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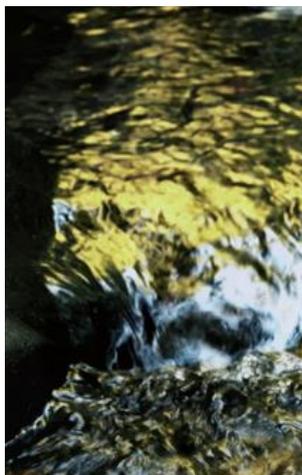
Social relations, individual attitudes and migrant integration experiences in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas in Belgium

Country Reports on policy outcomes



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REPORT

<https://whole-comm.eu>





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Executive summary

This report studies reciprocal interactions between post-2014 migrants and long-term residents. It also evaluates experiences of inclusion and exclusion of post-2014 migrants in four small and medium-sized towns in Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia). The findings are based on interviews conducted with post-2014 migrants and on four focus group discussions with a mix of long-term residents and post-2014 migrants, one in each locality. The report provides an overview of the factors that possibly foster or hinder experiences of inclusion and exclusion by post-2014 migrants and social interactions at the local level. More precisely, we discuss the role of the 1) socio-demographic factors (e.g. age, gender, country of origin, class, educational background, religion, etc.); 2) the ideational/political dimension (i.e. the discourse and framing, local politics, and protests related to migration, asylum, and integration at the local level); 3) the governance dimension (such as the impact of housing, labour market, and immigrant integration policies and practices, and their implementation at the local level); and 4) the spatial dimension (ethnic and racialized socio-economic disparities between neighbourhoods in housing at the local level). We note that a combination of these four dimensions gives insights into the extent to which inclusion and exclusion are experienced by post-2014 migrants in the four towns studied. On the one hand, we found that the presence of a strongly politicized discourse on migration, characterised by a largely anti-immigrant rhetoric (in the type D locality), the presence of a high level of racialized socio-economic disparities between neighbourhoods (in the type C and D localities), and inaccessible or badly maintained housing (in all localities) hindered perceptions of inclusion and social interactions at the local level of post-2014 migrants. On the other hand, we found that initiatives developed by local stakeholders to foster migrants' inclusion, the availability of spaces of encounter, as well as the presence of pre-existing migrant communities facilitated experiences of inclusion for post-2014 migrants, even in localities where migration is highly politicized or where there are high levels of racialized socio-economic disparities between neighbourhoods.



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1. Introduction

In the wake of the 2015 so-called “refugee reception crisis” Small and Medium-sized Towns and Rural Areas (SMsTRAs) have been playing an increasing role in the reception of humanitarian migrants. The arrival of migrants and refugees in the EU has peaked after 2014, and EU countries struggled to re-organise and manage their reception policies. The lack of immediately available reception facilities in cities, coupled with the dispersion policies implemented by states to ensure an “equal” distribution of asylum seekers across their national territories, has led to the increased involvement of Small and Medium-sized Towns and Rural Areas in the reception of people seeking refuge (Flamant et al. 2020). Even though immigrant integration in cities has been in the focus of research since decades now, we know relatively little about smaller towns and rural areas, localities that often have no or little prior experiences with migration. Research has shown, that “the experiences that new arrivals face in the first phase of their reception and accommodation, and the relationships they build in their neighbourhoods and host cities have a long-term effect on their later lives and play a significant role in the way their impressions, aspirations and motivations develop along the way of their integration trajectories” (Seethaler-Wari 2018).

We need to know more about, which factors facilitate, and which hinder positive experiences of inclusion when migrants (mainly arrived after 2014) settle in these Small and Medium-sized Towns and Rural Areas. The objective of the country report is thus to understand which role specific local contexts (or “local refugee integration opportunity structures”), within the same country, can play in shaping individual attitudes, social Interactions, and consequently migrant integration experiences in SMsTRAs. We define local (refugee) integration opportunity structures, as “sets of resources, arrangements and pathways that can facilitate or block integration” (Phillimore 2020). Among the contextual factors that determine the local opportunity structure we identify, following and adapting Phillimore (2020), four dimensions:

- a) the socio-demographic factors, highlighting the individual (e.g., age, gender, country of origin, class, religion) and the group level factors (e.g., presence or absence of support networks, civil society organisations);
- b) the ideational-political dimension, which includes a set of factors connected to discourse, such as media information, political ideology of leaders and the local community, and political mobilizations pro- and anti-migrants;
- c) the factors connected to governance including the impact of housing, labour market, and specific immigrant integration policies and practices, and their implementation at the local level;
- d) the spatial dimension, focusing on the specificity of SMsTRAs compared to cities but also on local socio-economic determinants and on spatial proximity/ **racialized socio-economic disparities between neighbourhoods**



The aim of this report is to identify, in the localities analysed in Belgium, which factors are more relevant in shaping attitudes, interactions between long-term residents and post-2014 migrants, and migrants' experiences of inclusion/exclusion.

Many European countries are currently facing a new refugee reception crisis triggered by the Ukraine war. Even though the focus of the Whole-COMM project is on post-2014 migrants' integration in SMsTRAs, the arrival of Ukrainian refugees begs the question: what can we learn from experiences of inclusion/exclusion in SMsTRAs of refugees who arrived in a different "crisis" period? Are SMsTRAs involved in the reception of Ukrainian refugees? Moreover, how is the arrival of Ukrainians reshaping social interactions, individual attitudes and post-2014 migrants' experiences? In this country report, we also try to address those questions to capitalise on the research conducted during yet another critical juncture.

In Belgium, as in other EU countries, small, medium-sized towns and rural areas (SMsTRA's) have become increasingly ethnically diverse since the 2010s, in part because the country received a high number of asylum seekers in the period between 2014 and 2021, with 2015 being the year with the highest influx¹. The arrival of asylum seekers to Belgium in SMsTRA's instead of in big cities is can be partly explained by a combination of employment and housing opportunities in SMsTRA's and by (what has been called) "indirect dispersal mechanisms" . In Belgium there are no strict dispersal mechanisms for recognized refugees after the asylum procedure. However, the allocation of asylum seekers to a reception centre in peripheral areas during the asylum procedure van be considered as an "indirect dispersal mechanisms". This is so because during the asylum procedure, which can take long, people get settled in this town, particularly families whose children go to local schools. Also the different language regimes in Belgium, with Francophone and Dutch-speaking regions, limits the mobility of former asylum seekers once they are recognized as refugees. Once they invested in learning the language in one region, during their asylum procedure, it is too difficult to yet start learning another language afterwards. This limits the movement of refugees and fixes their arrivals outside of large urban centres where they have been obliged to go when they arrived (El Moussawi & Schuermans 2020: 12).. On top of that, also other mechanisms, such as exclusion and discrimination on the housing market can restrict migrants' access to certain localities and neighbourhoods.

In this report, we analyse the reciprocal interactions of ... and the experiences of inclusion and exclusion of post-2014 migrants in **four SMsTRA's: two in the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders and two in the Francophone region of Wallonia**. Researching this across the linguistic border in Belgium is important for two reasons. First, immigrant integration policies are a regional competency in Belgium. Studying post-2014 integration across the linguistic

¹ Contrary to popular perception, however, we should note that arrival of asylum seekers is not responsible for the highest increase in immigration. Family reunification and labour migration still account for the highest percentage of immigrants arriving in Europe and Belgium. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Residence_permits_statistics_on_first_permits_issued_during_the_year_First_residence_permits_by_reason. Consulted on 23/02/ 2022.



border thus allows to evaluate the influence, or not, of different regional policies. Second, research has shown that refugees or new migrants that wish to move across the linguistic border face particular difficulties in Belgium: either because they have to start all over again learning an entirely new language, or because they have to redo the integration course. The latter is the case when migrants move from Wallonia to Flanders because Flanders does not recognize the integration courses offered in Wallonia as sufficient (Moussawi 2020).

1.1 Methodology

The cases for the research project were selected based on a set of the following variables:

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



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

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

Methodologically, this report relies on qualitative analysis of data gathered through extensive fieldwork in four Belgian towns, two in the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders and two in the Francophone region of Wallonia. More precisely, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 28 post-2014 migrants in the four selected towns. Moreover, one focus group with a mix of long-term residents and post-2014 migrants was conducted in each of the towns researched: a total of 4 focus groups. Together, the focus groups joined 36 participants. The long-term residents selected for the focus groups were defined as people who have resided over 15 years in the locality. Most of the participants identified as "long-term residents" had the Belgian nationality. A majority of the long-term residents participating in the focus groups had a migration history themselves, either having moved from a different Belgian city or from a different country. In the Belgian case study, the label "post-2014 migrants" includes refugees, family migrants, unaccompanied minors, and rejected asylum seekers. The data have been analysed by means of a qualitative comparative content analysis.

Because of practical reasons (i.e. the availabilities of the researchers), we conducted the focus groups before starting the individual interviews. Interviews with post-2014 migrants were aimed at understanding migrants' experiences of inclusion/exclusion in SMsTRAs. Focus groups discussions were aimed at exploring which variables are more relevant in each locality in shaping positive/negative social relations. The transcripts of the interviews and the four focus groups with post-2014 migrants (conducted in French and Dutch), along with participant observation notes served as the main data upon which the comparative analysis in this report is based. These were complemented with secondary data relating to the social, ideational/political, governance and spatial dimensions of the localities studied.



In the type A locality, 5 people participated in the focus group. More precisely, 4 post-2014 migrants and 1 long-term resident responded to the call for participants in the focus group. Most of the participants were contacted with the help of established contacts at the regional integration centre of the province. Of the post-2014 migrants participating, there were two Syrian sisters in their 30s with a refugee status, and their Ukrainian sister-in-law, under a temporary protection status. The two Syrian women had a family reunification status and their mother and brother had received asylum some years earlier after which they settled in the type A locality. The youngest of the two had lived in Ukraine until the start of the war in February 2022. Lastly, the only male participant to the focus group was an Asian man in his 50s with a refugee status. This man was placed in the asylum centre outside of the type A locality in 2016 when he applied for international protection and had afterwards stayed in the small town, whilst keeping the aspiration of moving to a larger town, potentially around Brussels or closer to Flanders. The only long-term resident who participated in the focus group in the type A locality was a woman from Syrian-Kurdish descent who had arrived in 2011 to the type A locality. We tried to contact other long-term residents to participate in the focus groups through the different organisations in town that we had been in contact with for the WP3 and WP4 reports. These organisations include the local branch of the Socialist Trade Union (FGTB), the regional integration centre, and a pro-migrant organisation working on the social integration of female migrants. Moreover, we spread the announcement through Facebook posts in several public groups of local inhabitants in the type A locality, but little response came to these public posts. The discussions in the focus group were very fluent and conducted in French and English. The participants had so much to tell that the focus group took longer than foreseen.

In the type B locality, 9 people participated in the focus group. There were 3 long-term residents: one 77-year-old man born and raised in the type B locality, a woman of 46 years old from a different Belgian city but who has lived over 15 years in the type B locality, and a man in his late 30s from Somalian origin who had arrived over 20 years ago to the type B locality as a child. The post-2014 migrants participating in the focus group were a woman of Iraqi origin in her late 20s, 2 Yemeni and two Sudanese men in their late 20s, and a Sudanese woman in her early 20s, all with a refugee status. Most of these participants were contacted by the diversity department of the local government of the type B locality, which organises buddy projects, amongst other initiatives to help refugees settle into the type B locality. All the long-term residents that took part in the focus group conversation volunteered as a buddy for newcomers in the city and were thus very much acquainted with the projects for newcomers set up by the local government of the type B locality. The discussion in this focus group was quite fluent with most of the people taking the word at some point. Most post-2014 migrants spoke Dutch quite well and felt confident to share their opinions in the group and engage into a discussion with the other participants.

