

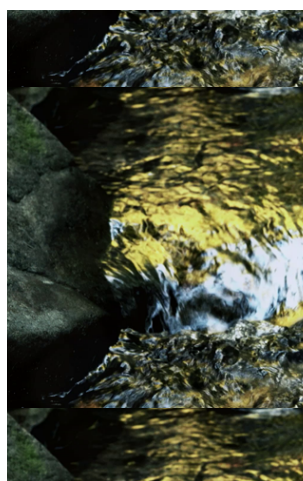


Immigrant integration in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas: local policies and policymaking relations in Belgium
Country Reports on multilevel dynamics



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<https://whole-comm.eu>





Abstract

This report looks at immigrant integration initiatives developed at the local level, paying particular attention to the multi-level governance dynamics involved. The findings are primarily based on interviews conducted in the four selected municipalities in Belgium (two in the Flemish-speaking region of Flanders and two in the Francophone region of Wallonia). The report provides an overview of 1) local integration initiatives; 2) the local integration frames; 3) the multilevel governance dynamics; 4) horizontal and vertical conflicts between local actors working on immigrant integration; and 5) the decision-making processes that have preceded the implementation of immigrant integration policies (or the lack thereof) for each of the four towns studied. The report finds that the extent to which local governments intervene in immigrant integration governance differs drastically across the regions. The role and funding that local governments have received from the Belgian meso-levels (the regions and communities), which were granted the competence for immigrant integration policies in the 1980s, explains whether local governments have developed interventionist or *laissez-faire* approaches towards immigrant integration. Whilst the region of Flanders has granted local governments the “coordinating role” on immigrant integration, followed by regional funding schemes, in Wallonia local governments have received little responsibilities or funding for this domain and immigrant integration has been outsourced to the regional integration centres. Still, also within the regions, local integration approaches vary significantly. Particularly the two Flemish localities have developed immigrant integration policies sensitive to the specific local context. We find that party politics, previous experience with ethnic diversity, and socio-economic factors mainly shape the local course of action. These factors also explain whether local governments see migration as a “problem” or rather as an added value to the locality, which in turn affects the climate in which migrants settle, and the courses of action taken by local stakeholders.



Table of Contents

1 Introduction	1
1.1 Aims of the Project	1
1.2 Multilevel Governance	2
1.3 Research Methodology	3
1.3.1 Case Selection	3
1.3.2. Data Collection	5
2. Introducing the Cases	7
2.1 The National Context	7
2.1.1 Migration Flows and Diversity in Belgium	7
2.1.2 Asylum Seekers Reception	8
2.1.3 Governance of Integration: The Federalisation of Competencies	10
2.1.4 Integration Approaches across the Regions (Flanders and Wallonia)	12
2.2 The Local Level in Immigrant Integration & Distribution of Funding	16
2.2.1 The Coordination Role of Flemish Municipalities on Immigrant Integration	17
2.2.2 Limited Responsibility for Walloon Municipalities on Immigrant Integration	20
2.3 Conclusions	22
2.4 Introducing the Local Cases	29
2.4.1 Locality 1: Type A Locality, Wallonia, Small Town	30
2.4.2 Locality 2: Type B Locality, Flanders, Medium-Sized Town	31
2.4.3 Locality 3: Type C Locality, Wallonia, Medium-Sized Town	33
2.4.4 Locality 4: Type D Locality, Flanders, Small Town	34
3. Overarching themes	36
3.1 Development of Local Integration Policies	36
3.1.1 The Walloon Localities	37



3.1.2	The Flemish Localities	40
3.2	Migrant Integration Frames	49
3.2.1	Type A Locality, Wallonia, Small Town	52
3.2.2	Type B Locality, Flanders, Medium-Sized Town	53
3.2.3	Type C Locality, Wallonia, Medium-Sized Town	56
3.2.4	Type D Locality, Flanders, Small Town	58
3.3	MLG Dynamics in Migrant Integration Policymaking.....	62
3.3.1.	Actor's Functions and Their Roles in Governmental Networks	63
3.3.2.	Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflicts	74
3.4.	Decision-Making	80
3.4.1.	Locality 1: Type A Locality, Wallonia, Small Town	83
3.4.2.	Locality 2: Type B Locality, Flanders, Medium-Sized Town	84
3.4.3.	Locality 3: Type C Locality, Wallonia, Medium-Sized Town	86
3.4.4.	Locality 4: Type D Locality, Flanders, Small Town	87
4	Conclusions	91
	References	97
	Appendix.....	101
	Annex 1	101

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1 Introduction

1.1 Aims of the Project

Whole-COMM focuses on small and medium-sized municipalities and rural areas in eight European and two non-European countries that have experienced and dealt with the increased arrival and settlement of migrants after 2014. More particularly, the research project explores how these communities have responded to the presence of post-2014 migrants¹, that is, which policies have been developed and implemented and how these policies shape and enable immigrant integration. Taking an innovative Whole-of-Community research approach, which conceives of immigrant integration as a process of community-making, Whole-COMM pays particular attention to the interactions between multiple actors involved in local integration governance (for example, individuals, public and non-public organizations, institutions and/or corporate entities). Moreover, the project looks at the embeddedness of local actors in multilevel frameworks in which regional, national and EU policies and stakeholders may play a decisive role in shaping local integration policymaking, considering both potential collaborations as well as tensions between actors at different government levels.

WP3 is concerned with **the multilevel governance (MLG)** of post-2014 migrants' integration into small and medium-sized towns and rural areas (SMsTRA). Its **goal** is to provide an in-depth understanding of multilevel and translocal political dynamics underlying policymaking processes in local communities. WP3 analyzes relations and patterns of interaction (i.e. cooperation, coordination, but also potential conflict and tensions) between local public and non-public actors in SMsTRA and stakeholders acting at regional, national, and supranational levels of government. Moreover, WP3 explores to what extent (governance) networks are emerging and/or expanding within one municipality as well as across municipalities. It further aims to unravel the role of politics in shaping immigrant integration policies.

- Guiding questions for WP3 are:
- How have SMsTRA mobilized vis-à-vis the new challenge and in relation to the policies and funding schemes put forwards by other levels of government?
- Which factors have led to the emergence of multilevel tensions and conflicts?

¹ The group of migrants that arrived in (Western) Europe after 2014 is very heterogeneous “but mostly comprises migrants that left from areas of political and humanitarian crises” (Working Paper 1 2021, 1-2). The majority of ‘post-2014 migrants’ thus entered as asylum-seekers but may have obtained different legal statuses by now (see for more detail Working Paper 1 for the Whole-COMM project).



- Are new cooperative relationships eventually emerging and, if so, what different patterns of interaction can we identify between local (policy) actors and regional/national/supranational authorities and stakeholders?
- Can we identify new translocal relations or the expansion of existing networks of SMsTRA?

1.2 Multilevel Governance

The term governance describes a clear shift in public action and public organization, which is increasingly characterized by the reliance on private and voluntary sector actors to “devise, manage, and deliver policies and services” (Bevir & Rhodes, 2016: 2). The process of governing consequently involves not only state actors, but a diverse range of organizational forms and actors which collaborate with each other at different levels, or to put it differently, in a multi-level framework.

Following Adam and Caponio (2019: 27), MLG can be defined as the “process of dispersion of authority away from the nation state and across interdependent, and yet autonomous, public authorities and non-public organisations placed at different levels of government”. Scholten and Penninx (2016: 95) further stress that in order to be able to speak of MLG some minimal degree of “interaction and joint coordination of relations between the various levels of government” needs to be involved. Consequently, the MLG concept may serve as a suitable lens through which interactions and relations between the supranational, national, regional, and local level can be examined. This is especially relevant since immigrant integration policies are not ‘just’ negotiated at the national level, but rather at different government levels and between various public and non-public actors (Adam & Caponio, 2019; Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018). The understanding that multiple actors are involved in the governance process concomitantly challenges the predominant idea that the nation-state is the ‘natural’ frame of reference for migration policies or (policy) analysis. This, in turn, underlines the need to look at the local level as an “independent level of policy development” (Van Breugel, 2020: 1) (and not just policy implementation) to better understand the outcome of immigrant integration policies (for a nuanced analysis of local-level politics addressing migration see, for instance, Schiller, 2015).



1.3 Research Methodology

1.3.1 Case Selection

The four cases for the research project were selected based on a set of variables, namely:

Population size	Medium-sized town: 100,000 – 250.000 Small town: 50,000 – 100,000 Rural area: 5,000 - 50,000 and low population density
Presence of a reception centre	Time period: 2014-2017
Number of currently residing migrants	Time period: arrived after 2014
Share of Foreign residents	Time period: in 2005 (SF2005)
Variation of Unemployment level	Time period: 2005-2014 (VARUN)
AND/OR Unemployment levels	Time period: 2005 and 2014
Variation of Number of Inhabitants	Time period: 2005-2014 (VARNI)
Regional variation	For example: East/West or North/South, choosing localities from different regions
Local politics	Parties in government and local political tradition, choosing localities with different political traditions (conservative/progressive)



The variables 'SF2005', 'VARUN' and 'VARNI' were used to identify **four types** of localities:

Type A	Characterized by a recovering local economy and an improving demographic profile and migrants' settlement before 2014
Type B	Characterized by an improving economic and demographic situation and no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014
Type C	Characterized by demographic and economic decline and migrants' settlement before 2014
Type D	Characterized by economic and demographic decline and no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014

In Belgium, small, medium-sized towns and rural areas (SMsTRA's) have become increasingly ethnically diverse since the 2010s, in part because the country received a large number of asylum seekers in the period between 2014 and 2021, with 2015 being the year with the highest influx². The arrival of asylum seekers to Belgian SMsTRA's has partly been the result of **employment and housing opportunities**, as well as **"indirect dispersal mechanisms" installed by the federal government**. In light of these recent migratory fluxes, we analyze the integration of post-2014 migrants in **four SMsTRA's: two in the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders and two in the Francophone region of Wallonia**. There is an interest in researching across the linguistic frontier in Belgium, even if immigrant integration policies are a regional competency, especially because **refugees often do move across the linguistic border, which comes with particular difficulties**; either because they have to start over again learning an entirely new language, or because they have to redo the integration course (Moussawi, 2020). For the Belgian context, four SMsTRAs cases were selected (see section 2.4.1-2.4.4 for a more detailed description of each locality).

² Contrary to popular perception, however, we should note that refugee arrival is not responsible for the highest immigrant increase. Family reunification and labour migration still account for the highest percentage of immigrants arriving in Europe and Belgium. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Residence_permits_statistics_on_first_permits_issued_during_the_year_First_residence_permits_by_reason. Consulted on 23/02/2022.



1.3.2. Data Collection

This report relies on a qualitative content analysis of data gathered through extensive fieldwork between October 2021 and March 2022 in the four selected Belgian towns. Four fieldwork periods of around one week in each locality consisted of semi-structured interviews with local actors, such as policymakers (representatives of the local government and municipal officials), street-level bureaucrats (working at the local public services for social welfare and housing services), civil society actors, local associations working with migrants or refugees, and private actors (especially private employers). Furthermore, we also conducted interviews with regional (civil servants at the integration departments of the Flemish and Walloon governments) and federal actors (civil servants at Fedasil: The Belgian federal institution for the reception of asylum seekers). More precisely, **57 semi-structured interviews** were conducted with a total of **65 respondents** in the **four towns** selected. About half of the interviews was conducted in person, the other half was conducted online, due to constraints related to the covid-19 pandemic. After the end of the fieldwork, the transcripts of the interviews (in French and Dutch) have been coded in NVivo according to the following overarching themes: policy measures, integration frames, and multi-level governance dynamics. This coding enabled us to compare the data gathered on the local migrant integration policies of the four towns in a systematic way. The coding guide can be found in annex 1. Lastly, the analysis of the interviews was complemented with data gathered from local policy documents (such as policy reports, annual reports, and legal texts) on the themes of WP3.

For WP3, we gathered data in these four localities with the aim of mapping the multilevel governance relations in Belgium regarding the integration of post-2014 migrants, as well as the modes and patterns of involvement in multi-level policymaking of the four localities. In this report, we examine the way in which the jurisdiction on immigration and immigrant integration in Belgium are spread over the federal government and the sub-national entities: namely the regions and the communities, the local governments, as well as public and private actors. Additionally, we analyze the mechanisms of vertical and horizontal dynamics of multilevel governance between these entities, aiming to understand the way in which these cooperate or relate to one another.

This report is structured as follows. Firstly, we present the national and the regional context of Belgium regarding immigrant integration policies. We describe the distribution of responsibilities in the field of immigrant integration policymaking across governance levels and non-governmental actors, examine the relevant legal frameworks, the way in which funding is distributed, as well as the general trends in integration policies in Belgium in the last five years (between 2016 and 2021). We then introduce the selected Belgian localities that will be investigated by discussing their demographic, economic, and political characteristics. In the third section, we will focus on the local policies and approaches that have been developed in the four Belgian localities in response to the arrival and settlement of post-2014 migrants. We will pay particular attention to the multilevel governance dynamics across different (governmental) actors, and we analyse the way in which local policies relate to regional or federal policies and legal regulations, allowing us to comprehend the extent to which a proper 'local response' to the integration of post-2014 migrants is present in the



four localities. In the subsequent subsection, we offer a comparison of the findings from the four localities and discuss the frames of perception and discourses on integration. We then map the actors involved in immigrant integration and their patterns of interaction, setting out the dynamics of cooperation and conflict for every locality. Lastly, we present a table in which the key processes of decision-making of actors in each locality are displayed. By discussing this table in more detail, we identify common trends or relevant differences across the localities and types of actors.



2. Introducing the Cases

2.1 The National Context

2.1.1 Migration Flows and Diversity in Belgium

The rapid economic boom in the 1960s and 1970s transformed Belgium from an emigration country to an immigration country. Whilst in the first decades of the 20th century Belgians would migrate to escape economic malaise, following the booming of the coal and steel industries in the second half of the 20th century, the country started to attract migrants from Southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain, as cheap labour forces and later also from Northern Africa, including Morocco and Turkey. In the first decades after their recruitment, these guest workers were considered to only stay temporarily in Belgium or “birds of passage”, it being assumed that the workers would return home after their contracts would come to an end (Piore, 1979). Therefore, whilst there were some measures taken to accommodate these workers, none of them were intended to promote their integration into Belgian society. The measures taken were for migrant workers, rather than for migrants. The Belgian state would ensure that migrant worker’s social, family, and economic well-being was guaranteed as to maximise the economic performance of migrant workers and to render Belgium attractive on the international market for foreign labour (Adam, 2013b: 13). Overall, the amount of money invested remained limited in this first phase of immigrant accommodation measures (Adam, 2013b: 13). After the federal government halted the recruitment of foreign workers in 1974, it took little time until it became clear that the assumed temporal stay of the migration workers in the country was a myth, as many migrant workers and their families chose to settle permanently in the country. This political realization would result in the elaboration of the first public policies focused on the integration of migrants, as we will discuss in section 2.1.1.

In the 1990s, immigration to Belgium increased once more, this following globalization processes and the **formation of the European Union**. Between 2004 and 2007, following the further enlargement of the European Union, Belgium received migrants from the A10 countries, who migrated mainly because of work opportunities, but also at times to evade discrimination in their home country, as was the case for the Roma community (Van Der Bracht et al. 2014: 74). In the early 2000s, as a result of different migration flows, the larger Belgian cities started to develop into majority-minority cities: spaces where ethnic Belgians make up less than half of the population. For example, in 2012, among the population under 18 in Antwerp, people with a migration background were more numerous than ethnic Belgians (SVR, 2012). In 2020, 48% of the total inhabitants in Antwerp were Belgians without a foreign origin, this whilst in 2000 this number was still 68%³. In larger Belgian cities such as Brussels,

³ Source: <https://multimedia.tijd.be/diversiteit/>. Consulted on August 15th, 2022.



Gent, and Genk, this trend is equally perceptible. **Since the 2010s, also small, medium-sized towns, and rural areas (SMsTRA's) in Belgium have become increasingly ethnically diverse**, in part as a result of the increasingly large number of asylum seekers arriving in the period between 2014 and 2021. The arrival of asylum seekers to Belgian SMsTRA's has partly been the result of **employment and cheaper housing opportunities**, as well as **"indirect dispersal mechanisms" installed by the federal government, namely the peripheral distribution of asylum centres in the country.**

In the period between 2014 and 2021, a total of 223.405 thousand applications for international protection were submitted in Belgium. The highest rise in applications was in 2015, when the number nearly doubled in relation to the previous year. Whilst in 2014, 22.848 thousand requests for international protection were filed, in 2015 this number rose to 44.759 thousand applications. Between 2013 and 2021, 87.694 asylum seekers have received a refugee status or subsidiary protection from the Belgian government⁴. The number of applicants for international protection dropped between 2019 and 2020, following the COVID-19 crisis, but increased again in the summer of 2021, especially after the Taliban ceased power in Afghanistan in August 2021 and many Afghans applied for asylum. People having received the refugee status are, moreover, allowed to apply for family reunification. Between 2014 and 2021, mainly nationals from Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, Eritrea, Somalia, Iraq, Guinea, Turkey, Georgia, and Albania received a refugee or subsidiary protection status in Belgium. Since February 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a significant number of Ukrainians has started to arrive in Belgium.

2.1.2 Asylum Seekers Reception

Fedasil (the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) has become operational since 2002. The Belgian asylum procedure commences once an applicant for international protection starts an application with the arrival centre (*het Klein Kasteeltje/Petit Château*) located in central Brussels⁵. If the application is accepted, the asylum seeker in question is allocated to a reception centre where they are to stay until they receive a response to their request for asylum. There is no fixed period for the duration of the asylum procedure, and it can take from a few months to several years. **In total, there are nearly 27,000 reception places available in Belgium distributed over about 500 centres, which each have a capacity of 200-850 spaces.** These collective centres are managed by Fedasil or its

⁴ Source: <https://www.statistiekvlaanderen.be/nl/internationale-bescherming>. Consulted on 29/01/2022.

⁵ Before the application is accepted, the Immigration Office registers the application and investigates whether Belgium is responsible for processing the application for international protection (Dublin examination) and whether this is the first application for international protection. If this is not the case, the Office looks at whether the foreigner is providing any new and relevant elements to support the new application (examination of multiple applications). At this stage, the applicant for international protection only makes a short statement and completes a standard questionnaire. Source: <https://www.fedasil.be/en/asylum-belgium/asylum-procedure>. Consulted on August 20th, 2022.



partners (the Red Cross, Caritas, and other private partner). **Asylum seekers are quite randomly assigned to reception centres scattered all over the country, often in peripheral areas**⁶. Asylum seekers are asked for their preferences regarding the location of the reception centre in which they are accommodated, but these preferences can almost never be considered, as many asylum seekers ask to be hosted in larger cities where limited numbers of reception places are offered⁷. Applicants for asylum are entitled to material assistance while their asylum application is reviewed. This assistance includes basic needs and social support. Fedasil provides this material assistance during the asylum procedure in reception centres, that is, a bed, meals, access to sanitary facilities and medical care. The centre also organizes personalized social support. Asylum seekers receive some pocket money (for an adult: € 7.90 per week), but no other financial support is granted.

Once an asylum seeker has received a positive decision regarding their asylum application, they can move to individual accommodation initiatives (LAI), even if the places are limited and especially single men often end up without a space. Since 2016, people arriving from countries with a very high asylum acceptance rate, (generally above 80%⁸), are allowed to move into LAIs immediately, this with the intention of speeding up the integration process⁹. In LAIs, asylum seekers receive the same services as in the collective reception centres, but they are generally responsible for doing their own household chores and cooking. They then receive an allowance of approximately 60 euros per week, per adult to buy food for three meals a day and hygiene products. LAIs are funded by the federal government but managed at the municipal level by the Public Centres for Social Welfare (*OCMW* or *CPAS*). Recognized refugees can stay for 2 months in a LAI (which can be extended twice with one month), after which they must find housing on the private market or apply for social housing, as there is no organization responsible for refugees after the asylum procedure has come to an end. Whilst the stay in LAIs is intended to foster immigrant integration, during their stay social workers are mainly

⁶ An employee from Fedasil noted that asylum seekers are asked for their preferences regarding the location of the reception centre in which they are accommodated but noted that these preferences can almost never be considered, as most asylum seekers ask to be hosted in larger cities where limited numbers of reception places are offered (Interview B-F-1).

⁷ Interview B-F-1

⁸ The Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (*Commissariat Generaal voor de Vluchtelingen en de Staatlozen/Commissariat Général aux Réfugiés et aux Apatrides*) is responsible for determining the acceptance rate that will be applied. The exact percentage and the nationalities that are eligible for the high acceptance rate fluctuate. Since 2016, Syria, Libya, and Burundi have been on the list of countries eligible for a “fast track” towards the local accommodation initiatives.

⁹ Interview B-F-1



preoccupied with helping refugees to find housing in speed time, because of the tight housing market¹⁰.

After people have received their refugee status, they can theoretically settle anywhere in Belgium. The place of settlement of migrants is not formally imposed by any level of government and there are no strict dispersal policies in place directed at those whose application for international protection has been approved, as is the case in certain other European countries¹¹. Yet, “**indirect dispersal mechanisms**” limit the movement of refugees and fix their arrivals outside of large urban centres in the first period after their arrival (El Moussawi & Schuermans, 2020: 12), and can at times influence where migrants choose to settle in the long term¹². Moreover, also other mechanisms, such as exclusion and discrimination on the housing market can restrict migrants’ access to certain localities and neighbourhoods.

After the application for international protection is approved (and people have received either a refugee status, subsidiary protection, or are recognized as a stateless person), one can apply for a **living wage** from the Public Services for Social Welfare (*OCMW* in Flanders and *CPAS* in Wallonia) or for other forms of financial assistance in case of need or before refugees have found work. To receive a living wage, one must meet certain conditions: 1) to be legally residing in Belgium; 2) needing financial assistance (the Public Centre for Social Welfare examines one’s economic situation and income); and 3) having a place of residence in Belgium. In 2021, the amount of the living wage is dependent on one’s family situation and comprises € 743,78 per month for somebody in a cohabiting situation, € 1.115,67 for a single person and € 1.507,77 for a cohabitant in charge of a family.

2.1.3 Governance of Integration: The Federalisation of Competencies

To start understanding immigrant integration at the local level in Belgium, we should first and foremost comprehend the division of competencies for immigration law and immigrant integration. Whilst the federal government remains to this day responsible for immigration and nationality law

¹⁰ Interview B-F-1

¹¹ In the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Sweden direct dispersal mechanisms are installed for refugees. This implies that they are assigned a fixed place (town or city) where they have to reside after having received a refugee or subsidiary protection status.

¹² This especially when we consider that the asylum procedure can take months and even years. During this time, refugees will already have started to learn the language of the region, which makes their move across the linguistic frontier of the country harder.



and for asylum, the Belgian meso-levels (the regions and communities) have since the late 1970s received the full jurisdiction on immigrant integration. Between **1970 and 2001, Belgium was transformed from a unitary state** into a complex **federal state** with **six meso-level authorities (three regions and three communities)** as the result of a large series of state reforms (Adam, 2013: 547). **The Policy-making jurisdiction on immigrant integration, alongside many other competencies** such as education, culture, wellbeing, health, sports, and language, **was gradually transferred to the Belgian meso-levels**, being the regions and the communities¹³ (Xhardez, 2020: 1). The sub-state entities received full legislative and executive power over the competencies assigned to them (Adam, 2013a: 2).

