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„I think we can all try a bit”. Public report on non-migrant youth’s perceptions and attitudes towards integration, vulnerability and resilience

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1. Executive Summary

The HORIZON-2020-project “**EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions**” (MIMY) focuses on integration processes of young migrants and how their situation in the arriving contexts can be improved.

This public report focuses on **local non-migrant youth** and their experiences of vulnerability and resilience as well as their understanding of migration and integration. We perceive local non-migrant youth in this paper as peers of migrant youth with similar age-related challenges. At the same time, they are also representatives of the (local) communities/societies and in this respect reflect their own as well as common perceptions of migration and integration. The report summarizes results from a qualitative study which is based on 152 interviews from 18 selected local case studies of the 9 European countries participating in MIMY (Germany, England/UK, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden and Hungary), conducted in the period from late 2020 to early 2022.

Core results are:

The **socio-economic situation** constitutes a fundamental vulnerability as well as resilience factor in relation to the experiences of young people in their transition into adulthood as well as in relation to their future perspectives. With regard to the whole sample, a precarious socio-economic condition in terms of low education, lack of financial means on individual and family level, unemployment and housing (place of residence and quality of housing) can be identified as an important challenge. Possible mental stresses which (can) cumulate with the socio-economic situation emerge as reinforcing factors. Here, the importance of the **family of origin** as a possible place of support and acceptance or of insecurity, instability and conflict becomes visible. Narratives about fathers play a special role here, predominantly due to their absence. Traditional gender roles and family images prove to be persistent in this regard. **Friendships** (also virtual) have an important and, in the absence of family support, often compensatory significance for young people.

The phase of adolescence, as a **transition into adulthood**, is related to finding one's own place in society, establishing oneself professionally and gaining (especially financial) independence. A lot of interviewees do not feel (sufficiently) taken seriously and listened to as youth. This shows the overall desire for **recognition and participation** in institutions and society. From spatial perspective, it is not per se the urban-rural divide that determines chances for social participation, but rather the **sense of place**, which can vary even in the same localities. Rural areas, like urban places, offer specific challenges as well as specific advantages. A sense of place, however, does not arise from attachment to places, but from **experiences of recognition and attachment** to people and social interactions. Especially the lack of these kind of meaningful connections to places and people can be considered a vulnerability factor in itself.

An important issue emerging from the interviews is the **experience of 'Otherness'** - often reported in the context of discrimination – that cross-cuts the differentiation between migrant and non-migrant youth. This relates to young people who are othered based on physical characteristics, particularly however to LGBTQIA+ and Youth of Colour. Our results also show that this experience of vulnerability due to 'Otherness' and social exclusion can inform choices of future professions to create a more inclusive society.

With regard to **migration and integration**, our analysis shows that lived-experiences of vulnerability make young people without migration experiences particularly sensitive to the challenges that young migrants have to cope with. Against the background of their own biographical experiences, they see language acquisition and labour market integration, but also experiences of 'Otherness', 'standing on one's own feet' and (not) being fully accepted as an individual by society as the main challenges for young migrants. Thus, integration does not appear to be a special task for migrants, but for young people in general. Rather, what matters are the opportunities for young people offered by society and

the question how young people perceive their chances of finding their place as fully recognized members of society.

Referring to the results presented here, it is highly recommendable to reorient policies towards a better promotion of the aforementioned protective factors, i.e. social and economic security, for all young people regardless of their migration experiences. Furthermore, the insights into the significance of young people's own vulnerability experiences can offer potentials for future inclusive youth work: not sensitizing about migrants as victims, as the suffering 'Other', but fostering an understanding related to non-migrant youth's own lived experience of inclusion and exclusion, pointing towards an inclusive and integrated society for all.

2. Introduction

The **HORIZON-2020-project** "MIMY – EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions" aims to identify successful and failed ways of young migrants' integration, including ways how to include and empower youth within the research process. While MIMY's focus lies on the study of the situations and experiences of young migrants, the subject of the empirical research presented here are non-migrant or local youth aged 18 to 29.³ This paper thus presents results from a qualitative, transnational, comparative analysis on interviews with non-migrant-youth living in the localities of 18 MIMY case studies from nine European states (Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, UK). The paper examines their perceptions of vulnerability and resources for resilience as well as their understandings of migration and integration.

Integration takes place in localities where people establish their social relations and shape their everyday lives. Like young migrants, young people without migration experiences are situated in local opportunity structures (e.g. labour market, educational institutions, social and political environment) that are framing their possibilities for action and keep similar age-related challenges. At the same time, they are the peers of young migrants beyond the structural level, namely on the social-interactive level in specific social spaces. One aim within the MIMY project is therefore to describe non-migrant youth's experiences of vulnerability and resilience, with a particular focus on experiences of 'Otherness'.

The definition of **non-migrant youth** as part of the local population in this paper is a broad and open one. It includes young adults aged 18 to 29 without experiences of international migration who lived in the local case study localities for at least 24 months. On the one hand, this definition allows for posterior comparison with the experiences of young migrants within the MIMY project, defined as youth who "establishes their usual residence in the territory of an EU/EFTA Member State for a period [...] of at least 12 months, having previously been resident of a third country" (EMN European Migration Network, 2020). On the other hand, this open definition allows for an inquiry into the youth's complex perceptions of oneself and others in a sense of belonging or foreignness, being integrated or disintegrated. In addition to being non-migrant youth, having experiences of vulnerabilities in different areas (e.g. accessing labour, education, health, civil rights, social welfare, and housing) was a sampling criterion.

As part of the MIMY project, this paper takes the concepts of **vulnerability** and (re)sources for **resilience** as a starting point to inquire into the life situations of non-migrant youth. While no clear and uniform definition of vulnerability exists in literature (Paul, 2014), the conceptualization of vulnerability applied within the MIMY project is multidimensional, including structural and individual dimensions (Gilodi, Albert, & Nienaber, 2022).

³ The definition of youth follows the UNESCO definition emphasizing that the term youth "is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence" (UNESCO 2016). Even though the MIMY Consortium agrees that the term youth should be seen as "fluid category rather than a fixed age-group" (UNESCO 2016) it applied the age definition used by the main European population surveys Eurostat and Eurobarometer (15 to 29 years) for transnational comparability. Due to ethical considerations and in order to fulfil the protection of data privacy for this report, we confined the age from 18 to 29 years.

Vulnerability has become a buzzword in various scientific discourses, for instance in climate and natural disaster research. However, it has also been frequently used in the context of migration issues. Vulnerability is often connected to the concept of risk (e.g. Paul, 2014) and understood as “the state of susceptibility to harm from exposure to stresses associated with environmental and social change and from the absence of capacity to adapt” (Adger, 2006). The definitions of vulnerable groups in the context of international migration also refer to such a risk-based understanding. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), for example, defines vulnerable groups as, “depending on the context, any group or sector of society (...) that is at higher risk of being subjected to discriminatory practices, violence, social disadvantage, or economic hardship than other groups within the State” (IOM, 2019, p. 230). In migration research, refugees are considered a particularly vulnerable group, as they have an “increased risk of unfavourable developments and adaptation processes” (Mehl, Gilodi, & Albert, 2021, p. 795) due to both the challenges of the arrival context in the host country and potentially traumatic experiences in the country of origin and/or during the flight. A recent quantitative MIMY report on youth migrants in European countries states that young migrants from Third Country States are “more exposed to vulnerable conditions and especially to multiple vulnerabilities than young people with no immigrant background” (Messing, V., Ságvári, B., 2020, p. 64).

However, the concept of vulnerability is also criticised for being paternalising and exclusionary (Butler, Gambetti, & Sabsay, 2016; Freedman, 2019; Sözer, 2021). Some approaches in social sciences therefore emphasise vulnerability as a universal feature of the human condition (Cole, 2016; Fineman, 2008). In this notion, autonomy does not appear as a natural characteristic, but as a product of societal and socio-politically shaped structures. Following this idea, the analytical perspective on vulnerability focuses on societal structures “to manage our common vulnerabilities” (Fineman, 2008, p. 8). It is hence important to include situational and structural dimensions of vulnerability in addition to subject-related ones into the analysis (Gilodi, 2021).

In order to examine and enrich this understanding, MIMY “uses a broader concept of vulnerability including dimensions like negative life events, adverse childhood experiences, illness, injuries and disabilities, as well as social, cultural and economic exclusion” (MIMY Consortium, 2019, p. 8) and no rigidly pre-defined “meaning of vulnerability” (MIMY Consortium, 2019, p. 8).⁴ We understand vulnerability as a dynamic process in which different factors interlink. Furthermore vulnerability has to be analysed as a social construction, as it refers not only to the (societal and individual) dealing with risks, but also with “ideas of risks” in which “hegemonic claims of normality⁵” (Bürkner, 2010, p. 39) are virulent.

When it comes to vulnerable youth, European discourses mostly focus on education and poverty. Several youth policies, like the EU-wide Youth Guarantee⁶ programme, refer to NEET youth – young people who are “disconnected” and are neither in the education system nor in the labour market – or to early school leavers. Moro et al. state that the concept of vulnerability in this context is closely linked to “the state of exclusion or poverty and marginalization” (Moro et al., 2021, p. 3). In addition, within European social science specific groups within the age group of youth such as refugees (e.g. Kien et al., 2019), LGBTIA+ (e.g. Russell & Fish, 2016) or BPOC (e.g. Priest et al., 2013) are discussed as vulnerable.

Resilience in MIMY is defined as “an ability to cope with shocks, malfunctioning and challenges before, during and after migration episodes” (MIMY Consortium, 2019, p. 10). This understanding provides a

⁴ In order to assess non-migrant youths’ experiences of vulnerability and resilience in an open manner, the sample of interviewees comprises a variety of proposed multiple and combined vulnerability factors: e.g. low education level, NEET, poverty, being in “care” or careleaver, disadvantaged family background, single parent, (former) drug abuse, chronic illness, mental health problems, precarity of housing, experience of discrimination due to racism, nationalism, ethnocentrism sexism or homophobia, being trans- or inter-Gender, belonging to a minority religion or group.

⁵ Translated from German.

⁶ The Youth Guarantee initiative is one of the EU's key social policies aimed at supporting vulnerable youth and their integration into the education system and the labour market. In this sense, it should act as a “linchpin of structural reforms and innovation across Europe” (Moro, Maiztegui-Oñate, and Solabarrieta, 2021, p. 2).

broad concept of possible individual resources and capacities to cope with adversity, but also includes opportunity structures at the meso and macro-level. The here presented transnational comparative analysis does not focus on individual resilience in a psychological sense, but rather follows an approach that identifies resources for resilience the young non-migrants name and use or try to use.

In contrast to an understanding of integration as a process of mere adjustment of migrants to the social-cultural and economic contexts of receiving countries, MIMY draws upon the concept of **“liquid integration”** (Skrobanek & Jobst, 2019). With this we go beyond a two-way-process of integration to show the complex interdependencies between the individual and the structural level within integration processes: integration is conceptualized as an open-ended process of social change that includes continuous changes on the institutional and structural level of society.

By choosing a **biographical-narrative approach** for the interviews, we analyse non-migrant youth’s experiences of vulnerability in order to identify patterns across the case studies as well as to highlight group specific or local experiences. Using a qualitative analysis based on Grounded Theory Methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) we aim to show empirically “how life chances and resulting practices of young people [...] are today framed by objective and subjective dimensions of life” (Skrobanek, Jobst, Grabwska, & Ryan, 2020, p. 11) and in which areas of life those two dimensions interrelate. MIMY’s place-based approach (MIMY Consortium, 2019, p. 22) enables us to indicate how policies of integration and other policy areas are reflected in the perceptions and experiences of local non-migrant youth and which opportunities but also obstructions non-migrant as well as migrant youth encounter. As the interviews were conducted mostly in 2021, also effects of the pandemic and protection measures were mentioned. We consider those where our interviewees highlight impacts on their experiences and perceptions.

Against the backdrop of this theoretical-conceptual and methodological framing, **the first objective** of this paper is to **describe non-migrant youth’s experiences of vulnerability and resilience**, particular focusing on experiences of 'Otherness'.

The second aim is to inquire into **young people’s perceptions and attitudes towards integration and their experiences of vulnerability and resilience** in order to contribute to a relational assessment and understanding of these concepts from a critical perspective. The youth’s narrations display their own perceptions of vulnerability, resilience and integration as well as societal understandings of normality shaping their passages into adulthood.

Moreover, non-migrant youth as parts of the local communities/societies reflect their own as well as common perceptions of migration and integration. **This paper therefore thirdly** contributes to a **better understanding of non-migrant youth’s role as representatives of the local communities** and their perception of themselves and the 'Other'.

By reorienting the view from the migrant to the local population we take a methodological step towards what Janine Dahinden has called the “de-migrantization” of migration studies: taking local youth as unit of analysis we can challenge the implicit norm of the immobile vs. migration as the abnormal “while remaining sensitive to the role of migration and ethnicity” (2016, p. 12) for the young people’s experiences.

Structure of this Paper

We will start out with some remarks on the research design (3) and present the 18 local case studies in their national geographical contexts, focussing in particular on local population structures and migration histories. In the following chapter on non-migrant youth’s experiences of vulnerability and resilience (4), we will first address the main areas where vulnerabilities and resources for resilience are (re)produced and play out in young non-migrants’ lives: their educational path and (future) work careers as well as their social lifes, particularly family and friends. We will then analyse the meaning of space and (im)mobilities for young non-migrants, before addressing processes of inclusion and exclusion and reflecting on the relationship between discrimination, exclusion/inclusion and vulnerability/resilience as categories of analysis in the context of young people’s transition into

adulthood. Against the backdrop of this sketch of non-migrant youths' situation in life, the fifth chapter addresses non-migrants' perceptions of migration and integration (5). After an analysis of non-migrants' conceptualization of integration and the challenges and opportunities they perceive for migrants and perceptions of 'we and the other', we address the question, how non-migrant youth's experiences of vulnerability, exclusion (resilience/inclusion) shape their perception of migrants and integration. Finally, we draw conclusions from our findings for integration concepts that focus on young people as a whole (6).

