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MIGRANT INTEGRATION IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

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Immigrant integration in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas: local policies and policymaking relations

in **Spain**

Country Reports on multilevel dynamics

By Reinhard Schweitzer, Nona Galvany, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Blanca Garcés Mascareñas

CIDOB, Barcelona

REPORT

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Abstract

This report looks at multi-level governance dynamics and the resulting integration policies targeting post-2014 migrants in six small and medium-sized towns and rural areas across four different Spanish regions. Primarily based on interviews conducted in each of the selected municipalities, it provides an overview of 1) national and regional integration policies targeting post-2014 migrants; 2) policymaking relations among the key actors involved in these policy processes in the selected localities and key features of policy networks within which these actors interact; and 3) how these actors perceive and define integration. The report finds that national laws are often perceived as hindering integration while regional governments have significant competences in this field. Local governments do not describe the issue as particularly pressing or central to their agendas, and none of the six localities devised any specific (formal) policy or strategy for the integration of post-2014 migrants. Concrete challenges are either related to very specific groups (mostly unaccompanied minors) or framed as issues of conviviality and addressed through mainstream policies and measures. Most of the local "integration work" is publicly funded but done by NGOs and associations, while the business sector plays a very minor and rather reluctant role in relation to integration. Overall, the arrival of post-2014 migrants in the six localities does not seem to have caused any significant conflicts within the local community or among the different actors. Instead, most interviewees described very good relations and effective collaboration at the local level, especially between public and third-sector organisations.

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1. Introduction

Over the last few years, Europe has received unprecedented numbers of migrants and asylum seekers, often in an unorderly way. This has led to a growing immigrant presence in scarcely prepared small and medium-sized towns and rural areas (SMsTRA). The way in which these local communities are responding to the challenges related to migrants' arrival and settlement in their territory is crucial for the future of immigrant integration in Europe. This is even more true if we consider that in 2022 these localities are again on the front line of refugee reception in Europe following the arrival of thousands of Ukrainians.

This report aims to explore how six small and medium sized towns and rural areas in Spain have responded to the presence of post-2014 migrants[1]. In particular, it aims to assess, first, which policies have been developed and implemented in these small and medium sized towns and rural areas, or, in other words, 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. In doing so, 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. Second, the report focuses on the interactions between the actors involved in integration policymaking, asking: what different patterns of interaction can we identify between local (policy) actors and regional/national/supranational authorities and stakeholders? Which factors have led to the emergence of collaborations as well as tensions between actors at different government levels? Are new cooperative relationships eventually emerging and, if so, what are the key features of resulting policy networks? Third, the report asks how the actors involved in these policy networks perceive and frame the integration of post-2014 migrants, under the assumption that frames can play a key role in influencing policymaking processes.

In the six selected localities – which differ in terms of their size, the political affiliation of their local government, their experience with cultural diversity, their economic and demographic situation and that are located in different regions – a total of 74 interviews (with 87 respondents) have been conducted with actors involved in local integration policymaking, including members of local government, local officials, street-level bureaucrats local councillors and a wide range of non-governmental actors. Insights derived from the interview material have been complemented with an analysis of policy and legal documents.

[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' entered thus as asylum-seekers but may have obtained different legal statuses by now (see for more detail Working Paper 1 for the Whole-COMM project).

Main findings

Regarding the national context and multilevel governance framework, the report finds that, especially from the perspective of local actors, the Spanish asylum and immigration system negatively affect the integration of asylum-seekers and other vulnerable groups. Most of the formal competences in this area lie with the regional governments which thus define the structure of local support systems and set the benchmarks for service delivery. Focusing primarily on the local level, our analysis shows that in none of the six localities any specific (formal) policy or strategy for the integration of post-2014 migrants has been put in place between 2014 and 2021; nor does any of the six localities have a specific department or sub-unit dedicated to immigration or (immigrant) integration.

This is in line with another important finding: that overall, integration is not being perceived as a particularly pressing issue for local governments, nor does it seem to play a significant role in local public and political discourse. In some localities, this is because the number of arrivals has remained rather low; in others, because certain sectors of the local economy actually need (mostly cheap and flexible) workers. When local policymakers do recognise concrete challenges related to immigration, they usually refer to very specific groups, like unaccompanied foreign minors and care leavers. Broader challenges related to cultural diversity tend to be framed as issues of everyday conviviality rather than immigrant integration, and thus something to be addressed through mainstream measures rather than specific policies.

The report also looks at how local actors understand "integration". This analysis reveals a huge diversity of underlying meanings attributed to this process. In particular, many interviewees highlight their own critical position towards the concept, the multidimensional and long-term nature of the underlying process, and the fact that (in their experience) it depends a lot on immigrants' origin and socio-economic status. In line with the Whole-of-Community approach that underlies this project (see Caponio and Pettrachin, 2021), and especially among local policymakers, integration was often explicitly framed in terms of social cohesion.

Regarding the role and relative importance of different local actors, it became very clear that in Spain, most of the local "integration work" is done by NGOs and local associations, including many migrant(-led) organisations. The role of local governments and public institutions, in contrast, was often described in terms of "outsourcing" since it mostly consists of the provision of funding. Many NGO representatives perceived local government as supportive but lacking own initiative. The business sector seems to play a very minor and rather reluctant role in relation to integration, with the notable exception of those sectors or companies that very heavily depend on immigrant workers. Somewhat surprisingly, in none of the selected localities, interviewees have reported any significant conflicts around integration (nor immigration more broadly); neither with/in the local community nor among the different actors. Instead, they were generally keen to highlight the very good relations and effective collaboration at the local level, especially between public and third-sector organisations.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows: Chapter two outlines the methodological approach and chapter three provides the national (3.1.), regional (3.2.), and local (3.3.) context in order to situate the subsequent analysis. The core chapter four discusses the findings of this analysis, by focusing on the development of local integration policies (4.1.), local frames of integration (4.2.), the corresponding dynamics of multilevel governance (4.3.), and the factors that influence decision-making at the local level (4.4.). The concluding chapter five summarises these findings and highlights commonalities and differences between the selected localities, as well as particularities of the Spanish context.

This Report is a deliverable of the Whole-COMM Project, which 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 (for more information about the project see: Caponio and Pettrachin, 2021).

2. Methodology

Empirical data for this report was collected in the period October 2021 until April 2022. Data collection comprised document analysis and semi-structured qualitative interviews with respondents at the local, regional/provincial, and national level. Potential respondents were sampled based on their (professional) positions, e.g., as local official working on integration in a municipality or employee in an NGO offering non-profit services to refugees. Most respondents were contacted through email first (usually in Spanish), occasionally followed by a reminder and a call. After establishing first contacts in a municipality, other respondents were identified using the method of 'snowball sampling' (Bryman 2016).

In Spain, a total of six municipalities have been selected (see section 3.3. for a more detailed description of each of them) and in each of them, data was collected during fieldwork periods of around one week. Overall, 74 interviews were conducted with a total of 87 respondents. Most of the interviews were conducted face-face during the field visits, whereas 10 of them had to be conducted online (mainly due to constrains related to the covid-19 pandemic). All interviews were conducted in Spanish and (all but one) were audio-recorded and subsequently summarised (partially transcribed and translated to English). Additional – mostly quantitative – data was collected through an online survey sent to all interviewee participants (one per interview), and of which (by the end of April 2022) 44 have been returned. The information obtained was also complemented by a review of relevant and policy documents and legal provisions.

The six localities on which this report focuses were selected based on several different variables. To ensure regional variation, they are distributed across four provinces, namely Catalonia, Valencia, Castile and Leon, and Andalusia (for a description of the regional contexts see section 3.2.). All localities hosted reception facilities for asylum-seekers or refugees between 2014 and 2017 and were still hosting some post-2014 migrants in late 2021. Case selection was conducted in the framework of the broader Whole-COMM project (see Caponio and Pettrachin 2021 for more details) in order to maximize variation among a set of variables including: population size[2], the share of non-EU migrant residents before the arrival of post-2014 migrants, unemployment levels before the arrival of post-2014 migrants, demographic trends before the arrival of post-2014 migrants, the political parties in government (conservative vs progressive). Some of these variables were additionally used to identify **four types of localities**:

[2] The Whole-COMM project distinguishes between medium towns (i.e., provincial/regional capitals with between 100,000 and 250.000 inhabitants), small towns (i.e., localities with between 50,000 and 80,000 inhabitants that are either provincial/regional capitals within rural regions/provinces or do not have any administrative function) and rural areas (i.e., localities with less than 30,000 inhabitants and a low population density).

Type	Characteristics	Selected cases in Spain
Type A ("revitalizing/better-off" locality)	Recovering local economy and improving demographic profile, migrants' settlement before 2014	Locality 1 = small town in Catalonia Locality 3 = medium-sized town in Catalonia
Type B (locality "in transition")	Improving economic and demographic situation, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	Locality 2 = small town in Castile & Leon
Type C ("marginal" locality)	Demographic and economic decline, migrants' settlement before 2014	Locality 4 = rural area in Valencia
Type D ("left-behind" locality)	Economic and demographic decline, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	Locality 5 = medium-sized town in Andalusia Locality 6 = small town in Andalusia

3. Introducing the cases

3.1. National context

3.1.1. Migration flows

In the early 2000s Spain turned to be one of the major migrant-receiving countries in the world, second only to the United States. Between 2001 and 2007 the total number of foreigners increased in more than 3 million, the highest inflow being in 2007 with a figure of 958,000 new arrivals. Several reasons come together to explain this "migratory boom": economic factors, with a flourishing economy and a labour market based on unskilled workers; demographic trends, including a notable rise in levels of educational attainment, especially in female workers, and an increase in life expectancy; and political dynamics, particularly a weak welfare state, thereby inducing a large-scale externalisation of reproductive work in the market, particularly outsourced to low-paid female migrants (see Domingo et al 2020).

With the economic crisis of 2007 the numbers dropped from almost a million in 2007 to 599,077 in 2008, 360,706 in 2010, 304,053 in 2012 and 280,771 in 2013 (Domingo & Blanes 2015). Moreover, between 2008 and 2013 2.4 million foreign residents returned to their countries of origin. However, after 2014 immigration flows started to recover again, with 532,132 arrivals in 2017, 643,684 in 2018 and 750,480 in 2019. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic led to a new reduction of immigration flows, from 750,480 in 2019 to 467,918 in 2020. In 2020 there were almost 5.5 million foreign residents in Spain, representing 11 percent of the total population (NIEM 2020). The main countries of origin were Morocco (760,715), Rumania (665,905), UK (300,640), Colombia (297,934), Italy (280,152), Venezuela (187,205), China (197,188), Germany (138,952), Ecuador (132,637), Honduras (109,500) and France (117,080) (INE, 2021).

The recovery of immigration flows after 2014 mainly responds to arrivals from Latin America and the EU. The former migrated to Spain mainly as a consequence of push factors in their countries of origin: serious political and economic crisis in Venezuela, increasing levels of citizen insecurity in Central America and increasing social inequalities in countries such as Argentina, also due to the effects of neoliberal policies (Domingo et al. 2020). The forced nature of some of these migratory movements explains the rising numbers of asylum applications: from 5,947 in 2014 and 14,881 in 2015 to 31,120 in 2017, 54,065 in 2018 and 118,264 in 2019. In 2019 Spain received the highest (absolute) number of asylum applications among all EU countries. Though still much higher than in earlier years, the Covid-19 pandemic led to a slight reduction, with 88,762 applications in 2020 and 65,404 in 2021. The great majority of asylum seekers came from Latin America. In 2021 the main countries of origin were Venezuela, Colombia, Morocco, Mali, Senegal, Peru, Honduras, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nicaragua (CEAR 2022).

3.1.2. Integration policies

Until 2006 national policy was almost exclusively focused on border control and regulation of immigration. Analysis of parliamentary debates, the different immigration laws (1985, two in 2000, 2003, 2009) and even the first programmes for immigrant integration (PISI 1994; GRECO 2000) shows that, up to this point, the main concern was "regulating entry" in order to cover the growing demand for foreign workers. As a result, immigration was treated as a matter of national security (and hence the influence of the Ministry for the Interior) and strictly linked to labour needs (and hence the increasing influence of the Ministry of Labour). This explains why the state was basically concerned with promulgating several Foreigners Laws in an attempt (not very successful) to channel the arrival of foreign workers and give legal status to all those (the majority) excluded by the law owing to long and complicated administrative procedures, both at the time of arrival and when residence permits had to be renewed (for a detailed analysis of these policies, see Garcés Mascareñas 2012).

Another factor that also explains the absence of integration policies at the national level is the fact that a considerable part of jurisdiction in health, education, employment and housing was in the hands of regional governments. While "immigration management" was considered to be the exclusive prerogative of the state, "integration of immigrants" was seen as a matter to be resolved at regional and local levels (Pajares 2007). Even after 2006, with the approval of the first national integration policy which sought to go beyond a mere declaration of intentions (the so-called "Programme for Citizenship and Integration", *Plan Estratégico de Ciudadanía e Integración-PECI*), regional and local governments continued to define the goals and specific measures they wished to introduce. Hence, the PECI should be understood as a national framework in which to fit a posteriori the policies that were already in operation at regional and local levels. The aims of the programme were to promote, on the one hand, equality of immigrants by guaranteeing "their civil, social, cultural and political rights" and access to public services and, on the other, their integration on the basis of constructing a new society (described as "just, inclusive and cohesive") based on agreement over shared values.

In parallel to the PECI, in 2005 the Support Fund for the Reception and Integration of Immigrants and their Educational Support was created. Under the framework of PECI, its aim was to channel supplementary funding to regions and municipalities to support the provision of services in areas such as health care and education. It was allocated to regional governments to finance integration initiatives led by local authorities. Created by the social democratic government, it reached a peak of 200 million euros in 2007 and 2008 and ended in 2012 under the centre-right government. Although regional and local administrations as well as social organisations have continuously requested its restoration, up to the present the fund (or a similar one) has never been reinstated. Though PECI I (2007-10) was followed by PECI II (2011-14), the latter was poorly implemented. In 2017 the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) regretted the lack of a national integration strategy in Spain as well as the lack of data and indicators to evaluate the outcome of integration policies.

In general terms, despite this lack of specific integration policies, the national policy framework is based on the idea of **equal access to rights**. For instance, a foreigner (legally) living in Spain has the same right as any citizen to access health care and the labour market. According to MIPEX, Spain scores high in immigrants' access to health care and to some extent as well in terms of labour market mobility, family reunion and permanent residence. In contrast, it scores poor with regard to education, political participation, anti-discrimination and very poor in access to nationality (conditional to 10 years of residence except for Latin American immigrants) (MIPEX 2020).

To understand the actual working of migrants' access to rights in Spain, it is fundamental to take into account the exceptionality of the Spanish Municipal Population Register (*el padrón*). This system was introduced by a national law in 1996 and implemented in 1998. It makes registration in the municipal census mandatory for all residents regardless of their legal status. Interestingly, on registering, all residents (nationals, immigrants and irregular migrants alike) are entitled to basic health coverage and access to education for their children. Registration in the municipal census is also key for legalisation through the so-called *arraigo social*, a regular regularisation mechanism in place since 2005. The central role of the *padrón* could explain why in Spain the national, regional and local authorities emphasise the residence criteria as crucial whenever they talk about integration and social cohesion. Interestingly, from this perspective, residence is perceived beyond origin and legal status, as the sum of real residence with the purpose of permanent settlement (Domingo et al. 2020).

Finally, the Spanish case cannot be understood without taking into account the role of irregular immigration both with regard to the migration regime as well as in terms of migrants' integration. As for the migration regime, we could argue that irregularity is part and parcel of Spanish immigration policies. In the early 2000s most immigrants arrived with a tourist visa, found work and subsequently legalised their stay in the country. While regularisations have frequently been interpreted as the best illustration of the "failure" of immigration policies and, more generally, the state's loss of control, regularisations in the Spanish case should be understood primarily as a de facto entry policy. Basically, because the end result was deferred "entry" – deferred since the condition for every regularisation is a period of illegal status – of however many immigrant workers were required by the employers. As González-Enríquez (2009) noted, this is nothing more than a cheap recruitment model in the place of destination. Cheap because the costs and risks of the migratory process were shouldered by the immigrant and cheap – we would add – because in political terms it was possible to have a high-numbers policy without putting it in writing and thus without needing to justify it.

Regarding immigrants' integration, national policies do very little to address the precarious conditions of irregular migrants. As will be shown in the core sections of this report**, it is precisely this precariousness resulting from immigrants' irregularity that local level actors often perceive as the main challenge in terms of successful integration and community cohesion**. The following quote from an interview with a municipal social worker (in locality 6) is just one of many examples:

> Irregularity is the biggest barrier to integration: When a person doesn't have papers, they don't go out much, they don't relate, they are afraid of the police… and so by helping them to get these papers we contribute an important aspect. It seems a small and insignificant element but it's very crucial (SP-6-04B).

Also in relation to migrant irregularity, another street-level bureaucrat (interviewed in locality 1) noted that "the problem is when things cannot be resolved at this [the local] level, because they depend on national legislation" (SP-1-07). While matters of immigration, including ex-post regularisation, indeed depend on the national level, the legal framework for the integration of newcomers is mostly set out by the regional governments.