The devolution of immigrant integration policies occurred at the same time as the political acceptance of the non-temporality of migrants. **When in 1974, the recruitment of labour migrants started to halt, mainly because of staggering coal and steel industries**, the assumption that migrant workers would leave the Belgian territory also started to fade. In this same year, the **competence over the welcoming policy for migrant workers was assigned to the Flemish and Walloon regions**. Later, the sub-state units developed more long-term integration policies. In **1980**, the second Belgian state reform was finalized, and **migrant integration policy was transferred from the Flemish and Walloon regions to the Flemish and French communities**. In **1993**, the competency over migrant integration was **shifted once more, this time only in Francophone Belgium**. More precisely, the jurisdiction over migrant integration was transferred from the French Community (which includes the Walloon and Brussels territories) **to the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission of the Brussels-Capital Region** (Adam, 2013: 552). Lastly, the German Community is competent in the German-speaking part of Belgium. The German-speaking community merely counts 100.000 inhabitants and is quite rural, with the result that no substantial number of migrants have settled in this region (Adam et al., 2018: 6-9). Whilst the German-speaking community developed migrant integration policies, differently than in Flanders and Wallonia, they did not implement a compulsory civic integration programme to this day.

We should point out that, whilst the development of state devolution was common in the European context in the second half of the 20th century, the extent to which the sub-state entities acquired autonomy is quite unique to the Belgian State. Compared to other federal states, the **Belgian federation corresponds more to the characteristics of “the ideal type of a dual federation”**, as the federal entities have full legislative and executive power for the competences that have been

¹³ There are three different regions, namely the Flemish region (Dutch-speaking), the Walloon region (French and German-speaking) and the Brussels-Capital region (French and Dutch-speaking) and three “communities”, which are defined along linguistic lines. In Belgium, there is a Flemish, a French and a German-speaking community.



assigned to them¹⁴ (Adam, 2013: 547/558). This far-reaching autonomy explains the extent to which policies differ across the Belgium meso-levels.

2.1.4 Integration Approaches across the Regions (Flanders and Wallonia)

Following the devolution of policymaking jurisdiction on immigrant integration to the meso-level authorities, **policies started to diverge considerably at first** (Adam, 2013) **and later evolved in a similar direction again** (Xhardez, 2020; Adam & Martiniello, 2013). Whilst the **Flemish approach** to integration in the **1980s and 1990s has been characterized as a multiculturalist approach**, the **Walloon approach** can be classified as a **universalist** one (Rea, 1994; Martiniello, 1995). **From the 2000s onwards, Flemish integration policies have moved in an assimilationist direction**, starting with the implementation of compulsory civic integration programmes but **without abandoning its multiculturalist features, such as the subsidization of ethnic minority associations and federations** (Adam, 2013). Researchers have argued that the policy divergence between Flemish and Walloon integration policies is the result of the **different politicization of migrant integration in Flanders and Wallonia, sub-state nationalist claims in Flanders**, and the influence of Dutch and French policy philosophies on immigrant integration (Adam, 2013a). In the first decades after devolution, the Flemish multiculturalist approach to integration largely mirrored the approach to immigrant integration policy in the Netherlands, adopting group-targeted policies for migrants (Xhardez, 2020: 7). The Walloon approach, on the other hand, was inspired by the French republican, universalist and colour-blind model, which focused on socio-economic inclusion of migrants (Xhardez, 2020: 7), and opted not to develop any policy categorically designed for migrant groups (Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010: 36). In addition, the **Flemish** approach to immigrant integration after devolution has been far **more “interventionist”** than the **Walloon** government, which adopted a **“laissez-faire”** approach to immigrant integration (Adam, 2013). In practical terms, we note that over the last decades far more budget, human resources, and parliamentary debates have been allocated to the question of migration and integration in Flanders than in Wallonia. When we focus at the developments in immigrant integration policies over the last five years (between 2016 and 2021), however, we notice a move towards the **convergence** of the Walloon and the Flemish immigrant integration policies.

In the late 1980s, immigrant integration prominently enters the Flemish political agenda as a result of the electoral success of the political party *Vlaams Blok* in 1988, 1989, and 1991. Counter-intuitively, this electoral success of an extreme-right and Flemish nationalist party originally leads to a

¹⁴ Competences that are granted to the meso-levels are those related to economy, employment, agriculture, water policy, housing, public works, energy, transport (except the Belgian railways), the environment, town and country planning, nature conservation, credit, foreign trade, supervision of the provinces, communes, and intercommunal utility companies. Source: https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/regions/competence. Consulted on 04/02/2022.



reinforcement of what could be called a lightly multiculturalist integration policy¹⁵. From the end of the 1980s onwards, the budget for immigrant integration policies seriously increases, and many of the formerly informal integration centres and initiatives now received extra funding and get institutionalized (Adam, 2013: 97-99). A major shift to the formerly more multiculturalist Flemish integration policy starts as of 2004, when the Minorities Decree of 1999 is replaced by the Civic Integration Decree of 2003. This new legislation rendered civic integration courses as well as Dutch language courses obligatory for migrants¹⁶. The Flemish integration decree was amended several times. Firstly, in 2006, when it became called the integration and civic integration decree (*Integratie en Inburgeringsdecreet*) and later in 2008, 2009, 2013, 2019 and 2021. Scholars have argued that, in practice, Flanders has adopted a model in which multiculturalist and assimilationist approaches exist alongside one another and have named the Flemish approach to immigrant integration one of “inegalitarian multiculturalism¹⁷” (Martiniello 1996 in Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010: 39). Yet, during the last decade, the multiculturalist features of the Flemish integration policy have declined, and its more exclusionary assimilationist character was reinforced, most importantly with the last legislative change to the new integration decree of 2021. In this new decree, the Flemish government added the obligation to not just participate in language and integration courses, but also to pass the exams¹⁸. Moreover, participants who do not work or follow training, are now obliged to do a 40-hours

¹⁵ For an explanation of the seemingly paradoxical development see Adam (2013: 97-99), Adam and Jeram (2015) and Adam and Torrekens (2015).

¹⁶ Certain persons are exempt from the duty to integrate in the Flemish Region: (1) Citizens of a member state of the European Union, the European Economic Area and Switzerland, and their family members; (2) people who have already obtained an integration certificate; (3) people who are unable to follow an integration program because of serious illness or disability; (4) people who have obtained a certificate or diploma in Belgian or Dutch education; (5) people who have attended a full school year of reception lessons; (6) people who are 65 years of age or older; (7) labour migrants with a temporary residence status that may lead to permanent residence.

¹⁷ This means that whilst ethnic minorities and group-based multiculturalism get a certain space in Flemish policymaking and public life, the Flemish cultural identity is always given precedence (Martiniello 1997 in Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010: 39).

¹⁸ At the same time, the 2021 Decree delineates the target group of the Flemish integration programme more strictly. Applicants for international protection whose requests are still being processed, caravan dwellers, and people without legal residence will no longer be eligible for an integration trajectory nor the separate components, such as the Dutch language or civic integration courses. An exception is made for underaged newcomers without a residence permit. Furthermore, applicants for international protection whose dossier has not yet been closed, do remain eligible for NT2 Dutch language courses (Integratiedecreet 2022, n.d.).



trajectory of societal participation (referred to as the fourth Pillar of the new Integration Decree)¹⁹. The government also charges the participants for following the courses and taking the exams²⁰, and in certain cases for the use of interpreters or translators. They also do not reimburse costs for childcare and transportation anymore, previously reimbursed to stimulate participation in the programme. In addition, the linguistic level to be attained by most participants was raised to B1²¹ (Adam & Xhardez, forthcoming: 7).

The **2021 Flemish Integration Decree also obliges migrants to sign a declaration on the 'rights and duties they ought to respect'**. Furthermore, the privacy rights of the participants to the courses are circumvented, as with the new decree information on their participation to the courses and tests will be shared with the federal immigration office, while considering the prolongation of their residence permits (Adam & Xhardez, forthcoming: 7). In parallel, several instruments of the formerly more multiculturalist Flemish integration policy have been withdrawn, retrenched, or are targeted by increasing critique. For example, in 2016, the government withdrew its support to former Flemish diversity plans that subsidized thousands of profit and non-profit organizations to set up a diversity policy to diversify their staff (Honggokoesoemo & Mawungu, 2018; Westerveen, 2020). Most importantly, the main former Flemish multiculturalist policy tool, the Minorities Forum (*Minderhedenforum*) has been drastically weakened and reformed into a network organization. Thereby it is no longer allowed to function as the organization representing migrants and minorities (organizations) vis-à-vis the Flemish government (Adam & Xhardez, forthcoming).

For the **history of Walloon immigrant integration policies**, we need to return to the first immigrant integration decree defined by the Francophone region. Against the background of a rising popularity of extreme-right views on immigration in Flanders, the **Walloon decree indicates that immigrant integration essentially is a non-issue in Wallonia** (Adam, 2013a, 556). Whilst the **Walloon region**

¹⁹ Each person integrating will be registered directly with the Flemish Service for Employment Mediation and Vocational Training (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding, VDAB*) to strengthen his or her economic self-sufficiency and increase societal participation. After four months in the asylum procedure, provided that no negative decision has yet been taken by the Immigration Department or the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, applicants for international protection are entitled to work and can be guided towards the labour market.

²⁰ From January 2022 onwards, participants are to pay 2 x €90 when signing the integration contract. Moreover, they will have to pay 2 x €90 for taking the civic integration and NT2 (Dutch language course) exams that are required to pass the civic integration programme. In case a person does not pass the examination, they will have to pay this amount again until they have managed to pass (*Integratiedecreet 2022, n.d.*).

²¹ Critics have argued that these new language standards are nearly impossible to attain for certain segments of the migrant population (Adam et al., 2021).



finances sub-regional integration centres, offers socio-cultural activities for migrants, and starts to stimulate institutions in the host society to interact with a migrant public, there is no clearly defined policy frame in which these integration centres function. In the integration decree of 1996, the Walloon Region does not describe their mandates, and no coordination structure is defined that could lead to the harmonization of the sub-regional or local integration centres' policies. This approach leads to the decentralization of immigrant integration policy, which becomes defined at the sub-regional or local level (Adam, 2013a: 556). With the following Walloon integration decree of 2009 not much changed. The decree is still characterized by the *de facto* decentralization of the regional policy (Adam, 2013a: 556).

A big shift followed, however, in 2014, when Wallonia, like Flanders, introduced a welcoming trajectory for newcomers, this about one decade after Flanders. In the first two years of its existence, the decree was called a Welcoming Trajectory (*parcours d'accueil*). In 2016, it was renamed the Integration Trajectory (*parcours d'intégration*) and was rendered fully compulsory for non-EU migrants. In 2016, FOREM, the Walloon office for employment and professional formation (*Office Wallon de la Formation Professionnelle et de l'Emploi*) initiated a service to assist newcomers in their search for employment and training (*le dispositif primo-arrivants*) (Gillebert et al., n.d.). In August 2017, FOREM signed a collaboration agreement with reception centres (Fedasil and RedCross), which enabled them to organise job-related information sessions in asylum centres and to assist asylum seekers in finding trainings during their asylum procedure. The aim of this new programme was to facilitate the labour market integration component of the integration trajectory that consists of: registration with FOREM, orientation and identification of their skills, training, and help in finding a job (ibid.). In 2018, the Walloon government further extended the integration trajectory with a compulsory socio-professional guidance component of minimum 4 hours, which was promoted by the Walloon government as an instrument to accommodate the increased influx of refugees in the aftermath of 2015.

With the implementation of the Walloon immigrant integration trajectory in 2014, approaches towards immigrant integration at the Belgian meso-levels started to converge (Xhardez, 2020). To explain this move of both Flanders and Wallonia towards a more assimilationist approach to immigrant integration, scholars have highlighted institutional and society-based variables. For Flanders, firstly, the greater politicization of migration-related issues due to the electoral success of the extreme-right, and secondly, the importance of the region's sub-state nationalism have been evoked as the two main factors explaining the Flemish turn towards an assimilationist approach to immigrant integration (Adam & Jacobs, 2014). The move towards a more assimilationist integration model by the Walloon region, on the other hand, has come to a greater surprise to scholars, as Francophone political elites had openly criticized the Flemish model of integration for its "restrictive and stigmatizing character" in the decades preceding the implementation of the civic integration trajectory (Xhardez, 2020: 2). To explain the swift change in approach towards immigrant integration



by the Walloon region, scholars have pointed to **Europeanization, the politicization of migration and policy-learning as potential factors** explaining these developments (Xhardez, 2020: 2).

Several of the **2021 amendments to the Flemish integration Decree point into the direction of an increasingly restrictive character** of the Flemish integration trajectory, in which the responsibility to integrate into Flemish society is progressively placed on the individual (both on a financial and ideological level), who needs to comply to integration and language examinations and prove that steps are being taken towards economic self-sufficiency. The 2021 amendments to the integration decree thereby introduce, **once again, a greater difference between the Flemish and the Walloon integration trajectories**, with the latter one remaining cost-free, and open for anyone to attend. Indeed, where in Wallonia applicants for the Belgian nationality are to prove their social integration through the integration trajectory, there is also a whole range of people who partake in this trajectory (completely or just some courses) on a voluntary basis²². Yet, various interlocutors in the two Walloon localities have noted that the supply of civic integration and language courses is often insufficient in Wallonia to respond to the demand.

2.2 The Local Level in Immigrant Integration & Distribution of Funding

Table 1: Distribution of responsibilities in the field of immigrant integration policymaking: the role of the local level

	Regional competency	Official role of municipalities
Flanders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The Agency for integration (<i>Agentschap inburgering en integratie</i>) (a joint agency since 2015)- InGent vzw (in the city of Ghent)- Atlas Antwerpen vzw (In the city of Antwerp) (The cities of Ghent and Antwerp refused to join the agency)	The "coordination role" on immigrant integration

²² Interview B-A-2



Wallonia	- 8 Regional integration centres in every province of Wallonia (Obligatory since 2014)	Very limited role in immigrant integration, solely for providing information on the immigrant integration trajectory to newcomers when they register in the commune
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Scholars such as Guiraudon and Lahav (2000) have noted that the scale of migration policymaking has shifted both upward and downward during the last three decades, and this especially following the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 (Kreichauf & Glorius, 2021: 874). On the one hand, the process of upscaling has been manifested in the increasing number of international treaties, transnational (or trans-regional) agreements, and the externalization of border management between receiving, transit, and sending countries. On the other hand, migrant reception, and integration policies, as well as other types of welfare policies have been increasingly dispersed away from the central state and assigned to regional and municipal authorities. In Belgium, the **process of downscaling of immigrant integration responsibilities has progressively taken place since the 1970s, when the Belgian meso-levels were assigned the responsibility for immigrant integration**. Since the 2010s, this process of downscaling of responsibilities has further accelerated. In Flanders, with the amendments of the integration decree of **2012, the local governments were assigned the ‘coordination role’ on local integration policies**. In Wallonia, the Regional Integration Centres (*Centres Régionaux d’Intégration, CRI’s*) at the level of the province were assigned the mission to facilitate the Walloon immigrant integration trajectory since 2014. The CRI’s are non-profit associations (*associations sans but lucrative, ASBL*) that receive public subsidies to set up missions of public interest, which are outlined by a legal framework, in this case the Walloon integration decree. In what follows we discuss firstly what is implied with the **‘coordination role’** that was assigned to Flemish municipalities and secondly, we discuss the missions of the Walloon CRI’s.

2.2.1 The Coordination Role of Flemish Municipalities on Immigrant Integration

The 2012 amendment of the Flemish integration decree that assigned local governments the **‘coordination role’** on immigrant integration grants local governments the independence to develop their programme for immigrant integration²³ according to the local realities and needs, whilst they

²³ In many cases, the cities prefer to use another word, such as ‘diversity’ or ‘inclusion’ program.

are to comply to the overarching integration policies and requirements implemented by the Flemish community²⁴. In Art. 28 of the 2012 amendment to the Flemish Integration Decree we read:

“The cities and towns have the **coordination role** over the integration policy on their territories. This means that, within the limits of the subsidiarity principle, they are responsible for the elaboration, guidance, coordination, and implementation of an inclusive local integration policy. They **direct** the relevant actors in their own city or municipality and involve the persons referred to in Article 3, first paragraph, 1° and 2°, and their organizations in this policy²⁵” (Art 28, integratiedecreet 2021, in Deprez et al., 2018: 22).

Pröpper et al. (2004) map out three dimensions of the **coordination role**: (1) having an overview of the situation; (2) setting out common policy lines between the municipality and the partners; (3) organizing cooperation between the relevant actors. Still, the coordination role has not been defined by the Flemish government in specific terms, which is a point of friction between the local and Flemish level in the localities studied (Deprez, 2018: 12).

To incentivize local governments to take on their coordination role in the implementation of immigrant integration policies in a proactive way, **Flanders provides municipalities with various sources of funding**. In **2014**, the Flemish government opened an **integration grant for local governments**²⁶. To receive this funding, cities and municipalities were to respond to three requirements. *Firstly*, at least 10% of the inhabitants of the municipality were to be of foreign origin, or a minimum of 1000 people with a foreign origin were to live in the municipality. *Secondly*, the local government had to take on an active coordination role in developing an integration policy. *Finally*, the municipality had to include an integration policy in its strategic multi-annual plans and formulate

²⁴ Source: <https://www.departementwvg.be/lokale-besturen-nemen-een-regierol-op-het-vlak-van-lokaal-sociaal-beleid-op>. Consulted on 10/02/2022.

²⁵ The coordination role for the local governments is continued by Minister Bourgeois, which is reflected in his policy memorandum on Integration of 2009-2014 and the Integration Decree of 2013, although the relevant article has not yet entered into force because no implementation decree has been issued to date. Moreover, Minister of Integration Homans refers in her policy memorandum on integration and civic integration of 2014-2019 to the need to strengthen the coordination role (Bourgeois, 2009, 7, 44; Homans, 2014, 22-23 in Deprez et al., 2018).

²⁶ This replaced the system in place until 2013, when municipalities could receive a subsidy for their integration policy based on the Minorities Decree of 2009. Their integration service was recognized on the condition that the municipality: (1) appointed an official responsible for integration policy; (2) appointed an alderman competent for integration; (3) concluded a cooperation agreement with a provincial or local integration centre; (4) made a financial contribution to the costs and operation of the integration service. In addition, an operational grant was provided for the establishment of a new integration service, enabling the municipalities to draw up an integration policy plan and to prepare an application for recognition of the integration service (Art. 29 2009 Minorities Decree).



indicators to monitor this integration policy (Deprez et al., 2018: 26). **Since 2016, this integration grant for local governments became incorporated into the municipal fund**, which means that it became part of the general pool of funding for local administrations.

Apart from the local integration grant, **various project subsidies** are allocated for the further implementation of the Flemish integration policy. Civil society actors as well as local administrations can apply for these project subsidies. **In 2016, in the aftermath of the increased influx of asylum seekers, Flanders opened a subsidy of a total of €22.6 million**, which was assigned in two instalments to municipalities with the objective to support them in the accommodation and integration of recognized refugees or of people having received a subsidiary protection status²⁷ (Deprez et al., 2018: 26).

Interlocutors in the two selected Flemish localities have noted that the Flemish funds were key for the set-up of services and initiatives for immigrant integration at the local level. Yet, **when the funding of the Flemish government for immigrant integration was phased out, local governments continued the funding** of projects that had been installed thanks to the increased regional funding made available in 2016. In the two Flemish localities studied, it is indeed local funding that currently makes up the biggest portion of financial support for the civil society sector involved in immigrant integration. Moreover, in both localities, the funding allocated to immigrant integration, including the number of services and staff working in the local administration in this domain, has increased every year during the last decade. Finally, besides the Flemish and local funding, **European funding**, and more particularly the **ESF** (European Social Fund) and the **AMIF** (the European Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund), were regularly mentioned by local actors as important sources of funding for local initiatives in different domains that promote immigrant integration²⁸ (*Ibid.*).

Between 2014 and 2021, the civic integration sector in Flanders has been significantly reformed. The 2013 amendment of the Flemish integration decree instructed the encapsulation (*de inkanteling*) of civil society organizations working on immigrant integration into a central agency for integration (*integratie*) and civic integration (*inburgering*) directed by the Flemish Community. Whilst previously the integration centres were 'private' non-for-profit organizations (although almost exclusively funded by public means), most of them now became integrated in a public regional agency. This encapsulation was completed in 2015. Henceforth, 1 public agency and 2 non-profit organisations

²⁷ The Flemish Government's decision laying down the conditions for granting the subsidy explicitly states that the municipalities can use the funds to (1) reinforce the existing municipal offer; and (2) take on the coordination role of local governments.

²⁸ Some initiatives mentioned involve the guidance to employment and training of post-2014 migrants.



manage the implementation of immigrant integration and civic integration policy in Flanders: The **Flemish Agency for Integration and Civic Integration** (*Agentschap voor Integratie en Inburgering, AGII*) (for the whole of Flanders, except Ghent and Antwerp). The cities of Antwerp and Ghent refused to join AGII and created their own integration centres. In these cities the integration trajectory is organized by local non-profit organisations: **Atlas vzw** (in Antwerp) and **In-Gent vzw** (in Ghent). The AGII includes five integration centres for each of the five Flemish provinces, as well as welcome offices and social interpreting and translating services, which local authorities can use (Deprez et al., 2018: 24). AGII also holds the responsibility to assist local governments in the elaboration of their integration policy and to provide them with expertise on matters related to integration.

2.2.2 Limited Responsibility for Walloon Municipalities on Immigrant Integration

In **Wallonia**, the most important development in the last five years in immigrant integration policies has been the **instalment of a 'welcoming trajectory'** (*Parcours d'accueil*) for newcomers in 2014. It was renamed the **'integration trajectory'** (*Parcours d'intégration*) in 2016, when it was made **compulsory** for newcomers in the possession of a residency permit of more than 3 months²⁹. The CRI's organise and coordinate the obligatory civic integration courses, the French language courses, and the socio-professional guidance. Since 2014 **every province in the Walloon region was obliged to dispose of such a regional integration centre** (8 in total). The last CRI was installed in the province of Luxembourg in 2014. In Art. 153 of the 2014 decree, the CRI's are referred to as the main partners of the Walloon government in outlining and organizing the reception and integration trajectories for newcomers. The mission of the CRI's is outlined as follows³⁰:

“(1) to develop, implement and organise the integration trajectory³¹; (2) to support local initiatives for the integration of foreigners and persons of foreign origin³² and to coordinate integration activities in the framework of local integration plans; (3) to coordinate integration activities within their

²⁹ EU residents being exempted from the obligatory integration trajectory.

³⁰ Walloon Government, 2013.

³¹ This first mission implies: 1) the creation of reception offices, where the reception program referred to in Articles 152 et seq. is provided; 2) the establishment, coordination, evaluation and information on the program, in conjunction with the coordination committee referred to in Article 152/9; 3) the centralization, in compliance with the Act of 8 December 1992 on the protection of privacy with regard to the processing of personal data, of all data relating to newcomers; 4) the emergence of and support for partnerships between the operators.

