national discourse and a more contested nature of local discourses, the approach in Szeged is based on a less inclusive and more hierarchical sorting of migrants based on their desirability. Based on the Hungarian examples the following graph illustrates these dynamics. While the approaches adopted in the 8th district of Budapest are opposed to national politics and discourses, locally the discourse is characterised by tolerance and inclusion of the

Local situation
shaping migrant
reception context

district's diverse population of migrants and non-migrants. In terms of broader discourses, Szeged is in line with the national level, but locally the question around who is entitled and desired is contested.

Similar contrasts between views on the local and national level were reported from the Polish case studies. Interestingly, and unlike in the Hungarian case, more open views were reported from the less metropolitan region (Gdansk) as opposed to the Polish capital of Warsaw. While the central government pursues a conservative approach towards diversity and migration, local approaches are more nuanced.

"[We are] cordial people, willing to help foreigners in everyday situations. Gdynia is favourable to foreigners. There is awareness that the influx is large [...]. There are many different initiatives." (S13, Pomorze/Poland, social worker)

"It seems to me that the local community, unfortunately, very often reacts badly to foreigners and immigrants, because [local community members] only see a certain aspect of their presence." (S34, Warsaw/Poland, NGO project manager)

Unlike in the Polish and Hungarian cases, stakeholders in Romania did not describe the overall national context as hostile towards migrants; albeit somewhat shifting after the 2015 turning point. Romania itself has high rates of out-migration and migrants were thus sometimes seen as filling in the gap.

"The local population is not xenophobic in Romania. It depends on how migration is presented in the media. Before 2015, the local population was pro-migration. Afterwards they changed their views, they are neutral." (S02, Bucharest/Romania, NGO worker)

Resembling the case of Szeged, the Italian case study of Reggio Emilia is another example around local discourses around migration being shaped by specific (economic) needs. While the overall discourse around migration is less welcoming in Reggio Emilia and its region, its economy is however dependent on the constant inflow of low-paid workers in the agricultural and food production sectors.

The economically dynamic metropolis of Milan is a more complex setting for migrant integration on the other hand. As in other cities with larger migrant populations (i.e. Sheffield, Dortmund or Malmö), the share of migrants varies considerably between neighbourhoods, often coinciding with already existing patterns of socio-economic segregation. Similar to the Eastern European contexts mentioned above, the political discourse implemented by the former populist, right-wing government in connection with a prolonged economic downturn have left a considerable impact on the local attitudes towards migrants.

"[...] the negative economic situation of Italy and the politics of hate [and their instrumental use of migration] have intensified the hostility toward migrants." (S04, Milan/Italy, 3rd sector association)

Similar to such political discourses, media portrayals also vary between local and national levels. Mostly, the national media sets the tone. A stakeholder in Sheffield described how the portrayal of migrants in national media shaped the local attitudes towards them:

Urban more diverse
but not necessarily
more welcoming than
rural areas

“And the media plays a big part in never kind of like telling you any positive, good news stories about asylum seekers and refugees... It's like the [overall] environment is becoming more hostile at the moment, I'm sorry to say.” (S01, Sheffield/UK, independent educator)

Sometimes local media – for example in the case of Holzminden – report more positively on migration and migrants. Often, as in the cases of Szeged or Reggio Emilia, such localised narratives around migration are driven by local interests, for example when specific groups of migrants are in demand within the regional labour markets.

4.2 Settings for encounter

4.2.1 Encounters in micro-publics

Everyday encounters and interactions between migrants and the local population are important components of the integration process (where these are not negative). For migrants such interaction is expected to increase their sense of belonging and their level of participation. For the local population it is likely to decrease prejudices (or even hostility) against migrants, which are often related to lack of contact, cultural distance or fear of competitors.

“Working together, getting to know each other, meeting, that’s the key.” (S08, Dortmund/Germany, head of NGO).

Following our interest in the role of the local, particular settings that facilitate such interactions are of relevance here. Such settings can contribute to bridging the distance between groups. Furthermore they may also increase the likelihood of sharing information and thus facilitating access to services and institutions, networks, or jobs among others.

Specific spatial settings are important to facilitate such encounters and exchange. 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 mentioned as facilitating social interactions between those with young children.

“You really arrive in Poland and find your way to the Polish society through a playground.” (S06, Warsaw/Poland, NGO coordinator)

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 very 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 has 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

Specific settings facilitate everyday interactions

Young migrants’ use of public space often contested

COVID pandemic and its impact on social life compromises spaces of encounter

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. An example from Holzminden shows how gatherings of young people in public space fuelled negative attitudes towards migrants:

“Well, I mean, the stereotype is [...], young men are just the population that tends to be the most unpleasant to be around.” (S07, Holzminden/Germany, counselling professional)

Feeling safe in a local community – for example from racist harassment – is, of course, a crucial pre-condition for positive social encounters. Racist harassment and other incidents were mentioned by stakeholders from the UK, where public attitudes have shifted after the Brexit vote:

“[...] in the area so for some young people it is about where they feel safe. [...] sometimes we think when they go to certain areas you think, they’re not going to be OK there because the local community is quite hostile. So if they don’t feel safe, they’re not going to come out and they’re not going to go into the community and get involved.” (S02, Regional/UK, social worker)

In addition, public authorities or business owners sometimes attempt to regulate the use of specific public spaces. Yet, public spaces without prescribed rules of access (e.g. entry fees, surveillance) and regulations of its use (e.g. permitted and not permitted activities) are especially important for young migrants. Such informal meeting places that allow for spontaneous meetings are important for the socialisation of young people (Evans, 2008).