3.1.3. Asylum seekers' reception

The Spanish reception programme foresees an 18-month period of accommodation, assistance, and financial support (extensible to 24 months for vulnerable cases) and consists of two phases. Before the first one, there is a prior initial stage of "assessment and referral", lasting a maximum of 30 days, in which temporary accommodation is provided in hostels and specific facilities for the most vulnerable cases. Afterwards, the first (or 'reception') phase starts, which lasts six months and can be extended to nine depending on the level of vulnerability. In this phase, asylum seekers are housed in one of the government's refugee reception centres (CAR, in their Spanish initials) or in reception facilities managed by social organisations with public funding. While before 2015 reception places were equally distributed between the publicly and privately managed centres, in the last years, with the growth of the system capacity, more than 90% of the reception centres are in the hands of social organisations. These centres are located throughout the country and the person seeking asylum will be sent wherever a place is available. Therefore, territorial redistribution depends on availability of places. As well as accommodation, asylum seekers are given legal, social, and psychological assistance, along with language and social orientation courses, and vocational training.

In the second (or 'preparation for autonomy') phase, which lasts 12 months and can be extended to 18 depending on vulnerability, asylum seekers continue with accompaniment programmes provided by the social organisations but are expected to live independently with rent and maintenance assistance. Rent assistance ranges from 376€ for a single person to 717€ for a family unit of four, and 870€ for a family of nine or more. Maintenance support ranges from 350€ for a single person to 620€ for a family unit of four, and 820€ for a family of nine or more. This phase coincides with the granting of the authorization to work from the sixth month onwards. Given the complexity of the housing market, in recent years social organisations also assist vulnerable cases in finding a house.

For different reasons, the national reception system has progressively left out growing numbers of asylum seekers. Firstly, those who have yet to formalize their asylum applications do not have access to the reception system, thus bearing the costs of the state's delays of up

to 5 or 6 months. Secondly, those who do not want to go to the designated centre in the first 6 months are left out too, as they can no longer continue with the subsequent phases of the reception programme. Thirdly, those who are unable to find work or housing, and cannot survive with the assistance provided in the second phase, find themselves in very precarious conditions. Finally, those who 'should be autonomous' after 18 or 24 months but are not, also face serious difficulties. That is precisely where local and regional administrations have been working, along with non-governmental organizations and civil society.

In 2021 the reception programme changed. In view to align the asylum procedures with the reception system, access to the second phase has been limited to those whose asylum application is resolved positively. This change means the end of a Spanish exceptionality, in the sense that Spain was the only EU country that did not discriminate between the condition of asylum seekers and that of beneficiaries of international protection, granting both groups similar rights and opportunities.

3.1.4. Governance of integration and reception policies

At the national level, the responsibility for integration policy lies with the **General Directorate for Humanitarian Assistance and Social Inclusion**, which is part of the State Secretary for Migrations (*Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones*). One vehicle through which the national government is promoting integration is the **Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants**, which among other things promotes the creation of migrant associations in order to foster their integration into Spanish society but also contribute to overall social cohesion. Other tasks include the coordination of integration programs and initiatives devised by regional or local governments and usually executed by third-sector organisations. The Integration Forum also publishes annual reports, summarising main developments and evaluating the integration of immigrants in Spain, taking into account the interrelation with other policy areas like international protection, education, inequality, interculturality, employment and equal opportunities. The last report was published in 2021 and focused on how the pandemic and related measures have affected the wellbeing refugees and migrants. It argues and shows that the pandemic aggravated the already difficult conditions for immigrants in many ways and made very apparent the insufficient resources and services available. Notably, one of the conclusions was that integration policies must be present at, and coordinated between, all administrative levels and across sectors (Foro para la Integración Social de los Inmigrantes 2021).

As for asylum, the main national bodies responsible are **the Office for Asylum and Refuge** (Oficina de Asilo y Refugio, OAR), which directly depends on the Ministry of Home Affairs and is responsible for the evaluation of asylum applications; and the **General Directorate for the Reception System of International and Temporary Protection**, again under the State Secretary for Migrations and in charge of the international protection programmes and the reception centres. Another crucial characteristic of the Spanish asylum system – as well as the

broader integration regime with which it overlaps – is **the central role that is played by third sector organisations**, which in this case are funded directly by the state (up to 2022 on an annual basis). Over time, the number of third-sector organisations working in this field has increased progressively, from just three NGOs that were involved in the 1990s, to ten in 2017 and then (very quickly) to 22 in 2019. The three major players within this system are Accem, CEAR and Spanish Red Cross (NIEM, 2018, 2020).

The national government is also responsible for the so-called **Humanitarian Assistance Program** for **those migrants arriving (irregularly) by sea, and that do not apply for asylum**. The aim of this program is to provide temporary shelter and very basic (medical, social, financial) support to those landing at the Spanish coasts in what used to be called the "pateras". Responsible for this program is, again, the General Directorate for Humanitarian Assistance and Social Inclusion, which runs a number of Temporary Reception Centres (*Centros de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes*, CETI) located in Ceuta and Melilla. More importantly (in the context of this report), the program also covers the transfer and (also temporary) accommodation of these migrants in reception facilities run by NGOs or associations in other parts of (mainland) Spain. In addition to basic assistance like food and accommodation, sometimes the program also offers language classes and other measures of social and sometimes even economic inclusion, even though the program is explicitly directed at migrants who are not supposed "to stay long in the country" (as a representative of a local association running one such centre, in locality 5, put it). The underlying idea is that after a short stay – generally the limit is three months – in the CETI or one of these centres, the migrants will move on to another country that is "their actual destination". While this indeed often happens, especially when they have family, friends or other personal contacts or networks in other countries, some of these migrants do **end up settling in the country**.

The General Directorate for Humanitarian Assistance and Social Inclusion is also responsible for **(national) funding of regional and local initiatives and programmes**, through annual funding calls. The central implementing actors are civil society organisations, which according to information provided by the Ministry, can receive funding for projects related to the following: Improving access of particularly vulnerable migrants to adequate protection systems, promoting equal treatment in different fields (health, gender, education), measures related to employment and employability as well as non-discrimination at work (co-financed by the European Social Fund), helping migrants to acquire the basic knowledge (e.g. language) to integrate in society (co-financed under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund[2]), among others.

3.2. Regional Contexts

As already noted, Organic Law 2/2009 devolves the responsibility and competence for immigrant integration to the 17 regions, called "Comunidades Autónomas". This study covers four of them – Catalonia, Valencia, and Andalusia, and Castile and Leon – whereby the first three of them are among the top-5 regions in terms of the numbers of asylum seekers they received since 2014.

Catalonia received the second-highest number of asylum applications (after the Metropolitan Region of Madrid), especially during 2018 and 2019, with most applicants coming from Latin American countries (particularly Venezuela, Colombia and Honduras). Catalonia has traditionally been among the Spanish regions with the highest share of foreign population, significantly higher than the national average. Among the selected regions, Catalonia is the most densely populated, with the highest GDP per capita and the lowest unemployment rate. The law regulating integration in Catalonia is Law 10/2010, regulating the reception of immigrants and returnees in Catalonia (*LLei d'Acollida*). This law highlights the importance to understand integration as a **long-term and bidirectional process that involves the reception community as well as the immigrants**. Compared to other Spanish regions the Catalan reception and integration system is one of the most complete and well-developed, its implementation relies on local administrations and civil society. The latest regional policy implemented was the **Citizenship and Migration Plan** (2017-2020), which defines four objectives: equality of opportunities at work, successful education, social inclusion of all foreigners and access to public services (MIPEX-R: la gobernanza de la integración en seis regiones españolas, 2022).

In **Valencia (*Comunitat Valenciana)***, the share of foreign residents also lies significantly above the national average, and the region has received significant numbers of asylum seekers since 2018. In contrast to all other regions, this number has continued to grow in the year 2020. Also here, the major countries of origin were Venezuela and Colombia, followed by Ukraine. The great majority of the population lives in medium and large cities mostly in coastal areas, while its interior parts suffer depopulation. Like in Catalonia, the basic legislation for the area of integration – Law 15/2008, on the integration of immigrants in Valencia – has been in place before 2014. A more recent policy is the so-called **General Plan for Integration and Cohabitation**, executed from 2014 to 2017. In addition, the regional framework for integration (*Pangea*) includes a network of local offices located throughout the region and responsible for coordinating integration measures taken by various actors.

In contrast to Catalonia and Valencia, the share of foreign residents in **Andalusia** lies below the national average, even though over the last couple of years the region received relatively high numbers of asylum seekers. It is also, and by far, the region that has been hardest hit by the economic crisis from which it is recovering only very slowly. Until today it is the Spanish region with the highest unemployment rate (it never fell below 20%) and the lowest GDP per capita. Andalusia has not been very active implementing integration policies throughout the last years. Among the latest initiatives was the **III Comprehensive Plan for Immigration in**

Andalusia - Horizon 2016, grounded on embracing diversity. The Plan wanted to foster inclusion in the social, economic, labour and cultural spheres. Other priorities were antidiscrimination and the fight against racism, through sensibilization campaigns showcasing the benefits of multicultural society. This policy is a continuation of previous plans that were implemented since 1996. The Andalusian Forum for the integration of migrant people, originally created in 1996, tackles integration issues in the region together with Provincial Forums. The current Andalusian Strategy for Immigration covers the period of 2021-2025, and also focuses exclusively on integration (rather than immigration) in Andalusia (Junta de Andalucía, n.d.).

Finally, **Castile and Leon** is part of what is sometimes called "Spanish Lapland" due to its very low population density (average 25 inhabitants per km2). Depopulation is a widespread problem – especially in rural areas and small towns with limited access to major transport networks – and the region as a whole has received relatively little immigration and low numbers of asylum applicants over the last years. As a result, the share of foreign residents remains significantly below the national average. Compared to Valencia, the region has a higher unemployment rate but also a higher GDP per capita, indicating greater efficiency of its productive sectors, including agriculture. In the field of integration, relevant policies have primarily focussed on the areas of healthcare, education, social services, conviviality, work, and culture. The baseline law regulating integration of immigrants in Castile and Leon is **Law 3/2013**. Within the study period there has been the **III Strategic Plan for Immigration and Intercultural Coexistence in Castile and Leon**, covering 2014 to 2017, and the **IV Strategic Plan for Social Cohesion with Immigrants and Intercultural Coexistence in Castile and Leon**, initially covering the period of 2018 to 2021, and recently extended until December 2022.

Table 1. Overview main policies and actors

	RELEVANT POLICIES/LAWS[3]	YEAR OF ENACTMENT	MAIN ACTORS INVOLVED	ROLE/ RESPONSIBILITY OF ACTORS	FUNDING?
NATIONAL LEVEL	Organic Law 2/2009 (Reforming Law 4/2000)	2009	Central administration institutions, local governments	To guarantee rights and liberties of foreigners in Spain and their	

[3] If applicable, specify what policy category it is (action plan, legal instrument etc.).

			and civil society	social integration	
	Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (2007-2010 and 2011-2014)	2007/ 2011	Central administration institutions, local governments and civil society	To promote equality, citizenship and interculturality within the Spanish society	Period *2007-2010,* executed budget: 2.320 million euros Period *2011-2014,* allocated budget: 1.290 million euros
	Law 12/2009	2009	Central administration institutions	To establish the criteria by which Spain regulates asylum rights and subsidiary protection	
REGIONAL LEVEL	**Catalonia** Law 10/2010 *(Llei D'Acollida)*	2010	Regional government, local administrations and civil society	To coordinate reception of immigrants and integration processes in Catalonia	
	Catalonia	2017	Regional government, local administrations	To promote integration on different spheres	

	Citizenship and Migration Plan (2017- 2020)		and civil society		
	Valencia Pangea	2017	Regional government, local administrations and entities	To coordinate integration policies between the regional government and local entities	1,8 million euros in 2017
	Valencia Law 15/2008	2008	Regional government, local administrations and civil society	To establish the basis of immigrant integration in Valencia	
	Valencia General Plan for Integration and Cohabitation (2014-2017)	2014	Regional government and local administrations	To foster inclusion and cohabitation in Valencia, reinforcing integration policies	
	Andalusia III Comprehensive Plan for Immigration in Andalusia Horizon 2016	2016	Regional government and local administrations	To foster inclusion in the social, economic, labour and cultural spheres	

	Andalusia Andalusian Strategy for Immigration (2021-2025)	2021	Regional government and local administrations	Continue to promote integration in the fields mentioned above	
	Andalusia Andalusian Forum for the integration of migrant people	1996	Regional government, local administrations and entities	To tackle integration issues in the region	
	Castile and Leon III Strategic Plan for Immigration and Intercultural Coexistence in Castile and Leon (2014-2017)	2014	Regional government, local administrations and entities	To include immigrants in the areas of healthcare, education, cohabitation, social services, work, household and culture	
	Castile and Leon IV Strategic Plan for Social Cohesion with Immigrant and Intercultural Coexistence in	2018	Regional government, local administrations and entities	To include immigrants in the areas of healthcare, education, cohabitation, social services, work,	

	Castile and Leon (2018-2021)			household and culture	
	Castile and Leon Law 3/2013	2013	Regional government, local administrations and civil society	To regulate integration of immigrants in Castile and Leon	

3.3. Local contexts

3.3.1. Locality 1 (Catalonia, type A, small)

Locality 1 is a small agro-industrial town located in the north of Catalonia that has a long history as the economic engine of the district and surrounding area. As such, it has always attracted a significant amount of immigration – initially from the South of Spain and since the end of the 1990s from various other countries (the most numerous groups are India, Morocco, China, Romania, Gambia, and Honduras. This is well reflected in the very high share of foreign population (21,7% in 2020, well above the national and regional average and comparable to some of the country´s major cities) which is also highly diverse. In spite of this, and in stark contrast to the localities in Andalusia, several interviews describe the local society as rather "closed" and traditional/rural/conservative (e.g., SP-1-04, 05, 06, 10) and some highlight a clear "divide" between locals and foreigners (SP-1-10).

The most important pillars of economic activity are the industrial and services sector, as well as agriculture and forestry. Especially the textile, metallurgic, leather, wood and paper, and furniture industries have a long history in the area; as has the meat industry which still plays a very important role, particularly as a sector that heavily relies on foreign workers. The town is also an important tourist and weekend destination with many hotels and restaurants, so also the hospitality sector has significant weight. The local economy is going well, unemployment rates are significantly below the national and regional average and also the pandemic has had relatively little negative effect, given the dominance of the food industry and the role as a destination for mostly local and day tourism.

Since 2011 the locality has been governed by Conservative parties, the current government is in power since 2019 and formed by the Catalan nationalist party Junts per Catalunya (Together for Catalonia). The locality´s population has constantly been growing over the last decades,

most significantly during the 2000s, which coincides with, and is mostly the most significant period in terms of immigration. In spite of the relatively small size and "village character" (e.g., SP-1-01) of the locality, it suffers from quite significant residential segregation – many interviewees identify a "classic immigrant quarter" – that goes back to earlier waves of immigration, and which is being addressed through policies in different areas, like the active mixing of pupils in the local schools. The locality/district is quite well known for its social and community services and active approach to maintain social cohesion, including significant spending on its social and community services.

3.3.2. Locality 2 (Castile & Leon, type B, small)

Locality 2 is located in an area known as "Spanish Laponia" due to its extremely low population density. One of the characteristics and main challenges of this area is the shrinking and aging of the local population, which is making it increasingly difficult to provide important public services (like schools or public transport) but also to keep local supermarkets and restaurants open in every locality, especially on the countryside. It is quite a remote area where it is difficult to get to and around without a private car. Of all the localities in our sample, it is by far the most difficult one to reach by public transport (any larger city including the regional capital is at least a three-hour train or bus ride away).

The main economic activity in the locality is agriculture, livestock, and hunting, which represents 13.35% of employment. The automotive industry represents 7.45% of the economic weight, closely followed by the hotel and restaurant sector representing 7.47% of the affiliates. Finally, the wood, cork, and furniture manufacturing industry account for 3.12% of the economy. Given the aging population – the share of people over 85 is among the highest in Europe – also (domestic) care has become a relevant sector of the local economy. For young people, on the other hand, it is a lack of attractive employment opportunities that makes more and more of them leave the area and move to other parts of Spain or other countries, in order to study or find work in other sectors; and many of them never return. Similar to locality 1 (and 3, and in contrast to localities 5 and 6), the local culture/community was described by several interviewees as rather closed and difficult to enter by "anyone coming from outside", even just other parts of the country.

Unsurprisingly (and in stark contrast to locality 1) the locality and surrounding towns and villages have never attracted much immigration. As a result, the share of foreign residents has traditionally been low and even though there has been a notable increase in recent years it continues to lie below the national average, and the same is true for the unemployment rate, which is significantly lower than in most other parts of the country. As a result, the relatively few local companies struggle to find workers locally (but also from other parts of Spain where unemployment rates have been much higher in recent years). On several occasions, this lack of local labour supply has been compensated by hiring and brining workers from other (mostly Latin American) countries (SP-2-04, SP-2-05), and also the regional government has long seen

immigration (policy) as a measure against depopulation. The locality and province only started to receive more significant numbers of refugees and asylum seeker around 2016/17 when several NGOs opened reception facilities in the city and province. In August 2021 the city government – formed by the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) that has been in power since 2007 – renewed its commitment (first made in Sept 2015) to act as a city of refuge and to receive refugees from Afghanistan.