³² As referred to in Articles 154 et seq.



territorial jurisdiction; (4) to encourage the social, economic and political participation of foreigners and people of foreign origin and intercultural exchanges; (5) to train those involved in the integration of foreigners and people of foreign origin; (6) to collect local statistical data; (7) to liaise with other centres in order to pursue coherent policies throughout the French language region³³.

To be accredited by the Walloon government, the **CRI's must be created on the initiative of the public authorities or associations**. Public authorities and associations then also have equal voting rights in the administrative and management bodies. The Walloon government allocates resources to the CRI's on a yearly basis. The amount assigned to each of the regional integration centres depends on the number of people that they assist in their integration process and the number of communes that they serve³⁴. The regional funding supports a substantial part of the working of the CRI's. Like in the Flemish localities, interlocutors in both selected Walloon localities repeatedly mentioned the **ESF and the AMIF** as significant funding sources for the elaboration of integration initiatives, more particularly in the projects that guide migrants to employment³⁵. Other important actors in the execution of the integration trajectory are the civil society organizations that are recognized as 'Local Integration Initiatives' (*Initiatives d'Intégration Locales, ILI's*). These organizations can receive financial support from the Walloon region if they offer at least one of the following services: French language courses, citizenship training, social support, and legal and juridical assistance. The CRI's and the ILI's work closely together in providing the obligatory integration trajectories and complementary social services for immigrants.

The Walloon integration sector has thus been assigned the complete responsibility for the implementation of the Walloon integration trajectory. In the Walloon integration decree, **local governments are solely obliged to offer basic information on the integration trajectory to migrants upon their registration in the municipality and to refer them to the CRI's**. Whilst local governments do have the freedom to develop a policy plan and complementary programmes for immigrant integration, this is not imposed or stimulated by the Walloon region. In the interviews with actors in the two Walloon localities, the lack of involvement of the local governments in the integration trajectory is commonly perceived as an impediment to the coherence and efficiency of the Walloon integration programme.

³³ Source: <https://wallex.wallonie.be/contents/acts/0/795/1.html?doc=27778&rev>. Consulted on 11/02/2022.

³⁴ Interview B-A-1

³⁵ Interview B-C-3

2.3 Conclusions

In this section, we discussed the division of responsibilities regarding immigrant integration policies in Belgium and the ways in which funding is provided to and distributed among actors promoting immigrant integration. The most noteworthy development in immigrant integration policies is that since the 1970s these responsibilities were dispersed from the Belgian federal government to the meso-levels. In **Flanders, this process of downscaling further continued in the late 2010s, when local partners received increasing autonomy in the elaboration and coordination of immigrant integration initiatives.** In 2012, Flanders assigned the local governments the ‘coordination role’ (*de regierol*) in the integration of migrants. The rationale behind the further downscaling of immigrant integration responsibilities by the Flemish region was the idea that the local level would be able to respond more accurately to the socio-economic reality of the localities in which they operate. Municipal authorities are considered to have greater potential to develop comprehensive bonds with the local civil society network, the local economy, and private actors and to coordinate their actions. Both in the literature and among local administrations, however, there is a **lack of clarity as to what the coordination role for Flemish municipalities exactly entails** (Deprez, 2018). In **Wallonia, on the other hand,** local governments have received nearly no role in the integration decree and **the regional government has almost completely delegated the implementation of immigrant integration policies to the sub-regional or provincial integration centres (CRI’s),** almost entirely funded by the Walloon Region. The integration initiatives of the CRI’s are further complemented by the Local Integration Initiatives. Given the complexity of the immigrant integration landscape in Belgium, **a MLG approach allows comprehending the complex policymaking processes and the ways in which different actors relate and cooperate** (Campomori & Caponio, 2017: 304-6), as well as the effects of cooperation or the lack thereof on local integration policies.

Table 1. Overview main policies and actors

	RELEVANT POLICIES/ LAWS	YEAR OF ENACTMENT	MAIN ACTORS INVOLVED	ROLE/ RESPONSIBILITY OF ACTORS	FUNDING?



NATIONAL LEVEL	Migration & nationality law	15 December 1980 ³⁶	<p>Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs</p> <p>Federal Public Service Migration and Asylum Policy</p> <p>Federal Service Home Affairs</p> <p>Federal Public Service Justice</p>	The FPS Foreign Affairs sets guidelines for the management, promotion, development, and coordination of Belgian foreign policy in the areas of immigration, the fight against human trafficking and the link between migration and development cooperation.	
	Asylum and reception law	<p>Fedasil was established by the programme Law of 19 July 2002. It is operational since May 2002.</p> <p>Revision of the law in 2007 on the reception of asylum seekers and other categories of foreigners</p>	<p>Fedasil (Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers Fedasil)</p> <p>Immigration Department</p> <p>The General Commission for refugees and stateless</p>	<p>Fedasil: help to asylum seekers³⁷:</p> <p>The Immigration Department: granting visas, registering asylum applications and the voluntary return of the deportation of persons residing illegally in Belgium</p> <p>The CGVS: offers protection to foreign nationals who, upon returning to their country of origin, fear persecution, conflict, or violence³⁸.</p>	

³⁶ Articles 77 and 77a of the Act of 15 December 1980 access to territory, stay, permanent residence, and deportation of foreigners. Final amendment: Act of 10 August 2005 (MB, 2 September 2005).

³⁷ Material help, housing, food, clothing, medical, social and psychological assistance, a daily allowance and access to legal assistance and to services such as interpreters and training as well as individual support for people who wish to apply for the return assistance program to their country of origin or to a third country on whose territory they are authorized to reside.

³⁸ The CGRS examines each asylum application individually and independently. It issues certificates and civil status documents to recognized refugees and stateless persons.



<p>Anti-racism law & anti-discrimination law & the culture pact (In addition to the federal law, each region and community has its own anti-discrimination decree)</p>	<p>1972: the Culture Pact³⁹ 1981: The anti-racism law 2003: The revised anti-discrimination law that implemented the EU anti-discrimination directives</p>	<p>UNIA⁴⁰ (The Inter-federal Equal Opportunities Centre) Equal Opportunities Cell Federal Public Service of Justice Myria (Federal Migration Centre)⁴¹</p>	<p>UNIA: Promoting equal opportunities and combatting discrimination⁴². Equal Opportunities Cell: Supporting the federal minister or secretary of state responsible for equal opportunities in policy preparation on equal opportunities and non-discrimination of all protected criteria of the anti-discrimination legislation, except for gender and disability.</p>	
<p>Law for societal integration</p>	<p>2002⁴³</p>	<p>Federal service for Societal Integration Public Centre for Social Welfare OCMW in Flanders (openbaar</p>	<p>Involved in providing social welfare at the local level Granting living wages Employment and training Housing and renting support Health: urgent medical assistance/home care.</p>	

³⁹ This requires public cultural institutions to be pluralistic and not to discriminate against users on ideological, philosophical, or political grounds.

⁴⁰ The Flemish government has announced that it intends to leave UNIA when the current cooperation decree comes to an end in 2023. More specifically, a concept note from the Flemish government from July 16th, 2021 announced that Flanders is opting for a equality body with a broader mandate in which the promotion of equality and combating discrimination would be integrated into a so-called "Flemish human rights institution" (*Vlaamse Mensenrechteninstelling*). Source: <https://www.unia.be/nl/artikels/vlaamse-regering-bespreekt-oprichting-vlaams-unia>. Consulted on 10/02/2022.

⁴¹ In 2014, the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism was transformed into an inter-federal institution. The purely federal tasks were entrusted to a new government agency, the Federal Migration Centre. For those tasks, Myria is the legal successor of the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism.

⁴² UNIA functions as the Belgian equality body, which is required by the EU's Racial Equality Directive (2000).

⁴³ Source: « Arrêté ministériel désignant les agents statutaires et contractuels de l'Agence fédérale pour la Sécurité de la Chaîne alimentaire ». Consulted on 22/02/2022.



			centrum voor maatschappelijk welzijn) & CPAS in Wallonia (centre publique d'action sociale)	...	
	Labour Law		FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg	Competent to issue work permits	
REGIONAL LEVEL	Immigrant integration decrees	2003 in Flanders, reformed in 2021 2014 in Wallonia.	Flanders (Community: <i>Gemeenschap</i>) The Agency for Integration and Civic Integration Wallonia (region): The Regional Integration Centres (CRI's: <i>Centres Régionaux d'Intégration</i>) were assigned responsibility to provide the integration trajectory.	Organising obligatory the Language courses, civic integration courses. Socio-professional assistance to immigrants	
	Social Cohesion Plan (SCP) ⁴⁴ (<i>Plan de</i>	2020 -2025	Wallonia	The SCP is broken down into coordinated actions aimed at improving the situation of the population in relation to social cohesion ⁴⁵ : The actions involve	a global envelope of 23.000.000 € allocated to local

⁴⁴ Social cohesion is defined as all the individual and collective processes that contribute to ensuring equal opportunities and conditions, equity and access to fundamental rights and economic, social and cultural well-being for everyone, and that aim to build a cohesive and co-responsible society for the well-being of all. Source: <http://cohesionsociale.wallonie.be/actions/PCS>. Consulted on August 31st, 2022



	<i>Cohésion Sociale)</i>			fostering : 1) the right to work, to training, to apprenticeship, to social integration; 2) the right to housing, energy, water, a healthy environment and a suitable living environment; 3) the right to health; 4) the right to food; 5) the right to cultural, social and family development; 6) the right to citizen and democratic participation, to information and communication technologies; 7) the right to mobility.	authorities by the Walloon Ministry.
	Employment legislation		VDAB in Flanders (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding) FOREM in Wallonia (Office Wallon de la Formation Professionnelle et de l'Emploi)	Providing vocational training to job seekers, especially for the so-called bottleneck professions. The Individual Vocational Training (IBO ⁴⁶) is an example of this. FOREM has since 2015 installed a cell for the accompaniment of newcomers ⁴⁷ offering 26 hours of customized accompaniment in their search for a job.	

⁴⁶ Source: <https://www.vdab.be/nieuws/pers/2016/vdab-zet-actieplan-op-om-vluchtelingen-naar-werk-te-begeleiden>. Consulted on 22/02/2022.

⁴⁷ Cellule Primo Arrivants. Source: <https://www.leforem.be/particuliers/accompagnement-ressortissants-etranagers.html>. Consulted on 22/02/2022.



	Rental and housing legislation	In 1991, the rental legislation was implemented by the federal level. Since the state reform of 2014, the regions are competent for housing regulations ⁴⁸		Rules on residential tenancy agreements. Inspection and criminal enforcement of housing quality. Safeguarding the right to housing & the right to quality housing)	
	Walloon and Flemish Codex for Housing	Code of 1998 in Wallonia, last revision in 2021 Code of 1997 in Flanders, last revision in 2021		Including quality norms for housing	Wallonia: Fonds for housing following the floods of July 2021 which has caused a severe material damage
LOCAL LEVEL	Flemish Municipalities: coordination role on immigrant integration	2012	Local governments	Coordination role on immigrant integration	2016: One time €22.6 million from Flanders ⁴⁹

⁴⁸ We find the Walloon Housing Code, The Flemish Housing Code and the Brussels Housing Code.

⁴⁹ This money was assigned in two instalments to municipalities with the objective to support them in the accommodation and integration of recognized refugees or of people having received a subsidiary protection status.



	Flemish Municipalities: coordination role on housing policy on their territory ⁵⁰	2020, implemented in 2021	Local governments	Coordination role on housing quality	Subsidies granted by the Flemish government following the demand of a local government
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⁵⁰ The coordination role on housing policy of the local governments means that, within the limits of the subsidiarity principle, they are responsible for the elaboration, direction, coordination and implementation of the local housing policy.



Locality	Policy	Year	DESCRIPTION
Municipality A	Coalition agreement	2018-2014	There is a mention of the fact that the commune should support the regional integration initiatives, but no projects designed by the commune.
Municipality B	Coalition agreement	2020-2025	€2.2 million allocated by the local government per year between 2020 and 2025 for diversity initiatives, refugee or newcomer-oriented initiatives and programmes
	Anti-discrimination Agenda	Since 2018	
Municipality C	Coalition agreement	2020-2025	The implementation of the Walloon Social Cohesion funds for projects on the ground. Near to no target group projects installed. A focus on poverty aid and.
Municipality D	Coalition Agreement 2019-2024 (inclusive city)	2019	Nearly € 200.000 euros for immigrant integration projects per year between 2020 and 2025.
	Inclusive city-identity Agenda	2022	

2.4 Introducing the Local Cases

Table 2: Overview of the local cases

	Municipality A Small town	Municipality B Medium-sized town	Municipality C Medium-sized town	Municipality D Small town
Region	Region: Wallonia	Region: Flanders	Region: Wallonia	Region: Flanders
Size	5.000 – 50.000	100.000-250.000	100.000-250.000	50.000 – 100.000



Population composition	28.4% with a migration background (2020)	23.7% with a migration background (according to nationality of origin) (2021)	33.5% with a migration background (2021) (long history of migration related to industrial past)	25.2% with a migration background (according to nationality of origin) (2021) (steep increase in the arrival of non-EU migrants after 2010s)
Reception centre	Yes (one of the biggest of the country just outside of the city)	No	Yes (several around the city)	No
Demographics	Population growth	Fast population growth Young population	Slight population decline Young population	Population growth Ageing population
Employment	Unemployment level around the national average (Low for the national average)	Unemployment level lower than national average	Unemployment level of the highest in the country	Unemployment level around the national average but very high for the Flemish Region
Political orientation	Centre/centre-right	Socialist/progressive	Socialist/progressive	Since 2019 coalition with: the Flemish-nationalist party (N-VA), the liberal party (Open VLD), the Greens (Groen), and Christian-Democrats (CD&V).

2.4.1 Locality 1: Type A Locality, Wallonia, Small Town



The type A locality selected for the Whole-COMM project, located in the **Walloon, Francophone region** of Belgium is a small city with **less than 50.000 inhabitants**, which makes it the smallest of the four selected cases in Belgium. This locality is characterized by a rather **centre-right political framework**, with Christian Democrats (*Centre Démocrate Humaniste, CDH*) and the Liberal Party⁵¹ (*Mouvement Réformateur, MR*) in government. This city has an unemployment rate around the Belgian national but below the Walloon average. One of the reasons commonly mentioned by interlocutors for the affluence of the locality was the **vicinity of a larger city** where wages are considerably higher. The vicinity of this city has also been argued to be the reason why the type A locality has a diverse population. Indeed, in 2005, this locality had a share of foreign residents well above the national average. The high percentage of foreign residents is attributed to the presence of a large number of EU residents residing in this small city, most of whom work across the border. For non-EU migrants, the possibility of working across the border is often not a possibility until they have obtained a permanent residency permit and reside longer than 5 years in Belgium.

In November 2015, **one of Belgium's largest reception centres was opened near this locality**. The maximum capacity of the reception centre was attained in the same year. In the period between 2016 and 2022, the number of residents has fluctuated, but in 2021, the maximum capacity was again nearly attained following the increasing arrival of Afghan refugees. Surprisingly, however, the presence of this reception centre near the locality in question only had a small to moderate impact on the socio-demographic evolution of the city. Even if the city has been the home of migrant communities for decades, such as the Yugoslav community formed in the late 1990s following the Balkan wars, **only a small number of post-2014 migrants who resided in the nearby reception centre decided to stay in this locality**. High rents and the poorly attended public transportation network in this largely rural province were commonly mentioned as the main reasons why post-2014 migrants often choose to leave this locality after they leave the reception centre. Several interlocutors argued that post-2014 migrants often prefer living in larger urban areas to join existing social networks or move to Flemish cities (especially non-Francophone refugees) in the hope of getting better job opportunities and social assistance⁵². The small number of post-2014 migrants that do remain in the type A locality, interlocutors stated, are those who have children that went to school during their asylum procedure, found a job that allows them to pay for high rents, or have made meaningful social connections.

2.4.2 Locality 2: Type B Locality, Flanders, Medium-Sized Town

⁵¹ The francophone liberal party in Belgium is liberal on economic themes, and centre-right on ethical issues.

⁵² Interview B-A-1



The type B locality is a **Flemish medium-sized city** that has a **leftist tradition** and where the social-democratic party *Vooruit* (which translates as ‘forward’), the Christian democrats (*CD&V*), and the green party *Groen* (which translates as ‘Green’) form a majority. This wealthy city is home to a **university** that attracts large numbers of international students, which has rendered it particularly diverse and created job opportunities. In 2005, however, the **share of foreigners in this locality was far lower than the national average**. This seems odd given the diverse history and appearance of the town. This relatively low percentage may be explained by the fact that most foreigners in the town in the early 2000s were students or other temporary residents, who often did not register in the locality and were thus left out of the statistics. **Since 2015, however, this locality has become one with the highest number of migrants per capita in Flanders and Belgium** (Noppe et al., 2018). This number has been in a further upward trend since 2017, mainly as the result of the increased arrival of asylum seekers, this whilst there was no reception centre in or near to the locality between 2015 and 2017.

Interlocutors interpreted the appeal of this locality for post 2014-migrants to be the result of the presence of a **wide range of integration initiatives and welcoming programmes** offered by the town and the dense network of public organizations assisting newcomers in their arrival and offering social services. Moreover, also **the large availability of student studios on the housing market, employment opportunities, and the vicinity to a large city** have been mentioned as pull factors for post-2014 migrants to this locality⁵³. However, interlocutors have repeatedly noted that the often economically vulnerable migrant population commonly ends up in substandard and unhygienic accommodations and frequently becomes victim to abuses by landlords. Whilst several interlocutors noted that the increased influx of post 2014-migrants and refugees **has not greatly altered the perception of the overall economic and demographic situation in the city**, another interlocutor did not agree and argued that tensions were rising in the city since 2015, and this especially in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The scarcity of affordable accommodation, and the fact that applicants for social housing or rental assistance compete to get access to these social services⁵⁴ were argued to be the

⁵³ Interview B-B-1

⁵⁴ Interviewee B-B-6, working in a social rent service of the town in question explained that this service assists applicants according to the highest needs. More specifically, the lower the income and the higher the housing needs (a homeless person has a higher housing need than someone living in an apartment that is too expensive for them or that does not comply to sanitary standards), the higher they will be ranked on the waiting list. In many cases, post-2014 migrants have lower incomes and higher housing needs than long-term residents and, therefore, receive housing assistance first. The interlocutor in question argued that this approach often leads to frustration amongst long-term residents who may remain on waiting lists for years on end without the prospect of getting help in the near future.



reason for **increasing tensions between long-term residents and migrants**, which at times cumulates in anti-immigrant and extreme-right sentiments in certain neighbourhoods⁵⁵.

2.4.3 Locality 3: Type C Locality, Wallonia, Medium-Sized Town

The type C locality is a **medium-sized city located in the Walloon region** of Belgium. This city has a **long history of immigration** since the 19th century when immigrants settled in the locality to carry out heavy work in the coal and metal industries, which were mainly located in Wallonia and particularly around this locality. In the **aftermath of the First World War**, **migrant workers** mainly came from Central and Southern Europe, predominantly Poland and Italy. The lack of labour force further increased after World War II and Belgium continued to attract migrants, this time also from Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Yugoslavia as well as from Morocco and Turkey to work as cheap forces in the heavy industries. In 1967, 44% of the workforce in the extractive industry in Belgium was of foreign origin (Manço et al. 2021, 4). In the 1970s and 1980s, however, heavy industries were gradually closed, which led to a wave of unemployment and impoverishment of the Walloon region. This economic slowdown is still very much reflected in the **staggering unemployment rates in this locality, which is among the highest in the country**. As a result of the long immigration history, many migrant communities can be found in this locality. Several interlocutors noted that the long history of labour immigration to this city is the reason why it has a particularly welcoming attitude towards post-2014 migrants⁵⁶. This welcoming attitude is reflected in the well spread Walloon public slogan '*Wallonie terre d'accueil*'. This slogan is referred to in public documents as an important feature of the Walloon identity, related to its history of industrialization and immigration, and written on public billboards when entering the region.

Concerning the political orientation, the city is **governed by a coalition of left-wing parties**. The main socialist party of Wallonia, the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) has the majority of seats⁵⁷ and governs together with what has been called the "extreme leftist party", the PTB (*Parti du Travailleurs de Belgique: Workers party of Belgium*), and the centre liberal Party MR (*Mouvement Réformateur*). Because of the already very diverse character of the city as a result of its long history of immigration, several interviewees argued that the influx of migrants in 2014/2015 has had a negligible impact on the demographic and economic situation in the locality⁵⁸. Other interlocutors, however, mentioned the particularly high influx of people without a residence permit to this city as a consequence of the open and supportive

⁵⁵ Interview B-B-6

⁵⁶ Interview B-C-2

⁵⁷ In many Walloon cities, and particularly the old industrial cities, the Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste, PS*) has had an absolute majority of seats since long.

⁵⁸ Interview B-C-1



attitude of the social services (the CPAS), which have taken an active role in supporting undocumented migrants⁵⁹. Moreover, another interlocutor noted that the **presence of 3 refugee centres near this locality, of which one has been closed in 2021**, did come with a palpable increase of migrants to the city and has put social services under pressure⁶⁰. Furthermore, most interlocutors also note the high mobility of post-2014 migrants, who often move to other localities following housing or employment opportunities. The interviewees in this locality mentioned that **refugees would often move to larger cities**, mostly in Flanders.

2.4.4 Locality 4: Type D Locality, Flanders, Small Town

The type D locality is a **small city located in the region of Flanders**. The current coalition governing the city consists of **the Liberal party Open VLD** (*Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten*: Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats), the **right-wing Flemish nationalist party N-VA** (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*: New-Flemish Alliance) and **Groen** (the greens). Nevertheless, this city has not traditionally voted right-wing. The social-democratic party (SpA, now called *Vooruit*) had been in power for several terms of office preceding the last elections of 2019. The city has historically been a passthrough as well a destination for migrants. Yet, according to interlocutors from the local government, civil society actors, and social service providers, the increased **influx of non-EU migrants and refugees from the 2010s onwards has had an enormous influence on the economic and demographic situation in the locality**. When questioning interlocutors about the increased influx of migrants, the **year 2012** was often mentioned as a turning point during interviews, as it was around this time that this **town became a transit destination for migrants aiming to cross the canal between Belgium and England**. Due to the increased police controls and the halt of ferry connections to England, transit migration has decreased again and is now almost inexistent. In the years between 2011 and 2021, however, this locality became increasingly diverse. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of non-Belgian inhabitants in the locality rose considerably, and this especially due to the increase of non-EU residents arriving to the city. Whilst in 2011, 15,3% of the inhabitants were of foreign origin, in 2021, this number rose to 25,2%. This rise is especially due to the arrival of non-EU migrants. In 2011, 10,6% of the inhabitants were of non-EU origin, whereas in 2021 this number rose to 18,9%. The arrival of refugees since 2015, mostly from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Eritrea, explains this rise.

Furthermore, this city is **particular in the Flemish context, because of its high unemployment rate**. The large number of elderly people residing in the city, as well as the large percentage of people with lower educational attainment compared to other urban centres in Flanders, have been mentioned as

⁵⁹ Interview B-B-11

⁶⁰ Interview B-C-3



explanations for this high unemployment rate⁶¹. Moreover, various interlocutors shared the perception that, whilst this locality has suffered from high unemployment rates for decades, the increased influx of migrants has further deteriorated the economic situation⁶². In general, the influx of migrants since 2014 has been very negatively perceived by a large part of the long-term residents in this locality. Many interviewees noted that there is a **polarized** atmosphere, and the city has over the past years known a **strong increase in extreme-right sentiments** and votes⁶³. Interlocutors have noted that a large part of the population, especially the **elderly, perceives the arrival of migrants as ‘a flooding’** that has severely affected public life. The steep increase in non-EU migration over the last five year, particularly the growth of the Afghan community, and the fear for rising segregation amongst population groups within the city were commonly argued to have caused increasing polarization in this locality by interlocutors.

