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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 **the Netherlands**

Country Reports on multilevel dynamics

By Elina Jonitz, Maria Schiller, Peter Scholten

Erasmus University Rotterdam

REPORT

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Executive summary

This report looks at multi-level governance dynamics and at the integration policies targeting post-2014 migrants developed by four small and medium-sized towns and rural areas (SMsTRA) in the Netherlands. 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 in the Netherlands; 2) policymaking relations among the key actors involved in these policy processes in the four localities and key features of policy networks within which these actors interact; 3) how these actors perceive and define integration.

Main findings

The report finds that despite the Netherlands' centralized approach to immigrant integration, the four localities in our case study have adopted their own localized responses to immigrant integration, by making use of the leeway provided within national legal regulations, by developing local policies addressing the issue at hand and by choosing their (local) collaboration partners to carry out the necessary tasks.

All four localities opted for a rather mainstream, integrated approach instead of a target group-specific policy because of local governments' previously limited role in this policy domain and because of the rather low number of recognized refugees coming to the localities each year. Furthermore, integration is seen as being closely interrelated with other policy areas such as work, care, or the social domain.

We find that local governance networks differ in terms of size, type of collaboration partners and distribution of tasks and responsibilities. They are often marked by close collaboration due to the smaller size of partners involved in SMsTRA, but also by conflict due to competition for funding, the politicized nature of integration and diverging ideas on how to address the topic. Support structures set up by *informal* actors such as volunteer or migrant-led organizations are particularly important because they represent the voices of migrants, mobilize resources, lobby for more inclusive policies, and question the existing system.

We see that governance structures do not only exist locally, but municipalities also collaborate at the (supra-)regional level – especially in the light of the decentralization of integration policy under the new Civic Integration Act. This is especially visible in smaller municipalities which often do not have the capacity, resources, and expertise to deal with the assigned tasks alone.

Finally, actors draw on various integration frames, most importantly a socio-economic frame with a focus on participation (through work) and self-sufficiency and a socio-cultural frame where integration is often defined as a two-way process that does not only rely on the individual newcomer but also on the receptivity of the society.

Important factors explaining the differences – and similarities – between the four case studies include size, political orientation, and economic/structural conditions. Experience with diversity draws a mixed picture.

Recommendations

⇒ Offering relevant services under one roof, either by one service provider or by multiple service providers that are located in one space to make resources more accessible

⇒ Organizing reception of asylum seekers and housing more regionally, allowing refugees to start their 'integration process' early on

⇒ Distributing refugees equally across the neighbourhoods to create a better balance between long-term residents and newcomers

⇒ Revising strict 'work first' approach under the Participation Act, giving actors more leeway in their work and refugees the opportunity to continue their education

⇒ Acknowledging the role of political leaders in taking a pro-active, dialogue-based approach and shaping a positive narrative around migration and diversity

⇒ Giving migrants, independent of their legal status, the opportunity to access information and services related to integration

Contents

1. Introduction

Over the last few years, the Netherlands 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 in the Netherlands.

This report aims to explore how four small and medium sized towns and rural areas in the Netherlands 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 SMsTRA have mobilized vis-à-vis the new challenge and in relation to the policies and funding schemes put forward 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 these localities – which differ in terms of their size, the political affiliation of their local government, their experience with cultural diversity, and their economic and demographic situation, and that are located in different regions – a total of 56 interviews were conducted with actors involved in local integration policymaking, including members of local government, local officials, street-level bureaucrats, local councilors, and a wide range of non-governmental actors. Additionally, 15 interviews were conducted with actors at the regional

[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" (Caponio & Pettrachin, 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 Caponio & Pettrachin 2021, Working Paper 1 for the Whole-COMM project).

and national level. Insights derived from the interview material have been complemented with a survey and an in-depth analysis of policy and legal documents.

The report finds that **immigrant integration policymaking in the Netherlands** is marked by a centralized approach, reflected in a national dispersal mechanism, a national Civic Integration Act, and nationally defined legal tasks in the realm of housing and social support for refugees. The responsibility to carry out these legal tasks lies with local governments and their collaboration partners. Despite the seemingly uniform approach steered by the national level, the report shows that the four localities in our case study have adopted their own localized responses to immigrant integration, by making use of the leeway provided within national legal regulations, by developing local policies addressing the issue at hand and by choosing their (local) collaboration partners to carry out the necessary tasks. All four localities opted for a rather **mainstream, integrated approach instead of a target group-specific policy** because of local governments' previously limited role in this policy domain and because of the rather low number of recognized refugees coming to the localities each year. Furthermore, integration is seen as being closely interrelated with other policy areas such as work, care, or the social domain.

In terms of **policymaking interactions and networks**, local governments have adopted different strategies: some choose to collaborate with local partners only, while others trust in national organizations; some distribute integration-related tasks widely and 'outsource' them, while others 'bundle' these tasks under one organization's roof. Conflicts have emerged in the past due to structural factors (funding and competition for funding, divided responsibilities), societal factors (controversies surrounding the arrival and settlement of post-2014 migrants), as well as diverging ideas on how to best address and perceive immigrant integration (rather restrictive national approach vs. more progressive local approaches). Furthermore, governance structures do not only exist locally, but municipalities also collaborate at the (supra-)regional level – especially in the light of the decentralization of integration policy under the new Civic Integration Act. This is especially visible in smaller municipalities which often do not have the capacity, resources, and expertise to deal with the assigned tasks alone.

Perceptions of integration often relate to a socio-economic dimension with a focus on participation and self-sufficiency or to a socio-cultural side of integration, evoking question about the 'extent' to which newcomers should adapt to the 'dominant' cultural context. Here, integration is often defined as a two-way process that not only relies on the individual newcomer but also on the receptivity of the society.

Important factors explaining the differences – and similarities – between the four case studies include size, political orientation, and economic/structural conditions. Experience with diversity draws a mixed picture.

The report is organized as follows. Chapter two gives a brief overview of the case selection process and the empirical data collection. Chapter three provides a detailed description of relevant trends and developments at the national and regional level in integration policymaking, before introducing the four case studies. Each sub-chapter contains information on the locality's population, demographic development, economic situation, political orientation as well as the locality's overall experience and attitude towards the topic of immigrant integration. Chapter four explores the four main themes of this report: chapter 4.1 looks at the development of integration policies in each municipality since 2014; 4.2 discusses relevant integration frames across governance levels and actors and highlights the particularities of immigrant integration in smaller communities and the ways migrants are perceived in them. Chapter 4.3 turns to some in-depth reflections on multilevel governance dynamics in integration policymaking by analyzing existing governance networks and the various functions and roles of the actors involved. It further explores different dynamics of cooperation and conflict and the underlying factors for them. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of relevant decision-making processes in local integration policymaking. The report ends with a conclusion and some practical recommendations.

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 Dutch), 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 total, 71 interviews with 80 respondents were conducted; additionally, the researcher had two unrecorded, informal conversations with local volunteers. Of the 71 interviews, 65 interviews were recorded; based on the preference of the respondents, 68 interviews were conducted in Dutch, 3 in English. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most interviews scheduled after November 2021 (when the Dutch government announced stricter regulations) were conducted online (41 interviews).

The four localities on which this report focuses were selected based on several different variables. All localities hosted a reception centre 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:

Type	Characteristics	Selected cases in the Netherlands
Type A	Recovering local economy and improving demographic profile, migrants' settlement before 2014	Municipality A = medium size town Province Utrecht, region: West
Type B	Improving economic and demographic situation, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	Municipality B = Small town Province South Holland, region: West
Type C	Demographic and economic decline, migrants' settlement before 2014	Municipality C = Small town Province Overijssel, region: East
Type D	Economic and demographic decline, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	Municipality D = Rural area Province Drenthe, region: North-East

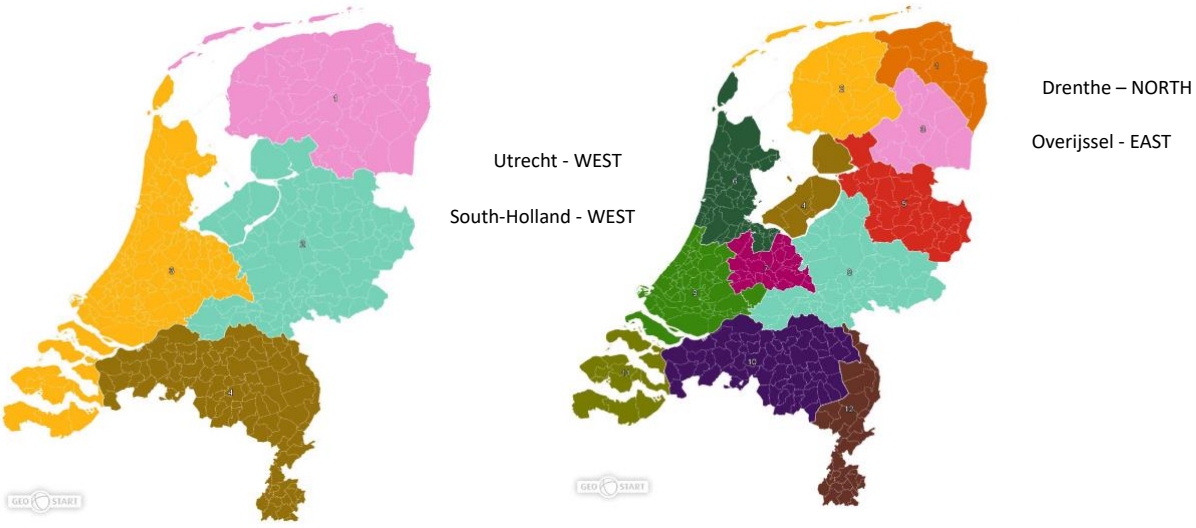
Table 1: Overview of the selected cases

In the Netherlands, four cases were selected.[3] To ensure regional variation, the four selected cases are distributed across four provinces, namely South Holland and Utrecht in the West of the Netherlands and Overijssel and Drenthe in the East and the North of the country, respectively. South Holland and Utrecht are part of the 'Randstad', a densely populated metropolitan region, including the biggest industrial cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. With its high demand for labor and direct access to the sea, the region has since long attracted migrants from different parts of the world. Over the past twenty years, the

[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).
[3] Importantly, the four selected cases may (slightly) vary from the ideal typical typology.

population of the two Western provinces has become increasingly more diverse: South Holland experienced an increase from 23% in 2000 to more than 33% in 2021, while the numbers in the province Utrecht (23,8% in 2021) are comparable to the national average of 24,6%. The North and the East of the Netherlands are less densely populated and both regions have a considerably lower number of residents with a 'migration background'. In Drenthe, the number of residents with a 'migration background' has slightly increased from 8% in 2000 to 10% in 2021; Overijssel has experienced an increase from 12,8% to more than 16%, of which 9% account for migrants from 'non-Western countries' (compared to 4,8% in Drenthe).

Asylum seekers have been hosted throughout the country in reception centers in different types of localities, including rural areas, mid-sized towns, and big cities, with a higher share of reception facilities in the Eastern and Northern part of the Netherlands and in small(er) municipalities. All four provinces have accommodated asylum seekers as well as recognized refugees, although the numbers differ significantly over time and across provinces. South Holland, the biggest and most densely populated province in the sample with 3.7 million residents, had to accommodate 6.138 recognized refugees in 2015 and 2.527 in 2020. The highly urbanized province Utrecht with its 1.36 million residents was asked to accommodate 2.159 recognized refugees in 2015 and 934 in 2020. In comparison, the less densely populated and most rural province Drenthe with 494.000 residents had to accommodate 840 recognized refugees in 2015 and 343 in 2020. Lastly, Overijssel with ca. 1.17 million residents was asked to accommodate 1.958 recognized refugees in 2015 and 803 in 2020. In total, the four provinces accommodated around 38 % of the total number of refugees in 2015 and 2020.[4]



Source: https://www.regioatlas.nl/kaarten

[4] All data presented in this section is derived from the national statistical office Statistics Netherlands (CBS).

3. Introducing the cases

3.1 The Dutch national context5

In the Netherlands, migration is a highly politicized topic and considered a complex or 'wicked' policy issue. 'Wicked' policy issues are marked by contestation and uncertainty and the "governance in these areas tends to involve disagreement, not only about what the best way would be to solve the policy problem, but also at a more basic level on what the policy problem actually is, how it should be defined, and what could be to blame." (Scholten, 2020, p. 28) Approaches to immigrant *integration* are likewise contested and reflect differing and at times conflicting traditions, narratives, and rationalities on how to best address the topic at hand. In the past two decades, these differing convictions have become apparent in policy developments at the national level where changes in the legal framework have gone back and forth between decentralizing and (re-)centralizing the task of integration (expert on integration policymaking). The substantial changes made at the national level in 2013 with the introduction of the Civic Integration Act (*Wet Inburgering 2013)* reflected, for instance, the neo-liberal idea that individuals should be made responsible for their own civic integration trajectory (N-SZW).[6] In the Netherlands, this trajectory is described as '*inburgering'* and refers to the newcomer's obligation to learn the Dutch language and culture and to pass an exam at the end of the process. Usually, persons have up to three years to integrate; yet, in some cases (e.g., due to illness, or having a baby) extra time can be granted. According to a respondent from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW), civic integration is considered the most important policy instrument in integration policymaking because it 'equips newcomers' with Dutch language skills and knowledge about Dutch society and the labour market. Civic integration thus aims at 'transforming' newcomers' initial unequal position into an equal one.

[5] The research in the Netherlands focuses on the governance of integration of *statushouders*. *Statushouders* are asylum seekers with a residence permit, that is, their asylum claim has been accepted. For this report, the term 'refugee' or 'recognized refugee' will be used to refer to the group of '*statushouders'* to differentiate them clearly from the group of asylum seekers that have not (yet) received a final decision for their asylum claim and are hence not considered under the Civic Integration Act as 'obligated to integrate'. Importantly, in other contexts the term 'refugee' is also used to refer to persons fleeing war, violence, conflict or persecution (UNHCR) more broadly (not exclusively to refer to those who are officially recognized as refugees and have been granted a residence permit accordingly).

[6] For national and regional level respondents, the acronym N – [institutional affiliation] is used to quote and refer to the respective interviewees in the report. For example: N-SZW is a respondent from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van **S**ociale **Z**aken en **W**erkgelegenheid).* For local level respondents, the acronym N - [locality type A/B/C/D] - [number of interviewee] is used to quote and refer to the respective interviewees in the report. For example: N-A-1 is respondent no. 1 from locality A. Importantly, the numbering does *not* follow a chronological order. An overview of all the acronyms can be found in the appendix in table 1.

After 2013, the national government regulated and supervised the policy implementation mainly via the national implementing body DUO (*Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs*).[7] Refugees received a loan from DUO to pay for their civic integration and to complete the '*inburgeringsexamen'* at the end of the trajectory.

However, this approach taken by the national government was not necessarily accepted or shared by all local level governments that – as a result of the introduction of the Civic Integration Act in 2013 – have had a limited role in integration governance, despite 'integration' being a highly localized process (N-VNG). The Civic Integration Act 2013 did not only transfer the responsibility to integrate to the individual level, but it also led to the outsourcing of the civic integration courses to private providers, resulting, amongst others, in poor quality of courses because schools did not underly the supervision of (local) governments (mentioned by multiple respondents across localities; N-VNG). Overall, it became clear that the Civic Integration Act did not deliver the desired outcomes, but instead led to a substantial drop in the number of refugees passing their integration exam and to an overall lower and less sustainable labor market participation (Pamflet 'Geef regie op inburgering aan gemeenten', Divosa, 2017). Respondents similarly pointed out that the focus on individual responsibility as well as the strict enforcement of the law did 'more harm than good' (expert on integration policymaking) and 'stood in the way of good integration' (N-SZW). For example, people tended to aim for the lowest language level required to complete the integration trajectory because failing the course could result in being sanctioned (N-SZW). In 2017, different organizations and associations in the broader social domain demanded giving the municipalities the '*regierol'* in supporting persons following the civic integration program (Divosa, 2017). With some delay, in January 2022, the new Civic Integration Act (*Wet inburgering 2021*) led to the decentralization of the task of integration, giving municipalities (again) the central role in the governance of immigrant integration. The underlying rationale is that decentralization will allow for more discretion and tailor-made responses to integration in local communities, taking into account local differences and contexts (N-SZW).

On a more general note, both ministry officials mention that in the future it will become more relevant to not (only) have a target-group specific integration policy, but to think more broadly about a generic "*samenleving-beleid*" ('society policy') which accounts for the increasing diversity in society. This 'society policy' would be accessible and available for all groups (knowledge migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, family migrants and EU migrants), and stimulate social cohesion among newcomers and 'established' residents, especially at the local

[7] DUO stands for *Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs* (literally: Education Executive Service). DUO is a national agency/implementing body which executes educational laws and regulations on behalf of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. DUO also implements the Civic Integration Act on behalf of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (see for more information: https://duo.nl/organisatie/organisatie/).

level (see for more information the WRR report: *Samenleven in verscheidenheid. Beleid voor de migratiesamenleving,* 2020).

Besides the Civic Integration Act, various other laws and policy documents play an important role for integration policymaking in general and for *local* integration governance in particular. The Civic Integration Act, the Participation Act (2015) as well as the Housing Act (2014) define specific legal tasks for which municipalities are responsible. Moreover, municipalities are affected by other national legal frameworks such as the *Wet Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers* because the reception of asylum seekers and the ways recognized refugees are distributed across the country have a direct impact on the settlement and integration process of refugees in local communities. The municipalities have an active role in the following areas:

1. Housing of refugees with a residence permit (*Taakstelling huisvesting vergunninghouders*)

Within two weeks after receiving their residence permit, recognized refugees are allocated to municipalities by the national implementing body COA (the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), taking into consideration various factors such as family size, country of origin, language, education, work experience, work contract, existing networks, medical details or plans for the future (Rijksoverheid Huisvesting Statushouder, 2022). The national government determines every six months the number of refugees that each municipality has to accommodate. Municipalities usually have limited say in how many and who is going to stay in their local community. To fulfil their task, (most) municipalities have a "*prestatieafspraak*" (performance agreement) with local housing corporations, which assign refugees to available social housing (N-SH). Based on a specific regulation, refugees can be prioritized for accessing social housing. However, since 2017 refugees to do not automatically receive a priority status anymore (N-O; Rijksoverheid Huisvesting Statushouder, 2022). The implementation of this legal task is supervised by the provinces who have various possibilities to intervene if municipalities fail to meet the set target number.

Various respondents from the national and regional level emphasized the interrelatedness of the areas of reception (*opvang*), housing (*huisvesting*) and integration (*integratie*) of refugees. The official civic integration process (*inburgering*) starts when refugees live in the municipality they have been assigned to (N-VNG). However, due to the current 'housing crisis' and the overall shortage of (social) housing, refugees often have to stay for an extended period of time in the reception centers, delaying their integration (N-O, N-SH, N-VNG, N-SZW, N-JenV). Another challenge derives from the fact that once asylum seekers have been granted a residence permit, they do *not* necessarily stay in the province in which the reception center is located. Moreover, the existing reception structure is not able to adapt to the at times significant fluctuation of numbers of refugees arriving in the Netherlands (N-G40).

To address these issues, national, provincial, and local governments have drafted the *Uitvoeringsagenda Flexibilisering Asielketen* (Implementation Agenda for the Flexibilization of the Asylum Chain), "an important document that outlines how the Netherlands is going to organize its 'reception landscape' in the medium- and long-term" (N-G40). One crucial goal of the agenda is the implementation of 'regional reception localities' (ROL) to ensure that asylum seekers who stay in one region during their asylum procedure will also be assigned to a municipality in the same region, thereby making sure they can start their integration process early on. The representative of the G40 city network emphasizes:

> *Within the flexibilization agenda, we have to move towards a different way of organizing the reception. So, we have to organize it in such a way that it contributes to integration and participation and also contributes to the support in society. And that's where we need to go, so that we can start as early as possible and also give that municipality the opportunity to do that in the right way.*

Importantly, since 2016, on behalf of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment the COA has also initiated several projects to activate and stimulate 'promising' (*kansrijke*) asylum seekers with a 'good prospect of staying' as well as recognized refugees in the reception centers, enabling them to "use their time more productively" (N-SZW). They can, for instance, access a *voor-inburgering* program (*pre*-civic integration program) to follow Dutch language classes or start voluntary work before moving to a municipality (N-JenV, N-COA, N-VNG).[8]

2. Social support *(Taakstelling maatschappelijke begeleiding)*

The social support provided by municipalities is defined in the Civic Integration Act.[9] Municipalities are responsible for the implementation of the 'social support' for refugees and receive 2.370€ per asylum seeker who is required to follow the civic integration trajectory (*inburgering*). Municipalities (usually) assign this task to a non-public organization which then supports and guides the refugees for a certain amount of time. The actual time varies per municipality and may range from 18 to 36 months or longer. Here, the municipality can choose which organization it would like to collaborate with and has therefore some leeway regarding the form of implementation of the task. In most municipalities, the Dutch Council for Refugees

[8] The interrelatedness of the three areas reception, housing and integration and the need to look at these areas more comprehensively, is also addressed in the "*Integrale handreiking voor opvang, huisvesting en inburgering*" (2021) compiled by the VNG, IPO, COA, and the ministries JenV, SZW en BZK as well as the "*Integrale Uitvoeringsagenda - van Asiel tot en met Integratie"* published in 2021 by the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), Divosa and the city network G40, asking for a (better) collaboration between the national government and municipalities to be more efficient in the way asylum, integration and housing are currently organized for vulnerable groups (labour migrants, refugees, and others).

[9] More information is provided by the Ministry of Finance: https://www.rijksfinancien.nl/memorie-van-toelichting/2022/OWB/XV/onderdeel/1052426 (accessed August 22, 2022).

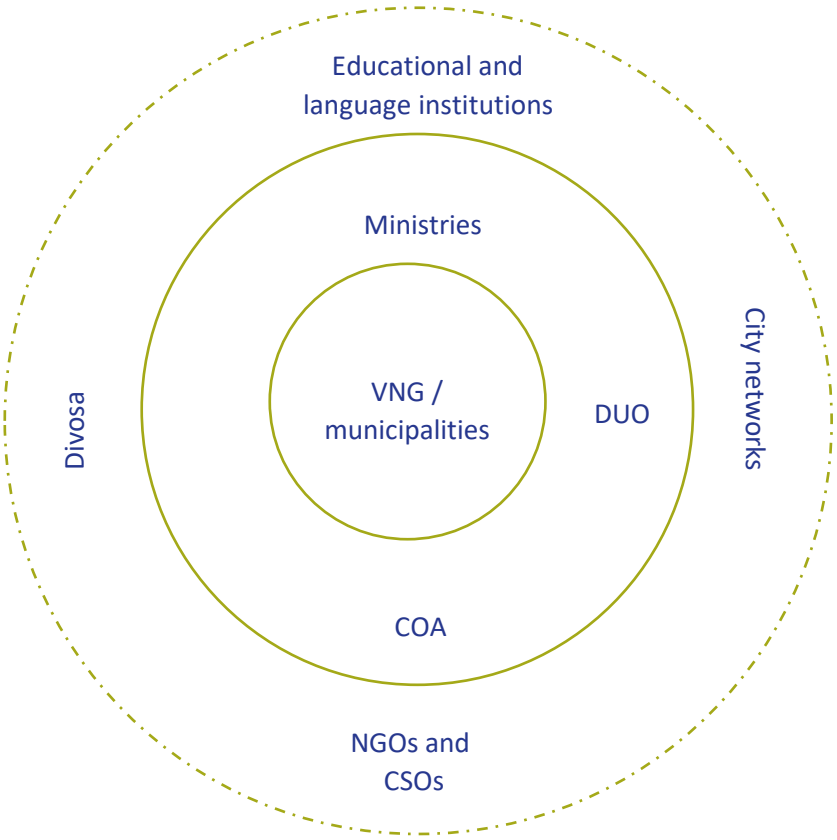
(*Vluchtelingenwerk*) is responsible for the social support. Yet, in three of the four cases (municipality A, B and D), the municipalities chose very consciously for a local partner. The task of 'social support' is either implemented by an organization that specifically focuses on refugees, or, in some instances, the task is executed by a mainstream welfare organization (*welzijnsorganisatie*) which offers their services to all residents and directs some services more specifically at refugees. These non-public organizations become thus part of the formal governance support structure, and accordingly, their employees may be seen as taking on the role of street-level bureaucrats, despite not being formally employed by a municipality.

3. Labor market (re-)integration (*Participatiewet*)

The Participation Act regulates that municipalities are expected to provide additional support for those who can work but are not able to find a job by themselves (e.g., persons with a 'distance' to the labor market, persons with a 'work restriction' (*arbeidsbeperking*)). To implement this task, municipalities receive funding from the national government. The Participation Act is especially relevant when looking at the integration of refugees because the act concerns the labor market (re-)integration of social welfare recipients. Once refugees start living in a municipality, they start receiving welfare benefits and thus fall under the target group of the Participation Act. The goal of the Participation Act is creating more jobs for more people and thus increase labor market participation (Rijksoverheid Participatiewet, 2022). Importantly, the Participation Act is also part of the aforementioned decentralization process, giving municipalities a central role in the local implementation of the national law. That is, they have much freedom to implement the local participation policy in their own way. An important starting point is to increase the capacities of citizens. Municipalities can moreover individually decide if they expect social welfare recipients to offer a compensation, for example in form of 'socially useful work or other activities'.

With regards to the Participation Act, the respondent of the VNG (Association of Dutch municipalities) notes that in theory, the Civic Integration Act and the Participation Act are supposed to complement and strengthen each other. Yet, in practice, there are sometimes discussions over which law should be prioritized: in some cases, local officials have to decide if the possibility of having a paid job, regardless of what type, trumps the importance of having a job that allows for enough time to learn the language. In other words, is the goal of the Participation Act to support people in finding a job as fast as possible more (or less) important than the goal of the Civic Integration Act to learn the Dutch language properly? This dilemma is also described across all four localities and will be discussed in detail later on.

Based on the document analysis and the conducted interviews it becomes apparent that many different actors are involved in governing the presence and integration of post-2014 migrants.



At the **national level**, the main actors are the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK), the Ministry of Justice and Security (JenV) and most importantly the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW). The SZW is responsible for the Civic Integration Act and the Participation Act and '*opdrachtgever*' (awarding authority) for other national implementing bodies such as DUO (for civic integration) and COA (for integration-related activities in the reception centers). Moreover, the SZW funds the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) and the Association of Directors of Social Services (Divosa) so they can provide support to municipalities in the area of integration policymaking (especially with regards to the implementation of the New Civic Integration Act; N-VNG). More broadly speaking, the ministries set the policy framework at the national level by translating political decisions and ideas into actual policies which are then implemented at lower government tiers. Ministries have an important network function, bringing all involved actors together and making sure everyone knows what their roles are (N-JenV).

The **provinces** as the second level of government play, according to most respondents, only a marginal role in integration policymaking. One province declined an interview referring to its small role in the integration field (Utrecht); respondents from Overijssel and South Holland mainly underlined the role of the province in supervising the implementation of the legal task 'housing of refugees' (as defined in the Housing Act 2014):

> *For the integration field, it is mainly the housing aspect that is relevant. We are not so much involved in aspects of social integration and work. We speak with municipalities to see if they meet their target, this means, we look at the numbers to see how many refugees they have provided with housing and how many they still must give housing to.* (Provincial official South Holland)

As '*toezichthouder*' (supervisor), the province occupies a position between the national level (defining the legal task) and the local level (implementing the legal task) (N-O). The regional

official in the province Overijssel explains that supervision is not an end, but the means to an end – the 'end' or goal is to provide people with good accommodation; therefore, the province does not take a top-down approach, but rather seeks the dialogue with municipalities and considers the local context in case the defined target is not met. According to the respondents, provinces can act as "umbrella" (N-O) or "linking pin" (N-SH) for municipalities to share information and experiences and find solutions to the often-difficult task of finding housing for refugees. Consequently, provinces are both supervisors and partners – two roles that can in some instances conflict with each other (N-O). Moreover, despite having only little *doorzettingsmacht* (enforcement power), the provinces have an important coordinating role with regards to the implementation of the *Uitvoeringsagenda Flexibilisering Asielketen*: the provinces invite representatives of each region to jointly design a 'provincial plan' for the flexibilization of the reception system (N-G40).

Interestingly, the province Drenthe decided very consciously to take on a more active role in the social domein and has implemented a Social Agenda and an Inclusion Agenda – despite not having a legally assigned task in this policy field: "'we do not have a legal role in social policy, but we said to ourselves 'we think it is so important, we want to have a role in it'" (N-D).The Inclusion Agenda "*Iedereen doet mee en iedereen doet ertoe* (everyone participates and everyone counts)! is based on the idea that "not everyone is the same, but everyone is equal" (N-D), and aims at creating an inclusive society where everyone is welcome and able to participate (not only focused on newcomers, but also persons with a disability, LHBTI+ community etc.; Inclusie Agenda 2021-2023, p. 5). The province has, amongst others, funded a project for women with a refugee background and has started a pilot to promote the integration of 450 refugees living in different municipalities in Drenthe (N-D).[10]

Another crucial link between the local level and the national government is the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG). The VNG advocates for municipalities' interests in two main ways: First, it watches the process of policymaking at the national level (especially with regards to the regulations that affect municipalities) and lobbies for the local governments' interests. Second, it supports the municipalities with the implementation of the legally defined tasks and informs the municipalities about relevant changes. Municipalities have some leeway regarding the implementation of tasks and regulations, but the VNG often 'gives a direction' based on the conversation with other actors at the national level. At the same time, the VNG also receives input from the municipalities and can negotiate at the national level (N-VNG).