3.3.3. Locality 3 (Catalonia, type A, medium)

Locality 3 is a medium-sized town in Catalonia. Many interviewees, including a local politician, describe the city as "divided" and thereby refer to both a high level of residential segregation (which is also noted in local schools) and a significant and very visible degree of socioeconomic inequality:

> There is a very clear and strong residential segregation in this city – the areas where immigrants live are obvious and visible, and well-known, there are some streets that are basically of the immigrant communities, where people from here hardly go anymore. And then there are also zones where rich people live… and where you will hardly find any immigrant family (SP-3-02).

While there are some very poor neighbourhoods in the city, others like the historical centre attract many tourists and the city´s overall economic situation is quite good. Since before the economic crisis the unemployment rate has remained well above the national average. Unemployment mostly affects the services sector, which accounts for around two thirds of the local economy, while industrial production (mostly food, paper, metal, machinery, textile, and electronics) accounts for the rest.

Since 2011 the city has been governed by Conservative parties (before that, the Socialist Party had been in power for more than 30 years), the current government was formed in 2019 by the Catalan nationalist party Junts per Catalunya (Together for Catalonia). Like in locality 1 (and also locality 2), the local society was often described as rather closed and conservative. When asked about immigration, many interviewees pointed to the adjacent municipality, which is often perceived as part of the city and has one of the highest shares of foreign residents of the whole country, a strong ethnic/Arab party, and generally is an exceptional case in this sense). Compared to that the locality itself has received less immigration – and from relatively few very particular countries (Honduras, Gambia and Morocco), as several interviews highlighted – but also here the share of foreign residents is significantly higher than the national average (and has been since long before 2014).

The municipality was among the first Spanish localities to declare itself a city of refuge (a commitment that has been renewed in August 2021 regarding the arrival of refugees from Afghanistan), and already in 2015, the City Council activated a series of municipal services (in the areas of housing, schooling and social and labour-market integration), and offered 10.000

Euros of funding in response to the arrival of refugees to the city. Several NGOs provide reception places for asylum seekers throughout and around the city, including an initial reception centre for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. At the beginning of 2016, a local volunteer and advocacy platform was founded and – in contrast to similar initiatives in other localities – is still active today. Interviewees agree that the most significant migration-related challenge the city has faced since 2014 was the arrival of unaccompanied foreign minors, which suddenly increased after 2016 (especially during 2017/18) and caused significant demand for local emergency social assistance and homelessness services (once they left the mainstream care system as young adults).

3.3.4. Locality 4 (Valencia, type C, rural)

Locality 4 is the smallest of the selected cases, and the only one located at the Mediterranean Coast. During the summer months it attracts a lot of (national as well as international) tourism, making the provision of tourist services the main economic activity (78% of the economy). The second-most important sector is construction, which accounts for 17% of the local economy. There is very little industry in (and around) the municipality, mostly consisting of small-scale agricultural processing companies. Historically, the local economy was mostly based on agriculture and fishing, both of which have lost importance due to the tourism boom that started in the 1960s, but the town is still surrounded by irrigated agricultural land and has retained a certain village character and rural lifestyle during the winter months. The local population has grown significantly less than that of most other Spanish municipalities, while unemployment levels have remained slightly above the national average. The strong dependence of the local economy on (summer) tourism creates significant fluctuation of unemployment over the year, which is seen as a significant local challenge. Also, the share of foreign residents is slightly higher than the national average and much of the immigration that the locality has received over the last decades has been seasonal: the booming tourism industry attracts many foreign workers every summer, while the harvesting season (from October to February) attracts agricultural workers, who usually reside in small districts near the municipality where the crops are located.

In terms of immigration and integration, interviewees describe the locality as “a friendly town without major problems” that has never received a significant wave of immigration. As a result, no (immigrant) “ghettoes” have formed but the foreign population is quite equally spread across the municipality (including the city centre). Only recently, xenophobic sentiments and welfare chauvinism seem to be on the rise among parts of the local population (SP-4-01), a development that has been addressed by the city council through the organisation of various programmes/events in favour of cultural diversity. Several interviewees suggested that the long tradition as a tourist destination, as well as own experiences of emigration to other more prosperous European countries, has helped locals getting used to foreigners and to “become more tolerant” (SP-4-09, SP-4-10). Like in locality 2, one of the main challenges is the shrinking and aging of the local population, a development that has been kept at bay only

thanks to immigration, as several interviewees highlight. This has not only allowed local schools and other public institutions to be kept open but also to sustain the remaining agricultural production, which locals are less and less willing to work in.

Since 2015 the local government is formed by the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) in coalition with a Valencian nationalist left party called Compromís, before that it had been governed by the conservative People's Party (PP) during three legislative periods (since 2003). The change of political leadership thus coincided with a rise in the number of arrivals of especially Syrian refugees to Europe, some of whom have been received in/by the locality, where one of the major refugee-serving NGOs (which currently provides a total of 217 places in the whole region) has been present since the 1990s. According to the NGO, only around 15% of the foreign residents in the locality are asylum seekers or refugees. Furthermore, since 2019 the NGO also provides accommodation for newly arrived (irregular) migrants under the humanitarian protection programme, which is also financed by the national government.

3.3.5. Locality 5 (Andalusia, type D, medium)

Locality 5 is the largest municipality in the sample and the one with the highest population density. Many local actors highlighted the striking lack of residential segregation, both in terms of immigration and socioeconomic status. The city has a long history as a major port city that has been open to trade and visitors from many other parts of the world, especially Latin America. As a result, locals still feel very much connected to Latin America and praise their society as the most open and welcoming of the whole country. One interviewee explained it like this: "The local population of this province [and especially the city] has traditionally been open, close to the sea, connected to the world… so it's a rather welcoming atmosphere, generally speaking, and in spite of the dire economic situation" (SP-5-03).

In fact, locality 5 is one of the Spanish cities that was hardest hit by the 2008 economic crisis, from which it never fully recovered. It still has one of the highest employment rates in Spain (and the whole of Europe). Its main economic sector is tourism, followed by fishing and a depleted shipyard industry. While mostly generating seasonal employment, the recent tourism boom puts a significant strain on local housing offer, as do the increasing numbers of foreign students (mostly EU but also parts of Spain) coming to the city, whereas the local/resident population is shrinking (and has been since the 1980, when the city had close to 160,000 inhabitants). Between 2005 and 2014 alone, the city lost more than 7% of its population due to the fact that many locals – including several of my interviewees themselves – have moved to one of the surrounding towns and villages even though they continue to work in the city.

The municipality is characterised by a very low share (and diverse mix) of foreign residents (around 2%, the lowest of all selected cases and far below the national average), mostly from Morocco, followed by various Latin American countries. This lack of direct exposure to what elsewhere has been perceived the "refugee crisis" partly explains why both its local population

and political leadership have been very open to the reception of refugees, as one interviewee argued:

> For example, when the war in Syria broke out, the city gov was quick to declare to declare the city a city of welcome… but that didn't have any practical implication. It was an important and necessary pronouncement but not much more than talk in the end. It also reflected the view of the majority of the population… but it was also clear that it wouldn't lead to a significant number of arrivals (SP-5-01).

This (at least rhetorical) openness might also have to do with the fact that since 2015 the city has been governed by a left-wing coalition, following 20 years of conservative (PP) government (1995-2015). It was right after the change of government, the city was among the first Spanish cities to join the network of refugee hosting cities, and about 100 families in the city welcomed asylum seekers into their homes. Currently, the city council collaborates with CEAR by providing several flats for the reception of asylum seekers. On the whole, however, the number of refugees who are actually living in the city remained comparatively low and of the relatively few people who pass through another local reception facility that is part of the humanitarian protection programme, hardly anyone stays in the city, mostly because there are no jobs.

3.3.6. Locality 6 (Andalusia, type D, small)

Locality 6 is a small town off the Mediterranean coast but nonetheless an important destination for day visitors and tourists. The municipality is the main economic power in the interior of the province, with a higher per capita income than coastal cities and with an evident evolution of the production model from agriculture to an increasingly powerful industrial manufacturing sector. While its unemployment rate lies slightly above the national average, its economic situation is much better than in most of the region. Within the province it is the municipality with the highest employment rate (68% among working age people). This gives the municipality the ability to spend quite a lot on social policies and local welfare support, as several interviewees highlighted, including the head of the social services dept (SP-6-04) as well as responsible member of the local government, who explained that "we happily fund the NGOs to do their important work the area of integration, and luckily, we do have the economic ability to do so, as a city government (SP-6-02).

The town is characterised by relatively little residential segregation (the issue was noted more in terms of socioeconomic status than ethnic origin/background) and was described as "a very quiet and safe city" with a very low crime rate (SP-6-04). Nonetheless, population growth remains significantly below the national average, as does the share of foreign residents living in the city (the largest groups are Brazilian, Romanian, and Moroccan, followed by British citizens), even though their number has recently been growing considerably. The transition from agriculture to industry (and services) also changed the profile of immigration, from temporary agricultural workers who used to return to their country of origin at the end of

each harvest season, to people escaping conflicts and/or poverty. Accordingly, the local population is just starting to get used to immigration und the resulting cultural diversity, as the local councillor noted:

> [Locality 6] is not a small city, it's quite big for this region… but it still has a kind of village-mentality… and to change this mentality isn't easy. But slowly slowly it is changing. Immigration has been a relatively recent phenomenon compared to larger Spanish cities. So, the people here first had to get used to it before they could open up and welcome the newcomers. So, in this sense the small size and rural nature of the city is not helping (SP-6-02).

Since 2011 the municipality has been governed by the conservative Partido Popular (PP), following almost 30 years of PSOE. The locality represents an interesting case regarding the reception of asylum seekers, since it was the first municipality in the region where a reception centre was established (in 2016) in response to the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015. Already in 2015, the conservative municipal government set up a partnership with the regional and national governments as well as various NGOs to accommodate 330 asylum seekers in the town and neighbouring municipalities.

4. Overarching themes

4.1. The development of integration policies

The fact that Spain has not been – or at least, never perceived itself – as a major destination (but rather a transit country) for post-2014 migrants, is clearly reflected in **the absence of concrete policy responses at the local level**. In none of the six localities any *specific* policy or strategy for immigrant or refugee integration – let alone the integration of post-2014 migrants – has been put in place between 2014 and 2021. Not only the responsible officials and politicians, but also many other local actors justified this lack of initiative by pointing out that there has been no need, as the director of a local employer organisation put it: "If there are no problems then there is no need to act nor to develop a new policy" (SP-4-09).

Overall, integration (as well as immigration more broadly) is not perceived as a pressing issue for local governments and administrations, nor does it seem to play a significant role in local public and political discourse. In some of the selected cases, this is simply because they have received very little immigration, especially after the economic crisis at the end of the 2000s. In particular, this has been the case for locality 5, as a municipal social worker explained right at the beginning of the interview:

> The issue is not very conflictive, and has never been, basically because little immigration arrives to the city. This is because there is no real pull factor, no major economic sector that would require or could absorb significant numbers of foreign workers, and so people do not come to the city, unless they have family here… Other parts of the province have been affected much more strongly as many people have passed through on their way north (SP-5-01).

Like several other interviewees – particularly in Andalucía – he thereby describes the role of his locality (and of Spain as a whole) during the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015/16 as a place of transit rather than a destination.

Interestingly, also in localities with very high shares of foreign population, integration is generally not perceived (or at least described) as a pressing issue that would require any political or policy response. For example, in locality 1 – which has the highest share of migrants in the sample, and one that lies significantly above the national average – immigration and integration were not mentioned even once in the Conservative party´s election manifest of 2019. When asked whether the town has really not faced any immigration-related challenges at all, the mayor describes the situation in the following way:

> There are no major problems of integration in the municipality, but there are minor problems of conviviality… and that´s understandable. The newcomers dress differently, eat different things, have different customs... and sometimes, especially in those neighborhoods where immigration has increased very suddenly, there have been minor incidents, usually to do with everyday issues… like people complaining about how neighbors behave in the building, how they use the communal areas, etc.

> … but these have never turned into a serious problem or conflict. In some cases, there are problems of perception, especially between the older (-aged) population and the more recent immigrants" (SP-1-03).

Notably – and as many other interviewees – he describes these concrete challenges in terms of everyday conviviality rather than immigrant integration, a framing that will be discussed in more detail below (and which might partly explain the lack of more explicit/specific policy responses).

Only in one of the six localities under study (locality 3) a concrete local "plan" for the reception of newcomers to the city is (currently) being developed (after being on the agenda since 2019) but has not yet been officially adopted, nor published. Another municipality (locality 1) used to have a local "plan for citizenship and immigration" during an earlier period (2008-2011) but not since then (they still use the "reception map" that had been produced in 2008, in 8 different languages, indicating all the relevant local institutions). In the rest of the localities (2, 4, 5 and 6), no specific local policy, plan, or formal strategy exists for the area of immigrant integration.

Several interviewees (in different localities) criticised this apparent lack of government attention for the issue, as the following statements of a local council member representing a small opposition party in locality 2 (A) and a member of the local administration in locality 3 (B) illustrate:

> (A) Here, as far as the local government is concerned, the topic doesn't exist. I can tell you that – they might tell you something else but there is nothing being done in this respect (SP-2-06).
>
> (B) The local government is not generating any progress in this area. Its silence also says something, the not generating policies, is also a policy, so to say (SP-3-11).

Several interviewees also convey the idea that local governments tend to shy away from addressing the topic more explicitly unless they absolutely have to. Even in larger municipalities with a relatively long history and experience of immigration, there seems to be a lack of general awareness and specific knowledge about the issue and the relevant legal frameworks, especially among (local) politicians, as pointed out by a local official (in locality 3):

> Immigration and Integration are absolutely not a priority issue for this [local] government, and there is a lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of the political leadership! Working on the "plan de ciudadania" we have realised that they don't even understand the basics of the relevant [immigration] legislation… they understand immigration as some anomaly that somehow has to be addressed through measures in terms of interculturality and such, but not as a matter of rights and equality and citizenship (SP-3-07).

Often this lack of local expertise is exacerbated by / reflected in the absence of any specific personnel dedicated to the area of immigration and/or integration within the local administration.

Who is responsible for immigrant integration within the local administration?

While there often is some person who "has the overview over all the activities and available resources in this area" (SP-5-11), as a member of the local government in locality 5 put it, they are usually not assigned any concrete formal competences, let alone specific budget. In **locality 1**, there is a team within social services that is responsible for "community work", which (implicitly) includes the integration/inclusion of immigrants. In **locality 2**, there used to be a specific person (also within social services) acting as the "contact point" for this matter, but s/he had been on medical leave since 2020 and not yet been replaced at the time of fieldwork. In **locality 3**, a dedicated worker (*´tecnica de ciudadania´*) was appointed at the end of 2018 – "because it really became very necessary, also due to the increased number of arrivals, and following the example of other cities in the area…" (SP-3-01), as a representative of a large NGO remembered. The same interviewee also explained how this effectively made a difference:

> From that moment on we realized a change in how the local administration was addressing the issue. For us and the other NGOs it became much easier to work with them because we had a concrete contact for any of these issues […] and working in this more coordinated way you can detect problems that before you wouldn't (SP-3-01).

In contrast to other municipalities where someone (usually a social worker) simply starts to act as the "main contact point" for newcomers and/or other local actors, in this case a new position was specifically created (and formally advertised). The fact that it is only a part-time position without any specific budget allocated to it, however, makes it difficult to develop concrete policies, as the holder of this position admitted in an interview:

> I try to be creative using the different doors that open up… I really have to ab/use any kind of opportunity that I see… because I don't have any budget of my own, so I have to rely on the departments with money. The municipal council [for social cohesion] has money, so I am there… (laughs) (SP-3-11).

In **locality 4**, the formal role of the equivalent person is that of an intercultural mediator (within municipal social services) and local coordinator of the regional integration program "Pangea" (see below). Notably, of all six municipalities this is the only case where this person has a migration background herself. In **locality 5**, there is a particular person (also part of social services) responsible for "external cooperation and migrations", but who also deals with any "integration issues"; while in **locality 6**, one of the regular social workers is "specialised on immigrants" (SP-6-02), i.e., clients with immigration-related issues or questions are referred to her, and as in other localities, she is the contact point for NGOs and other local actors

working in this area. In all cases apart from locality 3, this more or less formalised role or responsibility has already existed before 2014.