⁶¹ Note that the Flemish and the Walloon unemployment rates considerably differ, with Wallonia (and Brussels) having a far higher unemployment rate than Flanders. The national unemployment rate is raised by the Walloon and Brussels one. The unemployment rate in this locality is very high for Flanders, whilst it is still under the national unemployment rate, which is around 12%.

⁶² Interview B-D-16

⁶³ Nevertheless, due to the Cordon sanitaire, the extreme-right party *Vlaams Belang* has been kept out of government formations.



3. Overarching themes

In this section, we will discuss the policies, approaches, and initiatives that have been developed in the localities in response to the arrival and settlement of post-2014 migrants. We will describe which developments in the field of immigrant integration policies we have observed in the four different Belgian localities and the extent to which these approaches are ‘specifically’ local. To answer these questions, we pay attention to the multilevel governance dynamics in place. We note that the extent to which the four towns have developed local policies and approaches in response to the arrival and settlement of post-2014 migrants is very divergent because of factors such as ties with regional actors, the responsibilities granted to local governments by the regions, funding streams, political orientation of the local government, as well as socio-economic and demographic conditions in the localities. **The different regional approaches towards immigrant integration in Flanders and Wallonia and the extent to which local governments have been granted responsibilities in the domain of immigrant integration in these two regions appears to be the most decisive factor for explaining policy divergences between the localities.**

3.1 Development of Local Integration Policies

As explained in the previous section, the competency for immigrant integration has been devolved to the Belgian meso-levels since the 1970s. Regarding the cultural dimension of immigrant integration, **Flanders has taken a more *interventionist* approach towards immigrant integration** than **Wallonia**, which has adopted a far more *laissez-faire* approach towards immigrant integration (Adam, 2013). In addition, **the ‘coordination role’ on immigrant integration granted to the local governments in Flanders**, was meant to stimulate local authorities to develop local policies on immigrant integration in line with the local socio-economic and demographic conditions. This approach has, albeit only in localities where the local government grants importance to immigrant integration⁶⁴, led to a stronger involvement and **empowerment of local governments to develop ‘place-sensitive’ policies** for immigrant integration (Rodríguez, 2017, 189). Overall, we note that in Flanders, vertical coordination has a more comprehensive effect on the development of local immigrant integration policies than in **Wallonia, where it is especially civil society actors that have taken up the role of developing and coordinating local immigrant integration policies**. This results from the fact that cities and municipalities have hardly been given any responsibilities by the Walloon region. In fact, **the only responsibility municipalities have toward the Walloon region is to supply basic information to newcomers about the existence of the integration trajectory and on the obligation of certain people to follow this trajectory** upon their registration in the municipality.

⁶⁴ Interviewee B-B-4 gives the example of another Flemish municipality when she speaks of the local policies developed toward immigrant integration in the type B locality. This actor explains that this municipality only executes what Flanders imposes in terms of immigrant integration but has not developed many initiatives themselves. The interviewee notes that rather than investing in integration, this municipality rather works on deradicalization.



Additionally, the municipalities must communicate the personal information of newcomers to the Walloon region. The 'Director of Integration of people of foreign origin and equal opportunities' of the Walloon Region comments on the state of the integration trajectory in Wallonia:

“It is not always easy to ensure that municipalities fulfil their assigned role of providing the information regarding the integration centre to newcomers. We often get complaints about this (...) Still, the integration trajectory is improving as we go along, but we must remember that it is something quite recent. The budgets have increased quite a bit too, which has allowed us to do more, to finance many more operators for the activities that are offered within and outside of the framework of the integration programme”⁶⁵.

3.1.1 The Walloon Localities

Since the start of the obligatory integration trajectory, the funding for the integration initiatives have increased steadily⁶⁶. This **increase in funding allows the CRI's and the ILI's to set up projects that complement the obligatory integration trajectory** and that respond more specifically to local needs and realities of the municipalities and cities in which they operate. Next to funding from the Walloon region, **European funding** was often mentioned by the CRI's and the ILI's as important sources that **enabled civil society actors to initiate and coordinate projects on immigrant integration**. It needs to be said, however, that whilst **the CRI's are officially civil society actors, they can better be understood as quasi-NGOs, as they are nearly fully funded by the government** and recognized by the Walloon government to coordinate the integration trajectory.

In line with the relatively recent set up of integration trajectories in Wallonia and the limited expectations that the Walloon government has from cities and municipalities, we note that in both the type A locality and type C locality, **immigrant integration is far from a priority on the local political agenda**. Whilst in the type C locality there is a member of the local government who has immigrant integration as one of their main responsibilities, it is mostly the CRI that is in charge of coordinating initiatives and guiding the local approach towards immigrant integration. Indeed, the CRI in the locality oversees that the courses of the obligatory integration trajectory are provided and coordinates the professional guidance component (*Insertion Socio-Professionnelle, ISP*). Moreover, the CRI also coordinates the ILI's in the locality. Thus, in both localities A and C, the local government barely interferes in the working of the CRI. Besides, the local governments of the **type A and type C localities do not have immigrant integration policies as part of the social welfare services of the city, nor finances or support local initiatives for immigrant integration**. Instead, the initiatives for immigrant integration are

⁶⁵ Quote from interview B-W-2

⁶⁶ Interview B-W-2



largely ceded to the civil society sector, the CRI's and the ILI's, which receive most of their funding from the Walloon government, or at times from European grants. One can state that **in Wallonia, the development and implementation of regional and local immigrant integration policies has been outsourced to the 8 provincial CRI's**. Wallonia regulates its main tasks, but the **CRI's have substantive autonomy in developing their own provincial approaches and local initiatives**.

Type A Locality, Wallonia, Small Town

In the **type A locality**, there are **no local policies** that explicitly promote immigrant integration, and there is **no member of the local government who is responsible** for immigrant integration in this town. The actors that come closest to this position are the members of the local council responsible for 'Foreign Affairs' or the one responsible for 'Social Cohesion'. Moreover, the **local government does not finance, support, nor coordinate local integration initiatives (ILI's)**. This work is **left to the regional integration centre (CRI)**. Whereas the Walloon government finances ILI's in this locality, in some cases **associations that assist refugees and migrants in their arrival are self-sponsored**, of which we have identified two, but there are potentially more. One of them is the local Muslim Association, which takes an active role in receiving Muslim refugees in the town and in aiding them in logistical support regarding employment and housing⁶⁷. Another pro-migrant association provides a platform for migrant women to get to know each other, do activities together, and learn French. Furthermore, also the socialist syndicate provides language and employment assistance and internship opportunities for migrants. The courses that the syndicate provides is open to everybody, but the director of this service notes that the biggest group of beneficiaries of these services are migrants or people with a migration background⁶⁸.

Whilst there are thus no well-defined immigrant integration policies in the type A locality, there are certain initiatives directed by the local government that could indeed be perceived as promoting immigrant integration and social cohesion. Notably, **twice a year, the municipality participates in interfaith meetings** (on the Belgian national Holiday and on King's Day) in which leaders from the different religious currents (Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, Jews), the laic community, and local politicians join in a public festivity. According to the leader of the Muslim Association these public events "installs a general environment of respect in the town"⁶⁹.

A second initiative that the municipality was involved in, albeit upon request of civil society actors and neighbouring municipalities, is the **emergency reception initiative to accommodate transmigrants** on their way to the United Kingdom, who reside in the woods and along the highway near the town.

⁶⁷ Interview B-A-4

⁶⁸ Interview B-A-10

⁶⁹ Quote from interview B-A-8



Various actors interviewed in both Walloon localities have noted that there is a growing arrival of undocumented migrants as a result of the increasing repression against transmigrants in Flanders, who at times tried to cross to England through Flemish portal cities or aimed to get to Calais or other crossing points to Great Britain from there. In some cases, migrants also wish to travel through Wallonia to the North of France to England. The type A town has agreed to open emergency initiatives, such as shelter during winter months, and ensuring that the emergency medical assistance for this group of people, which the federal government ensures, is provided⁷⁰. These initiatives, however, do not necessarily reflect a very proactive approach of the type A locality towards immigrant integration, as the initiatives mentioned were either not very far-reaching, or requested by civil society actors or surrounding municipalities, which the type A locality then joined.

Type C Locality, Wallonia, Medium-Sized Town

In the type C locality few targeted initiatives have been developed for migrants, as the city support a **universalist approach** towards immigrant integration. The aim of the city's vision is to give everyone the ability to develop their full potential. Still, the local government has over the years started to take certain measures (some practical, most of them symbolic) to fight discrimination in the city and to assist migrants in their settlement in the city. Since **2016, for example, the city has set in place a reception, diversity, and social integration service** as part of the local Public Centre for Social Welfare (CPAS), which is dedicated to the management of files and administrative problems related to social assistance for foreigners residing illegally or in precarious and temporary residence. Still, the local government chose not to include the name "migrant" or "foreigner" in the name of the service, but rather to opt for "diversity" in the title⁷¹. In an interview with the director of the CPAS, published in a local newspaper, the director stated that they wished to not emphasize this in the name of the service, as to stay in line with the overarching universalist approach towards immigrant integration of the local government, which dismisses "target group-oriented services"⁷². Yet, the part of the service focusing on foreigners law is funded by the local CPAS. The local CPAS also has a second service which provides targeted services to migrants. This **migrant service** provides administrative assistance (with e.g. family reunification, marriage, divorce, filiation, equivalence of diplomas, social aid, residence permits and visas), a French as a foreign language course, social activation projects with individual assistance, as well as leisure activities. This service, which does have 'migrant' in its title, does not receive any funding from the local

⁷⁰ Undocumented migrants have the right to emergency medical assistance in Belgium as decided by the federal government.

⁷¹ Information retrieved from an interview with the head of the CPAS in 2016.

⁷² Information retrieved from an interview with the head of the CPAS in 2016.



municipality. The funds for the migrant service come from the Walloon region (*Plan de Cohésion Sociale*) and from the EU (AMIF).

Furthermore, also civil society actors have set up services targeting foreigners residing illegally in the country in the type C locality. One of the examples of such a local initiative is a **project on the validation of skills** promoted by the responsible person for labour market integration at the regional integration centre. This person talks about one of the personal ‘victories’ they achieved, which is that also undocumented migrants can partake in a validation of skills project. This attention **paid to irregular migrants** demonstrates the freedom that civil society actors enjoy in setting up target group-specific projects responding to the needs they perceive on the ground. To set up this project, the CRI called upon European funding and cooperates with different Belgian municipalities and European cities. This is thus an example of horizontal cooperation between cities within and outside of Belgium. Interesting is, however, that no Flemish cities are included in this intercity cooperation. This is exemplary of the very limited interregional cooperation between Walloon and Flemish cities. The consideration paid to the needs of irregular migrants by the CRI in this medium-sized Walloon city is barely found in the Flemish localities studied. The very different political context in Flanders and Wallonia (presence versus absence of a popular extreme-right party) can explain this difference (Adam, 2013a).

Finally, in the past years, the type C locality has taken part in several networks that foster immigrant wellbeing and fight discrimination. Firstly, the city is part of the network of ‘*Villes Hospitalières*’ (welcoming cities), a project initiated by the North-South cooperation platform CNCD 11.11.11⁷³, and the Union of Cities and Communes of Wallonia (*Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie, UVCW*). When joining the *villes hospitalière* network, a city engages to pursue three objectives: (1) raising awareness about migration and welcoming others within the city; (2) improving the reception and stay of migrants whilst respecting human rights; (3) showing solidarity with European municipalities and countries receiving large numbers of migrants and refugees. Moreover, following a call from the Belgian equality body Unia, an investigation on discrimination on the housing market has been launched by the Aldermen of Housing and Equal Opportunities of the city in collaboration with a research institute. The first report of this research will be presented to the real estate sector during the year 2022. Furthermore, in 2022, the local government spread a letter to real estate agencies to remind them of the anti-discrimination law, accompanied by a practical booklet and a form to be used during visits. We thus note an increased engagement of the local government in the field of anti-discrimination. Even though **these initiatives can be perceived as rather symbolic**, as they are not yet followed by more concrete measures to fight discrimination, they show an increased engagement of the type C locality with these issues.

3.1.2 The Flemish Localities

⁷³ Source: <https://cbcs.be/communes-hospitalieres/>. Consulted on 18/04/2022.



In the two **Flemish localities**, we witness a much more outspoken local approach towards immigrant integration instigated by the local government than in the Walloon towns. The localities have developed **targeted policies** and fund and coordinate far-reaching local integration initiatives. These local policies follow from the explicit attribution of the ‘coordination role’ for immigrant integration to local governments by the Flemish authorities. The extent to which both localities adhere to the regional framework and political vision of Flanders, however, are quite divergent.

Type B Locality, Flanders, Medium-Sized Town

In the type B locality, we note the most developed local integration policy of the four towns studied. This locality provides the highest amount of funding to support multiculturalist organizations and initiatives, to support initiatives for refugees, unaccompanied minors or young refugees, “newcomers”, or non-Dutch speakers to improve language skills, to support psychological assistance for refugees, and to support information and sensibilization campaigns on diversity. In the most recent multi-annual plan of the city, we read that the budget allocated to such initiatives comprises over € 2.2 million every year.

As explained above, the **type B locality has a left-wing coalition** with the social democratic party (*Vooruit*) in majority. Notably the locality focuses on a **multiculturalist approach towards immigrant integration**, this whilst the **Flemish government** has been steadily moving away from this approach and has started to focus more on **an assimilationist approach towards immigrant integration**. The official responsible for diversity in this locality is very aware of the fact that the local approach focused on multiculturalism swims against the current of policymaking in Flanders regarding immigrant integration:

“I am aware that from a policy perspective we are making several choices that are quite opposite to what Flanders envisages and to what other cities are doing in Flanders. We explicitly choose to focus on the encounter [between cultural groups]. (...) We are moving away from polarization. We don't participate in the 'us-them' story as Flanders is. (...) We make the city together with all inhabitants. We focus on inclusive language and communication”⁷⁴.

The member of the local government responsible for diversity explains that the specific policy on immigrant integration in the locality is based on three main pillars: **firstly, anti-discrimination and anti-**

⁷⁴ Quote from interview B-B-10



racism, secondly the reception of newcomers, and thirdly the stimulation of intercultural encounters⁷⁵. The interviewee argues that all **these three pillars are interlinked and interdependent**:

“You cannot see our newcomer policy in isolation from all the other initiatives, such as intercultural celebrations in the public space or the wide range of anti-racism policies. All that fits into that bigger picture of our approach towards diversity”⁷⁶.

Officials working on diversity in the locality, furthermore, state to be very pleased with the 'coordination role' of local governments and the liberty that comes with that to instigate local initiatives. The local official, for instance, mentions that whilst other municipalities might just merely implement that what Flanders provides or instigates “(...) here we go a lot further, and that is why we choose the word diversity policies instead of integration, as Flanders does”⁷⁷.

The type D locality focuses largely on anti-discrimination policies, which are thematically implemented. Concerning the housing sector, for example, the city actively executes situation tests and organizes training days for real estate agents on what discrimination implies and on how to deal with discriminatory acts against clients⁷⁸. The city has also set up a learning network within the cultural umbrella organization in the locality on how to deal with racism and discrimination. Within this network, the local government organizes a working group focusing on how to incorporate diversity and decolonization within the cultural sector and anti-discrimination initiatives in schools⁷⁹. Since 2018 the type B locality has also become part of **ECCAR**, the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism.

A noteworthy recent initiative taken by the local government was the **opening of a reception house for young (18 to 35 years old) and vulnerable foreign-language newcomers**, in which all social services relevant for newcomers (e.g. psychological assistance services, employment services, etc.) are gathered under a single roof. Secondly, in this space, people from the city and newcomers can attend activities and meet each other. A public employee of the city sees it as “a space for self-development,

⁷⁵ Interview B-B-4

⁷⁶ Quote from interview B-B-10

⁷⁷ Quote from interview B-B-4

⁷⁸ Quote from interview B-B-9

⁷⁹ Quote from interview B-B-4



or a space where young newcomers can follow an activation programme that prepares them for training and employment as well as a space where people can relax and enjoy themselves”⁸⁰.

A large part of the immigrant integration policies that the local government of the type B locality has installed are probably quite unique in the Flemish context for several reasons. Firstly, because it **focuses extensively on the role of the receiving society**, specifically through the implementation of a wide range of anti-discrimination and anti-racism initiatives that are promoted in all layers and institutions of the city and a wide range of interculturality and decolonization trainings and events. Furthermore, the type B locality has set up a very elaborated buddy project and other volunteering projects. In the buddy project⁸¹, long-term residents volunteer to become a ‘buddy’ for a newcomer to the city and assist them throughout their arrival and beyond.

Moreover, multicultural associations (migrant and ethnic minority associations) are of particular importance in this locality, something that we will elaborate upon in the next section of this report. Thirdly, policies and initiatives created to assist people in their arrival in the locality are quite comprehensive and far-reaching. The activation trajectory that was set up in collaboration with the social services in the aftermath of the increased arrivals of refugees in 2016 is an example of this. This activation trajectory entails a very intensive school year for young newcomers in which they receive mathematics, Dutch and IT training as well as professional orientation on the Belgian job market that informs them about the conditions, advantages, and disadvantages of certain jobs⁸². A public official notes that the aim of this integrated trajectory is that after one year participants have a realistic job target. Usually this one year is followed by a more specific training⁸³.

A social worker of the *OCMW* responsible for the integration trajectory in the type B locality notes:

“This trajectory was implemented because we saw that the integration processes for people that arrived after 2015/2016 ran in a very linear way. There were little lessons a week, which led to boredom, demotivation, which led people at times to start criminal activities because our target group [young refugees] often feels the pressure to financially support the family or the network in the homeland, which means they want to quickly earn money. Seeing this

⁸⁰ Interview B-B-13

⁸¹ The buddy project was initiated in the type B locality several years ago and has been adopted by many Flemish cities as part of their integration policies. The buddy project has become adopted as part of the 4th pillar of the new Flemish integration decree which will become operational from 2023 onwards and render volunteering work obligatory for newcomers as part of their integration trajectory.

⁸² Interview B-B-5

⁸³ Interview B-B-5



happen, we [social service providers of the OCMW] decided to knock on the doors of the local government and the OCMW and a lot of other partners with a request to set up an alternative pathway to respond to these needs. That is how we started to set up a very intensive preliminary path towards training and the labour market⁸⁴”.

The coordinator of the integrated trajectory explains that the local vision on labour market integration of refugees also differs largely from the Flemish and federal vision. Whilst the Flemish regional and federal governments focus on fast labour market integration, the city wishes to offer a longer trajectory which enables newcomers to find a lasting job that fits with their talents:

“This integrated trajectory is often a slightly longer way to a lasting job, but there are a lot of advantages (...) We have a board that is very open-minded and doesn't push us to put them in the first job newcomers can get. In this city, social services get the opportunity to work on the potentials of people. Since 2015 we have seen young refugees arriving to our city, who have had very few learning opportunities beforehand. For these people we want to see what we can teach so that they can still have a job here that they enjoy and continue to practice, a job at their level, interest, and potential. The federal government says that everyone who applies for a living wage must be prepared for work, which means that they must register with the VDAB as a jobseeker. I always found that a strange reasoning because a lot of living wage recipients are not looking for work yet because they can't; because they can't speak the language, or because of family reasons. Here we deal with this differently. We invest in people and hand them the tools so they can learn and grow⁸⁵”.

Type D Locality, Flanders, Small Town

In the **type D locality**, there is a **more outspoken alliance with the Flemish government** and the local approach towards immigrant integration is also more inspired by the Flemish regional vision than in the type B locality. The most obvious reason for this is the fact that the **mayor of this locality belongs to the same party as the Flemish minister responsible** for Integration and Equal Opportunities. The Flemish liberal party (*Open VLD*) that they both adhere to also has the most seats in the local council. The local policy expert for immigrant integration stated that the approach to immigrant integration of the type D locality was **largely inspired by the ‘Mechelen model’**. This model was instigated by the *Open VLD* mayor of Mechelen, Bart Somers, who is now Flemish minister for immigrant integration,

⁸⁴ Quote from interview B-B-5

⁸⁵ Quote from interview B-B- 5



and who was praised in Flanders and abroad⁸⁶. Both the mayor and the alderman for immigrant integration in this locality noted the strong link between the local policies and the policies of the Flemish administration⁸⁷.

Still, we cannot overlook that the type D locality also has an outspoken 'local' political agenda on immigrant integration, envisioned in relation to (perceptions of) the local socio-economic conditions of this town. The high unemployment rate, the increasing polarization in society due to the presence of migrants, and the idea of increasing segregation in the town were commonly mentioned during the interviews. In a way, the immigrant integration policies defined in this locality try to give an answer to these perceived conditions. **Policies that guide migrants to employment and aim to improve their language skills, as well as projects with a specific focus on street and neighbourhood work (amongst which neighbourhood improvement projects)** can be identified as particular to the local agenda of this town. In the most recent multi-annual plan of the city, nearly € 200.000 is allocated on a yearly basis to initiatives that promote the integration of people of foreign descent. About half of this amount is granted to civil society organizations. Below we discuss these three types of policies implemented to promote immigrant integration in more detail.

Integration through employment is a priority of the local government in the type D locality. The government funds and closely collaborates with the civil society actor, the 'Economic House', which provides trainings and assists people in finding and preparing for employment. This service functions in parallel to the service of the VDAB, the Flemish public employment agency that links jobseekers with employers. Yet, several members of the local government stated that the VDAB service functions particularly inefficient in this locality⁸⁸ and that the 'Economic House' therefore complements their work. For programmes that assist newcomers in the formal aspect of job seeking, this civil society actor has received funding from the European Social Fund. The Economic House offers a project to migrants that foster administrative skills, provides assistance in job applications to migrants, and organizes professional networking opportunities and driving licence trainings for newcomers. The Economic House also has more specifically targeted projects, such as one that has the objective of activating migrant women in the labour market.

⁸⁶ The mayor of Mechelen, Bart Somers (now Flemish minister for immigrant integration) was elected the 'World's Best Mayor' in 2016 and was praised for its inclusive local diversity policy.

⁸⁷ Interviews B-D-5 & B-D-16

⁸⁸ Interview B-D-5



Furthermore, several civil society actors in the type D locality organize **volunteer work opportunities** for migrants⁸⁹. The coordinator of the Economic House recognizes the value of volunteer work because it increases the employability of migrants:

“There are several benefits in volunteering. You strengthen your network, you improve your language, and you will at the end have something to put on your CV. This experience will facilitate one’s marketability on the labour market, to use an ugly word. Volunteering then has a lot of advantages as far as integration in the bigger picture is concerned”⁹⁰.