“Parks where there are a lot of people who play sports [are important]. For example there is a Sri Lankan community who plays cricket, [...] and every Saturday morning there are Chinese women dancing to Chinese music, and there is always an Italian man who tries to imitate them.” (S09, Milan/Italy, volunteer and teacher)

“For me, integration, how can it advance the quickest possible? When you have something in common. Sport is the cheapest. Football is the widest known. You can bring together people from here who are interested in this and people who arrived here [immigrants]. That’s why, for me, sport in general is the best, easiest, quickest and cheapest option to integrate people from other cultures, [...] and also to get to know their cultures.” (S20, Esch-sur-Alzette/Luxembourg, volunteer in a sports club)

Sports is mentioned in several case studies as an activity that bridges migrants and the local population, both informally in parks or public sports grounds and more formally in sports clubs. Encounters through sports are however highly gendered as male migrants tend to be much more involved in them.

Sports a low-threshold activity for encounter, albeit highly gendered

4.2.2 Role of institutions

Third sector organisations play an important role for facilitating encounters. 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 target groups for specific programmes or offers by organisations. For example, a common complaint was a focus on migrants from only one country of origin, rather than a less narrow approach that includes non-migrants as well.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused 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. 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 limited digital literacy.

Service interruption means less participation and encounters

“How do you deal with a computer? People only have their smartphone and don’t know they have an email address. I keep saying, ‘we have Corona, please email me, please send me a picture of this letter.’ [They respond:] ‘I don’t have an email.’” (S07, Holzminden/Germany, counselling professional)

Most 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.

Institutions – facilitating and sorting encounters

“We know that children at school grow up together and, without the cultural contamination of adults, they do not know the skin colour difference. They do not care where their friends or their parents come from.” (S13, Milan/Italy, professional at educational association)

“I really think it depends a lot on if they could be educated in Luxembourg. From the moment on when even an undocumented migrant entered an institution like a school, to some level, the person has managed to integrate and create networks.” (S10, Luxembourg, NGO social worker)

In rural municipalities in particular where opportunities for encounter are more limited, such institutional settings are regarded as crucial:

“Supermarket, city centre, school, workplace, I find quite decisive [...]. Otherwise there is relatively little mixing [...] And that’s why integration into the labour market and schools is so important.” (S07, Holzminden/Germany, counselling professional)

Access to institutions is not equal however and socio-spatial inequalities are reflected in segregated educational institutions (e.g. Boterman et al., 2019). In addition to influencing educational outcomes for example, such processes also shape the composition of groups that meet in certain institutions. While facilitating encounters, institutions thus also sort who encounters who.

“So they [migrant youth], they go there [...]. It's almost like, ‘where do you go [to school]?’ ‘Well, I am a child of an immigrant, so I go there [to this particular school]’. Actually, one is convinced, it's an auto-realised prophecy on the question of the educational career.” (S22, Luxembourg, manager of NGO)

4.3 Local social networks

The types of settings presented in the previous section are physical spaces. They are important because they facilitate casual encounters and the transfer of resources between people who may not have been in contact before. Most interactions are however pre-disposed by existing social networks. Establishing local social networks is often a major challenge for migrants (Plöger/Becker, 2015). The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic can also cause a feeling of isolation and loneliness, thus affecting peoples' mental well-being. 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. This is particularly the case in less diverse, more peripheral and rural settings.

Establishing local social networks, within and beyond migrant communities

“Migrants do not really participate in the social arenas where the locals are engaged. [...] they are somehow very isolated since, also because they do not have big migrant networks in the villages [...] thus they become very vulnerable.” (S17, Sogn/Norway, programme coordinator)

In some case studies, the local population was not intolerant or cautious of migrants per se. Perceptions and attitudes were reported to be based on specific characteristics of migrants such as ethnicity or religion. In the Polish case studies 'cultural distance' was mentioned when migrants received differential treatment by the local population:

“You cannot just have a casual talk with your neighbour. People are afraid of you. There are migrants that would like to practice their Polish, but they have no one to practice with” (S06, Warsaw/Poland, NGO programme coordinator).