(Immigrant) integration as an area of mainstream policy

As already mentioned, and across all six localities, **integration is often treated as an issue affecting the local population and community as a whole**; and thus, **a process that has to be fostered through mainstream policies rather than policies or services specifically (let alone exclusively) targeting foreigners**. In some cases, immigrants and refugees are mentioned as one among various disadvantaged groups (often subsumed under labels like ´marginal´, ´vulnerable´, or ´at risk of social exclusion´), in others they are not even explicitly mentioned but implicitly included[4]. Some interviewees – particularly in rural areas (locality 1 and 4) – identified a recent trend, whereas **integration is *increasingly* being treated as a matter of social cohesion rather than a process that affects (or depends on) immigrants only**; and as **a policy objective that can only be achieved through community development,** including the strengthening of the local network of associations and community groups[5]. Immigrant origin is often described as only one of many characteristics that can easily lead to social exclusion and that should not be "singled out". For example, the latest local "Plan for Inclusion and Social Cohesion" of locality 1, explicitly aims to "overcome the social segmentation that comes with focusing on concrete collectives" (p.24), which it presents as a rather antiquated approach to social inclusion. The mayor – under whose political leadership and responsibility this plan has been developed – provides a concrete example of what this means in practice:

> Social cohesion is what you aim to achieve, right? To avoid conflicts. Here in the municipality, for example, we have [since 2012] a team of three workers who are dedicated to resolving the kinds of everyday conflicts between neighbors, through dialogue, not via the police. It's not a service for immigrants but I think that normally these conflicts are related to immigration. (He gives the example of an older couple that complained about a Colombian family with many children and very loud music…). It's not a question of race obviously, but rather of education. But such conflict can easily acquire a racial dimension, through stereotypes and so on… and then it becomes a problem and undermines conviviality at a larger level (SP-1-03).

While these efforts are thus framed as mainstream policies targeting (and equally benefitting) every member of the local community, many of the concrete examples provided by interviewees did indicate that immigration and the resulting cultural diversity are seen as the

[4] Note that this issue will be more systematically compared and discussed in more detail in WP4.

[5] In this sense, local governments are seen as playing an important role by providing spaces (or subsidizing the rent) for local associations and community groups including immigrant organisations, as highlighted by an interviewee in locality 5 (as one of the few things that the local government does for the integration of immigrants in the city).

main challenge to local social cohesion. This becomes clear from the mayor´s statement but also from a folder published by the housing department in the same locality (1), which in colourful images provides examples of neighbourhood conflicts, many of which are depicted as resulting from perceived "cultural" differences[6].

The same logic – of mainstream services and resources being used to support the integration of immigrants more specifically – is also visible in the work and funding arrangements of NGOs, as the local coordinator of a large charitable organisation in locality 2 mentioned: "What we provide here is a programme of advice, orientation and training *for immigrants*, that is financed by the regional government through its general call for projects benefitting the whole society" (SP-2-08). Especially local officials and policy makers, but also street-level bureaucrats, were very keen to highlight that neither are immigrants excluded from local services and social benefits nor are they specifically targeted or treated preferentially, as the following statements of a local councillor in locality 2 (A) and a housing officer in locality 5 (B) exemplify:

> (A) Something like two thirds of the social assistance payments we make goes to foreign residents, between 60 and 70 percent. But this is because they occupy the lowest paid segments of the labour market, and often they are quite large families. But there is not one single programme here that would be directed specifically at immigrants (SP-2-02).
>
> (B) The public administration offers and administers mainstream services… that are for the whole population – everybody who is registered here and thus is a local resident. But none of the many projects that have been initiated by the housing department and other departments… was directed only at immigrants or their integration (SP-5-04).

The only kinds of services that are provided locally (mostly through NGOs) and specifically target foreign residents are either related to the reception of asylum seekers, the provision of legal/immigration advice and language classes, or, in some cases, local translation services (e.g., in locality 1).

In several localities interviewees even highlighted the absolute need for local integration policies to not target (only) the newcomers but rather the ´autochthonous population´. A social worker in locality 3 noted that "by working just with the newcomers… you will not change much, our work would have to focus much more on the host society" (SP-3-06). This kind of "sensibilisation work" was also mentioned (by the responsible local official) as an important part of the broader integration work done in locality 5: "Since the share of

[6] A very similar initiative was (at the time of fieldwork) being developed in locality 5, where it is also framed as being about improving neighbourly relations in general.

immigrants is very low, a lot of our work in this area is directed at the local population… trying to work against the small outbreaks of racism and xenophobia" (SP-5-12).

Only few interviewees – usually non-government actors – criticised the local government for its apparent reluctance to "do more" for the local immigrant population. The director of a refugee reception centre run by an NGO in locality 6 put it this way:

> They [the local government] are very motivated to do things and provide resources that benefit all the citizens… but not so much willing to do things for a specific group even though they have particular needs or vulnerabilities. I don't feel that there is very much willingness to do things for migrants or refugees specifically (SP-6-07).

She thereby points at an obvious problem underlying the idea of fostering (immigrant) integration via mainstream services only: that these services and the people providing them are often unable to adequately address the very specific circumstances of, for example, asylum seekers or migrants in irregular situations. As the project coordinator of a local NGO in locality 5 emphasised, "irregular migrants in particular are in a situation that is *not* shared with the rest of the population" (SP-5-07).

This is precisely what has led the local government in locality 3 to create a specific role specialised on migration and citizenship, as the person holding this position explained:

> The local administration always tried not to create any specific policies and services just for this group of people (immigrants), who would then come to one specific office just for them. Instead, the idea has always been to create generic services, but these services obviously weren't specialized and didn't have the necessary expertise in this area and so basically many of the issues were not addressed (SP-3-11).

In a similar vein, the local leader of a small opposition party criticised the government for presenting its newly developed reception plan (for newcomers to the city, including asylum seekers) as a measure for all "citizens":

> They call it ´citizenship plan´, which for me is something very different! It suggests that it is about everyone having the same full rights here, as citizens, but that´s not the truth, the immigrants don't have the same rights here, they often cannot even work, if they are irregular… it´s not the same! (SP-3-04).

Notably, **none of the six localities has a specific department (or sub-unit) specifically dedicated to immigration and (immigrant) integration**, and only in locality 5 there are plans to establish one, as a member of the local government mentioned during an interview:

> We are actually planning – hopefully we can make it happen – to create a concrete department for immigration within social services. This has even been mentioned in our political programme… it´s a political project that is difficult to achieve because we already lack resources… but it's a wish that we have and something that we see as necessary (SP-5-11).

In fact, while the political programme promises the "creation of specific services, within the Delegation of Social Services, for attending people with disabilities and people who migrated (´*personas migrantes*´)" (XX, p. 14) this political promise is not reflected in the governments´ *Action Plan for Social Services 2019-2022*.

Measures addressing concrete challenges identified locally

While none of the selected localities has thus developed a concrete local policy for the integration of immigrants and/or refugees, **some (more isolated) measures have been taken in response to more or less specific challenges related to the arrival of newcomers or the resulting cultural diversity**. One concrete example that was mentioned by interviewees in localities 1 and 2, was the partial adaptation of the municipal cemetery to the religions needs of a growing Muslim population – a need that recently became urgent not because of new arrivals but the suspension of international travel due to COVID-19, as the mayor of locality 1 explained:

> The last incident of this type was with respect to the cemetery: during the pandemic, when the bodies of people who died in the city and could not be transferred to the families´ country of origin (as they usually are), so a special section of the cemetery had to be adopted in order to suit the needs and beliefs of this community, including their symbols. So, it needed a bit of work to make everybody understand that the cemetery is a place for everybody who lives and dies in this city (SP-1-03).

It should be noted, however, that while local policy makers describe this measure as an active integration effort on the part of the government, it has rather been a (very slow) reaction to a claim made by the local Muslim community for many years, as a member of the local opposition (and former representative of a local mosque association), was keen to highlight:

> It would have been very nice if this had been a gesture coming from the government, a gesture of inclusion, but no; it has been a yearlong demand, we had to demand this as our right, [and we only succeeded] in the face of an exceptional situation (SP-1-13).

The same issue also came up in locality 2, where it has not (yet) been resolved, as a local councillor from an opposition party explained when he was asked whether the municipality ever faced any specific challenge in relation to immigrant integration:

> The only concrete issue in relation to this has been the claim – coming from the Islamic community – that there is no part of the cemetery adapted for their needs. And so there have been some meetings with the responsible council member… and they keep saying they are on it, but they haven't solved the issue. So, this is the only issue that reached the government… and it would be a local competence, and in other cities within this region it has been solved… but here nothing has happened. The topic is still there, unresolved (SP-2-06).

Another example of a concrete challenge related to the (more recent) arrival of non-EU ("post-2014") migrants, and particularly affecting the two medium-sized towns in the sample (locality 3 and locality 5), has been the rather sudden and unexpected rise (around 2017-2018) in the number of **unaccompanied young foreigners, mostly from Morocco.** While they usually arrive as minors and are thus initially received and attended by mainstream child protection services (which in Spain is a responsibility of the Autonomous Communities), once they turn 18 years old, they become the responsibility of the local government and (in the absence of other support structures and with no access to the formal labour market) often fall back on mainstream homelessness services, which in many localities became overstretched, as a municipal social worker in locality 5 explained:

> The only notable increase lately [in terms of immigration] has been of unaccompanied young people who arrived around 2017-18 and during the following years ended up on our streets. So suddenly they accounted for almost half of the homeless people in the city – this was a notable change, and a novelty. Because they were all young men, between 18 and 20 years old, who had arrived as minors, most of them from Morocco. At the beginning they were absorbed by the youth services, but once they turned 18, they left these centers and ended up in the street (SP-5-01).

A legal advisor and representative of an NGO working in locality 3 provided a very similar account of this situation, and explained how it has been addressed locally:

> They [the regional and local government]convened a round table… and a project was created to deal with this specific client group: it was a resource similar to a homelessness shelter, where they could spend the night, also with showers and so on… and this has been very successful and is still ongoing… over time it has been extended to become a much more comprehensive service that also provides courses and employability training and so on… initially it was run by an NGO but later it has been taken over by the local authority (SP-3-01).

This issue has also been noted by several interviewees in smaller municipalities, particularly locality 1, where according to a local official it became "a really big issue, and major policy focus" in 2017/18 (SP-1-09). Also in this case the response came from both the local and regional government, as the same interviewee explained:

> Two people have been specifically contracted [by the municipality] to improve the relations between these young people and other young people living here. And now there are also three people paid by the regional government that work in a project aimed to support young people after they turn 18 and thus stop being supported by the youth services. They are provided a place in semi-autonomous flats to give them a chance to start living on their own, with support from social workers (SP-1-09).

In locality 5, in contrast, this issue has been presented as one that is resolving itself – much like immigration/integration in general is often described as a self-regulating process: "Since the city doesn't offer them any work [opportunities]… they end up leaving anyway… and move towards other parts of the country or other countries in northern Europe (SP-5-09).

In the localities that did receive notable numbers of post-2014 migrants – particularly those in Catalonia (localities 1 and 3), several interviewees highlighted that although no new policy or services were created since 2014, already existing services have sometimes been extended or reinforced during that period, as the local coordinator of an NGO in locality 1 pointed out: "In that period most of the services including our own advice services increased the hours and personnel, and the [local social service department] put more money and resources into the [existing] reception system" (SP-1-11).

Interviewees also mentioned instances where instead of creating a new policy or additional support structures, the **existing (mainstream) support system had been adapted to allow local implementing actors to temporarily include specific client groups**: In locality 2, around 2017/18 there "was a feeling that something had to be done" in reaction to the rising numbers of asylum seekers waiting to enter the reception programme and "so, we got together with the relevant NGOs and the local government… in order to find a solution. And while that didn't lead to a new policy or programme, it did lead to a flexibilisation of the access rules for welfare support" (SP-2-12), as a social worker in the regional social welfare department recounted. Hence, in order to make up for a temporary backlog in the (national) asylum system, those asylum seekers that were "waiting in the queue" to enter this system and thus receive regular asylum support, could until then be treated as regular welfare claimants without having to prove at least one year of previous residence in the municipality.

In other cases, already **existing practices have been formalised**, as a representative of the local government in locality 3 noted: "What we have done in the plan, is basically to formalise those things that had already been done more informally… because the language courses, for example, and all that had already been done for a while… but it had not been ´protocolised´ so to say" (SP-3-05).

When asked about concrete policies or measures aimed at facilitating the integration of newcomers in general, and post-2014 migrants in particular, interviewees (including policy makers) in all localities pointed at rather **symbolic measures and initiatives like "intercultural" events**, which were often described as "well-meant but clearly not enough to foster real integration" (SP-1-05) or even to achieve real interaction and exchange that would go beyond a "one-day symbolic show-off of the various different cultures" (SP-2-11). The street-level bureaucrat responsible for the area of ´citizenship´ in locality 3 said the same about the city´s annual food festival "*cuisines of the world*": "We have realized that this focus on celebrating various kinds of folklore does not bring the desired results… it doesn't lead to meaningful interaction" (SP-3-11). As the responsible member of the city council in locality 2 admitted, local governments – who usually finance or at least subsidise these events – are aware of their limited impact, but **lack ideas (and means) for more substantial work or initiatives**:

> We try hard to expand the topics discussed, beyond intercultural encounters and celebrations of diversity. But it is not easy… whenever we offer funding through calls, they [NGOs and local migrant associations] usually propose these same things, and we

> find it difficult to go beyond them, like in the direction of more specific trainings… but we are trying (SP-2-02).

In the absence of a concrete local policy or substantial measures addressing the arrival, some (small) initiatives have been taken by local institutions themselves or individuals working within these institutions: One example – even though not realised – was mentioned by the local director of a major refugee serving NGO in locality 6:

> There currently is a plan, and willingness on the part of the health services, to develop official guidelines (´a protocol´) for dealing with the immigrant population… the initiative for this has come from the local health centre, before COVID, and it was interrupted due to COVID but now we want to take it up again, but that's where we are… nothing concrete has happened yet (SP-6-07).

In locality 1, an interviewee who works at the local employment office mentioned that when realising that for some reason many of their clients were from Gambia, she asked at the local *Caritas* office whether there was some "reference person" of Gambian origin, who could help the employment office to run information sessions for this specific collective: "Because it´s not the same whether this information and guidance is provided by someone from here or someone who shares the migrants' experiences… someone like that could probably help them much better [e.g. to find a fitting/satisfying job]" (SP-1-02). Like the example above, this was no official initiative or policy but merely "an idea that I had… it just came to my mind, but it´s very difficult [to put in practice]", as the same interviewee emphasised. At a more general level, an interviewee in locality 4 suggested that good (social) work done locally can make up for the lack of official integration policies, but s/he also highlighted that this requires a maximum of individual discretion on the part of the professionals doing this work.

References made to policy/developments at the regional level

As already mentioned (in chapter 2), immigrant integration in Spain is a regional competence, and especially in **Catalonia**, many local actors referred to the **regional integration policy of 2010** (´Ley de Acogida´) as the main legal framework for what they do locally, in the area of integration (e.g., SP-1-02, SP-1-03, SP-1-07, SP-1-09, SP-3-03, SP-3-07, SP-3-11). The mayor of locality 1 describes it as

> a well-organized reception system: As soon as somebody comes and registers in the municipality, they are offered various kinds of information sessions, regarding the healthcare system, cultural institutions, the labour market, etc… And all these initiatives taken by public institutions have helped a lot to make sure that the significant arrival of newcomers has not led to any significant problem (SP-1-03).

It is important to note that **most components of this service are actually provided by (publicly funded) NGOs** (see section 4.3.2); that at least theoretically this service is offered to any newcomer (even if just moving between localities, and independent of administrative status);

and that there is some margin for local level discretion in designing and implementing the concrete services offered (while certain minimum requirements have to be fulfilled). The following statements by the local official responsible for integration matters in locality 1 (A) and the responsible street-level bureaucrat in locality 3 (B) illustrate these points:

> (A) At the beginning this was a service that people themselves requested, but since the [law of reception] all municipalities of more than 20.000 inhabitants are obliged to offer this service to all newcomers, within an established framework… a certain number of hours of language classes, orientation regarding the labour market, etc. There are some specific elements that we have here that are not specifically mentioned in the law – like the focus on communal relations – but that come from us (SP-1-09).

> (B) The law establishes that we cover a bit of language, a bit of employment advice, and a bit of local knowledge of the city. But we think that this is not enough to integrate someone, so we also involve other actors and their services… like all the associations that work in the local community centers… we link our clients directly to their services, events, courses, etc. Through these things we also try to make up for all the things they cannot do and use because they face legal barriers (SP-3-11).

What local actors perceive and describe as t**he main limitation of this (regional) policy framework is its short duration and thus the impossibility to support peoples´ integration in the longer run**[7], as the president of a local migrant organisation pointed out:

> Although there is the initial reception program, which works well and everything… there is a lack of further support… once the program ends, people are left on their own… and the process of integration is obviously much longer than this initial period (SP-3-03).

In **Castile and Leon**, the legal framework is set out by the integration law of 2013, which establishes a "Network of Immigration Services" (´*Red de Atencion a Personas Inmigrantes en CyL´*) that should foster the integration of immigrants in a coordinated manner. In the province under study, this network is particularly thin[8], consisting of only two information centres for migrants. Both of them are located in locality 2 (see below/section 4.3.2) and run by the two major trade unions, which explains why immigrants are primarily seen and treated as (potential) workers[9], as several interviewees noted. Also here, interviewees complained about

[7] Note that the law explicitly makes this differentiation between short-term "reception" and longer-term "integration".

[8] It is the only province in the region that has no Integral Immigration Centre (*centro integral de inmigracion*), a fact mentioned by several interviewees as an indication of how little importance is given to the topic in this province.