In the type C locality, a total of 13 participants took part in the focus group. Whilst multiple efforts were made to engage long-term residents to participate in the focus group in the type C locality (by handing out flyers in a local market and during political gatherings, and by trying to contact long-term residents through civil society organisations and the local centre for public welfare) very little response came from this target group. Most participants were post-2014 migrants, mainly contacted through teachers of the French language courses for



newcomers organised by the local CPAS (the centre for public welfare). Many participants who partook in the focus group struggled with the French language, which rendered communication at times difficult between participants and between participants and the researchers. One woman from Chad, who spoke French on a native level, was the only person who had not been contacted through the language classes of the CPAS. The students of the French language class were a Colombian woman in her 30s, married to a Belgian man, a Moroccan Spanish woman in her 40s, 3 Moroccan women (all of them family migrants, some of them divorced), 2 Turkish people: one woman in her 30s (unsure about their residence permits), a man in his 50s, a Polish man in his 50s (unsure of his status), a Russian man in his 20s (unsure of their residence permits), and two Belgians in their thirties from the type C locality. Moreover, also two social service providers, namely the teachers of the French language class, partook in the focus group discussion. One of them often took the initiative to translate the responses of the other participants, especially when they had difficulties explaining their answer in detail due to language difficulties. It was hard, however, to make the language teachers share their personal views on the questions asked to the group. At times participants expressed themselves in their native languages (Arabic or Spanish) and other participants or the focus groups leaders helped the respondents in question to translate their opinions to French. The focus group in the type C locality discussion ran stiffly at times as both the researchers present, and the participants had a hard time understanding one another.

Lastly, in the type D locality, 9 participants partook in the focus group, among them 5 long-term residents and 4 post-2014 migrants. Most of the participants in this last focus group were women. There was one man partaking in the focus group: a long-term resident in his 80s, who actively volunteers with civil society organisations working on immigrant integration in the city (giving Dutch language classes and being an active buddy to newly arrived families). The man was born in a different Flemish city but has lived in the type D locality for over 30 years. The other long-term residents were 3 women, one of Malaysian descent in her late 30s, who lived over 10 years in the type D locality, and two women from Brussels in their 40s and 50s. The post-2014 migrants who participated in the focus group were a woman from Afghanistan in her 30s with a refugee status, a woman from Sudan in her early 20s with a refugee status, a Moroccan woman who has lived over 8 years in Belgium, but who had moved to the type D locality only a few years ago, and a Dutch woman of Moroccan descent who moved to the type D locality 1 year ago. Most of the participants were contacted through a social grocery store, which also serves as a social café where events and trainings take place. Most of the participants were in one way or another related to the social grocery, either working there or doing their shopping there. Particular to this focus group was, moreover, that the group was included long-term residents who knew each other quite well as they volunteer in the social grocery and who were very vocal about their beliefs. Several of the post-2014 migrants, however, did not speak Dutch very well and at times it was difficult to engage them into the conversation, even if they were asked directly to take the word.

Finding participants for the individual interviews with post-2014 migrants and for the focus groups was not an easy process. Most of the participants were found through civil society organisations, social service providers, city employees or volunteers, with whom we had been in contact during the first phase of the fieldwork, or who had been respondents during the



interview process for the WP3 and WP4 reports that took place between October 2021 and February 2022. Whilst at first, we intended to find participants who did not have a link with civil society organisations, this proved to be very difficult. In fact, an “intermediary person” was most of the time necessary for post-2014 migrants to trust us enough to take part in an interview. In particular, post-2014 migrants were not very sure about the way in which the data would be used afterwards. This means that most people interviewed have a relation with services in the city, be it civil society organisations, the local government or other service providers working with post-2014 migrants. We also noticed that it was more difficult to find long-term residents to partake in the focus groups than post-2014 migrants. This might be because we looked for participants with the help of local stakeholders who work mainly with migrants. Moreover, long-term residents might feel less related to the research than migrants and therefore might have responded less numerously to our call for participation. Most of the participants in the focus groups being contacted through stakeholders working on migration might have led to a biased result, as long-term residents who are work with migrants themselves or are connected to people who work with migrants might be more pro-migration than other long-term residents not involved in initiatives for migrants. We offered a voucher of a supermarket to all post-2014 migrants participating in individual interviews (a voucher of 25 euros per participant of the supermarket Carrefour) as well as to post-2014 migrants and long-term residents participating in the focus group discussions. We decided to provide vouchers with the overhead of the Whole-COMM budget as we believed this to be a fair compensation for the time and emotional effort that participating in these exchanges entailed.

We decided to slightly adapt the participant observation part of the study to the size of the localities. Three out of the four localities studied are considered rather large cities in the Belgian context (ranging from 70.000 to 200.000 inhabitants). Because of the relatively large size of the towns studied in Belgium, we decided to apply a mix between field observations and a modest walking ethnography. This approach allowed us to do multiple field observations and to visit different neighbourhoods in the localities, as well as public events, markets, and neighbourhood centres and to get a more complete overview of these larger cities. Moreover, this approach allowed us to apprehend how different neighbourhoods are connected to one another, and to understand the presence of **racialized socio-economic disparities between neighbourhoods**. Some field observations were also done in spaces that were mentioned by interview and focus group respondents. In the type D locality, for example, one public park with a playground came up as a space where conflicts would arise between children of migrants and children of long-term residents. Based on these comments, we decided to spend some time observing the social relations unfolding in this public space.

In the type A locality, the smallest of the four towns studied, we conducted participant observation in the central square of the city and the nearby park. We also spend time in a café that was mentioned by several post-2014 migrants as the one place that they frequented and where they often met other migrants, not necessarily from the same country of origin. We chose these locations as they were mentioned by several post-2014 migrants as spaces where they would spend a lot of their time and where they would be able to meet new people.



In the type B locality, we conducted participant observation in one of the largest parks of the city, where a lot of sports and social events are organised by the local government and civil society organisations. Moreover, we spent several hours at the reception home² and one-stop-shop, which were mentioned by various respondents to be important spaces where they were able to meet people and spend time. Various post-2014 interviewees mentioned that they felt at home and had met a lot of friends (both other migrants and Belgians) in this space. Another space in the type B locality that was commonly mentioned by respondents was a community centre opened by the local government. We spend some time in this space to observe how interactions unfolded.

In the type C locality, we decided to partake in the annual 1st of May celebration of the labour and socialist party, which is a very important festivity in this leftist, post-industrial city. We attended public speeches of left-wing politicians (of the socialist and communist parties) for the 1st of May celebrations and the festivities and gatherings that followed. Another field observation was done in the biggest open-air market of the city, which takes place every Sunday. This medium-sized city is the largest of the cities studied. Therefore, we opted for a “walking ethnography” here, to visit different areas of the city, mostly the post-industrial neighbourhoods built around the now closed coal mines, where many post-2014 migrants have settled because of the cheaper housing prices.

Lastly, in the type D locality, we equally chose to do several shorter field observations because of the size of the city. Firstly, we did a longer field observation of one public park in the largest migrant area of the city, as this space was mentioned by various respondents as a space where conflicts between migrants and long-term residents occur. Moreover, we also visited several civil society organisations and language schools for migrants, as these were spaces mentioned by post-2014 migrants to be of particular importance for them to forge social relations.

More details on the methodology and methods used and on ethics are found in Annex I.

² Reception home is the translation of the Dutch “Onthaalhuis”. The *onthaalhuis* is a space that is envisaged as a place where newcomers can feel at home. Concretely, in the *onthaalhuis*, newcomers have access to social services and there is a kitchen in which young refugees can cook and socialize, as well as a space to relax, to watch television and to use the internet.



2. Main findings per locality

2.1. General information on the relevant national and regional contexts

The ways in which local governments in Belgium have managed immigrant integration is largely affected by the transfer of the competency for integration policy to the regional level (i.e., Flanders and Wallonia) in the 1980s. Several factors have led to a clear policy divergence between Flemish and Walloon integration policies: the **different politicization of migration in Flanders and Wallonia**, the **presence of sub-state nationalist claims in Flanders**, and the **diverging influence of Dutch and French policy philosophies on immigrant integration** (Adam, 2013a).

Since the late 1980s, migration-related issues have been increasingly politicized in Flanders due to the success of the extreme-right party *Vlaams Belang*. In Wallonia, on the other hand, the politicization of migration remains limited. In recent years, the party *Chez Nous*, a party largely inspired by and in conversation with the French *Front National* and the Flemish *Vlaams Belang*, has tried to make an appearance in Walloon politics, but has not managed to gather a lot of success until now. Political scientists have argued that there is fertile ground for the rise of extreme-right political parties in Wallonia, especially due to high poverty rates and deindustrialisation. Yet, until now the protest votes have mostly been capped by the extreme left party PTB/PVDA³. As we will explain below, **the extent to which migration is politicized at the regional level, but also at the local level** (which stands in direct relation to the regional political landscape), **is an important factor that influences migrants' wellbeing in the different localities**.

Furthermore, the **very different economic conditions** in the two regions, are also important to contextualise local data. Whilst in the 1970s, the Walloon economy was hit by the disinvestment in the coal and steel industries, Flanders knew a rise in its economic growth in the 1960s and has since then quickly surpassed the economic development in Wallonia (Winters & Heylen 2014: 547). These developments are clearly discernible in the poverty and unemployment rates in the regions to this day, with Flanders having far lower unemployment rates than Wallonia⁴. The higher availability of jobs makes that many refugees choose to settle in Flanders rather than in Wallonia, which was also confirmed during interviews with post-2014 migrants in the four cities. Many post-2014 migrants interviewed mentioned that they deliberately chose to move to Flanders, even if they had originally been placed in an asylum centre in Wallonia. This is possible, because Belgium does not have a dispersal policy for

³ Source: <https://www.la-croix.com/Monde/Chez-Nous-nouveau-parti-belge-dextreme-droite-sinspire-RN-2021-10-27-1201182533>, consulted on the 1st of October 2022.

⁴ In the second quarter of 2022, Flanders counted an unemployment rate⁴ of 3,1%, and Wallonia one of 8,1%. Source: <https://bestat.statbel.fgov.be/bestat/crosstable.xhtml?view=7d30d7ff-ab74-4047-b2af-2a0bff250647>, consulted on October 14th, 2022.



recognised refugees. However, as we have explained above, these moves across the linguistic border come with difficulties for the integration process (Moussawi 2020).

2.2. Locality 1 [Small Town], [Wallonia] (type A)

The type A locality located in Wallonia, the Francophone region of Belgium, is a town with under 50,000 inhabitants. This small town is located in one of the most rural provinces of Belgium, which has the lowest population density of the country. The town is also far less densely inhabited than most Belgian cities or towns, with a population density of 253.26 inhabitants/km² for an area of 118.64 km². **Due to the low population density, the Walloon government has not invested greatly in the local public transport network.** Therefore, the city is poorly connected to larger Belgium cities. The province was, at the first half of the twentieth century, mainly characterised by a traditional agricultural labour market, although there were also certain sites of steel industry. Still, there are fewer industrial activities in this province than in other Walloon provinces. Between 2014 and 2018, furthermore, there was an increase in economic activities in the province, particularly in the commerce, transport, and hospitality services.