3. Research Design

3.1 Methodology

Vulnerability, resilience and integration are well studied, however highly changeable, contested and hardly quantifiable concepts. Thus, in order to grasp their meaning and significance for young non-migrants, a qualitative inductive research design appeared to be suitable. Across all 18 local case studies, the MIMY research teams conducted 152 biographical-narrative interviews with non-migrant youth, including 86 female, 64 male and two non-binary youth. Per local case study between 6 and 11 interviews were conducted.⁷

The applied autobiographical approach to narrative interviews goes back to Fritz Schütze (1977). This methodology reflects MIMY's explicit interest in a time course as well as a distinctly subject-oriented perspective. On the one hand, studying vulnerability and resilience on the subject-level requires a significant depth of the interviewees' accounts. According to Herrmanns, the biographical narrative representation offers much more differentiated knowledge to interviewees than in so-called self-theories that are mainly triggered by explanatory questions (Herrmanns, 1992). On the other hand, as a process-analytical method the biographical narration is most suitable to generate "temporal relationships" (Schütze, 1983, p. 285) and "provide an insight into [...] collective and individual processes of change" (Jakob, 2010, p. 221). This is an important basis for an analysis of integration, which as a concept and a process is highly changeable over time (Skrobanek & Jobst, 2019).

Biographical narrative interviews have been widely used in social research (Fangen, Johansson, & Hammarén, 2012; Rosenthal, 2002; Svašek & Domecka, 2020) involving vulnerable groups. Schütze himself used his method to study biographies of people in vulnerable conditions (e.g. Schütze, 2006). As the open impulses for narration leave maximum space to unfold their own relevancies, interviewees are addressed as 'experts of their own lives', transmitting a sense of 'being heard' and allowing for a self-determined approach to their life experiences. The autobiographical narrative interview is thus a very suitable interview method to investigate the experiences and perspectives on vulnerable youth.⁸ For the collection of the presented narrations, it was not used in its "pure" form, but in combination with guiding questions, inquiring deeper into the areas of analysis being vulnerability, resilience (resistance/coping) and perceptions on migration and integration. For the purpose of a consistent methodological approach, an internal working paper was drawn up on the method of the autobiographical narrative interview and its specific appliance (Penke, Wagner, & Kriszan, 2021).

Especially with autobiographical narrative interviews, aspects of anonymization and data protection as well as risks of emotional stress and re-traumatization must be considered for ethical reasons (Svašek & Domecka, 2020, 111f.). Therefore, in autobiographical narrative interviews in general and especially with vulnerable groups, it is necessary to pay special attention to aspects of communication and information appropriate to the respective specific group, to establishing good personal contact

⁷ The difference in size of the local samples is due to various influencing factors, in particular the population size (small villages or big cities), local field access, as well as differential local impacts of transnational crises like the Covid pandemic or the local handling of refugee influxes from Ukraine in Poland.

⁸ The Ethics Commission of HAWK approved the research design and all empirical instruments as well as the protection of data privacy.

and to conducting the interview in a sensitive manner. A specific procedure was hence proposed that considers these aspects.⁹

As “non-migrant youth in vulnerable conditions” sets very broad sampling criteria, the sample is very heterogeneous. Due to the recruitment mainly through specific local institutions, the variation is particularly pronounced between the case studies. Following the broad understanding of vulnerability previously established, it was assumed that no clear ex-ante category of vulnerable youth can be established. On the one hand, the discovery of young people’s self-perception as vulnerable is crucial for an inductive understanding of vulnerability. On the other hand, vulnerabilities can arise from specific biographical experiences and an accumulation of several risk factors that could remain undetected within a sample with predefined factors of vulnerability. The sampling therefore aimed to achieve a heterogeneous sample with regard to vulnerability factors. Due to the diverging local research settings and population structures in the different case studies, however, the vulnerability factors are not evenly distributed between the case studies. Particularly due to field access through certain institutions and during a pandemic situation, some local case studies are focusing on particular factors of vulnerability. Although this might give reason to critique, the analysis has shown that overarching vulnerability experiences as well as resilience factors could be identified. Furthermore, this enables us to deduce structural aspects across the different local case studies from different individual perceptions. However, it is explicitly pointed to in this paper where a specific local sample bias has been considered relevant for the derived results.

For the analysis, we used an approach based on Grounded Theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The grid that guided the analysis of all partners was developed out of an in-depth analysis of interviews with non-migrant youth in Holzminden (Germany). From that, categories as well as “sensitizing questions”, meant to open the analytical process were developed and brought together in the final grid for analysis. While these categories were reconstructed in only one case study, the partners were invited to complement those with their findings. The analysis of all case studies then focussed on axial and selective coding and the overall construction of theoretical categories. Quotes from the interviews depict the most condensed statements out of a variety of interviews. All interviews were anonymised in accordance with the privacy policy handed out to the interviewees.

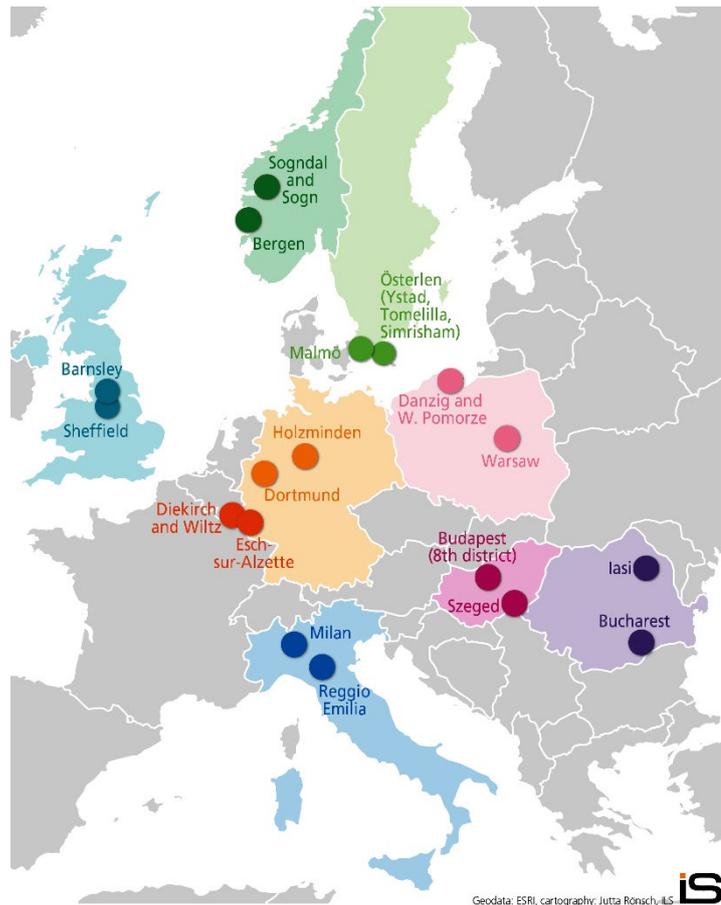
3.2 Local Case Studies

The MIMY project builds on a case study approach that allows deeper insights into the dynamics and mechanisms of social interaction on microscale. The MIMY Consortium selected in each of the nine participating countries two localities for in-depth research.

Although not being representative for the local youth population in the European Union nor the national contexts in each of the partner countries, the 18 case studies and their respective samples of non-migrant local youth provide a rich variety of local settings and youth groups. Contrasting these different locally (and nationally) embedded experiences allows for an exploratory qualitative analysis of non-migrant youth’s vulnerabilities, resilience and perceptions of integration and migration as a counterpart for arriving young migrants across the European Union. “MIMY highlights the importance of the local level as this is the level where face-to-face encounter and integration within the host society practically begins.” (MIMY Consortium, 2019, p. 22)

⁹ A preliminary talk first serves as an ethically responsible procedure by ensuring that the interview partners have all necessary information to decide for or against participation. In addition, a good relationship should be established between the interviewer and the interviewee, thus creating a basis of trust (Riemann 2006, p 18f.). In the following interview (Penke et al. 2021), the interviewees are given space and openness as well as appreciation for their own experiences and life realities through a special narrative interview technique and attitude. After the interview, there is a follow-up conversation in which the interview can be debriefed and reflected on, and which leads into a casual everyday conversation.

The majority of the selected case studies are larger cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants; six of them even have more than 500,000 inhabitants. Three case studies have the status of being capital city (Budapest, Bucharest and Warsaw), while one is an important economic centre (Milan). Some of the selected case studies are older-industrial cities undergoing economic restructuring (e.g. Dortmund, Sheffield, Esch-sur-Alzette, Barnsley). Others are mainly regional centres within their respective national contexts (Bergen, Reggio Emilia), while three of them are located close to or at national borders (Szeged, Iasi, Malmö) (Plöger & Aydar, 2021). A smaller number of case studies are (semi)rural or suburban municipalities, such as Österlen, Diekirch/Wiltz, Pruszcz Gdański, Holzminden and Sogndal.



Source: Plöger & Aydar, 2021, p. 6

Especially those cities with an industrial history (e.g. Sheffield, Esch-sur-Alzette, Dortmund) and spatial proximity to national borders (Szeged, Iasi, Malmö) have a long history of migration, while the Central Eastern European and the rural case studies (Sogn, Österlen, Holzminden) have become migrant destinations more recently for a variety of reasons (e.g. asylum seekers, university students, labour migrants) (ibid.).

However, with regard to social interactions particularly in urbanised contexts it is the neighbourhood and municipal level „of the immigrant and local population encounter of complex interactions [...] where they negotiate access to resources such as housing, work, education, social services and networks“ (Plöger & Aydar, 2020, p. 5).

4. Non-migrant Youth’s Experiences of Vulnerability and Resilience

As Fineman has pointed out, „the places and spaces where young people must build their resilience are primarily family, community, and school. These institutions, separately and in relation to each other form the geography of childhood [and youth]“ (Fineman, 2014, 321f.). We find these priorities also in the interviewees’ accounts which are centred on experiences connected to family, their social surroundings and school. For their outlooks on the future, perspectives of employment were most relevant. This coincides with the labour dimension being the main variable for the identification of vulnerable groups in European policies (Maiztegui-Oñate, 2020). Therefore, we will focus in the following on vulnerability factors and their accumulation as well as the building of resilience in education and work to finally address the area of family and social life.

4.1 Education and Work Perspectives

4.1.1 Experiences with Education

Across all case studies education and educational aspirations play a central role in the young non-migrants’ narrations. Educational failure or success are the main criteria interviewees across case

studies referred to in order to describe and evaluate their life trajectories up to date: *“I was a tearaway person. Didn’t finish vocational school to become a carpenter.”* (NM1_HU_Budapest_m)¹⁰ Educational aspirations are also an important issue regarding their future perspectives, particularly for those who had to leave school or consider their own attained educational level as not sufficient for the future they envision.

Most of the interviewees across our case studies still or again have been attending educational institutions. While in some localities (Dortmund, Szeged, Iasi, Malmö, Milan, Reggio Emilia, Esch-sur-Alzette) most interviewees have attended university, they have been in other cases mostly involved in secondary education, in (adult) secondary education or professional training (Bergen, Sogn, Holzminden, Österlen) or have encompassed diverse educational experiences (Bucharest, Pruszcz Gdąnski, Warsaw, Sheffield, Barnsley, Diekirch and Wiltz). Therefore, in comparison to work experiences, education is far more important in the young people’s reasoning and description of their own situation. An outstanding exception are the young people in Budapest 8th district: the interviewed youth are members of the ethnic minority of Roma that have a long-standing history and important presence in the district. This group of interviewees have mostly quit secondary education early to work and provide for their family or care for children.

Education is also one of the main areas in young non-migrants’ lives where vulnerabilities are (re)produced. At the same time, vulnerabilities created elsewhere can have a severe impact in this sphere.

One of the most salient vulnerability factors affecting the young peoples’ educational experiences are adverse family backgrounds. On the one hand, instable family relations and a lack of family support or even experiences of abuse significantly disturb educational trajectories. This is particularly true for youth who due to parents’ deaths or inability to care for them have experiences of recurrent changes between different foster homes. On the other hand, and even more importantly, the socio-economic background of the young peoples’ families proves to be very decisive for their educational experiences and trajectories. Poverty or a relatively disadvantaged economic situation can create a feeling of inferiority in interaction with peers and is an important basis of bullying and exclusion: *“Complicated childhood, that’s what I say, if I had a more financially stable childhood I might have identified better with students my age.”* (NM5_LU_Esch-sur-Alzette_f)

A lack of financial means in the family appears to be the main reason to quit school early despite higher educational aspirations or not being able to concentrate on studying. While this is particularly obvious with early school leavers in Budapest, it emerges as a pattern across the case studies and also displays a certain gender aspect: young women not continuing school due to early pregnancy and child care obligations.

Apart from the family background, mental health issues are the most important challenges for educational achievements the interviewed young people have described. Across case studies, interviewees reported depressive phases and problems with anxiety that made them lose track of education, sometimes connected to drug dependency. Noticeably, in Norway, Sweden, Germany and Luxembourg several youth referred to diagnosed ADHD and dyslexia as the main cause of their educational problems, while these diagnoses did not emerge as significant elsewhere. In cases where mental health issues are intertwined with substance abuse, a downwards spiral regarding education could be observed.