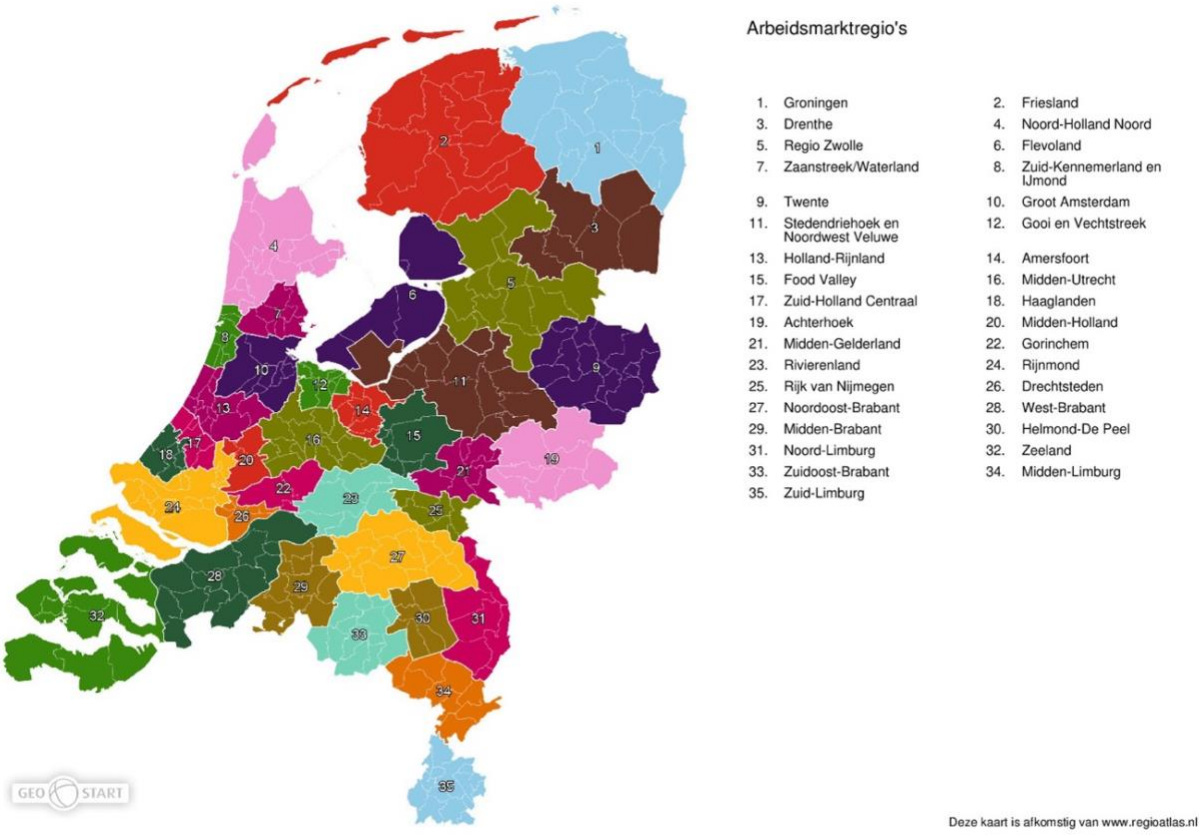
[10] The regional official in Drenthe mentioned that the province Overijssel has a similar focus in the social domein (https://www.overijssel.nl/onderwerpen/sociale-kwaliteit/).

Besides the VNG, there are other important associations and networks representing the municipalities' interests and guiding them through the process of policy implementation. One example is the city network G40, comprising 40 (medium)size cities in the Netherlands. G40 represents "one voice" towards the national government but is also contact point for the network members. The city network has a 'topic group' specifically focusing on asylum and fefugees (N-G40).

More generally, various respondents highlight that regional and transregional *samenwerkingsverbanden* (partnerships/collaborations) play a very important role for municipalities, also due to the increasing decentralization of tasks from the national to the local level (N-VNG, N-G40). The design of the new Civic Integration Act is in line with other decentralization processes that have started in 2015, especially in the social domain (for example, with the new Participation Act and the Youth Policy). This decentralization or 'down-scaling' of tasks towards the municipalities has resulted in the emergence of new forms and fora for collaboration within municipalities but also between municipalities and other public and non-public actors, eventually resulting in a 'semi-upscaling' of tasks at the regional level (Groenleer & Hendriks, 2020). This is especially visible in smaller municipalities who often have not had the capacity, resources, and expertise to deal with the newly assigned tasks alone and have consequently started working closely together with other municipalities and actors in the region (interviewees across localities; N-VNG, N-G40).

There are formal regional partnerships that were created by the national government and often focus on a specific topic such as care, education, or economy, as well as more informal collaborative networks (see for a detailed overview: https://www.regioatlas.nl). Different regions such as the *veiligheidsregio* (safety region), *onderwijsregio* (education region) or *arbeidsmarktregio* (labor market region) do not necessarily overlap and municipalities can (often) choose which municipalities they would like to cooperate with (N-G40). For the topic of integration there is no formal regional partnership between municipalities, but it appears that municipalities collaborating on that topic (especially with regards to the new Civic Integration Act) belonged primarily to the same *arbeidsmarktregio* (N-VNG, N-G40). Moreover, Divosa's 35 regional coordinators who support municipalities in the field of integration policy base their work on the 35 *arbeidsmarktregio's*, further strengthening the exchange and interaction between municipalities in that region (N-VNG, N-Divosa).[11]

[11] Divosa is the association of municipal directors in the field of social policies. More information can be found here: https://www.divosa.nl/over-divosa/ons-werkveld.



The municipalities in our case study are part of multiple formal and informal regional networks and partnerships: the medium-size town in Utrecht has 36 partnerships, the small town in South Holland 33, the small town in Overijssel 32, and the rural area in Drenthe 41.

Besides interacting in regional partnerships, public actors at the local level collaborate closely with provincial, and national level actors to discuss and facilitate integration-related tasks (asylum, housing, integration, and participation of recognized refugees) in the *Landelijke Regietafel Migratie & Integratie (LRT)*. In the LRT, every governmental tier is represented (N-G40). There is a difference between the H-LRT (high-level official national *regietafel*) where the 'director generals' of the ministries, the VNG and other organizations are represented. Then there is the 'support team' consisting of officials that are responsible for the preparatory work, that is, they look at the current situation and identify relevant 'bottlenecks' (*knelpunten*). Lastly, there is the 'core group integral implementing agenda' consisting of representatives from the various city networks G4, G40, M50, and P10, as well as Divosa and the VNG. In this 'core group' the identified challenges are discussed at the *implementing* level. The purpose of these 'layers' is to prevent every municipality from operating separately towards that national regietafel and, instead, speak with one voice after negotiating a common approach to the topic (N-G40).

At the local level, governmental tasks related to immigrant integration have increasingly been 'outsourced' to locally operating *non*-public (and often non-profit) service providers, covering the 'integration dimensions' housing, social support, language and (to some extent) work. In all four localities, similar actors appear to be involved in the reception and integration of post-2014 refugees – albeit with varying responsibilities, positions, and influence. This table provides a short overview; their (self-)ascribed roles as well as similarities and difference between municipalities will be discussed in more detail in the section below.

Actor	Role
Municipality	Funder and coordinator, also responsible for labor market integration under the Participation Act
Housing corporation	Responsible for finding housing for refugees as part of the 'performance agreement' with the municipality
(Local) NGO / non-profit service-provider	Responsible for the task of 'social support', assigned by the municipality under the Civic Integration Act
Local welfare organizations	Providing support for all residents, often neighbourhood-based
Other actors (NGOs, CSOs), incl. volunteers	Providing informal support to refugees (language support, social activities)

Table 2: Main actors in integration policymaking and their roles

To summarize, the national level is important because the main laws and policies are formulated at this level of government, resulting, for instance, in a major decentralization of responsibility in 2022: according to the new Civic Integration Act, the local level is given the main responsibility for integration. The provinces appear to be less important in the field of integration governance, despite having the task of supervising the accommodation of recognized refugees in the municipalities. Instead, regional and/or nation-wide city networks as well as the Dutch Association of Municipalities play an important role because they represent the municipalities' interests at the national level, provide support and information and facilitate the exchange of knowledge among actors operating at the local level.

	Relevant policies/laws	Year of enactment	Main actors involved	Role/ responsibility of actors
NATIONAL LEVEL	New Civic Integration Act (Wet Inburgering 2021)	2022	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment	Policymaking (design of the Civic Integration Act)
	Civic Integration Act (Wet Inburgering 2013)	2013	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment	Policymaking (design of the Civic Integration Act)
			DUO	Implementing and supervising body
	Participation Act (Participatiewet)	2015	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment	Policymaking (Focus on labor market re-integration)
	Housing Act (Huisvestingswet)	2014	Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations	Housing
	Law Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers	1994	Ministry of Justice and Security	Reception of asylum seekers
			COA	Implementing and supervising body
REGIONAL LEVEL	Housing Act	2014	Provinces	Supervision of implementation of 'housing task' at the local level
	Implementation Agenda for the Flexibilization of the Asylum Chain	2020	Regional actors such as VNG and the city network G40, together with national level actors	Defining a more flexible approach to reception of asylum seekers with a focus on the interrelatedness between reception, housing and (civic) integration
	Integral Handbook for Reception, Housing and Civic Integration	2021		
	Integral Implementation Agenda from Asylum to Integration	2021	VNG, Divosa, G40	

LOCAL LEVEL	Civic Integration Act 2021 – *implemented at local level*	2022	Local government (*gemeente*)	Directing and supervising role
	Civic Integration Act 2013 – *implemented at local level*	2013	Local government (*gemeente*)	Legal task – Social support
			Non-public non-profit service provider/ welfare organization	Implementing body
	Housing Act –*implemented at local level*	2014	Local government	Legal task - housing
			Housing corporation	Implementing body
	Participation Act – *implemented at local level*	2015	Local government	Facilitating access to labor market
			Non-profit service provider and/or service point for employers	Implementing body/ network
	Differing local policies, comprising sections on (civic) integration (table 4)		Local government, often in collaboration with local partners	

Table 3: Overview of main policies and actors across levels

Locality	Policy document	Year
Municipality A	Action plan "Reception and Housing of Refugees"	2015
	Coalition Agreement (2018-2022)	2018
	Policy plan "Inclusive City" (2021-2026)	2021
	Anti-discrimination Agenda (2021-2026).	2021
Municipality B	Program Integration	2016
	Coalition Agreement (2018-2022)	2018
	Social Agenda	2019
	Social Agenda, Policy 'meeting in the neighbourhood'	2019

Municipality C	Action Plan for the Integration of Refugees	2017
	Policy Plan: Coalition against Loneliness (2019-2022)	2019
	Coalition Agreement (2018-2022)	2018
	Implementation Agenda City Development	2021
Municipality D	Action Plan Social Support and Participation Statement Trajectory	2016
	Together Strong – Policy Plan Social Domain	2017
	Coalition Agreement (2018-2022)	2018
	Governance Program (2018-2022)	2018
	Action Plan Illiteracy	2020

Table 4: Overview of main policies in the four localities

3.2 The local cases

	Municipality A Medium size town	Municipality B Small town	Municipality C Small town	Municipality D Rural area
Province / Region	Province Utrecht, Region: West	Province South Holland, Region: West	Province Overijssel, Region: East	Province Drenthe, Region: North
Size	140.000 – 170.000	50.000 – 80.000	50.000 – 80.000	20.000 – 40.000
Population composition	25% with migration background (2021)	12% with migration background (2021)	27% with migration background (2021)	9% with migration background (2021)
Demographics	Population growth Slightly ageing population	Population growth Ageing population	Population growth Ageing population	Population decline Ageing Population
Employment	Unemployment level lower than national average	Unemployment level lower than national average	Unemployment level higher than national average	Unemployment level similar to national average
Political orientation (2018-2022)	Progressive & conservative	Center / center-right (Christian conservative)	Conservative	Conservative/moderate with strong local party

Table 5: Overview of the selected cases

3.2.1 Municipality A

Municipality A lies in the province Utrecht in the West of the Netherlands and has approximately 140.000 to 170.000 residents.[12] More than 25% of the local population has a 'migration background' (2021), of which more than 16% are categorized as 'non-Western'.[13] The share of foreign residents has increased in the last 10 years by approximately 2% (more than 2% for 'non-Western'). These numbers are similar to the national average where almost

[12] For anonymization purposes, the exact number of residents will not be disclosed.

[13] Statistics Netherlands (CBS) defines a person with a migration background as a "person of whom at least one parent was born abroad." CBS further differentiates between persons with a western migration background and persons with a non-western migration background. The latter category refers to persons "originating from a country in Africa, South America or Asia (excl. Indonesia and Japan) or from Turkey" (CBS: https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/onze-diensten/methods/definitions/person-with-a-migration-background). As of 2022, this differentiation will be replaced by new categories which will be based on continents and common immigration countries (see for more details: https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/longread/statistische-trends/2022/nieuwe-indeling-bevolking-naar-herkomst/2-de-nieuwe-herkomstindeling-in-het-kort.) Since the cases for this research were selected using statistical data from 2021 and earlier, the old categories will be used.

25% of the population has a migration background (of which 14% are categorized as 'non-Western'). In the survey, all six respondents noted accordingly that the city has also before 2014 'always been hosting people from other countries and exchanging with them'. In 2020, approximately 1200 adult recognized refugees resided in the municipality (Divosa/Stimulansz, 2020). A member of the local government estimates that each year between 100 and 150 refugees arrive in the city; according to him "*gaat [het] niet om gigantische aantallen*" (we do not talk about huge numbers). Because the municipality does not have a regular reception center, the city does not host a lot of asylum seekers. However, in situations with a higher influx of asylum seekers, the city has provided emergency shelters (in 2015, the city hosted more than 100 asylum seekers, mainly from Syria). Overall, the local population has grown over the past 10 years and has, on average, become slightly older, that is the ratio between the number of people aged 65 or over and the number of people aged 20 to 65 ("grey pressure") has increased by 6% (compared to the national average of more than 10%) (CBS).

Based on the survey, the economic situation in the city can be described as "rather good" (four respondents) to "very good" (three respondents). The unemployment level is lower than the national average and on average there are fewer people with a low educational background. In the past five years, both the number of jobs as well as the number of companies has increased significantly (LISA and I&O Research).

The political orientation of the city is a 'mixed' one: Progressive and (conservative) Christian democratic parties together hold the majority of seats in the municipal council. The member of the local government responsible for integration has an affiliation with a progressive party. Some respondents refer more generally to the Christian community in the city to explain residents' social engagement towards refugees (N-A-1, N-A-6, N-A-8, N-A-12).

Various respondents emphasize that this strong involvement of residents in providing support for refugees is one of the defining characteristics of the city in terms of integration. The employee of the local non-profit service provider responsible for the support of refugees describes the locality as 'very positive, social and open' (N-A-1):

> *It is a very social city. What I know about it, when the high wave of new refugees arrived, who came from Syria in particular, that a lot of people were involved with them, gave them a warm welcome, and wanted to arrange things well for them. So, a lot of energy came from society.*

In almost all interviews, the situation with regards to the reception and integration of refugees is similarly described as positive and welcoming (N-A-1, N-A-3, N-A-5, N-A-9). According to multiple respondents, the positive and open climate in the city becomes particularly apparent in the long-term involvement of many volunteers who are "easy to find" (N-A-1) and play a

very important role in the integration of migrants and refugees (N-A-1, N-A-3, N-A-5, N-A-8, N-A-9, N-A-12). The strong involvement of residents is visible in a Facebook group that was initiated in 2015 and is up until now very actively used to mobilize help and support for newcomers (e.g., collection of clothes, bikes, furniture; promotion of informal language support and social activities; spread of relevant information etc.). This "very strong network of volunteers" (N-A-5) is also recognized by the municipality. In 2015, the volunteers managed to mobilize political parties and the mayor by starting a petition to 'keep' refugees in the city (N-A-5, N-A-9, N-A-12, N-A-13).

Besides the involvement of volunteers, respondents emphasize that there is a very high number of informal organizations and initiatives working with migrants and refugees, ranging from migrant-led organizations over various language cafes and buddy projects to neighborhood-based initiatives focusing more generally on social cohesion (N-A-3, N-A-4, N-A-6, N-A-8, N-A-9), numbers ranging from 60-80. Lastly, respondents highlight that the topic of integration has received 'a lot of attention' and support from the local government (*bestuur*) and the municipal council. With regards to the reception of asylum seekers in 2015, a member of the municipal council specifies: 'All parties in the city council were positive (decisions were taken unanimously) and almost all parties provided volunteers to the emergency shelter' (member of municipal council in survey). (Former) members of the local government and local officials alike underline the importance of showing support at the political level to form a positive narrative around integration and diversity. The mayor has become a role model over the years, reflecting the open and welcoming attitude of the municipality (and its administration) in particular and the city's population more generally (N-A-5, N-A-8, N-A-9). According to the member of the local government it is crucial to show:

> *…what kind of society you stand for, right? That's how we live with each other. And that is mainly attributed to the mayor who has to operate as a citizen father, sometimes as a citizen mother and he must know what is going on in that society and he wants to establish opportunities and equality for everyone. That is also the role – to show what values and norms you have with each other about giving a place to newcomers and to make it possible and support it through policy.*

This general trend is also reflected in the survey where the local population's attitude towards refugees/migrants is described as (very) positive (7 out of 8 responses) and the integration of migrants is evaluated as rather successful. Some respondents mention some challenges regarding refugee integration, namely spatial segregation in and between neighbourhoods, social tensions related to (perceived) cultural or religious differences between groups (N-A-1, N-A-6, N-A-7, N-A-8) and difficulties for refugees to find *paid* employment (N-A-3, N-A-6, N-A-13). But overall, – especially regarding the political and municipal attention for the topic –, respondents describe the situation as positive and evaluate it as 'above (national) average'.

3.2.2 Municipality B

Municipality B lies in the province South Holland in the West of the Netherlands and has approximately 50.000 to 80.000 residents. The municipality comprises three smaller towns that merged in 2006. Respondents describe the locality as "*redelijk overzichtelijk*" (relatively manageable) (N-B-3) and as small enough to have 'short lines' within the municipal administration, and between the municipality and other local institutions (N-B-2, N-B-8); but "big enough to have a municipal official specifically working on the topic of integration" (N-B-8). Due to its small size, the local government is "close to its residents" and it is not easy to "just disappear or be overlooked" (ibid.). This is also reflected in the fact that the member of the local government is present when refugees sign their participation statement.[14]

Less than 15% of the local population has a 'migration background', of which less than 6% are categorized as 'non-Western'. The share of foreign residents has increased in the last 10 years by approximately 3% (almost 2% for 'non-Western'). These numbers are significantly lower than the national average where almost 25% of the population has a migration background (of which 14% are categorized as 'non-Western'). Since 2013, approximately 350 adult recognized refugees reside in the municipality. On average, 30-40 refugees arrive on a yearly basis (policy document, 2019). The number of arrivals of both asylum seekers and refugees in the municipality changes, sometimes significantly, in perceived 'crisis' situation such as the one in 2015/2016 when the local reception center hosted almost double the amount of people it usually does. Overall, the local population has grown over the past 10 years (by more than 5%) and has aged significantly (also compared to the national average) (CBS).

In terms of economics, the unemployment level is significantly lower than the national average, while the average national income is somewhat higher than the local average (Economische Agenda 2015, p. 47, CBS). Based on data collected in the survey, most respondents see an improvement in the economic situation from "rather good" in 2014 to "very good" in 2021, with only one respondent describing the economic situation as "rather bad" in 2021 (survey data). There are relatively few highly educated residents and illiteracy is seen as a challenge, especially among those "who left school early and started working as a fisherman or in construction" (N-B-8; N-B-5; Economische Agenda 2015). Important economic sectors comprise agriculture, the food and metal industry, and tourism. The respondent of the service provider responsible for labor market integration highlights that "there are no big tech or corporate (service) companies", which is sometimes seen as challenging for the integration of highly skilled migrants. According to the respondent, there are many jobs in the low skilled

[14] After starting their civic integration, refugees have one year to sign their participation statement. By doing so, they state that they "will actively participate in Dutch society and […] respect what is important in the Netherlands." (https://www.inburgeren.nl/en/taking-the-integration-exam/participation-statement.jsp).

sector (especially in the flower industry) which are not suitable for persons with a university degree who often have different ambitions.

The political orientation in the municipality can be described as "center or center-right" with the majority of the seats in the municipal council being held by Christian democratic parties (at the time of the research). On a more general note, the Christian foundation of the municipality is a crucial characteristic of the locality: In almost all interviews, municipality B is described as Christian municipality – an aspect that seems to play an important role in the self-identification of the residents. Yet, the 'Christian identity' of the locality, combined with its relatively small size, is evaluated very differently: for some, it explains the commitment of residents to help refugees (importance of charity); for others, it shows why there is a distance between newcomers and long-term residents as the local tight-knit community is seen as potential barrier to integration (N-B-2, N-B-5, N-B-8, N-B-11). According to an employee from the local library, the municipality has a "pretty white monoculture".

When looking at the topic of immigrant integration more specifically, municipality B can best be described by the term "*dubbel*" (ambiguous).

> *It is very ambiguous. On the one hand, there is a lot of aversion to migrants and on the other hand there is also a whole socially engaged movement. The town is, of course, traditionally ecclesiastical Christian. [...] mercy, charity, are the key concepts. People think that they are ready with open arms for the migrants, for the refugee. To some extent that is also the case, but the right-wing populist is also very much present in our municipality*. (Member of the local government)

This "*twofoldedness*" or ambiguity of residents' attitude towards refugees in particular and the 'state' of integration of newcomers more generally is also mentioned by multiple other respondents. On the one hand, there seems to be an institutionalized support structure in place, involving multiple public and non-public actors in the 'integration process'. Their tasks range from finding accommodation, to providing social support, and facilitating participation and access to the labor market. The relationship between these actors is mostly described as collaborative and "well-functioning", marked by "short lines" (N-B-2), regular meetings and trust ("we know each other"). Moreover, the municipality has over the years allocated more funding than legally required to the social support of refugees (N-B-1, N-B-8).

On the other hand, – and when asked about the situation regarding the 'integration of post-2014 migrants' more generally –, some respondents stated that their integration "has not been successful' or "is not going very well" (N-B-1, N-B-4). Migrants are not "ready for society" (even) after having completed their civic integration program which includes mandatory Dutch language courses and a final exam testing participants' knowledge on Dutch society and

culture. Respondents elaborate that the 'unsuccessful' or 'failed' integration of newcomers becomes apparent in insufficient language skills, a low number of people with paid employment, and – importantly – the fact that groups do not 'mix'. As the local official put it: "it is difficult to make connections" because of the 'culture' of the local community ('closed door village') and the fact that "refugees stay in their own surrounding".

The lack of connections and shared sense of community is further reflected in spatial segregation, resulting from the concentration of refugees in specific neighborhoods which are characterized by "*torenflats*" (residential towers), social housing and a higher share of people with a 'migration background' (N-B-1, N-B-3, N-B-4). This, in turn, may lead to alienation of those residents who have lived there longer (N-B-8). Moreover, missing connections between old and new residents are also seen as a result of the aforementioned negative attitude towards refugees (N-B-1, N-B-4, N-B-5, N-B-7, N-B-8).

3.2.3 Municipality C

Municipality C lies in the province Overijssel in the East of the Netherlands and has approximately 50.000 to 80.000 residents. Overall, the local population has slightly grown and become older over the past 10 years (more than 10% increase in grey pressure) (CBS). The city has a relatively high share of residents with a migration background (Strategic Policy Plan Social Domein 2022): More than 27% of the local population has a 'migration background', of which 16% are categorized as 'non-Western'. The share of foreign residents has increased in the last 10 years by approximately 3% (almost 2% for 'non-Western'). These numbers are somewhat higher than the national average where almost 25% of the population has a migration background (of which 14% are categorized as 'non-Western'). In 2020, approximately 500 adult refugees resided in the municipality (Divosa/Stimulansz, 2020). The local reception center has more than 350 spots for asylum seekers, a number that is sometimes exceeded in exceptional situations, for example in 2015 or in 2021 when the municipality decided to welcome 250 refugees from Afghanistan (newspaper article; N-C-6).

From a socio-economic perspective, multiple interviewees described municipality C as a "poor" or "deprived" city with a high share of social welfare benefit recipients (N-C-5, N-C-6, N-C-14): In 2021, almost 70 out of 1000 residents received welfare benefits, compared to the national average of 44 out of 1000 (CBS – Participatiewet, 2021). According to the local official responsible for labor market re-integration, there are at least 1,500 residents with "a very long welfare dependency", among which refugees account for almost one third (400-500). The local coalition agreement also states that the city knows "inherited poverty, persistent unemployment, a relatively low-skilled population and a quality of life under pressure" (p. 5). Moreover, the city has a relatively high number of social housing in older neighborhoods (Strategic Policy Plan Social Domein 2022; N-C-6). In its Strategic Policy Plan for 2022, the

municipality warns that this larger stock of social housing may increase the chances of persons applying for benefits on the basis of the Participation Act (p. 4). This aspect was also mentioned by two representatives of the municipality who expressed concerns that social housing would attract (unemployed) residents from other parts of the country, further increasing the burden on the municipality's welfare system (N-C-5, N-C-6). Some respondents link the weak economic position to the city's former labor-intensive textile industry, which heavily relied on migrant labor (N-C-6, N-C-14).

Despite its overall weaker socio-economic position, in the past five years the city's unemployment rate has dropped by more than half (from almost 10% in 2015 to less than 5% in 2020) and the number of job opportunities as well as the number of companies has increased substantially (Kennispunt, 2021). The city's economic landscape is now also shaped by big, international tech as well as logistic companies and "more than enough jobs" (N-C-6).

The political orientation of the city has changed significantly since 2014 from rather liberal left/Christian democratic to conservative-right. This clear political shift to the right in the municipal elections in 2018 "shocked" some of the interviewees. Nowadays, respondents describe the city as "*rechts*" (right) (N-C-2, N-C-3, N-C-14) with the majority of seats in the municipal council being held by three conservative(-right) parties. Despite – or because of – this political climate, there are many volunteers who offer their support to refugees as language coaches in the library or during other activities offered by local NGOs (N-C-1, N-C-3, N-C-4, N-C-7, N-C-8, N-C-15).

While municipality A is referred to as unique, respondents in municipality C describe the situation often as not too different from other localities because there is nothing too 'particular' about the city and/or the approach that the municipality has taken towards integration (N-C-7, N-C-8). As previously mentioned, more than ¼ of the city's population has a migration background. By far the largest group comes from Turkey, followed by Moluccan (former Dutch East-Indies), Iraq, Germany and (since 2021) Poland (CBS). Furthermore, multiple interviewees mentioned the 'tight-knit' Armenian community. According to many respondents, the presence of the rather large Turkish, Armenian, and Polish (or "Eastern European") communities has had an impact on the socio-cultural dynamics in the city as well as the municipality's approach to integration. The member of the local government responsible for integration explains:

> *Integration has been on our political agenda locally for a long time because of the fact that we have a very large group of Turkish people and now also for a number of decades Armenians. We have a very large Armenian community, which makes it complex, because Armenians and Turkish people do not get along with each other.*

These tensions are also mentioned by other respondents who further highlight that migrants prefer staying in their own "circles" or "networks" (N-C-4, N-C-7_2, N-C-12). Similar to the other municipalities, this perceived separation between groups and the lack of exchange – especially between migrants and Dutch residents – is also reflected in the spatial concentration of refugees and migrants in specific neighborhoods (N-C-2, N-C-7_2, N-C-13).

The member of the local government draws an ambivalent picture of the municipality: according to him, the municipality is tolerant and welcoming, and 'integration' has been on the political agenda for years (also due to the city's history of migration). In 2015, the city offered additional asylum seekers shelter. Yet, his evaluation of the situation appears to be rather pessimistic ("disappointing results"). One of the problems seems to be the limited ability of governments to intervene and to sanction people; he also refers to the limited role of the municipal government before the implementation of the new Civic Integration Act and describes the national integration policy as "failed", also resulting from a too liberal *migration* policy. Throughout the interview, he expresses his 'concern' and 'worry' - especially regarding the inability of some people (or groups) to integrate. In this context, he refers to the overrepresentation of migrants in criminal statistics (especially 'welfare fraud'), the lack of language skills, and the relatively high percentage of unemployed post-2014 migrants. With regards to the overall population, he worries about missing social support.

> *If a Dutch person is going to get the feeling like, hey, you've been here for 10 years, and you haven't really done anything to get to work or become a part of society. That is where it stops ('then the shore turns the ship').* (Member of the local government)

Similar to municipality B, the image that is being drawn is **ambiguous**: various organizations are involved in integration policy and offer refugees support; yet, respondents still identify many obstacles (language, work, lack of interaction). Moreover, integration appears to be a politically contested topic, or as the local official puts it: "in this city, you cannot win elections with the topic of integration."

3.2.4 Municipality D

Municipality D lies in the province Drenthe in the North of the Netherlands and has approximately 20.000 to 40.000 residents. Respondents describe the locality as a small "*plattelandsgemeente*" (rural municipality), comprising one central town and almost 30 surrounding smaller villages (*het buitengebied*).

Less than 9% of the local population has a 'migration background', of which less than 4% are categorized as 'non-Western'. The share of foreign residents has increased in the last 10 years by approximately 1% (almost 2% for 'non-Western'). These numbers are significantly lower

than the national average where almost 25% of the population has a migration background (of which 14% are categorized as 'non-Western'). Despite the lower share of persons with a 'migration background' among the local population, four out of five respondents indicated in the survey that the municipality has had experience with the arrival and settlement of migrants also before 2014. This may be related to the fact that already in 1995, an asylum seeker center was established in one of the villages (with more than 300 spots). While the municipality is pleased with the reception center, it is not willing to establish a second one, before the other municipalities in the region 'have taken their responsibility' (Coalition Agreement 2018, p. 11).

The municipality has for a long time been subjected to a "shrinkage scenario" (N-D-10), that is, the local population has declined over the past 10 years. This trend has only recently been slightly reversed. According to a member of the municipal council, this is also related to people moving from the West of the country to the East where the housing market is (supposedly) less tense. The population of municipality D has aged significantly, with an increase of grey pressure by almost 20% since 2010 (CBS; Policy Plan Social Domain 2017, p. 14).