The political orientation of the town is rather centre-right. The town is governed by the Christian Democrats (*Centre Démocrate Humaniste*: CDH) and the Liberal Party⁵ (*Mouvement Réformateur*: MR). The city has an unemployment rate around the Belgian national average, but below the Walloon average. In 2005, the locality had a share of foreign residents of 8,28%, which lays around the national average. This high percentage for the small and peripheral city can be attributed to the vicinity of a foreign city and the presence of many EU residents residing in this small city, most of whom work across the border. In 2020, the number of foreigners increased to 17,2%.

The housing market of the type A locality is characterised by high rent prices. These are considerably higher than those in the surrounding towns. All respondents in this town mentioned that this is due to the high percentage of foreign workers and the nearness of the foreign city, where wages are higher. The difficulty in accessing housing is an issue that both long-term residents and migrants face in this locality. Nevertheless, migrants face additional obstacles to access housing, such as discrimination and language difficulties. The local government did not install policies on housing for migrants or refugees. The **high housing prices have been mentioned as the main reason for migrants to leave the small town, even though there is a large refugee centre located outside of the small town** (about 5 kilometres outside of the city). This **refugee centre, which opened in 2015, is one of the largest in Belgium and has been running without major difficulties or protest from local inhabitants.** On the contrary, respondents noted that a large number of long-term residents offered to do volunteer work in the refugee centre⁶. **In terms of neighbourhood organization, we did not**

⁵ In Belgium the MR, the francophone liberal party, is liberal on economic themes and center-right on ethical issues.

⁶ Interviews B-A-7 & B-A-1



identify areas that were particularly segregated along ethnic lines, this especially because of the smallness of the town.

The small town disposes of the necessary **facilities and infrastructure**. Yet, in comparison with the other towns studied, this is far less comprehensive, especially in terms of public transport. Although there is a **local public transport** network in place, stops are less well served than in other cities in Belgium. Both buses and trains were perceived to arrive too sporadically by respondents during the focus group held in the type A locality. Furthermore, whilst there are several primary and elementary schools in the locality, no higher education institutes nor universities are found. The type A locality is home to a youth centre and a civil society associations centre, located next to the city hall and there are various sport associations, places for religious worship, supermarkets, and open-air markets. The locality also counts a number of social services, such as a public centre for social welfare, as well as several civil society organisations, often related to socialist or Christian democrat organisations. These services have at times redefined their originally generic operations in light of aiding newcomers in the area.

The major/important associations in this town are, more precisely, firstly the Christian and Socialist trade unions: the Christian Workers Movement (*Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien*), and the 'General Federation for Belgian Workers' (FGTB) The trade unions are organisations that have historically worked to defend workers' rights and have in recent years started to work with newcomers and refugees, independently of their worker's status. Secondly, important associations in the type A locality are also the Centre for Permanent Education (an adult training centre) and the *Centre Action Laïque* (Secular Centre). The services offered by these civil society organisations are French language courses, help with the CV and help with obtaining a driving licence, for example. The organisations provide 'inclusive services' for all rather than target-group tailored services only for immigrants and refugees. Another important organisation present in the type A locality is the provincial branch of the Mission for employment insertion (MIRE) (*Mission d'insertion dans l'emploi*), which aims to make the bridge between people who have been excluded or out of the labour market for a longer period of time and employers. Many of the people that are helped by this organisation are newcomers, even if this group is not included in the envisioned target group of the proposed services. All these organisations are publicly subsidized. Furthermore, there are several more informal organisations, that work in a more targeted way with post-2014 migrants. Two important organizations that we identified are an organisation for migrant women, coming together once a week to learn French and to do social activities, and a Muslim association, working to integrate different strands of Islam in the city, and to orient the Muslim community in the type A locality in a more general sense. None of these two more informal organisations receive funding from any governing body or institution. When asked about this, the founders did not think that it was necessary for the organisations to receive such funding. The organisation for migrant women is, however, able to use a room in a centre for associations made available by the local government.

In the interviews and focus group in the type A locality, **no local protests against migrants** have been mentioned during interviews of focus groups in the small town. On the contrary, respondents noted that there has been a **wave of solidarity with refugees in the city**. When



the nearby reception centre opened in 2015, there was a large group of local inhabitants who offered to volunteer to help refugees who left the asylum reception centre to settle in the type A locality. **Post-2014 migrants perceived this local engagement to have a very positive effect on their settlement and stay in the locality.** Several respondents mentioned that they felt very welcomed in the locality and that they felt supported by the local community on different occasions: during house visits, or when children had difficulties doing homework, etc. Yet, help regarding housing for refugees is **not coordinated or organised**, which means that it is sporadic and cannot be counted upon as a secure service. Furthermore, the **local government of the type A locality has maintained a hands-off approach towards immigrant integration and has thus not engaged in facilitating or promoting immigrant integration in the town.** Moreover, inhabitants of the type A locality have also been engaged in the arrival of transitory migrants in recent years, who often do not have the intention to stay in Belgium but temporarily stay there with the intention of moving to the United Kingdom. Inhabitants have pushed the local government to open spaces where these transitory migrants can sojourn and have engaged in organising food provision and other necessities to the temporary accommodation centre in town.

Regarding the factors that shape attitudes, interactions, and experiences in the type A locality, we note that the lack of politicization of migration in the locality, the solidarity of inhabitants towards migrants and refugees, and the availability of spaces of encounter (especially one that fostered encounter between migrants) facilitated the whole-of-community integration process and migrants' experiences of inclusion. In fact, most migrants spoke of how they had positively experienced solidarity of locals, who would take the initiative to offer help, both in the nearby refugee centre and on other occasions. Some migrants mentioned that locals approached them in the streets to ask if they needed help or could assist them in any way (B2-A-4). This solidarity and openness of long-term residents and the absence of the politicization of migration on the local level fostered experiences of inclusion among migrants. A Moroccan woman in her late 20s who married a Syrian refugee in the type A locality states:

“All the people I met when I arrived here, they are very welcoming. They are open and... My neighbours are Belgian, they are very, very welcoming... And I met many Belgians and they helped me⁷”.

Several of the post-2014 migrants also mentioned the importance of an “Arabic café” in the centre of the town in forging friendships and feeling included at the local level. Several post-2014 migrants interviewed who spoke Arabic (Moroccans and Syrians) mentioned that they often meet with other migrants of their language community at this café, and that it is a space where they hang out and meet new friends. By contrast, a non-Arabic-speaking migrant, from an Asian country, mentioned that the lack of a community of people from his region or others that spoke his language hindered his experience of inclusion. This respondent said that he “feels accepted in the town” and that he “lives well in the town thanks to the help of locals” (quote from B2-A-5), but still does not feel entirely at home in the type A locality because of



the lack of a community from his country of origin. Another 30 years old Syrian refugee mentioned:

“It is true that here Arabs stay with Arabs. Afghans stay with other Afghans. They talk in their own languages. Life is like that. We talk a little bit with other people but it's quick. Not really friendships. I miss having more internationally oriented social encounters⁸”.

On the other hand, the lack of availability of a good transport network and affordable housing was found to obstruct migrant experiences of inclusion. Moreover, several migrants also mentioned that they felt discriminated against by local real estate agencies, further hindering their access to housing. A last factor mentioned by several interviewees in the type A locality is their experience with one administrative worker in the city hall of the type A locality. Several respondents mentioned that they had felt discriminated against by this employee and mentioned that this had made them feel unwelcome. This shows that, even if the overall encounters with long-term residents are rather positive in the type A locality, the initial contact with officials when registering in the commune or for other administrative matters, is of major importance in the experience of inclusion for migrants.

Based on our interviews, we note in the type A locality there are no clear spatial divisions between neighbourhoods along ethnic lines, this especially due to the smallness of the town. Seeing the rather limited number of inhabitants and surface area of the town, we note that if migrants are able to find housing in the type A locality, which was mentioned to be extremely difficult because of high rent prices and the discriminatory experiences by real estate companies⁹.

Lastly, we note that in the type A locality, the COVID pandemic and the subsequent periods of quarantines has had an impact on the interactions between migrants and long-term residents. More particularly, **the COVID pandemic is experienced as an obstacle to learning the language as migrants find it harder to engage in social contacts**, which according to several post-2014 migrants led to social isolation. One refugee of Asian origin in his early 50s who arrived in the type A locality in 2016 notes that:

“Now I don't work because I'm doing training for French courses. Advancing with my French is very difficult. The problem is that because of COVID I don't get the occasion to speak much. But now we can go to physical classes again and I am doing a training for 4 days a week, in 2 different language schools¹⁰”.

⁸ Quote from the focus group in the type A locality.

⁹ For more detailed information on the topic of access to housing for post-2014 migrants, see the WP4 report: Hantson, Westerveen & Adam, 2022: “Post-2014 migrant access to housing, employment and other crucial resources in small- and medium-sized towns and rural areas”: https://whole-comm.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2_Belgium_WP4.pdf

¹⁰ Quote from the focus group in the type A locality.



Name	Generic name	Year of foundation	Formal/In formal	Purposes and activities	Leadership and membership (e.g., locals and migrants, only migrants, only locals)	Offers services to post-2014 migrants	Participates in pro-migrant / anti-racist mobilization	Migrants' / minority cultural association	Participates in anti-migrant mobilization
	Regional Integration Centre of the province	2014	Formal	Organising the regional integration trajectory and coordinating different organisations working on immigrant integration and offering language classes, amongst other activities.	Migrants only	Yes		No	No
	Centre for permanent education	1972	Formal	Offering activities and trainings to workers (employed or unemployed) and in fighting against exclusion of vulnerable groups.	Locals and migrants	Yes, but they are not a defined target group	Not that I know of	No	No
FGTB Fédération générale du travail	General Federation of Labour of Belgium	19th century	Formal			Yes, but they are not a defined target group		No	No



de Belgique									
MOC (Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien)	Christian workers movement	Originated in the 19th century	Formal	To defend and liberate workers.	Locals and migrants	Yes, but they are not a defined target group		No	No
CAL (Centre d'Action Laïque)		1969	Formal		Locals and migrants	Yes, but they are not a defined target group		Yes	No
	Organisation for migrant woman	2019 (more or less)	Informal		Migrants			Yes	No
	Organisation for Muslims	Recent organisation	Informal		Locals and migrants				



2.3. Locality 2 [Medium-size town], [Flanders] (type B)

The type B locality is a medium-sized town with a population of **about 100.000 people**. On top of that, tens of thousands of students reside in the city, who are not officially registered in the city.—The city is characterised by a very small surface, a very high population density (1790 hab./km² for an area of 57 km²) and a fast-growing population. Since 2000, the population has increased by 1% on a yearly basis. The average income is 16,345 eur/hab. (figure of 2011), and the unemployment rate is below the Flemish average. The city is home to a large university that attracts large numbers of international students. This has rendered the city particularly diverse and created many (skilled) job opportunities. In 2005, the share of foreigners officially registered in this locality was with 4,7% far lower than the national average. This seems odd given the diverse history and appearance of the town but may be explained by most foreigners only arriving in the town in the early 2000s. Before that, foreign residents were mostly students or other temporary residents, who often did not register in the locality and were thus left out of the statistics. Yet, since 2015, this locality has the highest number of migrants per capita in Flanders and Belgium (Noppe et al., 2018: 46). This number has been in a further upward trend since 2017, mainly as the result of the increased arrival of people under international protection and other migrants. This development took place despite the lack of a reception centre in or near the locality between 2015 and 2017. In 2017, 18,1% of the population were foreigners and 30,4% of the population was of foreign origin¹¹. The influx of refugees (recognised refugees and people under subsidiary protection) is high in the type B locality. In fact, the locality has 13.5 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, which is the second highest number in Flanders. Only the type D locality scores, with 14.5 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, higher than the type B locality¹².