While these vulnerability factors have an important influence on educational outcomes, education and particularly schools can also be areas, where vulnerabilities are produced or reinforced. Bullying experienced during childhood and adolescence in school affects young peoples’ further life trajectories and self-esteem, causing school changes and drop-outs: *“I realised that I can’t go on in this school,*

¹⁰ We use the following code for interview quotations: (NM [=non-migrant youth] 1, 2, 3, [no of interview] ... _Country Code _local case study _gender). The Country Codes are: Germany - DE, Hungary - HU, Italy - IT, Luxembourg - LU, Norway - NO, Poland - PL, Romania - RO, Sweden - SE, United Kingdom – UK.

psychologically [...] I lost all the motivation I had. I would rather not pass and change school.”
(NM7_PL_Warsaw_m)

Youth with higher weight or visible physical health issues was the main group reporting experiences with bullying. This finding is well known from relevant studies on bullying, according to which the factors of non-heterosexual orientation, high weight or physical disability are significant risk factors for becoming both a victim and a perpetrator of bullying (Eisenberg, Gower, McMorris, & Bucchianeri, 2015). Exceeding accounts of bullying by far, however, were experiences of racism by minority groups. In contrast to bullying, racism mostly did not come from fellow students, but from teachers and school staff.

Negative experiences with teachers and a lack of support from the school as institution seems to be a major factor that increases vulnerability in education. With the exception of Norway, young non-migrant youth with adverse educational experiences and personal difficulties depict schools as inflexible and demanding institutions. Particularly, however, the lack of understanding and interest of teachers for their individual problems and situations, emerged across case studies as enhancing educational vulnerabilities: *“Like, I just didn't trust my teacher either or forever. It's not very helpful, they don't focus on the students that need the help. But then I'm not saying I'm not smart, but sometimes when I need help and there's someone that's ignoring you it just doesn't help.”*
(NM7_UK_Sheffield_m)

Vice versa, the personal support from specific teachers was identified as being very decisive for positive school experiences throughout all case studies. These positive experiences mostly referred to teachers' understanding of difficulties the young people went through and believing in their capability: *“there really was this one teacher who believed in me”* (NM8_DE_Holzminden_f). An interesting exception to these experiences was expressed from the interviewees in Norway, where schools mostly are perceived as supporting and adapting to the needs of students.

While school is a place where vulnerabilities can be reinforced and created, it can also be a source of resilience. These experiences seem linked deeply with the conduct of individual teachers while the structural level (institutions) was not explicitly mentioned. Moreover, while some interviewees have reported problems with bullying the function of schools as important social arenas where (long-term) friendships and supportive connections arise was mostly reported as an important resource for further life.

4.1.2 Work Perspectives

Youth studies have highlighted the importance of work for the transition into adulthood for young people. „Finding employment that offers a degree of security and provides the means to sustain independent living still forms the bedrock upon which other transitions are built. Without employment it is difficult to become independent and make a life. Employment, though, is being transformed, drawing in its train a string of changes that impact on virtually all aspects of young people's lives” (Furlong, 2017, p. 5). The Covid-19 pandemic, as has been stated, has had and continues to have a negative impact on the economic situation of young people, especially in their transition to work. „Despite the unprecedented public support measures, young people who have recently entered or are about to enter the labour market have been affected disproportionately by the pandemic. Young workers have experienced considerable loss of work and income as a result of unemployment and reduction in working hours. Social distancing and home working brought about by COVID-19 might have a negative impact upon the career prospects of even those young people who have managed to secure a job” (Konle-Seidl & Picarella, 2021, p. 52).

While educational experiences are dominant in the interviewed young peoples' assessment of their past and present, work and job opportunities play the main role for their future perspectives. For those who are already having jobs, mostly young people in their late 20s and the afore mentioned Roma youth in Budapest, a low educational level appears to be a major vulnerability as it limits job options on the labour market. Particularly in the Eastern European case studies in Romania, Poland and

Hungary, this lack of options goes along with low salaries that are not enough to provide for themselves, as well as informal and unprotected working conditions. The precarious working conditions made this group of working youth also susceptible to the impacts of the pandemic. As an important barrier regarding access to the labour market, some interviewees reported racial discrimination – particularly regarding Black people and women wearing a headscarf.

The most salient vulnerability concerning the youth's work life however seems to be unemployment without a clear job perspective. While these situations are mostly rooted in an accumulation of other vulnerabilities like low education levels and mental or physical illnesses, they can also be the source of mental health problems like dysphoria and depression: *"[Not having a job] means that I don't have a lot to do with my time. I want to do things, but I'm just not capable"* (NM6_NO_Bergen_m).

Sources for resilience, in contrast, appear to arise from high levels of education that give access to good job opportunities and a financial background that permits to explore various options, e.g. through voluntary services and internships, without the necessity to provide for oneself or others.

4.2 Social Life

4.2.1 Family Experiences

For the interviewed youth, family is one of the main areas where vulnerabilities are created at the same time as being decisive for support and acknowledgement and thus the development of resilience. When the young people talked about their family experiences they mostly talked about their parents, to a lesser extent about siblings and grandparents. Members of the wider family like aunts or cousins were only mentioned occasionally as significant. However, for those who are already parents themselves the relationship to their children and co-parents was at the centre.

Apart from socio-economic factors, a central vulnerability regarding family relations is instability. On the one hand, some youth described changes between different care settings, particularly orphanages and foster care as destabilizing. On the other hand, confrontational or even violent separations of parents can have long-lasting destabilizing effects. Instability can also result from family members, particularly parents' bad health or death. Young people with experiences of deaths in their close family described coping with the grief parallel to increased family responsibilities as a major challenge as well as a fear of losing someone else: *"If some other person I love dies, I don't want anymore!"* (NM14_LX_Diekirch and Wiltz_f)

Parents' substance abuse, particular alcoholism, and mental instability is another important factor causing vulnerability. Even though, also describing a lack of parental support in other situations, young non-migrant youth experienced these problems of their parents as main source for feelings of abandonment as well as resulting financial difficulties in the family.

Parents' own vulnerabilities, deaths of family members and the lack of parental support in general can lead to a problematic parentification early in life. This involves taking on financial responsibilities, taking over care work for siblings or parents, the need to emotionally stabilize parents as well as taking over the mental load of family organization: *"So it's cooking, cleaning and making sure the house is in in the right place and make it so as if everyone's up to date with their jobs and also education and my education."* (NM6_UK_Sheffield_f)

Parentification is a particular challenge for young 2nd generation migrants who in some cases need to support their parents due to language barriers. On the other hand, it is especially 2nd generation migrants who emphasised that they were only able to take up studies through the support of their families: *"We are not a high social class, but my parents allowed me and my brother to study at University, I will always be grateful to them."* (NM6_IT_Milan_m)

Apart from the general lack of parental support, some interviewees stressed a lack of acceptance and understanding from their parents as a problem. While this was mentioned in many interviews, it has

become a major cause for vulnerability in the case of LGBTIQIA+ youth who feel rejected by their families or cannot out themselves in front of their parents.

Important resilience factors inversely are a generally stable family situation in terms of finances and a safe, non-violent environment, as well as the feeling/knowledge to have a familial fall back option when facing problems or hardships that some interviewees expressed: *“I wouldn’t say it’s a challenge [being alone with two kids], because I always have my parents in the background, the whole family actually.”* (NM6_DE_Holzminden_f)

A positive and close relationship to parents or a single parent is also decisive for family to be a source of support. In case parental support is lacking, or parents are the source of vulnerabilities, grandparents and siblings become more important. Grandparents often (temporarily) take over parental duties and siblings can be an important source of emotional support and understanding. Intergenerational differences with parents can even lead to closer relationships with siblings, particularly in the view of 2nd generation migrants: *“My sisters are my reference point: they always understand me [...] sometimes I meet difficulties with my parents, I think the age difference is too much.”* (NM4_IT_Milan_f)

For young people who already have children themselves, being responsible for a child can have an important stabilizing effect that motivates to overcome own problems like drug addiction or no school-leaving certificate: *“After the birth of the child, I looked at the child, and it was such an impulse that ‘what would I tell this daughter’? I’ll tell her ‘you must learn’ and she’ll say ‘you don’t have school’! And what will I tell her then?”* (NM3_PL_Pruszcz_f)

4.2.2 Gender and Care: Father Figure, Mother Figure and the distribution of Care Work

An important pattern emerging across all case studies is the perception of absence or violent behaviour of fathers as a major source of vulnerability for the youth. Alcoholism and domestic violence are the main negative experiences with present fathers, while several young people reported the complete absence of fathers in their life. Several interviewees also ascribed negative experiences with their fathers an important role for their problems and fears in life: *“Coming from a family where my father left, I was very afraid of abandonment.”* (NM1_RO_Bucharest_f)

The father figure is also depicted as absent in an emotional sense, not spending time with children and lacking emotional support: *“[My father is a] ‘OK-dad’. You say something and he just responds ‘OK’. No feelings.”* (NM2_SWE_Österlen_m)

Mothers on the contrary are often perceived as the most important person in the family and as the central source of support and understanding: *“Had I not had such an incredible mother I would not have managed anything. She really is the sunshine in my life. [...] She comforted me immediately when I started to question myself and my gender and sexuality and understood directly that I wanted to be called [my new gender neutral name].”* (NM7_SWE_Österlen_nb)

Even though being raised by a single parent was described as economically difficult, the interviewed young people particularly expressed admiration and gratitude towards single mothers. The role of mothers, however, is also idealized: e.g. the mother is described as *“the pillar of home”* (NM4_IT_Reggio Emilia_f) who cares for and supports children and family. This idealized picture can be a potential source for vulnerability, if mothers are psychologically instable and children take on the role of the emotional support giver.

In the vast majority of local cases, the single parents were mothers. That the care work for children, but also younger siblings, is mainly – nearly exclusively – done by women is a persisting pattern throughout the case studies and through generations. The figure of an absent father repeats itself with young non-migrants who are already parents themselves: without exception within the sample of this study, if they are single parents it is the young women and young men only refer very occasionally to caring for their own children (and never as the main care taker). Not surprisingly, this can lead to challenges. At several points, young women reported being overloaded with the burden of providing

and caring for their children alone: „I was alone when the baby was 8 months old. It was horrible, I cried, at some point I felt like killing myself. I thought only that I choose a wrong person in my life [the child's father] and that it will be impossible to raise the child by myself. With no help from family, financially, it was very hard.“ (NM8_RO_Bucharest_f)

Care work emerges also as an important impediment for young women's work life, not being able to find a job that is compatible with child care or lacking work experience due to prior care obligations. Our interviewees perceived rather traditional images of parents' engagement in which binary gender stereotypes are dominant.

4.2.3 “The normal family” as a wish and chronic deception

As family plays an important role in the perceptions of vulnerability and resilience of our interviewees, it is interesting to see that their ideas of a “normal family” can also be a source for vulnerability itself. Their wishes for the future in this respect reveal an idealized picture, of what a “normal” or “real” family should look like. “For my private future, just get settled with my wife, have children, get married before. The storybook picture of a family somehow.” (NM7_DE_Holzminden_m)

Apart from young people who report a similar family constellation in their childhood, also interviewees with contrasting experiences made use of such images in their narrations about their own family and their wishes for the future. Interestingly, even young people identifying themselves as LGBTQIA+, who experience state propaganda against homosexual parenting like in the case of Poland and Hungary, expressed very similar pictures of their desired future family: “I would like to have a small house or a small farm somewhere, ideally in Spain, with a dog, a wife, and children.” (NM9_HU_Szeged_mf)

These “storybook families” at the same time are a benchmark for young single mothers or children from single mothers: their family constellations were judged as deviant: “A couple of times I was sent to another family to see how a real family [family with mother AND father] works.” (NM5_NO_Sogndal_f)

Here we find a strong adoption of traditional ideas of normality. However, this is also made difficult by the fact that only a few of the interviewees have experienced such situations themselves. In this respect, the adoption of this social standard points to a permanent tension between own experiences and projections to which there seem to be no alternatives. Thus, every failure to live up to the ideal type becomes a source of disappointment and harbours a considerable vulnerability potential.

4.2.4 Friendship and Leisure

Recent studies reconfirm the importance of friendships for the emotional well-being of young adults and show that friendships are also a protective factor against social and general anxiety and depressive symptoms during the Covid-19 pandemic (Juvonen, Lessard, Kline, & Graham, 2022). Our interviewees consistently attributed a very high importance to friendships, foremost in compensatory and socialisatory manners: “My friends are there for me, they back me and they get what I'm going through.” (NM6_UK_Barnsley_m)

Friends as a supporting network are specifically important to youth with difficult relationships to their families. In contrast to family, the supportive role of friendship the non-migrant youth described in their lives by far exceeds problematic aspects. The negative influences of friends and cliques the youth mentioned mostly concern drug abuse. However, as in comparison to family relation, friendships are experienced as more temporary and less instable.

The importance of friendship was also expressed in the lack of friends or difficulties to establish relationships. “My biggest challenge in life is that I'm alone. I want to find [a significant other] to spend my life with, and I just think it would really help my life situation to not be alone anymore – to share my life with someone [...]. I feel incredibly lonely, and my biggest fear is that I'm going to be alone for the rest of life.” (NM6_NO_Bergen_m)

For those with few contacts in particular, the isolation caused by the protective measures during the Covid-19 pandemic had very negative effects on their social life and for some young people the isolation aggravated or triggered mental health problems.