The second most frequently mentioned policies throughout the interviews with local members of government and civil society actors in the type D locality were **language policies** that the local government stimulates by financing and supporting civil society actors that set up language courses, and organize practice opportunities to help migrants. These classes complement the obligatory Dutch classes, which are part of the Flemish integration trajectory. The language summer courses for adults and children, which is ran almost entirely by volunteers but receives funding and is coordinated by the local government, were often mentioned throughout interviews. Moreover, other civil society actors organize conversation platforms, sometimes focused on different target groups, such as migrant women. These opportunities can “draw people away from their home environment, get to know new people and have them speak as much Dutch as possible”⁹¹. A public official working in integration in the type D locality stated that:

“In the policy plans, you can also read that the Dutch language is the key to integration. And even if the previous council also worked on stimulating the Dutch language among newcomers, in the policies of [the current] council (...), there is more of a coordinated and transversal approach to language policy”⁹².

Furthermore, the local member of government responsible for immigrant integration explains that the municipality has engaged in setting up job-oriented language lessons in which migrants can learn

⁸⁹ This programme also functioned as a pilot project for the 4th pillar of the new Flemish integration decree adopted in 2021, which will become operational in January 2023 and will render volunteering work obligatory for newcomers as part of their integration trajectory.

⁹⁰ Quote from interview B-D-3

⁹¹ Quote from interview B-D-3

⁹² Quote from interview B-D-4



some dialect or locality-specific words that are relevant to their job⁹³. The mayor of the locality notes that:

“Language policy is one thing, but also everything that has to do with employment. [Name of Town]@Work implies all sorts of trainings, which also increase chances of people to get to work. I am willing to invest quite a lot of resources in this”⁹⁴.

Thirdly, **street and neighbourhood work** receive a particular importance in the integration policies of the type D locality. This means that the local government invests in neighbourhood-oriented interventions, be it in renovating or embellishing the street(s), or in organizing events to get people from different background living in an area to interact. The mayor of the locality noted that:

“In order to make sure that people get fully integrated in society, it is not only important to get them to work, but we must also focus on those neighbourhood-oriented activities in the city that promote social cohesion, that prevent and circumvent the segregation in our community”⁹⁵.

There are several projects that work on creating social cohesion in one of the main commercial streets in the locality which has, in the past 10 years, become increasingly diversified, meaning that there are more shops now owned by entrepreneurs with a migrant background. The project coordinator of the Economic House states that in the past this diverse and rather poor neighbourhood, located quite far from the city centre has been forgotten for way too long⁹⁶. The coordinator states that it is only with the current legislation that the local government started to focus and invest in this neighbourhood. Furthermore, the member of the local government responsible for immigrant integration explains the particularities of a recent project that was initiated by the local government in this same street.

“With a non-profit organization we set up a project in this street to improve the ‘façade’ and to stimulate interaction between different shop owners and residents of different origins who often do not interact with one another. This association went through the street with a silk-screen studio on wheels to portray merchants who live next to each other. In that way they would also get to know one another. Following this project, an interactive map was made, in which the range of shops in the street are portrayed. The portraits were hung in the shop

⁹³ Quote from interview B-D-5

⁹⁴ Quote from interview B-D-16

⁹⁵ Quote from interview B-D-16

⁹⁶ Quote from interview B-D-3



*windows. The local government also invest in the façade of the street, in lighting, greening projects. We're trying to give that street a face, to improve its public image."*⁹⁷.

Moreover, a civil society actor talks about the intercultural strolls that they organize through this neighbourhood:

*"This project is important as we see that we must focus hard on fostering connection between migrants and long-term residents, so they get to know each other. A few years ago, diversity was less visible in certain neighbourhoods of this town. Some neighbourhoods changed very fast, and I think that you need organizations like us to create a relationship between new residents. We don't think that people will do this on their own. This is, I believe the job of civil society actors together with the local government. This implies that we organize a lot of cultural activities and events, always from a diversity angle"*⁹⁸.

One of the interviewees states that the main objective of the local government is "simply to remain active in this street, this through different types of actions and interventions"⁹⁹, which range from musical performances to street renovations. The intention of these interventions: "is to make certain residents aware of what this street has to offer, the kind of products that are sold and ultimately to get long-term residents to go into the shops of which they previously thought, 'oh, I don't want to go in here'"¹⁰⁰. The local member of government responsible for immigrant integration states that the investment in this very diverse street is important for the local government:

*"Because that street is a vein running through the town that connects the different neighbourhoods and reaches all the way to the centre. Everyone walks and drives through it, that's also why the local government decided to put the rainbow zebra crossing (a sign of respect for diversity) in that very street"*¹⁰¹.

Intercultural initiatives are of particular importance in this locality as well. The locality has, notably, **hired an intercultural expert**. This actor notes:

⁹⁷ Quote from interview B-D-5

⁹⁸ Quote from interview B-D-7

⁹⁹ Quote from interview B-D-5

¹⁰⁰ Quote from interview B-D-5

¹⁰¹ Quote from interview B-D-5



“My position is quite unique in Flanders, often we see that a focus is placed on deradicalization and prevention. Here the focus is very much on inclusion”¹⁰².

The local government takes intercultural initiatives in three main ways. Firstly, the city **organizes meetings with key figures from migrant communities**. These meetings serve to find out how migrant communities feel in town, what are the main issues and obstacles they encounter, and to give migrant communities a voice regarding the policies that apply to them¹⁰³. Secondly, the town **trains ‘intermediary professionals’ on intercultural competencies** to deal with cultural and religious diversity within their sectors. Those intermediaries can be social workers, teachers, group leaders, or employees of the VDAB. Lastly, the town has been taking steps to set up **anti-discrimination initiatives** this especially in the fields of education and employment. More concretely, the city focuses on fighting discrimination in the employment sector by promoting anti-discrimination policies in recruitment, particularly also in its own ranks. Moreover, the city has recently also set up a hotline where hate crimes and discrimination assaults can be reported. The intercultural expert notes that these anti-discrimination initiatives are “quite recent and will be elaborated further in the future”¹⁰⁴. Furthermore, the type D locality has recently joined ECCAR, the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism and has taken the initiative to develop an action plan against racism and discrimination. This is an example of how this town engages in horizontal governance with other European cities and how the type D locality is making the role of the receiving society more concrete. The integration officer notes that these anti-discrimination initiatives are still quite recent and will be further developed in the future: “we are starting to develop these initiatives and we also want to involve the citizens in the action plan”¹⁰⁵.

3.2 Migrant Integration Frames

In the next section, we will discuss the major integration frames used in the four different localities. We will provide empirical evidence and add relevant quotes to illustrate the immigrant integration frames evoked by local members of government, officials, and civil society actors. The frames that we present are inductively built from the interviews with local members of government. On several occasions, there are various frames regarding immigrant integration forwarded by different actors (members of local government, civil society actors, or social service providers) in one locality. In these

¹⁰² Quote from interview B-D-4

¹⁰³ Interview B-D-4

¹⁰⁴ Interview B-D-4

¹⁰⁵ Interview B-D-4



cases, we will discuss the roles the different frames play in the locality, which ones are more dominant amongst which type of actors, or how these different frames are used simultaneously and, ultimately, how (the mixture of) frames might affect immigrant integration policies or their implementation.

Table 2. Dominant frames in the different localities

	Dominant frames used by local policymakers	Dominant frames used by local policymakers/ integration officer	Dominant frames used by civil society and social service providers	Dominant frames used by members of the local opposition
Type A locality	Hands-off frame/non-frame: non-interventionism in immigrant integration.		Social cohesion frame: a focus on the social inclusion of migrants, emphasizing the co-responsibility of the receiving society and newcomers in forging a cohesive community.	
Type B locality	Multicultural/diversity frame: focus on fostering contact between different cultural groups and supporting ethnic associations. A strong focus on the role of the receiving society.	Multicultural /diversity frame		Assimilationist frame: the idea that the migrant arriving in the society needs to adapt and blend into the existing cultural codes.
Type C locality	Ideological universalist frame: No distinction is made between different groups receiving social services from the local government. The aim is to provide the same services to everybody. Welcoming city identity frame		Welcoming city identity frame: The focus on a united city identity that both long-term residents and newcomers can identify with.	Work and language are key frame: A strong conviction that employment and language acquisition will lead to the integration of migrants.
Type D locality	Welcoming city identity frame	Assimilation frame	Work and language are key	Assimilation frame



3.2.1 Type A Locality, Wallonia, Small Town

In the type A locality, the universal/non-frame prevails. The local government primarily takes on a *laissez-faire* attitude towards immigrant integration, which is reflected in the fact that there is no member of the local government in charge of immigrant integration. The members of the local government closest related to this are the ones responsible for ‘international solidarity’, ‘foreign affairs’, and ‘social services’. These last two actors were interviewed, and their frames on immigrant integration will be discussed¹⁰⁶. Apart from not having an alderman responsible for immigrant integration in the municipality, the director of the regional integration centre maintains that:

“The town commonly fails to provide the right information or neglects this responsibility. This whilst the only legal responsibility of the commune is to provide information to newcomers about the integration trajectory upon their registration in the municipality”¹⁰⁷.

Furthermore, according to the director of the CRI, there are several civil servants who are hesitant in aiding newcomers in their registration process, that is, they would fail to provide the right information or not refer them to the CRI upon their registration in the commune. Service providers confirm that there have been complaints about racist comments in some cases by one civil servant. In response to this complaint, the CRI has started diversity trainings for the personnel of the local government “as a way to try to reach these civil servants in an indirect way”¹⁰⁸. In general, the director of the CRI states that rather than a hostile environment, the approach of the local government can better be described as a culture of disengagement: “the local officials maintain that migrants will leave anyway, so why should they get involved?”¹⁰⁹.

This sense of disengagement with immigrant integration was also noticeable during the interview with the member of the local government responsible for foreigners’ services, as well as with social service providers of the local centre for public welfare (CPAS). These actors stated on several occasions during the interview that most migrants leave because of several reasons: first, because they join existing networks and their communities in bigger cities, often in Flanders; second, because

¹⁰⁶ Interview B-A-1

¹⁰⁷ Quote from interview B-A-1

¹⁰⁸ Quote from interview B-A-1

¹⁰⁹ Quote from interview B-A-6



of the sparse and badly served public transport network in the region; and third, because the housing prices are particularly high in this town. Employment was generally never perceived as the problem in this locality. Indeed, there are work opportunities in the region, but often the French language requirements are too high for non-Francophone migrants to take advantage of them. The housing prices are also adapted to the higher wages in the larger foreign city close to the locality, where Belgians and other EU-migrants often work. The vicinity of the locality to this city makes housing prices far too expensive for people who work in Belgium. The latter factor is one that recurred in every interview conducted in the locality. The member of the local government does, however, not see it as the responsibility of the local government to assist post-2014 migrants leaving the reception centre near the town in their search for affordable housing. The fact that people leave is rather seen as a normal consequence of the local conditions. The members of the local government and social workers of the public centre for social welfare (CPAS) interviewed did not see it as their responsibility to change these conditions or to set up programmes that could facilitate the access of migrants to housing or employment.

From these accounts we discern a non-frame/hands-off approach towards immigrant integration by social service providers and members of the local government. This frame is also reflected in the way in which civil society organizations interpret their work. A civil society actor working on social inclusion, for example, implied that they do not assist their public differently according to their status or background:

“So, concretely, we do not work specifically with newcomers, except for a project we did in collaboration with the regional integration centre, that means that we do not make any distinction between the way in which we approach or work with our different beneficiaries. We help people with disabilities, people who receive social assistance from the CPAS [the public centre for social welfare], those who have been excluded from the labour market for over 2 years, people who have little qualifications, and then newcomers and migrants, of course”¹¹⁰.

3.2.2 Type B Locality, Flanders, Medium-Sized Town

The **dominant integration frames** used by the members of the local government and local officials in the type B locality are the **multicultural and diversity frames**. These frames are in quite some ways **closely related**. The member of the local government responsible for immigrant integration mainly

¹¹⁰ Quote from interview B-A-3



focused on the multicultural frame and when asking her about her vision on integration, she focused largely on the **subsidies of the local government for ethnic associations**:

“In [name of locality], we have a regulation whereby we encourage different communities to form (ethnic) associations, to join or form a mosque, or any other association they like. With these subsidies, local associations can also implement a module to accommodate newcomers from their own community. The local government supports local associations or socio-cultural activities financially, grants subsidies for projects or when they provide certain facilities and supports the association organisationally on the precondition that they comply to certain conditions, such as attending public festivities at least twice a year, having a board, demonstrating that the association has met a certain number of times a year, or setting up language classes. That is how funding for associations can increase. That is how the funding for an association can be build up”¹¹¹.

Interesting is that the **local officials see these ethnic associations as a communication channel**, which allows the local administration to appeal to these associations when needed and to exercise some influence over the communities they represent. The motivations for subsidizing multiculturalist associations in the type B locality include having a direct point of contact to migrant populations, and being able to intervene in times of crisis and to influence their working. One of the interviewees explains:

“There are for example groups from Somalia, China, Nepal that have been here for a long time and who stand also in direct contact with the newcomers in this city. And because we as a local government encourage ethnic associations to form, we also keep a direct line to them to engage into a relation with the city. When corona arrived, for example, this link allowed us to give the right information, to enable people to ask questions, to get around fake news and to make sure that the vaccination willingness went up [in certain communities]. In short, the fact that we work on this connection between these associations and the local government means that we can react to problems a lot quicker and more effectively. We make sure that people know that there is a place where they can ask their questions”¹¹².

In the type B locality, there are also many **local officials working in the ‘diversity’ department**. When asking local officials in a joint interview about their perception on immigrant integration, they continuously stated that “here [in the locality], we do not speak of integration, we prefer to speak of

¹¹¹ Quote from interview B-B-10

¹¹² Quote from joint interview local officials B-B-1



‘diversity policies’¹¹³. Moreover, they maintained that diversity policies are a lot more comprehensive in this locality than the integration policies implemented by the regional Flemish government, “which simply implies receiving people, getting people to work and then let go”¹¹⁴. One of the respondents explained the rationale behind choosing the term ‘diversity policies’ for the local policies in the following way:

“We have 170 nationalities here [in the locality] and how do you deal with that in the long run? (...) I think that integration policy is only the top of the iceberg. That does not mean that we do not think that integration is important. Reception, language, and job-market insertion is a prerequisite (...), but Flanders is really approaching integration policies too much in the short term - that also means integration of maybe one to three years, depending on what we are talking about, to find a house, to find work. And then they let go. Diversity policies means that we focus on the encounter between people, positive perceptions, and ultimately to empower people to participate in social life and to form part of communities. To be able to make your voice heard (...) Start your own association even! (...) We go much further than those initial survival mechanisms [of the integration trajectory]. The idea behind diversity policies is that we should respond to what diversity means in the long run (...) So that means that you must diversify your society for all life phases, that means taking into account that ethnic diversity is present in all aspects and layers of life: that is healthcare, elderly care, childcare, schooling, associative life, and so on. Diversity governance implies that diversity becomes embedded into the organisational and associative life of the community, to ask an effort from migrants to the same extent as from the receiving society, and this on the long term”¹¹⁵.

Concretely, the diversity policies of the type B locality **focus on diversifying social life, on placing responsibilities on the receiving society and on participation of newcomers**. The local officials explain that diversity policies are concerned with “**making society**”, which means that the local government does not only focus on the target group of these policies (the migrants), but also on the responsibilities of the receiving society: “**with the diversity approach to policies, we try to make the role of the receiving society concrete and take the focus away from the responsibilities on the newcomers only**”¹¹⁶. In practice, there are a wide range of policies implemented in this locality, which intend to make **the role of the receiving society** concrete. These span from anti-racism policies to intercultural policies. The objective

¹¹³ Quote from joint interview local officials B-B-4

¹¹⁴ Quote from joint interview local officials B-B-4

¹¹⁵ Quote from interview B-B-4

¹¹⁶ Quote from interview B-B-4



of the policies is to make organizations aware of diversity, to support migrant communities, and to bring different communities into contact.

We should note that this approach is divergent from the dominant Flemish integration policy frame that became increasingly assimilationist since 2004 and insists more and more on individual duties for migrants rather than their access to rights (Adam & Xhardez, forthcoming; Kostakopoulou, 2010). A third integration frame that came up in the type B locality was the **assimilationist frame, this by an interviewee from the extreme-right party *Vlaams Belang***, which is not represented in the local government. In the type B locality, the social democratic party has been in government for the past 25 years and the extreme-right party has never been part of the local government. Whilst this is the case everywhere in Flanders because of the *cordon sanitaire*¹¹⁷ implemented in the 1990s, the extreme-right party is much less popular and consequently has only little impact on the public debate in this locality compared to other Flemish cities. For example, the **assimilationist frame is of much bigger importance in the public debate in the type D locality, where *Vlaams Belang* has gained far more support, than in the type B locality**. Nevertheless, the influence of *Vlaams Belang* – as well as the other Flemish sub-state nationalist party *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (N-VA) – on the public debate on immigration and integration in Flanders, as well as on the political priorities of other political parties regarding these matters, can hardly be overlooked (Deswaef, 2018).

3.2.3 Type C Locality, Wallonia, Medium-Sized Town

In the **type C locality**, the main integration frames used are the **universalist/non-frame and the inclusive welcoming city frame**. Whilst in the type C locality, there is a local councilperson responsible for immigrant integration, they believe their task to be limited and give great freedom to the regional integration centre to coordinate the immigrant integration initiatives on the ground. The local government takes a very limited role in organizing, coordinating, and funding the integration sector. Nevertheless, there is a **quite outspoken local vision on “equal opportunities”, which can best be captured by the universalist/non-frame**. This frame entails that **all people should receive the same services**, and that no distinction should be made between different groups of people and the social services they receive or have access to. Designing different services for different groups of people would go against the idea of equal opportunities, which the local government wishes to promote in the town. According to the alderman for immigration integration, setting up specifically targeted services would reify social differences and cleavages:

¹¹⁷ The *Cordon Sanitaire* is a joint agreement among all (traditional) parties not to enter a coalition or cooperate with the extreme-right party.



“I prefer to talk about inclusion in the broad sense, rather than about integration. Everyone has their place [in this city]. I think that we should not impose distinctions of any kind: of gender, of origin, of language. In fact, I dream about a situation in which the regional integration centres should no longer exist so that people would no longer have to go through categorical services”¹¹⁸.

The director of the regional integration centre further explains the idea of inclusion of migrants rather than integration:

“We to use the term ‘inclusion’ rather than integration, as integration implies the idea that those people are not already with us, that they would have to be integrating into something. This whilst in fact they are already present, and they already participate at different levels of society. The word ‘integration’ has a pejorative connotation (...). In a way it implies that we would have to accompany migrants to acquire citizenship. Integration is a collective responsibility, not an individual responsibility of migrants”¹¹⁹.

A second integration frame that came out of the interviews in the type C locality was the **'inclusive welcoming city' frame**. The alderman for immigrant integration argues that “the main objective is to make [name of the locality] an **inclusive city at all levels**. It is really one of our objectives and priorities for this term of office, to make [name of the locality] a **hospitable city** (...)”¹²⁰.

Still, the universalist/non-frame seems to dominate for the members of the local government, especially in the eyes of social service providers and civil society actors. A social service provider working at the public centre for social welfare (CPAS) states that there is:

“(...) a complete lack of a local integration strategy in [name of the locality]. We, at the CPAS have the means to carry out actions, because of a Local Integration Initiative subsidy from the Walloon government”¹²¹.

The interviewee regrets the fact that there is no real integration strategy at the local level, as he believes this impedes the migrant service of the CPAS from having a proper room or space to welcome

¹¹⁸ Quote from interviews B-C-8 & B-C-9

¹¹⁹ Quote from interviews B-C-8 & B-C-9

¹²⁰ Quote from interviews B-C-8 & B-C-9

¹²¹ Quote from interview B-C-4



the public and other kinds of possible support¹²². The interviewee explains that in fact the migrant service of the CPAS, which offers French courses, individual support, and social assistance, is not part of the transversal plan of the local government, and that the CPAS prioritized other services such as social integration and elderly homes. He states:

“I don't think that the integration of foreigners is a priority at the level of the commune. The migrant services of the CPAS, are not present in the policies, and we are not a mandatory mission of the local CPAS”¹²³.

According to the interviewee, this “non-obligatory character” of the migrant service makes that this service is largely ignored, or at least appears not to be a priority of the local government. This forms an important obstacle in its functioning, as it impedes setting up a collaboration with the ‘*service de l'égalité de chances*’ (Service for Equal Opportunities) and has resulted in the service not having a proper space in the city to do their work. Still, the interviewee states:

“I don't feel like complaining because there is enough work and, in the end, I am supported by my hierarchy, people are happy with my work and I have a carte blanche to do my job, the CPAS gives me the freedom to carry out initiatives and set up projects focused on migrant populations”¹²⁴.

The migrant service of the CPAS in the type C locality came about largely thanks to the individual initiative of this interviewee. The service, specifically addressing migrants, is thus an exceptional service within the social services of the city. There are generic social services to which post-2014 migrants can turn, but not many particularly designed to assist migrants in their integration. Local immigrant integration policies that are different from, or additional to, the regional policies are rather developed by civil society with funding from Wallonia or Europe.

3.2.4 Type D Locality, Flanders, Small Town

In the locality type D, there were many different frames used by different actors to refer to the policies designed to accommodate newcomers in the town. The **assimilationist frame** was mentioned as an important one by the mayor and the extreme-right opposition, this whilst the local official for

¹²² Interview B-C-4

¹²³ Quote from interview B-C-4

¹²⁴ Quote from interview B-C-4



immigrant integration policy rather uses the **welcoming city identity** and the **social cohesion frame**. At times, political actors, such as the mayor, refer to multiple frames at once. Non-public service providers, on the other hand, spoke of the importance of **work and language acquisition as a frame** for the integration of post-2014 migrants.

The different prevailing frames are, among others, the result of the complex coalition in the local government, consisting of the liberal party Open VLD, the Christian democrats, the sub-state nationalist right-wing party N-VA, and the Greens. Furthermore, during the last decade, the extreme-right party *Vlaams Belang* has gained increasing support in this small city. As a consequence, the assimilationist approach to integration is very present in the local public debate. Even though *Vlaams Belang* has never entered the local coalition, the assimilationist frame should be taken into consideration. Several researchers have demonstrated the impact of extreme-right parties on mainstream parties, even if not governing (Deswaef, 2018). At the same time, the local councilperson responsible for immigrant integration has substantial freedom in outlining immigrant integration policies. Belonging to the green party, this councilperson mostly adopts the inclusive welcoming city frame and the social cohesion frame. Alongside these frames, many of the immigrant integration policies in the type D locality focus on fast labour market integration and place the responsibility for integration with individual migrants. Yet, in the last years, policies focusing on anti-discrimination have also been implemented, bringing in the role of the receiving society.

When asking the local official responsible for immigrant integration about her perception on immigrant integration, she answered: “in this city we believe that everybody who lives here belongs to [name of locality]¹²⁵” This inclusive framing ‘*Everybody [name of locality]*’ has been adopted by all members of the local government as an overall frame to approach integration in this city. The alderman for immigrant integration states that this framework “was decided upon with all the parties in government at the start of the legislative term” and explains that:

“What we want, above all, is that once someone lives and works here, they feel as [name of inhabitants of the locality]. Whether they come from Iraq, Iran, or Germany, or just from Antwerp. We want everybody to have as many opportunities as possible and we want them all to have the tools to participate in this society. And for some people you must make more of an effort than for others. (...) if you read our government agreement, it says that everyone who is recognized here as a refugee and comes to our city will be treated as [name of inhabitants of the locality]. Everyone is welcome here”¹²⁶.