Whether or not migrants received support in building up their social networks depended on national integration policies and how these were translated into support at the local level. Sometimes engaged professionals in these structures (e.g. social workers or counsellors) were crucial for integration outcomes as the following example from Luxembourg illustrates:

“I would say that the biggest opportunity is to get a social worker that is very motivated and does everything for you to help you get integrated because the government is not doing much.” (S17, Esch-sur-Alzette/Luxembourg, NGO social worker)

Across all case studies, language proficiency was regarded as key for integration as it can be instrumental for facilitating the interaction between migrants and the local population. This bridging potential of language was often referred to as an important first step for integration.

Language skills an important first step, but cannot be expected from everyone

“In terms of befriending a community [...] that's one of the barriers and that barrier is basically a language barrier.” (S06, Sheffield/UK, project coordinator)

“The Italian language is a way to communicate and integrate at local level.” (S04, Reggio Emilia/Italy, educator).

The availability of language courses was mentioned across most case studies as an important component of the integration process. Yet, language acquisition also shows that the “work of integration” is not equally distributed between migrants and the local population. The required effort is entirely a responsibility of migrants. Language acquisition was also reported to be biased by age; young migrants are usually regarded as having fewer problems with learning the local language and finding ways to interact socially.

“From around 40, they have problems to learn German. It’s not related to intellectual ability, but because they don’t go out or because they don’t have contacts”. (S13, Dortmund/Germany, NGO co-founder)

Furthermore, language skills alone do not always lead to interaction between migrants and the local population.

“It’s hard to get into Swedish society. It’s hard to learn the language. It’s hard to get into contact with other people.” (S30, Malmö/Sweden, NGO project leader)

Gender was also said to have an impact on the formation of local social networks. This is partly attributed to gendered divisions of labour and cultural values. Some stakeholders mentioned that women are more likely to stay at home due to care work and domestic chores, which makes them less likely to interact with locals than men and children. Moreover, women are underrepresented in educational programmes, language courses, and integration services and often more difficult for organisations to reach.

5. Conclusions

This report focusses on the **role of the local** and regional context as a setting for migrant integration from the specific perspective of local and regional stakeholders.

The interplay between local populations and young migrants in vulnerable conditions is place-specific. It can be understood as the **localised negotiation of access** to often limited resources and the specific possibilities of participation for newcomers within local communities. The livelihoods of young migrants are very often quite localised in terms of education, jobs, or social networks.

In localities where access to resources such as housing, employment, education or social services is already difficult for the local population (i.e. areas of relative deprivation), recent migrants may be perceived as competitors or a threat. The underlying social and socio-spatial inequalities are difficult to address by local stakeholders as they are mostly structural. Nonetheless stakeholders can support the formation of local coalitions between actors engaging in dialogue and resource transfer between groups.

The expert interviews revealed how the overall structural conditions not only shaped local migration and integration outcomes but were in turn also shaped by these. As shown by the research, the **local political agendas and discourses** with regard to migration matter. It highlights the role of scale: while clearly not beneficial, a hostile migration regime and restrictive policies on the national level can be somewhat offset at the local level, when

stakeholders, politicians, local population and migrants form a coalition based on more inclusive approaches. Such local autonomy can be in opposition to national approaches, for example in the case of anti-immigration regimes at the national level and welcoming initiatives at the local level.

Migrants – even if not being embedded on the national level – may be quite embedded (rather than integrated) locally for example through their use of public spaces, institutions, support infrastructures and social networks. Not only can local populations be brought into broader discussions about migrant integration and access to resources, they may also actively counter the impact and discourse of less inclusive approaches at the national scale – even under difficult conditions.

Interestingly, this is not simply a question of more seemingly progressive cities and “backward” rural areas. Less diverse localities who only recently started to receive more significant migrant inflows can potentially be inclusive **spatial settings**, whereas more diverse urban settings may shift to less favourable attitudes towards migrants due to negative national discourses or economic downturns.

While not downplaying the role of broader economic and political processes, the empirical material points out some **potential for the bottom-up shaping of local trajectories**.

Settings that allow for encounters are crucial for facilitating interaction between migrants and local populations. This includes a broad range of public, semi-public or private spaces (or ‘micro-publics’), where such encounters can take place. Interaction between social groups is however limited when institutions and neighbourhoods are segregated. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on social interactions, due to contact restrictions, the shift to online language courses and the limiting effect on establishing local social networks. These circumstances also reveal the vulnerabilities of young migrants in particular as they are in educational institutions, face difficulties during the transition into the labour market, and find their possibilities for social interaction reduced.

Policy-makers, planners and other stakeholders need to find new and creative approaches for fostering interactions and convivial encounters between local populations and young migrants. In doing so, adopting a place-sensitive view that builds on the **context-specific opportunities** is likely to improve results.

Within the MIMY project, the research teams will continue to examine in the case studies how taking the local level more seriously can benefit our understanding of migrant integration. In upcoming empirical tasks, the views of the young vulnerable migrants themselves will be incorporated. From this and their juxtaposition with the stakeholder interviews, we expect further insights into the barriers to and opportunities for migrant integration in European urban and rural communities.

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Project Identity

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