[9] Much of the information and services provided focus on employment advice, employability training, legal advice regarding employment rights, work permits, etc.).

the short-sightedness and lack of stability of the information and advice service they provide locally, which one of them described as a "non-permanent service that year after year depends on the availability of funding" (SP-2-01). Also in the case of **Valencia**, regional legislation partly devolves the responsibility to provide information services for immigrants to local authorities, via a network of local offices (so-called *Oficinas de Atención a Personas Migrantes (Pangea)*). These services are financed by the regional government (*Conselleria de Igualdad y Políticas Inclusivas*), since 2018 on an annual basis, from 2021 the financing will be through longer-term ("plurianual") contracts.

In **Andalusia**, the central planning and coordination of policies and initiatives addressing immigration and immigrant integration has happened since 1996 through a series of "Comprehensive Plans for Immigration" (*Planes Integrales para la Inmigración*), the latest one (III) was approved in 2014 and focused on the "management of the diversity". In spite of this institutional continuity, several interviews in localities 5 and 6 mentioned a somewhat less favorable treatment of the issue in general and/or **more restrictive approach especially in relation to irregular migrants, since the conservative PP won the 2019 regional elections** (before that, the PSOE had been in power since the 1970s). The following account of the coordinator of a local pro-migrant group in locality 5 exemplifies this sentiment:

> The regional government used to fund many integration projects and initiatives during 2014-2018, but lately they are cutting down on this kind of funding. This maybe reflects the kind of [right wing] government that we now have, and the pressure from far-right political parties… And also, they are taking some steps back in terms of irregular migrants´ access to healthcare, for example (SP-5-03).

Whereas in many other parts of Europe, the arrival of refugees (especially from Syria and Afghanistan) after 2014 constituted a significant turning point and triggered policy-responses not only from national governments but also at the local level, interviewees in Spain tend to describe this period in terms of refugees coming to Europe, rather than to Spain, let alone their concrete locality, and many of the immediate reactions to what elsewhere was perceived as a "refugee crisis", remained largely symbolic. **Many Spanish municipalities (especially larger cities) were quick to declare themselves "cities of refuge", including both of the medium sized towns in our sample** (localities 3 & 5), the latter of which was soon after dubbed "the city of refuge without refugees" because of the very low number of asylum seekers that were actually accommodated within the municipality. As the representative of a local NGO suggested, this does not only reflect the lack of reception places made available but also that the city is not a very attractive destination given the lack of employment opportunities.

> The city declared itself a city of refuge … I think already in 2015, and this was discussed and agreed upon by all the relevant actors. We told them that probably these people prefer to go elsewhere… and in the end that's what happened (laughs) (SP-5-03).

Also smaller municipalities, including those governed by conservative parties, have presented – and still present – themselves as places where refugees are welcome, as illustrated by the following statement of the mayor of locality 1, who also highlights his personal involvement in this endeavour:

> This municipality has always been among those who did receive and welcome refugees, and this has been a political decision based on the conviction that resolving these issues is a responsibility of all of us. […] Since some weeks there are 21 Afghan citizens in the municipality. And as mayor of the city, I went there to welcome them, to make them feel welcome here. It's a small symbolic gesture, but something that makes a difference, I think (SP-1-03).

Several (mostly non-government) interviewees also highlighted the need to at the same time inform and sensitise the local population and to raise their awareness for these issues in order to avoid anti-immigrant sentiments that would lead to local conflicts (e.g., SP-1-01, SP-1-09, SP-2-02, SP-3-04, SP-3-06, SP-4-01, SP-5-03, SP-6-03).

The actual arrival of refugees in the municipalities sometimes coincided with the arrival of NGOs (this was the case, for example, in locality 1 in 2017, localities 2 and 6 in 2016[10]), **or the opening of new reception facilities by NGOs who had already been present in the same municipality**: in locality 3, for example, the Red Cross opened several flats with a total of 20 reception places in 2017; in locality 4, CEAR had been running a refuge reception centre (CAR) since 1994 and in 2019 also started to host humanitarian migrants; in locality 5, a local NGO had been running a small reception centre for humanitarian migrants since the 1990s, while two other NGOs opened various flats for asylum seekers in the years after 2015.

Apart from NGOs – which are (among) the most important actors in the Spanish asylum and humanitarian protection systems – **the arrival of refugees has sometimes also coincided with the establishment of central government offices in the locality**, as the responsible councillor (member of the local government) in locality 2 remembered:

> When it became clear that we needed an office for international protection, because of the rising numbers, we discussed this with all the relevant actors, incl. the Subdelegation of the national government and the responsible NGO, and in the end this has indeed happened. Because we couldn't do this via telephone with the office in [the next larger city] but we needed our own office here, and so it was established [in 2018]. Lately, with COVID, the number of arrivals dropped and so right now this office doesn't exist anymore. It's not needed really, at the moment (SP-2-02).

While **the decision to open new reception facilities or to extend the number of existing places** in the different localities had primarily been taken by the NGOs themselves together

[10] NOTE that these were not the first NGOs to work with/for migrant populations within the locality. In all three cases other NGOs had already been doing this since at least the 2000s.

with the responsible (state) ministry (see section 4.4), in most cases, this move has been supported by the respective local government, as the following accounts from the responsible local official in locality 2 (A), the responsible councillor of locality 6 (B), and a representative of one of the major refugee-serving NGOs in locality 1 (C) suggest:

(A) The issue of asylum that arose during these years [after 2014] has been dealt with by three NGOs, and from the first moment we as the municipality have been working with them. For example, when [name of an NGO] arrived here, we conceded them the space for their offices. And with [name of another NGO] we work in close coordination in the area of labour insertion, and also in terms of referrals to and from social services (SP-2-02B).

(B) In 2016, when an NGO opened a refugee reception centre in the city, the municipality fully supported this process and welcomed the decision of the organisation to open a centre here, because there was a lot of need for reception places in Spain. The decision was taken by the ministry and the NGO taking into account the available options… and here it was quite well received (SP-6-02).

(C) [Name of an NGO] has been very well received here, the Ayuntamiento has facilitated the setting up of our office and our work, especially with refugees. And that is not always the case: in [another municipality in the same province] for example, the Ayuntamiento was very hostile to the arrival of CEPAIM, saying there are other organisations already, and so on… (SP-1-14).

4.2. Frames of Integration

A closer analysis of the frames used by interviewees in order to describe their own (largely personal, as many have highlighted) understanding of the concept of integration reveals – above all – the **huge diversity of underlying meanings** that local actors attribute to this process. When asked how they would define "integration", quite a few of them (particularly in locality 2) first of all highlighted the complexity and **multi-dimensional nature** of the concept and/or the process that it tries to capture, and the fact that this makes it very difficult, if not altogether impossible, to provide any comprehensive definition. Several interviewees also specifically highlight the **long-term nature** of integration (i.e., describe it as a process that naturally takes many years, or even happens over several generations). Others immediately note that the degree or success of integration varies **depending on the ethnic/national origin or "cultural background"**, i.e., that certain immigrant communities tend to integrate "better" or "quicker" or "easier" or are generally more "willing" to integrate than others (often those from "Muslim countries" or "the Chinese"). Instead, some respondents (in Catalonia, localities 1 and 3) describe integration as **a matter of class and socio-economic status**, as the following two statements illustrate:

> Among the recent (post 2014) immigrants there are also investors, from China to Switzerland and all kinds of countries… and nobody talks about their integration… (SP-3-14).

> I think the solution is very often to give immigrants the chance and responsibility to occupy important positions in our society (SP-1-10).

At the same time, and in line with much of the critical integration literature, many interviewees note their own **critical stance towards the concept** of integration and/or its un-usefulness within the context of their work. This was highlighted most frequently by respondents in the two Catalan localities (1 and 3), and related either to the ambiguity of the concept (the fact that it can mean almost anything) or the perceived danger of it being confused with *assimilation*, i.e., the idea that immigrants have to become like "natives" in order for integration to be (seen as) "successful" or even possible. Most of those who therefore "generally try to avoid the word *integration*", instead speak of "inclusion" (or use various other notions, like settling down - *´asentarse´*). This avoidance does not only/always reflect a strictly personal stance but rather a more general trend, as a SLB in locality 3 put it: "Let's say it's not en vogue … rather the opposite, in our meetings we tend to avoid it" (SP-3-11).

Instead, and in line with the "Whole-COMM approach", integration is quite often being framed as (or at least in terms of) social cohesion – especially among policy makers[11] (members of local government and local officials):

> For me integration begins with social cohesion, it is about a networked society (SP-2-02B)

> For some time, I have seen it more as an issue about social cohesion, and that's the focus we have in the local council for cohesion… But social cohesion is not about sticking together or coming closer as a society… what we have to do is break certain existing inequalities! The concept needs this internal conflict and negotiation, it is not happening automatically nor is it a peaceful and happy process… (SP-3-07).

As the latter statement illustrates very well, some interviewees also criticise the idea that immigrant integration can be achieved without any struggle or conflicts, and/or highlighted that overcoming these conflicts requires a lot of negotiation between different groups and actors.

Overall (across all six localities and all kinds of actors) the two most common ways to describe/define integration was in terms of "normalization" and **"mutual respect and/or adaptation"**. Both of these frames were used in all localities, by at least one respondent (but usually more than one). Respondents using the latter frame (most often in localities 1 and 5) tend to highlight the two-sidedness of the process, the equally shared responsibility of immigrants and "hosts", and/or the opposition to the idea of assimilation.

The former (**"normalisation"**) frame emphasises, on the one hand, that everyday social relations between locals and newcomers become "normal" and, on the other, that immigrants (can) lead "normal" lives and do all the things, access all the services, and deal with local institutions "just like everybody else". The following quotes illustrate the use/s of this frame:

> Integration means that the daily life of a newcomer is just like that of a person who was born here. (SP-1-02A)

> There simply wouldn't be a difference between the immigrant and the local, just like between the man and the woman (SP-3-09).

> Integration would mean that the treatment between immigrants and natives would be the same as among natives (SP-3-12).

> For me, integration is that a person who is not from here does the things she does at the same level as I do. Like go to the municipality and register… if I can do that alone and without problems than the newcomer should also know how to do that (SP-6-07).

[11] Only in locality 1, this was among the dominant frames overall.

Notably, this (quite common) interpretation of "integration" can come close to the idea of "assimilation", as the following statement illustrates:

> It would be to enter a community and not feel different in any way… but obviously there are differences, not only in terms of socio-economic status but also language, beliefs, etc. Complete integration would be that you do not note any difference at all (SP-2-07).

Only a minority of respondents explicitly framed integration in terms of **"assimilation"** (and in fact, many interviewees instead explicitly highlighted that integration must *not* be understood in this way[12]). Most of those who did, were – unsurprisingly – representatives of conservative/right-wing political parties, but also private employers, as well as real estate agents. Notably, the following examples are both from interviewees in locality 3, where this frame was used most frequently (by one third of all respondents).

> I would say it's the assimilation to a new environment, and to a new culture… this is to say: integration happens through adopting – completely or at least partly – the new identity of the receiving society. So, if you keep you own identity intact, so to say, you never stop being an immigrant [quickly adds that he is not fully in favour of this view] (SP-3-02).

> Obviously, it is mostly the immigrant who has a bit of a disadvantage because its him who has to integrate in a structure that is already here. Because often it's a complete adaptation… (SP-3-10).

> Integration is about adapting to the place that you move to… (SP-3-14).

A relatively common counter-frame is that of **society as a whole unavoidably becoming something new** ("a new whole", as one interviewee put it) – not just due to immigration but also many other, parallel, developments often subsumed under the label "globalization":

> The problem is that as long as people expect that [assimilation] to happen, they will get frustrated because it is not going to happen. The result of immigration will always be a different society (SP-2-08).

> In the end it is not about them changing, or us changing, but it´s about finding the way that we all have to adopt… like building a puzzle… putting all the pieces together and finding the way in which they all fit. In the end it´s an effort that society as a whole has to make (SP-1-12).

> It should be taken to mean that we create a new and different society in which all the different cultures and traditions are being respected and where in spite of these

[12] In several cases, this assertion also reflects a certain social-desirability bias.

> differences all of us function together, as a whole; like an organism formed of many cells – each of which with a different function – that all are interrelated and work together. That would be the ideal meaning of integration (SP-5-10).

It is not easy to identify clear patterns in the way that different kinds of actors tend to frame integration. If anything, "policy makers" (i.e., members of local government and local officials) tend to use "less ambitious" conceptualisations or minimum definitions of integration (like the absence of apparent conflicts, discrimination or exclusion/ary policies, a "normalisation" of social relations, or simply that immigrants and locals are "sharing the same public spaces and workplaces" (SP-2-04). Other actors, especially those representing civil society organisation (and/or working for NGOs) tend to put more emphasis on the role and responsibility of the "host society" or the "autochthonous/local population".

(How) does the size of a locality affect migrant integration?

When asked about their perception of the **relationship between the size of their locality and integration (processes or outcomes)**, most interviewees pointed at advantages – but also some (at least potential) disadvantages – of smaller communities, in which "everybody knows everybody".

The most obvious **advantage that comes with small size is that newcomers will "automatically" have closer and more personal contacts with other residents but also with public institutions and services**, as an NGO representative (who herself has moved to locality 1 two years before the interview), pointed out: "People will get to know each other much faster and better. Because you can meet the same person at work, at the supermarket and at the school of your children… And also, the attention and treatment by public services is much more personal" (SP-1-01). A local official in the same locality also highlighted this more "personalized" service provision as well as the fact that different local actors (can) work together more directly: "the small size of this town is what allows us to work a lot face-to-face and in direct contact with the different actors, and so everybody is quite well informed about what the others do… although during to the pandemic much of this has become more difficult" (SP-1-09). Also in other localities, interviewees recognised the fact that in smaller places it is easier to have a "less bureaucratic" approach and way of dealing with individual cases across different institutions (SP-2-02, also recognised by SP-3-01).

From the perspective of newcomers, small size can make it "easier to know who plays what role in society, even if it's not a formal role" (SP-2-03), whereby – as another interviewee suggested - what matters is not so much the size of the host community but where people come from: "especially if you come from a small city, it will be much easier to arrive here [in another small city] and find your place, understand how the society works…" (SP-2-06). Quite similar to the integration of immigrants, small size can also facilitate the "integration" of new actors arriving in the locality, as the local director of an NGO that opened a reception centre in locality 6 (in 2016) mentioned: "The fact that this is a smaller town has been beneficial…

because it is easy and quick to get to know all the local actors and start collaborating with them… that was much easier [here] than in a large city" (SP-6-07).

At a more general level, **small communities/towns are generally (perceived as) quieter and safer** (e.g., for children to play on the street) as mentioned in localities 1 and 4, **and immigrants tend to be "more dispersed".** With the exception of locality 1 (where many interviewees highlighted this problem), small communities seem to suffer less from residential segregation[13] or "ghettoization". The latter might also have to do with another important difference that was highlighted by a representative of the biggest employer organisation in locality 2: "[In big cities] you find people from your country that will help you… and so everybody integrates into their own community. But because it is such a small place the different groups also sometimes interact with each other" (SP-2-05). In terms of (integration) policies, the small/er size of a community is also described as making it "easier to see if integration works or not" (SP-1-08), and as allowing for a "more friendly and human" (SP-2-08) reception process, that "tends to work more smoothly than in a big city" (SP-1-13).

However, **small towns and rural areas do not only provide advantages in terms of integration**. An important **disadvantage** that is mentioned by quite a few interviewees in different (-sized) localities is that in places where "everybody knows each other", there is bound to be **more social control and potential for stigmatisation**. The following account of a local representative of a trade union (who himself had moved to locality 1 to join his partner) illustrates this point (which was made by several other interviewees too):

> The problem of [locality 1] is that because it's so small we all know each other, and we use very concrete and specific social codes in our everyday interactions, which are different from other parts of Catalunya. And it's a relatively closed world, so that whoever arrives newly seems to arrive from the moon, almost. And that makes it very difficult for newcomers… it´s not that they are treated badly necessarily, but they struggle to fit in… (SP-1-05).

Several interviewees mentioned the fact that in small communities, newcomers are more easily identified and singled out (e.g., SP-6-03), and that they "cannot just disappear into a diverse mass of people" (SP-1-15). As indicated by an NGO representative in locality 6, this can be a good or bad thing, depending on an individual´s behaviour and "reputation" within the community:

> As a person who for whatever reason has a worse reputation, because of some minor incident or misbehaviour in the past… it will be very difficult. Nobody will give you a job, or rent out a room to you, for the very same reason, because this is a small place, where these things will be known by everyone (SP-6-07).

[13] Note that also in locality 5 – a medium-sized town – there is little segregation, but this is related to the very specific geography of the city.

Other respondents **related the question of community size directly to the degree of locals (in general) being used to cultural diversity,** as the following quotes from interviews with representatives of a local company (A) and an NGO (B) in locality 2 – a small town of type B – illustrate:

> (A) The good thing about large cities is that independent of where you are from, you will always be part of some group, because people tend to be used to see and be with people from all over the world. In a small town that's different: here the people see you as ´strange´ (SP-2-13).
>
> (B) Newcomers will be much more identifiable… and subjected to prejudices and stereotypes. And there is more social control… Slowly slowly this is changing a bit … before 2014, as a foreigner you very much stood out, now there are a more and more immigrants and people get used to this diversity… (SP-2-08).