¹²⁵ The literal frame used contains the name of the locality so therefore this more anonymous frame.

¹²⁶ Quote from interview B-D-5



The integration officer of the city explains that this model of the welcoming city was largely inspired by the efforts made in the city of Mechelen, which is seen as an example on immigrant integration in Flanders. The local official explains this model in the following way:

"You don't have to be integrated to be part of this town. Once you live here, you belong here. And then it is up to us, as a local authority, and as a host society, to take the necessary steps so that you feel well. For us, you already belong here. In this city we really go for inclusiveness, and that clashes with the idea that you are going to approach one community distinctively"¹²⁷.

Yet, the local official responsible for social services stated that the local government was deviating from this intention not to approach certain groups differently, after the steep increase of Afghans to this small city and the increasing fear for segregation. This fear of segregation was a topic present in almost every interview conducted in this locality. The city is indeed starting to set up more focused policies to integrate this specific group of Afghan refugees. Furthermore, the Alderman for immigrant integration explains that they are withdrawing from the more "multiculturalist approach" that the previous legislation adopted towards immigrant integration. The Alderman explains the rationale of the local government to make this choice:

"In the previous legislation there were funds for a Latina evening, the Nepali New Year celebrations or for organising a Moroccan barbecue, for example. But what we saw during these activities was that they always attract the same kind of people, and people from the same community (...) So I'd say that was not very inclusive. Only people already convinced of the advantages of diversity, would attend these events, and that the city did not manage to connect the common city dweller"¹²⁸.

The mayor of the locality portrays a rather different integration frame and discourse. He defends an assimilationist vision on integration in his city, even if he did not mention the term 'assimilation' as such. The mayor from the liberal party (Open VLD) responded in the following way when he was asked about the way in which he perceived integration:

"I don't even mean that migrants should 'adjust', I use the word 'tuning in' to the new environment where they live (...). It is a big challenge to motivate people to adapt to the society they are living in and not to stay within the bubble of the society they come from. I am not asking that those people should lose their identity, or surrender it, on the contrary. (...) As a liberal, I'm not saying that you should force people to wear certain clothes for example, but

¹²⁷ Quote from interview B-D-4

¹²⁸ Quote from interview B-D-5



rather that you should try to convince them to adapt to the new society. I feel that people who do that are respected and accepted. People who don't, have great difficulties in society to find a house, to find a job. I believe that that must be made clear to them. If you want to advance in society, you must adapt to society (...) I am convinced that [people from this city] would respect people, no matter their origin, who make the effort to adapt"¹²⁹.

By choosing the word 'tuning in' (*afstemmen*), rather than 'adjusting' (*aanpassen*), we believe the mayor aims to distinguish his point of view from an assimilationist perception on integration coined by the extreme-right party, commonly known for its slogan '*aanpassen of opkrassen*' (adapting or buzz off). Yet, the frame of the mayor does come close to an assimilationist frame, even if it is less extreme than the one forwarded by the member of the party *Vlaams Belang*, as we will explain below.

The **position of the mayor is one of inciting people to adapt to the receiving society's tradition**. The responsibility to find a house or employment and of integrating into society is placed with migrants rather than with the receiving society. It is the **individual responsibility of each migrant to fit into society** and to gain access to housing and to employment. This point of view is only slightly more lenient than the interviewee from the extreme-right opposition party. The mayor does not argue that people should distance themselves from their ethnic identity, whilst the interviewee from the extreme-right party did state more crudely that:

"These people must assimilate completely to our society. (...) We [at Vlaams Belang] adhere to the views that Eric Zemmour expressed during his campaign for the presidential elections of 2022 in France: complete assimilation! People must conform completely to the customs, the mentality, and the culture in which they come to live, people can keep their own culture, but only in private, inside their walls. So, our opinion is that integration into the population to which you've come, first as a guest and later you can become a full citizen. That, of course, is the difference -the term assimilation- compared to other parties who always speak of integration. We go a lot further in that because that's the only solution to avoid societal problems from arising"¹³⁰.

To distinguish the views of the mayor of the type D locality from the ones forwarded by the member of the extreme-right party, we should note that **at another part of the interview, the mayor also mentions the importance of the inclusive frame**. About this frame, the local official for immigrant integration repeatedly mentioned:

¹²⁹ Quote from interview B-D-16

¹³⁰ Interview B-D-15



“You can have respect for your traditions, but you can also express your traditions in your private life. For me, these don’t have to be Flemish. I think this should be a society where we all respect each other and where we can also respect people who have a different origin. That is what we do in [name of town] with the people of Antwerp and the French-speakers. We approach them as just pertaining to our city, which is why we have the motto in our town: ‘Everyone is an [name of the inhabitants of the town]’. But this means that people from other origins must also feel as if they pertain to [name of the town]”¹³¹.

So even if the assimilation frame is defended by certain actors in the locality, this frame does not have a very far-reaching effect on the policies that are implemented as the member of the local government responsible for immigrant integration and the one responsible for social services place more effort on inclusivity and the role of the receiving society in fostering immigrant integration. Still, in comparison to the previous coalition that was in power until 2019, a move away from more multiculturalist approaches towards immigrant integration can be detected. Unlike the type B locality, the other Flemish locality, the local government turned against the involvement of ethnic associations in the integration of migrants. The new coalition of four parties (with the liberal party, the N-VA, the green party, and the Christian democrats) is much less keen on financing multicultural events than the previous coalition, which included the social democratic party (previously called SpA and now *Vooruit*) that delivered the mayor.

However, some aspects of a multiculturalist approach are still upheld by various civil society actors. A representative of one of the most prominent ethnic associations in the locality explained how they must change their way of operating. The association concerned was created 25 years ago as a coalition of several ethnic associations (such as the local Turkish and Moroccan association and the African platform). Whilst previously the organization focused mostly on sociocultural events, now the new local government incites them to invest especially in providing 'bridge figures' to different communities, to invest in education ambassadors, health ambassadors¹³² and to distance themselves from their previous more multicultural working.

3.3 MLG Dynamics in Migrant Integration Policymaking

¹³¹ Quote from interview B-D-16

¹³² Interview B-D-8



The following section includes insights retrieved from the interviews with local actors as well as survey results. In all four localities, interviewees were asked to respond to questions regarding the frequency and form of interactions with other actors concerning the integration of post-2014 migrants before and during the pandemic. We should note that in every locality there were a few respondents who did not fill in the survey that was sent to them, but this number remains limited. The reasons for not filling in the survey varied. In some cases the respondent found that they did not occupy their position long enough to respond without bias to the survey (usually a period of less than 3 years). In other cases respondents did not feel that their position did not sufficiently involve immigrant integration policies to respond to certain questions posed in the survey.

3.3.1. Actor’s Functions and Their Roles in Governmental Networks

Table 3. Overview of actors and their governance roles

	Local government	Civil society actors	Social services Public Centres for Social Welfare: OCMW (Flanders) and CPAS (Wallonia) Employment agencies: VDAB (Flanders) and FOREM (Wallonia)	Private businesses
Type A locality	Providing information about the integration trajectory to migrants registering in the municipality	Regional integration centre: coordination of civil society actors and the implementation of the Walloon integration trajectory Local Integration Initiatives: providing components of the regional integration trajectory	Guidance towards employment	No outspoken role. The CRI does provide anti-racism and discrimination trainings to employers



		MIRE: Les Missions Regionals pour l'Emploi asbl		
Type B locality	Coordination role and funding of civil society actors working on immigrant integration as well as ethnic associations	Very wide range of projects aiding migrants in settling in the locality: language assistance, trainings, and psychological assistance are some of the most important projects set up by civil society actors	Overseeing housing quality Guidance towards employment	No outspoken role. The local government does provide anti-racism and discrimination trainings to employers
Type C locality	Providing information about the integration trajectory to migrants registering in the municipality	Regional integration centre: coordination of civil society actors and the implementation of the Walloon integration trajectory Local Integration Initiatives: providing components of the regional integration trajectory MIRE: Les Missions Regionals pour l'Emploi asbl	Guidance towards employment	No outspoken role. The CRI does provide anti-racism and discrimination trainings to employers
Type D locality	Coordination and funding role	Language courses and practice opportunities Guidance towards employment & training opportunities (the Economic House)	Overseeing housing quality Guidance towards employment	No outspoken role. The local government does provide anti-racism and discrimination trainings to employers

3.3.1.1. The Walloon Localities



In both Walloon localities, type A and C, the regional integration centres were identified as the main actors working on immigrant integration. The Walloon immigrant integration trajectory is entirely outsourced to the CRIs, which have been called “quasi-NGOs” (Adam, 2013b) and have a central function to coordinate and ensure that the regional integration trajectory is provided. In order to do so, CRIs usually collaborate with local **civil society actors and social service providers, which can in turn be funded by the Walloon government to set up Local Integration Initiatives (LIIs)**. LIIs can receive funding if they provide components of the regional integration trajectory or other related administrative services. Civil society actors, social service providers, local authorities, and foundations can apply for ‘LII funding’ with the Walloon government on a two-yearly basis. These actors can, for example, receive LII funding if they offer French language training, citizenship courses, assistance for socio-professional insertion, or provide social or legal support specialized in foreigners’ rights¹³³. The regional integration centre has been granted the responsibility to implement the Walloon integration trajectory and to coordinate actors providing local integration initiatives. In the type A locality, for example, the director of the regional integration centre sees it as their role to play an organizing, coordinating and outreaching role towards immigrant integration initiatives and actors. The director of the CRI of the type A locality explains the way in which the CRI collaborates with other actors in the locality:

“We work with the local civil society organizations on the development of projects: with the house of culture, and with the civil society network uniting the organizations that offer language classes, citizenship courses, and qualification training for migrants. Furthermore, we have also set up projects with the nearby asylum centre. We regularly collaborate to inform the residents about what will come next once they have obtained their residence permit. More recently, we met with them to propose a basic intercultural training course for municipal staff. We came up with an offer and they showed interest, so we are in the process of putting this into practice to try to propose ongoing training for municipal staff”¹³⁴.

The **role of the local governments**, in contrast, was described as ‘**absent**’ in the type A locality, and as ‘**minimal**’ in the type C locality. There are, however, other regional services that did play an important role in immigrant integration. Concerning guidance towards employment, the **Walloon office for employment and professional formation (le FOREM)** was identified as an important actor. Since 2016, FOREM disposes of a **cell for newcomers (le dispositive primo-arrivants)**. This service consists of provincial cells operating in both the type A and type C locality. These provincial cells organize individual interviews and/or group sessions to: 1) facilitate administrative procedures; 2) identify skills and

¹³³ Source: <http://actionsociale.wallonie.be/integration/initiative-locale-integration>. Consulted on 29/04/2022.

¹³⁴ Quote from interview B-A-1



needs: studies, training, professional experience, languages; 3) inform newcomers about the job market; 4) provide job offers according to the profile of the clients; 4) direct the newcomers to appropriate services: screening, language test, training in French as a foreign language, training leading to qualifications, validation of skills and/or experience, diploma equivalence, work experience¹³⁵. Regarding **housing** policies, there are no specific services that focus on providing housing to migrants or refugees in the type A and C localities. Post-2014 migrants are to resort to mainstream housing aids and services such as social housing and social real estate agencies to receive housing or rental assistance. Yet, staggering waiting lists for social housing in both localities, as in most of Belgium, often leaves post-2014 migrants without or with too little help.

Locality 1: Type A Locality, Wallonia, Small Town

Whilst the actors identified in both Walloon cases are similar, there are some differences in the ways in which these actors perceive their roles. **Particular to the type A locality is the large involvement of pro-migrant groups** involved in more informal immigrant integration projects. The **pro-migrant groups identified are for example religious-oriented organizations**, such as a Muslim Association and an association for migrant women. Both organizations do not receive any funding. The Muslim association focuses on aiding Muslims in settling in the small city by helping them to find employment or housing or facilitating their access to other services. The migrant women association engages in offering social activities and provides informal French language classes. This last organization can count on a location offered by the municipality to organize their weekly gatherings.

Furthermore, there are a number of civil society organizations that historically aid workers by organizing socio-cultural events, providing socio-professional assistance, language and math education, courses for obtaining a driving licence, amongst other activities, but have in the past years also started to provide targeted courses and assistance for migrants in response to funding made available by the Walloon government or the EU. Lastly, there are also province-wide organizations that provide targeted services in the type A locality. The **Christian Workers Movement** (*Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien*), the **Centre Action Laïque** (Secular Centre) and the **communist syndicate** are examples of these organizations.

Protests and mobilizations in solidarity with refugees, as well as undocumented migrants and transmigrants have also taken place in the type A locality. With the opening of one of the largest reception centres of the country just outside of the small city, the director of this reception centre noted that “there

¹³⁵ Source: <https://www.leforem.be/particuliers/accompagnement-ressortissants-etranagers.html>. Consulted on 30/04/2022.



was a wave of solidarity from local residents and a lot of people who offered to volunteer”¹³⁶. Furthermore, in the last years, the locality has also become a transit destination for migrants trying to reach Northern France and eventually England. Whilst previously ‘transmigrants’ would pass through Flanders, increasing police controls and repression has pushed many of them to change their route. The local community has showed a strong solidarity with these transmigrants crossing the nearby highway and often residing in the surrounding woods. Upon request of NGOs, civilians and surrounding municipalities, the local government of the type A locality has opened a crisis reception centre in the locality and has provided food, and other necessities¹³⁷. It was the local population and surrounding municipalities who pushed the local government to act on this issue and to increase the support provided.

Locality 3: Type C Locality, Wallonia, Medium-Sized Town

Particular to the type C locality is that **public service providers take a more active role in immigrant integration than in the type A locality**. Whilst a large part for the funding for these services comes from the Walloon government, the local CPAS does allocate part of its resources to a service particularly designed to provide administrative aid to migrants, with a focus on undocumented migrants. The person responsible for the service working on immigrant integration at the CPAS notes that they collaborate with the CRI, especially in coordinating the obligatory integration trajectory, but regrets that the collaboration is not extended outside the framework of the integration trajectory¹³⁸. Moreover, the lack of engagement of the local government in coordinating and supporting the integration initiatives apart from the regional integration centre was perceived as impeding the well-functioning of the services they provide.

In terms of **mobilizations and protests**, there have been no physical protests against the arrival of refugees in the surrounding refugee centres. Yet, several interviewees noted that there are tensions in the disfavoured neighbourhoods in the city, and this especially in spaces where there are apartment blocks in which social housing is provided. One respondent, who is the head of a local NGO on the ground floor of a social housing block, noted that they at times receive racist letters and that there is a lot of tension regarding the presence of newcomers in disfavoured neighbourhoods in the city. There is a negative image of migrants prevailing in post-industrial areas of the city, where there is economic suffering and people often feel like they are competing to receive access to social services. These tensions were not acknowledged by the members of the local government or the

¹³⁶ Quote from interview B-A-7

¹³⁷ Information retrieved from a local newspaper and from interview B-A-5

¹³⁸ Interview B-C-4



director of the regional integration centre during the interviews. These actors rather focused on the positive perception of migration in the locality, emphasizing that diversity is in the DNA of this post-industrial city¹³⁹.

3.3.1.2. The Flemish Localities

In both the type B and D localities, the local government has the coordination role on immigrant integration. Both local governments fund projects that promote immigrant integration and collaborate with civil society actors as well as public services (the OCMW and VDAB), amongst other actors, to implement certain aspects of their policies. In both cities, there is a collaboration with the Flemish Agency of Integration that provides the obligatory Dutch language classes and civic integration courses.

Locality 2: Type B Locality, Flanders, Medium-Sized Town

The local government or mayor, local officials, non-public service providers, and public social services take the most prominent role in coordinating immigrant integration initiatives. **The local government takes on a very strong monitoring role**, as it finances and coordinates the working of the civil society actors, and multicultural associations. The civil society actors operating in this locality are almost all entirely funded by the local government and multicultural associations can receive funding. A particularly important civil society actor, entirely funded by the local government, is a reception home or the 'Welcoming House' that was opened in 2019. The city has provided a large building for this reception home where all important social services for migrants in the locality are brought together: the public centre for social welfare, the VDAB, translating services, psychological assistance, education and training services. A local official working at the service for diversity explains that these services are open one day a week with the aim of "providing assistance to refugees in a very accessible way so that they do not have to run around all over the city to get the right services"¹⁴⁰. This Welcoming House is also a space where young refugees can relax, cook, have access to internet, and socialize. Another important component of this project is the promotion of intercultural encounters. The coordinator of the Welcoming House explains:

"The advantage of having a building where all services are joined is that we can stimulate neighbourhood connection. For example, we organized a festival to celebrate the anniversary

¹³⁹ Information retrieved from interviews B-C-8 & B-C-9

¹⁴⁰ Quote from interview B-B-4



of the [name of Welcoming House] and a lot of people from the neighbourhood came. We had free food and there were cultural events”¹⁴¹.

Lastly, local government in the type B locality also **collaborates with and funds multicultural associations** (even if this funding is often not enough to pay employees, but rather to support the functioning of associations, as we will explain below). These multicultural associations are important partners for the local government, as the city relies on them for the reception of newcomers, to partake in city events, such as festivities, and to **function as intercultural mediators**. The city collaborates with key figures of these associations to spread information to a specific cultural group or to address certain issues, as we have explained above.

Concerning guidance to **employment**, this city has created a **dense network of actors: the Public Service for Social Welfare (OCMW)**, which has a specialized team working exclusively on professional activation, **the local VDAB** (the Flemish public employment agency, which has a service for non-native speakers), **and civil society actors**. In this locality, **the OCMW has worked out a training programme of one year**, which is specifically targeting young (often minor unaccompanied) refugees. The team coordinator of the professional activation team at the OCMW explains that non-native Dutch speakers can either be aided by the OCMW or by the non-native speakers service of the VDAB, depending on the needs of the person. People who really need a lot of support will be aided by the OCMW, which provides an integrated trajectory, as we have explained in more detail in part 3.2. “If we think the VDAB's offers should suffice”, the social service provider at the OCMW explains, “then the person is followed up by the VDAB's service oriented towards non-native speakers [*anderstaligen*] (...)”¹⁴².

There are several social services and civil society actors that are involved in matters concerning **housing**: to ensure housing quality, and to tackle homelessness. The housing services are less targeted towards migrants than the employment services. Migrants can resort to mainstream housing services such as social housing and social rental agencies. The housing services providers involved in the locality are **the OCMW (Public Centre for Social Welfare), the CAW¹⁴³ (generic social assistance centres entirely funded by the Flemish government), social housing rental offices, the local discrimination reporting point, the spatial policy department of the local government, and other public actors**. The actors gather twice a year in a housing consultation. There is also the public **housing department**, which oversees

¹⁴¹ Quote from interview B-B-13

¹⁴² Quote from interview B-B-5

¹⁴³ The CAWs are quasi-NGOs. This is a centralized service fully supported by the Flemish government for generic social assistance issues.



housing quality in this town. This department ensures quality control of housing and fights desertion and dilapidation of the housing market. The head of the housing department explains:

“The bulk of what we do is housing quality inspections and procedures related to certificates of conformity or declaration of inadequacy/unfitness, the fight against slumlordism and so on. We work with several partners: police bodies from the federal judicial police, the local police, the public prosecutor's office, the housing inspection, but also several welfare actors such as the OCMW, CAW, the tenants' association, and the union of tenants [de huurdersbond], to focus on providing support for vulnerable tenants. So, we are mainly concerned with housing on the rental market, and especially the lower segment of the rental market, but not only that. We also have files with owner-occupiers who then live in a problematic situation, but that's a smaller piece of what we're doing”¹⁴⁴.

An operator of a social housing service further explains:

“Here in this city, we [the social rental office], which is closely involved with social housing services, are seen as an added value. I think we can call it a progressive city government in that respect. We also receive extra subsidies from this town to further develop our work. So, in that respect, the cooperation is excellent”¹⁴⁵.

Services like the social rental office or social housing assistance are not conceived to work only with migrants or refugees. Yet, operators note that a large part of their work is focused on migrants, even if they are not able to put an exact number on this. For this reason, we can thus consider them housing services accessible to newcomers. There is, as we have mentioned previously in this report, **no refugee centre nor are there Local Accommodation Initiatives (LAI) present in this town**. Members of the local government defended this choice by stating that the city already received a lot of ‘voluntary influx’ of refugees. Since there are no LAIs in the type B locality, **refugees must find a house or studio on the private market or find social housing, for which waiting lists are very long**.

Locality 4: Type D locality, Flanders, Small Town

In the network analysis for the **Flemish type D locality**, we see that, similarly to the type B locality, **the local government and civil services** are the most important actors in providing and coordinating local immigrant integration measures. Out of the surveys, we learned **that the local government has started to take a more central role in coordinating immigrant integration in comparison to the pre-pandemic period**.

¹⁴⁴ Quote from interview B-B-2

¹⁴⁵ Quote from interview B-B-6



According to the Alderman of immigrant integration, it is since the new legislature that the local government started to take a more active coordination role in immigrant integration:

*“Upon the start of the current **legislation (in 2019)**, we noted that there were overlaps in the programmes that civil society actors offered and that they had a lot of liberty. Together with the integration officer and the intercultural officer, the local government now oversees that everyone fulfils their cooperation agreement, achieves their goals, and collaborates with other actors, especially because we witnessed that actors often used to work alongside one another and that there were a lot of overlaps. I think it's very important that organizations learn to work together. Resources are limited so actors must define their boundaries and draw up a kind of business plan to make sure their objectives are achieved. We as a local government monitor these objectives. My predecessors [from the social democratic party Vooruit] used to just give out subsidies and then let things happen. For years, there was no cooperation between the social services and the Economic House, for example. We are stimulating collaborations between different services. The poverty policy plan focuses very strongly on integration. The employment pact also contains a large section on integration. That is exactly what our team is trying to do: to get actors to work together. A very difficult exercise! We really try to start from a vision and an overarching policy: if we want people to integrate in society, we need an overarching plan”¹⁴⁶.*

This increasing **supervising role of the local government** has meant that the **functioning and the projects initiated by civil society actors are now monitored**. As we explained in part 3.2, certain civil society actors have had to revise their programme and abandon or revise activities that promoted multicultural events, and other activities that promoted multiculturalism. Civil society actors thus have **less autonomy** in setting up projects since the start of the new legislation period. Furthermore, particular to the type D locality is that the **business sector is more involved** in integration initiatives, which might be explained by the “language and work are key” approach to integration adopted by the local government. This means that the local government and civil society actors collaborate **quite intensively with private companies and the business sector in comparison to the other three localities studied**. The Economic House has, for example, set up initiatives to prepare employers for (ethnic) diversity in the workplace and organized events to connect people with a migrant background and employers.

Furthermore, in the type D locality there is, like in the type B locality, **no reception centre nor are there Local Accommodation Initiatives (LAI) present in this town**. In principle, no local actors are responsible for providing housing for refugees, who, like other migrants, **must find a house or studio on the private**

¹⁴⁶ Quote from interview B-D-5



market or find social housing, for which waiting lists are very long. Regarding **more general local housing policies**, the local government has invested specifically in **tackling abuses by landlords as well as the dilapidation of the real estate market**. The mayor explains the vision of the local government on the matter:

“I am conducting a very tough policy against abusive landlords. I force people who own property either to restore them and adapt them to the housing code, or to sell them, demolish them and build new buildings that are comfortable and that guarantee quality of living. This is in the interest of everyone, because if you can't guarantee housing quality, then you're going to have big problems in your society”¹⁴⁷.