Leisure activities are in most narrations closely connected to the sociable function of friends and friendship. This can range from *“hang out”* (NM2_LU_Esch-sur-Alzette_m) to the shared engagement in activities (especially sports). Apart from being an important strategy to cope with stress, integration into sports clubs – particularly soccer – plays an important social role for those who participate in these activities. Another very common leisure activity the interviewees mentioned was online gaming. In most cases intensive gaming appeared to be a symptom of vulnerabilities like loneliness, socio phobia or the wish to escape real life problems: *“It allows me to enter this imaginary world that I actually enjoy”* (NM6_NO_Bergen_m).

Not only as a leisure activity social media play an important role in the young people’s lives and can have compensatory effects to a lack of friendships and/or recreational activities. The most important aspect of using social media appears to be the possibility to communicate with friends and find new social contacts, irrespective of their physical location. Most young people interviewed, with exception of few who actively avoid spending time on social media, also use social media for entertainment in their everyday lives, but also to get information about news and politics. Social media use for information and entertainment, while not depending on it for social contacts or relaxation seems to be symptomatic for youth with little vulnerabilities and high resilience. On the other hand, social media and online communities can be an important resilience factor for youth with social vulnerabilities: young people who have experienced bullying or discrimination in their local surroundings can communicate online with people they feel more comfortable with: *“I am a shy person. I prefer making friends through internet. It is easier. Through different LMBTQ platforms I find lot of people.”* (M1_HU_Szeged_m)

In addition, young mothers who lack opportunities and time to meet like-minded people face-to-face use the online space to get into contact. A young person with a physical disability that ties her to her home for most of the time reported that social media was *“the main part”* (NM8_DE_Holzminden_f) of her life as it was her means to communicate with friends. 2nd generation migrants then rely on social media to communicate with the part of their families abroad. The pandemic obviously still increased the significance of online social contacts for all of these groups.

Besides the importance attributed to social media, there is a shared negative notion of excessively using social media across all case studies. The interviewees feel that social media, particularly Instagram, create a *“fake world”* (NM1_IT_Reggio Emilia_f) that exercises pressure on young people to fit these images. They also reported that hate speech against ethnic minorities and the LGBTQIA+ community is stronger on the internet than in real life.

Youth with accumulated vulnerabilities, regarding their family situation, social network and particularly mental health issues, reported noticeably less leisure activities. This is especially true for young single or separated mothers. Their life is shaped mainly by the daily routine of the children, so that sometimes no meaningful distinction is made between work and leisure. The pandemic drastically decreased leisure activities: *“In lockdown years, real free time, I can’t really remember it.”* (NM5_DE_Dortmund_f)

Friends and friendships, whether digital or analogue, have a high compensatory and socialising function for those we interviewed. They are resources for support, compensation and further development. This becomes particularly clear in the narrations in which rejection or the lack of friendships (permanent or pandemic-related) is described. Likewise, negative effects were discussed less than positive ones. Here, too, we find an idealistic picture that is equally shared by those who have reported the absence of friendships. What is also striking is the especially vulnerable situation of young mothers, in whose stories leisure time has no place.

4.3 Transition into Adulthood

The importance of transition into adulthood is highlighted throughout all case studies and is also reflected in youth studies mostly as the passages “from education to work, from dependence to independence and from co-residence with parents or carers to co-residence with partners or friends or to solo living” (Furlong, 2017, p. 3). Especially the age group studied here is considered by some youth researchers to be particularly vulnerable because “their transition to adulthood is increasingly complex in contemporary society” (Moro et al., 2021, p. 16). This makes them “one of the new social risk groups” (ibid). Vulnerable youth are considered to have greater burden and more insecure outcomes in going through those challenges (Xie, Sen, & Foster, 2014).

The concept of “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000) attempts to capture the understanding of a phase of life that is increasingly characterised by fragmentation and reversibility. This concerns the typical developmental tasks of adulthood: running the own household, entering into (lasting) partnerships, orienting oneself professionally and being financially independent. “Youth in industrialised societies has become increasingly marked by change and exploration of possible life directions, rather than a clear shift into settled, long-term adult roles and relationships” (Belmonte, Conte, Ghio, Kalantaryan, & McMahan, 2020, p. 6). In general, a delay in the economic independence of young people in favour of further vocational qualification is observed in the EU – although there are also considerable differences within the member states (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011).

Even though the interviewed youth are at very different stages within the transition process, they reported finding “a place in society”, starting a career and in general building an independent life on their own as main challenges in their present lives across the case studies. The specific point of legally coming of age is decisive for this experience. *“To become an adult: moving out, to finance yourself. I think this is still the biggest challenge”* (NM5_DE_Dortmund_f). Becoming financially independent is a major task and hurdle the youth described. Taking on the economic responsibility for themselves is an important marker for having entered into adulthood in their eyes: *“I would like to be able to have my own apartment and really have the full responsibility to take care of all the bills and stuff.”* (NM5_SE_Malmö_m)

Two central diverging tendencies regarding young non-migrants’ vulnerabilities and resources for resilience in their present and future career emerge: on the one hand, there are young people with relatively high educational levels, particularly university students, who aim for or have found job positions matching their education. A rather optimistic outlook on their future life and specific career plans marks this group, aiming for jobs that do not only provide financially but are also fulfilling on a personal level. On the other hand, there is young people with relatively low levels of education, particularly early school leavers, whose main aim is to find a job at all: *“And the challenge that I see in the future is very clear: to find work, work, actually just work.”* (NM5_DE_Holzminden_m)

This group is marked by a rather pessimist outlook on the future up to fears of not making it and becoming homeless, lacking plans and perspectives of development opportunities: *“I struggle to imagine a future for myself. I just generally don't have a good outlook on the future, it's very hard for me to picture.”* (NM6_NO_Bergen_m)

A stable economic perspective as main motivating factor for the (future) choice of profession was mostly expressed by youth from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds with experiences of having little money. However, achieving higher education appears as an important means of social mobility that partially transcends these opposing tendencies. Young people with adverse socio economic backgrounds, particularly 2nd generation migrants, show a high consciousness of this function of educational efforts.

The need to provide and care for themselves at an early age can mark a quicker entrance into adulthood. This is increased if the young people are (feeling) responsible for others, like younger siblings, parents or their own children. A gender divide emerges here: for young men, the expectation of being able to provide financially as a marker for adulthood is an important source of pressure and potential frustration. Several young women’s accounts on the other hand rather show that the

transition into adulthood is accelerated by practically taking on a “caring” responsibility for others that includes economic responsibility.

The strains for young people without a supportive family network are well known from careleaver research. The demands of transitioning to an independent life at a comparatively early age (e.g. 18 or 19) can easily become overwhelming without family support (Mann-Feder & Goyette, 2019). Other vulnerable groups of young adults also often move out of the parental household prematurely, which can be associated with specific risks: *“When I moved out at the age of sixteen, however, my working part-time was necessary for me to be able to provide for myself. It’s not easy living alone.”* (NM5_NO_Bergen_f)

On the other hand, for youth with an adverse family background being able to get away from parents or other guardians as a legally adult young person can be an important liberating step. Here, the ambivalent role of independence during transition into adulthood becomes apparent: (the feeling of) being on their own can be a challenge or a vulnerability, if responsibilities are too much to cope with or expectations not met. On the other hand, the gained independence as a young adult can be an important resource. Positive aspects of this independence are the ability to take decisions by themselves and not being decided upon anymore by parents or other legal guardians: *“Now I am entitled to decide myself where I want to stay, and with whom I want to spend time. Now that I have more independence, I have become more confident towards dad!”* (NM6_NO_Sogndal_f)

The most important challenge connected to their life stage reported, however, is *“getting things together on your own”* (NM11_DE_Holzminden_f), moving out of the space of parental support and protection, to be recognised as independent and to be taken seriously. Several interviewees share the feeling that their views and opinions as youth are not being heard and taken seriously: *“Being able to have a say in the decisions that affect your life, being listened to and having a voice. You know we are told so often that young people don’t understand because they don’t have the life experiences yet that adults have. But I have life experience, I’ve had serious mental health issues and I’ve come out to my parents and those are massive things to have lived through and important life experience but this is not valued or seen as important.”* (NM7_UK_Barnsley_f)

Important for this aspiration of being heard and taken seriously is the desire to be seen and valued as an individual, with personal problems and capacities. In the Norwegian interviews, for example, this was mostly stressed regarding social services and their ability to address the young people as individuals with individual problems. For several young people this lack of understanding mainly by professionals and teachers leads to a clear plan for their own future professional career – even referred to as a *“mission”* (NM9_DE_Holzminden_m) – particularly to become teachers themselves. However, also other experiences of vulnerability and exclusion can inform choices of future professions. This was especially pronounced from interviewees in several case studies with experiences of mental health issues.

A derived objective can be a professional career that enables them to help others facing similar problems, e.g. studying psychology or becoming a teacher, motivated by their own adverse educational or even experiences with racism or disadvantages attributed to a migrant background. The general idea is to support future generations of children by understanding and accepting their needs: *“I know how easy it is to end up in the wrong place. It’s a bit easier to know how to meet the young people, to make them listen, if you have been there yourself, if you have been a difficult kid [laughter].”* (NM6_SE_Österlen_f)

While the interviewees in our sample show different attitudes on their pathways into adulthood, depending on socio-economic backgrounds, but also differing resources for support in other areas, it becomes clear through all case studies that they strive for recognition and the possibility to participate in their respective societies. Even though they have a strong impulse to be accepted as they are, their efforts also reflect certain ideas of threading into predetermined social systems and norms. These “hegemonic normalities” might themselves be a source for vulnerability as they require adaptation to perhaps hard-to-reach ideals. In these ideas, conceptions about the prerequisites of belonging and

integration are already shimmering through, which can be assumed to contain decisive parameters for an understanding of integration.

4.4 Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion

As we have mentioned above, being accepted and recognized in society with own personal situation and opinions plays an important role in the process of transition into adulthood. Thus, experiences and perceptions of in- and exclusion have high relevance for the self-perception and as resources for resilience. Exclusion as well as vulnerability can occur in different fields. In this section, we do not aim to provide a comprehensive description of all factors that can contribute to discrimination and exclusion of young people. Rather, we present the main categories and memberships in social groups that emerged as relevant for the youth's experiences of inclusion and exclusion. The perspective of social exclusion was chosen to analyse in how far the belonging to certain social groups is connected to experiences of discrimination, disadvantage and deprivation for non-migrant youth (Krishnan, 2015). Furthermore, this perspective enables a relational analysis that does not conceptualize in- and exclusion as two disjunctive concepts, but rather as intertwined processes (Omtzigt).

Central to experiences of social exclusion are the youth's feelings of (in their own words) being "different" and deviating from the social norm. Processes of being excluded from a constructed hegemonic social norm are merged with the term 'Othering'. As Jean-François Staszak has pointed out, 'Otherness' differs from difference in that the former is "the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ('Us', the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ('Them', Other) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination" (Staszak, 2009, p. 2).

The concepts of Otherness and Othering are based in the work of postcolonial theorists Edward Said (1978) and Gayatri Spivak (Spivak, 1985). Following their theoretical framework, processes of Othering have mostly been analysed in the context of the dominance of the Western or European 'Self' over the colonized or demonized Other in the Global South or "the Orient" (Said 1978, p. 9). Importantly, a growing body of research in this tradition has highlighted the discrimination and exclusion experienced by People of Colour and migrants who are constructed as the Other by the dominant national in-group (see e.g. Meijer, 1994; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). More recently, the concept of Otherness has also been applied to grasp the experiences of LGBTQIA+ and other as minorities marked groups (e.g. Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015). In the following, we will highlight how Otherness plays out in the experiences and perceptions of the interviewed youth.

4.4.1 Health issues

Across all case studies, mental health issues, including reported neurological disorders, are a major vulnerability factor for the interviewed youth. Mental health emerged as a decisive node for their experiences of vulnerability: it is at the same time a source for vulnerabilities in other areas like education and work or accumulate with problems in the educational process as well as it can be a symptom of other vulnerabilities like adverse family situations and experiences of violence and discrimination: *"I had such periods that I actually lay in bed all day, because I was not able to get up, so for me, finding a job... [was very demanding]. [...] I sent my CV, but there was no answer, so then I was frustrated that I was unsuccessful, that I was useless."* (NM1_PL_Pruszcz_f)

For some interviewees the interaction of mental illness with other vulnerabilities lead to the impression of being in a downward spiral, resulting in a dark outlook on the future: *"that my ADHD will get worse, that I can't concentrate, that I can't find a job because of this, that's what I'm most afraid of."* (NM10_DE_Holzminden_m)

This downward spiral can be increased by drug or alcohol addictions, particularly regarding the feeling of incapacity to end the addiction and the constant fear of a relapse even after having become clean: *„And yet the best thing was, you were clean for half a year, and then you can let a health officer tell you that you are a junkie."* (NM3_DE_Holzminden_m) Regarding problems like depression, dysphoria

and social anxiety the Covid-19 pandemic had a further deteriorating effect for several of the young people.