The political orientation of the town is mainly leftist. It is governed by a coalition of the social-democrat party *Vooruit* (which translates as 'forward'), the Christian Democrats (*CD&V*) and the green party *Groen* (which translates as 'Green'). The social democrats have been in power in this town for long. The type B locality is known to be a particularly **expensive city to live** in compared to other cities in Flanders and Belgium. This can be explained by the presence of a large student population that adds to the housing scarcity and high housing prices. In recent years, it has been calculated that a quarter of the residents in the type B locality spend a large amount (more than 30%) of their income on housing. Particular to the housing in the type B locality is also the **very high number of single-person households**, a number that with 47.7% comprises about half of the households (data of 2020). Furthermore, as is the case in other Belgian municipalities, there are **long waiting lists for social housing**, which continue to grow¹³.

¹² Data from 2018.

¹³ In 2021, around 12.000 people were on a waiting list of a social housing service in the type B locality.



Concerning the labour market in the type B locality, we note that there is a large presence of inhabitants with tertiary education, who mostly work in the tertiary (commercial service provision) and quarterly (non-commercial service provision) sectors. Furthermore, relatively few inhabitants of the type B locality work in the primary (agriculture, forestry, and fishing) and secondary (industrial activities) sectors. In 2018, 74.4% of the inhabitants worked in high-technological sectors¹⁴. Nowhere else in the Flemish region is this percentage this high. Wage earners of non-Belgian origin are, however, mostly represented in the tertiary sector, and less in the quarterly sector. **The economy of this medium-sized town has grown strongly in recent years.** Between 2009 and 2015, gross value rose from 56,201 to 68,154 euros per inhabitant. This represents an annual growth of 3.28%. To compare, the annual growth rate in this period the in the whole of Flanders was 2.39%.

The type B locality has an elaborate public transport network, and associative and commercial infrastructures. The city is home to a large array of schools (primary and secondary) as well as to a big university and various graduate institutes. The locality is particularly well connected to other towns and has an elaborate public transport network, with well-served train and bus stations. A large amount of religious and other ethnic associations (including several mosques as well as Kurdish, zen-Buddhist, Persian, Sudanese associations, and many other ethnic associations) can also be found in the city, and several of these are supported by the local government. Moreover, the type B locality is home to dozens of cultural and sports associations, which also receive funding from the local government. The local government also subsidizes multi-ethnic festivities in the city, which can be organised at the initiative of citizens or ethnic associations. There are, furthermore, various community centres in place. In 2019, the local government opened an old industrial building as a temporary location to serve as an incubator for sustainable urbanity. In this space, there is a wide range of entrepreneurial civic initiatives (e.g., a social grocery), as well as a space for event-based activities. In addition, in 2019, the city has opened a reception home (*onthaahuis*) for newcomers in the type B locality. This reception home also functions as a one-stop-shop in the locality where the main service providers involved in immigrant integration (the OCMW -the public centre for social welfare-, the VDAB, and the Agency for Integration) gather once a week to improve the communication between the different services working on immigrant integration and to tackle administrative barriers that newcomers may encounter. This is a clear example of local horizontal coordination on immigrant integration, organized by the city. However, **no asylum centre, nor a Local Accommodation Initiative (small-scale initiatives for the housing of asylum-seekers and/or refugees)** can be found in the type B locality. The local government did not wish to open accommodation initiatives because, so they argue, the city already attracts a lot of migrants (Interviews B-B-1 & B-B). Members of the local government mentioned that around 2015 a large number of young refugees chose to settle in the type B locality because of the presence of a lot of services in the city, and because of the large availability of single student studios due the high number of students in the city¹⁵. Many of the cheaper studios rented by young

¹⁴ This includes pharmaceuticals, transportation equipment manufacturing, utilities, waste management, and business and audio-visual services.

¹⁵ Information retrieved from interviews B-B-1 & B-B-4.



refugees, however, were in bad conditions and a lot of exploitation happened on the housing market. As a response to this, the local government has decided in recent years to start tackling slumlordism and to invest in renovating its housing stock. This, in turn, has pushed up the rental prices in the city. As a consequence, the city has become far less affordable, often pushing refugees, migrants and people with lower incomes out of the city. Moreover, this city has attracted a large number of newcomers because of the numerous social services present and the many labour opportunities available.

The major/important associations in this town are the civil society organisations supported by the local government that work on immigrant integration, inclusion, and the promotion of multiculturalism. The local government supports and funds many immigrant and ethnic minorities organisations. These organisations are thus formally recognized and play a role in the local diversity policies. They can receive funding when they participate in or set up festivities in the city and when they take up a role in receiving and orienting newcomers from their community. When these associations provide language classes, they can receive extra funding. We thus note that the local migrant and minorities associations are funded by the local government, and intensely cooperate with the local authorities. However, to be funded, they have to respond to the local authorities' funding priorities. If an ethnic association provides Dutch language courses, and or partakes in multicultural festivities, for example, they receive additional funding from the local government.

Regarding the factors that shape attitudes, interactions, and experiences in the type B locality, we note that the lack of politicization of migration in the locality, the solidarity of long-term residents towards migrants and refugees, the strong involvement of the local government and civil society actors in the inclusion of migrants, as well as the availability of spaces of encounter (especially one that fostered encounter between migrants) facilitated the whole-of-community integration process and migrants' experiences of inclusion. Concerning the politicization of migration, the leftist local coalition, that unites the socialist party *Vooruit*, the green party and the Christian democrats, are welcoming towards migrants and refugees. Furthermore, according to the accounts of respondents and analysis of local documents and local media, no anti-migrant protests have taken place since 2014. On the contrary, there is an open attitude towards newcomers and a general a sense of solidarity in the locality. During interviews, most post-2014 migrants mentioned that they found it easy to approach people in public space and felt welcome and at home in the type B locality. Still, most post-2014 migrants did mention that it remained hard to forge strong friendship relationships with long-term residents.

Several interviewees mentioned that activities organised by the local government or civil society actors, such as volunteering opportunities or activities at the reception home (opened by the local government in 2019), were of importance in fostering encounter in the locality. We will discuss these initiatives in more detail in sections 4.1 and 4.2. The large availability of initiatives that focus on encounters between long-term residents and post-2014 migrants have been widely appreciated by the post-2014 migrants interviewed.



Based on our interviews, we note that spatially, the type B locality is characterized by a rather mixed ethnic social landscape, however one that is, as in the other cities, characterised by a class division. In the last years, a common trend in the type B locality, is that post-2014 migrants and their families, as well as other low-income families, are increasingly obliged to find housing in surrounding municipalities. Housing prices in this medium-sized city are of the highest in the country and are constantly on the rise. Other (post-2014) migrants, such as students or well-paid migrants working in the university or tech sector, amongst other employment possibilities in the city, do easily find housing in the city. The engagement of the local government with anti-discrimination measures on the housing market might have an influence on the potential of migrants with a high income to find housing. Nevertheless, a large number of post-2014 migrants interviewed in the type B locality mentioned that they had been obliged to move outside of the city to the surrounding municipalities in due to high housing prices. These interviewees mentioned that they continue to turn to services and aid offered in the city. At times, however, local service providers or civil society actors do not offer services to people who are registered outside of the type B locality because of a lack of spaces or resources. Besides, having to leave the type B locality was perceived as difficult by several post-2014 migrants interviewed because this meant that they had to discontinue several activities and lost connections they had forged.

Lastly, we note that in the type B locality, the COVID pandemic and the subsequent periods of quarantines has had an impact on the interactions between migrants and long-term residents, and thereby also on the experiences of inclusion of migrants. Nevertheless, **respondents from the type B locality considered the COVID pandemic to be less of an obstacle in learning the language and engaging in social contact than in the other three localities researched.** The reception home (*onthaahuis*) where young refugees can spend their free time, receive social assistance, and follow language classes, amongst other activities, remained open during the whole COVID period, albeit with strict social distance rules. The local government took this decision consciously to prevent potential social isolation of migrants as a consequence of the lockdowns¹⁶.

¹⁶ Information retrieved from the interview B-B-4.



Name	Generic name	Year of foundation	Formal/Informal	Purposes and activities	Leadership and membership (e.g., locals and migrants, only migrants, only locals)	Offers services to post-2014 migrants	Participates in pro-migrant/anti-racist mobilization	Migrants'/minority cultural association	Participates in anti-migrant mobilization
	Diversity organisation of locality B.		Formal	Organising the buddy project as well as facilitating multicultural activities in the city	Migrants	Yes	No	No	No
	Volunteering organisation for refugees	Around 2017		Organising volunteering activities for migrants	No?			Yes	No
	The reception home & one-stop-shop	2019	Formal	Opening of a reception home for young people with a refugee status Other newcomers Diversity projects	Migrants (refugee)	Yes	No	No	No
	Numerous multiculturalist organisations		Formal (receive funding from the local government)	Organising multiculturalist festivities, welcoming newcomers/organising language courses etc.	Migrants /ethnic minorities	Yes	At times	Yes	No



	Civil society aiding refugees and migrants in the process of finding housing in locality B	2017	Informal	Helps refugees with finding housing	Refugees/migrants	Yes	At times	No	No
CAW (Centrum voor Algemeen Welzijn)	Centre for General Wellbeing		Formal (Flemish funding)	Working on a wide range of topics. Housing assistance, psychological wellbeing, administrative aid (specifically for family reunification)	Locals and migrants	Yes	No	No	No



2.4. Locality 3 [Medium-sized town], [Wallonia] (type C)

The type C locality is a medium-sized town located in the Walloon region of Belgium that has between 100,000 and 250,000 inhabitants. The city is quite densely populated, with 1.964,7 hab./km² for an area of 102,9 km². The annual average revenue is 13,444 €/hab. (figure of 2011), and the unemployment rate is with 23.6% (figure of 2013), one of the highest rates in Belgium. The city, which has known a **rapid industrialisation** in the late 19th century, has experienced a considerable economic and demographic decline between the 1970s and the 2010s, and this particularly in the heart of the city. During this period, the type C locality has lost 60% of its population living in the city centre and 20% of the inhabitants of the agglomeration (Marion, 2019: 77-78). This **demographic decline** is not only a question of the number of inhabitants leaving, but also of the profile of the individuals who decided to move. It was especially the wealthier class who could afford to move to different cities or to the green periphery surrounding the type C locality, leaving the city centre to a lowly qualified and economically weakened class. This phenomenon of urban spreading of the middle classes worsened the financial situation of the type C locality (Marion, 2019: 76). Whilst the population in the type C locality is still declining today, this decline is far less significant than in the first decades after deindustrialization.

The demographic exodus that took place in the decades after industrialisation in the type C locality has also affected the housing situation in the city, which is to this day characterised by a high percentage of empty dwellings. In 2013, 2.6% of the rental properties in the city were vacant. A census of 2016 of a social housing service counted 1,358 unoccupied dwellings, of which 597 were undergoing major renovation works, 109 were for sale, and 194 others were being reallocated. The local government of the type C locality has tried to tax the owners of unoccupied buildings as a strategy to combat vacancy on the housing market, but this proposal has been declared illegal by the court, a decision which was appealed by the city. Lastly, the type C locality has a very long waiting list for social housing, even though the percentage of social housing is 10% higher than the national and regional average. The type C locality is home to three reception centres for asylum seekers that are located on the outskirts of the city. The presence of these reception centres (which all three together host about 600 asylum seekers) leads to a high number of refugees in the locality, even if they often also choose to move to other Walloon cities, or to Flanders in the long-term.