The mayor, furthermore, states that the problem is that Afghan communities settle in neighbourhoods with bad housing quality, something that impedes their integration process:

“There was a lot of abuses in [name of the town] by offering horrible houses at absurd prices full of mould for € 700 per month! Refugees and people in precarious situations often pay that because they have no choice (...) In order to tackle these issues, we have the action [name of project], which was started by the previous government and which we are continuing. City employees go to neighbourhoods in town, street by street, to check the quality of the houses. So, after the humanitarian crisis, when the subsidies from Flanders halted, we did continue the contracts as we realized the importance of this work”¹⁴⁸.

Lastly, in terms of **protests and mobilizations**, respondents have pointed out that several physical small-scale anti-migrant protests have taken place in the locality in recent years. A member of the opposition party, the extreme-right party *Vlaams Belang*, noted that they had organized gatherings to protest the opening of new mosques in the city¹⁴⁹. The overall political climate in the type D locality has changed with *Vlaams Belang* having doubled its voice since 2014. Moreover, the perception lives that migrant communities, especially the Afghan community, which has been growing in the past years, are closing in on themselves. A large part of the long-term residents in this locality are anxious about the increased arrival of (non-EU) migrants in the locality, and local members of government as well as civil society actors noted that the sentiment of fear has risen amongst long-term residents in the city. Whereas the local government focuses on the responsibility of migrants to find work and learn the language, recent voting results have also had the opposite outcome, with the local

¹⁴⁷ Quote from interview B-D-16

¹⁴⁸ Quote from interview B-D-16

¹⁴⁹ Interview B-D-15



councilperson responsible for immigrant integration has taken this 'shift to the far right' as a strong incentive to work on inclusivity in the city, and to promote neighbourhood projects, anti-discrimination initiatives, amongst other projects. We will explain these different aspects of the local integration policies in more detail in part 3.3.3.

3.3.2. Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflicts

Table 4. Overview of horizontal and vertical cooperation and conflicts

	Type A locality	Type B locality	Type C locality	Type D locality
Main identified conflicts horizontal coordination	Lack of involvement of local government Problems with the local administration in sending beneficiaries to the regional integration centre	Too much is expected from multicultural associations in the local integration policy without the proper funding provided	Lack of involvement of local government	Phasing out of multi-culturalist elements from the local integration policies
Cooperations horizontal coordination	Cooperation within the framework of the <i>Plan de Cohésion Sociale</i> (social cohesion plan)	Gathering of social services and civil society actors on immigrant integration in the reception house Ethnic-minorities platform		Multicultural forum
Main identified conflicts vertical coordination	Segmented nature of public policies in Wallonia that hinders the implementation of integration projects by the regional integration centre	Obligatory character of the 4 th pillar of the 2021 Flemish integration decree Flemish Agency of Integration is neglecting its role as a regional coordinator Solidary cities, an initiative of the NGO <i>Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen</i> (refugee work Flanders)		Obligatory character of the 4 th pillar of the 2021 Flemish integration decree



Cooperations vertical coordination		Centrum-city consultation (<i>centrumsteden overleg</i>) of the Flemish Association for Cities and Municipalities VVSG (<i>Vlaamse Vereniging voor Steden en Gemeenten</i>)	Regular contact between the regional integration centre and the administration of the Walloon region, related ministries and cabinets	Structural consultation with the Agency for Integration once every three months
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In what follows we will lay out the main dynamics of collaboration and conflict identified throughout the interviews in the four localities. We will, furthermore, offer a comparison of these dynamics between the different localities and regions. The results from this analysis are based on the inductive coding of interviews with local actors in the four localities, as well as from the interviews conducted with regional actors.

3.3.2.1. The Walloon Localities

Locality 1: Type A Locality, Wallonia, Small Town

Concerning the dynamics of conflict and collaboration in the **type A locality**, we noted throughout the interviews that the cooperation between the regional integration centre and civil society actors is considered very fruitful. The **main source of conflict regarding horizontal coordination in this locality is clearly the lack of involvement of the local government** in immigrant integration initiatives, as this same issue was frequently evoked by the regional integration centre and pro-migrant groups or associations. In some cases, this **lack of involvement was seen as a real problem, in other case it was more viewed as a given that did not heavily affect the functioning of the service provided.**

The director of the regional integration centre states to be in contact on a regular basis with the local government, especially on administrative questions and issues of social emergency, and particularly in relation to the conditions of transmigrants. However, the director explains that:

“With the population service of the city we often interact. All the communes of this province have a partnership agreement to work with us, but they do not finance us, we receive funding from Wallonia. The town refers newcomers to us, but this is not always very fluid. Especially in [type A locality], this is not always done with a lot of efficiency or willingness. It is not the most proactive municipality,



unfortunately their collaboration is not very steady. We often have to remind them that they should refer newcomers registering in the commune to us”¹⁵⁰.

A social worker at the regional integration centre highlights that they as a CRI have too little political influence on the local government:

“We are socially minded, and we defend certain principles that perhaps do not resonate with the vision of certain municipalities. But in the end the problem is that we have nothing to impose on them (...) Communes are obliged by the Integration Decree to do certain things [such as providing information about the Integration Trajectory], but as there is no sanction if they do not fulfil their responsibilities, in the end they can do what they want”¹⁵¹.

The director of a pro-migrant group that sets up (amongst other initiatives) permanent language education opportunities for migrants as well as other residents of the town in a precarious situation noted that:

“I sometimes have contacts [with the local government], but that was mainly before the covid period. Now there are less interactions. I am sometimes in contact with social workers from the CPAS of the town (...), but with the municipal administration or the elected politicians, not at all in fact”¹⁵².

When asking this actor on whether this inexistent contact poses a problem to the functioning of their services, she answered:

“As long as the subsidy is guaranteed by the Walloon Region it does not pose a very big problem. It would be nice if the town would refer newcomers to us, but they seem to find the trainings that we offer by themselves. I don't know what this town could add to our work for the moment. Maybe it would be possible to establish collaborations, but for the moment I cannot envision these. Yet, migrants have communicated the fact that the communal administration is not very friendly with them and that it is at times complicated for people to obtain the documents”¹⁵³.

¹⁵⁰ Quote from interview B-A-1

¹⁵¹ Quote from interview B-A-2

¹⁵² Quote from interview B-A-10

¹⁵³ Quote from interview B-A-10



Regarding **vertical multilevel coordination**, the director of the regional integration centre in the **type A locality** evoked the **segmented nature of public policies in Wallonia**, and the problems this causes for the integration trajectory. He states:

*“Politics in Wallonia are extremely segmented. The regional integration centres are attached to social action (service publique de l’action Sociale) and the socio-professional insertion programme to the public service for trainings (service publique de formation et développement). **Some of the programmes that we offer do not fall under the same ministry**, which is why so many issues arise. Very sad. Besides, this is a default of the integration policies. For example, the fight against poverty in Wallonia is steered by the minister-president. He can manage this in transversality with the local authorities. The fact that integration is specifically attached to social action really complicates things: In the field of immigrant integration, we have a very wide field of action, but I have a very restricted regulatory framework (...) If I want to set up a project for children under 18, then I have to turn to the educational services of the Fédération de Wallonie-Bruxelles, if I want to organise something to do with trainings, I must turn to the public service for trainings and development (...) This segmented political reality makes it very difficult to deploy actions on the ground. This is true for all the regional integration centres as it is also the case for the work of civil society actors. Within the sector we often refer to the ‘institutional lasagne’, and the extent to which it complicates our work”¹⁵⁴.*

Locality 3: Type C Locality, Wallonia, Medium-Sized Town

The collaborations and conflicts mapped in the second Walloon locality, the **type C locality**, are **similar to the ones noted in the type A locality**. Most importantly, the **lack of involvement of the local government** was equally noted to be the most important point of conflict in horizontal coordination. Local service providers, an employee of FOREM working in the cell for newcomers, and a director of a pro-migrant group all noted this problem regarding horizontal relations in the city¹⁵⁵. The head of the migration service at the CPAS perceives this lack of involvement of the local government in the service **as a huge obstacle and as having direct effects on the services that are provided**:

“The big difficulty is that I work with teams that are scattered all over the town. We don’t have our own reception area for the public that we assist. It would be ideal if we would dispose of space somewhere in the centre with a reception area where people can come have a coffee

¹⁵⁴ Quote from interview B-A-1

¹⁵⁵ Interviews B-C-3, B-C-4, B-C-7 & B-C-10



and wait before having an appointment, socialize. We have been given the means to carry out migrant services at the CPAS, but there is still a lack of a real local integration strategy and a lack of collaboration of the local government with a service like ours, so we are far from an ideal situation. An identifiable space where we could receive our public would be very helpful”¹⁵⁶.

Still, in comparison with the type A locality, the local government established far more interactions with the regional integration centre in the type C locality. Local Integration Initiatives, for their part, have far less interactions with the local government. Both in the type A and type C localities, conflicts are quite varied. In the type C locality, one local official noted that there was **competition between civil society actors and public actors (CPAS) to obtain funding from the Walloon government**. In the type C locality, service providers at the regional integration centre were also rather critical of the content of the integration trajectory. One actor pointed out the problem of the ‘linearity of the integration trajectory’. The director of the regional integration centre explains:

“The main problem with the integration trajectory is that it is experienced by beneficiaries as too linear. So, when people arrive, they are supposed to go to the commune, then they are sent to us, then they have the social accompaniment that we put in place and then they take French and citizenship courses. But people’s lives are not linear, it doesn’t work like that. There should be more flexibility, so people can fit the trajectory with their other activities”¹⁵⁷.

3.3.2.2. The Flemish Localities

Locality 2: Type B Locality, Flanders, Medium-Sized Town

Differently from the Walloon localities, the **local government in the Flemish type B locality takes a very active role** in supporting, funding, and coordinating the actors working on immigrant integration. The **horizontal relations are much more institutionalized** than in the Walloon localities. There are a **multitude of platforms and networks** within the city allowing different actors working on immigrant integration to exchange. Moreover, there is a strong city platform for multicultural associations, which allows them to exchange with one another and to inform the city of potential problems that they might encounter in their communities. This platform gathers on a bi-monthly basis¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁶ Quote from interview B-C-4

¹⁵⁷ Quote from interview B-C-8 & B-C-9

¹⁵⁸ Information retrieved from the official website of the city.



The main horizontal conflict noted is that the town relies for many services on the multicultural associations, but people working there are often not paid at all. A local official who sets up collaborations with multicultural associations states:

“Multicultural associations almost never work with paid staff and yet a lot is expected from these associations from a policy point of view. They are expected to play a bridge-building role to lower thresholds for newcomers to access services in the receiving society, to take on a reception role for refugees, and so on. Usually, these associations do this because of their commitment, but it quickly becomes too much. So, I try to make sure that we don't ask too much from them, because often they will say yes to everything the local government asks because they are dedicated, but this can lead to problems. It may mean that associations end up not being able to get things done, which does not help the associations nor the diversity policy of the city. It is a problem if we assume things to happen that ultimately cannot be done because of a lack of personnel, manpower or time. I think we must proceed in a very respectful way and make sure that the support capacity of multicultural associations is not surpassed”¹⁵⁹.

The **main conflict** evoked by local actors of the type B locality concerned the **vertical coordination with the Flemish government, and at times with the federal government**. At several moments during the interviews with policy makers and civil society actors in the locality, the difficult relationship with the Flemish government regarding immigrant integration was evoked. Examples include Flanders claiming to have initiated initiatives that were developed in this locality, the obligatory character of the 4th pillar of the new integration decree (obliging volunteering work for newcomers or a buddy-trajectory), and the fact that the Flemish Integration Agency is not taking a more active role in setting up platforms for different Flemish municipalities and cities to exchange about integration in their respective localities⁷³. Most importantly, the **locality takes an overtly multiculturalist approach** towards immigrant integration, this at a time when the **Flemish government is progressively weakening and withdrawing multiculturalist elements** from its policies while at the same time moving towards a tougher approach to immigrant integration (Adam & Xhardez, forthcoming: 8).

The conflictual vertical relations with the federal government arise particularly in relation to the potential opening of Local Accommodation Initiatives and a reception centre, which the local government has rejected as they argue to already have a very high spontaneous influx of migrants and a cramped housing market. Various local officials criticized the federal level by stating that “for them the story ends with bricks, but there is not a more comprehensive vision on what comes next”¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁹ Quote from interview B-B-9

¹⁶⁰ Quote from interview B-B-4



The slicing of responsibilities regarding reception (a federal competency) and integration (a regional competence), with the local governments having the coordination role on integration, impedes, according to these actors, a more “cohesive” approach towards immigrant integration that connects accommodation with societal integration, participation, labour integration, and other elements¹⁶¹.

Locality 4: Type D Locality, Flanders, Small Town

Similar to the type B locality, **the local government of the type B locality strongly take up its coordination role**, engaging civil society actors in its immigrant integration policies. The difference with the type B locality is that multicultural associations play an increasingly less important role in the local integration plan, as was explained in section 3.2. By contrast, there is more collaboration with the private sector in the type B locality, as part of projects that promote fast labour market integration of migrants. Still there are certain multiculturalist initiatives that continue to persist in the locality. The multicultural advising council, which gathers once a month, is an example of this. This organization functions as the official spokesperson of the ethnic-cultural minorities in the town and the hub between the local government, other agencies, and minorities. Through its advisory function, the advising council acts as an advocate for the minorities.

The local official responsible for immigrant integration explains that there is an intensive and substantive cooperation between the type D locality and the Flemish government, and that the Flemish Agency for Integration is generally a very interesting partner. More precisely, the local integration official and the Flemish Agency for Integration have a structural consultation once every three months. These meetings serve to exchange information and to signal needs that are pointed out to the local government by the civil society actors working on immigrant integration on the ground. The Flemish Agency of Integration also provides the obligatory Dutch language classes and civic integration courses in this town. We noted throughout the interviews with members of the local government and with people working in the local administration that **the relationship between the type D locality and the Flemish government was very cooperative**. The city also organized a pilot project where the Flemish government is experimenting with the obligatory social participation and volunteering work as part of the integration trajectory.

3.4. Decision-Making

The federalization of immigrant integration competencies in Belgium has led to the divergence of regional integration strategies and different allocated roles to actors involved in implementing

¹⁶¹ Interview B-B-4



regional integration policies, as has been explained in part 1 of this report. In Flanders, the downscaling of integration competencies to local governments in 2012, when municipalities were granted the coordination role on integration, has led to the decentralization of local integration policies within the region (Schillebeeckx et al. 2019). In Wallonia, where local governments have nearly no competencies in the field and where the regional integration centres take a central role in providing and coordinating integration initiatives, local approaches are less developed. The regional integration decree, carried out by the regional integration centres, largely defines the course of action in the region. Yet, despite the rather limited role of local municipalities in Wallonia, we find that local approaches to immigrant integration diverge from each other. To understand these diverging approaches, it is important to look more closely at factors influencing the localized decision-making process in the realm of immigrant integration.

Besides influences from the regional levels, there were various other contextual (locally specific) factors influencing local decision-making with regards to immigrant integration. Factors influencing local integration policymaking that were described in the interviews include party politics, funding streams, previous experience with migration, socio-economic realities, and the size and connectedness of the municipality. The role of local politics and the previous experience with cultural diversity were most frequently mentioned as guiding local decision-making processes on immigrant integration measures. The local political colour largely influences the overall integration path developed. Some parties define integration from a more assimilationist perspective, focusing on the individual responsibility of migrants to culturally and or economically integrate, whilst others view it more from the perspective of social assistance, or inclusivity, or anti-racism. The previous experience with cultural diversity mainly affects whether the arrival of post-2014 migrants is perceived as problematic or if diversity is appreciated as an added value or part of the identity of the municipality. The extent to which these perceptions of diversity are acted upon, however, continue to diverge across the regions, with a far more interventionist approach in Flanders and a more laissez-faire attitude by Walloon municipalities. We explain the decision-making processes in the four localities studied in more detail below.

Table 5. Dominant factors influencing how local policies are decided and acted upon by actors in different localities

	Factors that crucially influence local policymakers' actions and decisions	Factors that crucially influence actions/decisions/mobilization of 'political actors' (e.g. advocacy NGOs, pro-migrant or anti-migrant movements, local councillors from opposition parties etc.)	Factors that crucially influence the actions and decisions of street-level bureaucrats/non-profit service providers/trade unions/private employers /employers' organizations
Type A locality	The perceived fact that few people want to settle in the locality as most asylum seekers leave to larger urban centres.	The need to assist trans-migrants.	
Type B locality	Party politics (local coalition and their ideologies) Pride in being a progressive government and in the progressive approach towards ethnic diversity which stand out in the Flemish context Path dependency Electorate	The perception that diversity forms an added value to our city	
Type C locality	Pride in being progressive / socialist city with a history of migration (B-C-8& B-C-9)		The tradition of openness and diversity in the locality Diversity it in the "DNA" of the locality" (B-C-7)
Type D locality	Increasing segregation between 'locals' and migrant communities in the town/anti-migrant feelings and high unemployment rates (B-D-5 & B-D-16)	Anti-migrant sentiment	Increasing segregation and polarisation between different groups in the local community



			Rising extreme-right sentiment in the locality The higher percentage of unemployed with migrant background
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3.4.1. Locality 1: Type A Locality, Wallonia, Small Town

The discourse forwarded by local policy makers as well as by social service providers of the CPAS when asked about immigrant integration in the locality is that refugees will leave the locality anyways soon after they leave the reception centre that is located just outside of this locality. **The smallness of the town, the poorly served transportation network and the high housing prices** in comparison to neighbouring towns are mentioned as the main factors for people leaving the town. A social worker of the social services explains this in the following way:

“As I said, in the centre of [name of town], there are many people who leave because they think that the town is too small, it's a village for them and they want to go to the big urban towns, often even in Flanders. In many cases, there is also the factor of pre-existing communities. People choose to go to join their family or people from their community. Indeed, compared to the number of people who pass through the centre, very few of them stay here. In fact, only families with children tend to stay, and they integrate very easily”¹⁶².

The local councilperson responsible for ‘Foreign Affairs’ mentions that:

“Often the problem is the high rent prices in this town. Usually, people who leave the reception centre spontaneously tend to look for housing in the region with the help of volunteers and the strong civil society network present in the locality. But the rents are so high that it's not easy. At times they also leave to larger urban centres because there they would be able to find work, (...) potentially they go to other cities because they know that there are communities that can assist them to find work, which is often a problem (...), I think that they don't necessarily have the possibility of working in the nearby capital, in any case

¹⁶² Quote from interview B-A-4



it's not easy to find work here for this group of people. In general, also, people know best themselves. They search, and what we can do is sometimes support them in their search, but we're not going to encourage them to stay here either"¹⁶³.

In short, the overall discourse is **that refugees often do not stay anyway**. Furthermore, the local policy maker interviewed clearly states that they do not think it is the responsibility of the local government to lift barriers for migrants to settle in the locality, nor to incite people to stay in the locality. This discourse explains the **'hands-off' approach towards immigrant integration** in the type A locality.

The member of the local government responsible for social services pertaining to the liberal party MR (*Mouvement Réformateur*), mentioned the value of the Walloon integration trajectory in promoting social cohesion in the locality and to fight communitarianism and segregation in the locality on various occasions during the interview. This member of the local government was pleased with the Walloon integration trajectory and did not think the local government should take any further responsibility than the one granted to them by the Walloon government:

"Communitarianism appears when communities close in on themselves and start to function in a kind of vacuum. Well, that's obviously likely to lead to problems in society, and that's certainly not the kind of society that I want. I want it to be a society in which everyone can exchange, and I think that's the spirit of the legislator [of the Walloon government] to have instigated the integration trajectory. So, this must be applied! There must be some political will at the level of the local administration to support this trajectory"¹⁶⁴.

3.4.2. Locality 2: Type B Locality, Flanders, Medium-Sized Town

In the type B locality, the reasons for adopting a certain approach towards immigrant integration mentioned by members of the local government and local officials were **party politics, path dependencies, and the pride taken in being a progressive government and having a progressive approach towards ethnic diversity which stands out in the Flemish context**. We should keep in mind that the policies adopted in this locality fit with the **diversity and multicultural frame**, as we have explained in part 3.2. When asking the member of the local government responsible for diversity in this locality about the factors that influence the local integration, she answered:

¹⁶³ Quote from interview B-A-6

¹⁶⁴ Quote from interview B-A-4



“We are a progressive board here. Before me was my colleague Alderman for Diversity, she belongs to the same [party as the] mayor so we all adhere to the same persuasion. So, the current policy is a continuation and a strengthening of what has been happening. That's how it goes. You must lay foundations so that you can then jump on that and accelerate further. Of course, it also does a lot that we have had a mayor with a migrant background here for 3 years. He is also from my party, [the social democratic party Vooruit], and I am very grateful to him, I like his approach a lot. This confidence of the population then also gives an extra push, some extra confidence that we can count on a progressive population in this city”¹⁶⁵.

Furthermore, **path dependencies** have been mentioned as another explanation for the decisions made by the local government. The alderman for diversity in the type B locality states:

*“Also because of past **experiences** that have shown that fostering connection and having confidence in people is the best way to go, that in the end you can make more social 'profit' that way. I think it is out of conviction that we have built a valuable pattern in this city. It's the DNA of our city as well. I would find it very strange if we suddenly adopted a completely different approach towards diversity in this city. In fact, everybody in the coalition agrees with this approach, together we put progressiveness first and we take everyone into consideration. My role as the alderman for diversity is to make sure that the objectives concerning diversity are monitored by my colleagues. But there's a lot of common ground for that”¹⁶⁶.*

Lastly, the local member of government responsible for diversity mentions the electorate of this town to be a reason why they pursue a unique approach towards integration and diversity in this locality:

“We have a progressive population in [name of locality], we see that in the voting results. We also know that that's because a lot of highly educated people live here. Traditionally, you attract a lot of diversity because you are a university town. Diversity is really in the DNA of the city here. We also saw this in our city monitor. One of the questions asked was: 'how do your residents feel about diversity?' In our city monitors we have seen that the people of this locality are the most tolerant in Flanders towards other cultures and towards diversity. That is very nice to see, and it confirms something that we already feel and see in our streets. That also gives me the confidence to make those progressive choices as

¹⁶⁵ Quote from interview B-B-10

¹⁶⁶ Quote from interview B-B-10

*in fact there is a pride in being a progressive political coalition*¹⁶⁷.

3.4.3. Locality 3: Type C Locality, Wallonia, Medium-Sized Town

In many interviews in the type C locality, such as with people involved in the regional integration centre and with the alderman for integration, **migration in general and the European migration crisis specifically were not perceived to have had a big impact on the socio-economic or demographic situation of the locality**. Firstly, some interviewees, notably people working at the regional integration centre, noted that it did not affect the socio-economic situation of the locality at all, nor did it put a lot of pressure on the local social services¹⁶⁸. In some cases, local actors argued that migrants would commonly leave the locality quite soon after they left the reception centres, often to find jobs in urban centres in Flanders. The high unemployment rate in this locality (which with 20,6%¹⁶⁹ lies considerably higher than the national and Walloon average) and the accompanying difficulty to find a job in the locality was mentioned as an explanation for the low impact that migrants have on the locality. Other actors did not agree at all with this statement and argued that there was indeed a high influx of post-2014 migrants to this locality, and this especially of irregular migrants who, because of the open and *laissez-faire* attitude of the city and the pre-existing migrant networks, find opportunities to make a living. A member of the local opposition of the liberal party MR (*Mouvement Réformatoire*) argued that:

*“We have a great influx of irregular residents on our territory because the social services are very generous here. In general, irregular migrants are taken care of in a positive way. So, I think the city does what it can. It's never enough, so I don't criticise the action of the municipal authorities because we don't have a lot of means”*¹⁷⁰.