Mental health problems were also an important factor to feel excluded from society. The most salient perception shared is a lack of understanding from society: *“the inability to understand that I function differently.”* (NM7_SE_Malmö_f) This lack of understanding was particularly mentioned regarding schools and teachers who do not understand their situation, are not able to be supportive and require more from them than they can cope with. Some young non-migrants reported experiences of discrimination due to mental health disorders. As this young woman, who missed a job opportunity that she had already been promised: *“Back than it hit me hard. [...] It is actually very sad. It was unfair.”* (NM6_DE_Dortmund_f)

Physical health issues were mostly mentioned from the interviewees as hindrances regarding education and work, not as basis of discrimination. Exceptions are higher weight, which the interviewees mostly talked about as a reason for experiencing bullying, and physical disability. One young person with physical disability in particular stressed her situation of exclusion from society. On the one hand, this included structural exclusion like the lack of accessibility of local services for people with disabilities as well as having worse access to health services due to living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. On the other hand, she described her experience of not being accepted as a person: *„So my biggest challenge was to be accepted for the way I am.“* (NM8_DE_Holzminden_f)

The feeling of being or not being understood is also the main factor shaping the young non-migrants' experiences with mental health services: the feeling of being accepted and understood when accessing services – by the specialists there, but also other young people with similar problems met at these services – can have a very positive effect, particularly as opposed to the lack of acceptance in the 'outside world'. Negative experiences with services include receiving treatment and medication against one's will and not receiving helpful support or no support at all from institutions. Another very important factor shaping the experiences with mental health services – and social services in general for that matter – is the experience of not being taken seriously and being decided upon by others throughout childhood and youth: *“It was really interesting moving into adult mental health services. I was with children's mental health services for 7 years, and through that whole time they made decisions for me, and they medicated me and that was what my life was like. Then when I started in adult services they asked me what I wanted and I didn't know how to react to this. It was like for the first time someone had seen me as having a role in my own mental health care and I couldn't believe it. I cried happy tears because of this. It was like being seen properly and heard.”* (NM5_UK_Barnsley_f)

4.4.2 LGBTQIA+

Youth identifying as LGBTQIA+ have been described as a vulnerable group in social science research for quite a long time (Russell & Fish, 2016). Transgender young people in particular experience discrimination and are exposed to significant unequal treatment due to different national legislations. Their risk of mental illness is therefore clearly increased (Reisner et al., 2015). This is particularly precarious when young people do not receive sufficient support on a social and/or structural level, as a study reveals for transgender youth: vulnerability arises from “lack of safe environments, poor access to physical health services, inadequate resources to address their mental health concerns, and a lack of continuity of caregiving by their families and communities” (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006, p. 111).

The interviewed youth identifying as Queer described coming to terms with their own sexual identity and/or orientation and coming out as a troublesome process throughout their transition to adulthood particularly regarding families and the social surroundings: *“I had quite a lot of friends, but it broke up as soon as they found out that I had started a transition, and it fell apart a lot in the meantime, a lot of people just broke up. As if they were at the beginning, oh, great, and hands up, whatever you want to call it. But over time you can just see that people have moved away because maybe... you can clearly see it.”* (NM6_PL_Warsaw_f)

The particular challenges and potential vulnerabilities LGBTQIA+ youth face in the process of finding their own identity during adolescence have been pointed to elsewhere (e.g. Fineman, 2014). The interviewed LGBTQIA+ youth described a wide range of experiences with discrimination. Most prominently, however, they described the feeling of having to hide in order to avoid discrimination and violence as a constantly accompanying pressure. This is very pronounced in the case of Szeged in Hungary, where national homophobic politics create a hostile ambience for LGBTQIA+. However, the local level can mediate such national tendencies: *„I participated in the Szeged Pride, and my boyfriend was a member of the organizing team. The atmosphere was nice, good, and friendly. I was afraid because if something is going to happen because of general public opinion. But then nothing happened, it was amazing.”* (NM2_HU_Szeged_m)

The queer youth who were interviewed recurrently reported a feeling of loneliness and feeling isolated in their local surroundings due to a lack of social contacts (or the loss of these) they feel comfortable with. This points to the importance of safe spaces where to interact with other LGBTQIA+ youth with similar experiences. The example of Szeged, where the interviewed young people reported a complete lack of such spaces, highlights this point. Most interviewed LGBTQIA+ youth referred to online spaces to find these social contacts they lack in their local surroundings.

LGBTQIA+ youth reported “pretending and hiding” as an integral part of their life experience. This is particularly the case for transsexual youth. Visible signs of homosexuality, non-normative gender identities and transsexuality have been described as a constant source of social control, discrimination and potential experiences of violence: *“Because I was really fed up with pretending, hiding, living in hiding, but I just wanted to come out, and that, unfortunately, half of Pruszcz knows me, because Pruszcz is not a big city, is a little town and I was already on this HRT [hormone replacement therapy] then, but these changes are visible after some time and people would be wondering, so for me, this is the life in hiding”* (NM1_PL_Pruszcz_f). This narration points to the relational experience of place connected to the social control of Otherness pointed to above. Still more importantly, it indicates the crucial role of visible difference for the young people’s experiences and the meaning of ‘passing’ unperceived under the heterosexual norm: *“Visible difference of gayness is not taken well, for instance feminine features are not taken well.”* (NM6_HU_Szeged_m)

‘Passing’ as a concept has been described as “seeking or allowing oneself to be identified with a race, class, or other social group to which one does not genuinely belong” (Gianoulis, 2010, p. 1).¹¹ As the youth’s experiences show, ‘passing’ can be an active strategy and potential source of resilience as well as a vulnerability factor: on the one hand, the youth describe how they actively perform normative gender identities and sexualities in public and thereby avoid discrimination or violent offences. On the other hand, being perceived as heterosexual or cis-gender can create the feeling of “living in hiding” and increase the pressure to disguise.

4.4.3 2nd Generation Migrants and Youth of Colour

Youth of Colour¹² have by far reported most experiences with discrimination. In all case studies except Romania, 2nd generation descendants of migrants participated. In the two Italian localities Milan and Reggio Emilia all interviewees were 2nd generation migrants.

Experiences of racism include being accused of shop-lifting, racist comments at soccer games, being told *“go back to your country”* (NM4_SE_Malmö_m) or facing stereotypes due to family origins: *“If you are Albanian you are a thief, if you are Croatian you are a gipsy, if you are Moroccan you are a pusher.”* (NM1_IT_Reggio Emilia_f) *„We are somehow representative, meaning, for the people who*

¹¹ In the context of transgender and transsexuality, ‘passing’ can be used in a differing sense, describing the person’s “ability to be perceived in accordance with their gender identity” (Gianoulis, 2010, p. 2).

¹² People of Colour is a term originally introduced in the US as a self-identification of people identifying as “non-white”, who share experiences of racial discrimination (The Anti-racist Educator (2019). In this paper we use ‘Youth of Colour’ to refer to youth with experiences of discrimination, that can but not necessarily have to be connected to a migrant background in the family.

have a migration background, [to show] that our kind also exists, that we are not only the stupid ones but [...] that we can speak German just as well.” (NM9_DE_Holzminden_m)

School and education are the areas where experiences with racism occurred most. Importantly, several interviewees shared the experience of their capacities being questioned by teachers in school, with consequences for further educational trajectories. Particularly in the Luxembourg case study, where several 2nd generation migrants reported not having received necessary recommendations for a certain type of advanced secondary school due to the supposed lack in German and Luxemburgish language skills.

Apart from the education system, institutional racism was recurrently reported in the health care system and at foreigners’ offices. The experiences at foreigners’ offices highly interlace with structural discrimination due to the residence status, as some 2nd generation migrants – even though born on national soil – do not have the right to citizenship or face major hurdles in obtaining it. For instance, they are excluded from educational opportunities like international school exchanges or work opportunities abroad. In our sample this has been particularly the case in Italy, but also in Germany.

Across case studies, Youth of Colour reported feeling “judged” by society. Even in cases where young people do not actively experience racial discrimination, the fear of being discriminated against is an important factor. 2nd generation descendants of migrants considered they had to work a lot harder than other youth to be accepted as equal in the eyes of society: *“So that’s another thing is like obviously people of colour they have to work a lot harder, to be honest, especially when you’re in an environment like that, you have a poor background and you’re from a hardcore school. When I apply for six forms, as soon as you put your school, oh, they definitely look at that. She’s from that school. She might need to check her personal statement, a bit more and make sure she hasn’t got into fights and things like that.” (NM6_UK_Sheffield_f)*

Black youth reported the highest level of racial discrimination. They directly attributed these experiences to being Black: *“And there was this guy who tried spitting on me for no reason. There was a few times people screaming racist things, a few times chucking things, if you know what I mean, which is not good, you know? I’m kind of used to it.” (NM1_UK_Sheffield_f)* *“[In some areas] you’re always on edge, you know, driving round or walking round, you know, just try to think, Oh gosh, am I going to get attacked? Is this going to happen to me? And it’s just simply because they have a dislike towards your skin tone.” (NM1_UK_Barnsley_f)*

Importantly, a higher share of People of Colour can create a more comfortable environment for 2nd generation migrants and Black people as it gives the possibility to blend in: *“I don’t have any migration issues because I was born in a town in the South of England [...] the move from there to Barnsley was very different in terms of like how we were treated and, like, skin colour actually became more of an issue and things when I moved. Whereas in the other town, I just kind of looked at myself and was like, Yeah, we’re all the same kind of things.” (NM1_UK_Barnsley_f)* Living in diverse communities offers possibilities “to hide in the crowd” which can be perceived as protection strategy against being objected to othering dynamics. Furthermore, as Bolt et al. (1998) have also proven for urban contexts, living in heterogeneous communities can also be connected with a higher sense of local identity and fewer experienced racism.

An experience shared by Youth of Colour was their local belonging being questioned or neglected by society: *“I was born here, I grew up but there was always someone to remind me that ‘you don’t belong here’.” (NM6_LU_Esch-surAlzette_f)* *“At the beginning we were all the same, but later I started to notice differences [...]. When you are a child and people ask you where you are from is funny, but then I started to see less inclusivity: you are a foreigner, you are a foreigner.” (NM4_IT_Milan_f)*

Most 2nd generation migrant youth explicitly position themselves with regard to their migrant descent during the interviews. For some, having two or several backgrounds causes something one interviewee herself called “identity crisis” and the feeling of being in-between, particularly in adolescence: *“I had an identity crisis. I was the only foreigner in my class... I didn’t know who I was. I never felt connected to Italy, but I didn’t feel Filipina enough either.” (NM3_IT_Milan_f)* Black youth share similar identity

conflicts regarding skin colour: *"I am too much Black for white people and too much white for Black people."* (NM8_IT_Reggio Emilia_f)

However, having several backgrounds can be an important resource when the young people relate positively to both parts. Particularly, the ability to move smoothly in different contexts was appreciated, being able to understand the situation of nationals as well as migrants and knowing several languages. Being of migrant descent can also create a feeling of community and understanding. Several youth mentioned a shared sense of humour, which nationals without a migrant background cannot understand, in this context: *"I think it's a lot of fun. I am also a member in Swedish groups, but in Arab groups they make funny jokes that no Swede can laugh at."* (NM3_SE_Malmö_f)

The processes of identity construction among 2nd generation migrants have been subject of migration studies for quite some time (see e.g. Levitt & Waters, 2002). The feeling of "in-betweenness" (Brockert, 2020) has been studied as well as the inclusion into transnational and diaspora communities (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 2002). However, an interesting aspect regarding the self-positioning of 2nd generation migrant youth emerges from the interviews. While some young people fully identify as part of their country of residence, others identify as "foreigners" or as nationals of their parents' country of origin even though born in their country of residence and only having travelled to their parents' country rarely: *"my country [horn of Africa] first and British second"* (NM1_UK_Sheffield_f). The narration suggests that the latter is mostly the case of youth with strong ties to diaspora, as well as youth with pronounced experiences of racial discrimination (for a further elaboration on this topic see 5.3.4).

4.4.4 Religion

With few exceptions, e.g. youth attending a Christian school in Norway, it is 2nd generation migrant youth who talk about religion referring to Islam. On the one hand, they describe religion as a source of orientation and feeling of belonging transferred by family and faith as a source of support when facing difficulties. Mostly, however, if religion was referred to at all it is in terms of discrimination.

Young Muslim 2nd generation migrants in Malmö reported how their religion was being associated with terrorism. Seeing how the narrative of *"Muslims are terrorists"* (NM3_SE_Malmö_f) is interwoven with the discrimination of (2nd generation) migrants from certain origins or perceived as 'Arab' the term "antimuslim racism" (Lewicki & Shooman, 2020) appears most appropriate to describe this phenomenon.

4.5 Local Spaces and Spatiality in the lives of non-migrant youth

Following action-oriented approaches in social geography (e.g. Pain, 2003) local contexts are perceived as social spaces offering spatial conditions for action on the one hand and reflecting spatial consequences of actions on the other (Werlen, 2017; Werlen & Reutlinger, 2019). In this sense local contexts as arenas of individual lifeworlds can booster, produce or reproduce vulnerabilities and resiliences, independently if they are located in urban or rural areas. Following Werlen (Werlen, 2017, p. 38), "the spatial dimension [has to be perceived as] an element of social realities but not as its determinant".