Furthermore, the type C locality is characterised by **racialized socio-economic disparities between different neighbourhoods**: the centre, the periphery and the green belt surrounding it. This phenomenon is largely the result of its industrial past. In the city, **the urban boom and the industrial boom** (especially the mining, steel, and glass industries) **developed hand in hand** between the 18th and the 20th centuries. The workers' housing areas that were established near the industries did not follow any development plan and gradually developed into an industrial agglomeration with complex shapes dictated by the boundaries of the mines, the communication routes, and the industries (Marion, 2019). To this day, the traces of the industrial past affect the urban landscape, which remains largely segmented, and the available



housing stock. Firstly, in the type C locality, there is a strong **spatial concentration of poorer, worker neighbourhoods spread out around the industrial sites of the city** (now abandoned or repurposed), **mostly following the course of the river crossing the type C locality**, which offered a transport way for resources and goods. **The richer neighbourhoods, on the other hand, are mostly located in the green outskirts, further away from the industrial sites.** Post-2014 migrants, refugees and people with a migration background often live in the post-industrial, economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, inhabiting old worker's houses. Secondly, **a large share of the current housing stock was built for workers, before the Second World War**, during the industrial boom. Many of these worker's houses are today in very bad conditions. During interviews, post-2014 migrants spoke of humidity and the lack of insulation as the main issues in their housing situation, and how these issues affected their health and/or that of their children by, for example, causing respiratory problems due to humidity¹⁷. On top of that, several respondents mentioned that houses were often much too small for their family¹⁸.

Concerning the political orientation, the city is governed by a coalition of left-wing parties. The main socialist party of Wallonia, the *Parti Socialiste* (PS), has the majority of seats¹⁹ and governs together with what has been called the radical left-wing party, the PTB (*Parti des Travailleurs de Belgique: Workers party of Belgium*), and the liberal Party MR (*Mouvement Réformateur*) even if these two last parties are not necessarily mathematically equivalent in terms of seats in the municipal council. The city has a long history of immigration since the 19th century when immigrants settled in the locality to carry out heavy work in the coal and steel industries (Manço et al. 2021: 4). When industries gradually closed in the 1970s and '80s, the type C locality, as well as other parts of the Walloon region, was left impoverished. Whilst the economic stagnation of the mid 20th century is still very much reflected in the poverty and unemployment rates in the city, in recent years several renovation projects have been initiated in and around the city and several old industrial zones have been restored and repurposed. In the past 10 years, the locality has started to specialise in the fields of aerospace, biotechnologies, and the technology industry with the aim of reviving the local economy. Around the city centre, four sectors of economic activity have emerged over the last 10 years, creating over 10,000 jobs in the life sciences industries, health centres and hospitals. The advanced manufacturing industry, represented by large international companies with expertise in aeronautics, aerospace, transport, or glass, also constitutes a large part of the employment in the city. Lastly, the type C locality offers services linked to crafts, tourism, and leisure, which are concentrated in the rural areas around the city.

According to the data gathered through interviews and the focus group in the type C locality, the major/important associations and public services working on the integration of

¹⁷ Information received from interviews B2-C-6 and B2-C-7.

¹⁸ Information received from interviews B2-C-6 and B2-C-7.

¹⁹ In many Walloon cities, and particularly the old industrial cities, the Socialist Party PS has had an absolute majority of seats for a long time.



newcomers are a generic civil society organisation, two specific social services within the local public centre for social welfare, as well as the regional integration centre, which coordinates and implements the regional integration trajectory, and some local integration initiatives, which can receive funding from the Walloon region if they provide some aspects of the regional integration trajectory, such as French language classes. The most important services mentioned during interviews with post-2014 migrants and during the focus group in the type C locality are the two services of the local public centre for public welfare (the CPAS). One service works specifically on supporting migrants by providing French language classes and by organising social activities to help newcomers to forge a social network. This service receives European project funding from the European Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) and from the Walloon government. The second service in the local CPAS provides administrative help to migrants, mostly regarding their family reunification procedure, naturalisation, and the refugee status, amongst other topics. The CPAS also partly funds these services with its own resources. Furthermore, there are several generic civil society organisations, such as the Mission for employment integration (MIRE, *Mission d'insertion dans l'emploi*), which has a provincial branch in the type C locality. Like in the type A locality, the MIRE provides mainstream services to different groups of people who have been excluded from the labour market. Whilst migrants make up a very large portion of the people that are assisted by this civil society organisation, they do not offer targeted services for migrants. The (provincial) Regional Integration Centre has its offices in the periphery of the city. This location renders it less well known and reachable for migrants.

Regarding the infrastructural makeup of the city, the city has a wide range of elementary and secondary schools and is home to several university campuses and colleges. Furthermore, there is a very elaborate social service network (with a dense network of social services) and there are community spaces (such as social cafés at the offices of the local public centre for social welfare) located in different areas of the city. Nevertheless, during interviews and the focus group held in the type C locality, post-2014 migrants often pointed out that these services and spaces are located in peripheral neighbourhoods that are hard to reach from the city centre. More precisely, respondents stated that the bus and metro/tram network in the type C locality is badly served and that the waiting times are high, this especially around and between peripheral areas²⁰. The dispersal of social services across the peripheral neighbourhoods of the city, together with a poorly served transport network impede the access of migrants to different types of services, such as language classes, and administrative assistance. Both the regional integration centre as well as the service working on migrant integration at the public centre for social welfare (CPAS) in the type C locality are, for example, located in two different peripheral neighbourhoods of the city. Service providers noted that their location at times inhibits migrants from visiting them, because the services are difficult to reach. They argued that a centralization of their services would foster better service provision to migrants.

Spatially, then, the type C locality is characterized by a high concentration of migrants in disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the city, which are particularly the post-industrial areas. In

²⁰ Information retrieved from the focus group held in the type C locality.



the wake of the industrialisation of the city, the richer inhabitants of the type C locality often moved outside of the city, to the green outskirts, or to other cities as a response to deteriorating living conditions within the city. The housing stock in post-industrial cities in the type C locality is, whilst initiatives are being taken to start processes of renovation, still largely characterized by a worn-down accommodation, often in unhygienic conditions.

Regarding the factors that shape attitudes, interactions, and experiences in the type C locality, we note that a feeling of insecurity and discomfort in public spaces as well as bad and unhealthy housing conditions hinders the whole-of-community integration process and migrants' experiences of inclusion. Furthermore, several post-2014 migrants mentioned that they felt unwelcome and found it hard to engage with long-term residents in the type C locality. Whilst the local leftist coalition provides an inclusive discourse on migrants, this does not seem to be sufficient to foster an inclusive environment. In the economically deprived neighbourhoods of the type C locality, long-term residents often perceive that they must compete with newly arrived migrants to get access to basic social services, housing and jobs, which gives rise to anti-migrant sentiments²¹. On the other hand, several interviewees (B2-C-2, B2-C-3, B2-C-4, B2-C-5) mentioned that activities organised by the local government or civil society actors to foster encounter in the local community (such as French language classes or common activities) were of importance for migrants to create a social network and to feel included in the type C locality.

Lastly, in the type C locality, none of the respondents during the focus group nor in the individual interviews mentioned the ways in which COVID, and quarantines had impacted their social lives. Nevertheless, many post-2014 migrants mentioned to feel very isolated. Whilst this experience was not directly related to the COVID pandemic, it was potentially exacerbated by it.

²¹ Information retrieved from interview B-C-7/



Name	Generic name	Year of foundation	Formal / Informal	Purposes and activities	Leadership and membership (e.g., locals and migrants, only migrants, only locals)	Offers services to post-2014 migrants	Participates in pro-migrant/ anti-racist mobilization	Migrants'/ minority cultural association	Participates in anti-migrant mobilization
CPAS	Public Centre for Social Welfare		Formal	Language classes Social activities Administrative support	Locals and migrants	Yes	No	No	No
MIRE	Employment organization		Formal	Aiding people to (re)integrate into the labour market.	Locals and migrants	Yes, but they are not a defined target group	No	No	No
Regional integration centre	Regional Integration Centre of the province	1997	Formal	Organising the regional integration trajectory and coordinating different organisations working on immigrant integration and offering language classes, amongst other activities.	Migrants only	Yes	No	No	No
	Local Integration Initiatives		Formal	Civil society organisations that work on immigrant integration initiatives. They can receive funding to set up such initiatives by applying once every 2 years	Migrants only	Yes	At times	No	No



2.5. Locality 4 [Small town], [Flanders] (type D)

The type D locality is a small city located in Flanders and consists of 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants. The city is densely populated with 1752.16 inh./km², this for a surface of 40.95 km². The annual average income is 18,877 euro/inh. and the unemployment rate is high compared to other Flemish cities. The large number of elderly people residing in this coastal city, as well as the large percentage of people with lower educational attainment compared to other urban centres in the region, are explanations for this²². The largest sectors of employment are the tourist sector and 'blue' economic activity in relation to the sea and the coast.

The current political coalition governing the city is rather right-wing. It consists of the centre-right wing liberal party *Open VLD (Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten: Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats)*, the right-wing Flemish nationalist party *N-VA (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie: New-Flemish Alliance)* and *Groen (the greens)*. However, this city has not traditionally voted right-wing. The social democratic party (SpA, now called *Vooruit*) had been in power for several terms preceding the elections of 2019. Between 2011 and 2021, the type D locality became increasingly diverse, with a high number of non-EU migrants arriving. Whilst in 2011, 15,3% of the inhabitants were of foreign origin, in 2021, this percentage rose to 25,2%. This rise is especially due to the arrival of non-EU migrants. In 2011, 10,6% of the inhabitants were of non-EU origin, whereas in 2021 this number rose to 18,9%. From 2015 onwards, the type D locality has started to host many refugees. Family reunification has subsequently added to already high levels of diversity. This locality has one of the highest numbers of refugees per 1000 inhabitants in Flanders.

Concerning the housing market, we note that renting and buying houses in the type D locality is relatively cheap in comparison to other Flemish cities. This is also the reason why many refugees and migrants chose to settle in the type D locality since 2014. A survey that the city held on housing choices and conditions in the city shows that half of the newcomers chose to settle in the type D locality because of the low housing prices. The housing stock in the type D locality is, however, in bad conditions, with quite some dilapidation and vacancy. The new local government (elected in 2019) has set up programmes to combat these phenomena and has started investing massively in new construction projects.

Regarding the infrastructure, the town is equipped with a very large shopping centre, many elementary and secondary schools. In the last decade, however, the city has seen higher education institutes disappear. Furthermore, the type D locality counts numerous youth centres, sport associations, religious sites (amongst which Mosques and other religious

²² We should note that the Flemish and the Walloon unemployment rates considerably differ, with Wallonia (and Brussels) having a far higher unemployment rate than Flanders. The national unemployment rate is raised by the Walloon and Brussels one. The unemployment rate in the type D locality is very high for Flanders, whilst it is still under the national unemployment rate, which is around 12%.



centres...), as well as community organisations and social service organisations. With regard to the latter, the public centre for social welfare (OCMW) has become part of the local government, this with the aim of improving coordination. In addition, the city is **very well connected by public transport** and has a well-served train connection, as well as a tram and bus network. Nevertheless, post-2014 migrants, as well as respondents in the focus group noted that the public transport connection to areas further away from the city centre, which are often also less privileged parts of the city, was considerably worse than to areas closer to the city centre. This lack of a good transportation network created a sense of disconnection with the city.