The latter statement indicates that the degree of openness does not just depend on the size of a city, but tends to **change over time**, which was also highlighted by another interviewee (in relation to "social change" more generally): "I think that social change is happening much slower [in smaller cities[14]]. Social movements and the innovations they bring will eventually arrive but always with some delay…" (SP-3-07). The concrete experience of an NGO that runs reception centres for unaccompanied foreign minors and semi-autonomous flats for care leavers (in and around locality 3) reveals the complexity of the relationship between community size and acceptance or rejection among the host population:

> We have experience with opening centres in very very small municipalities and this didn't work very well. For the kind of image that is created… the local population hasn't been very receptive but also the local resources and services couldn't deal with the newcomers. In a bigger locality with good connection [public transport] the young people can do more things, move around, they don't have to ´hang around on the same square every day´ [a frequent complaint made by neighbours of one such flat] (SP-3-08).

Another important disadvantage of small localities (that was mentioned also by other interviewees), is the lack of specific (immigration-related) services that could adequately respond to migrants´ or refugees´ particular needs (e.g., SP-2-01), as well as **a general lack of awareness and effort on the part of local bureaucrats to actively address the issue of integration** (e.g., SP-3-04).

Overall, the "perfect size" does not seem to exist, but **medium-sized towns seem to be suffering from both sets of disadvantages**, as a local representative of a major (national) trade union in locality 3 suggested:

[14] Note that s/he compares locality 3 – a "medium-sized town" – with the regional capital Barcelona.

> Small size makes it easier to have personal ties quickly… but for that this city is already too big. But it´s not big enough to provide the full range of opportunities that a city like Barcelona provides, in terms of diversity, consciousness, but also policies that are made to have a positive effect on the lives of these people… So, the medium sized towns don't have the good things of small towns nor those of big cities… (SP-3-13).

In the end, however, many interviewees agree that **the concrete challenges faced by municipalities – whether large or small – are basically the same**, as the responsible local councillor in locality 2 illustrated with an example:

> In [small towns] the same things happen as in bigger cities but at a smaller scale. When in Madrid maybe 10.000 people arrive in one day, here it might be 10 people… Here we also have discrimination, we also have some people without homes or inadequate housing, but these are very isolated cases (SP-2-02).

What he seems to suggest is that **while the arrival of migrants and refugees creates the same (kinds of) challenges, their relatively lower incidence makes them more manageable**. In other words, (successful) **integration is a matter of proportion (i.e., the relative number of newcomers) rather than the size of the municipality**, as the following quotes from interviews with a local politician (A) and a social worker (B) in locality 5 – the other medium-sized town in the sample – suggest:

> (A) I think in [locality 5] there are no problems of integration, but probably this is because of the small size of the immigrant community. If they were many, we would have to do more for this integration to happen, but since they are very few, the integration happens pretty much automatically (SP-5-09).

> (B) After all it´s much more a question of proportionality than size. As long as the number of newcomers is not out of proportion, and they disperse across the city… the arrival of people will not be seen as a problem and will not cause any problem (SP-5-01).

Locals´ attitudes towards immigration

When we asked our interviewees about their perception of **locals' attitudes towards post-2014 migrants**, many of them emphasised that what they can provide are merely their personal (an in any case non-representative) opinions on this, and that they find it difficult to differentiate between attitudes towards "post-2014 migrants" specifically, and "immigrants" in general. The latter is because – as already mentioned – the period of 2014-2015 has generally not been perceived as a "crisis" and in many localities there was no noticeable increase or change in terms of migrant or refugee arrivals. Even where the number of new arrivals did rise (slightly), it has not been very visible (if at all noticeable) to the general population, as local politician (opposition) in locality 2 remembered:

> After 2014 nothing has changed, we got to know through the media that people from Syria and Afghanistan have been coming to our town, but we didn't know where they were living… [they were accommodated in flats rented by NGOs, spread throughout the city] So, the issue overall is very very invisible here (SP-2-06).

Overall, local´s attitudes tend to be perceived as (more) positive whenever **immigrants fulfil an important function for (local) society** – usually in terms of filling a specific labour shortage, but also when they counterbalance an excessive aging of the local population, as is the case in locality 2 – where an NGO representative summarised locals´ attitudes as "a relation of convenience" (SP-2-08) – and, to a lesser extent, locality 4. The following statements of NGO representatives in locality 2 (A) and 4 (C), and a local counsellor in locality 2 (B), illustrate this relationship:

> (A) There has never been a particular rejection against immigration on the part of the local population, but especially in recent years people have realized more and more that it is the migrants who tend to occupy those segments of the labour market that locals don't want to do, and so without them, and local young people leaving, nobody would take care of our grandparents… and so it [immigration] is seen more and more as a necessity, and a valuable contribution (SP-2-03).
>
> (B) It is very likely that some member of your family is being cared for by an immigrant… and this makes that it is very badly viewed to openly express anti-immigrant or even racist views. You don't hear anything like that! (SP-2-02A).
>
> (C) The arrival of immigration has been a relief for the tourist and the agricultural sector, since in recent years, there has been a decline in the number of [local] workers willing to take on certain jobs especially in the countryside, and immigrants have filled that gap (SP-4-13A).

In localities with a (comparatively) good economic situation and low unemployment rates (particularly locality 1), locals´ attitudes are described as better, and (also here) both issues are often explicitly linked to each other, as the following exchange between two members of a local opposition party shows:

> A: Especially the arrival of refugees has been received quite positively, by the population and the local media.
>
> B: And in part this relatively positive view on immigration has to do with the fact that the locals know that these people come to do the jobs that nobody else wants to do, like in the slaughterhouses (SP-1-13).

Also the mayor himself related the apparent lack of conflict to the fact that foreigners are not perceived as "taking locals´ jobs away", which he relates to both a low unemployment rate and the fact that they fill specific demands of the local labour market:

> There has never been a widespread feeling among the local population that immigration represents a threat or competition in terms of employment, that is a very

> important aspect, compared to other places. And this is probably because the kind of work that most immigrants find here, is work that the local population is not interested in, and also because the unemployment rate in general is comparatively low. (SP-1-03)

In localities where unemployment is high, in contrast, this was mentioned by some interviewees as an explanation for growing anti-immigrant sentiments among parts of the local population, as mentioned by an NGO representative in locality 5: "The very difficult economic situation is what increases the chance of racism and rejection on the part of the local population, because many of them are also in very difficult situations (SP-5-07). Importantly, however, this effect is largely offset by the fact that such localities either receive very little immigration (like locality 5) or only of a very specific kind (like Latin American women working in domestic care, as is the case in locality 6).

Another aspect that was frequently described as the reason for relatively positive attitudes towards migrants in the municipality **is a lack (or low level) of residential segregation**, as the following quotes indicate: (Note that this has been mentioned in small/er localities: locality 4 (rural), localities 2 and 6 (small), and locality 5 (medium, but somewhat exceptional in this sense, see section 3.3.5.)

> The fact that [locality 2] is too small to have residential segregation… makes that everybody interacts in their everyday life (SP-2-05)

> [In locality 6] we also don't have a specific immigrant neighborhood… it's all quite mixed. Even though obviously there are richer and poorer parts of the city… but that doesn't overlap too much with ethnic background. This makes our work towards integration much easier (SP-6-02).

> This city [locality 5] and its population have always shown solidarity with migrants and refugees, I think also because there are no ghettoes here. There is no notable segregation, no "immigrant neighborhoods" but the city absorbs the few newcomers quite well, they live dispersed. And so, the perception of the local population and the contact between the different groups is good, and friendly (SP-5-01).

In addition, some respondents mention **age** as a relevant factor, with old/er people usually being described as more likely to reject immigration, as an interviewee in locality 2 noted: "The fact that there is more and more negative discourse about migration in general, and since in Soria there are many old people living, who generally tend to buy into this more easily… it is also notable here, in the last years" (SP-2-01).

Several interviewees also pointed out that in their perception locals´ attitudes depend on **migrants' country (or region) of origin as well as their administrative categorisation**, with refugees (at least initially) being more welcome than "economic migrants", as a representative of an NGO that runs reception facilities for asylum seekers in locality 2 remembered:

> A couple of years ago when the first refugees from Syria and Afghanistan arrived here, it attracted quite a lot of media attention and public discussion… but there haven't

> been any significant problems. Generally speaking, the reception has been positive. At the time we have been contacted by several local actors, individual citizens also real estate agencies… who wanted to help. There was a citizen-led initiative of volunteers that was very active for several years [but not anymore] (SP-2-03).

In a similar vein, also an NGO representative interviewed in locality 4 highlighted that while "civil society made great efforts when in 2018 the whole refugee issue became fashionable" and that "many inhabitants started to offer their homes" to accommodate asylum seekers, he also added that this initial euphoria quickly started to fade and lately – with the rise of the far-right party VOX – disappeared altogether (SP-4-13B).

Looking across all cases, **a majority of respondents perceives (or at least describes) locals´ attitudes towards immigration (in general, rather than just those who arrived after 2014) as "mostly welcoming"**. As can be observed in table A.2 (see Annex), this has particularly been the case in localities 4, 5 and 6, whereas in localities 2 and 3 no clearly dominant perception could be identified, and in locality 1, the dominant perception was that of locals being "clearly split" regarding this question, as also the mayor noted:

> There have been all kinds of reactions. Some people very proactively engaged in voluntary organizations and networks … to help newcomers to get to know the city and so on… But there is also an important share of the local population – larger than that of "los solidarios" – that see this with preoccupation and sometimes with fear (SP-1-03).

Importantly, attitudes are described as "**split**" not only in the sense of some people being for and others against immigration but also depending on the specific sphere of interaction (i.e., racism being much more widespread in the sphere of housing than the labour market, for example), as well as on individual behaviours, as an NGO representative in locality 6 explained:

> We have a specific group (of young men) who create more problems, they hang out on the streets, some consume drugs, alcohol… and that quickly leads to complaints among the neighbours about "anti-social behaviours" … and so this quickly leads to more generalised rejection towards foreigners. But as long as you [as a newcomer] adapt your behaviours that are socially accepted and seen as normal and good, and you try to fit in… there is no problem… but as soon as you fall outside of this image of the "good citizen" the locals start to distance themselves (se echan pa´tras) (SP-6-07).

Several respondents highlight the fact that in order for (many) locals to develop a (more) positive attitude to immigration, newcomers must not just "not cause any problems" but be seen as **very actively making an effort to integrate** (by, for example, learning and using not just the national but also the regional language):

> While this is probably a rather closed society… the Catalan language works very well as an important element of integration! Those newcomers who make an effort early on to learn Catalan tend to be accepted much more readily. The value of the local language as a factor of integration is very high, also because it´s our language – a

> language that we had to fight for… So, this gives a plus, very quickly, if you make an effort to learn it. (SP-3-01).

Locals themselves, on the other hand, are often not seen as making a corresponding effort: "The majority of the upper-middle class does perceive and understand the difficult situation of many immigrants but are not willing to do anything to help, nor to risk their own privileged position" (SP-3-04).

4.3. Multilevel governance dynamics in integration policymaking

4.3.1. Actors' functions and their roles in governance networks

Across all localities, and in Spain in general, **the actors who by far do most of the "integration work" are NGOs (some working at the national, others at the regional or local level) and local associations including many migrant(-led) organisations.** Not a single interviewee questioned or even opposed this observation. In many instances, other (categories of) interviewees, including local policymakers, immediately referred to these organisations (*´las entidades´*) as those actors that "know best" and that we should thus be talking to about anything to with the issue of integration.

The role of local governments and institutions, in contrast, was usually described as minimal, as in the following statements by the responsible street-level bureaucrat in locality 3 (A), a municipal social worker in locality 5 (B), and a local official in locality 6 (C):

> (A) The local administration never had any role in this. Whenever they encounter someone who wants to claim asylum they refer them to the Red Cross, whenever they encounter anyone in an irregular situation, they refer them to Caritas… and that's all it [the local administration] does … apart from financing some specific programs (SP-3-11).
>
> (B) Everything to do with the arrival of refugees has been dealt by NGOs [in this case particularly the Red Cross and CEAR] and funded directly by the state […] I don't remember any specific lines of work [in the area of integration] on the part of the local administration… apart from subsidizing some of the NGOs to do this kind of work… and thus basically outsourcing it (SP-5-01).
>
> (C) We do our best to also contribute to this… but we are not the decisive factor in terms of integration! We don't play a crucial role, compared to that of the NGOs. It is much more an issue for [civil] society and the various associations… than a responsibility of the [local] administration (SP-6-04A).

This (self-)perception was also confirmed by many representatives of NGOs and local (migrant) associations, as one of them (in locality 6) put it: "They support our work, but there hasn't been any concrete policy coming from them" (SP-6-01). From their perspective, the local administration generally appears as **supportive of their work in general and of any concrete initiatives developed in this area, but as lacking own initiative**, as another NGO representative (in locality 2) specified:

> The local government has always demonstrated its support, it has agreements not only with our organization but also the others that are active here. And it has always supported our work politically … but there have not been any concrete resources or programs by the local authority aimed specifically at migrants or refugees – that would be our only criticism towards them (SP-2-03).

Also a local council member representing an opposition party (in the same locality 2) confirmed that since s/he had been elected (in 2019) "there has not been any formal or official initiative by the local government in relation to the integration of immigrants" S/he quickly adds, however, that the local government does "present itself as a partner of the NGOs that do all the work in this area, and they do collaborate, that yes" (SP-2-05).

Only one of the six localities in the sample seems to stand out in this regard: In locality 1, several local actors (public as well as private) did attribute a central role to social services (which in this case, are provided at the district level). The local representative of a (national) NGO put it like this: "Here the central actor in terms of everything to do with integration is the [social services department]. They have almost like a monopoly" (SP-1-01, also the coordinator of another NGO in the municipality (SP-1-11) confirmed this). Also the responsible local official highlighted this as a somewhat exceptional situation as s/he tried to explain why this is the case:

> We have the luck here in [the district] that [the political leadership] has always believed in social policies, that's why we have a team of 11 people working on community relations – that's not the norm! We are lucky to have this. In other municipalities it might be one person or two, and they will just be able to focus on reception policies and administrative procedures but nothing else. The difference is that our local government puts money in this. And once the whole sector of social policy is large and well-financed it's easier to do good work, and thereby prove that the investment is worth it (SP-1-09).

Even in this case however, and as already discussed in section 4.1, there is currently no formal policy or strategy for the integration of immigrants more specifically, as a representative of an opposition party lamented:

> I don't want to say that the local administration doesn't do anything, but there is no clear and explicit strategy in this sense. All the different actors are doing a lot of work, but I don't see any concrete policy of integration… there is no specific document or policy of integration that provides like an overarching, longer-term strategy (SP-1-13).

The central role of NGOs

Many interviewees justified the fact that most if not all of the integration work is being done by NGOs by pointing out various advantages that **they have over public institutions and that put them in a significantly better position to deliver integration-related projects and services**: that they are much "closer" to, and actually trusted by, the migrant and refugee population; that they/their staff have the necessary expertise, awareness, and intercultural skills and experience; and that they are less strictly limited in terms of the target groups of their programmes or services. The latter aspect is particularly relevant in relation to migrant irregularity, which many interviewees described one of the most important challenges and most effective barriers to integration.

The **relationship between the NGOs (as the protagonists) and the local as well as other public administrations** was often described in terms "**outsourcing**", with the contribution of the latter being rather "indirect" and almost exclusively consisting in the provision of funding. **Local authorities in particular are thereby sometimes portrayed as providing only a small but more stable share of the funding for the area of integration**, as was noted by a representative of a well-established NGO in locality 6, who described the funding agreement with the local government as something that the organisation "can count on", whereas:

> …the public funding usually happens through specific calls, on an annual basis, which makes our planning quite difficult, every year we don't know for sure if we will continue to get funding. The financial support from the local administration has been more constant but it only covers like 10% of the program (SP-6-01).

Several interviewees (especially in Andalusia) identified a general trend from longer-term funding relationships through (multiannual) contracts or agreements towards more **short-term, project-specific funding** that was sometimes described as an after-effect of the economic crisis, which resulted in **stricter rules and monitoring for public institution**. For example, a member of the local government of locality 5 recognised such shift and justified it with the fact that "it has become more difficult to enter these long-term relationships, because of auditing and all that" (SP-5-11).

NGOs and other third sector organisations are not only crucial for the implementation of concrete projects and the provision of services but also as **intermediaries**: between the migrant population and public institutions but also the private sector, as an NGO representative in locality 2 highlighted:

> An important part of our role is that of an intermediary: we work with local schools, religious communities, but also with local companies… with the aim of contributing to the sensibilization of the general population (SP-2-03).

Importantly, **the NGOs also act as intermediary and/or "buffer" between newcomers and the local population**, as the local coordinator of various reception facilities for unaccompanied migrant children and young people noted:

> The fact that we as a well-known NGO that is financed by the regional child welfare system, is behind these kids, that we vouch for them, and that people can contact us in case there is any problem or complaint, does help a lot, it smothers resistance, and it helps their integration (SP-3-08).