Our findings confirm that it is not per se the urban-rural divide that determines chances for social participation, but rather the sense of place which can also vary even in the same localities. In this context the sense of place concept may be very fruitful to examine the relevance of spatiality for youth in different spatial contexts "as people value certain aspects or characteristics of places differently, they may in turn perceive different risks and experience unequal vulnerability to place change." (Rajala, Sorice, & Thomas, 2020, p. 719)

4.5.1 Urban vs. rural? Barriers and resources for youth in different local settings

One positive aspect commonly named by interviewees residing in rural areas was being close to nature and the calm, rather peaceful surrounding. This positive assessment of tranquillity is mostly related to

the perception that rural areas are a safer environment regarding drugs and criminality than cities. The most important resource young people find in rural areas however is the social proximity and sense of community, particularly in small villages. The close-knit social network is considered very helpful e.g. when searching for a job and the feeling of being “one of us” (NM1_NO_Sogndal_f) can be a very important resource against social alienation. However, that ‘everyone knows everyone’ in villages and small towns is at the same time seen as one of the biggest problems. Several interviewees from rural areas have expressed the desire to live in surroundings with less social control. This is especially the case with minorities such as LGBTQIA+ or 2nd or 3rd generation migrant youth who feel that in the more homogenous rural surroundings they stand out more and therefore experience more discrimination: *„It is a question of ‘village mentality’ [...] otherness is a little bit marginalised here, people are afraid of it.”* (NM1_PL_Pruszcz_f)

Also, nature and the calm environment were mostly considered positive in the retrospective, recalling their own childhood as well as regarding future children. At their present life stage as youth, the rural environment and its lack in social and cultural offers, health and social service infrastructure and particularly educational and work opportunities were considered a big barrier of their living space. Insufficient public transport aggravates the lack of opportunities and several interviewed young people reported that they moved from rural areas to cities, or are planning to do so, in search of these opportunities. Young people living in urban metropolises accordingly named the variety of cultural offers, educational opportunities and work perspectives as most important resources. Some interviewees, however, experienced the crowdedness of the city as bothering while feeling lonely due to the social anonymity.

Even though particularly those interviewees living in rural areas ascribed the shortcomings of their living environment often to the rural-urban divide, this cross-country analysis suggests that the rural-urban dichotomy is not the most significant one for the young people’s living conditions. Rather, it is the experiences, social interactions and identities which configure youth’s attachments to space. This is quite well reflected by the situation of LGBTQIA+ youth in Hungary: while the city of Szeged was perceived by the majority as affluent university city, LGBTQIA+ youth criticized a lack of facilities for personal development: *“There are no in-person opportunities for gay people in Szeged. No bars, no clubs. This is a problem.”* (NM4_HU_Szeged_m)

Most experiences are connected to young people’s own neighbourhoods which can be perceived as mirrors of social inequality: *“There are many homeless in the neighbourhood. And we live next to the homeless shelter. There are many alcohol addicts, too, who, unfortunately use the street as a toilet. And there are many drug addicts, too. We can’t evade them. I do quarrel with them because of my children.”* (NM3_HU_Budapest_f)

It is also worth mentioning that youth’s perceptions of their local surrounding are shaped by the comparison to significant other places of reference. This was particularly reported in the Swedish case study: while interviewees in Malmö considered their city as rather quiet, small and “comfortable” comparing it to the capital Stockholm, interviewees in Österlen compared their situation to the large, noisy and dangerous city life in Malmö: *“If someone says ‘hello’ to me here I say ‘hello’ back, but if someone says ‘hello’ to me in Malmö, I run.”* (NM2_SWE_Österlen_m)

4.5.2 (Im)Mobilities within social spaces and beyond

Mobility and immobility are important factors for non-migrant youth’s vulnerability and resilience, as well as for their assessment of local spaces. Interestingly, the interviewees have reported more negative than positive biographical experiences with mobility. Particularly recurrent changes of place throughout childhood and early adolescence can cause vulnerability: loss of friends and instable social networks as well as problems in school. Contrariwise, immobility can be a source of stability and security, particularly in connection with local communities.

In contrast, of course, a lack of opportunities for mobility can also disadvantage youth in various ways. Mobility can offer a wide range of possibilities: changing localities for a short or long term (vacation,

ERASMUS, work or internships) were described by some of the interviewees as a contribution to their personal development and careers by gathering new experiences and acquaintances: *“It was an incredibly good year, to just really get away, to stay somewhere completely new.”* (NM2_NO_Sogndal_m) As this quote implies, mobility can also be a coping strategy to escape problems, e.g. difficult family relations. Throughout the interviews in Poland, Hungary and to a lesser extent Romania, outmigration towards more affluent EU countries was an important theme: *“the divorce of my parents, my mother went abroad to earn money, my brother went also abroad.”* (NM3_RO_lasi_f) *„To leave Romania; maybe in Europe because it is comfortable, you have rights, etc. as a European citizen.”* (NM3_Bucharest_f)

The search for better living conditions in terms of higher wages, safer jobs and sufficient social security were present in accounts of their past experiences, e.g. concerning themselves, parents or friends, as well as in future plans to migrate to another EU country. Plans of outmigration were particularly salient amongst LGBTQIA+ youth – this included youth in Northern European countries and was mostly motivated by the wish to feel more accepted.

4.5.3 Places and Spaces of Belonging

The notion of belonging refers, as Maine et al. (2021) put it, to different spheres like spatiality, social relations and multiplicity as well as materiality, affect and dislocation. The interviewed youth expressed feelings of belonging mostly in terms of social relations. Family again plays an ambiguous role also for belonging. For some, the family, particular family members or the family home are most important for feelings of belonging, 'feeling at home' and feelings of safety. Others explicitly search for feelings of belonging outside the family, mostly when family relations are problematic. An important factor for developing a sense of belonging is the feeling of being understood and accepted: *“to be part of a community, a group of friends, where we accept each other the way we are.”* (NM7_RO_lasi_f)

Several interviewees in different case studies explicitly stated that they rather feel belonging with people than with places. Other statements show that feelings to belong to a place also are mostly shaped by the social contacts at these places: *“[Talking about the city of Bergen] This place is my home. All of my childhood memories and my best memories are from here. [I love it] in general both because I grew up here, and because I have good friends here.”* (NM1_NO_Bergen_m)

One other interviewee showed a very strong sense of belonging to his city: *“I love Sheffield and I'm very proud of it. And I see kind of as its problems like any place does. But it's like whenever I go anywhere else, I never think I'd like to live here...I could never see myself living outside of Sheffield.”* (NM5_UK_Sheffield_m)

Apart from these references to cities, most respondents expressed feelings of belonging and feeling “at home” about smaller spatial units, particularly neighbourhoods: *“When I think about what home is, I think about my neighbourhood.”* (NM2_IT_Milan_f) *“I've lived five minutes away from here for about eight nine years. Next to the mosque, after that we moved out five minutes from there. This is just my home, my area, my community.”* (NM8_UK_Sheffield_m) Localized community structures like work contexts and sports clubs, but also religious communities, national diasporas or LGBTQIA+ communities concentrated in certain areas can also create a sense of belonging. Nation states as spatial frames of reference for belonging are mentioned surprisingly little. An important exception is Luxembourg. One interviewee e.g. said *“I love Luxemburg”* but then added about the Congo, her parents' country of origin: *„I know that I am at home there.”* (NM6_LU_Esch-sur-Alzette_f)

When expressing belonging to places, these feelings were most often related to stability and safety experienced at these places. In this context, experiences of forced mobility from one place to the other – particularly during childhood – reduced the feeling of belonging to places – and the localized social contacts. The lack of these kind of meaningful connections to places or people can be considered a vulnerability factor in itself.

An evolving development is the stronger attachment to virtual spaces (Löw, 2019), which from the perspective of the interviewed youth, have been experienced particularly by online gaming. This

appeared most important for youth with vulnerabilities in the social area, as experiences of discrimination or a lack in social contacts in general. Online gaming can be the most important space to relate to other people and where to create a feeling of community, when youth have problems getting into contact in the outside world: „[Where do you feel you belong?] among gamers? Yes, I don't know, I feel safest there. Simply because I'm, like, at home. And I have people around me I can talk to. Because I trust these people. And then it's just better than when I'm running around outside [...]. That's when phobias and stuff like that tend to pop up. Fear!“ (NM11_DE_HOL_f)

4.6 Intersectionality and Intersecting Vulnerabilities

Throughout the interviewees' narrations it became clear that their experiences are shaped by complex accumulations and intersections of various factors of inclusion and exclusion. Famously, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw has introduced the concept of intersectionality to grasp the specific marginalization of Black Women at the intersection of gender and race (Crenshaw, 1989). Since then intersectionality has been broadened and employed to a wide range of intersecting “structures of power” (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013, p. 305), including class, sexuality, religion, mental health and disability to name just a few of the more salient fields of analysis. In this report, we do not aim to provide a comprehensive intersectional analysis of lived discrimination by the interviewees. Rather, some interesting patterns regarding intersecting systems of exclusion across countries and case studies are worth highlighting:

Across several case studies, young Muslim Women of Colour wearing a headscarf reported experiences of discrimination in education and the labour market as well as being considered “*stupid*” (NM4_DE_Holzminden_f) connected to their gendered religious practice of wearing a headscarf as well as to racialized stereotypes: “*Some of my friends told me: if you had worn the veil, we wouldn't have been friends.*” (NM4_IT_Milan_f)

With regard to the whole sample, socio-economic class in terms of (low) education, (lack of) financial means on individual and family level, (un)employment and housing (place of residence and quality of housing) resulted as the most important “structure of power” in Crenshaw's terms. This is particularly salient in the interviewees' accounts on the areas of education and work (see chapter 4.1). Considering the above mentioned care obligations, social class particularly intersects with gender in the situation of poor (single) mothers who struggle to economically maintain themselves and their children, as cases in Bucharest and Budapest highlight. While a disadvantaged socio-economic background often intersects with other factors of exclusion like mental illnesses or racial discrimination, an economically well-off personal and family situation as well as good education appear to be very important resilience factors to cope with individual vulnerabilities as well as discrimination, e.g. in the case of Youth of Colour in Luxembourg, whose parents sent them to private schools after experiences of discrimination.

As shown in the previous chapters, the young people interviewed mostly perceive a lack of family support, learning difficulties at school or psychological problems as the vulnerabilities of their life stories and current life situations. Bringing together the MIMY research agenda on vulnerability and resilience with intersectional analysis – that focuses mostly on structural discrimination – promises to be very insightful for further research on the complex settings of (dis)advantage, discrimination and privilege, social inclusion or exclusion shaping the lives of young people.

5. Non-Migrant Youth's Perceptions and Attitudes towards Migration and Integration

Within the scope of the MIMY research project on migrant youth in vulnerable conditions, one main research interest of this paper is to investigate young non-migrants perceptions of migration and integration against the backdrop of their own experiences of vulnerability and resilience. In addition, non-migrant youth – as part of the wider local society as well as age group counterparts for migrant youth – and their perceptions give important indications for a critical revision of the concept of integration. While youth's attitudes towards migrants in terms of positive or negative sentiments have

been analysed in some quantitative studies (Bentsen, 2017; Somerkoski, 2021), youth's perception of migration and integration from a qualitative perspective remains widely understudied.

5.1 Conceptualization of integration by non-migrant youth

Migrants' 'adaptation' as the main pathway for integration is a recurrent theme in the non-migrant youth's conceptualization of integration. This includes first and foremost to learn the language, know and follow "the rules", actively get into contact with the local society and adapt to values and "culture". While most young people located the "culture" to adapt to on the level of an underlying idea of a national identity, some also pointed to "Western Culture" as the relevant frame of reference: *"Well, actually that [migrants cultures] are other cultures than the, the Western, what Germans carry with them."* (NM2_DE_Holzminden_m)

After adapting in terms of language and "culture", another important area of integration the non-migrant youth pointed to is economic integration. While some stressed that migrants should work to contribute instead of receiving money, others pointed out the individual relevance of work for young migrants: *"[Someone is integrated when] when someone is independent [...] when s/he can provide for him/herself."* (NM4_DE_Dortmund_f)

This rather one-way image of migrants' integration as an achievement of migrants themselves in terms of cultural adaptation and economic integration into the labour market shows high similarity with assimilation theories as presented in the work of Milton Gordon (1964) or Hartmut Esser (2001), whose basic assumptions were dominant in integration theory for a long time (Spencer & Charsley, 2021). However, in one way or another the interviewees in all case studies also pointed to the local society as a player for integration, implying a concept of integration as a two-way-process. Most often, the young people stressed the need of society to give migrants the opportunity to integrate: *"that society also allows the individual to do so. It is a street in two directions."* (NM1_SE_Malmö_f)

Other roles ascribed to society within the integration process are welcoming migrants, actively including them and offering them possibilities to make integration easier for them. A very important aspect of the two-way nature of integration the interviewees have stressed is the mutual respect and acceptance, including the acceptance of migrants "as they are" and making it possible for them to feel "at home". Few people also defined integration also entirely as a responsibility of the state and local society: *"Integration represents all the actions an institution or country can take for migrants."* (NM3_RO_Iasi_f) Regarding the role of the state and institutions, granting migrants equal rights and access to services without discrimination was considered most important. It is noticeable that it is mostly 2nd generation migrants who think of integration in terms of rights and discrimination.

Even though most young people stressed that society also plays a part in integration, with little exception society's role stays limited to giving the opportunity to integrate and help migrants in this process. Only two interviewees mentioned that integration also implies change for the local society, indicating that integration means to *"have a little bit of everything, it makes us more unique"* (NM6_NO_Sogndal_f) or to be *"able to change oneself"* (NM11_DE_Holzminden_f). Apart from that, a rather static picture of society emerges: *"Maybe these people need some kind of clash [with reality], that things will not look like the way you want it, but the way they are and you need to adjust. Because it is not the world that changes for you, but you change for the world."* (NM5_PL_Pruszcz_m)

Regarding the concept of liquid integration as a process of societal change, this is surprising and interesting in two regards: on the one hand, several young people talk about the "multicultural" or "open" society that exists or should exist in a positive way, implying a change of the local society in terms of cultural values and heterogeneity of national culture. Even though the interviewees did not actively conceptualize integration as societal change, among some young people there seems to be the implicit observation of an ongoing process of structural change towards a more diverse society (induced amongst others by migration) that will transform integration and integration debates in the future. On the other hand, in line with liquid integration's conceptualization of integration as "a never-ending open process of change" without "an explicit starting and endpoint" (Skrobaneck & Jobst, 2019,

p. 313), several young people criticised the concept of integration itself. On the basis of their own experience of not being fully accepted they stated that it is not possible to define a certain point in time, when a person is “well integrated”: *“Integration doesn’t exist. Even if you are an Italian citizen with Italian documents, you can’t consider yourself Italian because people judge you.”* (NM4_IT_Milan_f)

When talking about integration, at some points the interviewees also referred to their own integration or disintegration into society. Most importantly, they related the concept of integration to being excluded on the basis of social class: *“I began to get really into that and began to research it and try to understand a lot more because of the background that I have like other people shouldn’t have to feel things like isolated, all like be discriminated against for who they are and things they can’t change...like my like social class. I like the place that I grew up.”* (NM3_UK_Barnsley_f)

A young person in Holzminden, Germany, considered the “three-class-society” (NM3_DE_Holzminden_m) as exclusive, where he himself as a “German born” is disadvantaged as part of the lower class as well.