The open and *laissez-faire* approach towards migration and integration of the local government, civil society actors, and public social services leads to a general welcoming attitude to refugees and undocumented migrants in the type C locality.

Interestingly, the perception of the impact of immigration on the locality might be affected by the role of the interviewees. People working for the regional integration centre or for social services

¹⁶⁷ Quote from interview B-B-10

¹⁶⁸ Interview B-C-1

¹⁶⁹ Unemployment figure in 2014.

¹⁷⁰ Quote from interview B-C-11



might have less the impression that there is a considerable influx of migrants because irregular migrants would not frequent these services offered by the Walloon government or the city. The more *laissez faire* and universalist approach to integration in this locality also means that the local integration initiatives have more freedom to work with the populations that they encounter, which in many cases are irregular migrants. NGOs have the liberty to set up aiding services for irregular migrants. Since the needs are high for this group, there are many civil society actors in this locality that work especially with irregular migrants, either to help them in their regularization process or with administrative issues. The city is also home to a federal service assisting irregular migrants to return to their country of origin.

Furthermore, the history of diversity in the locality affects the policies that are decided upon by the local government, or in this case, the lack of policies that are decided upon. First and foremost, this city has been **accustomed to a very diverse population** due to the historical migration moves of people working in the coal and steel industries. Indeed, the (historic) presence of a diverse population, as Rodriguez (2008) has shown, often leads to a less restrictive stance on immigration. A civil society service provider argues:

“The industrial past of this city means that it has a history of migration flows. Communities of Italian, Turkish and Moroccan origin have settled in this district to work in mines and the steel industries and in recent years we have also seen Syrians, Afghans, and so on who have settled here. (...) As a result, you’ll find a lot of Italian, Turkish, Moroccan associations, cafés, small restaurants, businesses, and shops which have a long history in the neighbourhoods and are strongly involved in them. This is the reason why an open mentality persists in this city, a mentality to let communities find themselves and to continue to frequent their communities and to maintain their own traditions, their own culture, while being integrated in (public) life, including the professional life in [name of town]. So yes, there really is a very strong history of welcoming migratory flows to [name of town] and in employment as well”¹⁷¹.

Moreover, the traditional leftist political orientation of this locality (where the socialist party, the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) has been in power for a long time) has an effect on the ways in which immigrant integration is perceived and on the services that are provided. There is in many ways a *laissez-faire* approach to immigrant integration, as is characteristic for the Walloon region (Adam, 2013).

3.4.4. Locality 4: Type D Locality, Flanders, Small Town

¹⁷¹ Quote from interview B-C-2



In the type D locality, **fear of segregation and polarization** in the city was commonly mentioned by local members of government, local officials, and social service providers **as reasons why certain integration measures and frames were adopted**. The focus on labour market integration by the local government of the type D locality is defended by the mayor in the following way:

“The biggest problem is people who do not work, people who hang out in the streets for a long time, people who have no goal. This leads to crime, this leads to hatred, people of this town who say: ‘I have to go to work every day and they walk around here all day, doing nothing’”¹⁷².

For the civil society actors, we note that their decision-making regarding immigrant integration depends largely on the type of organization. The reason mentioned for implementing more programmes particularly focusing on labour market integration is the higher percentage of non-native speakers among the unemployed in the locality. The director of the Economic House, the agency of the local government working on the local employment policies, explains:

“The numbers show that we have 800 vulnerable young people in this town who have nowhere to go. Moreover, we also note that in the period between 2000 to 2020, there was a quadrupling of unemployment figures of people with a migration background, that makes it worthwhile for us to focus on that target group, which is why we always submit projects (to EU calls for funding, for example), which can have a far-reaching effect and that can be offered to a comprehensive number of people”¹⁷³.

The respondent continues that the kind of projects that are implemented also depends on the ‘profitability’ of investing in one group rather than another one:

“If you get the young people to work, they can still actively participate in a society for 40 years. That is more profitable than putting someone aged 62 to work, who can still do a job for two years. That is why we made the decision to focus our projects on young vulnerable people and on people with a migration background in this town”¹⁷⁴.

Moreover, also the implementation of policies directed at migrant women, explained in section 3.2, follow this reasoning. The respondent explains:

¹⁷² Quote from interview B-D-16

¹⁷³ Quote from interview B-D-3

¹⁷⁴ Quote from interview B-D-3



“if you take a look at the numbers at the Work Support Centre, you see that we have about 3000 jobseekers, but more importantly also about 9000 non-active people in the city! So, where is the potential? Amongst the inactive segment of the population! Because those 3000 jobseekers, some of them you might just never get to work, and the VDAB already invests a lot in this group. We believe that it are those 9000 inactive people that we should also try to reach with more embracing actions. In fact, we see that many of these inactive people are in fact migrant women, that is why we have started an initiative for this target group, to help them to take first steps to the labour market”¹⁷⁵.

On another note, polarization is increasing in this locality and anti-migrant sentiments has a large influence on the type of initiatives and integration frames developed in the locality. This reasoning is important especially for the Greens. Whilst the coalition in the type D locality is rather right-wing (with the Flemish nationalist party N-VA, the liberal party Open VLD, the Greens and the Christian democrats in government), the competencies on social services and immigrant integration are in the hands of the Greens. In the interviews, the competition with the far-right and the rise of *Vlaams Belang* in the city, which gained more than 20% of the votes in the 2019 elections, was commonly mentioned as an important reason for fostering an inclusive city identity and to invest in neighbourhood work in areas of the city that have become diversified, as to counter negative images and anti-migrant sentiment. Also, certain civil society actors interviewed saw the rise of the far-right party and the polarization as a menace for social stability in the small city and as something that the local government should act upon. The coordinator of one of the most important civil society organizations in the locality notes:

“The polarization is palpable constantly in this city. When I open Facebook, I immediately notice it (...). I try to understand the reasons behind this. Firstly, this city has seen diversity increase very fast in a short amount of time. I am only thirty-seven now, but when I was in secondary school here, there was no diversity. There were only a handful of children with a migrant background in my school. It is very different than in Brussels, for example, where diversity has been present for much longer. Also, we are a city with a lot of poverty, which poses a lot of problems anyways, which is why I think there is extra work in [name of town]. That is why we organise the 'New Neighbours' course to people who don't know much about diversity yet and who are not open to new people. These people are referred to our civil society organization when doing a computer class. They kind of roll in it without choosing to. I

¹⁷⁵ Quote from interview B-D-3



*strongly believe that people can change, but after the first lesson I always went home with a stomach-ache. I heard things during these gatherings that shock me*¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷⁶Quote from interview B-D-8



4 Conclusions

In this report, we have mapped out the specific integration policies that have been developed (if any) for the arrival and settlement of post-2014 migrants in the four different localities studied, two in the Francophone region of Wallonia and two in the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders. We have noted that the **integration policies and approaches developed in these four localities are remarkably distinctive, and this especially along regional lines**. A first main finding is the difference between the number of policies developed in the Walloon cases versus the Flemish cases studied. In the two **Walloon localities** (type A and C), **nearly no integration policies** were established by the local governments, this whilst in the **Flemish localities** (type B and D) **local-specific integration policies** were elaborated and **we found there to be a much more interventionist approach** to immigrant integration. This observation converges with earlier accounts on the differences between Flemish and Walloon regional policies (Adam, 2013).

In both the type A and type C localities, as is the case for all Walloon towns, the regional integration centres are responsible for implementing the regional integration trajectory and for coordinating the local integration initiatives on the ground, with the local governments taking on a very limited role in immigrant integration. Still, we find that there are some differences between the Walloon localities. In the small Walloon city, the type A locality, there is no alderman nor are there other local officials responsible for immigrant integration. In this locality, a hands-off approach prevails when it comes to immigrant integration. Particular to the Walloon medium-sized town, the type C locality, is that both local social service providers and civil society actors have set up integration initiatives for undocumented migrants, a policy approach that was not found in the other three localities studied. Furthermore, the local government of the type c locality has taken a few symbolic measures to promote anti-discrimination in the city and generally perceives migration as part of the city's DNA. The municipality has, for instance, subscribed to the network of '*Villes Hospitalières*' (welcoming cities), a project initiated by the North-South cooperation platform CNCD 11.11.11, and thereby engages to improve reception possibilities for migrants and refugees arriving in the locality.

In both Flemish localities, the local government funds civil society actors, and directs social services, employment organizations, as well as civil society actors on the ground to ensure a coherent and direct relation between different actors working on immigrant integration. The implementation of integration initiatives is quite divergent between the localities. **The integration approach of the type B locality is quite unique in the Flemish context because of the focus of the municipality on multicultural associations and facilitating encounters between cultural groups**. For example, local ethnic associations have been assigned an important role in the local integration plan, as they are expected to receive newcomers and to identify the needs of certain cultural groups in the city. **In the type D locality**, integration frames **focus on a welcoming city identity** as well as on **fast labour market integration and Dutch language acquisition**, a view which is more in line with the current Flemish approach towards immigrant integration. Moreover, since the start of the new legislation period of the local government



in 2019, civil society actors are encouraged to withdraw from multiculturalist events and to transform these into activities that encourage migrant communities to ‘make the bridge’ with the receiving society¹⁷⁷.

The *why* of the distinctive immigrant integration policies pursued in the four towns is complex. **Vertical relations** are of primary importance to understand policy divergences. Since the federalization of the Belgian state in the 1970s, different authorities at the sub-state level have acquired the competency over immigrant integration policy. This originally resulted in a more interventionist approach on the cultural dimension of immigrant integration in Flanders (which was both multiculturalist and assimilationist) as compared to a more laissez-faire universalist approach in Wallonia (Adam, 2013b). These diverging approaches have been explained by the varying degree of politicization of immigrant integration in Flanders and Wallonia, as a consequence of the presence of an electorally successful radical right-wing party in Flanders (*Vlaams Blok*) and the absence of a successful radical right-wing party in Wallonia¹⁷⁸. Moreover, the presence of a sub-state nationalist project in Flanders has been said to foster the culturally interventionist dimension of immigrant integration policies in Flanders (Adam, 2013b). However, since 2014, when Wallonia implemented its first civic integration trajectory for immigrants, immigrant integration policies have started to converge between Flanders and Wallonia (Xhardez, 2020). At the local level, however, we see that the interventionist versus laissez-faire approach on immigrant integration observed for regional policies (Adam 2013b), is still accurate.

Secondly, **the differing role that local governments have been granted** by the Flemish and Walloon governments in the governance of immigrant integration is an important factor in understanding the divergence of immigrant integration policies implemented in the Flemish and Walloon localities. In Flanders, local governments were explicitly granted the “coordination” role on immigrant integration in 2012. Furthermore, in the aftermath of 2015, with the increased arrival of refugees and migrants to medium-sized and smaller municipalities, the Flemish government allocated funds to municipalities where at least 10% of the inhabitants of the municipality are of foreign origin, that host more than 1000 refugees and that are engaged to set up immigrant integration initiatives. The discrepancy between the integration policies developed by type B and type D localities can be explained by the increasing autonomy that has been granted to local governments by assigning them the coordination role, which has led to a decentralization of local integration policies in Flanders (Schillebeeckx et al. 2019). In Wallonia, on the other hand, with the implementation of the ‘welcoming trajectory’ in 2014 (renamed as the ‘integration trajectory’ in 2016), the Walloon funding for integration trajectories is entirely attributed to civil society actors: the regional integration centres

¹⁷⁷ Interview B-D-8

¹⁷⁸ See Adam (2013b) for a more in-depth analysis.



(CRI's) and local accommodation initiatives (ILI's). The regional integration centres can be understood as quasi-NGOs, as they are officially recognized by the Walloon decree to implement immigrant integration and receive a big part of their funding from the Walloon region (Adam, 2013b). Wallonia has thus not incited (be it by funding or by comprehensive legal obligations) local governments to develop local approaches towards immigrant integration. If they do so, this is entirely on their own initiative.

Thirdly, the local socio-economic conditions, the experience with diversity in the localities, the political orientation of the local parties in power, as well as the size of the locality can be identified as elements in explaining divergences in immigrant integration policies developed at the local level. **Party politics** and the **previous experience with diversity** are important elements in the approach towards immigrant integration in the type B, C and D localities. In the Flemish **type B locality**, the **political ideology of the local government** is significant if we are to understand its elaborate policies and initiatives regarding immigrant integration and the high amount of funding allocated to projects that focus on refugees or newcomers. Notably, the local government prides itself in being a progressive, left-oriented government with an 'open approach' towards ethnic diversity and that focuses on the role of the receiving society in immigrant integration. The locality has, moreover, been governed by a left-wing government since long, relying on a wealthy and highly educated electorate. Furthermore, this city is home to a university that attracts foreign students, meaning that local residents are used to diversity in the city and see it as part of the city's DNA. In the Flemish small town, the **type D locality**, on the other hand, the **steep increase of diversity** since the 2010s, especially as a result of the arrival of non-EU migrants, together with high **unemployment rates**, has been raised by local actors as an explanation for increasing anti-migrant and extreme-right sentiments¹⁷⁹. This political climate crucially influenced local policymakers' decisions regarding immigrant. As a counter-reaction to increasing polarization between long-term residents and newcomers, the local government, pushed by the Greens, invested largely in fostering a welcoming city identity. Yet, the local integration approach is also one in which there is a focus on **fast labour market integration and Dutch language acquisition**, which is promoted more by the right-wing/liberal parties in the coalition of the type D locality and which is very much in line with the current Flemish approach towards immigrant integration. In comparison to the type B locality, there is partly a focus on laying the responsibility for integration on individual migrants rather than on society as a whole, this whilst the more left-wing branch of the local coalition also pushes for anti-discrimination measures and an overall inclusivity approach.

¹⁷⁹ Interviews B-D-5 & B-D-8



In the Walloon medium-sized city, the type C locality, local officials, and civil society actors mentioned that the experience with **diversity influenced the local approach towards newcomers**. Local members of government, social service providers, and civil society actors considered the settlement of migrants to be part of the 'DNA of the city'¹⁸⁰. This 'openness' is reflected in the particularly open approach towards undocumented migrants by social service providers and civil society actors, which were rarely or never mentioned as target groups of integration policies in the other localities. Yet, the very high unemployment rates and **staggering economy** in the locality means that many migrants want to leave the locality. Still, because of the large number of migrant communities historically present in this post-industrial city and relatively low housing prices, many post-2014 migrants (refugees, but also undocumented migrants) have settled in this locality. The fact that this post-industrial city has been governed by the socialist party for decades further explains the open and easy-going approach towards different types of pre- and post-2014 migrants. Lastly, in the smallest locality studied, the type A locality, the size of the locality and the local socio-economic reality were the prime factors that explain the lack of engagement of the local government in immigrant integration. High rent prices, the smallness of the town and the poor public transport network were mentioned by local actors as reasons for refugees from the nearby asylum centre to leave to larger cities, mostly in Flanders.

Furthermore, to understand the distinctive ways in which the four localities have developed and implemented immigrant integration policies, we should lay out the established **network relations** (local, trans-local, across levels of government) regarding the settlement and integration of post 2014 migrants and the interactions between them. **In the Walloon localities, the regional integration centres have been granted the responsibility** to ensure that the different components of the Walloon integration trajectory are offered and have therefore entered in collaboration with civil society actors. Yet, there are **little interactions regarding immigrant integration between the local governments in the two Walloon localities and the Walloon government, and between the local governments and civil society actors**. In both Walloon cities, the type A and type C localities, the lack of involvement of the local government with these civil society actors and social services set up for immigrant integration has been mentioned to impede the smooth functioning of immigrant integration initiatives. The vertical relations between local actors and the Walloon government are more prominent as most civil society actors working on immigrant integration receive funding from the Walloon government through the Local Integration Initiative funds. Regarding horizontal dynamics, little other horizontal relations between civil society actors and the local government, or between local governments in the same province were identified. In the type C locality, the horizontal relations are marked by a cooperation between the regional integration centre and the local government. Other civil society actors, such as

¹⁸⁰ Interviews B-C-1, B-C-8, & B-C-9



the local integration initiatives and pro-migrant groups, however, noted that they are in contact with the regional integration centre, but not at all with the local government.

In the two Flemish localities, more network relations can be identified between the local government and other actors (civil society actors and social service providers). In the type B locality, comprehensive network relations have been established at the local and trans-local level as well as across levels of government regarding the settlement and integration of post-2014 migrants. Since 2019, these relations have been intensified with the opening of the reception home for newcomers, in which services that work on immigrant integration (the local Flemish employment agency (*VDAB*), the public centre for social welfare (*OCMW*), several civil society actors, and the Flemish agency for integration) gather once a week and offer an information session for newcomers. The intention of the local government to gather these services in a single space is to synchronize the services offered and to simplify the administrative fuss for refugees and migrants. Whilst the Flemish agency for integration is present in the reception home, in other instances, local officials noted that relations with the Flemish and federal governments can best be described as ad-hoc. Party incongruence largely explains the sparse relations between the local and the Flemish government on immigrant integration. Furthermore, the multiculturalist approach towards immigrant integration is the one that the Flemish government is currently actively turning away from. In the type D locality, on the other hand, the local government retains a very close relation with the Flemish government and the Flemish agency for integration on issues related to immigrant integration. The type D locality has, for example, opened a 'lab' to prepare for the 4th pillar of the integration trajectory, being the obligatory buddy project and volunteering work for migrants. Furthermore, we see a close affinity between the local approach of the type D locality and the one elaborated by the Flemish government. Party congruence can again be seen as the explanation, as the mayor of the type D locality and the Flemish minister of immigrant integration both pertain to the liberal party (Open VLD).

Overall, certain conflictual vertical relations were mentioned throughout the localities. The slicing of responsibilities regarding reception (a federal competency) and integration (a regional competence), with the local governments having the coordination role on integration impedes, according to the local government in the type B locality and civil society actors in both the type B and D localities, a more "cohesive" approach towards immigrant integration that connects accommodation with societal integration, participation, labour market integration, and other elements related to the integration trajectory. Actors of the regional integration centres in the Walloon localities mentioned that the 'institutional lasagne', referring to the many different Walloon ministries responsible for projects related to immigrant integration, complicates and slows down their work.





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Legal documents

Title (translation/ <i>original</i>)	Date of enactment	Source
Civic Integration Act Integratiedecreet	First adopted in 2013 changes applicable from January 2023	https://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1708229
Civic Integration Act 2014 Wallonia Code wallon de l'Action sociale et de la Santé relatif à l'intégration des personnes étrangères ou d'origine étrangère	First adopted in 2013-2014	https://wallex.wallonie.be/contents/acts/0/795/1.html?doc=27778&rev



Reception Law (<i>Loi Accueil</i>) on the reception of asylum seekers and other categories of foreigners	First adopted in 2002, revised in 2007 and in 2013	http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_lloi/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&cn=2007011252&table_name=loi
Flemish Codex on housing quality Besluit Vlaamse Codex Wonen van 2021.	First adopted in 1997, last revision 2020, implemented in 2021	https://codex.vlaanderen.be/PrintDocument.ashx?id=1033919&datum=&geannoteerd=true&print=false#H1100422
Walloon Codex on housing quality	First adopted in 1998, last revision in 2021	https://wallex.wallonie.be/eli/loi-decret/1998/10/29/1998027652/1999/03/01?doc=6086

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Appendix

Annex 1

Coding guide NVIVO for Work package 3 & 4 Whole-COMM VUB

Thematic codes

1. Perceived evolution(s) in local situation vis-à-vis immigration

1.1. Perception of the evolution of the demographic situation in the locality (what is perceived as the most important demographic change as a consequence of immigration over the last years and how does it affect the local community?)

1.1.1 Local schools can remain open because of refugee influx (example)

(Was built inductively from the interviews conducted)

1.2 Perception of the evolution of the economic situation in the locality (what is perceived as the most important economic change as a consequence of immigration over the last year and how does it affect the local community?)

1.2.1 Renewed work force in bottleneck professions

(Was built inductively)

1.3 Impact corona crisis on local immigrant integration

1.3.1 Less interactions because of lockdowns

(Was further built inductively)

2. Integration frames (build inductively out of the interviews)

2.1 Assimilation frame (Example)



2.2 Diversity frame

2.3 Non-frame/Universal frame (Example)

3. Policy measures (on paper) (built inductively)

- 3.1 Language policy
- 3.2 Guidance to employment
- 3.3 Anti-discrimination policy
- 3.4 Civic integration
- 3.5 Informal network building
- 3.6 Buddy projects
- 3.7 Volunteer work
- 3.8 Intercultural coaching /training

...

4. Multi-level dynamics

- 4.1 Vertical coordination
 - 4.1.1 Competency divisions (in practice)
 - 4.1.1.1 Federal – Local
 - 4.1.1.2 Regional – Local
 - 4.1.2 Conflict
 - 4.1.3 Cooperation
 - 4.1.3.1 Institutionalized
 - 4.1.3.1.1 Bilateral
 - 4.1.3.1.2 Multilateral
 - 4.1.3.2 Informal/Ad-hoc
 - 4.1.3.2.1 Bilateral
 - 4.1.3.2.2 Multilateral

4.2 Horizontal coordination



4.2.1 Competency divisions (in practice)

4.2.1.1 Among local governments

4.2.1.2 Local governmental actors – Civil society actors

4.2.1.3 Local governmental actors – Private actors

4.2.1.4 Civil society actors – Private Actors

4.2.2 Conflict

4.2.3 Cooperation

4.2.3.1 Institutionalized

4.2.3.2 Informal/Ad-hoc

Self-perception of governing role

5. Integration obstacles and facilitators (policy practices at the frontline)

5.1 Employment

5.2 Obstacles in the access to employment

5.3 Practices that facilitate access to employment

5.4 Who is affected?

5.5 Housing

5.6 Obstacles in the access to housing

5.7 Practices that facilitate access to housing

5.8 Who is affected?

5.9 Other resources and services

5.10 Training

5.11 Obstacles in access to training

5.12 Practices that facilitate access to training

5.13 Who is affected?

5.14 Equivalence of diploma's

5.15 Obstacles in the access to the equivalence of diploma's

5.16 Practices that facilitate the equivalence of diploma's



- 5.17 Who is affected?
- 5.18 Social services
- 5.19 Obstacles in the access to social services
- 5.20 Practices that facilitates access to social services
- 5.21 Who is affected?

6. Funding streams

- 3.1.2 AMIF
- 3.1.3 ESF (European Social Funds)

- 3.2 Federal
- 3.3 Regional
- 3.4 Local

4 Factors that influence policymaking (explanations)

- 4.1 Party politics (local coalition and their ideologies)
- 4.2 Competition with far-right
- 4.3 Migrant electorates
- 4.4 Europeanisation



<https://whole-comm.eu>



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