In addition, **NGOs are also described as the ones who "push local government to act"** (SP-1-14), as a representative of a local migrant organisation in locality 1 put it, who provided the concrete example of an NGO responsible for refuge reception having to push the government to oblige local schools to offer a halal meat option if requested by the refugee families: "In the end there was a swift reaction by the public institutions, but it needed the little push from civil society, this is an important role that we have" (SP-1-14). Also several other interviewees (across all localities) highlighted the advocacy function of civil society organisations, which can

be difficult to combine with their role as service providers for the same local administration that they challenge or criticise.

The role of other local actors

Apart from the NGOs and the local administration itself, there are also other kinds of actors that are perceived as playing a significant role in facilitating the integration of (post-2014) migrants. In particular, several respondents – including two local councillors – explicitly highlighted **the role of ethnic networks and communities that are already established in the locality**[15], as well as their **various associations**:

> A very important role is that of their own [ethnic] community and networks… especially for migrants in irregular situations – they are usually accommodated by some friends or family, and through them is how they find work in the informal sector… so this is also a kind of integration I would say (SP-2-02).

> *What I can say is that the established migrant communities and their organisations are the ones helping us to integrate, help, and receive the newcomers. […] So, in the development of our local reception plan we also include this aspect, of involving the existing communities in our integration efforts (SP-3-05).*

A particularly crucial function is attributed to **religious institutions**: In locality 1, the coordinator of an NGO described them as even more important than NGOs (SP-1-01), while the mayor highlighted their role as points of contact with, and (informal) representatives of, the various migrant communities:

> Many of the people who have come here more recently, do not organise themselves in the same way as we do… Sometimes it's difficult to identify their representatives, sometimes there are none. Sometimes it's the religious leaders who have this function… and they are important contact persons for the municipality… [he mentions that every Ramadan he goes and "gives a little speech" in order to strengthen this important link] (SP-1-3).

A relatively minor and rather reluctant role is being attributed to **the local business sector**, including private employers but also their organisations (e.g., chambers of commerce, etc.). They are generally portrayed (and tend to perceive themselves as **neither responsible for nor interested in the topic of integration**. The notable exception from this rule are those **sectors or individual companies that very heavily depend on immigrant workers,** like the meat industry in locality 1, the elderly/domestic care sector in locality 6, and some agricultural

[15] This was also mentioned in localities with comparatively little experience with cultural diversity, like locality 2.

producers in and around locality 2). The overall very few (and minor) initiatives that have come from them always "arise from self-interest" (SP-1-13), as a local politician in locality 1 put it. A local trade union leader provided a concrete example:

> [A large meat-processing company], for example, employed a specific person specially to teach Spanish to the employees… so that they understand the orders that they are given. So, it is really in the interest of the employer that they learn [the local language] … to avoid work accidents etc. But of course, they also take advantage of their situation, that's also clear, like everywhere (SP-1-04).

Both public and civil society actors highlight **the lack of knowledge and awareness of local companies** and especially the many temporary employment agencies that usually act as intermediaries. Also here, it is usually the NGOs who initiate any direct involvement and/or need to do a lot of work explaining the different types of documents and legal statuses.

Trade unions, on the other hand, tend to perceive immigrants as part of their clientele and thus primarily as workers, who due to their situation are at a particular risk of exploitation, as a local representative interviewed in locality 3 highlighted:

> Obviously among our clients there are very many migrant workers, because its them who work in the most precarious jobs and conditions, so there are many reasons for complaints… especially in the care sector (SP-3-13).

In relation to migrant and refugee integration beyond the labour market, the role of trade unions varies significantly depending on the regional context: In localities 1 and 3 (Catalonia) they deliver one specific part – the one related to employment, employability, labour rights, etc. – of the reception service established by the (regional) integration law (´*Ley de Acogida*´). In locality 2 (Castile and Leon) they play a really central role within the local "integration regime", as the principal providers of information, advice, and orientation for newcomers to the city[16]. In localities 5 and 6, trade unions do not seem to play any role in the area of integration, at least at the local level (one interviewee in locality 5 pointed out that at the provincial and regional level the union is sometime involved in advocacy work, but also not specifically related to integration (SP-5-13)).

4.3.2. Dynamics of cooperation and conflict

Across all the selected localities, **no significant conflicts around integration (or even immigration more generally) have been reported by the interviewees**: neither within the population nor among the different actors. When asked this question, several respondents

[16] In this case the two major trade unions act as Centro de Información a Trabajadores Extranjeros (CITE) within the regional "Network of Immigration Services". According to regional legislation every province should have an "Integral Information Centre" but this is the only province where no such centre exists.

(especially in localities 3 and 5) pointed at other, neighbouring municipalities that are much better known for their high share of immigration and where in comparison to their municipality, the issue is or has been more conflictive[17].

Interviewees in all six localities (and across all categories) were generally keen to highlight the **very good relations and effective collaboration at the local level**, **especially between public and private actors**. This perception is reflected in many of the quotes presented in the previous section, as well as (more specifically) the following statements by the director of the local employment office in locality 1 (A), the coordinator of social services in locality 2 (B), and the responsible council member in locality 2 (C):

> (A) Here at the local level, there is a lot of collaboration with other entities ("se trabaja mucho y muy bien en red"). And quite often there is the possibility to work specifically around individual cases, together with other actors. Everyone works in the same direction (SP-1-02).
>
> (B) The NGOs in charge of international protection have been doing a lot of work, also in terms of language training and social and labour insertion. And the municipality collaborates with them and also with employers' organisations. For example, we directly finance [NGO] personnel that provides employment advice. So, the NGOs do most of the direct work with the families, and we have these links with the local business community to support this work…(SP-2-2B).
>
> (C) Whenever there is a specific problem, we call the relevant organisation or community and discuss it with them… the fact that this is such a small place very much facilitates this. … It makes it very easy to work in a coordinated way: everybody has my mobile phone number (SP-2-02A).

As noted by the latter, **small size obviously facilitates this kind of direct collaboration**, and thereby also makes it easier for the "newcomers" among these actors to "integrate" into the local integration regime, as the director of one such organisation in locality 6 remembered:

> At the beginning we had to "integrate" as an organisation… get to know and present ourselves to the different organisations that had already been working here, and also initiate contacts with/in the public administration, the municipality… and obviously the whole place had to be reformed, because it used to be a religious convent (SP-6-07).

Institutional frameworks for cooperation at the local level

In all selected municipalities apart from locality 4 there is at least some kind of **institutionalised forum in which the relevant local actors meet** on a more or less regular basis

[17] In both cases, these other localities had been discussed as potential study sites but did not fit the selection criteria.

to discuss issues to do with integration of immigrants/refugees. However, in none of them has this forum been created in response to (or around the time of) the arrival of "post-2014 migrants" (in most cases their creation dates back to the first half of the 2000s, i.e., before the economic crisis). In addition to that, several of these fora are not only nor specifically about (immigrant) integration but have a somewhat broader remit (e.g., about issues of "inclusion" or "social cohesion", as in localities 3 and 5). Others, in contrast, are very narrowly focussed on the planning and organisation of one specific annual event (locality 2).

In locality 3, for example, a "Municipal Council for Social Cohesion" was created around 2011 but, according to a member of local government, it

> …did became more relevant and necessary after 2014 and in 2018 it was the place where we started discussing the issue of the unaccompanied young people… […] It is until today the forum where problems [around immigration/integration] are being identified and specific answers being discussed and initiated, and later formalised" (SP-3-05).

As another representative of the same local administration admitted, the broader focus (on social cohesion) means that immigrant integration is not necessarily a continuous line of work:

> At the moment one of the specific work plans and lines of work of the council is immigration, but that will change – in a recent meeting they were discussing future issues and immigration, and integration were not among them! So, we will have even less support (for this work) (SP-3-11).

While some of these fora get together **quite regularly** (two/three times a year), others tend to meet more on a **much more ad-hoc basis**, i.e., whenever specific issues arise that have to be addressed (like in locality 6). In addition, some of them – including the "Municipal Council for Immigration and Social Inclusion" in locality 2 – have not been meeting for several years. While this was **sometimes presented as a result of pandemic** (as was also mentioned in locality 6) it might also reflect the fact that the issue of integration has either not been very central or "problematic" (a common perception among interviewees in locality 5), or were simply not given importance by the policymakers, as a member of an opposition party in locality 2 implicitly suggested:

> There is a special council but only in theory – in the 2,5 years that I have been part of the city council it has never met! It should be participative and everything… but it stopped working with the pandemic, and never started to work again, while other municipal councils – for local schools, or tourism, for example – did meet, in spite of the pandemic (SP-2-06).

In localities 2 and 5, interviewees instead pointed at equivalent institutional fora at the provincial level, which they perceived as more active and/or "useful" for their own work in this area.

The main actors within all of the existing local fora are the relevant department/s of the public administration (particularly social services) and the NGOs and associations working in the area of integration (or social cohesion more generally, or "with immigrant populations"). In a minority of cases (e.g., in locality 3) also the business sector is represented (by an employer organisation or local chamber of commerce) or at least invited. In the case of locality 5, according to the local official responsible for this municipal forum, "they [employer organisations] are formally invited but they never come or at least don't actively participate" (SP-5-12). In three cases (localities 1, 2, and 3) also the major trade unions participate regularly.

One of the problems attributed to these fora by interviewees is that they often lack representation of immigrant communities – as one interviewee noted: "everyone in this meeting is White" (SP-1-05) – and/or their representatives, mostly local, migrant/led organisations, feel that they are invited and listened to, but not really taken seriously. The local coordinator of an advocacy organisation put it this way:

> I have participated in a huge number of fora and meetings and things like that, invited by the local and the regional government… many times… and there are usually no migrants. So, they are discussing some idea for a policy or program without inviting the migrant population. So, these are just things that are done to be done, to have another meeting, take a photo, look good… it´s mostly symbolic. But there is normally not much practical outcome. When there is funding available everybody comes and participates but otherwise nobody is interested. So, it's not about results. (SP-5-05)

While some interviewees also mentioned additional fora (or umbrella organisations) within which only civil society organisations meet and exchange or coordinate their activities (on a less regular and institutionalised basis), NGOs generally do feel heard and taken seriously, but also they sometimes criticise the lack of concrete outcomes or change:

> We [a local Foundation] are always invited to these discussions as representatives of the third sector (among others) and they do listen to us and we talk… but then not much happens, in terms of resources of concrete measures… (SP-5-07).

> We as [local migrant organisation] do not participate in these, but we could, they are pretty open. But the thing is that it's always the same discourse, always the same discussions, very little real progress is made, that's my feeling (SP-1-14).

In addition to that, the meetings were sometimes described as not happening often enough to really address more complex or urgent issues, as an NGO rep in locality 2 noted:

> For example, we criticized the local administration for only attending people in social services who had been registered for 6 months in the municipality, because that left all those waiting to enter the asylum reception centre excluded from public support! But all these issues we tried to resolve outside of the formal meetings… because it was very urgent, it couldn't wait until the next meeting of the commission (SP-2-11).

The relationships between different local actors

Also the relationship between different third sector organisations is generally described as very good and characterised by cooperation rather than conflict. Among the various NGOs within each of the localities there is quite a clear separation of tasks and/or client groups, especially between those working with asylum seekers (and financed by the state) and those dealing with other migrants[18]; but also among organisations providing equivalent services, as the last of the following three statements (of a municipal social worker and two NGO representatives) indicates:

> Among the third sector, there is a good separation of work in this area: the Red Cross deals with everything around asylum, Caritas provides basic support and assistance, runs the food bank, etc. (SP-3-09).

> There is an NGO doing everything related to asylum (CEAR), and another one (Red Cross) that provides legal advice… so there is a clear separation of tasks… (SP-6-01).

> We have a general rule among us [the NGOs] that is that we don't take over the clients from one another. Who is already being attended by one remains with that one [organisation], in principle… also to avoid that everybody goes asking for support everywhere! So, we tend to provide courses to our clients… instead of sending them to another NGO, because they have their own clientele (SP-6-07).

The **separation of tasks between asylum-NGOs and others** is also (sometimes) reflected in the relations that these organisations have with the local administration, with those funded by the central government having slightly less collaboration and contact. This became apparent during interview with the director of the local social services centre (A) and a social worker (B) in locality 6, in which they referred to the NGO running the local reception centre:

> [A:] I don't really know how many refugees arrived… [name of the organisation] informs us very little… in very few cases they get in touch to comment any particular issue with one of their clients, that social services should be aware of, but that's it. [B:] Since they in principle are covered under the (state) reception system as the [national asylum] law establishes… we have very little to do with these cases, in general. Maybe if there is a problem with the kids at school or in the family or something like that. But everything else is done by that organisation. [A:] And so this organisation doesn't interact so much with the rest of the NGOs nor with the municipality… (SP-6-04).

Interestingly, a representative of that same organisation, in turn, complained that during the pandemic she had read in the newspaper that the municipality had provided face masks and disinfection gel to another local NGO serving migrants, but had not even offered that to her organisation, which she perceived as an unjustified unequal treatment (SP-6-07). As became quite clear from the interview quoted above, as well as the one with a local government

[18] This was explicitly mentioned in localities 1, 3, and 6.

representative, this disparity simply reflects the fact that the local administration sees this organisation as the responsibility of the state. That said, however, the local authority seems to have been more involved at the time when the organisation opened the centre in the municipality, as the same local official (quoted above) remembered, and which provides a good example of successful local cooperation:

> In this case the municipality played an important role. The NGO came to us and explained the need for more reception places… and presented the possibility to open such centre here in the city in a meeting of the local coordination platform. And the municipality decided to support this idea, and also make an institutional effort to rehabilitate a religious convent that had recently closed down… and transform it into a reception centre, in relatively little time. The church accepted the idea… the municipality supported this reformation financially, even the council members contributed privately! So, the organisation arrived with full support from the local administration (SP-6-04A).

Even though to some extent the **third sector organisations all depend on the same – mostly public – funding sources**, hardly any interviewee mentioned any conflicts, tensions, or disagreements between them. Only one NGO representative, interviewed in locality 4, at least hinted at a bit a conflictive relationship with another local organisation that according to her is just "playing the charity card" in order to look good, while not doing any useful work and refusing to collaborate with the other actors (SP-4-13A).

There also seems to be very little political conflict around the issue at the local level, apart from the local opposition occasionally criticising the governing party (or parties) for – usually – their lack of initiative. In locality 3, for example, the opposition has been pressuring for a reception plan, as a representative emphasised:

> Already last year this topic was one of our conditions for us to approve their budget plans… and we reached an agreement on that, but they haven't complied. They finally employed a part-time worker but that also only very recently. The plan hasn't even been presented, and then we will still have to approve it as local council… and there is also no budget set aside for it at the moment (SP-3-04).

When interviewed at the beginning of December 2021, the responsible member of the city council said the plan "will have been approved in January or February [2021]" but three months later (April 2022) this has not happened, which might indicate that has been more debate than expected. With a view the upcoming local elections, she added that "it also depends on the political party in power at the local level: we are now making this effort [to create the plan] but who knows what will happen if in 2023 another party forms the government… it might just end up in a drawer" (SP-3-05).

Only one interviewee – a (former) local official in locality 4 – mentioned some political disagreement around the opening of a local reception centre, which the mayor managed to

resolve by presenting the centre as a source of employment and promising (to the local population and the opposition) that only people who had been living in the municipality for at least five years would be eligible for these newly created jobs (SP-4-03).

Distribution of competences

A more frequently mentioned issue is the formal **distribution of tasks and competences**, as well as the limited (but not necessarily insignificant) room for discretion on the part of the local administration and its institutions. The responsible local officials in locality 3 (A) and locality 1 (B) describe these issues in quite similar ways:

> (A) Much of this area of integration and social cohesion is like a no-man's-land in terms of competences (´un campo libre´); you can do things, but nobody has to do anything specific. Like all these things that we call community work and that happen at the level of each neighbourhood … there is a lot of work being done in relation to cultural diversity and conviviality and all that… (SP-3-07).

> (B) Much of [immigration] is a national competence, the regional level has partial competence in relation to [regularisation], and also partly in the area of refugee reception. And the municipality can allocate some of the funding… and thereby put the emphasis on what they want, a little bit, no? In this sense there is some margin of discretion… and they can make more or less funds available, but that also depends a bit on their economic situation (SP-1-09).

As will be discussed in the following section (4.4), the economic situation of the locality is perceived by many (different) actors as one of the most relevant factors influencing their decisions taken with regard to integration policies or measures.

The lack of competences and resources is also, and especially in Andalusia, given as a reason why so much of the work in this area is being left to NGOs, as a local official in locality 5 argued: "So, we don't get the financial resources nor the necessary competences to solve many of these issues – that's why in the end we refer many of these people to the NGOs… rather than attending them ourselves. If we had the necessary competences, we would do more (SP-5-12). A similar point was made by the equivalent interviewee in locality 6, who specifically blamed the regional government for the increasing lack of funding:

> the funding that used to be there for these things has been cut… before that we used to receive more money from the regional government to do activities and programmes… but right around these years this funding has been cut, and we stopped doing many of these things. But we have continued to support and fund the work of the various local NGOs who work with migrants (SP-6-04).