These observations point towards an understanding of integration as social cohesion of society as a whole, rather than as a topic particular to migrants.

5.2 Perceived challenges and opportunities of migrants

The two main challenges perceived for young migrants are learning the language and experiences of racism. Even though Youth of Colour showed particular sensitivity for racism and discrimination of migrants, youth without the experience of racial discrimination themselves also pointed to it as a main challenge for migrants across case studies. The latter mostly reported racist experiences by friends as eye opening on the matter. Racism is considered a problem regarding racist aggressions, but also migrants being judged based on prejudices rather than as an individual: *“It must be hard being judged for someone you might not be.”* (NM3_SWE_Österlen_f)

Several young people observed the development of a negative attitude towards migrants in society, triggered mostly by national politics, as challenging; this was pointed to in Norway, Sweden, Italy, Germany and Hungary, with Hungarian political discourse against migrants experienced as the most violent: *“The problem is that politics made migrants a scapegoat. It is difficult like that [to integrate].”* (NM2_HU_Budapest_m)

The non-migrant youth also perceived institutional and structural racism as a problem, mostly discrimination of migrants in school, at social services offices and considering legal constraints that inhibit young migrants to settle and build a life. In this context, complicated bureaucracy and non-recognition of migrants’ documents were considered important factors of exclusion.

Other areas where the young people expected migrants to face challenges are the labour market, concerning difficulties to find a job (also due to discrimination) as well as dire working conditions and low pay, plus the necessity to learn the new “rules” that apply in the country of arrival.

Regarding the specific situation of young migrants, the non-migrant youth perceived the lack of social contacts as a problem. In terms of lacking support from family as well as the difficulty to make friends: *“As a migrant, you feel rather, how shall I put it? Alone.”* (NM12_UL_Diekirch and Wiltz_m) The feeling of loneliness and having to struggle with one’s problem one-self, without the support of parents, related to the young non-migrants own struggles, particularly regarding the difficulties of starting a life on one’s own.

When thinking about migrants’ challenges some interviewees directly addressed the situation of refugees, talking about war, having *“fled their homeland [and left] their families behind”* (NM5_NO_Bergen_f) and following trauma as main problems. Similarly, integration itself was sometimes thought of as an issue concerning refugees: *“The first thing I thought of [when hearing “integration”] is when families flee war.”* (NM4_SE_Malmö_m)

As for opportunities, the youth mainly considered that the receiving countries offered migrants more opportunities in terms of education, social welfare, health care and economic perspectives than their home countries. This is particularly the case for Norway, Sweden, Germany, Luxembourg and to a lesser extent Italy. The young people in these countries also showed a mostly positive picture of their countries' political system as a whole, considering migrants have more freedom and safety than in their countries of origin and that opportunities are open for everyone. This has also been mentioned in Romania: *"I do not think there are more opportunities for one of them [migrants or locals]. I think all have the same chances in Iasi."* (NM3_RO_lasi_f)

Some youth in Romania, Italy, Luxembourg and Hungary also perceived a societal change to a more open society as an opportunity, both for migrants and themselves, as they considered negative opinions on migrants mainly present in the older population and thought that societies in general are growing more diverse.

A particular case is Budapest: as the local Roma youth live in very disadvantaged conditions, they actually perceived migrants better off than themselves, regarding the economic situation and educational background.

5.3 We and the other

5.3.1 Perception and attitudes towards migrants

The young non-migrants interviewed across case studies showed an open and empathetic attitude towards migrants, with few exceptions of youth who show indifference. Negative opinions on migrants were expressed rarely, and then related to Islam as a religion rather than to migrants themselves: *"I am not saying that every Muslim is bad, because this religion... there are several types of Islam [...] but some of them are very radical, and they follow sharia law [...] these are people that cannot be changed, they are 'ideologists'."* [NM9_PL_Warsaw_m]

Very dominant is the notion of shared humanity as unifying factor, considering that there is no essential difference between people with different origins, appearing in most of the local case studies: *"You can't judge people by the way they look. [...] The same blood flows through our veins. It's about mentality, not skin colour. We are all humans."* (NM10_LU_Diekirch_m)

This idea of general equality, however, is partly contradicted by differentiations some youth made in constructing different groups of migrants: *"With the current refugee policy of the EU I must honestly say I don't really agree, because I think economic refugees should not necessarily be there [...]. But otherwise I'm actually quite okay with people of other origins, people of other skin colors."* (NM5_DE_Holzminden_m)

This differentiation between „real“ refugees fleeing from war, who deserve help and “economic migrants”, who are not perceived as deserving, is also present in other case studies. The most salient differentiation, however, is the one between those who learn the language quickly and “work hard” as opposed to migrants who, in the eyes of the some interviewees, do not want to integrate and do not contribute to society: *"There are people who are really negative and do nothing, they get help from the state and yet they sit lazily at home. To them I say: Go back and leave me alone! On the other hand, I see those who go to work, who do everything they can to get ahead. Why should they be looked at negatively?"* (NM14_LU_Diekirch and Wiltz_f) This idea of conditional deservingness depending on migrants' performance and usefulness, which emerged in several case studies, has been analysed in a growing body of literature (see e.g. Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015; Ratzmann & Sahraoui, 2021).

Some non-migrant youth also differentiated between groups of migrants in terms of their origins. While this is mostly shared as a critical observation, how society treats people of different origins, the youth in Budapest stated observed differences between “Arab”, “Chinese” and “African” migrants. They reported different levels of interaction with these groups, while not expressing hostility towards any of them.

5.3.2 Perception of the local society

When talking about migrants and integration, the non-migrant youth also expressed their perceptions about the national society: *“Norwegians are more closed.”* (NM3_NO_Sogndal_f) Similarly, in Österlen and Malmö youth considered that Swedes are *“calm and quiet”* (NM4_SE_Malmö_m), *“introvert”* (NM1_SE_Österlen_f) and *“reserved towards strangers”* (NM1_SE_Malmö_f). LGBTQIA+ youth in several countries, including Hungary, Poland and Sweden, thought that their surroundings are less accepting and open than other countries, mostly pointing to the US or Canada. It is noticeable that the impressions shared on the national society (as in contrast to other countries or the migrants) are mostly negative. In Luxembourg in particular, the interviewees expressed negative opinions on the national society, having a *“very closed mentality”* (NM6_LU_Esch-sur-Alzette_f), that *“people are very much after money”* (NM4_LU_Esch-sur-Alzette_f) and that youth have to conform to a *“formatted Luxembourgish life style”* (NM12_LU_Wiltz_m). While these observations mostly address possible difficulties for migrants interacting with the local people, they also express social challenges the young people perceive for their own development in these surroundings, particularly in terms of their own Otherness. This is particularly obvious in the recurrent reference to the *“life-style”* and *“normalized way”* in Luxembourg in terms of a social pressure to adapt to these standards.

In some of our case studies, most saliently in Luxembourg, but also in Budapest’s 8th district, being migrant or of migrant descent rather seems to be the norm than the exception: *“I am not interested in politics. This migrant thing [meaning the government’s anti-migrant propaganda] is stupid. Look around! This is the eight district, after all. Everyone is a migrant here. There are Blacks, Arabs, Gypsies, all kinds of people live here. Even my family can be seen as an immigrant. My parents came from Szabolcs County.”* (NM1_HU_Budapest_m)

This opposition against negative government propaganda targeting migrants and the identification as part of the wider group of migrants could also be due to the shared experience of being marginalised and discriminated against by society. Here, the divide between the local and immobile population as the norm and migrants and mobility as the exception becomes blurred. In the following, we therefore enquire deeper into the in- and outgroups the youths construct throughout the interviews and the ways they position themselves with regard to the wider context of migration and integration.

5.3.3 Who is „we“ and who are “they”?

Most non-migrant youth without a migrant background referred to migrants as “they” and to themselves as part of the local/national population as “we” mostly as a matter of course. For Youth of Colour and 2nd generation migrants the delimitation of in- and outgroups seems to be more complicated: *„of course, there [on social media] are many things that, I would say, only us foreigners can understand“* (NM9_DE_Holzminden_m). This young person was born in Germany and holds German citizenship, but nonetheless includes himself in the “we” group of foreigners, as opposed to Germans. Similarly in Malmö, a young 2nd generation migrant talked about other people with migratory background taking *“the other’s side”* (NM4_SE_Malmö_m), referring to Swedes. And in Reggio Emilia, a young Muslim woman referred to the Italian society as “they”, who *“do not dare to ask questions”* (NM4_IT_Reggio Emilia_f) about Islam. These youth with migratory background clearly positioned themselves outside or at odds with the national society as an in-group.

However, also among non-migrant youth without migratory background there are some interesting exceptions. One young person with physical disability referred to herself and migrants as “we” in terms of people discriminated against by society, wishing for society to realize *“that we are also normal human beings and that people at least give us the opportunity to show what we are capable of”* (NM8_DE_Holzminden_f). And several LGBTQIA+ youth in various case studies referred to the LGBTQIA+ community as “we” as opposed to the more or less accepting surrounding society.

These narrations across different groups of non-migrant youth in a variety of local settings suggest that youth without experiences of discrimination based on membership in a particular social group (e.g. disability, LGBTQIA+, ethnic minority and/or migrant background, religion) show an unquestioned

perception of “we” as the national/local society in-group and “they” as the migrant out-group. This “we” gets unsettled when fissures in this in-group become apparent to young people, particularly due to experiences of discrimination and being excluded from this group oneself. Most importantly, visible traits of Otherness seem to be the basis of feeling excluded. These empirical findings point to the crucial importance of Othering processes for the youth’s perception of themselves and society. The experience of being positioned outside the in-group of mainstream society – due to the perception as racialized other, but also due to perceived Otherness based on sexuality or disability – unsettles the self-identification as part of the local “we”.

5.3.4 Visibility of Otherness

Regarding the positioning as the 'migrant Other' – being positioned by others, but also self-identifying as outsider to the local/national in-group – the decisive factor appears not to have migrated oneself or one’s parents, but the level of visible difference in terms of physically 'looking foreign' including visible signs of (ascribed) religion. Youth who position themselves as 'foreigners' mostly reported discrimination due to their externally visible features or other noticeable traits of difference, like a certain accent: *“because of the migration background, because I mean, it’s easy to see, when you look at me you wouldn’t think ‘ok he’s totally German’.”* (NM9_DE_Holzminden_m)

As has been pointed to above, it is Black youth and young women wearing a headscarf who experienced most racial discrimination and also who reported the highest level of feeling excluded and different – being the 'Other': *“like in English areas and other places, because they’re not used to black people or different people, different colour skinned, you know.”* (NM1_UK_Sheffield_f) 'Looks' as most relevant basis of differentiation between different groups was also perceived by non-migrant youth without migrant background or experiences of racial discrimination themselves: *“They’re often bullied for their skin colour and hair. Based on this I feel like this is probably a challenge for many [migrants] too; that they struggle to fit in because they look different and because their traditions are different.”* (NM3_NO_Bergen_f)

This narration also points to perceived or expected 'cultural distance' as a basis of being positioned as the 'migrant Other'. Several youth pointed to the circumstance that the level of acceptance of migrants, but also 2nd generation migrant youth, by the local society without migrant background highly depends on *“where they come from”* (NM5_NO_Bergen_f; NM6_NO_Bergen_m) – or their parents respectively. The perception of 'cultural distance' related to place is also closely linked to Islam and Muslim countries of origins as signifiers for Otherness.

On the other hand, several 2nd generation migrant youth explicitly stated that they do not visibly stick out from the rest of society in terms of 'looking foreign'. This group reported little to no experience of racial discrimination and identify themselves as nationals or feeling belonging to both national contexts, the local as well as the one of their parents: *“I mean, I’m half Turkish and half Norwegian, but I don’t feel like I’m one more than the other. To be perfectly honest, I don’t even think about it that much – the fact that I’m ‘a foreigner’.”* (NM5_NO_Bergen_f) *“If you look at me, I don’t look foreign”* (NM6_IT_Milan_m). *“I am lucky not to have this diversity [black skin]”* / *“because they [Italians] usually don’t understand where I come from.”* (NM2_IT_Reggio Emilia_f)

Concerning the perception of Otherness due to a perceived cultural distance, the perception of migrants or youth with a migratory background stemming from places perceived as 'culturally close' build an interesting contrast. This is particularly the case for Iasi in Eastern Romania where migrants from the Republic of Moldova – even though having migrated from a non-EU country – are rather considered local than being migrants, as they share a similar language, a common history with the region of Iasi and are therefore not perceived as a 'cultural' or 'migrant Other', but rather as part of the local in-group. Similar attitudes can be observed regarding ethnic Hungarians from Serbia in Hungary, or descendants of ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union to Germany, as this account from a young person with Turkish migrant background highlights: *“those with a real migration background, and by that I don’t mean, like, German-Russians or something like that, because for me, they are so deeply rooted sometimes.”* (NM9_DE_Holzminden_m)

These empirical findings give intriguing insights on young non-migrants' perceptions of Otherness in the context of migration: for the perception as 'migrant Other' the decisive factor is not the act of migration itself, but rather the fact of visibly standing out and being perceived as 'foreign' and 'different'. This points to the crucial importance of being able to 'pass' as a part of the "natio-ethno-cultural" (Mecheril, 2003) in-group for young peoples' lives, regardless of whether they have migrated themselves or not. The concept of 'passing' which we have pointed to earlier regarding the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth, has a longstanding history in critical race and postcolonial studies, referring to "an assumption of white racial identity by People of Colour" (Siddiqi, 1998). The empirical data show, that 'passing' as a strategy and/or involuntary process continues to be crucial for the lived experiences of Youth of Colour as well as LGBTQIA+ youth. As we will argue in the following, experiences of 'standing out' and with struggles to 'pass' due to visible traits of Otherness are an important ground for empathy towards migrants.