When looking at the economic situation in the municipality, various respondents point out that the rural area is located in an overall poor(er) region ("*arme hoek*") and refer as an explanation to the region's former "*veenkoloniën*" (peat colonies) that have shaped the area until today (N-D-10, N-D-14, N-D-15). Traditionally, 'peat villages' (villages located in the peat colonies) are economically not very strong, characterized by a higher unemployment rate, generational poverty, and a population with a lower educational background.[15] The member of the social advisory board explains the relation between the region's historical economic structure and its difficult economic and demographic situation today:

> *We are here in the 'peat area' (veengebied). In the past, people worked hard here, 6 days a week for a low wage, mainly manual work. From that generation they still have to deal with the past, with intergenerational unemployment. Parents and grandparents were peat workers and children were poorly educated. This has to do with financial resources and possibilities. [...] In the 'peat area' you notice in terms of mentality: bottle on the table and car in front of the door, that was the most important and the rest was not important. Currently, many are still relatively poorly educated, and employment opportunities are limited; many young people therefore leave for other parts of the country*. (Member of the social advisory board)

[15] The Rijksuniversiteit Groningen has conducted research on intergenerational poverty in the peat colonies. More information and first results can be found here: https://uithetmoeras.nl.

Importantly, there are inner municipal differences in terms of socio-economic status – not all villages are affected by the developments mentioned above in the same way: “A number of areas in our municipality have a low economic status. These are mainly the areas in [the main city and two villages]. In the rest of the municipality, the socio-economic status is about the same as the average in the Netherlands.” (Policy Plan Social Domain 2017, p. 14) Overall, the municipality has less jobs than the national average and more people with lower educational background (ibid., p. 15). However, the unemployment level is on average lower and there are less social welfare benefit recipients (CBS – Participatiewet, 2021). This also mentioned by the union representative who describes that the municipality is economically better off than the other municipalities in the region and is therefore facing less problems. The most important economic sectors comprise tourism, agriculture, ‘industry’ as well as SME (small and medium size enterprises) (Coalition Agreement 2018, p. 10).

The locality’s political orientation can be described as both conservative and social-democratic. The strongest party in the municipal council is an independent, local party that pays particular attention to the needs of the surrounding villages and neighborhoods (N-D-5). The member of the local government responsible for integration has a social-democratic background. His approach to integration is described by various respondents as ‘very social and involved’ (N-D-7, N-D-15).

With regards to the situation of integration in the municipality, it becomes apparent – similar to the other municipalities –that the picture is not as clear cut. On the one hand, respondents highlight several aspects that are going well. Both the local officials and the member of the municipal council underline that the municipality is accommodating *more* refugees than legally required and is therefore ‘ahead’ of its task: “Here, for example, we have a head start with housing refugees in our municipality, where most municipalities are lagging behind with their task” (N-D-10). Moreover, the collaboration between public, non-public and private actors and the commitment of the municipality are described as positive (N-D-1, N-D-2, N-D-14). In terms of support structure, various respondents mention a multifunctional neighborhood center where all relevant public and non-public actors (including a local language school) are represented, making services easily accessible. Lastly, the asylum seeker center is widely accepted and even seen as “part of our village” (N-D-8).

On the other hand, respondents also describe forms of resistance in some neighborhoods, the influence of (negative) prejudices and stereotypes and a general lack of familiarity with ‘diversity’/people from other countries (it is a fairly “white municipality” (N-D-2); N-D-1, N-D-8, N-D-13). In this context, almost all respondents mention “curtains” – or better ‘the right type of curtains’ – as a major point of controversy (N-D-1, N-D-5, N-D-9, N-D-11, N-D-12, N-D-12). Long-term residents have complained about newcomers keeping their curtains closed

during the day and/or hanging the 'wrong' curtains in their apartments because this supposedly conflicts with their ideas of living 'properly'.

> *They often close themselves off […] they sit in their house with the curtains closed and this builds a wall between people – certainly here on the countryside. […] That's the feeling of the people. They only see them [migrants] going to a store and coming back behind the curtains.* (Member of the municipal council)

As a reaction, the local housing corporation designed a leaflet explaining that "Dutch people are used to having the curtains open at daytime. This is also better for ventilation. In the evenings (when it is dark), the curtains are often closed. The length of the curtains is such that they do not have to lay on the windowsills. This way it looks tidy" (document of local housing corporation).

Another point of concern is the segregated housing situation within the municipality: there are currently approximately 180 refugees living in the municipalities who are mainly concentrated in the main town and in four to five villages (out of almost 30) due to the uneven distribution of social housing within the municipality (N-D-9). Most of the social rental apartments are located in the post-war neighborhoods in the main town. Consequently, the situation regarding integration differs significantly per neighborhood (N-D-5, N-D-10, N-D-11).

4. Overarching themes

4.1 Development of local integration policies

After having introduced the four cases, this section looks more closely at the policy development in the field of integration after the increased arrival of asylum seekers in 2015/2016. Before zooming into the four localities, it is important to mention two policy agreements at the national level that were made in 2015 and 2016 as they affected policymaking processes in all four municipalities. In response to the increased arrival and settlement of asylum seekers after 2014, the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), together with the government coalition, concluded the agreement *Onderhandelaarsakkoord Verhoogde Asielinstroom* in November 2015, resulting in the expansion of the 'social support' (*maatschappelijke begeleiding*) for recognized refugees at the local level. Practically speaking, municipalities were given more money per refugee to implement the agreed upon task. In April 2016, the VNG signed the *Uitwerkingsakkoord Verhoogde Asielinstroom* in which further agreements were made regarding education, care, labour, and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. As a reaction to these agreements, municipalities started drafting their own agenda and/or action plan regarding the integration of refugees at the local level.

4.1.1. Municipality A

As a response to the higher influx of asylum seekers in 2015, the municipality drafted the **action plan "Reception and Housing of Refugees"** which is based on the principle of being 'welcoming and generous' towards asylum seekers and refugees, namely through providing shelter (*opvang*) and housing, showing newcomers their way in 'Dutch society', and creating social support within the local community (*maatschappelijk draagvlak*) (p. 3f.). The action plan stresses the importance of political commitment and of coordination and collaboration with local actors (non-public organizations, churches, educational institutions, volunteers etc.) to help refugees. The national implementing body COA is named as crucial actor in control of the emergency shelter and regular reception of asylum seekers. Moreover, the municipality promises to invest more money and 'manpower' for the implementation of the task and to seek the dialogue with residents, also with those "who are worried, who have been waiting for an apartment for a long time, who do not feel safe, who expect problems and who resist" (p. 4). This last aspect is also highlighted by a former member of the local government:

> *We obviously thought about which sports hall, but after we decided which one, we started talking to the neighborhood, not only sent a letter, but the mayor and I went into the neighborhood together with spokespersons from the municipality. And we talked to people and had coffee with people to explain [the situation]. There was resistance in the neighborhood [...] because the neighborhood was not enthusiastic*

> *about it, had all kinds of images of young men wandering the street late at night and harassing their daughters or children. Well, what we did then was invite all the neighbors to the location before the refugees came. Just being there as an alderman and being the point of contact for everyone.*

The municipality's governance approach thus is based on transparent communication, offering different fora where residents could raise their concerns and where political representatives could explain and communicate their intentions, but also make clear that they 'stand behind their decision.'

The municipality's welcoming approach to the arrival and settlement of refugees is also reflected more broadly in later documents, such as the **Coalition Agreement** (2018-2022), the policy plan **"Inclusive City"** (2021-2026) and the "**Anti-discrimination Agenda**" (2021-2026).

In the **Coalition Agreement** (2018-2022), the city is explicitly described as "a diverse and inclusive city" that takes a stand against racism and discrimination and supports newcomers to integrate well (p. 5). With regards to the topic of integration, the agreement specifies: "We want newcomers to learn Dutch as fast as possible and start working" (p. 5). In collaboration with the main non-public service provider in the field of integration and other volunteer organizations, the municipality actively 'matches' refugees and employers so that "refugees can start working as fast as possible" (p. 5).

The municipality's definition of inclusion and integration is further specified in the "**Inclusive City"** policy (2021-2026) under the section "samenleven in diversiteit" (living together in diversity): "Inclusion is an attitude in which we positively value the difference in the other person and attach equal opportunities and treatment to it. Integration is the process in which we in society learn from the difference with the other and grow closer to each other." (p. 40) The municipality is described as a city that has dealt with diversity for a long time – and therefore knows the challenges and benefits that come with it. The goal is to create an inclusive city where everyone is treated equally, where diversity is seen as an added value and where a feeling of connection – a shared sense of "we" – is developing. Multiple respondents confirm that the topics of inclusion/integration and diversity are of high political relevance (N-A-1, N-A-5, N-A-6, N-A-9; N-A-13). Regarding the integration of newcomers, the policy states the city will make sure that newcomers are 'well equipped' to participate, get to know the community and meet other residents, with the help of formal and informal initiatives (p. 41).

These formal and informal organizations and networks are connected in the 'Municipal Network Integration' which was initiated by the municipality in 2019 and is now coordinated by the local welfare organization. The development of an 'Inclusive City' policy plan and an

Anti-discrimination Agenda, combined with the clear positioning as an inclusive city and the initiation of a 'network integration,' appear to be quite remarkable for a medium-size city.

Interestingly, refugees are only explicitly mentioned once (p. 47) in the policy. Instead, the document speaks primarily of "newcomers" and/or persons with a migration background. This also applies to the "**Anti-discrimination Agenda**" (2021-2026) which aims at supporting residents that experience discrimination, such as "people with a migration background" or older people (p. 42). Following some of the respondents' answers, this more generic approach to integration may be related to the municipality's idea that all people living in the city are residents – regardless of their background and legal status. While a migration background has certain consequences for one's positioning in society, the person is first and foremost a person living and participating in the local community (N-A-8, N-A-9). The idea to create a shared sense of 'we' may (ideally) supersede the focus on differences between 'us and 'them'.

The municipality's approach to integration is often referred to as "unique" because of its long-term commitment in integration policymaking – both politically and structurally (N-A-1, N-A-5, N-A-8, N-A-9, N-A-12). As previously mentioned, politically, the municipality has given the topic of (civic) integration and the support of newcomers substantial attention. Structurally, the municipality has built a solid support structure and continued channeling – more than legally required – funding towards the integration of refugees, despite policy changes at the national level that have in the past two decades given or taken away responsibility to/from municipalities. The local official responsible for integration emphasized:

> *They get a very good starting position, regardless of what [happens] at the national level. [Even] with the integration law of 2013 – well, we all know the evaluations, it was just not good for the migrants, – in [name of the locality] there has always been a network for these people. There has always been support despite the regulations and that was not only because of the local politics that were involved, but also because of the structures that were there. I think you're lucky if you end up in [name of the locality] and that gives you better opportunities. [...] I think there has always been support, even if it was not required by law. And we've always looked at the person and less at the rules.*

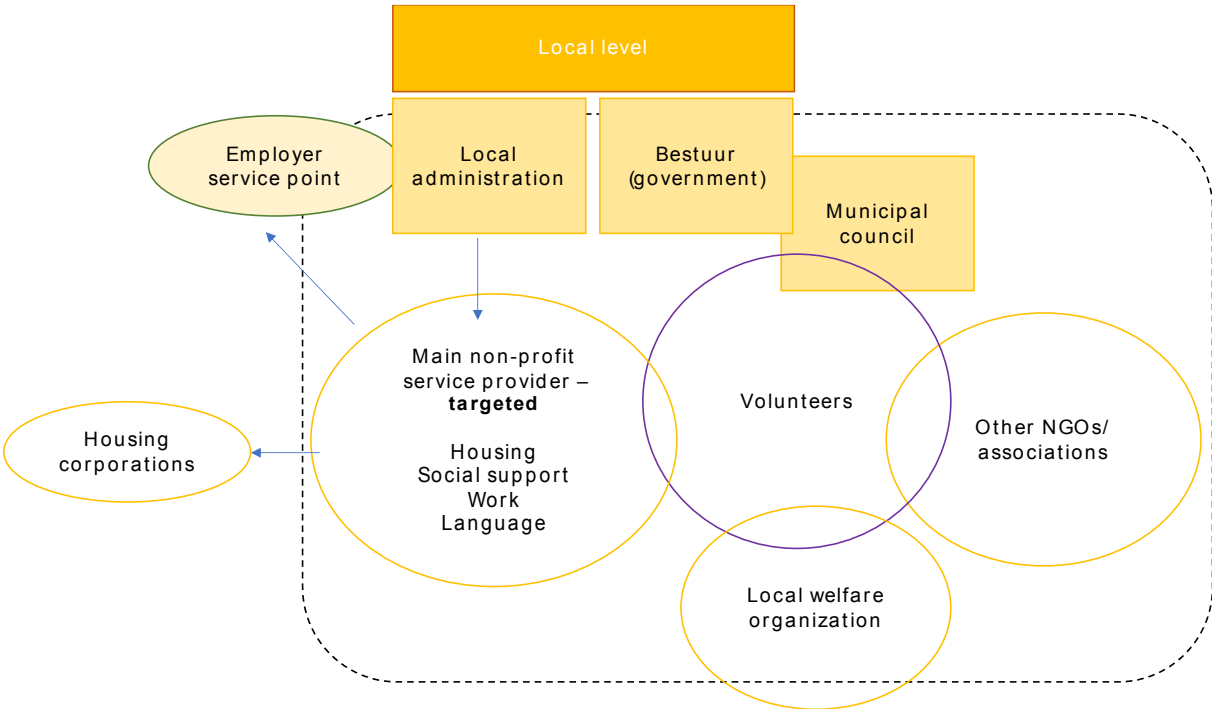
The city's support structure is particularly interesting because the municipality has for the past 40 years collaborated with one non-profit service provider that bundles the main integration-related tasks "under one roof", namely housing, social support, language, and labor market integration – instead of distributing the tasks among various actors and organizations. Having this main integration actor supporting refugees/newcomers with their integration, is described as one of the core elements of the city's 'unique' or 'different' approach to integration (N-A-7, N-A-8, N-A-9, N-A-12).

With regards to the influence of the national level, respondents do not only highlight the municipality's continuous attention and support for the topic (despite national changes), but also its "creative ways" in dealing with national legal regulations that are (often) perceived as constraining and too narrow (N-A-9). For example, some street-level bureaucrats as well as local governments tried to overcome or work around some of the constraints through channeling funds under the Participation Act towards the main non-profit service provider to support the labor market integration of refugees. At the same time, the municipality tried influencing national policymaking by lobbying for a change at the national level (usually through the Association of Dutch Municipalities or other networks). Respondents linked the perceived 'mismatch' between politics at the national level and policymaking at the local level to differing narratives on migration and integration as well as desired outcomes of policies. According to a local official, national politics reflect a particular political 'color', drawing upon narratives of fear and aiming at satisfying voters' needs instead of helping refugees. Policies designed at the national level may therefore 'clash' with local realities where refugees are first and foremost considered residents, falling under the municipality's responsibility.

National regulations further influence local policymaking in the area of **reception of asylum seekers and recognized refugees** (N-A-12, N-A-14). The allocation of both groups is regulated nationally by the implementing body COA, leaving municipalities limited room for negotiation. This has proven to be challenging in two main ways: First, most refugees allocated to the municipality have previously lived in other provinces, making it difficult for the municipality to connect with them early on. The previously mentioned "*Uitvoeringsagenda Flexibilisering Asielketen*" aims at solving this problem by organizing asylum seeker reception regionally (N-A-9, N-G40). Second, in case of *rejected* asylum seekers, national policy aims at enforcing their return, while the municipality considers them part of the local community that 'deserve' to be included as well (despite not having an official legal status) (N-A-8, N-A-9). Respondents from local organizations describe similarly that they have difficulties offering their services to rejected asylum seekers because from a national policy perspective they 'are not supposed to integrate' (N-A-3, N-A-4, N-A-5). Hence, their work is also affected by national legal regulations, albeit to a lower degree.

In 2015, following a petition by a group of volunteers, the municipality challenged existing regulations regarding refugee allocation by starting bilateral negotiations with COA to ensure that asylum seekers living in the city would be allowed to stay (and not be distributed across the country) once receiving a residence permit.

Turning to the main actors in municipality A, the main competences are distributed as follows:



The main actor in the field of integration policymaking is a local **non-profit non-public service provider** which functions as the first contact point for refugees in the city and supports them during their civic integration over a duration of three years (N-A-1). The organization has formally been assigned the legal task of 'social support' by the municipality and thus acts as the implementing body at the local level. Besides social support, the local non-profit service provider for integration provides in-house language courses, assistance with labor market integration as well as finding accommodation. The assigned tasks are carried out by both paid staff (e.g., integration coaches) as well as volunteers (social mentors) and in close collaboration with the municipality and the housing corporations. Importantly, there is one employee who specifically focuses on labor market integration, working closely with the 'employer service point' of the municipality and local employers.

In light of the implementation of the new Civic Integration Act, the relation between the municipality and the integration organization has changed from a 'subsidy relation' between a public and a non-public actor to a 'horizontal' one in which the service provider has received the status of a public (*publiekrechtelijke*) organization (N-A-8, N-A-12).

After three years, refugees can receive assistance from the local **welfare organization** that mainly operates at the neighborhood level. The local welfare organization has information 'shops' (*informatiewinkel*) in the neighbourhoods, works with social care workers and social neighborhood teams (N-A-1, N-A-6). The organization is furthermore responsible for the coordination of the 'network integration' and the allocation of grants to local initiatives. The

local welfare organization has set up a website which contains information on local and neighborhood-based initiatives, project, and activities.

On the topic of housing, the municipality collaborates closely with three **private housing corporations** as well as the main local non-profit service provider for integration. While the latter is mainly involved in the housing of refugees, the former organizations are also collaboration partners for broader housing-related developments in the city (city development, construction of new housing, 'livability' in the neighborhoods). Importantly, the municipality (following national regulations) assigned 35% of the housing stock to social housing and gives refugees priority on the housing market. The local official responsible for housing stresses here, that while municipalities need to fulfil the assigned task, it is not mandatory (anymore) to treat refugees as a group with a particular 'urgency'.

> *Nowadays it is actually the case that you are not obliged to say that refugees are given an urgency status. With us, they get 3 months of urgency. We have still included this in the housing regulation. That obligation was once removed and that has to do with national policy or the Housing Act. Nevertheless, you have to meet that target, don't you? So, we translated it at the time – and 'we' are of course the politicians – into 'we think it is important to just give that urgency'*. (Local official housing)

As shortly mentioned, there are many other local organizations focusing on supporting migrants and refugees, but they are not formally included in the main 'integration governance network'. That is, they do not received funding from the municipality to implement legal tasks such as 'social support' as defined in the Civic Integration Act. Nonetheless, they provide crucial additional support in areas such as labor market integration, psychological support, informal language educational and social network building. The roles of these actors will be discussed in the section below. Finally, the local library offers three times a week a 'walk-in hour'; expats, asylum seekers, refugees, and family migrants use the library's language-related services (language café, courses for reading and writing, individual solutions).

4.1.2 Municipality B

Following the agreements between the VNG and the national government, in 2016 municipality B adopted the "**Program Integration**" to support and stimulate refugees to become self-sufficient (*zelfredzaam*) and find paid employment as fast as possible (p. 6). The program highlights which steps the municipality would take to help refugees with their integration, while emphasizing that integration is ultimately the person's own responsibility.

Looking back at the time when the program was designed, the local official stresses that

> *it had cost them [her colleagues] a lot of time and energy to bring all the parties together, the housing corporation, the local welfare organization, to make agreements and to ensure that the process works – that someone who arrives here will be able to pay the rent, receive welfare benefits, can send their children to school, knows where to find a doctor.*

The "Program Integration" thus reflects a process of institutionalization in the field of immigrant integration with the definition of clearly defined goals and tasks and the more formal inclusion of local institutions as collaboration partners, most importantly the local welfare organization and the local housing corporation. In a later document, the local government stresses again the relevance of collaboration (*ketenaanpak*) and specifies that together with other institutions (*ketenpartners*), "we guide refugees so that they can find their own way regarding work and language and thus participate in society" (policy document Social Support Status Holder, 2019, p. 2).

Yet, despite the initial plan to continue the "Program Integration" until 2020, the topic of integration was eventually included into a more generic "**Social Agenda**" in 2019. The "Social Agenda" is now *the* main policy concerning all issues in the social domain, including (amongst others) care, welfare, education, health, and integration (it has replaced almost 10 previously existing policies, p. 31). Consequently, the local official underlines that there is no separate integration policy: "the Social Agenda is really our basis for integration. I did not develop additional policies for the topic." However, the specific approach to immigrant integration and the agreements with local cooperation partners outlined in the "Program Integration" of 2016 are still considered guiding elements in the way the municipality addressed immigrant integration under the umbrella of the "Social Agenda".

One of the main goals of the "Social Agenda" is to facilitate participation in the local community: everyone should be able to participate (*meedoen*), regardless of their "background, religion, believes, political affiliation, race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, disability or marital status" (Social Agenda, policy 'meeting in the neighborhood', p. 4). Through its policy, the local government aims at identifying potential obstacles for people (lack of language skills can be one, but also overweight, age, low educational background) and offering help and support to those who are in different ways 'restricted' in their ability to fully participate. The policy underlines further that every resident should feel socially accepted in the local community, especially those who may have a disability, a different (sexual) orientation or a different 'cultural' background (refugees and people with a 'non-Western' background).

Municipality B appears to have chosen a more **mainstream approach** to immigrant integration – with an overarching "Social Agenda" that pays attention to topics such as 'social acceptance'

and 'participation' for all (vulnerable) residents in the community. There is no separate integration policy (N-B-2, N-B-7, N-B-8) because integration is seen as an integral part of the society. The (most) important collaboration partner, a local welfare organization, follows a similar approach: it is responsible for the welfare of all residents, social support of refugees being only one of many areas of concern (N-B-1, N-B-4). The member of the local government summarizes this integral approach to integration, stressing that it is also related to the conscious choice to collaborate mainly with local organizations that know the context well:

> *There are also municipalities that work with the Dutch Council for Refugees, for example, but we work with a local organization. That was traditionally also a special local association [...] they were originally a group of volunteers, about 10 years ago, I would say. Very nice. So, we still work a lot with volunteers, also at [local welfare organization]. The organization looks more broadly at social activities and that also offers an opportunity for integration. Because if they organize a meal in a neighborhood building, then that is not a meal in the context of integration, but then that is a meal of the neighborhood and at the same time also an activity to integrate. So as far as I'm concerned, that's a good example of why [local welfare organization] does that and not a Dutch Council for Refugees who then sends someone here from somewhere else.*

A local employer describes similarly that the local welfare organization has "roots" in the town and is thus well connected.

Overall, the topic of integration has been – despite or because of the controversy after the higher influx in 2014 – on the agenda of the municipal government. This is reflected in the "Program Integration", but also in the "Social Agenda" where the vulnerable situation of refugees is explicitly mentioned (albeit under a broader umbrella). The new Civic Integration Act has increased the focus on the topic due to the changing role of the municipality.

The recurring reference to the new Civic Integration Act makes clear that policies made at the national level are an important point of reference in this municipality because of the municipality's dependency on national funds as well as the national level's authority in defining legal tasks for local governments. The announcement of the previous minister for Social Affairs and Employment Koolmees in 2018 that the Civic Integration Act of 2013 will be replaced by a new Act in 2020 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, press release, 2018),[16] has proven to be an important factor in local policymaking in municipality B because

[16] This proved to be too ambitious and the new law was finally implemented in January 2022 (for a timeline of the development of the new Civic Integration Act see: https://www.divosa.nl/onderwerpen/inburgering/tijdlijn.)

it left municipalities in a "vacuum", waiting for the new law to be implemented (N-B-2). According to the local official, municipalities did not define their own integration policy, knowing that a major change was coming at the national level.

According to respondents from municipality B, the national government in The Hague in influences local policymaking in four main areas, namely housing, '*inburgering*', labor market integration and service provision.

First, housing **of refugees** is challenging because of the tense (social) housing market (N-B-3) and the long administrative processes (N-B-2). The member of the municipal council states:

> *Of course, there is a very big influence from The Hague, right, so they are also working on that, on the distribution of asylum seekers between municipalities. That is done centrally and then the municipalities are put under pressure to take people in.*

Second, the design of the old **Civic Integration Act**: as previously mentioned, with the implementation of the Civic Integration Act in 2013, the responsibility for integration was shifted to the individual and language courses were privatized, that is, language courses were now offered by private language course providers. Or, as the member of the municipal council puts it: the politician Geert Wilders "dismantled the language education." The consequences of this 'failed' national integration policy were felt at the local level, but municipalities and local actors had limited tools to supervise the process and/or enforce other regulations, despite agreeing that the system in place was not working (N-B-4, N-B-7, N-B-8).

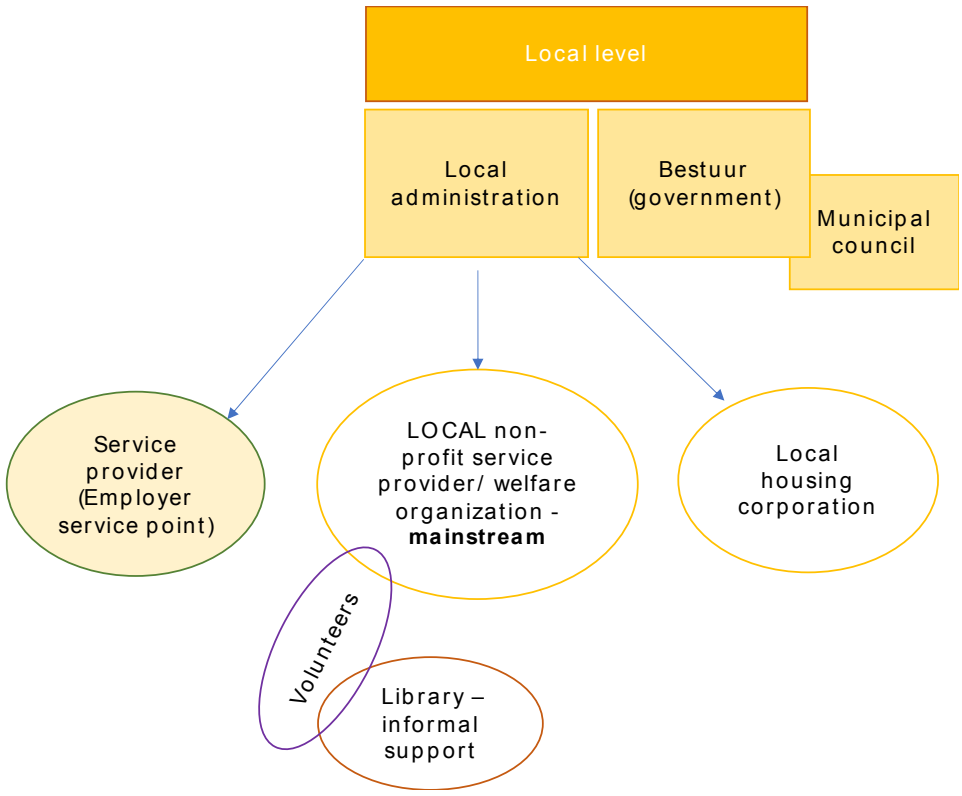
Third, **labor market integration**: here, the national **Participation Act** plays a major role according to respondents. The representative of the service provider supporting people with the re-integration into the labor market states that – according to the law – "people should be self-reliant" and start working as fast as possible. Many refugees are therefore channeled into jobs in the unskilled or low skilled segment of the labor market. This may contradict the aspirations of some to continue their study and/or find work in a job that corresponds with their professional and educational background (especially for those highly educated) (N-B-6). Here, the national law influences the approach to labor market integration at the local level.

Similar to municipality A, the fourth point of friction relates to the **access to 'integration-related' services and initiatives** (ranging for example from official language classes to informal language support through a buddy), which depends on the (il)legal status of an individual. Someone without a permit has no or limited access to these services, despite residing in a locality (N-B-2). Here, the national migration law limits the leeway of municipalities to provide specific services to all residents – at least with the budget foreseen for integration. In the past,

the municipality 'circumvented' these restrictions by funding a volunteer association/initiative that organizes activities for rejected asylum seekers, too (N-B-10).

With regards to the dynamic between local and national levels, the local official states that it is often "the municipalities against the national government", especially due to insufficient funding. The municipalities can lobby for their interests via the VNG and thus influence national policymaking (N-B-2; also stated by the representative of the VNG).

Turning to the main actors in municipality B, the main competences are distributed as follows:



In the field of immigrant integration, the municipality is collaborating with three main actors: a local housing corporation, a local welfare organization, and a service provider that is also part of a larger regional service point for employers (*werkgeverservicepunt*).[17] These actors cover the main integration-related areas of housing, social support, and work/participation.

[17] The Netherlands is divided into 35 'labor market regions.' Every region has a public WerkgeversServicepunt (WSP) ('Employers Service Point'), a collaboration of municipalities, the UWV (Employee Insurance Agency), educational institutions, knowledge centers and other parties. The goal of the WSP is to help jobseekers who are not immediately employable, such as welfare recipients, older unemployed persons, jobseekers with a disability and refugees, to find work more quickly.

Regarding housing, the municipality has made a performance agreement with the **local housing corporation** to implement the legal task of finding accommodation for refugees who have been linked to the locality ('*gekoppeld'*). With regards to the provision of social support, the municipality cooperates closely with a local **welfare organization**. The local welfare organization receives funding by the municipality to support and guide refugees during their civic integration program for a period of up to three years. The welfare organization supports refugees in all administrative tasks and meets them regularly to monitor and discuss their progress (N-B-1, N-B-4). As mentioned previously, the local welfare organization is responsible for the 'social domain/welfare' more generally, refugee assistance being one of its tasks. This is in line with the municipality's approach to see integration as an integral part of the community (life) more broadly. Lastly, the **regional service provider** helps refugees with finding employment. Importantly, the service provider offers their support to all residents who receive welfare benefits and/or have a 'distance to the labor market'. Since refugees are (in most cases) part of this target group, they are sent via the municipal administration to the regional service provider in order to be re-integrated into the labor market (N-B-2, B-B-6). Within the municipality itself, the administration has up until January 2022 been mainly concerned with the topic of social allowances (N-B-2).

Another actor that is not structurally embedded in the 'integration governance network', but still relevant is the local **library** which offers informal language support and education to all migrants – not 'just' refugees (N-B-5).