Spatially, the type D locality is characterized by a high concentration of migrants in disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the city²³. Two areas of the city commonly came up during interviews as being the neighbourhoods where most people of immigrant origin live. The first area is very centrally located around the major vending streets of the city. Respondents of the focus group noted that in the past 10 years this neighbourhood has changed considerably. Whilst it used to be a rather white middle-class neighbourhood, it has increasingly become inhabited by migrant families. Many shops have also been opened by newly arrived migrants in this neighbourhood. The second area is located further away from the city centre. This neighbourhood is located around the old fishing port, historically a neighbourhood where fishers and their families would settle. The modest housing infrastructures of the 19th century have not been well renovated and are often in bad conditions. Respondents living in this area complain about the bad conditions of their houses, at times leading to respiratory problems for themselves or their children²⁴. Respondents of the focus group maintained that the old fishing area is prone to criminal activities and said that they feel unsafe in the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood directly next to the old fishing neighbourhood has, on the contrary, been the focal point of project developers and many luxurious flats are currently being built there. This increases the sense of disinterest of the local government towards the old fishing neighbourhood. A respondent during the focus group in the type D locality notes:

“Have you seen the new neighbourhood they are building? You can see it clearly, those are the rich, and we, people from [name of neighbourhood], we are the poor. Just look at the difference. There everything gets fixed in a blink of an eye! Money, money. It's all that counts²⁵!”

Regarding the factors that shape attitudes, interactions, and experiences in the type D locality, we note that the politicization of migration at the local level as well as bad and unhealthy housing conditions hindered the whole-of-community integration process and migrants' experiences of inclusion. The politicization of migration has been visible in public space on various occasions. Firstly, in contrast to the other three towns studied, there have been several explicit anti-migrant protests in the type D locality, more specially at the occasion of the opening of mosques in the city. These protests were always led by the local branch of the

²³ Information retrieved from a report by a civil society organization.

²⁴ Interview B2-D-7.

²⁵ Quote from a long-term resident in the focus group held in the type D locality.



Vlaams Belang, the extreme-right party and attended by about a hundred people. The participants in these protests were mainly a mix of neighbourhood dwellers who were unsatisfied with the way in which public space was used and followers of the *Vlaams Belang* party. According to one of our respondents, these protests took place in the early 2010s (2011 and 2014 were mentioned by a member of the local branch of the *Vlaams Belang* party²⁶).

Whilst these protests have thus taken place quite some time ago, smaller incidents take place on a frequent basis. During the fieldwork in the summer of 2022, we witnessed an example of public display of racism during a public photo exhibition focusing on diversity in the city organised by the local government. Several of the photographs on display showing people with a migration background were smeared with swastika signs and the faces on the pictures were erased with a black marker. The local government replaced these photographs, but they were vandalised once again a few days after with the same marks²⁷. This incident shows the ongoing polarization on migration in the type D locality and the expression of extreme-right sentiment in public space. **Post-2014 migrants are confronted with this polarization and racism in their everyday lives, which largely hinders their experience of inclusion**, as we will explain in more detail in the following section.

On the other hand, several interviewees (B2-D-1, B2-D-2, B2-D-4) mentioned that activities organised by civil society actors to foster encounter in the local community were of importance for migrants to create a social network and to feel included in the type D locality. As a response to the socio-political climate of polarization and anti-migrant sentiment, several civil society organisations in the type D locality have actively set up projects to foster inclusion and community cohesion. These include, for example, projects that engage migrants into volunteering in public spaces (such as in the Covid vaccination centre during the different waves of the pandemic) as well as initiatives that set up inclusive cultural events. These initiatives aim to foster encounter between long-term residents and migrants and counter polarization in the type D locality.

Lastly, we note that in the type D locality the Covid pandemic and the successive periods of quarantine had an impact on the language capabilities of post-2014 migrants. A volunteer giving language classes to migrants in a civil society organisation mentioned that:

“What we witnessed in our language courses for migrants is that the Corona period has really had a large impact on the language capabilities of newcomers. People had really lost a lot of their Dutch during this year and a half that we were not able to attend classes in real life²⁸.”

Another respondent in the focus group in the type D locality mentioned that many migrant families or long-term residents with a low income have had difficulties to get access to the required digital tools (computers or internet access at home) in order for their children to

²⁶ Interview B-D-15.

²⁷ Notes from the participant observation in the type D locality.

²⁸ Quote from focus group in the type D locality.



attend online classes²⁹. These interviewees also mentioned that local governmental and civil society actors set up a service to rent out laptops and classes for people with little digital skills³⁰.

²⁹ Information retrieved from the focus group in the type D locality.

³⁰ Interview B-D-8.



Name	Generic name	Year of foundation	Formal / Informal	Purposes and activities	Leadership and membership (e.g., locals and migrants, only migrants, only locals)	Offers services to post-2014 migrants	Participates in pro-migrant/ anti-racist mobilization	Migrants' / minority cultural association	Participates in anti-migrant mobilization
	Mondial and Democratic Organisation	1995	Formal	<p>Connects and empowers people in the super-diverse society: creating spaces of dialogue and encounters & focusing on social participation and supporting the voice of people with a migration background in the public debate. Aim to fight polarization.</p> <p>Organises buddy projects</p> <p>Organises volunteering opportunities for migrants</p> <p>Many other activities</p>	Migrants and locals	Yes	At times (more by cultural interferences in the public space)	Yes	No



Diversity organisations	1980s	Formal	Language classes and practice opportunities	Migrants	Yes	At times, by voicing the needs of migrants in society to the local government	No	No
Civil society working on cultural projects and inclusion		Formal	A participatory art association offering a space where people from different backgrounds, including the most vulnerable, get the opportunity to experiment with different art forms ((audio)visual arts, music, and theatre)	Migrants and locals	Yes, but not exclusively	No	No	No
Economic Centre	2008	Formal	Offering free services to its entrepreneurs and acts as a contact point for businesses. The NGO also sets up projects with public administrations, employers, and employee organisations to promote economic life in the type D locality. The organisation also offers tailored assistance to migrants to lead them to the labour market.	Locals and migrants	Yes	No		No



CAW	Centre for General Wellbeing		Formal	Offering administrative aid to migrants, especially in the area of family reunification. Housing assistance, especially offering advice to people who might get evicted from their homes. More mainstream services not tailored to a specific target group: psychological aid, aid regarding domestic violence, etc.	Locals and migrants	Yes, but not exclusively	No	No	No
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3. Main findings in comparative perspective

In this section, we will firstly highlight the similarities and differences across the localities regarding social interactions between post-2014 migrants and long-term residents. Secondly, we will discuss migrant's experiences of inclusion and exclusion across the localities. These comparative descriptions allow us to focus on the factors that are most relevant in facilitating or hindering a whole-of-community integration process³¹, by supporting positive or negative social interactions, and experiences of inclusion and exclusion of post-2014 migrants. The research conducted in the four small and medium-sized Belgian towns (through in-depth interviews with post-2014 migrants and mixed focus groups with post-2014 migrants and long-term residents) confirms that **migrants' experiences of inclusion or exclusion are highly locality specific. We find that initiatives developed to foster migrants' social inclusion (by civil society actors, local governments, or social services), the availability of spaces of encounter, the politicization of migration at the local level, the presence of pre-existing migrant communities, and socio-economic realities** are the most relevant factors in facilitating or hindering a whole-of-community integration process and migrants' experiences of inclusion. Some structural issues, such as the **lack of availability of affordable and or healthy housing conditions, was found to obstruct migrant experiences of inclusion across the four localities.**

3.1. Reciprocal interactions and migrants' experiences of integration

In this first sub-section, we focus on social interactions and attitudes and migrants' experiences of inclusion and exclusion, trying to establish common patterns or clear divergences between the four different towns in Belgium. Throughout the fieldwork across the Belgian towns (two in Flanders and two in Wallonia), post-2014 migrants provided different testimonies about their relations with long-term residents and gave different reasons for why they experience these interactions as positive or not. When comparing across the four towns, the accounts of respondents signal varying feelings on the social interactions with long-term residents and other new migrants, as well as varying degrees of positive or

³¹ This perspective conceives of migrant integration as an open-ended process that involves interactions between multiple actors – including citizens, long-term residents, and newly arrived migrants as well as state, market, and civil society actors – and that takes place in specific local contexts.



negative experiences of inclusion or exclusion. More particularly, in the type A and B localities, migrants gave the most positive accounts on the social interactions in the city and found that they were well received by long-term residents. Most post-2014 migrants also spoke of a strong sense of solidarity in the city. Outspoken problems with racism and discrimination were especially observed in the type D locality. This at times strongly hinders positive social interactions from arising in the public space. Also, in the type C locality, respondents commented that it was at times hard to engage in positive social relations in public spaces, some mentioning a strong sense of isolation and disconnection with the city and other inhabitants³². A woman from Chad in her early 40s notes that:

“I often feel lonely and left to myself here. Not only in figuring out administration but also in my neighbourhood. Especially in the one where I used to live before moving. There, I didn’t know anybody. I don’t even know if there are other people from Chad in this city. I am very lonely, and I am a person who likes to be around people. It weighs a lot on me to be alone. And the fact that nobody would visit me at my home is so difficult. But where I live now, I have some Belgian neighbours who have come to share a meal with me. They have invited me to their place. That really has meant a lot to me! I had only moved in a week before and since, they keep track of me daily. When they don’t see me for a day, they call me. That touches me a lot. These are the very positive encounters, but there are also some people there who do not accept others at all. They don’t accept you because you are a foreigner. I don’t know if it’s because of fear, they don’t say so in many words. But you can see it in the way they look at you. For many people here the acceptance of ‘the other’ appears to be very difficult.”³³

Across the four localities, we find that the role of socio-economic realities and (the perception of) resource competition between migrants and long-term residents at the local level affect the ways in which positive social interactions can emerge or are hindered. In the type D locality, the socio-economic realities, characterised by a high level of unemployment, together with the presence of a very politicised discourse on migration (since the 2010s the city has known a steep increase in the arrival of (especially non-EU) migrants) has led to a very polarised public discourse on migration. Various long-term migrants who partook in the focus group mentioned that it did not seem fair to them that refugees would receive more support than locals needing social assistance. Some respondents mentioned that they would like to see “everybody treated equally”, whether one has a refugee background or not³⁴. These respondents noted that they also had economic difficulties.

In the type D locality, various post-2014 migrants interviewed mentioned to have been victim of **racist comments in public spaces**. Some mentioned to have received racist comments on

³² Information retrieved from the focus group in the type C locality.

³³ Quote from the focus group in the type C locality.

³⁴ Quote from the focus group in the type D locality.



the streets, in public transport or in public spaces, such as the local swimming pool or on the beach:

- A) *“Sometimes we get racist remarks at the beach. There was this one time, for example, when my friend was getting dressed after swimming and a man got angry at him about the fact that he was changing there. It turned into an argument. The man and his wife said some racist things like that he should return to his own country. In the swimming pool or in the city hall similar things have happened to me too. I sometimes get ugly looks in the swimming pool when me and my friends buy a ticket with our discount cards. Even at the counters in the city hall, people sometimes get ugly looks by employees. They speak in strong dialect to you; it seems as if they do it on purpose, so you don’t understand them. I’ve heard from many people that clerks working in the city administration services are quite disrespectful towards migrants³⁵.”*
- B) *“The people aren’t friendly here. In my country, your neighbour will talk to you. Here, the neighbour’s door is closed. We’ve had the same neighbour for five years and he’s never said hi to me or my family³⁶.”*

The account of the 21-year-old Afghan man regarding the unfriendly approach of administration toward migrants was voiced by several other migrants during the focus group in the type D locality. Several interviewees equally mentioned that this negative first contact with the city services during registration or during other administrative procedures made them feel excluded. The registration services are often the first contacts that new arrivals have in cities and therefore play an important role in shaping the perception of migrants about the city administration. Research has shown that the first phase of accommodation and the relationships built have a long-term effect on how newcomers feel in the locality in which they settle and their future integration trajectories (Seethaler-Wari 2018).