The most conflictive relationship seems to exist between the local and the national level (a situation that is particularly pronounced in the case of Catalonia, reflecting the ongoing

struggle for independence), and which leads to a lack of collaboration between these two levels, as the mayor of locality 1 noted:

> We have to do what we can. And that is mostly at the local level, a few things we try to do at the level of the Catalan government… but with the Spanish state there is no kind of relation at all in this sense. Even though its them who have the power to decide on macro-questions around immigration policies. […] So every level does their thing, but we are not coordinated. I am the mayor, and I never speak with the [delegation of the national government in the province] about these issues. Never. There is no forum for that kind of exchange! (SP-1-03).

In general, when asked about any conflicts or specific contradictions between the various different levels of government involved in immigration and integration policymaking (and implementation), most respondents, independent of their role or the specific region, pointed to the fact that especially migrant irregularity – for many one of the, if not the single most important barrier to integration – "can only be resolved at the national level". The local councillor responsible for social policies in locality 6 describes the underlying problem in terms of an incongruence between formal competences and distance from the (target) population:

> As the local administration we are the one that is closest to the people but have hardly any competences. The competences have those who are the furthest away… and so this makes our work for the integration of these people very difficult, because often the barrier is an administrative barrier, of missing permits, missing papers. And we are the ones who get frustrated the most in this process because the ministry that decides the cases doesn't have the person in front of them, we do! So, we always try to find a solution and often the solution is some application to which the state says no (SP-6-02).

Conflicts between the local and the regional level, on the other hand, were also mentioned in locality 2 (Castile and Leon), and – like in Andalusia – mostly in relation to funding cuts:

> A lot of the relevant competences is regional, so these policies and programs rely on funding from the regional government but are delivered by the local government … so there is a constant fight between these two levels, often about funding. And one level blames the other for anything that goes wrong. Especially in the area of social assistance, the local governments have to spend a lot of their own money to provide necessary services because the regional government does not fund them properly, that's true in general. And the regional government then often pushes the blame on to the state, even if they do have their own resources (SP-2-06).

According to the same interviewee, this reflects a much more general problem in relation to multi-level-governance in Spain: "that policies or initiatives coming from other administrative levels will be supported or opposed depending on the political party in power. It's strictly party-political. This is the main problem of Spain: the lack of cooperation between different levels of government that are not led by the same political party! (SP-2-06). In line with this assessment, the director of the local branch of a large NGO in locality 4, noted that the current

political alignment between the municipal government and the regional government has made it possible to carry out integration plans running over more than five years. Under this regional framework, called PANGEA, the city council hired an intercultural mediator dedicated to solving potential conflicts between locals and newcomers.

4.4. Decision-making

As already highlighted in the context section, and also becomes clear in section 4.1, not many concrete actions or measures have been taken, and thus not many decisions made, by local policymakers or other local actors in relation to the integration of post-2014 migrants. Nonetheless, and in addition to the semi-structured interviews, participants were also asked to answer a short (online) survey asking them about the factors that most crucially influenced their actions, a question that was also discussed during the interviews.

Overall (across all localities and actor categories) the factor most often identified as either "extremely influential" or "very influential" has been the decision makers´ **own "values and ideas"**. Only in Catalonia (localities 1 and 3, both type A), also the **"economic situation of the locality"** has been attributed a similar importance. Arguably, this suggests that this factor is more likely to influence decision making if the economic situation is (perceived as) particularly good – as is the case in these two localities – than when the economic situation is (perceived as) comparatively bad – as in the Spanish case would be in locality 5 and 6 (both type D), where the factor has been mentioned but does not appear as dominant. Also during the interviewees, it was mostly in locality 1 that respondents explicitly referred to the economic situation as a relevant factor, almost always specifically mentioning the employment situation (but sometimes also the fact that the municipality has money to spend e.g. on social and community services – see above??). The following statements made by a street-level bureaucrat (A) and the mayor (B), exemplify this:

> (A) The fact that there is a lot of jobs makes the integration easier and less conflictive. People tend to find work quite quickly although often for a very short period of time, so it's very instable employment… (SP-1-02)
>
> (B) The municipality has one of the lowest unemployment rates in CAT, and this does influence local policymaking. Employment is not a big problem – there are problems but more specific, like how to offer jobs that are adequate to specific/higher education (SP-1-03).

As both also point out, finding (any) employment is certainly not enough to ensure longer-term integration nor opportunities to advance professionally, issues that will be discussed in more detail within WP4.

A representative of an employer organization in locality 3, suggested that what actually "helps" integration policy making is the fact that the local population had time to get accustomed to cultural diversity and accepted it as part of the local reality, but also he links the locality´s long history of immigration to (regional) economic growth: "In general, I think the people of this city and the region in general have had a lot of time to get used to immigration and cultural diversity and that obviously helps. And I think the reason for that is that economically this region as always been very well-off" (SP-3-14).

A third important factor seems to be **"requests/pressures/suggestions from local NGOs or associations"**, as several respondents, particularly policymakers and street-level bureaucrats indicated in their survey responses (as well as during interviews). This is no surprise given the very crucial role played by NGOs within both the Spanish asylum system and integration regime more generally. Fewer participants mentioned "requests/pressures/suggestions" from other actors as particularly influential, including from the local government (street-level bureaucrats in locality 1); or from the national government (SLBs in locality 2).

Interviewees also mentioned some **"other factors"** beyond those explicitly listed in the survey, particularly referring to the following problems (e.g., particular needs of the migrant population and/or the lack of specific resources to address them) that they or their institutions have identified as warranting a response:

- Racism in the private housing market (locality 1)
- Lack of respect for migrants´ fundamental rights (locality 5)
- Cultural diversity as "good for the community" and for the integration of society (locality 2)
- Lack of resources for migrants' labour integration (locality 3)
- A notable increase of "aporophobia", i.e. fear of poverty and/or rejection towards poor people (locality 4), an issue clearly linked to the "economic situation of the locality" (see above).

A representative of a (left-wing) opposition party interviewed in locality 1 noted that her party has been careful not to raise the issue or "push too much" given the **fear that if too much public attention falls on the issue the whole topic might be "taken over" by right-wing, anti-immigrant parties** (SP-1-13). While this might partly explain the reluctance of public institutions to take responsibility for immigrant integration, **the lack of financial resources**, as well as **limited (formal) competences** were most often mentioned as the main reasons for the insignificant role played by local administrations, particular in relation to the arrival of asylum seekers, as the responsible local counsellor in locality 2 (A) and SLB in locality 3 (B) emphasised:

(A) All of this is outside of our competence, as a local authority, we cannot grant international protection, so this is a bit of a problem. But we nonetheless do all we can to support the integration of these families, and we work hand in hand with the NGOs in order to resolve these cases … but there is not much we can do in that sense (SP-2-02).

(B) Between 2014 and 2018 the NGOs have been sustaining the whole system of reception, without help of the public institutions. If anyone, then they [the NGOs] made an effort to foster the integration of newcomers, it depended 100% on them.

> We are lucky, as a city, and as a government, that we have these organizations! We as a government arrived late, late and with insufficient resources (SP-3-11).

Especially in locality 2 but also, to a lesser degree, in locality 4, several respondents explicitly referred to **the demographic situation**, i.e., the shrinking and ageing of the local population, as a relevant factor, and as a development – often presented as one of the major challenges that the municipality or province is facing – that can only be compensated by immigration. The following account of a representative of a pro-migrant organization (in locality 2) illustrates this perception very well:

> The arrival of immigrants has kept the population stable… and thanks to this arrival many public institutions like local schools could be kept running… And many of the people who arrived, especially those in irregular situations, ended up working in the care sector… precisely because this is a strongly aging population. In some cases, it is also immigrant families who use the opportunities offered by some local administrations to move to some village that is losing so much population that people are offered housing for free, or almost free (SP-2-11).

Somewhat surprisingly, only one respondent (a local official in locality 4) explicitly mentioned the fact that an NGO opened a refugee reception center (with 80 places), as the crucial factor influencing some of his decision making. Another important question closely related to this is who even takes **the decision to open a new center or reception facilities in a specific locality**. In Spain, these decisions are primarily taken by the relevant NGOs, in liaison with the national ministry (which determines the overall number of places). The following quotes from interviewees with the coordinator of an NGO running a center near locality 3 (A), a representative of the NGO running reception facilities in locality 2 (B), and the director of the reception center in locality 6 (C) illustrate this situation:

> (A) We do not really take into account the economic situation but maybe the demographic situation, a little bit, it wouldn't help to open centres where there is absolutely no immigration and where most people are old… but that said, we also try to not put the centres or flats in those neighbourhoods that are already very densely populated by immigrants. We a looking for a good balance (SP-3-08).
>
> (B) When in 2016/17 new resources were created by the organisation in [locality 2] for the reception of refugees […] the decision to do this has been an internal strategic decision by the organization itself… the idea was a bit to diversify the migrant population in the area… normally there is less public debate about refugees than irregular migrants and for the latter, most of the recourses [refers to the humanitarian protection programme] were concentrated along the Mediterranean coast. And so, it was an initiative on the part of the NGO to seek a better distribution and make also other parts of Spain more multicultural (SP-2-03).
>
> (C) At that time there was an urgent need for more reception places in the country. So, we were looking for a relatively large space… and got in touch with the church…

> and they offered us this monastery here in [locality] At the beginning they gave it to us for free… but obviously we had to reform the whole building. So, the deal (with the church) was a bit: we can use this space for free for the beginning but are responsible for its upkeep. Now we do pay rent to them… which is covered by the ministry of inclusion (SP-6-07).

In contrast to the first two statements, the respondent who provided the last one, explicitly highlighted that in this case, economic or demographic factors did not have any significant influence on this decision.

5. Conclusion

The brief discussion of the national context highlights various **dysfunctionalities of the Spanish asylum (and immigration) system that negatively affect the integration of asylum-seekers** as well as other specific groups. In some cases, like the recent reform of the asylum system that explicitly limits integration measures and resources to recognized refugees, this effect is clearly intended.

Regarding the **development of local integration policies**, our analysis shows that in none of the six localities any specific (formal) policy or strategy for the integration of foreigners – let alone that of post-2014 migrants more specifically – has been put in place between 2014 and 2021. Only in one of them (locality 3) a concrete local "plan" for the reception of newcomers to the city is (currently) being developed but has not yet been adopted. Another municipality (locality 1) used to have a local "plan for citizenship and immigration" during an earlier period (2008-2011). Notably, both are localities of type A but they also share other characteristics.

The lack of local policies is in line with the fact that overall, **integration (as well as immigration more broadly) does not seem to be perceived as a particularly pressing issue for local governments and administrations**, nor does it seem to play a significant role in local public and political discourse. In some of the selected municipalities (especially localities 5 and 6), this is related to the fact that the number of arrivals has remained quite low. More generally, **immigration is often perceived as following economic pull-factors** (and thus automatically affecting only those localities where the local economy needs or least can absorb foreign workers). This logic is also partly extended to refugees and asylum seekers who in the eyes of many interviewees "will not stay here anyway" if they do not find a job.

When local policymakers do recognise concrete challenges related to immigration and the resulting cultural diversity, **they tend to frame them as issues of everyday conviviality rather than immigrant integration**. The issue is thus usually described as affecting the local population and community as a whole; and thus, as a **process that has to be fostered through mainstream policies** rather than policies or services specifically (let alone exclusively) targeting foreigners. The only kinds of services that are provided locally (mostly through NGOs) and specifically target foreign residents are usually those related to **the reception of asylum seekers, the provision of immigration advice and language classes.** None of the six localities has a specific department (or sub-unit) dedicated to immigration and/or (immigrant) integration, and only in locality 5 there are (rather vague) plans to establish one. While there usually is some person who "has the overview" and acts as a contact point for newcomers and other local actors, these roles **do not include any concrete formal competences, nor specific budget**. As a result, many of the measures taken (or mentioned) by local governments are often largely **symbolic** (like "intercultural" events).

An important problem underlying the idea of fostering (immigrant) integration only via mainstream services is that these services are often **unable to adequately address the very specific circumstances of, for example, asylum seekers or migrants in irregular situations**. In

the absence of concrete local integration policies or plans, some (more isolated) measures have been taken in response to more specific challenges (like the need to adapt the local cemetery) or target groups (especially unaccompanied young foreigners). In some instances, already existing services have been extended or reinforced during the post-2014 period, or parts of the mainstream support system have been adapted to allow local implementing actors to temporarily include specific client groups.

The regional governments – which have the formal competence in this area – **provide the legal frameworks** (through laws that precede 2014 and haven't changed since then), **which define the structure of local support systems** and/or set the minimum benchmarks for service delivery but leave **significant room for local discretion**. Local authorities fill this room to varying degrees, mostly depending on their economic situation and thus financial capabilities.

The analysis of **how interviewees frame "integration"** reveals – above all – the **huge diversity of underlying meanings that local actors attribute to this process**. Many highlight their own critical position towards the concept, the multidimensional and long-term nature of the underlying process, and the fact that (in their experience) it depends a lot on immigrants´ origin but also their socio-economic status. In line with the "Whole-COMM approach", and especially among policymakers, integration is often framed in terms of social cohesion. Overall (across all six localities and all kinds of actors) **the two most common ways to describe integration was in terms of a "normalization" and "mutual respect and/or adaptation"**. While it is difficult to identify patterns in the way different kinds of actors tend to frame integration, policymakers tend to use "less ambitious" conceptualisations like the absence of apparent conflicts, discrimination or exclusionary policies, or a "normalisation" of social relations. This is in line with the common idea to foster integration through mainstream policies.

Regarding **the relationship between integration and the size of a locality**, respondents pointed out advantages (ease of making friends, more personal contact with locals and institutions/services) as well as disadvantages (lack of ethnic networks and support structures, "closed" societies, social control and stigmatisation) of smaller communities. Small size also facilitates collaboration among local actors as well as the "integration" of new actors arriving in the locality. Interviewees also suggest that it is not just about size but also **the degree (and time) of exposure to ethnic diversity** that is decisive, as well as the relative size of the immigrant community.

Closely related to this, the only overall conclusion that can be drawn from the **interviewees´ perceptions of locals' attitudes towards (post-2014) migrants, is that they are perceived as (more) positive when the overall economic situation is (perceived as) better, and whenever newcomers fulfil a necessary function for (local) society** – usually by filling specific labour needs or counterbalancing a negative demographic trend. High unemployment, strong residential segregation, and the rise of anti-immigrant parties are seen as having the opposite effect.

Regarding the **role and relative importance of different actors**, it is clear (and unquestioned) that most of the local "integration work" is done by (national, regional and local) **NGOs and local associations** including many migrant(-led) organisations. They are not only the main service providers but also act as intermediaries and have an important advocacy function. The role of local governments and public institutions, in contrast, was often described as minimal, and usually in terms of "outsourcing", i.e., limited to the provision of funding). They are generally perceived as supportive but lacking own initiative. Only locality 1, where the (district´s) social services seem to play a very central and active role – stands out in this regard. In relation to (public) funding, interviewees (especially in Andalusia) identified a trend towards more short-term, project-specific funding as an after-effect of the economic crisis. Other – especially private – actors seem to play a very minor, and rather reluctant, role in relation to integration, with the notable exception of those sectors or individual companies that very heavily depend on immigrant workers, like the meat industry in locality 1, the elderly/domestic care sector in locality 6, and some agricultural producers in and around localities 2 and 4.

Somewhat surprisingly, **in none of the selected localities, interviewees have reported any significant conflicts around integration (nor immigration), neither within the population nor among the different actors**. Instead, and across all categories, they were keen to highlight the very good relations and effective collaboration at the local level, especially between public and private actors. In all selected municipalities apart from locality 4 **there is some kind of institutionalised forum** in which the relevant local actors meet on a more or less regular basis to discuss issues to do with integration of immigrants/refugees (often among other issues). However, in none of them has this forum been created in response to (or around the time of) the arrival of "post-2014 migrants". Some of them have not been meeting for several years, which was presented as a result of the pandemic. Particularly migrants themselves (through local, migrant/led organisations) tend to not be represented in these fora, or feel that they are invited and listened to, but not really taken seriously.

Among the various NGOs within each of the localities there is generally a good relationship (hardly any indication of conflicts or competition) and clear separation of tasks and/or client groups, especially between those working with asylum seekers (and financed by the state) and those dealing with other migrants. Those funded by the central government tend to have slightly less collaboration and contact with the local administration. **The most conflictive relationship seems to exist between the regional and the national level** (and particularly in the case of Catalonia, probably reflecting the ongoing struggle for independence).

Regarding the **factors that determined policymakers´ or other local actors´ decision-making**, the factor most often identified as either "extremely influential" or "very influential" (across all localities and actor categories) has been the decision makers´ own "values and ideas". Only in Catalonia (localities 1 and 3, both type A), also the "economic situation of the locality" has been attributed a similar importance. This suggests that this factor is more likely to influence decision making if the economic situation is (perceived as) particularly good – as is the case in

these two localities – than when the economic situation is (perceived as) bad – as in the case of locality 5 and 6 (both type D), where the factor has been mentioned but does not appear as dominant. Unsurprisingly, also "requests/pressures/suggestions from local NGOs or associations", are mentioned frequently, particularly by policymakers and street-level bureaucrats. Especially in locality 2 but also, to a lesser degree, in locality 4, several respondents explicitly referred to the demographic situation, i.e., the shrinking and ageing of the local population, as a relevant factor.

6. References

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