4.1.3 Municipality C

Similar to municipality B, municipality C developed an "**Action Plan for the Integration of Refugees**" (2017) as a response to the higher influx of asylum seekers in 2015 and the administrative agreement between the VNG and the national government (*Onderhandelaarsakkoord Verhoogde Asielinstroom van het Rijk an de VNG*). The goal of the municipality's action plan was to foster and accelerate the participation of refugees in the local community by providing more support and by establishing integral connections with residents, companies, existing structures and facilities, policy areas, and best practices. Indicators for a successful implementation of the plan were, for instance, an increased self-sufficiency of refugees, their (full) integration in their neighborhood, an increased percentage of refugees passing their exams and a minimum of 20% outflow towards paid employment (p. 6). Additionally, a team of *dedicated klantmanagers* (client managers) was formed that was supposed to have a lower caseload and focus primarily on refugees (N-C-2).

Interestingly, the action plan for the integration of refugees was **never implemented** due to a major municipal restructuring towards a neighborhood-based approach which also had consequences for the team of *dedicated klantmanagers*.

> *That plan is really outdated, at the time it was very nicely set up to draw extra attention to refugees. What happened then is that a team came with dedicated 'client managers' and the intention was to give that team a lower caseload so that they could also spend more time and attention on persons who were following the civic integration trajectory [inburgeraars]. What happened to that plan, it didn't really get off the ground because there was an internal reorganization within the municipality and that meant that the team fell apart because the coaches had to 'sit' in the neighborhood. Everything had to be much more connected in the neighborhood, but that also meant that the team fell apart.* (Local official)

After the action plan for the integration of refugees, the municipality has not designed another policy specifically addressing migrant/refugee integration more comprehensively. Instead, there are other overarching policy documents that cover aspects that appear to be relevant for integration as well, such as **policy programs** related to "economy and participation" or "care" or the "**Policy Plan: Coalition against Loneliness**". These policies mention persons "who do not speak Dutch sufficiently", "young people with a migration background", "refugees" or "asylum seekers" as some of many other target groups, falling under the municipal administration.

In the **Coalition Agreement** (2018-2022), "integration" or related terms such as inclusion, '*inburgering'*, discrimination or diversity are not mentioned. The agreement focuses instead on the more general description of forms of collaboration, the municipality's neighborhood-based approach as well as its integral approach in the social domain: here the focus lies on "the continuous development of the integral approach regarding care in relation with poverty, job opportunities and participation because of the issues' interrelatedness" (p. 10). In its "**Implementation Agenda City Development**" (2021), the municipality addresses similarly broad the importance of "*verbinding en onmoeting*" (connections and encounters) to create a "livable and inclusive city" and underlines its priority to support and stimulate "vulnerable groups", without mentioning migrants or refugees more specifically (p. 16).

In line with existing policies, the local official responsible for integration confirms that there is **no separate "integration policy"** – also because the municipality's role in integration policymaking had been rather limited before the decentralization of integration-related tasks in January 2022. Again (and similar to municipality B), the new Civic Integration Act acted as a driver for change at the municipal level: in 2019 the municipality hired a local official for integration policy development and initiated the formation of a 'team inburgering' with coaches only for "*inburgeraars*" (persons following the civic integration trajectory; N-C-2) – almost reversing some of the changes that resulted from the restructuring of the municipal administration (when *dedicated klantmanagers* for refugees were replaced by generic workcoaches in the neighborhood). Within her new role, the local official intends to promote

better cooperation and interaction between actors involved in integration governance because in the past actors were often not aware of each other's activities and responsibilities.

Despite the action plan not being implemented in 2017, the **emphasis on work and self-sufficiency** can up until today be seen as a crucial element of the municipality's approach to integration (N-C-2, N-C-4, N-C-7_1, N-C-7_2, N-C-8, N-C-10).

The municipality follows the principle of the national Participation Act that 'everyone who can work, should work and participate', clearly prioritizing work over education: "so the focus is more on work and not on developing the language and also not on looking at, 'but what have you done and what can you do?' Because in the Participation Act, of course, all work is appropriate work" (N-C-10). Or, as the employee of an NGO puts it critically: the strategy is to "let the young refugees work, let school on the side". In some cases, local officials tried finding individual solutions for their clients; however, the funding provided under the Participation Act (re-integration budget) leaves only limited leeway and officials had to "fight hard" to be able to make an exception (e.g., continue financial support also for those choosing to pursue their education instead of working immediately). In this context, two respondents, who have a refugee background themselves and experienced the (civic) integration trajectory firsthand, mention that the situation in the locality has also changed over the years: in the past, integration was not really facilitated, but now newcomers have more possibilities to access services, learn the language and develop themselves further (at least to some extent).
According to a representative of the union's office in the region, the city follows more generally a "work-first" approach, 'pushing' people to start working as soon as possible without taking their wishes and talents into consideration (also mentioned by a volunteer at the local non-profit service provider for integration):

> *"[Name of locality] is a municipality that really has the approach 'just get started, just work' [...] That is the politics of [name of locality]; so not specifically for refugees, but also refugees are expected to just do that because 'there is work and then you have to do it.' [...] In practice, there is little attention to your own talent, [...] 'Ensure that these people get to work as quickly as possible. We need hands in logistics' and [...] just chase those people there*." (Union representative)

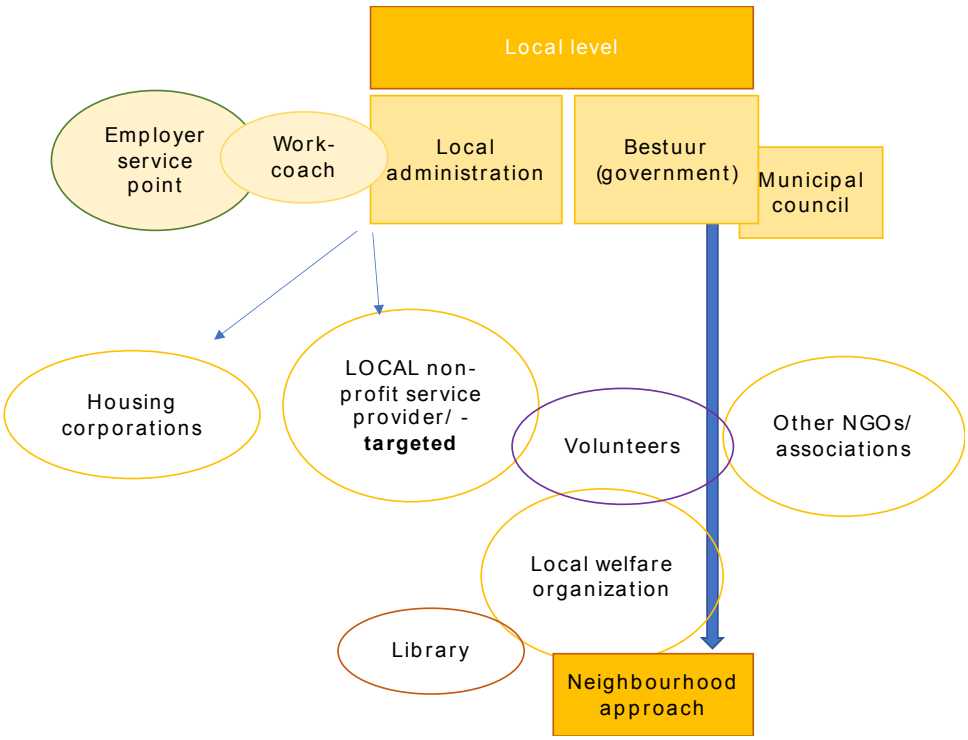
Moreover, the respondent describes the municipality as a **"Law and Order City"** because of its strict enforcement of rules and "merciless" implementation of sanctions, for example in the form of reducing welfare benefits if someone fails to fulfil their obligations under the Participation Act. Compared to other municipalities in the region, municipality C has adopted a 'very strict' implementation of the national Participation Act, while others have taken a more social approach (N-C-14). This means that municipalities have a certain leeway in interpreting nationally defined legal regulations, resulting in locally diverging policy implementations.

This becomes further apparent in the municipality's approach to the legal task of accommodating refugees (Woonvisie 2020 – 2030; Huisvestingswet 2014). Since 2017, refugees do not automatically receive priority on the housing market. This means that a municipality can decide for itself which persons are prioritized for a social rental apartment. In municipality C, in 2021, the local executive decided refugees should be treated like other (future) tenants: "The political executive board wants housing associations to no longer give priority to refugees when looking for an accommodation" (opinion piece by local political party). However, with regards to the actual implementation of this decision, the respondent of a local housing corporation specifies that they do have some leeway:

> *In principle, the municipality's opinion is that refugees are regular housing seekers. This is in line with the motion passed by the municipal council. But […] it is still possible to make exceptions when prompt housing is important. We can also provide tailor-made solutions for exceptional cases, at the discretion of the housing corporations. This means there are still plenty of opportunities to assign an accommodation to them as a priority in addition to the regular housing allocation for refugees.*

The decision of the municipality to not give refugees priority anymore stands in contrast to the other three municipalities where the municipal administration decided consciously to prioritize the group of refugees when assigning them to social housing.

Turning to the main actors in municipality C, the main competences are distributed as follows:



Similar to municipality B, in locality C tasks related to integration have been transferred to various actors: On the topic of labor market (re-)integration, the municipality collaborates closely with other municipalities and the UWV in the "Employer Service Point". The goal is to help social welfare benefit recipients, including refugees, to find a suitable job. Moreover, the service point supports employers by providing information about how to apply for subsidies, organizing trainings on intercultural communication or sending in a job coach who speaks the language of the refugee (N-C-5).

On the topic of housing the municipality collaborates closely with local housing corporations. As part of the aforementioned 'performance agreement', municipalities assign refugees to suitable housing and thus help the municipality to fulfil the legal task of 'housing refugees' (Woonvisie 2020 – 2030).

The task of social support has been assigned to a **local non-profit service provider**. Similar to municipality A, this local non-profit service provider focuses only on supporting refugees during their civic integration program (as opposed to municipality B where the task is carried out by a local welfare organization which is also responsible for other target groups). However, in municipality C the organization is solely responsible for the social support of refugees and *not*, as in municipality A, also for labor market integration, housing, and language courses. Municipality C thus has chosen to distribute these tasks among different actors. Interestingly, the social support was initially offered by the Dutch Council for Refugees (national NGO providing social support in most Dutch municipalities). Yet, after some disagreements in the past, a new organization was founded by local volunteers and the municipality decided to assign the task and the subsidy to this new local actor (local newspaper; N-C-15). Importantly, the non-profit service provider offers language support for newcomers on a voluntary basis (not funded by the municipality).

Besides the formally embedded organizations who have been assigned a legal task related to integrating refugees (housing, social support, labor market integration), there are a few other actors that provide different services to migrants and refugees (next to other target groups).

An important actor in the field is the **local welfare organization**. It is not only responsible for welfare-related tasks in the city (e.g., providing easily accessible support in the various neighborhoods for *all* residents), but it also coordinates voluntary work and the '*taalpunt*' (language point) in the local library. Similar to municipality B, the '*taalpunt*' plays an important role in the provision of informal language support: it offers a language café and one on one language lessons with local volunteers. The language services are open to both NT1-er (Dutch as first language) and NT2-er (Dutch as a second language) and are accessed by a diverse group of people, including persons following a civic integration program, labor migrants, and migrants from Morocco and Turkey (N-C-4).

Another actor providing services to migrants and refugees, is a **national (volunteer) organization** that has offices in various cities in the Netherlands. In municipality C, the organization offers a program in which migrants can receive additional support for one year on a voluntary basis. The program does explicitly not focus on administrative tasks (this is the responsibility of the local foundation for refugees), but on the participation in the community and on education and language learning: "We help people to find their own way" (N-C-8). Importantly, refugees can follow their civic integration program *and* be supported by the organization at the same time. The volunteers in the program are usually "*ervaringsdeskundige*" ('experts by experience') who share similar experiences and can offer support in many different languages.

4.1.4 Municipality D

Similar to the other municipalities, decisions made at the national level influenced policymaking in municipality D: following the previously mentioned *Bestuursakkoord Verhoogde Asielinstroom* (2015) and the *Uitwerkingsakkoord Verhoogde Asielinstroom* (2016), the municipality drafted the "**Action Plan Social Support and Participation Statement Trajectory**" (*Plan van aanpak maatschappelijke begeleiding en het participatieverklarings-traject*) which had to be handed in with COA before September 2016 in order to receive a higher budget per refugee (2370,00€ instead of 1000,00€). The plan's purpose was to describe how the municipality had so far implemented the task of social support, how it planned to extend the social support and to implement the participation statement trajectory (that became then part of the civic integration program). The agreements made between the VNG, and the national government seem to have led to a process of institutionalization at the local level with more actors structurally involved in the integration governance as well as a clear(er) definition of the goal of 'civic integration': "In order to be able to implement the design of the participation statement trajectory and the expansion of the social support, we would like to cooperate with local organizations/institutions and VWNN [Dutch Council for Refugees] with the ultimate goal: the participation of permit holders in the municipality and increasing the self-reliance of this target group." (p. 4)

Besides emphasizing the importance of collaboration with local organizations, the municipality suggests including refugees as a target group in the 'action plan illiteracy' and to focus on additional language support in order to facilitate better participation in the community. The Action Plan Social Support and Participation Statement Trajectory contains a detailed description of the distribution of tasks among relevant stakeholders in the locality, namely the local housing corporation (housing of refugees), the Dutch Council for Refugees (social support and practical help), the local welfare organization (support and guidance after 18 month), a national NGO (informal language support) and the municipality itself (additional support (to find work) through the '*klantmanager participatie*') (p. 3). Moreover, after 2015

more staff was hired to specifically respond to the increased arrival of asylum seekers and refugees in the locality (N-D-9).

Although none of the interviewees specifically mentioned this action plan, the municipality's approach to integration appears to still be based on this division of responsibilities among the actors named in the policy document. With regard to the new Civic Integration Act, one official elaborates that even before 2022, the municipality 'acted according to the new law' with a clear focus on participation and support to find work provided by the municipality (N-D-9, N-D-10, N-D-13, N-D-14).

While integration is important, it is not a 'very big topic' "because the town is not Amsterdam or Rotterdam" (N-D-10). Respondents underline that nowadays there is "no hard integration policy in the municipality" (N-D-5), but rather an "overarching social policy" (N-D-9).

The first comprehensive policy plan for the entire social domain was made in 2017 (**Together Strong – Policy Plan Social Domain** 2017-2020). The first pillar and most important goal of the policy is participation (*meedoen*), followed by inclusion (*meetellen*) "to make it even clearer that everyone deserves a place in the community" (p. 8). The policy plan is based on the idea that everyone can participate in the community to the best of their abilities. If this, however, is temporarily not possible, "then we support the person and figure out together what is needed to start working/participating again" (p. 18). In the policy, the municipality's role is described as follows: "We make policy, we implement it, we are responsible for a part of the money/funding and for our legal tasks, we offer care and support and are the spider in the web of the social domain" (p. 10). At the same time, it is important to bring different parties together and to involve various actors, including volunteers, to succeed. This approach is also in line with the general governance style that is defined as "*verbindend besturen*" (governing and connecting) – a style that puts residents, associations, organizations, and companies first (Coalition Agreement 2018-2022).

While there is no separate integration policy, refugees are explicitly mentioned in other documents such as the **Coalition Agreement** (2018-2022) and the **Governance Program** (2018-2022). The desired goal is to "let refugees actively participate in the community" so that they can find their 'place' (Coalition Agreement, p. 10) and "feel like a resident as fast as possible" (Governance Program, p.3). Language, voluntary work, employment, and integration in the neighborhood are mentioned as key factors for an active participation. Importantly, integration is linked to other policy areas such as work or care. This integral approach to integration is also mentioned by the member of the local government: *"*Poverty issues, income issues, integration – they are all related. You therefore have to make that connection between the policy areas*."*

Reflecting more generally on policy developments in the field of integration, one member of the municipal council noted that he is glad about the new **Civic Integration Act** because the municipality is able to "do a better job than in the past years" where the national level was mainly responsible for the task: "We are very happy that we are now taking over. Because we actually want that responsibility as a municipality and also think that we can do it better than how it went in recent years." (N-D-10) His implicit critique related to the old Civic Integration Act is also vocalized by other respondents who (for example) describe the former law as being 'politically tinted' and preventing integration rather than facilitating it (N-D-7, N-D-14). The national framework thus was perceived as having a constraining effect on local integration processes because it limited the municipality's role.

A second field where the influence of national policymaking becomes apparent is, yet again, the **housing and allocation of asylum seekers and refugees** (N-D-2, N-D-4, N-D-7, N-D-8). The local official explains that asylum seekers living in the local reception center are not necessarily linked to the municipality once being granted a residence permit. This, in turn, may slow down their integration process (N-D-4, N-D-9). Yet, sometimes the municipality successfully finds agreements with COA to have refugees allocated to the locality that are already living in the local reception center, thereby negotiating seemingly rigid legal regulations put in place by the national government.

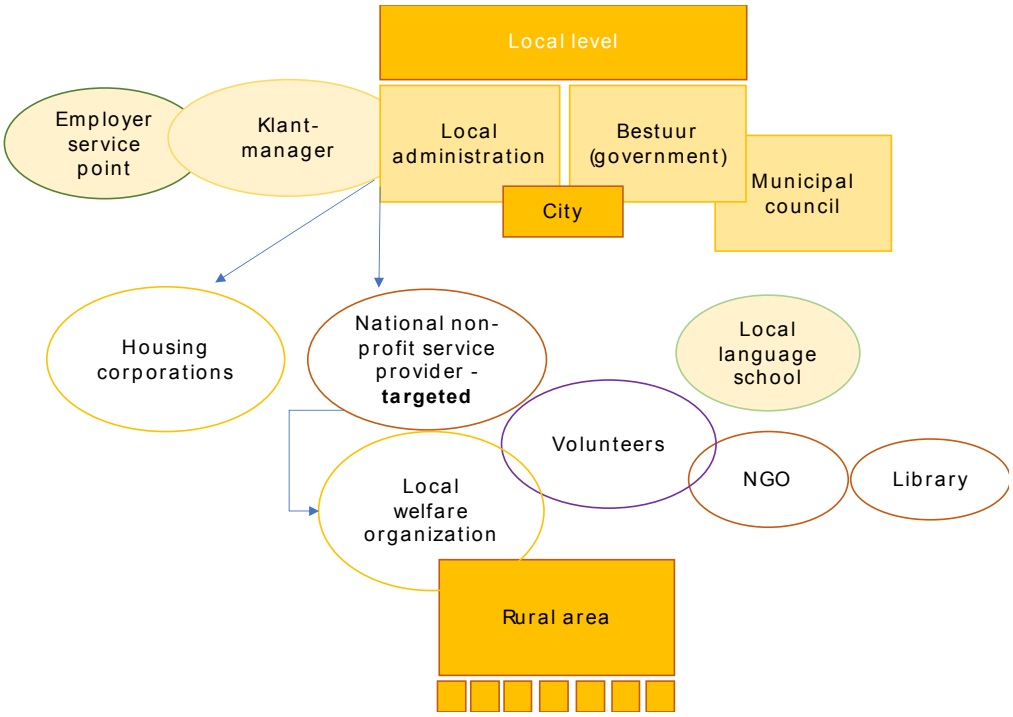
> *It's a pity that we don't have a one-on-one matching, because that would actually be very nice for us, because then you can do more and look even more and even faster towards civic integration and integration! But that's not the case. It is not yet arranged in that way nationally. I do hope that eventually it will happen that we have a 100% 'matching' from the AZC [local reception center]. At the moment, we do have agreements with the AZC to try and see if we can get a match from the AZC. And sometimes it works, the other times it is also a bit more difficult because they have to link refugees to the South of the country, to Brabant and Limburg*. (Local officials)

The perceived 'friction' or 'mismatch' between reception, allocated housing and integration is even more pronounced in municipality D because the local asylum seeker center is a so-called '*flex-locatie*'. This means that the '*outflow region',* that is, the region where recognized refugees are assigned to, changes regularly by 'flexibly' adapting to the situation in municipalities across the country. For example, there are currently less reception centers in South Holland – this is why more asylum seekers have to be transferred from the East of the country to the West (according to the numbers determined by the national government). According to a local employee, being a *flex-locatie* makes it more difficult to establish long-term relations with local actors – because it is often unclear if asylum seeker can stay in the region. She elaborates further:

That makes it very difficult, I can tell you, because then we are just here with great ideas to get someone to work, participate, a training program, a 'learn-work experience' and then he is being disconnected [linked to a different region/province] and then our refugee goes that way.

Here, the *Wet Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers* appears to be at times detrimental to the implementation of the Civic Integration Act which, in turn, affects local policymaking as well as individuals who sometimes have to change reception centers multiple times, waiting for a final decision to be made. Only then, they can start settling down and prepare for their integration (N-D-2).

Turning to the main actors in municipality D, the main competences are distributed as follows:



The municipality's governance style, characterized as *verbindend besturen* (governing through connecting; Coalition Agreement 2018-2022), is also reflected in the municipality's approach to integration where various tasks are assigned to a wider range of local and national actors. Like municipalities B and C, the municipality collaborates closely with the local **housing corporation** to find housing for refugees and to implement the 'housing task' given to the municipality by the national government. Contrary to the other localities, municipality D has assigned the task of 'social support' not to a local actor, but to the Dutch Council for Refugees, a national non-governmental actor that offers social support in most Dutch municipalities. In the case of locality D, the **Dutch Council for Refugees** receives funding from the municipality to support refugees over a period of 18 months. This period is considerably shorter than in

the other municipalities where refugees are support for up to 36 months. The Dutch Council for Refugees works primarily with volunteers who become the main contact point for persons following the civic integration program (N-D-2).

After 18 months, the task of assisting refugees if they face problems is transferred to the local **welfare organization**. Importantly, the welfare organization offers its services to all residents (N-D-4). Additionally, the organization has initiated target-group specific projects, for example in collaboration with the local asylum seeker center to activate refugees who have already been given a residence permit, but still live in the reception center (N-D-8).

Less formally involved, but nonetheless an important actor is a **national NGO** that offers once a week individual as well as group language lessons for migrants and refugees – regardless of their status. Their work (coordination of the informal language support as well as the language education itself) is based on the commitment of volunteers. Moreover, the NGO provides other services such as '*thuisadministratie'* (support with administrative tasks) to a wider group of people to increase people's self-sufficiency (*zelfredzaamheid*).

Additional informal language support is also offered by the *taalpunt* in the local **library**. However, the services offered by the *taalpunt* in municipality D are only accessible to those who have already completed their civic integration or for those who are exempt from following the civic integration program. Here, the *taalpunt* complies with the municipality's objective to primarily focus on illiterate persons with Dutch as their first language (NT1) and if needed on those not following other official programs. The coordinator of the taalpunt specifies: "So starting from the moment people are required to integrate, it is actually very official that we do not link them to a volunteer from the language point." This is for instance different in municipality C where the local *taalpunt* is accessible to a broader group.

Lastly, the locality has a local **language school** where refugees – and other migrants – can follow Dutch language courses. Due to the small size of the municipality, this was highlighted as one important element of the existing integration support structure. However, the local language school did not win the tender necessary to continue offering civic integration classes under the new Civic Integration Act and may therefore have to close its doors in the future.

With regards to the topic of labor market integration, the municipality decided to organize this task 'in-house' through the role of *klantmanagers* who specifically focus on facilitating refugees' access to the labor market (N-D-9). According to a member of the municipal council, the municipality has also more broadly chosen to leave tasks related to the social domain with the municipality instead of transferring the responsibility to a separate organization: "in the municipality they have chosen to leave that entirely to the municipality, just to the civil servants, very close to the organization" (N-D-5). The local officials argue similarly that the 'in-

house' approach was a conscious choice to create 'short lines', because within the municipal administration 'you can just walk to each other'. This in-house approach stands, in contrast to municipality B where most tasks are outsourced to different providers.

4.1.5 Interim conclusion

At an institutional level, all municipalities drafted a policy document or action plan as a reaction to the higher influx of refugees in 2015/2016 and the agreement between the VNG and the national government. This has led to a formalization of collaboration and agreements between actors involved and to a clearer definition of the goal of 'integration'. Goals were often related to an increased participation and self-sufficiency in the local community. However, the actions plans were implemented to varying degrees.

Despite not having a formal (leading) role in integration policymaking under the old Civic Integration Act (2013) and hence limited possibilities to intervene and supervise the integration process, zooming into everyday practices of local policymaking has shown that local actors do in fact negotiate existing policies by interpreting and implementing them against specific local backgrounds. This has resulted in diverse local landscapes of policymaking where municipalities explore and perform their leeway in their approach to integration. Some choose to collaborate with local partners only (A, B, C), while others trust in national organizations (D); some keep tasks 'in-house' (D), while others opt to outsource them (A, B, C); some distribute integration-related tasks widely (B, C, D), while others 'bundle' these tasks under one organization's roof (A); some allocate additional funding (A, B), while others see sanctions/strict enforcement as means to increase (labor market) participation (C). Besides the legal task of 'social support' which is assigned to and carried out by non-public service providers and specifically targeted at refugees, most other services are offered to a more diverse group of (vulnerable) people.

Hence, over time, integration governance appears to move from a very targeted service provision to a more mainstream approach. First, refugees receive 'social support' under the Civic Integration Act, a tailored form of support specifically for refugees during their '*inburgering*'. Later (ideally after the successful completion of their civic integration, albeit not always), the responsibility is transferred to local welfare organizations that often operate in neighborhoods. They target all residents and address a broad range of topics, focusing on connecting people, offering easily accessible support and places (e.g., neighborhood houses) where people can get help, advice, and meet others.

Refugee integration as a topic is in most cases integrated into a broader *social agenda.* Municipality A is the only locality that explicitly relates integration to topics such as anti-discrimination and diversity.

The influence of national legal regulations becomes further apparent in policy areas such as housing. Across all four municipalities, respondents identify various problems with the current practice of distributing refugees and finding accommodation for them. One challenge derives from the fact that the reception of asylum seekers is not organized regionally, but across the country; this means that once asylum seekers are recognized and given a residence permit, they might have to move to a locality in a different part of the country. It is therefore difficult for municipalities, but also for local organizations and volunteers, to build (lasting) relationships early on. Besides very long asylum procedures, this relocation process is seen as causing significant delay in the 'integration' process and thus being sometimes at odds with the goal of the Civic Integration Act. This 'delay' may further be exacerbated through difficulties in finding appropriate accommodation for refugees. On paper, municipalities have 10 weeks to find appropriate accommodation for refugees; in practice this takes oftentimes much longer due to the current tense housing market. As a result, recognized refugees often live for extended periods of time in the reception centers. Some municipalities (A and D) creatively dealt with existing regulations by finding bilateral agreements with COA and/or through the mobilization of volunteers who questioned the system in place.

4.2 Frames of integration and local perceptions

4.2.1 Comparison of integration frames

The formulated goal of the Civic Integration Act is to facilitate newcomers' participation in Dutch society as fast as possible, preferably through paid work. While the definition of *civic* integration (*inburgering*) is relatively clear cut – and agreed upon by respondents across municipalities –, definitions of 'integration' (*integratie*) and especially 'good integration' are less unequivocal. Underlying assumption of what successful integration looks like for the individual as well as local communities inform and influence (local) policymaking processes. Consequently, this section looks at how respondents define and perceive 'integration' and what a 'successful integration' in their community would look like, highlighting also factors that are seen as crucial to achieve integration.

4.2.1.1 National and regional level

According to the national official (SZW), integration means "equal positions for everyone", that is, a person's background and starting position should not matter. However, a migrants' background does often play a significant role because they are disadvantaged in three main ways, namely lack of language skills, no/less recognition of qualification, and a small or unstable social network, leading to an overall socio-economic disadvantage. The goal of integration *policy* is then to overcome these unequal starting positions by 'equipping' newcomers with the necessary skills and to transform unequal positions into equal ones (N-SZW). On the long-term there "should not be any differences anymore between groups with

and without migration background" (N-SZW). Besides this socio-economic dimension of integration, there is also a socio-cultural, 'softer' dimension relating to norms, values, and attitudes that people hold – both newcomers as well as established residents. The latter aspect is also mentioned by the expert on integration policymaking who highlights that integration is a "two-way process" and is therefore also about how newcomers are received in society. The respondent argues critically that the dominant political discourse about and approach to immigrant integration is based on the idea that "people are becoming like us", assuming that there is an unanimous agreement about what it means to be 'Dutch' – leaving fundamental debates on what it *actually* means and who gets to define it on the side. Consequently, integration is both highly politicized – and controversially debated – and highly *de*-politicized – not 'allowing' debates going beyond the current civic integration policy in place (expert on integration policymaking).

Similar to the expert on integration policymaking, the representative of the city network G40 underlines that both refugees and long-term residents have to integrate because integration "has to come from two sides". Policies should therefore not only focus on refugees, but also on current residents to create and maintain societal support or a 'bearing surface' (*maatschappelijk draagvlak*). If there is no 'bearing surface' in local communities, reception and settlement of newcomers will prove difficult (N-G40). According to the VNG representative, integration means that "newcomers should also be able to actively participate in Dutch society, be a part of it, experience no barriers, have a job, receive support if they need it, have necessary contacts within the society" (N-VNG). Integration is closely related to '*inburgering'* which aims at facilitating the participation of those following the civic integration trajectory, that is, "after three years, a person should be able to fully participate" (N-VNG).

Before turning to the local level where respondents across all four municipalities draw on similar frames of integration, it is important to note that perceptions of integration are also closely related to perceptions of 'the migrant' or 'the refugee'.

Throughout the interviews, refugees are often described from a *deficit*-oriented perspective, that is, they are characterized as traumatized, lacking in language skills, adequate work experience and a social network, (sometimes) having 'wrong' expectations or being subjected to discrimination. These identified obstacles are the starting point of policies targeting refugees, aiming at overcoming these obstacles to facilitate their full participation. According to respondents, one of the biggest hurdles is insufficient Dutch language skills because language is not only crucial to find employment, but it also opens access to society. Moreover, various interviewees emphasized that refugees 'do not just come like that', but because of war and conflict – contrary to migrants from so-called 'safe countries'. The *victimization* of refugees seems to serve as a justification of the legitimacy of their stay and the support given to them. For some respondents, this differentiation between 'deserving' refugee and

'undeserving' (economic) migrant appears to play an important role in the delivery of services only to those who have the 'right' (refugee) status. Conversely, others frame refugees as well as (rejected) asylum seekers primarily as residents *not* having to 'earn' their right to stay.