In the economically deprived neighbourhoods of the **type C locality**, locals also perceive that they must compete with newly arrived migrants to get access to basic social services, housing and jobs, which gives rise to anti-migrant sentiments. Nevertheless, in the type C locality, **there is no politicized discourse on migration**. On the contrary, the local government, ruled by a left-wing coalition, takes pride in the fact that migration is in the DNA of the post industrialist city. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the city attracted a high number of migrants to work in the coal, steel, and glass industries. **We thus note a strong difference in the ways in which anti-migrant sentiments are capped by a political movement or not**. Whilst there was one account of a racist incident in the type C locality, racist incidents were much less widely spread than in the type D locality. When racist sentiments are approved and disseminated by political leaders, a public platform for expressing them is created and these expressions then are considered, as they are also voiced by political representatives. A common finding in recent scholarship on the implications of the mobilization of anti-migrant political discourse on public opinion is that “anti-immigrant political rhetoric increases the

³⁵ Quote from interview B2-C-5 (Afghan man of 21 years old).

³⁶ Account from interview with an Eritrean woman in her early 30s. Interview B2-C-3.



level of nationalist sentiment and ethnocentric attitudes in the majority population, suggesting that political rhetoric can drive the development or cementing of anti-immigrant environments more generally” (Simonsen, 2019: 2). The presence or absence of an anti-migration rhetoric in the local political sphere in part explains the perceived differences between the type C and type D localities in terms of the experiences of inclusion by 2014 migrants³⁷.

Nevertheless, these two localities share the bad housing conditions and the presence of more explicitly deprived neighbourhoods, as well as the absence of -or at least not experienced- solidarity movements of other citizens. These factors help explain the lower positive perception of social interactions with long term residents in the type C and D localities, in comparison to the type A and B localities. **In the type A and B localities**, post-2014 migrants mentioned that it was easy to engage with long-term residents and they generally felt more at ease in public spaces than in the type C and D localities. **The comparison between the type A and B localities and the type C and D localities prove that socio-economic conditions help explaining the extent to which post-2014 migrants experience inclusion and the extent to which positive social interactions with long term residents are reached.** In the type A locality, the relation between newcomers and long-term residents was commonly described as “not problematic³⁸” by respondents in the focus group and by post-2014 migrants. Moreover, respondents spoke of widespread solidarity towards newcomers by locals. A 50-year-old refugee explains that the relation between long-term residents and refugees is positive and explains that he has always felt welcome as a result:

“There is really a lot of solidarity in this city! Many people, often older people, volunteered to help us when we were in the asylum centre and afterwards as well. They always ask us what we need, what our children might need. They ask if they can help with their homework for example. People are always open to help us here! We have a good position in this town because of the local community. They have helped a lot. It is thanks to them that we live well³⁹”.

A Syrian man having received a refugee status, living in the type A locality for over 5 years with his Moroccan wife and son says to feel very well and accepted in the city and to have become friends with many people from different nationalities. Whilst the women partake in social activities organised by a pro-migrant group organising language classes and social activities

³⁷ We should remember, however, that the extreme right *Vlaams Belang* party has never been part of the local government in the type D locality (or in any other locality in Flanders for that matter) because of the *Cordon Sanitaire*. The *Cordon Sanitaire* is a joint agreement among all (traditional) parties not to enter a coalition or cooperate with the extreme-right party. Still, several researchers have demonstrated the impact of extreme-right parties on mainstream parties and on public opinion, even if not governing (Deswaef, 2018).

³⁸ Quote from focus group in the type A locality.

³⁹ Quote from the focus group in the type A locality.



for migrant women, the Syrian man attends prayers on Friday at the local mosque, often visits the Arabic café in the city centre, takes French classes at the language school and plays football at a local soccer club. These are the activities through which he was able to meet most of his friends. Regarding his sports activities he states:

"I play football with Belgians, with Tunisian, Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese, and Moroccan friends. We see each other very often to play. I really have a lot of friends here"⁴⁰.

In the type B locality, migrants equally perceived their stay as positive, and commonly mentioned to feel at home and accepted in the city. A young man of 27 years old from Somalia and living for over 8 years in the type B locality shares his experience in the city during the focus group:

"Here in [locality B] I have no problem with talking to people on the street, also because there are many students of different nationalities. That was very different in Limburg. There it was much harder to talk to people or to approach them than it is here"⁴¹.

The opportunity of having serendipitous or occasional encounters in public space was largely appreciated by post-2014 migrants in the type A and B localities. In several cases, these swift encounters were very important for migrants as a starting point to be able to get access to other services, or to other social contacts. For example, a 30-year-old Sudanese man with a refugee status, his 3 children and a wife interviewed in the type B locality mentioned that a serendipitous encounter with a Belgian lady helped him to get access to housing at a time when he and his family were in dire need to find accommodation. Since they live in the apartment, the landlord has helped this respondent and his family to deal with administrative difficulties and has been very lenient when at times the family had financial issues and was not capable of paying the rent on time⁴².

Another important factor to understand the extent to which convivial relations can occur in the different localities is the overall **sense of security in using public space**. In the **type C locality**, various migrants mentioned that it was **very difficult to make contact with residents from the city**, and this especially because of a feeling of insecurity in public spaces. This sense of discomfort and or unsafety was mentioned by basically all post-2014 migrants interviewed, whilst this topic did not come up at all in any of the interviews done with post-2014 migrants in the type A, B or D localities. **Several respondents in the type C locality spoke of the issue of (petty) criminality (especially thefts on public transport), and public drug use in public transport**, and in the neighbourhood where they lived. These issues hindered them from enjoying parks and the bulk of public spaces in their neighbourhoods. Moreover, migrants complained about the fact that public spaces were badly maintained and dirty, with a lot of rubbish lying around. These factors were mentioned in various interviews as inhibiting their

⁴⁰ Quote from interview B2-A-4.

⁴¹ Quote from interview B2-B-1

⁴² Interview B2-B-6.



experiences of inclusion in the city (respondents speaking of a feeling of unsafety or discomfort in the city: B2-C-1, B2-C-2-, B2-C-4, B2-C-5 & various accounts during the focus group) and making it hard for them to get in touch with people:

- A) *“My friends told me that before coming, and it is true, it is like Chicago over here, there are so many people using drugs everywhere on the streets!”⁴³”*
- B) *“Often, especially at night I do not dare to leave my home, there are too many drugged people outside, I don’t feel safe at all!”⁴⁴”*
- C) *“There are so many people doing drugs in the street where I live, people selling drugs, aggressive people, a lot of noise. It is not a nice place to hang out and I don’t stay out very much”⁴⁵.”*

Whilst in both the type C and D localities migrants did indeed perceive obstacles for engaging in convivial relations in public spaces, as we explained above, there were also initiatives that helped them to foster social ties. In what follows we will turn towards **the importance of initiatives that foster encounter and collaboration**. Notably, the work of civil society organisations, social services, and at times local government to foster encounters, be it by setting up buddy projects, enabling volunteering projects, organising trips or festivities where migrants and long-term residents can meet, or opening of reception houses/one-stop-shops have been appreciated by respondents as initiatives that can lead to friendships and to experiences of inclusion. In what follows we further develop this statement with quotations from respondents in the different localities studied.

In the type D locality, several post-2014 migrants mentioned how the large number of active civil society organisations have helped them to build a social network and to feel embedded in the city, that is to have a sense of deep belonging to the city (Konig et al., 2017). Both the local government (especially the alderman for immigrant integration of the Green party) as well as one of the largest civil society organisations in the city work hard to promote a positive image of inclusiveness for migrants, and to involve migrants into events that take place in the city, such as cultural events (theatre, cinema, and music spectacles), and in organising neighbourhood festivities. Moreover, the civil society organisation in question also sets up volunteering possibilities for migrants through buddy projects, which is very positively received by many respondents interviewed. Notably, civil society organisations in the type D locality are very aware of the polarised social environment regarding migrants and have therefore worked hard to implement initiatives that foster encounters between migrants and long-term residents and to install projects that counter discriminatory discourses. Two of our respondents talked about the way in which civil society initiatives have helped them to build a social network in the type D locality and to feel at home. The first person is a man of 28 years old from Eritrea with a refugee status. He lives in the type D locality for 6 years now. The

⁴³ Quote from interview B2-C-5.

⁴⁴ Quote from interview B2-C-2.

⁴⁵ Quote from interview B2-C-4



second testimony is given by a woman from Belarus in her early 40s. She has lived in the type D locality for 4 years.

- A) *“The first days were difficult when I arrived. At [name of 3 civil society organisations] and the local cultural festival, I managed to make a lot of friends. And of course, there is also my buddy [a person that is allocated to a newcomer]. Through him I also got to know the city and many people. We also do a lot of things together with his family. We are going to visit Paris soon! When volunteering at [name of civil society organisation] where they work a lot with music and theatre, I also got to know a lot of people.”⁴⁶*
- B) *By the way, the people who work at [name civil society organisation] are super friendly. When I finally ended up there after many months of feeling quite lost here, I told my husband ‘This is the only place in this city where I am welcome here. Now every time I go to have a walk with him in the city centre there is always somebody who stops to have a chat with me. He says, ‘you really know everybody in this city.’ That makes me feel a lot happier here”⁴⁷.*

The accounts of the young man of 28 years old from Sudan and the 44-year-old women from Belarus demonstrate that there are quite some moments of positive social interactions in the city between migrants and long-term residents. The presence of civil society organisations and public events facilitating exchanges is of vital importance to foster positive experiences of inclusion, , this especially in the context of stark polarisation on migration.

In the type C locality, the social events organised by a social service provider to foster community cohesion, such as city trips and a holiday to the Ardennes in Belgium for people taking part in French language classes, are also largely appreciated by many (post-2014) migrants interviewed. Three Moroccan women, a man from Burundi, two Syrian-Kurdish families and a young Afghan man mentioned during interviews that these events had been very important for them to build a social network in the city and to feel at home. One family migrant, having arrived around 2014 gave testimony of the marital violence that she had been living in previous years and mentioned that it was thanks to the social contacts that she was able to build during French language classes offered by the local CPAS, that she was able to voice her problems and to get help from social service providers and friends. We thus see that civil society initiatives are of importance in the type C and D localities to give a counterweight to the experience of exclusion that post-2014 migrants at times experience in public space.

Nevertheless, also in the localities where serendipitous encounters were easier to happen, encounters fostered by civil society organisations were considered important⁴⁸. In the type

⁴⁶ Quote from interview B2-D-1

⁴⁷ Quote from interview B2-D-3.

⁴⁸ There might be a bias in the sense that many of our respondents were contacted through these civil society organisations. Most of our respondents were aware of the work of civil society organisations and were in contact with them. Considering the recruitment process, they might have a more positive stands towards the work of civil society organisations. Another important factor to consider is that interviews were at times conducted in the rooms of civil society organisations.