5.4 Non-migrant youth as peers for migrant youth

As we have stated at the beginning, a central aim of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of non-migrant youth's role as a counterpart for arriving migrant youth in the process of integration. Important questions for non-migrant youth's role in integration processes and their perception of migrants are, how and under which circumstances contacts with migrants take place and, more generally, what hinders or supports diverse social contacts. As studies on youth's attitudes towards migration based in contact theory state, "quality contacts" and friendships with migrants and racialized youth improve youth's attitudes towards migration and reduce the impact of negative images of migration and migrants from media, family or peers (Bentsen, 2017; Jones & Rutland, 2018). In this context, a large disparity between non-migrant youth with and those without a migratory background emerged. In several case studies, non-migrant youth without migratory background reported relatively little personal contact and friendships with migrants. Even though (with very little exceptions) young people expressed openness or even eagerness to be friends with migrants, they feel *"it simply doesn't happen"* (NM7_DE_Holzminden_m): *"But on a personal level, I have very little to do with migrated people, which I find kind of funny, because I never fight against it, it just never came up that way, I think, but I noticed it actively just now. And I was like, hey, I only have German friends, that's totally weird."* (NM1_DE_Dortmund_f)

This lack of social contacts with migrants reported in both German case studies, Bucharest, both Polish case studies and Österlen (Sweden). Regarding its relatively high share of migrant (and migrant background) population as well as the long-standing history of migration, the report from Dortmund is particularly surprising. It provides initial evidence on somehow separated life trajectories and social networks of non-migrant youth who do not have a migrant background and youth who do (migrant youth and youth of migrant descent). In this context, the experiences of 2nd generation migrant youth in the Luxembourg case studies, despite the highest level of diversity in the population in terms of origins and nationality, point to the crucial importance of school and the school system: *"When I look at my sister for example, she was in the technical school and she had many Portuguese friends, while my brother and I who went to the classic school also have one or two Portuguese friends, but because of the school we were more obliged to make relationships with people of different origins or with more Luxembourgers."* (NM4_LX_Esch-sur-Alzette_f)

Youth's social contacts in Sheffield then show the opposite situation, where contacts with different groups are part of the young peoples' everyday life, without them actively looking for them: *"it's not been a strategy, I just suppose it's just ended up like that really. When I say my six closest mates and one is from like a Jamaican heritage, one from a Ghanaian heritage, one's from a South Asian heritage, one from an Irish heritage, others English...its quite a mix really."* (NM5_UK_Sheffield_m)

Young non-migrants with migration history in their families, on the other hand, mostly reported very diverse social networks and friendships, involving locals without migratory background, other youth from migrant descent as well as migrants. This is apparent in Reggio Emilia and Milan for example, where all interviewees were 2nd generation migrants. However, experiences of exclusion and racism

can result in staying amongst other people with similar experiences: *“During the primary school you never see what’s going on [...] then in the secondary school you start to feel excluded and so you look for people with your same origins.”* (NM9_IT_Reggio Emilia_m)

Particularly Black youth reported feeling more comfortable with others sharing their experiences, emphasising the empowering effect: *“When they [generation of younger sister] were in class, they were not the only Black girls, they were with Black boys and girls. So their friendships, their social network [...] is diversified. Whereas mine was very small, I was the Black among Whites [...] When I see my sisters, I find that they are much more fulfilled than I was at their age”* (NM6_LU_Esch-sur-Alzette_f)

Sharing similar experiences must not, however, be connected to having a different nationality or international migrant background. Some 2nd generation youth in Italy e.g. appreciated the relationships and friendships with southern Italians because *“there are a lot of similarities [...] and they have the double reality [double sense of belonging] like us.”* (NM1_IT_Reggio Emilia_f)

To pick up the statements in Chapter 4.5 on locality and space, while the relative diversity of the local society in youth’s living surroundings appears to be one important factor for the development of naturalized diverse contacts and friendships, the institutional and socio-spatial setting proves to be decisive. Relatively separated life trajectories between migrants and youth with migratory background on the one side and youth without migratory background on the other side, seem to be a major inhibiting factor for the development of diverse social contacts. As contrasting examples, the experiences of youth in Malmö and Sheffield are illustrative here. Both cities have a rather diverse population in regional and national comparison as well as a longstanding migration history. In Malmö, however, youth reported a very high level of segregation of migrants and locals of migrant descent into certain rather disadvantaged neighbourhoods. One 2nd generation migrant young woman in particular described the living surroundings in her neighbourhood, including e.g. Arabic speaking teachers in school, as very much separated from the Swedish mainstream, leading to her having problems with the Swedish language up until early adulthood. Youth in Sheffield on the other hand spoke about contacts transversal to the migrant – non-migrant divide in a rather naturalized manner. Even though no direct comparison can be drawn here due to differing samples, these diverging experiences point to the importance of local institutional setting and politics shaping a rather inclusive or exclusive social space.

5.4.1 Role of non-migrant youth for integration

Several 2nd generation young migrants explicitly described themselves as “mediators” or brokers, who understand the local *“cultural background”* (NM9_DE_Holzminden_m) as well as the one of migrants – referring here to a shared Muslim background with a large group of migrants – and can therefore create bridges between migrants and the local society: *“We are mediators 24h because we have always had to find a balance between a lot of things.”* (NM4_IT_RE_f)

As already stated in chapter 4.3 “Transition into Adulthood”, several 2nd generation migrants also aim for a career as teachers to support children suffering from racism and structural barriers, like language barriers, in school. However, also non-migrant youth without experiences of migration in their families directly address the role they see for themselves in the process of migrants’ inclusion into society. Again, relating to their own experiences: *“Be with them! I have been new at a school, and then it’s very nice when people come over and talk to you, because people there are already in cliques. It’s so easy to think ‘it’s not my responsibility’, and it’s a bit wrong to say it is, but if you can: get to know them. I think we can all try a bit.”* (NM5_NO_Sogndal_f) Several youth stressed that it is by openly approaching migrant youth and talking to them in every-day life that they can actually contribute to making young migrants *“feel safe and desired”* (NM4_RO_lasi_m).

5.5 Perceptions of migrants mirroring own experiences

For the purpose of this paper we analysed non-migrant youth's conceptualization of integration, their perceptions of migrants as well as their embedded views on society and experiences of Otherness against the backdrop of their own biographical experiences of vulnerabilities and resilience. This perspective has shown that the youth's perceptions of migrants and of the challenges the latter encounter in many cases mirror their own situation, problems, needs and aspirations.

A particular momentum where non-migrant youth connect their own experiences with those of migrants are experiences of Otherness. This is very pronounced amongst the interviewed Youth of Colour, who perceived the experience of racial discrimination as the main commonality, and several 2nd generation migrants expected their own feeling of being torn between two-worlds to be a problem for migrants as well: *"you are left in a squeeze. I doubt its easy coming here – it probably takes several years to become 'yourself'."* (NM1_NO_Sogndal_f)

One young 2nd generation migrant described these common experiences as a *"similar past and suffering"* (NM9_IT_Reggio Emilia_m) he shares with migrants, which creates a feeling of understanding and solidarity. However, also youth who are discriminated against on grounds other than racialized difference related their own experiences of Otherness to the situation of migrants, as this account of a young person with physical disability shows: *„Because the people, I think, they already discriminate against me and if then on top you are a foreigner, could be difficult."* (NM8_DE_Holzminden_f)

Some youth also have related migrants' challenges to the experiences of discrimination they themselves or nationals of their countries have made abroad: *"They [the Sri-Lanka workers] are seen as we, the Romanians, are seen in Italy."* (NM1_RO_Bucgarest_f)

'Otherness' is also experienced in the sense of 'sticking out' from the crowd and therefore being in danger of being attacked or experiencing other forms of discrimination. This is particularly the case of LGBTQIA+ youth. Accordingly, young LGBTQIA+ in Szeged have considered that migrants who "stick out" experience more discrimination than those who *"melt in"* (NM10_HU_Szeged_m). *"I think the most vulnerable group in Szeged is the foreigners, because they are not like the locals who can move around freely in the city."* (NM9_HU_Szeged_mf)

More generally, the feelings of 'not fitting in' and being looked upon as different was reported by several young people across case studies (even though mostly in relatively smaller towns) and feeling fully accepted was named at several points as one of the most important desires of the young people themselves. This desire for themselves is reflected in the perception of *"being accepted as they are"* (NM1_DE_Holzminden_f) as a major challenge for migrants.

The non-migrant youth also perceived common challenges for young migrants connected to their life stage in transition to adulthood – particularly regarding school as a potentially problematic. Some young people who had difficulties in the school system, considered succeeding in school and obtaining diplomas a major challenge for young migrants, particularly considering the added language barrier. A young person who experienced bullying herself expected *"being bullied"* and *"being humiliated"* (NM11_DE_Holzminden_f) to be a potential problem for newly arrived migrants in school.

More generally, the interviewees perceived *"finding a place in society"*, a place *"where you feel comfortable"* (NM7_RO_Iasi_f), as a difficulty for young migrants, particularly for those who travel alone, without the support of their parents. This relates to the recurrently reported challenge of the young people across case studies to find a place and build a life for themselves apart from their parents and family home.

An important common challenge in society the interviewed youth perceived for themselves as well as for young migrants is being seen as an individual, heard and taken seriously with their own views. They criticised that discourses on integration do not consider migrants as individuals, not taking *"people's [migrants'] situation"* and *"people's feelings"* (NM3_UK_Barnsley_f) into consideration: *"They're*

referred to as a group instead of being considered as individuals [...] I just feel like they, through this kind of political debate, are being dehumanized – that we no longer see the people behind the numbers and statistics.” (NM4_NO_Bergen_m) Getting back to the concept of Otherness as a “negation of identity” (Staszak 2008, p. 2), the 'Other' as an out-group lacks identity as it is identified on the basis of stereotypes by the dominant in-group. The youth's insisting on being perceived as an individual – themselves as well as migrants – therefore can be interpreted as an endeavour to disrupt this position as stereotyped 'Others' and be seen and respected with one's own identity, biography and opinions.

6. Conclusion

In the first part of this paper we have shown **1) that the socio-economic situation** [(lack of) support and (economic) stability] constitutes a fundamental vulnerability/resilience factor in relation to the experiences of young people in their transitions into adulthood as well as in relation to their future perspectives.

We have pointed out **2) that the experience of otherness** represents another significant vulnerability factor. For young people without migration experience, however, it is precisely these experiences that form the basis for sensitising or understanding the situation of young migrants.

Based on our empirical material, we do not state that non-migrant youth with vulnerabilities are generally more open towards migrants than more privileged youth. However, the empirical evidence derived from this biographical approach strongly suggests that lived experiences of vulnerabilities, particularly experiences of exclusion due to Otherness or the feeling of not being accepted, can sensitize youth for the problems migrants encounter.

Regarding the role of non-migrant youth as part of the local population and as peers for young migrants, it becomes clear from our findings that **3) social integration is a challenge for all**, independently if we are looking at rural or urban contexts. Since the traditional urban-rural dichotomy is being dissolved, the accessibility of opportunities for participation becomes a crucial factor regarding the reinforcement of vulnerabilities. The challenges faced by young migrants – integration into work, takeover of family responsibilities, transition to independent living – also affect young people without migration experience. Thus, integration does not appear to be a special task for migrants, but for young people in general. Rather, what matters are the opportunities for young people offered by society and the question how young people perceive their chances of finding recognition in society. In the narrations of the young people, the experiences of otherness and discrimination play an especially important role. Resilience factors for dealing with the challenges of growing up and managing the transition to an independent life appear to be, in particular, a stabilising social environment through family and/or friends and sufficient (family or own) economic resources.

We also aimed at contributing to a relational assessment and understanding of the concepts of vulnerability and resilience from a critical perspective. For the **concept of vulnerability**, our findings show that for young people without migration experience the **feeling of recognition and acceptance** is central to the experience of vulnerability. An essential risk factor is the experience of otherness and discrimination. This is independent of one's own migrant background and is rather dependent on factors on the basis of which social categorisations take place. This shows the great relevance of persisting structural categories of gender, race and class for the experience of vulnerability.

The results presented in this report show that policies should address discrimination, particularly experiences of otherness, regarding all youth, cross-cutting the differentiation into migrants and non-migrants to promote equality and diversity. Furthermore, the insights into the significance of young people's own vulnerability experiences for their perception of the challenges young migrants face can offer potentials for future inclusive youth work: not sensitizing about migrants as victims, as the suffering 'Other', but fostering an understanding related to non-migrant youth's own lived experience of inclusion and exclusion, pointing towards an inclusive society for all.

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