4.2.1.2 The four cases

Municipality A

In locality A, different integration frames emerged from the interviews. First, some respondents define **integration as participation** (*meedoen*) and **becoming a 'normal' resident in the community** (N-A-1, N-A-5, N-A-8, N-A-9). Importantly, the notion of participation in this context goes beyond economic participation via work and also includes talking with the local baker (N-A-8), being a 'good father or mother' (N-A-8, N-A-1), or knowing where to find support and services (N-A-9). Or as the employee of the local service provider for civic integration puts it:

> *Integration is much more than civic integration (inburgering). That is how we see it and integration is actually that you become a citizen of this city, a resident who participates on all fronts, that is no different from others, who has a job or maybe doesn't have a job, but then takes care of the children or who is active in the neighborhood, who understands how things work, who finds his way in this society and then preferably participates as much as possible. That's actually it, yes, I think participation (meedoen) is actually the core concept when I think about integration.*

Other frames include the idea that **integration relates to the society as a whole** and can be described as **a two-way process**. Integration thus is a "*samenlevingsvraagstuk*" (societal issue) (N-A-8), posing the question of 'how do we want to live together'? Integration is not only about newcomers, but also about people that already live in the city (N-A-3, N-A-4, N-A-8, N-A-9, N-A-13). When looking at the broader socio-cultural context, respondents mention that integration can lead to tensions and alienation between groups due to cultural differences. These dynamics are described as one of the main challenges related to integration.

> *Because I notice that a lot of people become self-reliant in society, but within their own ethnic group or religious group. I don't think that's integration, because then you have your completely different cultural values and norms and that can eventually lead to tensions.* (Member municipal council)

Conversely, integration is then seen as 'successful' when **old and new residents 'mix' and interact with each other**, for instance by building friendships or communicating about cultural differences and learning more about the others' way of living (N-A-5, N-A-6; N-A-9; N-A-12, N-A-13, N-A-15).

Finally, integration can also refer to **a feeling** – a person may be integrated when they start feeling at home, happy and welcome (N-A-5, N-A-11).

Municipality B

In the small town in South Holland, multiple respondents define **integration as 'participation'**. Some respondents describe participation **primarily in economic terms**, reflected in having paid employment, being self-sufficient and independent from governmental support (N-B-2, N-B-4, N-B-6, N-B-8, N-B-7, N-B-11). The employee of the local service provider for labor market integration explains that "once you found work, you can say that you are integrated". The member of the municipal council notes similarly that "having a job is integration, and if you do not have a job, you are only half integrated". Other respondents add that participation can also include voluntary work (N-B-6), or **being involved in the local community**, for instance by going to the museum, attending church service, or becoming a member of local associations (N-B-2, N-B-8). From a policymaking perspective, the local official highlights that in the Social Agenda, participation (*meedoen*) and paid employment are defined as key goals of integration. The member of the local government explains the 'critical balance' between the facilitation of participation through policies, requiring people to take part in the local community, and leaving enough space for people to 'keep their own habits':

> *The process of integration must lead to you being able to participate in this society. And then of course you have your own background that you keep and the language you have always spoken, you have to maintain that, right? But you have to be able to participate in this society according to 'how it goes here'. And that's a complicated balance, isn't it? Because in XY they have had a horse market for more than 1000 years [...] So if you're going to live in XY, if you want to be a real resident of XY, then you should go to the horse market, right? But do you really have to do that to be integrated? There are also plenty of Dutch people who never go to that horse market, so that is not necessarily necessary. Do you know your neighbors? Do your children go to the local school? Are you going to participate in sports activities? Are you part of society? As far as I'm concerned, that's integration and I think you can be a great part of society and at the same time cook nice and spicy because you're used to that because you like that yourself and you can wear what you want and be part of society.*

The quote shows that policies aimed at facilitating participation are related to questions about what it means to be a resident of the local community and to what extent newcomers are expected to adapt. According to an employee of the local welfare organization, integration means: "When you come from different country, you have your own culture and your own norms values, but when you come here? You also have to adapt to this environment." Closely related to the 'participation frame' is the notion of integration as 'knowing your way around' (N-B-1, N-B-2, N-B-5) and 'being familiar with local ways of living' (N-B-2, N-B-3, N-B-11).

With regards to the socio-cultural dimension of integration, respondents draw (like interviewees from municipality A) on the ideas that 'integration is a two-way process' (N-B-3, N-B-8) and 'mixing' between groups a sign of good integration (N-B-1, N-B-2, N-B-4, N-B-8).

Municipality C

According to most respondents, the most prevalent definition of integration in the small town in Overijssel is based on the **'economic participation' frame**, reflecting the municipality's strong focus on paid employment and self-sufficiency. In other words, at the end of their (civic) integration, refugees should not rely on welfare benefits anymore and be able to manage on their own (N-C-1, N-C-3, N-C-4, N-C-6, N-C-7, N-C-10).

> *If you speak of integration, then this is immediately linked to work, so people have to get started. […] Well, from the municipality it is mainly focused on work, participating. But okay, on the other hand of course, self-sufficiency is also a part of this.* (Local official)

Importantly, some respondents questioned this one-sided definition of integration, pointing out that participation can go beyond labor market participation. In their own work, they focus on **self-development** (as opposed to finding work as fast as possible) and **empowerment,** or on **facilitating interaction between residents** (N-C-7_2, N-C-8, N-C-13).

The socio-cultural dimension of integration is, again, reflected in the perception of integration as a **'two-way process'** (N-C-1, N-C-9). Interestingly, the member of the local government interprets the 'two-sidedness' of integration very differently from the other respondents: for him, 'two-way' means that the Netherlands/the municipality supports refugees, and, in return, they are expected to adapt to the local community and ways of living 'here'. He describes integration as a 'marriage' which comes with certain obligations and expectations because people make an actual choice to come and live here:

> *I also perceive it as a marriage. It goes both ways, it is not like all those people are just here; they also chose for the Netherlands and if you choose this, that also is fine, but then you should somewhat adapt to the way the 'social traffic' works here. And sometimes that is difficult, I understand that and that's a matter of ups and downs. Dutch people are direct, and you must learn how to deal with that. If you cannot do that, that's unfortunate, but then you should be somewhere else, I am not saying that you should become the same, but you should be able to understand it.*

Integration here means having the ability to adapt and understand how it 'works' in the Netherlands. Relatedly, having a different cultural background and staying only 'in your own

circle' can be seen as an obstacle to fully participating in society (N-C-6). Mixing thus is seen as both a means to and a sign of good integration (N-C-4, N-C-10).

Finally, integration can also have an **emotional dimension** and mean 'feeling at home' (N-C-3, N-C-9), 'feeling happy' (N-C-8, N-C-12) or 'feeling as a part of the local community' (N-C-13).

Municipality D

In the rural area in Drenthe, various respondents define integration as '*meedoen*' (**participation**) in Dutch society or the local community (N-D-1; N-D-3, N-D-4, N-D-6, N-D-7, N-D-8, N-D-9, N-D-10, N-D-11, N-D-14). Having paid or voluntary work is seen as a symbol of 'successful' integration, as the representative of the national NGO illustrates when talking about her friend from Somalia:

> *And now she works as a volunteer at a nursing home. Her children all go to HBO, university. […] She is a really great example of successful integration, and yet she is lonely. But that is truly a fantastic example of someone that also contributes a lot to the Dutch society.*

Local officials mention that the term 'integration' is not commonly used, but instead *meedoen* is used as a key term. From their perspective, integration means having a "*goede en zachte landing*" (good and soft landing) in the local community, and to show newcomers 'our' culture, thereby fostering participation (N-D-9).

Related to the latter point, the familiarity with and **adaptation to the 'local culture'** or **'local ways of living'** appears to be a very important integration frame in this municipality as it is mentioned by most respondents (N-D-1, N-D-2, N-D-4, N-D-5, N-D-6, N-D-7, N-D-9, N-D-14). The respondent from the Dutch Council for Refugees states that a fully 'integrated person' has transitioned from someone who is searching to someone who knows how life in the Netherlands works and is able to make choices confidently. Throughout the interviews, respondents referred to 'curtains' and 'neat gardens' to exemplify that tensions have emerged in the past between residents and refugees because newcomers were not 'doing it right':

> *At a certain moment they would sit in the house, and the curtains were closed every day and night. Then you have some problems, at a certain point you have to tell these people, yeah, that is not how we work in the Netherlands. You can maintain your own culture. That is important. But at a certain moment you have to go along with the surrounding environment in which you live.* (Representative of local advisory board)

'Open curtain' and 'neat gardens' are seen as symbols of the local culture, an expression of socially accepted, unwritten rules that mark 'the good life'. The member of the local government elaborates further that the arrival of newcomers with 'a very different culture, very different habits', presumably ignoring these exact 'rules' or 'ideas of a good life', may lead to people feeling threatened in their common way of living:

> *You keep your garden clean; you should always be able to care for your family well. There are several people that live with financial assistance, but those we can drag along, together. And then there are the ones from a completely different culture, with completely different habits, closed curtains, the weed grows so high […] [People think] Yeah, how am I supposed to align that with my own interpretation of a good life…? That harms me in my good life.*

Hence, integration is here closely related to questions of **local identity, local values, and norms** that newcomers are expected to adapt to or at least understand if they want to integrate and be accepted by the local population (socio-cultural frame) – while still being able to 'keep' their own culture (N-D-9, N-D-14). It appears that the emphasis on 'open curtains' and 'neat gardens' is related to strong social and cultural norms, presumably being characteristic of rural areas with a cohesive, 'mono-cultural' community and less experience with diversity or 'diverging' lifestyles (N-D-2, N-D-13).

> *I think that people in the countryside may be a bit more traditional than in cities where diversity has already developed in various areas. And on the countryside, diversity is a bit less developed in various areas. So, whether it's about homosexuality, or you coming from Eritrea – you are simply different than other people. And people often have to switch a bit.* (Volunteer, national NGO)

Yet, it is important to note that respondents also see integration as **a two-way process** which requires Dutch people to "integrate as well in a constantly changing society" (N-D-13) and asks everyone to develop a sense of understanding for each other and the others' differences (N-D-4, N-D-8, N-D-9, N-D-12).

Lastly, and similar to the other municipalities, integration can also be expressed in 'feeling welcome' and 'feeling at home' (N-D-2, N-D-11).

4.2.1.3 Interim conclusion

Comparing our insights on the frames in the four localities, we find that perceptions of integration often relate to a **socio-economic** dimension with a focus on **participation (through work) and self-sufficiency**. This frame is especially pronounced in the small town in Overijssel

(municipality C). The prevalence of this (economic) participation frame across our localities can perhaps be attributed to the strength of this frame in broader national discourses on immigrant integration as well as the emphasis on participation and work in the Civic Integration Act. Importantly, respondents in all localities highlight that participation can also go beyond mere labor market participation and include **voluntary work or involvement in social activities**.

A second dimension relates to the 'softer', **socio-cultural** side of integration, challenging dominant ideas of 'Dutch' norms and values, and evoking question about the 'extent' to which newcomers have to adapt to the 'dominant' cultural context. Here, integration is often defined as **a two-way process** that not only relies on the individual newcomer but also on the receptivity of the society. There are some differences in the extent to which either culture/cultural differences or societal issues of living together are emphasized across cities, with the cultural frame being particularly strong in the rural area in Drenthe (municipality D). Both dimensions operate next to each other, and not necessarily in a hierarchical relationship.

Importantly, most respondents draw on multiple integration frames simultaneously which potentially could be one strategy of dealing with complexity. It is therefore not possible to associate one frame with one locality and/or governance actor only. The interwovenness of frames in local narratives on integration policymaking presented by the respondents shows, yet again, that 'integration' is an "illusive term" (expert on integration policymaking) which often appears straightforward due to its almost self-evident use in political and public discourse and policymaking. However, our findings show that 'integration' as a concept may bear very different meanings for different actors, reflecting underlying assumptions on what it means to become a member of this society – both economically and culturally.

	Dominant frames used by local policymakers	Dominant frames used by other actors
Medium-size town, Utrecht	Participation (economic and social) Integration as two-way process Mixing (as sign of good integration)	Participation (economic and social) Integration as two-way process Mixing (as sign of good integration)
Small town, South Holland	Participation (economic and social) Mixing Familiarity with local 'ways of living'	Participation (economic and social) Mixing Familiarity with local 'ways of living'
Small town, Overijssel	Participation (economic self-sufficiency) Assimilation Mixing	Integration as two-way process Feeling (emotional frame)

Rural area, Drenthe	Participation (economic and social) Familiarity with local ways of living/ assimilation	Participation (economic and social) Familiarity with local ways of living
National Officials	Participation/economic self-sufficiency Integration as two-way process	-
Regional Officials	Not applicable due to perceived small role in this policy area	Integration as two-way process (N-G40) Participation (N-VNG)

Table 6: Overview of integration frames across levels

Lastly, with regards to factors hindering or facilitating integration, two important themes emerged. First, respondents in all four localities emphasize continuously that **language is *the* key to integration** because language skills are crucial to find work, communicate and learn more about the Netherlands. Or in other words language is "as important as eating and drinking and breathing." (N-A-2). Importantly, good language skills are seen both as means to and symbol of good integration. Second, interviewees mention separation between long-term residents and newcomers who 'tend to stay in their own bubble' as a hindrance to integration. Conversely, **'mixing' of groups** is described as an important factor in facilitating integration – for instance through receiving support from Dutch friends and communicating about cultural differences, thereby fostering mutual understanding. Moreover, persons with a 'diverse' network outside of their ethnic community are often described as 'successfully integrated'. The country report for Work Package 4 looks in more detail at factors influencing dynamics of (dis)integration.

4.2.2 Particular views on integration in smaller communities

While the previous section looked at definitions and perceptions of integration in each locality individually, this section will provide a comprehensive summary of respondents' views on the particularities of immigrant integration in rural areas, small towns, and medium-size towns because "there are very big differences between bigger and smaller communities" (N-VNG). Comparing views on integration across levels and localities, respondents mentioned several factors as informing and/or being characteristic for integration policymaking in small(er) communities. These factors can be grouped into structural factors, organizational/ governance-related factors and socio-cultural factors.

First, **structural factors** include labor market conditions/availability of jobs, access to housing, and infrastructure. In terms of labor market integration, respondents state that there may be fewer job opportunities in smaller municipalities (N-SZW). Moreover, looking for a job in bigger cities may be easier because of the presence of bigger companies who often have a

more diverse staff and may therefore be more willing to employ someone with a refugee background (N-C-5). In smaller communities, the contact to local employers may be closer which could also prove advantageous. In terms of access to housing, it may be easier to find (social) housing in areas where the housing market is less dense, for example in rural areas in the East (N-SZW; N-B-3; N-D-10); but in terms of reception of *asylum seekers* it appears more difficult to create in-between or ad-hoc solutions in smaller communities (N-G40). Moreover, infrastructure and especially public transport is often less developed in rural areas. It is therefore difficult for refugees living in the smaller villages to reach from A to B, especially if they do not have a driving license (N-D-5, N-D-13; N-A-4).

The respondent from the local reception center in Drenthe explains further that being in a rural area may restrict opportunities to organize activities and activate people:

> *We have certain policy agreements and within those, a location manager has quite some leeway. But sometimes this is very limited already. An asylum center where we are located [in the rural area] offers completely different opportunities than for example […] a fairly big city. That's where you simply have way more opportunities, so you really have to look for small successes here.*

Importantly, potential differences between 'small' vs. 'big' cities are sometimes seen as less relevant compared to the 'East' vs. 'West' differences (Randstad vs. rural Drenthe).

Second, **organizational/governance-related factors** relate to limited expertise/capacities of small communities to provide integration support, the handling of integration tasks by a small number or even just one organization (civil society support structure), and the short lines between actors.

According to respondents, smaller communities have a different organizational structure than bigger cities, that is, the organization of integration activities in small localities is characterized by a small number of staff dedicated to the topic of integration and potentially less expertise on how to best address the integration of newcomers (respondents across all municipalities; N-VNG, N-G40). This also affects their role in networks or associations such as the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) where it appears to be more difficult to hear the voices of smaller towns "because bigger cities can often respond faster to requests for input due to their expertise and higher number of officials working on a topic" (N-VNG).

Respondents point out that the particular organizational or governance structure is also related to the generally lower number of refugees and/or migrants in the localities ('We are not Rotterdam or Amsterdam'; also mentioned by N-SZW, N-VNG). For example, smaller communities appear to have difficulties in providing civic integration courses for multiple

language levels because there are not enough persons to fill the courses (N-SZW). The low numbers may also influence the specific approach to integration: according to the VNG representative, big cities often have higher ambitions and more policies designed to actively integrate refugees; in smaller municipalities with 10 to 20 refugees per year it is sometimes difficult for the administration to justify why the municipality sets ambitions and invests time for this issue. Smaller towns therefore usually seek "practical solutions that are viable and contribute to integration and that stay feasible considering the lower number of people" (N-VNG). A member of the municipal council in the rural area in Drenthe stated similarly that the municipality's approach is more pragmatic: the 'mere' fact that refugees are here means that "we have to find accommodation for them" (N-D-10). But there is no active policy towards integrating these newcomers, also because there is less urgency compared to big cities (N-D-10). Moreover, the smaller number of refugees also means less budget which makes it more difficult for the municipality "to do more" (N-B-2).

Another 'pragmatic solution' for smaller municipalities is then to collaborate with other municipalities in regional '*samenwerkingsverbanden*' (collaborations) to address larger social issues, including (labor market) integration and provision of language courses (see also section on the national/regional context; N-VNG; N-D-10).

Regarding existing civil society support structures, respondents point out that these usually consist of fewer actors (less projects and initiatives), but the collaboration and coordination between actors is often described as 'working well' due to 'short lines' between both public and non-public actors (N-VNG). The local official in the small-town in South Holland explains for example that due to the smaller size of the municipality, the task of integration seems 'doable', the lines are short, and the number of actors involved is limited which means that "very good agreements can be made" (N-B-2; also mentioned by other respondents across localities and levels). And the library's representative explained that it is easier to collaborate if there are less actors involved because responsibilities are clearly divided ("*er is geen wirwar van die doet dit en die doet dat*") (N-B-5). The employee of the local welfare organization in the small town in Overijssel argues likewise that the smaller size of the municipality is an advantage because there is only one big welfare organization that operates "everywhere, on all levels" (N-C-13) and has good relations with other local actors. All welfare-related tasks thus are bundled in one main organization, giving it a good overview of the residents' needs and activities in the city and its neighborhoods. The involvement of a few, but well-connected actors may also prevent that people 'fall in-between the cracks' because the number of refugees as well as actors involved makes it easier to maintain a good overview (N-D-12). In the locality in Drenthe this is also structurally visible in the multifunctional center where all important actors are represented and their services thus easily accessible.

However, certain facilities such as language schools are often not located in smaller towns, making accessibility more difficult (especially in rural areas with less public transport).

Third, **socio-cultural factors** comprise the 'monocultural' make-up of local societies and strong internal community ties. With regards to the socio-cultural level, respondents across municipalities mention that people in bigger cities are more accepting of migrants because they are more used to living in a diverse environment (N-SZW; N-B-3, N-B-5). Smaller localities, in turn, often have less experience with diversity, making integration for newcomers who are perceived as different more difficult. While some respondents refer to racism and xenophobia as main obstacles to integration (N-D-3, both respondents), others capture local residents' hesitation or 'suspicion' towards newcomers with the expression "*onbekend maakt onbemind*" – meaning "you do not love what you do not know" (N-D-2, N-D-4, N-D-7):

> *XY of course isn't that big. Well, sometimes it is a bit more difficult to help people with integration, participation […], because unfamiliarity makes (someone) less loved here. In big cities everything is indeed just a tad easier, because people know the 'foreign image'.* (Employee local reception center)

Difficulties for newcomers to integrate are also explained by smaller localities' tight-nit internal communities and certain expectation regarding the following of social rules, for example, to greet someone on the street or, as mentioned above, to keep one's garden clean and tidy. The respondent from the Dutch Council for Refugees in Drenthe pointedly summarizes this dynamic:

> *In villages, your neighbours are much more important, everyone knows each other. It is not always something positive, but it can be very positive. But I think that in smaller villages you surely deal with the social rules that are a bit different here. And to know how things are dealt with in your village…There's eyes on you and you feel that, so you also feel that everyone knows that you leave the house at 6 'o clock in the morning instead of 9 'o clock. It is expected of you that you greet people and that you greet your neighbors and that you have some small talk when you take out the garbage. And in a big city it's, I think, easier to hide yourself a bit, but that integration is done in a completely different manner. Here you really are reliant on the Dutch. You do have people from the same country, from the same culture, but a lot less. You stand out more, in a street you are the one that is not white, and that will certainly have an effect on your integration and to what extent you easily and quickly find your place, but also to what extent another person, how quickly another person accepts you as the neighbor. I think that in Amsterdam for example, well everything already 'walks' together there. I think that it does make a difference.*

She also highlights the double-sidedness of the different handling of social rules and the close contact between neighbors: On the one hand, it may be more difficult for newcomers to fit in and be accepted; on the other hand, and this is also mentioned by other respondents, people in smaller communities may be more willing to help and connect because they are (still) more used to looking after each other – which also makes it less likely for people to be overlooked (N-D-2; N-A-3; N-C-2; N-B-2).

At the same time, some of the '*big city problems*' are also visible in small communities, for example in neighborhoods with a high number of social housing where the majority of migrants resides. Here, people are 'not well integrated' and are especially affected by loneliness and addiction and/or are unable to participate (N-B-8).

Importantly, municipality B and D refer to themselves as smaller town and rural area, respectively; for municipality A and C being a 'small town' is not necessarily part of their self-identification. In some instances, this also depended on the reference frame – in comparison to Rotterdam or Amsterdam they were considered small, but not compared to the many smaller municipalities in the surrounding where some of the above-mentioned characteristics would be more applicable. In case of municipality D, differentiation was also made between the central town and the associated villages that 'are even smaller'.

4.2.3 Perception of locals' attitudes towards post-2014 migrants

Finally, this part of section 4.2 briefly looks more specifically at perceptions of locals' attitudes towards post-2014 migrants because, as was shown above, locals' attitudes towards refugees matter for the integration process as well ('receptivity of the society').

4.2.3.1 The four cases

Municipality A

In the medium-size town in Utrecht, locals' attitudes are described by almost all respondents as very positive, open, and welcoming: "In general, I think it is a very open city, little dissonances, little protests, little fuss." (N-A-1) According to the survey data, the local attitude towards migrants is between "rather positive" (5) to "very positive" (2) (7 respondents). This positive attitude becomes visible in the high number of volunteers and initiatives in the city (see also section 'introducing the cases'; N-A-5, N-A-8, N-A-9). In 2015, there was some resistance in neighborhoods with regards to the reception and housing of asylum seekers, but no actual protests (N-A-12). However, in the light of the housing crisis, some residents have expressed resentment regarding the priority regulation for refugees, believing that they contribute to the shortage of affordable housing (N-A-1, N-A-14, N-A-15).

Overall, respondents highlight the strong involvement and welcoming attitude of both local residents and the local government (N-A-12). One example that was regularly mentioned was the petition that was started in 2015 by the group of volunteers that had also set up the previously mentioned Facebook group. In their petition, the group demanded that the asylum seekers who were at that time residing in the municipality in an emergency shelter were to stay in the city once recognized as refugees. As a result, the mayor started negotiations with COA (the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) and succeeded – the majority of refugees were able to stay and settle down in the city (N-A-9, N-A-12, N-A-13). The member of the municipal council (in her role as volunteer) enthusiastically remembers:

> *With 200 volunteers we just had a great time for two months and the refugees were so happy with, say, all those contacts and all that positive energy, that we then started a petition. And we handed it over to the mayor to offer the refugees a house in the municipality, to make an agreement with COA, so that the network could be maintained. The mayor went to COA with this and was indeed able to make a deal as part of the housing that we had to offer to refugees anyway.*

Municipality B

In the small town in South Holland locals' attitudes towards post-2014 migrants are 'ambiguous' and split between welcoming (mobilization of volunteers) and hostile. According to the survey data, the local attitude towards migrants is between "rather negative" (3), "neutral" (2) and "rather positive" (2) (7 respondents). According to a local employer, younger residents are open to the reception of refugees, while older residents are critical about the arrival and settlement of newcomers. In 2015/2016, the hostile attitude was visibly expressed in protests against the arrival of newcomers. While most respondents agree that the protests have 'quieted down' (N-B-7), social media has now become the platform where individuals express their concerns or post racist comments (N-B-1, N-B-2). The respondent from the local library notes moreover that some regular visitors were complaining that "this is our library" (N-N-5) because half of the surface is nowadays used to offer language lessons for migrants. Like municipality A, another common concern relates to the shortage of housing and the priority that is given to refugees in being assigned an accommodation by housing corporations.

Here, the member of the municipal council stresses that refugees are usually assigned houses that were rejected by Dutch residents, alluding to the presence of certain false narratives (*angstverhalen*) about refugees and their impact on local communities. Multiple respondents emphasize that narratives about the reception center and foreigners play an important role in shaping people's perceptions, despite not being true. Stories misleadingly depict migrants as a threat or thieves (N-B-2, N-B-7, N-B-8). The municipality plans to proactively change these rather negative narratives by providing information and letting refugees tell their story (this

new communication strategy is planned for 2022). On a more personal level, some respondents mentioned experiences of discrimination and racism, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic where foreigners were seen as 'carriers of the disease' (N-B-4, N-B-12).

Importantly, there is also a group of people who has mobilized the Christian community in the locality and who has set up an association to help and support (rejected) asylum seekers. Other respondents also mentioned that "people are always ready to help and are cooperative" (N-B-12) and, especially in the library, there are enough volunteers providing support as language coaches or during group language lessons (N-B-5, N-B-11, N-B-12).

Municipality C

Similar to municipality B, locality C is characterized by a rather ambiguous attitude towards refugees and migrants. On the one hand, there is "*veel betrokkenheid"* (a lot of engagement by volunteers; N-C-4; N-C-7); on the other hand, there are a lot of supporters of conservative-right parties that usually represent a more restrictive stance towards immigrant integration. According to the survey data, the local attitude towards migrants is between "rather negative" (1), "neutral" (2) and "rather positive" (3) (6 respondents). Respondents point out that it is "not always easy to connect with the *'outside world'*" (N-C-8) and it takes time to establish and extent the personal network (N-C-7_2). According to the respondent of a local service provider this is also related to residents' attitude of "*ons kent ons*" (us knows us). The local official states that people regularly complain to the housing corporations that "they do not want refugees as their future neighbors". Overall, respondents did not refer to any actual protests (on the street), but rather referred to the election outcome to describe local residents' resentment or 'negative gut feeling' (N-C-15) towards newcomers. According to one volunteer of the non-public service provider for integration (social support), the voting results "are not a good sign" (N-C-15) when it comes to immigrant integration. Consequently, municipality C appears to be confronted with resentment expressed politically with people voting for conservative-right parties. These voting results may, in turn, have had a mobilizing effect in the opposite direction, that is, residents disagreeing with the results started volunteering "to show a different side of the city" (N-C-7_2).

Municipality D

An important characteristic of this locality (and the region more generally) is the concept of '*naoberschap'* (literally translated to 'neighborliness') which means that neighbors care for and look after each other (N-D-11). It appears that this does not necessarily always apply to newcomers – especially to those 'deviating' from well-established social rules and norms that are defining elements of the small community. Respondents underline that residents are not per se against refugees or newcomers (N-D-11), but 'the unknown' may cause fear and suspicion.

According to the survey data, the local attitude towards migrants is between “rather negative” (2), “neutral” (3) and “rather positive” (1) (6 respondents).

Moreover, public narratives fueling the idea that “refugees get everything” (N-D-4) and compete for the same type of jobs and housing have resulted in tensions between new and old residents (N-D-5, N-D-15):

> *As soon as a social housing is available, it almost immediately is filled with refugees and that makes that in certain neighborhoods and in the city itself, tensions emerge in certain neighborhoods. At a certain moment, there are people that say, yes, I also want rental property, my children would also like to live somewhere, and they have been waitlisted for years. A house is empty, and they just arrive. And that is a type of feeling. I’m not saying that it is like that, but it is what you encounter, let’s say over drinks during your birthday. That is the gut feeling. They arrive, they get everything, but do not do anything for it. I immediately say that this is not the case, but this is the feeling that exists*. (Member of municipal council, local party)

While the implicit, uneasy ‘gut feeling’ of residents towards refugees is usually expressed ‘over a beer at a birthday’ (N-D-5) or towards employees of the housing corporation and members of government, there have also been actual clashes between migrants and long-term residents (N-D-11). One employee of the local welfare organization mentions an incident where residents of a village tried to prevent a Syrian family from settling down by attacking their house. Protest was also expressed through slogans on the street saying, “our people first” (N-D-8). These actions resulted in a solidarity movement in the village, helping the refugees to feel welcome.

4.2.3.2 Interim conclusion

Comparing attitudes towards post-2014 migrants across localities, we find quite diverging patterns: a rather positive and welcoming atmosphere in municipality A, an ambiguous, leaning towards hostile, one in municipality B and municipality C, and a suspicious attitude in municipality D, where strong social/cultural norms are held high, and newcomers are often only tolerated on the condition that they would adhere to these norms. Interestingly, this does not reflect the municipality’s approach which is described as highly committed and welcoming towards newcomers. This is, for instance, different in the small town in Overijssel (municipality C) where also the local government takes a rather restrictive stance towards immigrant integration, framing migrants and their integration as problematic and potential burden for the social welfare system. In the medium-size town in Utrecht, the local governments’ approach appears to be most in line with locals’ attitude towards post-2014 migrants.

We argue that the diverging patterns found may (partially) be linked to diverging political orientations in the four cases: in the medium size town in Utrecht, the alderman responsible for integration is affiliated with a left-progressive party; in the small town in Overijssel, the respective alderman is from a conservative-right party. In the small town in South Holland, the alderman is a member of a Christian democratic party which frames 'support for refugees' in the form of charity essentially as a Christian value (N-B-8). The rural area's alderman has a socio-democratic, labor party background, explaining his social stance towards immigrant integration (N-D-11). The section on 'decision-making' will look more closely at the role of politics in national and local integration policymaking. The general housing crisis in the Netherlands seems to exacerbate the 'hostile'/'negative' feelings of some residents who feel that refugees are given an unfair advantage in an already tense housing situation.

4.3 Multilevel governance dynamics in integration policymaking

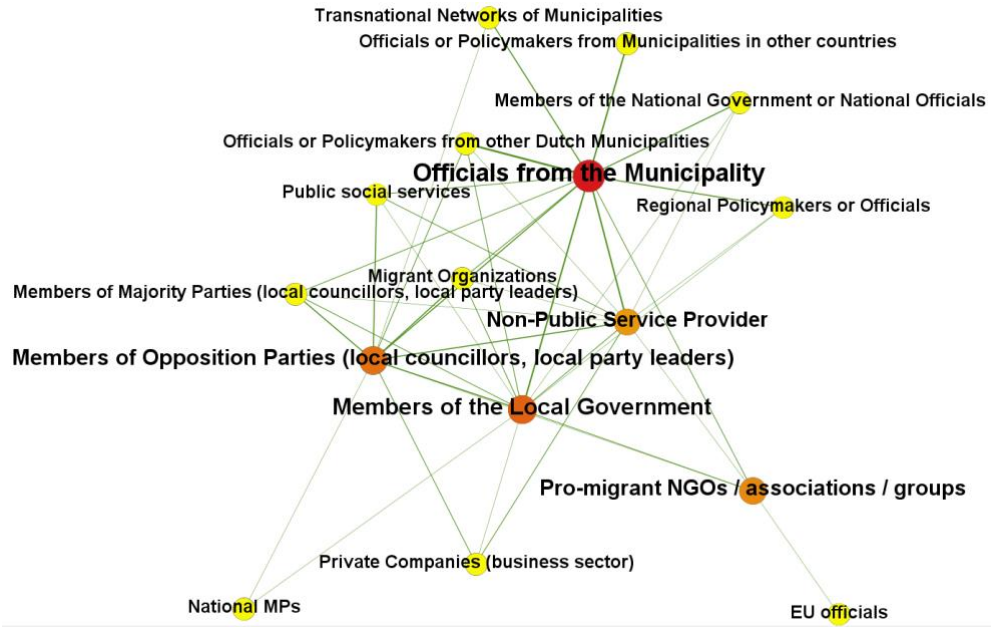
A. Mapping the networks

The following section includes results from a network analysis which is based on the survey results, highlighting key actors and patters on interaction among these actors. In the survey, respondents were asked about the frequency and form of interactions with other actors concerning the integration of post-2014 migrants before and during the pandemic. It is important to note that not all respondents filled in the survey or mentioned that they did not feel confident answering all the questions, either because they did not perceive their organization as being well-connected to other actors at other governance levels; or because they have only held the position in the respective organization for a short time (typically, two to three years). Consequently, the description of interactions and cooperation below is complemented by data collected in interviews and document analysis.

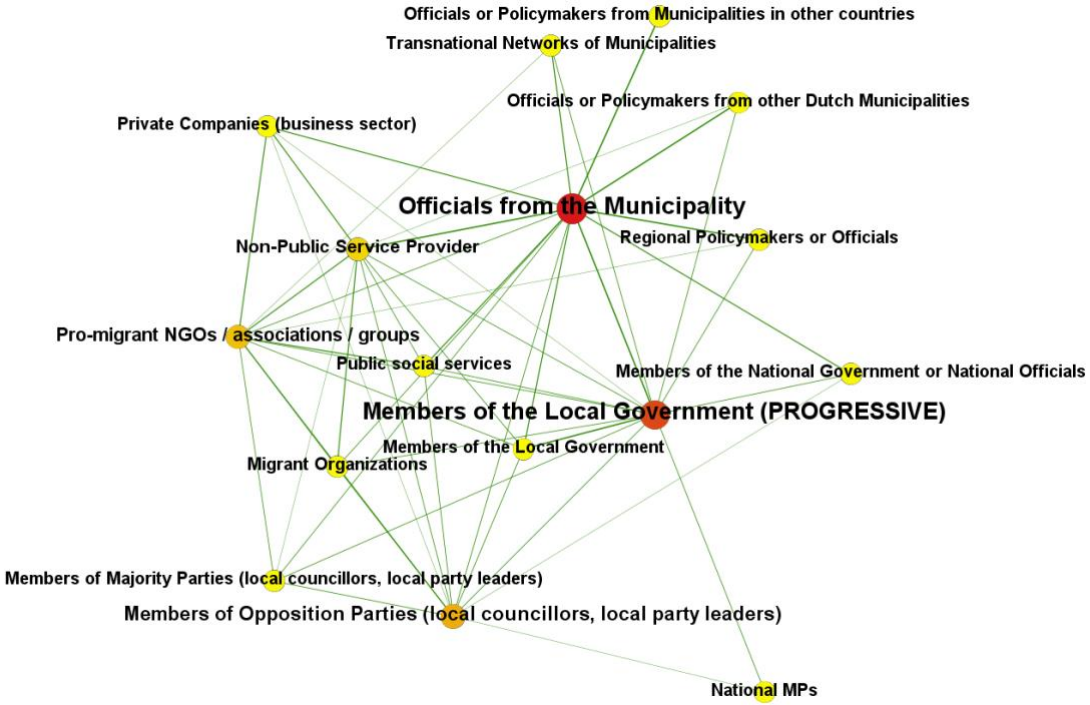
In the **pre-/post-pandemic networks** displayed below, the thickness of the lines/edges indicates the **frequency** of interaction, for example, the thicker the line the more frequent the interactions. Moreover, a force-directed algorithm was applied that keeps closer actors that interact more frequently.

Municipality A

Pre-pandemic network



Post-pandemic network



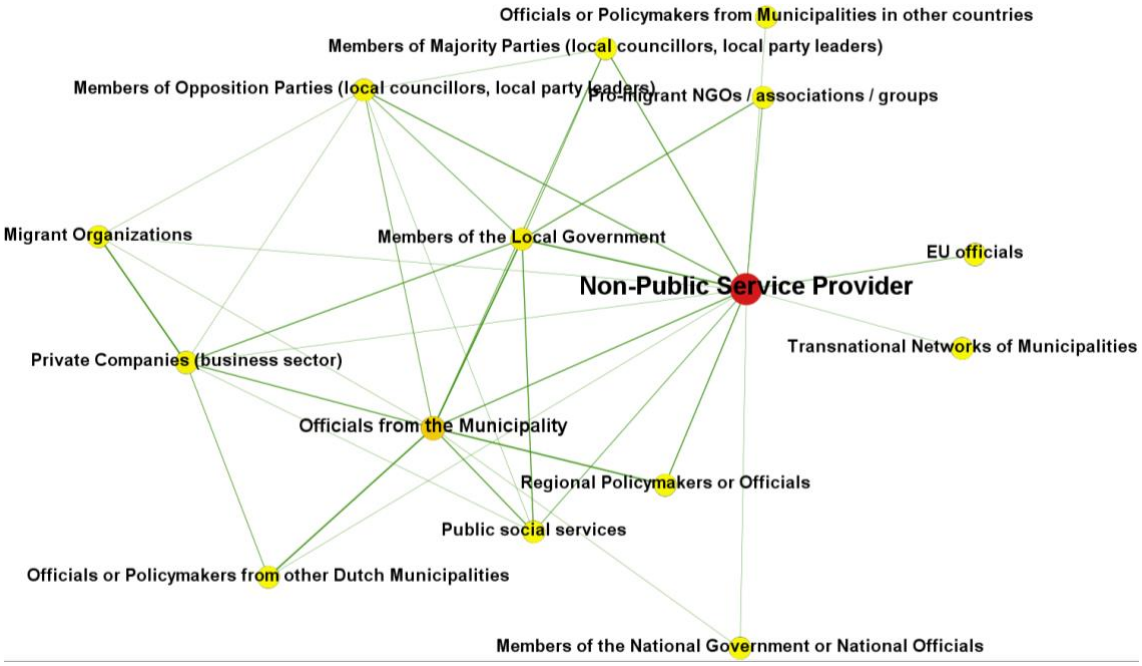
As previously mentioned, *the* key actor in the integration governance in municipality A is – besides the municipality – the main service provider for integration, offering all integration related services such as social support, language, housing, and labor market integration under one roof. Moreover, there are a high number of other NGOs and CSOs involved, providing more informal support, for example through social activities and language projects. The

frequency of interaction between these main actors (local officials, member of local government and nonprofit service providers) appears to be higher before the pandemic. Moreover, local actors are centrally located, indicating that they interact more frequently with each other compared to actors at the regional, national or EU level. This is also in line with the interviews where respondents highlighted the very close interaction between the municipality and the main service provider (N-A-1, N-A-8, N-A-9) as well as between the municipality and other non-public actors that are part of the *network integration* (N-A-6). With regards to the influence of the pandemic, it was mentioned that actors still interacted, albeit less frequently and mainly via available online platforms. According to most respondents, there was very little to no interaction with the EU level. Some organizations that were also active in other municipalities, interacted across regions with the representatives of other local offices (N-A-3, N-A-4). Local officials and members of the local government interacted for example with other officials and government representatives in regional partnerships (*samenwerkings-verbanden*), city networks, or the "*Landelijke Regietafel*" for Migration and Integration (see also section on regional/national context).

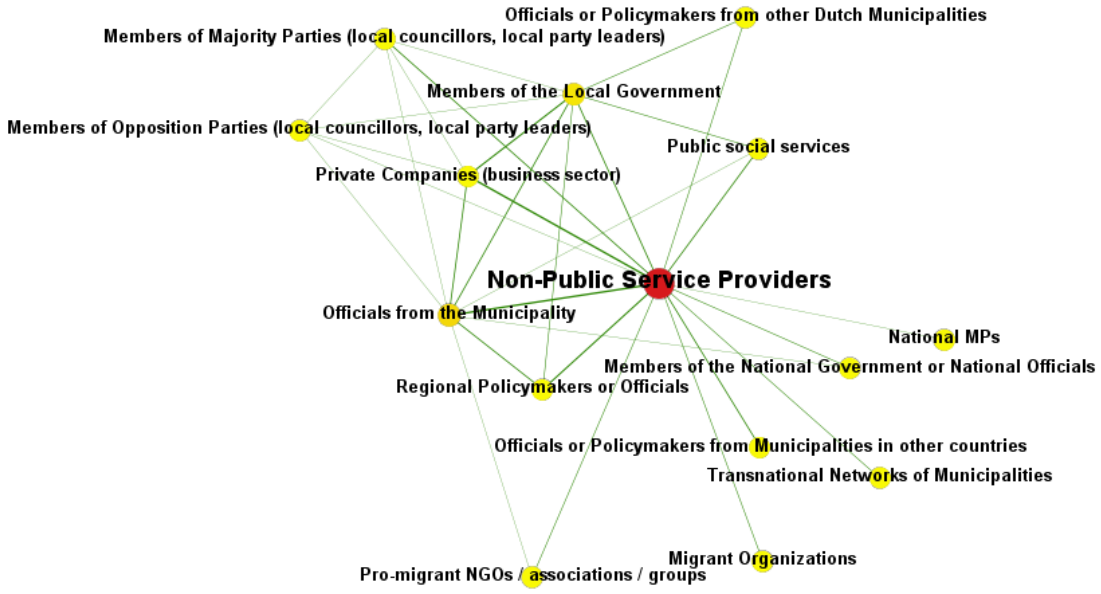
In terms of **structures of support** created by civil society actors, NGOs and the business sector, municipality A stands out due to its high number of informal initiatives and projects in the realm of migration and integration, numbers ranging from 60 to 80 (according to various respondents). These initiatives are active both at the city and the neighborhood level and offer, for example, informal social activities, language cafés or other forms of support to facilitate the integration of newcomers in the city. A website run by the local welfare organization bundles all these activities and provides information on the various activities (N-A-6). Another important platform is the previously mentioned Facebook group that was set up by a group of volunteers in 2015. On this website, both residents and newcomers can, for example, ask for advice and share information on upcoming activities and services provided in the city. The website is very frequently used and appears to be an important source of information as well as an informal support structure where volunteers regularly mobilize support for newly arrived refugees (at the time of writing primarily for refugees from Ukraine).

Municipality B

Pre-pandemic network



Post-pandemic network



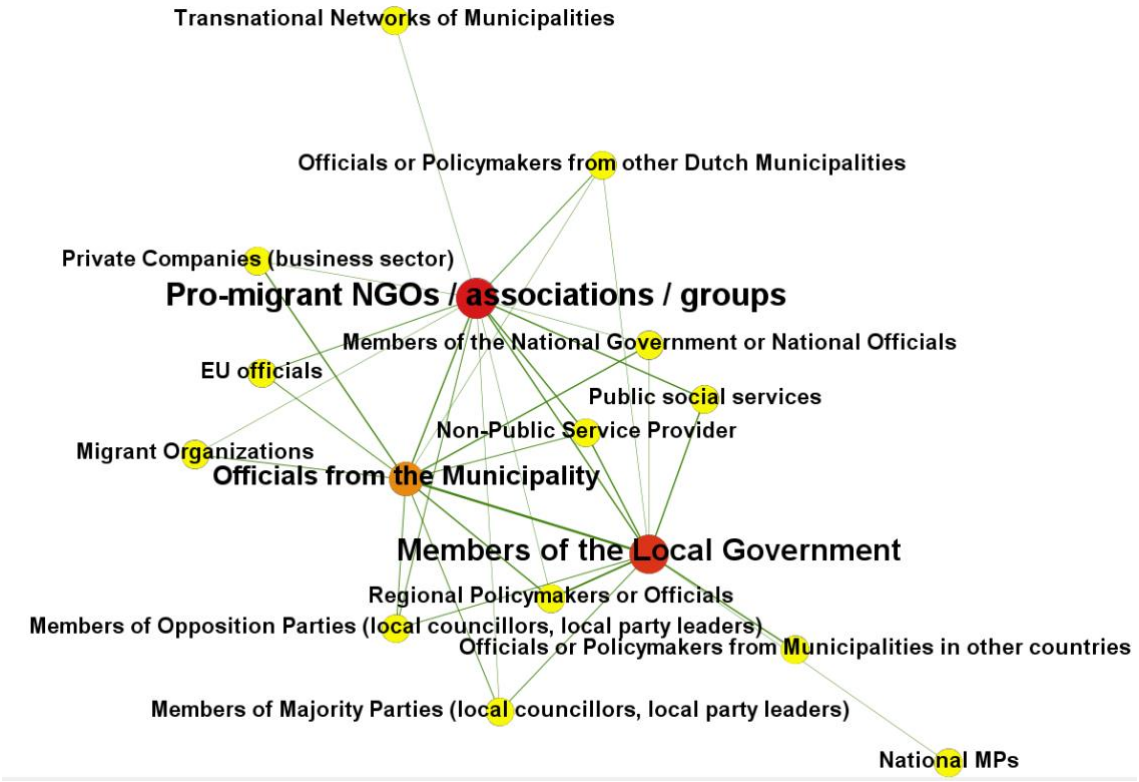
Similar to municipality A, the network revolves primarily around local actors, most importantly the municipality and local non-profit service providers offering social support, language lessons and help with labor market integration. These local actors are centrally located, indicating that they interact more frequently with each other compared to actors at the regional, national or EU level. This is, again, in line with the interviews where respondents

described close interaction and collaboration between the municipality and local non-profit service providers, most importantly the welfare organization offering social support to refugees (N-B-1, N-B2). With regards to the influence of the pandemic, respondents mention that interaction between main actors even increased but took place mainly via available online platforms. Again, the EU level did not seem to play an important role, and local officials and members of the local government interacted with other municipalities mainly at a regional level (not provincial or national), for example, in the respective *arbeidsmarktregio* (N-B-2, N-B-6). Interaction towards the national level occurred primarily via the Association of Dutch municipalities (N-B-2). According to the member of the local government, the municipality decided very consciously to collaborate with local actors, instead of national ones, which may explain the centrality of local service providers in the network.

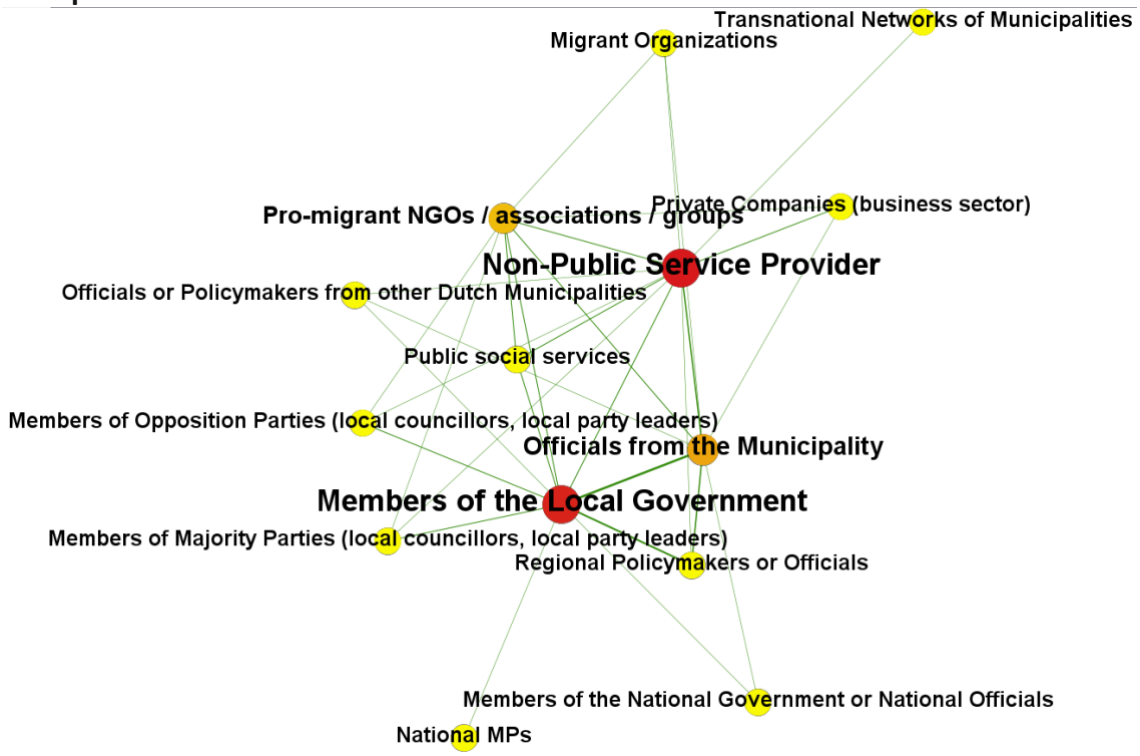
In terms of **structures of support**, local churches founded an association to support (rejected) asylum seekers, mainly through the organization of social activities (such as bible study groups or language lessons). The local association is mainly run by volunteers but is supported by a national Christian organization. Churches also organize other activities such as the 'neighborhood soup' where local residents can meet (N-B-5, N-B-8). The local welfare organization offers many different activities in the various neighborhoods, also in collaboration with other local actors (sport clubs etc.). Lastly, the library appears to be an important place where newcomers and residents meet and connect, mainly via the informal language/educational activities. Yet, two respondents also mentioned that there are not enough places where people can *actually* meet (N-B-1, N-B-12).

Municipality C

Pre-pandemic network



Post-pandemic network



Based on the networks displayed above, it can be said that members of the local government and local officials interact frequently with each other. The same applies to the interaction between local officials and non-public actors such as the non-public service provider and pro-migrant NGOs / associations. These actors are also most centrally located in the existing network. The interactions between the municipality and the non-public service provider seem to have increased significantly in the post-pandemic network as the non-public actor has gained a more central position within the network. Contrary to the other two municipalities, interactions with regional and national officials appear to occur more frequently (especially before the pandemic). Some of these observations are in line with the interviews where respondents continuously referred to the non-public actors as being an important part of the existing governance network (which would explain their centrality). The municipality interacts closely with the non-profit service provider for social support (which may have been defined by some respondents as pro-migrant NGO) because of the provider's crucial role as first contact point for refugees in the city (N-C-15). With regards to the national and regional level, some respondents mention that they work with other municipalities and labor market actors in the regional partnership 'Employer Service Point' and/or with representatives from other national organizations such as *Humanitas* (that have offices in most Dutch municipalities). Moreover, one respondent of the main service provider for refugees explains that they collaborate with other similar organizations at a regional level.

In terms of **structures of support**, there are various non-public organizations in municipality C, offering formal and informal support to newcomers in general and refugees in particular. Most importantly, the local service provider for refugees which carries out the task of social support on behalf of the municipality, provides additional language support for refugees with the help of more than 30 volunteers. This local non-public service provider was founded in 2015 by volunteers who consciously separated themselves from the bigger national organization (Dutch Council for Refugees) which offers social support in most Dutch municipalities. The volunteers felt that by starting their own foundation they could provide better support to refugees, have a more direct line to the municipality and be less involved in bureaucratic processes of a big organization. One of the volunteers involved remembers:

> *Then, of course, we had to participate in a tender of the municipality, so we just formed a board. And well, the municipality said, we want to work with you and not with the big Council for Refugees. We have been [name of the organization] again for 6 years now, I believe, and that works fine. We just have a direct contact with the municipality and yes, that's okay, we don't have to give account to the whole big organization, and that works better*.

Moreover, the **support structure** in the small town in Overijssel consists of (amongst others) a small NGO that organizes social activities and voluntary work for asylum seekers and

refugees, and the library with its '*taalpunt*' (language point) where migrants can receive support with their language learning. The '*taalpunt*' is coordinated by the local welfare organization which additionally provides easily accessible services in the broader realm of 'welfare' (for all residents). Lastly, the national NGO Humanitas initiated a buddy program to offer additional support to newcomers, with the defined goal to increase their independence. Throughout the interviews, these actors were named consistently. Sporadically, respondents mentioned other actors – but their services were not specifically targeting refugees but, for example, persons with debts (such as *debt counseling*) or persons with insufficient financial means (such as the *food bank*).

Municipality D

For the rural area in Drenthe, it was not possible to create a network due to the low number of completed surveys.

Based on the conducted interviews, it can nonetheless be said that local public and non-public organizations have interacted and collaborated closely in the immigrant integration policy area (detailed description of main actors follows below; distribution of competences can be found on 36ff.). Both the national non-profit service provider carrying out the task of social support (Dutch Council for Refugees) and the national NGO offering language lessons and language buddies maintain relations with their 'counterparts' in other municipalities and with the national level (the main office of each organization), expanding the network across municipal borders. The municipality itself collaborates very closely with two surrounding municipalities in a formalized partnership, addressing for instance different topics in the social domain (social welfare, social services). EU and national level both appear to be less relevant for the municipality. However, the local welfare organization mentions one EU-funded project that the organization carries out in collaboration with the local reception center (COA). Lastly, one aspect that stood out in the interviews with the respondents in the rural area is the municipality's close collaboration with local employers (more so than in other municipalities) with whom the local government has initiated various pilots and partnerships to facilitate labor market integration (N-D-9, N-D-10, N-D-14).

The local **structures of support** are bundled together in the multifunctional neighborhood center which appears to be the main point of reference when talking about forms of support provided to refugees. Newcomers can easily access both 'formal' (language school, Dutch Council for Refugees) and 'informal' services and actors describe the proximity as very advantageous for the tailored provision of help (N-D-2, N-D-3, N-D-6, N-D-12). Besides actors specifically targeting refugees and/or migrants, there are also other organizations represented in the multifunction center (such as the food bank or a local religious community).

B. Actors' functions and their roles in governance networks

The *formal* distribution of local actors' roles regarding housing, social support, and labor market integration was described earlier. This section is based on the *self-perception* of actors.

B.1 The four cases

Municipality A

According to the member of the local government, the **municipality** has two roles: First, it creates conditions that make it possible to provide adequate support, "through policy and subsidies, (we) make it possible that this kind of support can be established, for the society, for the '*inburgeraars'* [persons following the civic integration trajectory] and for the migrants." Second, the municipality's role, and in particular the mayor's role, is to give an example on the kind of society we stand for, to show "this is how we live with each other" and these are "the values and norms that are important to give newcomers a place in society" (N-A-8). The local official elaborates further that the municipality also has an important role in lobbying for municipal interests at the regional and national level, for instance in collaboration with the city network G40 and the VNG.

The main **non-profit service provider for integration** is described as an easily accessible organization, focusing on language learning, work, and participation because "economic self-sufficiency appears to form the best basis for integration" (website). One goal is therefore to connect refugees and employers, but also to make 'people feel at home in a world of difference' (website). The organization is specialized in supporting refugees during their civic integration trajectory. Importantly, civic integration is not in itself seen as a goal, but as a means to an end, namely integration which goes beyond 'mere' civic integration (N-A-1):

> *We are the actor that really helps persons following the civic integrationist trajectory. We help them on their way to basically everything in life here in the Netherlands. [...] Our role is to ensure a good start. And to make sure that even if more help is needed after the 'good start', we try to entrust it [support for refugees] to other organizations.*

The member of the local government describes the non-public service provider as the "spider in the web" which works closely together with other public and non-public actors and is in close contact with all refugees following the civic integration program (N-A-8).

The **housing corporation**'s role is to "make sure that people are connected and know each other" (N-A-15). According to the respondent, this is especially important for the topic of integration because "your environment is very important for your integration". Moreover, the corporation ensures that people can live in a good and cozy neighborhood.

The **local welfare organization** "does everything in the area of welfare" (N-A-6) and regulates on behalf of the municipality the subsidies that are given to city- or neighborhood-based initiatives that are organized by residents and focus for instance on '*meedoen'* (participation), facilitating collaboration, or preventing loneliness (N-A-6). The organization has 'information shops' in the different neighborhoods which function as an easily accessible support structure, helping residents who "are searching for their way". The organization's role is to make sure people feel comfortable in their neighborhood and are able to participate. Due to its proximity to the needs of residents, the organization can "signal problems" to the municipality and/or try to address some of the issues through the provision of subsidies. Moreover, the welfare organization is also responsible for the coordination of the 'Network Integration' which was initiated in 2019 by the municipality to bring together formal and informal actors working in the field of integration, including churches and mosques (N-A-6). Initially, almost 70 actors were invited to join the network; nowadays, the network comprises 20 to 25 active members.

The 'Network Integration'[18] included a **national social corporation** with a focus on labor market integration that matches newcomers with local employers or organizations (N-A-3). In doing so, newcomers, in particular refugees, are prepared for a job and for a 'place in our society' (website). The social corporation offered customized support by looking closely at a person's educational and professional background to find the right type of work. Besides the main non-public service provider for integration, the social corporation was the only organization in municipality A focusing on labor market integration (N-A-3).

Moreover, the integration network includes a **national initiative** with a focus on the 'social side' of integration, aiming at expanding a newcomer's network and building friendships by matching newcomers and long-term residents ('buddy system'; N-A-4). The coordinator describes the role as follows:

> *Ultimately, the main goal is that we can in any case improve the integration of newcomers, support them a bit more. We do have a different view on helping and that is actually because we indicate from the start that whether you are a Dutch person who participates or a newcomer, you are both a buddy.*

Finally, there is a **local language café** where newcomers can practice Dutch. The coordinator of the language café emphasizes that they are more than 'just' a place where people improve their language; people "also come to celebrate their birthday or the birth of a child".

[18] The researcher reached out to more organizations but has only received a positive response by some of the organizations that are active in the integration field. Interviews were conducted with organizations that were named by multiple respondents and appeared to be key actors in the field (such as the social corporation focusing on labor market integration and the national initiative matching newcomers and long-term residents).

Part of the sample was also a small NGO (non-profit service provider) that offers psychological support to migrants and refugees – an aspect that is, according to the respondent, often not addressed in the formal civic integration program. The organization works with volunteers that have a migration background themselves and speak the language of the persons they are supporting. The organization primarily supports families with 'multiple problems', in need of long-term assistance. The respondent highlights that the organization's approach differs substantially from the approach of the main service provider for integration. It addresses an individual's situation from a holistic perspective by considering their social and institutional environment, instead of working with a checklist (managerial approach).

Municipality B

The **municipality** has the directing role, it is the actor deciding how much budget is given to each partner and defining specific policy goals (N-B-2). The local official adds that policy is made in continuous dialogue with all partners. It is important to invest in the relationships with the other actors to "keep the relation clear, clean and honest" (*helder, zuiver en eerlijk*) and to connect the dots. The member of the local government explains likewise that the municipality is both "director" and financier: "we have the directing role towards the person integrating, but also towards the other partners who have a role [and] we finance [...] so we also [...] have to say how we want things to happen." The municipality thus defines the tasks, but the implementation itself should *not* be done by the local government. The strength for the implementation of specific tasks lies with local partners due to their expertise.

The local **welfare organization** is seen as one of the main actors in the integration governance because it is "involved from day one" (N-B-1, N-B-4). Social workers help refugees with the organization of all administrative tasks (registration at the municipality, application for welfare benefits, health insurance, energy provider, general practitioner, registration of children at school, etc.) and offer consultation hours. In total, newcomers are being supported for three years through a '*trajectbegeleider*' who helps them design an "action plan" and to "find their way" (N-B-4), especially in difficult situations.

The local **housing corporation** has naturally a very big role to fulfil, "because living is the most important good that you have" (N-B-3). Having a house means having a status and experiencing safety – and without the housing corporation, there would be no housing. The performance agreements with the municipality are thus taken very seriously (N-B-2, N-B-3).

The regional **service provider** is responsible for facilitating refugees' access to the labor market. Its role can be described as two-fold: first, it connects people with employers through their "strong employer network" (N-B-6). Second, it promotes the development of people, for instance by letting people participate in a "*werkfit programma*" or in other trainings – sometimes in collaboration with schools or other educational facilities (N-B-6).

Lastly, the **library** fulfils three roles: First, it offers informal language support and practical help (e.g., with filling in forms). Second, it has a social "meeting function" (N-B-5) by offering a space where people can meet and interact with each other. Third, it gives information: "We try to be kind of a nodal point. Someone can come in, like a spider web, and we check, what do you want? Who are you? What can you do? What would be good for you? Then we send them out to everybody [to other organizations]" (N-B-5). Their services are both for people with a migration background (NT2) and for 'illiterate' 'Dutch' people (NT1). The municipality often refers refugees who have completed their civic integration program, but still have insufficient language skills.

Municipality C

The **municipality**'s task is to seek connections with other partners, such as NGOs, CSOs or sport associations, to help "people find their way" (N-C-6). According to a local official, the municipality is the "spider in the web", responsible for the implementation of certain legal tasks – but in close collaboration with local partners such as housing corporations (housing) and the service provider for refugees (social support) (N-C-2). Both the local official and the member of the local government underline the importance of collaboration with external partners to make sure "refugees can integrate as good as possible" (N-C-2).

The **local NGO** (main non-public service provider for refugees) responsible for the legal task of social support is the first contact point for refugees in the city (N-C-15). Its most important task is to accompany people "that do not know their way at all" by providing not only (administrative) information, but also by "motivating, stimulating, and connecting people" (N-C-7_2) if needed. The organization functions as "the spider in the web" (N-C-15) because it knows where to find solutions for people and where to refer them to. The coordinator of the organization noted further that "we are for people the 112 – if something happens, they call us immediately, if someone is sick… we are always ready to help. They do not know anyone and through our network, we link people to each other." Importantly, the coordinator has a refugee background himself which is seen as a crucial benefit because he can communicate with many refugees in their own language (N-C-7_2).

The respondent from the **housing corporation** refers to the corporation as "an instrument to find housing" and argues that the corporation tries to find suitable housing for everyone – often in collaboration with other actors such as the local NGO responsible for social support.

The **local welfare organization**'s is the main actor in the welfare domain and its role is to connect residents with each other:

> *We connect residents with each other. We are a kind of catalyst, sometimes to get things going, to support resident initiatives, organize information evenings, well, very broadly, but it is about connecting residents among each other, groups among each other and internal and external contacts among each other. So, we are constantly making connections.* (Employee local welfare organization)

On the topic of integration more specifically, the organization offers easily accessible opportunities to learn and practice the language "without applying pressure" (N-C-4).

Besides these actors that appear to be more 'formally' included in the governance network (because they receive funding from the municipality to carry out specific (legal) tasks such as housing or social support), there are two other actors that seem to be relevant in the realm of integration policymaking. First, a **small NGO** that facilitates interactions between asylum seekers, refugees, and Dutch residents, namely through the organization of social activities (N-A-3). Second, a **national NGO** that provided support to newcomers and accompanied them for up to one year to increase their independence and participation and to "help them find their own way" (N-C-8).

Municipality D

A local official defines the role of the **municipality** as follows: "We make sure that refugees can start their civic integration, we guide them towards work and school, and we arrange the settling down process in the beginning" (N-D-9_2). Besides this more practical role, the municipality also has an 'overarching role' to facilitate refugees' integration and participation in the community and to ensure "that they are feeling well here" (N-D-9_1). Lastly, the municipality listens to residents to understand what can still be done on this topic.

The **national NGO** (Dutch Council for Refugees) implementing the task of 'social support' perceives itself as the "voice of refugees, offering a helping hand and lending an open ear to their needs" (N-A-2). This means, "we are here for the normal administrative stuff, but also in those moments when someone really does not know what to do or where to go next. And we can also communicate towards the municipality if something does not go well."

The **housing corporation** is responsible for assigning refugees to appropriate housing; but it appears that its activities go beyond this task, for example, they also make sure that refugees understand *how* to live in the local community by helping them pick and hang the 'right' curtains and they facilitate interaction between new and old tenants. Importantly, the services offered later through the 'neighborhood advisor' are for all residents, not just for refugees; they organize different initiatives and activities for tenants (N-D-1).

The **local welfare organization** collaborates with local partners to find a good (practical) approach to immigrant integration, while not directly being involved in the policy-*making* process. More generally, the organization has a "signaling role" (N-D-8) and its goal is to "help people with any issue that they run into" (N-D-4):

> *We divided the municipality in four districts and one overarching district. In every district there are two social workers, two community development workers and one neighborhood coach, and together they are the ears and eyes of the village, picking up signals that we then take to the municipality and together with the municipality we think of key points to focus on. We go to the villages, into the neighborhoods and discuss with residents their needs and interests.* (Employee welfare organization)

The **local language school** focuses on learning the Dutch language and gaining knowledge about Dutch society. But its role goes beyond the mere provision of formal education. The coordinator describes her role as being an 'anchor' for persons in need of help:

> *I think we are really the anchor, so if there are problems, they come to us. [...] You are a confidant. And we are also sometimes asked for complicated bookings of money or something, you know? You're really a confidant […] in addition to the teaching part.*

Both the **local library** and a national **NGO** provide informal language education. However, the local library's focus lies primarily on illiterate persons with a Dutch language background and refugees are only allowed to access their services after having completed their civic integration trajectory. The language coordinator defines her role in integration therefore as "rather small". The national NGO offers both individual lessons and group lessons but "these activities are more than just language because they are also against loneliness as they provide possibilities to network, to create friendships, to meet each other." (N-D-3_2)

B.2 Interim conclusion

In all four municipalities governmental tasks related to immigrant integration have been 'outsourced' to locally operating *non*-public (and often non-profit) service providers, covering the 'integration dimensions' housing, social support, language and (to some extent) work. In all four localities, similar actors appear to be involved in the reception and integration of post-2014 refugees – albeit with varying responsibilities, positions, and influence. The table below provides not only a description of their formally defined role, but also an overview of how actors perceive themselves, also in relation to other actors, in the field of immigrant integration. We see that actor's self-perception often goes beyond the rather narrow definition of their roles with regards to assigned tasks. Across all actors and municipalities one common theme was to 'help people find their way' in the new environment and in Dutch

society. Moreover, actors stressed the importance of collaboration with local partners. The next section will therefore look more closely at the forms of collaboration between actors.

Actor	Formal role (on paper)	'Informal' role (self-perception)
Municipality	Funder and coordinator, also responsible for labor market integration under the Participation Act	- Policymaker (A, B) - Role model (A) - Directing role (B) - Funder (B) - Spider in the web (C) - Facilitator (D)
Housing corporation	Responsible for finding housing for refugees as part of the 'performance agreement' with the municipality	- Connecting people (A, D) - Providing a safe space (B)
(Local) NGO / non-profit service-provider	Responsible for the task of 'social support', assigned by the municipality under the Civic Integration Act	- Spider in the web (A, C) - Providing a good start (A) - First contact point (A, B, C) - Emergency line/112 (C) - Representing voice of refugees (D)
Local welfare organizations	Providing support for *all* residents, often neighbourhood-based	- Signalling role (A, D) - Facilitating participation of residents (A, D) - Connecting people (C) - Offering low-threshold support (A, C, D)
Other actors (NGOs, CSOs), incl. volunteers	Providing informal support to refugees (language support, social activities)	- Tailor-made support (A) - Connecting people (A, B, D) - Providing information (B) - Confidant (trust person) (D)

Table 7: Overview of formal and informal roles of actors in integration policymaking

C. Dynamics of cooperation and conflict

In the first section of the country report, it was highlighted that public and non-public actors across local, regional, and national governance levels interact and collaborate with each other in so called '*samenwerkingsverbanden*' (collaboration networks/partnerships) which may range from very formalized to less formalized and often focus on specific areas, such as labor market, health, or integration. Local level governments often interact with national level actors via intermediary organizations, including city networks, the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), and national implementing bodies such as COA.

Here, the VNG representative noted that collaborating with ministries and the national implementing bodies COA and DUO "usually goes well because we all have the same ambition". However, disagreements sometimes emerge especially with regards to the actual implementation of policies when trying to align policy implementation across municipalities. According to the respondent, the implementing bodies DUO and COA may find it sometimes difficult to understand that the VNG cannot *oblige* municipalities to implement a policy in a certain way, they can merely *advise* them to do so.

At the horizontal level, provinces interact with each other in regular meetings to exchange information and find solutions for issues that keep emerging with regards to the housing of refugees at the local level (N-SH). Moreover, provinces interact with multiple municipalities in regional meetings, or individually with one municipality, to discuss for instance what steps need to be taken in case municipalities do not fulfil their assigned task. The respondent from the province Drenthe mentioned that provinces and municipalities could even interact more closely with each other. The plan is to create the network "Drenthe Inclusive", with one of the topics being 'newcomers and migration', to provide a platform that facilitates dialogue and connection between the province and the municipalities.

Looking closer at the local level, we found that all four municipalities are involved in various formal and informal collaboration networks, both across provinces (for example in city networks) and within their province and – even more so – within their region, namely with municipalities in their more immediate surrounding. According to two Divosa regional coordinators, this collaboration has often increased in light of the implementation of the new Civic Integration Act: at the regional level, municipalities have for example tried to find a more concerted and harmonized approach to integration policymaking and to enter into contracts with the same (language course) service providers (N-Divosa-1, N-Divosa-2).

The section below discusses relevant collaboration partners and sheds light on some conflictual dynamics that have occurred in the four localities. Factors influencing interactions and dynamics between actors include structural factors (competition for funding, divided responsibilities), societal factors (controversies surrounding the settlement of post-2014 migrants), and formal and informal structures of support and conflicts arising from that.

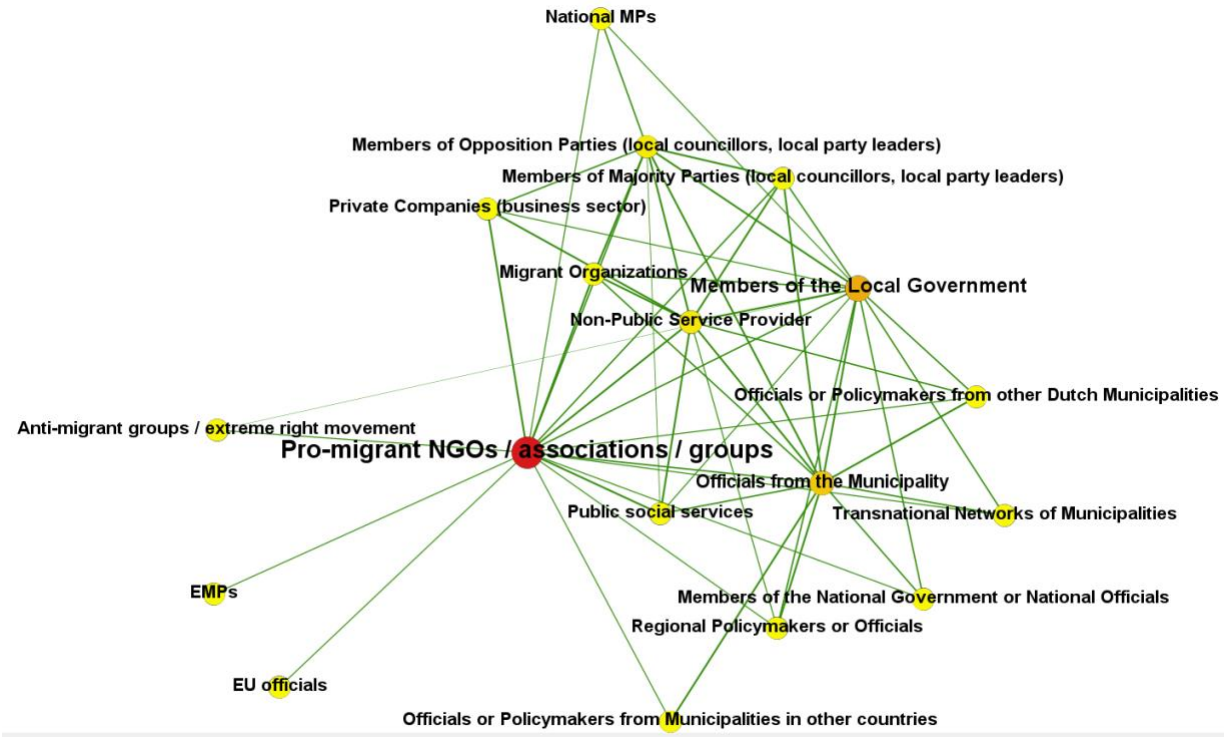
The section further includes results from the network analysis which is based on the survey results. In the **network displaying collaboration and conflict**, the thickness of the lines/edges indicates the **degree of collaboration**, that is, the thicker the lines/edges the more collaborative the interactions. Conversely, thin lines represent conflictual interactions. Moreover, a force-directed algorithm is applied that keeps closer actors that have more collaborative/less conflictual interactions.

C.1. The four cases

Municipality A

In municipality A, integration-related tasks are carried out by the main non-profit service provider for integration. There are weekly or monthly meetings between this organization and the municipality (local officials), at times also including other actors such as the housing corporations and/or the local welfare organizations to discuss relevant topics and find joint solutions to problems (such as difficulties in finding housing) (N-A-1, N-A-8, N-A-14). Besides these more formalized meetings between actors that carry out governmental tasks, the 'Network Integration' has played an important role in bringing together formal and informal actors working on integration. The centrality of local actors such as pro-migrant NGOs and associations is also visible in the network below displaying forms of collaboration and conflict.

At the regional and national level, the municipality "sits at the negotiation table with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment" (N-A-9) and closely collaborates with the G40 city network and the VNG. Moreover, it works with municipalities in its immediate surrounding and supports smaller communities, for example by providing access to services such as language schools for refugees living in these smaller communities where, due to the small number of newcomers, such services are not available.



Based on the network analysis, it cannot be clearly concluded if there are big differences in terms of collaboration between actors or if there have been conflicting relations between stakeholders. In the interviews it was mentioned that the main tension in municipality A has appeared between **formal and informal actors** dealing with migrant integration, mainly in two ways. Importantly, it was mentioned that the collaboration has significantly improved, also with the arrival of the new director of the main integration service provider.

First, after the arrival of refugees in 2015, tensions between the 'formal' main integration actor and 'informal' volunteers arose over *how* to provide support (N-A-1, N-A-5). According to the member of the municipal council, formal support is mainly based on (legal) rules, sanctions, and processes, while informal help provided by volunteers relates more to the 'socio-cultural' side of integration, for example by motivating people, creating friendships/a social network, or explaining unwritten rules as well as local norms and values (also mentioned by N-A-4). This benefit of informal help has not always been appreciated and/or considered in the local policy approach (N-A-5, N-A-13).

Second, tension have emerged within the relatively new 'Network Integration', especially regarding a potential inclusion of informal actors in the formal support structure (N-A-3, N-A-6). For example, the municipality has certain guidelines as well as requirements for subsidies. Informal network partners have (sometimes) had the ambition to become a more structural 'paid' member of the network but were not always familiar with the municipality's requirements (N-A-6). The welfare organization thus often acts as 'translator' between actors that speak different 'languages' because they differ in terms of ways of working, target group, goals, expectations, and motivations. Respondents also mention that the high number of projects and initiatives as well as the diversity of actors has led to difficulties (N-A-6, N-A-9).

> *The social support is carried out by one organization. But all those other foundations and initiatives had ideas about how it should be done well, whether it should be a lot more or a lot less, while that was not part of their tasks, so then they sometimes look at each other and say, oh, it's not going well [...] while ... it is really limited what can be done, [...] it is very nice that there are so many initiatives, but it is a challenge - how do you make sure that we work well on this together? And then I suddenly noticed that the voices of the persons integrating, of the migrants themselves, was almost forgotten, although this is the most important thing.* (Local official)

Due to its close relation with the municipality as well as its broad range of tasks and responsibilities, the non-profit service provider responsible for integration (almost) occupies a **'monopoly position'** within the governance network (N-A-3). On the one hand, this is seen as an advantage because everything is managed 'under one roof', refugees only have one main contact point, and the organization has over the past 40 years gained a lot of expertise in the

field. On the other hand, it appears more difficult for smaller, less established organizations to be involved in the field of migrant integration and to receive adequate recognition. This has led to frustration in the past, especially for actors who have adopted a different approach to helping newcomers and who have not received sufficient funding or funding has stopped with the implementation of the new Civic Integration Act (N-A-2, N-A-3, N-A-4, N-A-13).

Financing – or the lack thereof – is here seen as a symbol that the engagement and initiatives of residents are (not) appreciated and recognized as important contributions to the integration of newcomers:

> *It's about recognition. It is not about the recognition for me. I think that the municipality needs to say that integration is only possible when you involve citizens. […] And I think that with some funding, it doesn't have to be big, that you give a recognition towards citizens. 'You are doing well, and we encourage you to help newcomers to integrate.'* (Coordinator language café)

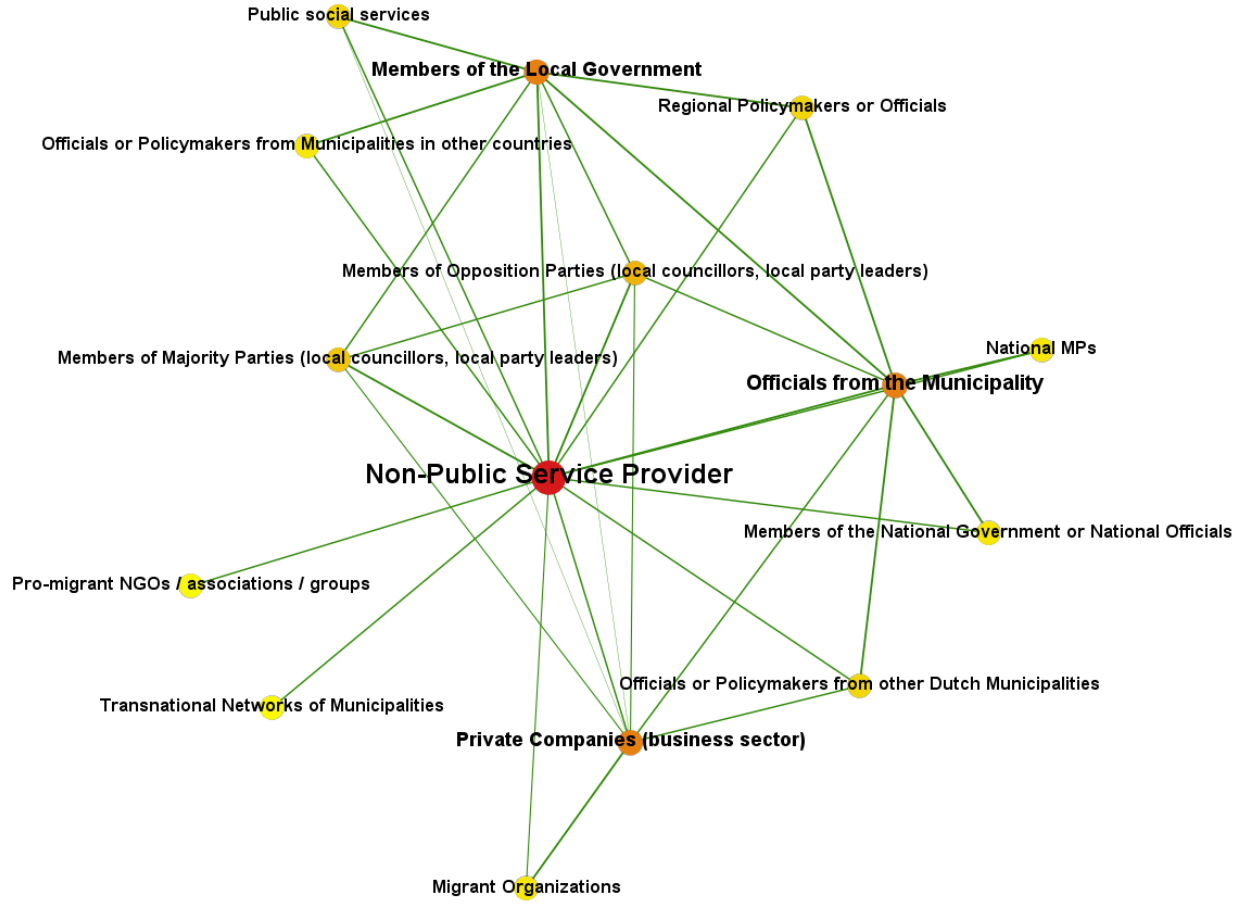
Finally, some respondents mention that there was **no or little collaboration with COA** and the local reception center because of differing understandings regarding the provision of support for (rejected) asylum seekers. Three respondents of local non-profit service providers explain that they tried involving (rejected) asylum seekers in their activities, but the local COA office was not very collaborative and made the involvement of the residents in the reception center very difficult to impossible. Similarly, a local official pointed out that interactions with COA were, at times, conflictual because the municipality sees (rejected) asylum seekers first and foremost as local residents falling under the responsibility of the municipal administration; while COA argues that rejected asylum seekers do not need to be 'integrated' (N-A-9).

Despite the reported differences and tensions, respondents emphasize that collaboration between the main actors involved is going well and that there has been an open dialogue – also with the municipality – about the past conflicts.

Municipality B

In municipality B, integration-related tasks (housing, social support, and labor market integration) are clearly divided among three local actors and coordinated by the municipality. There is a regular meeting to discuss relevant topics and concerns and the actors collaborate with each other; yet there appears to be almost no overlap between the different areas of responsibility. During the interviews, it is made clear that actors themselves see this clear distribution of tasks and do not interfere. According to most respondents, the collaboration between the actors involved in local integration governance is going well and agreements made in the aftermath of the increased arrival of asylum seekers in 2015/2016 last until today.

In the network displaying forms of collaboration and conflict, non-public service providers appear to be *the* central actors in existing collaboration networks, having relations with both public actors and other non-public organizations and associations. The strongest form of collaboration seems to exist between the non-profit service providers and the officials from the municipality. Moreover, the municipality appears to also collaborates with other municipalities in the region, and actors at the national level which, based on the interview with the local official, are presumably COA, the VNG, and Divosa (N-B-2). VNG and Divosa are seen as important platforms to exchange experiences and to receive input and support (especially regarding the implementation of the new Civic Integration Act).



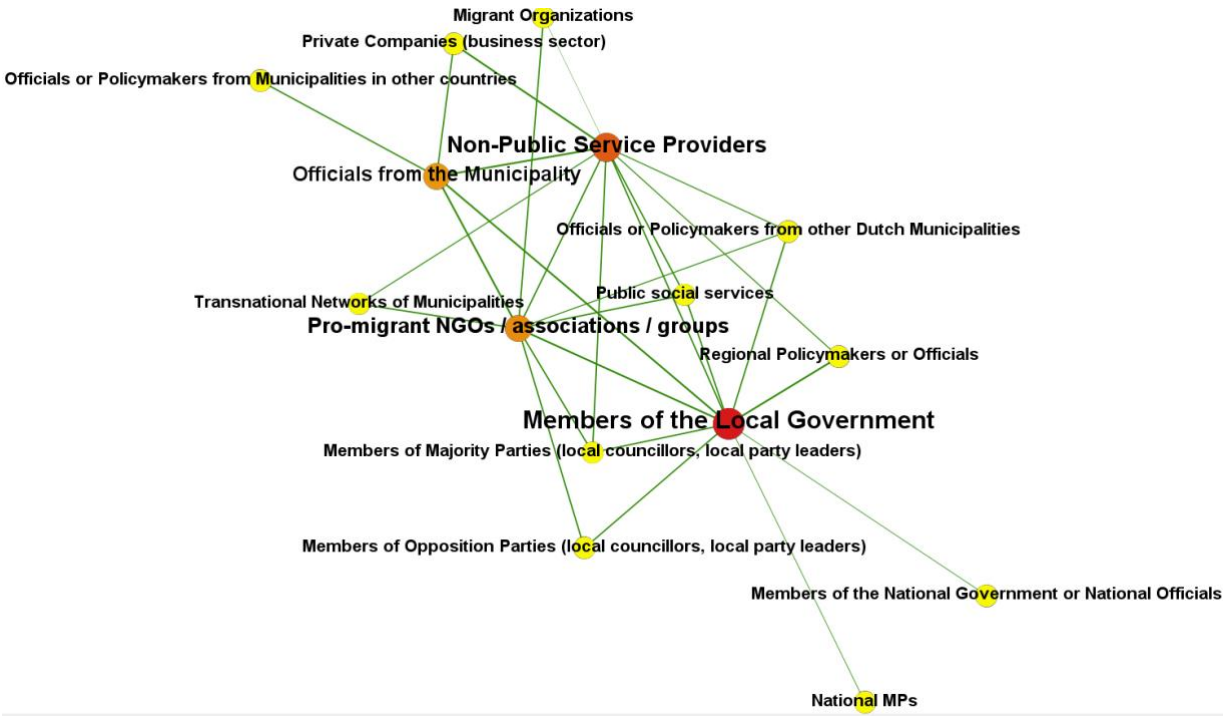
Despite the general positive interaction between actors, some respondents also mentioned some tensions due to a *perceived* overlap of roles and competition for funding (library and local welfare organization); due to differing ideas of language support and desired outcome of such support (library and employers), or due to difficulties in arranging a work placement for refugees. Here, the goal to find work as fast as possible, which is in line with the Participation Act and hence encouraged by the municipality, may clash with the reality of the job market where newcomers with very low language skills are difficult to place (N-B-6).

Municipality C

In municipality C, the local government collaborates with the housing corporation, the non-public service provider responsible for social support and other municipalities/labor market actors in the partnership 'Employer Service Point' to facilitate labor market integration. The form of collaboration is characterized by "short lines" (N-C-2).

In the network displaying forms of collaboration and conflict, non-public service providers and members of the local government appear to be *the* central actors in existing collaboration networks. While the non-public service provider has primarily relations at the local and regional level, the local government appears to collaborate to some extent with national actors as well. However, based on the network analysis, it cannot be clearly concluded if there are big differences in terms of collaboration between actors and/or if there have been conflicting relations between stakeholders. The interviews shed more light on these dynamics. For example, according to the local official working on integration policymaking, the **network of non-public actors involved in integration is rather fragmented** and actors are often not aware of each other's' roles and responsibilities. With the municipality taking on a new role, the intent is to connect the main "*ketenpartners*" ('chain partners') to increase collaboration and knowledge exchange (N-C-2).

At a regional level, the city collaborates with other municipalities in the region to implement the new Civic Integration Act (N-C-2). For the topic of labor market integration (not specifically linked to refugees), there is furthermore a regular meeting with various labor market actors (union, municipality, educational institutions, Employee Insurance Agency (UWV)).



Despite the presumed fragmentation of the network, throughout the interviews the different non-public actors (local welfare organization/library, national NGO, local non-profit service provider) refer to each other and mention various forms of collaboration, albeit not necessarily formalized ones. For example, one employee of the local welfare organization describes that they sometimes refer refugees to other organizations if they think that their services are a better fit for the individual. This is, for instance, different for the topic of "loneliness" where various public and non-public actors have formed an actual *coalition against loneliness* to address the topic at hand in a more strategic way (N-C-13). Most non-public actors appear to have **good *individual* relations with the local officials** – no major conflicts were reported in the interviews. However, some respondents mentioned that their approach to and perception of integration differs from the municipal one, leading to some constraints in their work: while the municipality focuses strongly on labor market integration, non-profit service providers try to support refugees in finding their own way by taking their needs and wishes into account, but are at times impacted by the municipal goal to 'make' people work as fast as possible (N-C-7, N-C-8, N-C-15). Another respondent highlighted that the collaboration with the municipality works well but is also influenced by the fact that the municipality is both collaboration partner and "*opdrachtgever*" ('task giver'). The welfare organization would like to determine *how* to implement the task assigned by the municipality, but the municipality would also like to have a say in that (N-C-13).

Despite the municipality's rather strict stance towards integration and recent political decisions restricting refugees' access to social housing, the non-public actors (in particular) provide a variety of services to refugees, ranging from formal social support to informal language courses and social activities, and appear to be highly engaged and committed to facilitate the integration of newcomers.

Municipality D

As previously mentioned, the municipality collaborates closely with local partners to facilitate the participation and integration of newcomers. Due to the small size of the town, the lines are described as short, and collaboration as marked by the ambition of actors to "find joint solutions for arising issues" (N-D-2; N-D-9). The employee of the local housing corporation stresses likewise that "collaboration is of course very important. It is very important to know the "*poppetjes*" [literally: 'puppets', read: people from other organizations] and to know what you can do for each other, […] to know that you can build on and trust each other" (N-D-1). Importantly, the municipality also has good collaborative relations with local employers, especially socially engaged companies (N-D-9, N-D-10, N-D-11, N-D-14).

At the regional level, municipality D and two neighboring municipalities have entered a partnership in which the three municipalities exchange information and work together on

topics related to the social domain, in particular the implementation of the Participation Act (N-D-5). At the level of the 'labor market region', there is a regular, structural meeting between municipalities of the respective region and various labor market actors such as employers, the union's regional office, the Employee Insurance Agency, and educational institutions to discuss and develop labor market policies, but without a specific focus on the integration of migrants (N-D-15).

While respondents described the relations between organizations as 'generally good', it also became apparent that some forms of collaboration were not necessarily sustainable and highly dependent on specific persons. For instance, with a change in management at the local branch of the national NGO, collaboration with other actors was not smoothly continued (N-D-3). The new management was (at the time of the research) busy with the establishment of new connections which was perceived as rather difficult, also due to the fact that both members of the management board were doing this on a voluntary basis.

More generally, in municipality D volunteers play a crucial role in the provision of services for refugees (e.g., Dutch Council for Refugee works with the help of volunteers). Volunteers are highly committed and willing to go the extra step for their 'clients' (N-D-2). However, their role is also being discussed among respondents because relying solely on volunteers may also limit the capacity of organizations to offer support, for instance if volunteers drop out or are not available during certain times (N-D-2, N-D-3, N-D-10). The **dependency on volunteers** for some part of the integration process (most importantly social support, but also informal language education) became especially problematic during the pandemic (N-D-3): most of the volunteers are of older age and did not feel comfortable meeting with others during that time; this **revealed the fragility of the support structure** in place and raised the question if some tasks could not be better carried out by municipal officials or other paid staff. This point is also mentioned by a member of the municipal council:

> *We have rather clear agreements about what they [national NGO] offer, and they do it well, but they are volunteers. It is a special construction because it almost concerns tasks that are part of the municipality's own domain. This can sometimes be a bit of a problem because these are tasks where you would expect the municipality to hire a professional rather than a volunteer.*

The coordinator of the library's *taalpunt* stresses that there is also a risk of volunteers becoming unpaid social workers, despite this not being their actual role.

C.2 Interim conclusion

Comparing our findings from the different localities, we see that both collaboration and conflict were recognized as occurring between different actors involved in the integration of post-2014 migrants. Tensions occurred between the municipality and the civic sector but also within the civic sector and often related to the differing capacities of these actors, based on their control over funds, their mandate, or professional grounding. With regards to forms of collaborations at the regional level, we find that most municipalities seem to have more or less established forms of exchange with municipalities in the immediate surrounding region or within city networks, but, especially for the smallest communities, inter-provincial relations or relations to actors at the national and EU level appear limited. This was also confirmed by a respondent at the EU level stating that smaller communities have difficulties accessing EU funds because of lack of expertise and staff and not being part of broader city networks.

More generally, the importance of regional forms of collaboration shows (again) that – while the task of integration has been decentralized to the local level – municipalities (especially the smaller ones) have very often teamed up and started collaborating closely with the municipalities in their (labor market) region. Depending on the locality's size and – relatedly – positionality in the region, the municipality has taken on a more or less leading role in preparing for the implementation of the new law.

D. Decision-making

Since 2013, integration policymaking in the Netherlands has been centrally steered by the national government and supervised by its implementing bodies DUO and COA. The national Civic Integration Act 2013 set the legal framework for immigrant integration at the national level and was based on a neo-liberal rationale, transferring the main responsibility for integration to the individual. Hence, up until recently, municipalities have had a limited role in immigrant integration and were primarily responsible for the implementation of nationally defined tasks related to housing and social support of refugees. Yet, despite this rather centralized approach, we find that municipalities' approaches to immigrant integration diverge – at times quite significantly – from each other. To understand these diverging approaches, it is important to look more closely at factors influencing the localized decision-making process in the realm of immigrant integration.

Factors influencing local integration policymaking that were described in the interviews include lack of funding for the tasks given to stakeholders and the local government, the distribution of refugees across municipalities (see section above), without leaving the municipalities much room for negotiation, and policy shifts at the national level, most importantly the implementation of the new Civic Integration Act. The latter has led to

significant changes in the organizational support structure in the localities, for instance through the creation of new municipal positions (local official responsible for integration policy development) or forming new agreements with old and new collaboration partners to implement municipal tasks. Besides influences from the national level, there were various other contextual, locally specific factors influencing local decision-making with regards to immigrant integration. Most importantly, political, economic, and social factors.

The role of politics in policymaking was also recurringly mentioned by national and regional level respondents. At the national level, respondents identified 'politics', or more specifically political power relations and political ideologies, as major influencing factor in policymaking. The respondent from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment argues that in theory "we do know what works and what is needed for a 'good' integration process […]. However, due to political ideologies, some of the evidence is not included in the actual policy." (N-SZW) The respondent from the Ministry of Justice and Security notes likewise that there is a tension between research and policymaking because the ambition is to design evidence-based policies. This is, however, difficult if the evidence does not correspond with agendas and decisions made at the political level. The role of politics and political parties becomes also evident at the provincial where, according to respondents, the local government and the majority political party determine to some extent how the role of the province is fulfilled (N-G40). The VNG representative describes similarly that "you can see the political colors coming back" when looking at the different ways of implementing a policy at the local level. Some parties define integration from a 'security perspective', others from a 'social domain perspective' – and design the policy accordingly. This also becomes visible in our four case studies to which we turn now.

Municipality A

In the survey, respondents were asked which factors influenced their actions and decisions related to immigrant integration between 2016 and 2021, and to evaluate the importance of these factors on a scale from 1 to 5. Based on the survey[19], the most important factors for policymakers/members of the local government were 'locals' attitudes towards migrants', 'economic situation of the locality' and 'requests/pressures/suggestions from parties forming the majority within the local council'. Non-public actors identified 'economic situation of the locality' and 'locals' attitudes towards migrants' as main influencing factors for the decision-making process. This is also reflected in the interviews where the former member of the local government mentions for example that concerns raised by residents (locals' attitude) was one

[19] The survey results do not always show a clear trend, that is, respondents did not necessarily name the same factors as most influential. The factors named in the text are those which (counting all points together) scored the highest (for example, 13 points out of 20 possible points).

of the reasons why the local government adopted a transparent approach based on dialogue. Moreover, pro-migrant mobilizations in the form of an active volunteer network led to the local government starting negotiations with COA to 'keep' refugees in the city. Finally, respondents mentioned local politics as defining element in the city's approach to integration. The political climate is more welcoming than the one at the national level and not based on the idea that newcomers must 'earn' their place in society (N-A-9). Here, personal convictions and values of some political actors as well as street-level bureaucrats opened new avenues for integration governance. For example, throughout the period 2013 – 2021, the municipality opted to invest resources in the integration of newcomers, despite not being legally responsible for this task (N-A-8, N-A-9). The mayor acts here as an important figure in representing and driving the city's open stance towards refugees.

Municipality B

Based on the survey, the most important factors for policymakers/members of the local government were 'requests/pressures/suggestions from national, regional, *and* local governments'. Non-public actors identified 'suggestions from public officials/public servants' as main influencing factor for the decision-making process. Other important factors for decision-making are, according to respondents, local politics and protests (local attitudes) as well as the housing crisis. Related to the latter two, the narratives have also shifted: earlier, residents were concerned about "foreigners stealing our jobs" (N-B-8); now the housing crisis seems more relevant and plays into the negative narrative of foreigners "stealing our scarce apartments" (N-B-7, N-B-8). According to one respondent, the negative attitude of residents prevented the local government from putting the topic higher on the political agenda (N-B-1); other respondents argue, however, that the protest and negative comments were one driver for the municipality to set up a new communication campaign and proactively 'counter' the negative narrative (N-B-2).

Municipality C

Based on the survey, the most important factors for policymakers/members of the local government were 'requests/pressures/suggestions from the national government'. Non-public actors identified their 'ideas and values' as main influencing factor for the decision-making process. Based on the interviews, it became clear that local politics were another influential factor: in municipality C, integration is '**not a topic to win elections'** because it has a negative connotation (N-C-2, N-C-3, N-C-14).

> *Look, aldermen don't want to make themselves unpopular before the elections of course [...] the administration is pretty sensitive to the fact that there are a lot of refugees receiving welfare benefits, this is quite something and there is a pretty strong focus on that. It is seen as important to enforce something, make sure people stick to*

> *agreements and just go to work as soon as possible. [...] It's not a high priority for the administration, for the alderman, to distinguish themselves with this topic. And then it's the right-wing ideology that plays a role again, which makes them more likely to speak out on this. ... In XY, it's more on the right-wing side, that surely plays a role.* (Local official)

The conservative-right orientation of the local government is reflected in a low prioritization of the topic of integration, framing it as an economic problem because of the high number of refugees receiving social welfare benefits. This rather restrictive approach also becomes visible in the recent decision of the local government to not prioritize refugees on the housing market anymore.

A lacking focus on integration seems to be linked to economic concerns because refugees are seen as an additional burden on the welfare system that already has to deal with a relatively high number of welfare benefit recipients. These concerns are further enhanced by the perception of the municipality as a poor city. The member of the local government explains:

> *Socioeconomically, we are not a very strong municipality. We have many people on welfare benefits, we have very old neighborhoods, and, in those neighborhoods, we have a lot of social housing. [...] The problem is mainly that we have many welfare recipients, and this should be a bit more balanced. It costs a lot of money and that does definitely play into it.*

The link between a weaker socio-economic position and concerns regarding the integration of newcomers is also mentioned by other respondents who refer to the overall lower socio-economic background of residents to explain the success of conservative-right parties in the municipal council (N-C-15).

Municipality D

Based on the survey, the most important factors for the member of the municipal council were his 'values and ideas', 'locals' attitudes towards migrants' and 'requests/ pressures/ suggestions from private companies and from parties forming the majority within the local council'. Non-public actors identified their 'ideas and values', 'locals' attitudes towards migrants' and 'requests/pressures/suggestions from the regional *and* national government' as main influencing factors for the decision-making process.

The member of the local government explains local decision-making as follows:

> *What the municipality does is politically and administratively driven. What I do, what I say, […] is politically driven, but within the administrative context of municipal government. And if you can share that political drive with the democratic majority in the council, that's very good. […] The crux is always there for me ... because I have a political background, but as an alderman you always talk on behalf of the whole executive board. My political party does not play a role in my public appearances, also towards the municipal council. […] I'm politically driven, personally, and I have to convince the executive board, otherwise it won't work. But it [integration] is not a subject that will make you popular.*

He argues that on a personal level, he is politically driven by his party background (socio-democratic), but in his role as alderman he speaks "in the name of the entire '*college'* [political executive board]" (N-D-11). In the area of integration policy, this can at times be challenging because integration not necessarily a 'popular topic', but a divisive one. Other respondents highlight the alderman's leading role in shaping integration policymaking at the local level because he acts according to his personal as well as political values and thus defines the municipality's social approach:

> *Look, [name of the locality] has had an alderman for years [...] And for him personally, this was very important. He may not be very much [...] in the newspaper or so, but he is a doer and a connector and with a very big social heart. And, he conveyed that, also towards his officials, you know 'practice what you preach'. I attribute this very much to him as well [...], which is why the relations never became that conflictual, which is why the number of PVV and Forum for Democracy voters has remained very limited, which is why the loss of social democracy has remained limited*. (Union representative)

Besides politics, the economic situation plays a role as well as it determines "*mogelijkheden en onmogelijkheden*" (possibilities and impossibilities) in local policymaking (N-D-11). This is also mentioned by the union representative who noted that the rural are in Drenthe is economically better off than its neighboring towns and therefore has more leeway or possibilities to approach the topic from a social perspective.

A final decisive factor appears to be the locals' attitude towards migrants and related tensions in specific neighbourhood with a higher concentration of social housing, where typically refugees are assigned to. These tensions have influenced current policymaking: the new 'housing vision' emphasizes that refugees (and other groups eligible for social housing) must be better distributed across the municipality and more social housing has to be built in other areas of the municipality (N-D-11).

	Factors that influence local policymakers' actions and decisions	Factors that influence the actions/decisions/mobilization of 'political actors'
Locality A	**Survey** (3 respondents) - Locals' attitudes towards migrants - Economic situation of the locality - Requests/pressures/ suggestions from parties forming the majority within the local council **Interview** - Local politics/ role of mayor	**Survey** (4 respondents) - Economic situation of the locality - Locals' attitudes towards migrants **Interview** - Pro-migrant mobilization
Locality B	**Survey** (3 respondents) - Requests/pressures/suggestions from national, regional, and local governments **Interview** - Local politics - Anti-migrant mobilization - Housing crisis	**Survey** (3 respondents) - Suggestions from public officials/public servants **Interview** - Anti-migrant mobilization
Locality C	**Survey** (3 respondents) - Requests/pressures/suggestions from national government **Interview** - Local politics - Economic situation	**Survey** (2 respondents) - Your values and ideas **Interview** - Local politics - Economic situation
Locality D	**Survey** (1 respondent) - Values and ideas - Locals' attitudes towards migrants - Requests/pressures/suggestions from private companies and from parties forming the majority within the local council **Interview** - Local politics - Locals' attitude towards migrants - Demographic development and economic situation	**Survey** (4 respondents) - Ideas and values - Locals' attitudes towards migrants - Requests/pressures/suggestions from the regional and national government **Interview** - Role of local alderman - Economic situation

Table 8: Factors influencing how local policies are decided and acted upon by actors in different localities

5. Conclusion

5.1 Main findings

In analyzing local responses to the arrival and settlement of post-2014 migrants, we showed that integration policymaking consists of interrelated, dynamic and at times conflictual governing processes which do not follow a linear 'top-down' approach but are continuously socially co-constructed by several actors whose actions are "inspired by competing webs of belief rooted in various traditions" (Bevir & Rhodes, 2016, 5). Policies and policy narratives defined at the national level may be adopted, resisted, or transformed by local level actors who "interpret and forge practices of governance on the ground" (ibid. 6), thereby occupying an important role in the 'struggle' of immigrant integration policymaking. By adopting a multi-level governance lens, we explored this 'struggle' by tracing the dispersion of authority and responsibilities as well as the interactions – both collaborative and conflictual – across multiple levels of government and between a diverse range of public, non-public, and private actors (Adam & Caponio, 2019). The complexity and wickedness of immigrant integration is reflected in the contestation and ambiguity concerning this policy area where different actors provide differing interpretations of the meaning of '(good) integration' or the 'right' approach to address the issue at hand (see also Scholten, 2020).

Due to the **centralized approach to integration policymaking** in the Netherlands, marked by a national dispersal mechanism, the national Civic Integration Act, nationally defined legal tasks, and local governments' limited role in enforcing policy implementation, **we expected a rather 'homogenous' picture across localities**. However, we found that the four localities in our case study have adopted their **own localized responses** to immigrant integration, by making use of the leeway provided within national legal regulations, by choosing their (local) collaboration partners very consciously, or by representing a 'counter-narrative' to the restrictive national approach. To understand *why* localities have decided upon and pursued a particular approach to integration, we zoomed into the local contexts in which policymaking has taken place. By interviewing different stakeholders involved in the governance of integration at both the local and other levels of government, we learned more about the ways these actors make sense of their decision-making processes, actions, and interactions.

The table below provides an overview of the localities' most important policies, (self-) description of defining elements of the locality and its approach to integration governance, and the dominant integration frames.

		STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS	
		+	-
EXPERIENCE WITH CULTURAL DIVERSITY	+	**Locality A** **Medium size town** in Utrecht (West) - *Inclusive City Policy* - *Anti-discrimination Agenda* - Welcoming and inclusive city - 'Unique' approach - Bundling integration-related tasks 'under one roof' - Integration as two-way process and participation	**Locality C** **Small town** in Overijssel (East) - *Generic policy programs* - *Coalition against loneliness* - 'Poor city', ('tolerant' city) - Neighborhood/place-based approach - Distribution of tasks to various actors - Integration as economic participation and self-sufficiency
	-	**Locality B** **Small town** in South Holland (West) - Overarching '*Social Agenda*' - Mainstream approach - Christian community - Ambiguous attitude - Clear division of responsibilities among various actors - Integration as economic and social participation	**Locality D** **Rural area** in Drenthe (North-East) - Overarching *Policy plan Social Domain* - 'Neighborliness' and social rules - '*Onbekend maakt onbemind*' - 'In-house' approach, but still collaboration with local partners - Integration as assimilation and participation

Table 9: Comparison of localities

While none of the four localities has a targeted integration policy, three of four municipalities (A, B and D) mention the integration of newcomers and refugees explicitly in their coalition agreement, governance programs and/or in overarching policies for the social domain. Here, municipality A stands out because it has furthermore designed an "Inclusive City Policy" and an "Anti-discrimination Agenda", explicitly positioning itself as welcoming and inclusive municipality and focusing not only on integration, but also on broader societal challenges such as discrimination. Municipalities B and D see their role in helping newcomers overcome certain obstacles (related for example to their refugee background or their language skills) to be able to fully participate (*meedoen*) in society. Municipality C mentions refugees in more

generic policy programs on labor market participation or housing, but not exclusively with regards to their overall integration process. Respondents across localities explained that they have not developed a targeted integration policy because of the local governments' previously limited role in this policy domain (B, C, D) and because of the rather low number of recognized refugees moving to/being assigned to the community each year (B, D). Furthermore, the topic of integration is seen as being closely interrelated with other policy areas such as work, care, or the social domain which is why localities seem to have opted for a more mainstream, integrated approach instead of a target group-specific policy (B, C, D).

Besides the **lack of "*massa*"** (high numbers) and **limited enforcement power at the local level,** other factors influencing local (integration) policymaking include local politics, structural economic conditions, and experience with diversity. First, **local politics** appear to determine to what extent a locality has adopted a more restrictive or more social/welcoming approach to integrating newcomers. For example, the medium sized town's (A) left-progressive (alderman responsible for integration) and Christian democratic (mayor) political orientation appears to relate to its welcoming and open stance towards newcomers and the municipality's active involvement in integration policymaking – despite the centralized, restrictive approach taken at the national level. Conversely, the small town in Overijssel (C) with its rather right-conservative political orientation has largely followed the national government's approach to integration governance, by transferring the responsibility to the individual level, relying on sanctions as policy tool and framing integration primarily in economic terms.

Second, **structural economic conditions,** including the socio-economic background of the local population, can be seen as another factor explaining diverging local approaches to integration governance. In the small town in Overijssel (C), 'persistent poverty' and a relative high number of welfare benefit recipients appear to limit the local governments' possibility and willingness to make more funding available for the integration of newcomers and may explain its focus on self-sufficiency and participation. The relatively high illiteracy and 'low-skilled' background among local populations were further seen as factors fueling feelings of resentment towards newcomers, for instance because newcomers are perceived as potential competitors on the job market (B, C, D).

Third, **experience with diversity** as influencing factor yields less clear-cut results. In both the medium size town in Utrecht (A) and the small town in Overijssel (C) more than 25% of the local population has a migration background. While the former presents itself as a diverse and inclusive city and refers to its long experience with "people from different cultural backgrounds" in a positive way, the latter perceives the presence of 'large ethnic communities' primarily as a problem because of perceived tensions between these communities and their 'failed' integration (a view that is not necessarily shared by non-public actors). In the small town in South Holland (B) and the rural area in Drenthe (D), the 'lack' of

diversity in a rather homogeneous (white) community seems to explain residents' ambiguous attitudes towards newcomers from a different cultural background who are not following 'local ways of living'. While 'locals' attitudes towards newcomers' are considered an important factor influencing decision-making, local politics seem to 'trump' this relatively negative attitude among local populations. In both municipalities (B, D), the aldermen responsible for integration seem to draw on their Christian-democratic and social-democratic political values, respectively, to put integration on the political agenda and justify their socially driven approach. Experience with diversity alone thus does not allow us to explain the policy approaches taken across all localities.

Finally, the **size of the municipality** seems to play an important role in shaping local integration policy, for example regarding availability of expertise, dedicated staff and funding, existing support structures, or positionality in regional and national level networks. For example, the medium sized town in Utrecht (A) appears to be less concerned with (lack of) funding and the existing support structure (both formal and informal) was often described as extensive, comprising between 60 to 80 actors. Moreover, the city occupies a central position in the surrounding region, supporting other smaller communities, but also at the supra-regional or national level where it actively negotiates with other medium size towns in the G40 network or with national level actors in the ministries. Conversely, the two small towns (B, C) and the rural area (D), had only recently hired a policy advisor for integration and the existing support structures for integration comprised less actors. Moreover, their operating area appears more limited and mainly oriented towards the surrounding region or the province and much less towards the national level. For instance, the rural area in Drenthe (D) relies on a bigger 'center municipality' nearby to carry out some of the tasks in the social domain – while the medium size town occupies the role of the 'center municipality' in its own region. Consequently, it is important to take these mediating factors into account when analyzing, understanding, and comparing local approaches to integration.

After having looked more closely at various influencing factors shaping integration policymaking at the local level, we now turn to some final reflections on the networks that localities have established at the local level and across other levels of government. Here, the **national legal framework** appears to play an important role as it defines specific tasks and responsibilities for local level governments. The influence of the national level becomes especially visible in the **areas of reception, housing, civic integration, and labor market participation** because local level governments are, for example, legally responsible to find accommodation for refugees linked to their municipality (via the national dispersal mechanism) and to provide social support for those following the civic integration trajectory. To carry out these integration-related tasks, the municipalities collaborate closely with different stakeholders at the local level which thus become formally involved in governing immigrant integration in the locality (for example by receiving direct funding from the

municipality or via performance agreements). As previously outlined, this has resulted in diverse local governance networks because some municipalities choose to collaborate with local partners only (A, B, C), while others trust in national organizations to carry out the task of social support (D); some prefer to keep some tasks specifically 'in-house' (D), while others opt to outsource them to various actors (A, B, C); some distribute integration-related tasks widely (B, C, D), while others bundle these tasks under the roof of one umbrella organization (A). Besides these more formally involved organizations, informal actors such as civil society and migrant-led organizations, volunteer groups and voluntary organizations play an important role in providing support and services to asylum seekers and refugees. (Even) many formal organizations rely on volunteers to provide their services.

However, there is at times a cleavage between formal governance structures (which mainly concerns public actors and those organizations that the municipalities have formal agreements with) on the one hand and the involvement of informal actors on the other hand. Informal actors that are not structurally embedded in the governance structure may have more leeway in their activities because they are not tied to national policy regulations; their target group may be broader, and they may be able to help newcomers over a longer period. At the same time, they feel at times 'left out', suffer from 'under-funding' and are to some extent still affected by national policies, especially when it comes to collaborating with public actors who have a clearly defined task which may 'clash' with the informal actors' approach to immigrant integration. The **'formal' – 'informal' support structure divide** has created some additional challenges since informal actors are not officially part of the governance structure (set up by governments), but still appear to participate in the co-construction of governance by representing the voices of migrants, by mobilizing resources, lobbying for more inclusive policies, and questioning the existing social system and its underlying structure.

Besides conflicts between local level actors, respondents across localities and levels noted that **tensions have also emerged between municipalities and national level actors** such as COA, for example with regards to the reception and dispersion of refugees across the country, or the (non-)allocation of services to migrants with differing legal statuses. Moreover, there has been much negotiation regarding the implementation of the new Civic Integration Act which eventually resulted in the decentralization of the 'integration task' to the local level. Interestingly, this decentralization or 'down-scaling' of tasks towards the municipalities has in some cases led to **new forms of collaboration between municipalities at the (supra-)regional level**, eventually resulting in a 'semi-upscaling' of tasks at a higher level of governance (Groenleer & Hendriks, 2020). This is especially visible in smaller municipalities who often do not have the capacity, resources, and expertise to deal with the newly assigned tasks alone. Consequently, they started working closely together with other municipalities and actors in the region, seeking a more concerted and harmonized approach to immigrant integration. Intermediary institutions such as the VNG (Association of Dutch Municipalities), the city

network G40 or Divosa (an association of municipal directors in the field of social policies) are actively supporting the municipalities in this new task, providing a bridge between the local and the national level by representing local interests at the national level and translating national policies back to the municipalities. Finally, all government levels have joined forces in the *Landelijke Regietafel Migratie & Integratie (LRT)* to work collaboratively on tasks related to asylum, housing, integration, and participation.

5.2 Practical recommendations

First, in terms of support structure, bundling services either under one roof (locality A) and/or in one space (locality D) to make services more accessible for refugees (and others), and to keep the 'lines short'. While acknowledging the important role of informal actors and volunteers in providing services for refugees, for example, by removing bureaucratic obstacles when applying for funding and by channeling funds in more sustainable, long-term ways.

Second, organizing reception and housing more regionally, to allow refugees to start their 'integration process' early on – without having to move across the country multiple times. This would also enable municipalities to establish a connection to the person while they are still in the reception center and allow for a more customized response regarding housing and/or labor market integration.

Third, in terms of housing, distributing refugees equally across the neighborhoods to avoid higher spatial concentrations of persons with a migration background/lower socio-economic backgrounds. Creating a better balance would not only prevent tensions between newcomers and long-term residents who may otherwise feel alienated from their own neighborhood, but also allow refugees to stay in neighborhoods with (equally) good access to services such as school, doctors etc. (services that are often of 'poorer quality' in 'poorer neighborhood').

Fourth, in terms of labor market integration, revising the 'work first' emphasis in legal regulations such as the Participation Act, giving actors more leeway in their work and refugees the opportunity to continue their education and/or try and find a job that corresponds to their previous qualification – without having to fear sanctions in the form of social welfare cuts.

Fifth, acknowledging the role which political leaders can play in taking a pro-active, dialogue-based approach and shaping a positive narrative around migration and diversity, potentially countering negative stereotypes and concerns/resentments among local populations. This model seems to have worked well in municipality A where the local community was involved in negotiations related to the reception of additional asylum seekers in 2015.

Sixth, giving migrants, independent of their legal status, the opportunity to access information and services related to integration, such as language courses and social activities or support in finding a job. The rather narrow focus of the Civic Integration Act on some specific 'migrant groups', most importantly recognized refugees, excludes other migrants who may equally be in need of support (financially and socially), but are not considered in existing policies due to their (il)legal status and related assumptions (for example, expats' and labor migrants' stay is often framed as 'temporal'; rejected asylum seekers are framed as returnees without a future in the Netherlands). At the local level, the de-facto presence of these groups may still pose challenges to the municipalities which is why including them into existing services could alleviate some of the unintended consequences of exclusionary migration and integration policies.

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6.1 Legal documents

Title (translation/ *original*)	Date of enactment	Source
Civic Integration Act *Wet inburgering 2013*	First adopted in Nov 2006, changes applicable from January 2013 to December 2021	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020611/2013-01-01
Civic Integration Act 2021 *Wet inburgering 2021*	First adopted in 2020, applicable from January 2022	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0044770/2022-01-01
Law Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers *Wet Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers*	Adopted in 1994, changes applicable from January 2020	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0006685/2020-01-01
Hosing Act 2014 *Huisvestingswet 2014*	Adopted in 2014, Changes applicable from January 2022	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0035303/2022-01-01
Participation Act *Participatiewet*	First adopted in 2006, Changes applicable from January 2015	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015703/2015-01-01/1

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⇒ Municipality specific statistical data has also been retrieved from: https://www.waarstaatjegemeente.nl

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Appendix

Table 1: Overview of conducted interviews, relevant for the WP3 country report

a. Locality A – 14 respondents, 8 completed surveys
b. Locality B – 12 respondents, 7 completed surveys
c. Locality C – 15 respondents, 6 completed surveys
d. Locality D – 15 respondents, 6 completed surveys

No	Type	Acronym	Respondent	Survey
1	LOCALITY A	N-A-1	Employee of local non-profit service provider, responsible for integration	Yes
2		N-A-10	Employee of local non-profit service provider, responsible for labour market integration	No
3		N-A-2	Employee of a local NGO/non-profit service provider (focus on psychological support)	Yes
4		N-A-3	Employee of a local foundation/non-profit service provider (focus on work)	Yes
5		N-A-4	Employee of a local NGO/non-profit service provider (focus on language and social activities)	Yes
6		N-A-5	Member of municipal council	Yes
7		N-A-11	Two representatives of employers' organization (+ employers themselves)	No
8		N-A-6	Employee of local welfare organization	Yes
9		N-A-12	Former member of the local government, responsible for integration	No
10		N-A-7 N-A-8	Mayor and member of the local government, responsible for integration	Yes
11		N-A-9	Local official of the municipality, responsible for integration	Yes
12		N-A-13	Volunteer/coordinator of local initiative (focus on language support)	No
13		N-A-14	Local official of the municipality, responsible for housing	No
14		N-A-15	Employee of local real estate company	No
1	LOCALITY B	N-B-1	Employee of local non-profit service provider/welfare organization, responsible for social support of refugees	Yes
2		N-B-2	Local official of the municipality, responsible for integration	Yes
3		N-B-3	Employee of local real estate company	No

4		N-B-10	Employee of local pro-migrant organization	No
5		N-B-11	Employer, HR representative	No
6		N-B-4	Employee of local NGO/non-profit service provider, welfare organization, responsible for social support of refugees	No
7		N-B-12	Local resident, organizes workshop for newcomers	No
8		N-B-5	Employee of local library, responsible for language support	Yes
9		N-B-6	Employee of service provider, responsible for labor market integration	Yes
10		N-B-8	Member of local government, responsible for integration	Yes
11		N-B-7	Member of municipal council	Yes
12		N-B-9	Former member and chairman of local employer association	Yes
1	LOCALITY C	N-C-9	Employee of local real estate company	No
2		N-C-1	Employee of national NGO/non-profit service provider, responsible for language	No
3		N-C-2	Local official from the municipality, responsible for integration (policy development)	Yes
4		N-C-3	Employee of local NGO (foundation)	Yes
5		N-C-10	Local official from the municipality, responsible for labor market integration (policy implementation)	No
6		N-C-4	Employee of local welfare organization, responsible for language	Yes
7		N-C-5	Local official from the municipality, responsible for access to labor market	Yes
8		N-C-11	Employer, HR representative	No
9		N-C-7	Coordinator of local non-profit service provider, responsible for social support of refugees (N-C-7_1); volunteer (language coach) (N-C-7_2)	No
10		N-C-6	Member of local government, responsible for integration	Yes
11		N-C-12	Employee of non-profit service provider (psychological support)	No
12		N-C-8	Two employees at national NGO (volunteer organization), focus on social support	Yes
13		N-C-13	Employee of local welfare organization, responsible for neighborhood support	No
14		N-C-14	Employee of the union's regional office	No
15		N-C-15	Volunteer, local non-profit service provider, responsible for social support	No

1	LOCALITY D	N-D-1	Employee of local real estate company	Yes
2		N-D-2	Employee of national non-profit service provider, responsible for social support of refugees	Yes
3		N-D-3	Two representatives of national NGO (volunteer organization), language support and social activities	Yes
4		N-D-4	Employee of local welfare organization, responsible for social support for all residents	No
5		N-D-5	Member of municipal council, local party	No
6		N-D-6	Employee at local library, responsible for language support	Yes
7		N-D-12	Teacher and coordinator of local language school	No
8		N-D-7	Official/manager at local reception center	No
9		N-D-8	Two employees of l local welfare organization, responsible for social support for all residents	Yes
10		N-D-13	Volunteer/coordinator at national NGO (volunteer organization), language support	No
11		N-D-14	Chairman of foundation working with undocumented migrants, and chairman of local "social advisory council"	No
12		N-D-9	Local officials of the municipality, responsible for integration (policy development and implementation) (N-D-9_1, N-D-9_2)	No
13		N-D-10	Member of municipal council	Yes
14		N-D-15	Employee of the union's regional office	No
15		N-D-11	Member of local government, responsible for integration	No

No	Type	Acronym	Respondent[20]
1	NATIONAL	N-SZW	Official at Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW)
2		N-JenV	Official at Ministry of Justice and Security (JenV)
3		N-COA	Employee at Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA)
4	REGIONAL	N-G40	Official working for a city network comprising 40 medium-sized cities, responsible for migration and integration

[20] The remaining respondents at the regional and national level are referred to in the WP4 country report (for example, the representatives of the union at the national level).

5		N-VNG	Official working for the Dutch Association of Municipalities (VNG)
		N-Divosa 1	Regional coordinator Divosa
		N-Divosa 2	Regional coordinator Divosa
6		N-SH	Official working for province South Holland, responsible for housing
7		N-O	Official working for province Overijssel, responsible for housing
8		N-D	Official working for province Drenthe, responsible for inclusion

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