B locality, various migrants mentioned that it was **not very hard for them to enter into contact with long-term residents**. Firstly, many migrants mentioned to have a good contact with their Belgian neighbours, who at times helped them with certain issues related to their settlement. Still, many also mentioned that these interactions remained quite superficial. It was, however, through **civil society initiatives that deeper and stable bonds, or more lasting friendships between post-2014 migrants and long-term residents, as well as amongst long-term residents could be created**. A man from Yemen of 28 years old living in the type B locality explains that he has been able to develop meaningful relationships with long-term residents, and to form strong friendships with other migrants mainly thanks to two initiatives. Firstly, the man often spends time at the Welcoming home [*Onthaalhuis*], which was opened in 2019, and which serves as a space where young refugees can spend time to cook together, relax, take language courses, and have access to social service providers. Moreover, the Yemeni man reflects on the importance of volunteering work for him to be able to forge meaningful connections with long-term residents:

“Refu-interim [a project that organises volunteering opportunities for refugees] or the Welcoming home [Onthaalhuis] are initiatives in this city that allow us to mix with the local community. When people like us [migrants] are involved in a project, volunteer, or work in, say, the hospitality industry, then I see that people approach us more easily. But just starting a conversation with somebody here without a context is very difficult. They don't know anything about my history or background, they don't know anything about what Yemen is. If we get to know each other through a project, then it is easier for both sides. It is through these initiatives that trust is created, and in these occasions that people from [name city] will talk to me⁴⁹.”

A man of 30 years old from Iran⁵⁰, and a woman of 25 years old from Turkey⁵¹, both highly educated in their country of origin, equally speak of the extent to which the initiatives of civil society organisations, especially those organising volunteering opportunities for refugees, have been vital for them to foster a social network and a group of friends in the type B locality⁵². A Turkish woman without any secondary education with three children equally speaks of the way in which civil society organisations have helped her to build a social network:

“We have gotten a lot of help in [name locality]. We have received Dutch classes, got the opportunity to volunteer at cultural festivals, and we receive a lot of help with the homework of the children. This last organisation also organises a lot of parties and city trips. Through them I have gotten to know friends. Often also mothers coming from different countries⁵³.”

⁴⁹ Quote from the focus group in the type B locality.

⁵⁰ Interviewee B2-B-2

⁵¹ Interviewee B2-B-4

⁵² Interviews B2-B-2 & B2-B-4

⁵³ Interview B2-B-3



3.2. Value of socio-demographic/ideational-political/governance/spatial dimensions/factors in understanding social interactions between post-2014 migrants and long-term residents and experiences of inclusion and exclusion

In this sub-section, we try to understand the differentiated experiences of inclusion and exclusion of post-2014 migrants across the different localities, as well as their different experiences regarding interactions with long-term residents. We observed that there is a more positive appreciation of the relations between post-2014 migrants and long-term residents as well as more positive experiences of inclusion in the type A and B localities versus the type C and D localities. We will analyse how the following factors contributed to understanding these differences.

First, we evaluate the role of what can be called 'social factors', namely individual socio-demographic features as well as meso-level social factors, in particular the presence or absence of civil society support. Second, we will look at ideational-political factors, and particularly a set of factors connected to discourse in relation to immigration, mainly in the local press and individual expressions of long-term residents; the political colour of the local government, as well as political mobilization (both pro-and anti-migrant). Thirdly, we study the importance of the governance dimension, that is the impact of housing, the labour market, and specific immigrant integration policies and practices, and their implementation at the local level, on post-2014 migrants' experiences. And finally, we also study the importance of the spatial dimension in understanding positive social interactions, as well as the extent to which post-2014 migrants experience inclusion or exclusion. When referring to the spatial dimension, we focus on the specificity of smaller cities (as no rural areas were studied in Belgium) compared to larger cities, but also on local socio-economic determinants and on spatial proximity/dispersal at the local level. Based on the fieldwork in the four localities, we will discuss the way in which these conditions foster or hinder experiences of inclusion of post-2014 migrants during the first stage of settlement. We note that a combination of these conditions render the extent to which experiences of inclusion or exclusion are experienced by post-2014 migrants at the local level, and the extent to which positive social relations can arise at the local level, very diverse.

3.2.1. The socio-demographic factors

Individual socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, country of origin, class, religion) are of great importance in understanding processes of inclusion. These individual characteristics largely affect the ways in which people can get access to services and feel accepted at the local level. Secondly, also group-level social factors (in particular the presence or absence of support networks and civil society organisations) determine the extent to which post-2014 migrants experience inclusion at the local level.



Firstly, the question of **gender, at the intersection with religion**, was commonly mentioned by post-2014 migrants as one that affected the way in which they were able to socially integrate into the locality and the extent to which they felt accepted. The local approach towards the public display of religious (and particularly Muslim) symbols was very diverse in the four different localities. **In the type D locality**, migrant women gave testimony of how them **wearing a veil affected their access to services in the city** as well as the extent to which they felt accepted in public spaces. Notably, several Muslim women partaking in the focus group discussion noted that wearing a burkini was not allowed at all in the public swimming pool of the city, and local schools prohibited girls from wearing the veil. Furthermore, wearing the veil was also perceived by the women participating in the focus group in the type D locality to evoke racist remarks in public space⁵⁴, as we have exemplified in the previous section.

In the other Flemish town, the type B locality, and the two Walloon localities, the type A and C localities, on the other hand, the public display of religious symbols such as veils is not approached in the same way. None of the migrant women wearing a headscarf that we interviewed mentioned that the veil impeded them from getting access to public services or that they had received comments on wearing the veil in public space. A Moroccan woman in her 20s living in the type A locality and wearing a veil mentioned that:

“There too we have friends in Flanders, and she found it very difficult to find a job and that because she is veiled. She said she had been denied on several occasions to work because she wears the veil. Here [in the type A locality], I have never experienced anything alike. There are plenty of stores that accept their workers to wear a veil, that accept refugees, that give women like me a contract⁵⁵.”

This discrepancy in the approach towards the veil at the local level shows that the politicization of migration, and especially of Muslim migration, affects the way in which people might or might not be accepted based on identity traits. Indeed, people of non-Maghrebi origin interviewed in the type D locality experienced far less discrimination in the public domain. Two post-2014 family migrants (one from Peru and one from Belarus) interviewed in the type D locality noted that they had never experienced racist remarks in public space, even if they also mentioned to have felt isolated and mentioned that at times, they found it hard to make social contacts with long-term residents in the small town. Moreover, the data previously presented show that **gender and religiosity** are two socio-demographic factors that affect the ways in which people can experience inclusion into a town, this also depending on the extent to which migration is politicized at the local level (and especially Muslim migrants), as we explain in the next section.

⁵⁴ Information retrieved from the focus group in the type D locality.

⁵⁵ Quote from interview B2-A-4.



Secondly, the education background of the post-2014 migrants influences the extent to which they are able to participate economically and socially. Migrants with a university degree, and especially those who are trained in practical domains (in the domain of engineering or programming, for example, in which language difficulties are not as important because of the practicality of the working field) generally have easier access to jobs than migrants who have a diploma in more country-specific domains, or in careers that require the local language to be spoken (e.g., law or nursing diploma's). Highly-skilled migrants with a diploma in practical domains were especially able to find jobs in the type B locality, where there are more highly-skilled jobs available in relation to the university. Moreover, there are an above average number of jobs available in the high-technological sectors. Easily finding a job also means that this group of post-2014 migrants is able to find housing more easily⁵⁶. In fact, more than ethnic discrimination, post-2014 migrants from the four localities noted that discrimination on the housing market also appears in relation to the source of income. More particularly, several respondents mentioned that there was discrimination on the housing market against people receiving a living allowance from the local centre for public welfare (OCMW in Flanders or CPAS in Wallonia). In many cases, discrimination on the housing market based on the source of income also led to people not being able to work, as one needs an official residence address to receive a work contract and vice versa. Several post-2014 migrants mentioned that this type of vicious cycle had affected their potential of settling in Belgian society and how this process had also led to social isolation.⁵⁷

The combination of discrimination on the basis of one's source of income and ethno-racial origin proves to be the most problematic for new migrants trying to find housing in all four Belgian localities. Other highly educated post-2014 migrants, however, mentioned to have not been able to find a job according to their previous experiences and level of education. Several post-2014 migrants mentioned to have been pushed into badly paid and low-skilled jobs and did not succeed in validating their diploma or were not invited to interviews in the type of jobs they had practised in their country of origin (examples are post-2014 migrants in the field of marketing (interview B2-C-4), history and archology (focus group type A locality), and nursing (focus group type C locality)) even if they feel that they could take on jobs much better aligned with their previous experiences. Moreover, people with practical diploma's or skills are equally not able to find jobs according to their skills and previous experiences. A Syrian woman in the type A locality notes that:

“Take my husband. He speaks perfect English, and now also French. In two years, he spoke very well French. He is a professional programmer! And where does he work now? Picking up rubbish off the street. He has been looking for over 4 years to find another job. He handed out his CV to all companies here [in the type A locality]. He was refused because he is a refugee! In the end he just decided to work cleaning up the streets because he needs to earn enough working days to get the Belgian nationality. He needs to work 468 full days for that. Now he is working through the article 60

⁵⁶ Interviews B2-B-3 & B2-B-4.

⁵⁷ Information retrieved from focus groups in the type C and D localities.



measure⁵⁸ at the CPAS. Once he can get the nationality, he might have better job opportunities. But for him it is so stressful because he does not want to do the job that he is doing. In our country (Syria) he worked in communication and logistics of an enterprise for over 10 years. He has more than enough experience!⁵⁹

Furthermore, **the trap of volunteering work** has also been mentioned by several respondents in the type D locality. On the one hand, volunteering was often appreciated by refugees and post-2014 migrants in the type B and D localities as experiences that allowed respondents to make friends and to feel part of the local community⁶⁰. On the other hand, respondents in the type D locality mentioned that they felt not to be able to get a “real job”, and to be stuck in volunteering posts with a social integration income⁶¹.

Lastly, **age** also plays **an important role in the extent to which migrants can socially integrate at the local level**. Young migrants often find new contacts through school and are generally able to forge social relationships much more easily than older migrants, who often feel isolated, struggle to master the new language, and are consequently unable to take on a career, which at times means that they are further isolated and unable to learn the language. Whilst civil society organisations often offer volunteering opportunities and language tables or other social events in which also older migrants can participate, we find that there are more services organised for younger refugees or migrants. **Older migrants are less on the radar of the local governments and civil society organisations**. An Asian refugee in his early 50s and trained as a historian and archaeologist reflected on the reasons why it is so hard for him to find a job:

“It is too difficult to start working. You need very, very good French. And I don’t understand! I might not be perfect in French, but I can drive well, for example. I drive for over 20 years, why can I not start working as a driver and learn French whilst working? Why do I have to stay at home? On top of that my age is a huge issue when I go looking for a job. For manual work, for example, employers prefer young people. So,

⁵⁸ Article 60 and Article 61 are a form of social assistance that allows the public centres for social welfare to offer work to someone who has never been active in the labour market or who has been inactive for a longer period. The public centres for social welfare conclude a contract with an organisation to hire long-term unemployed people for a fixed period. To be able to conclude a contract within the framework of Article 60, the employee must simultaneously fulfil the following conditions: 1) receive an integration income or equivalent financial social support; 2) be registered in the population register or the register of foreigners; 3) not be entitled to full unemployment benefits. The employee then receives an employment contract with the CPAS or OCMW, which puts him/her at the disposal of the external employer. This form of social employment offers the opportunity to gain professional experience, but also to open or reopen the employee’s entitlement to unemployment benefits at the end of the contract and to be (re)integrated at the professional level. The employment contract is for a fixed term (minimum 1 year and maximum 2 years) and as a rule for 30 hours a week. The article 60 and 61 measures are not specifically targeted at refugees and migrants. However, in practice, **a lot of refugees and migrants do resort to this measure to get a foot into the Belgian labour market**, whilst being able to receive social benefits from the public centre for social welfare.

⁵⁹ Interviews B2-C-5 & B2-C-6 & B2-D-4.

⁶⁰ Information retrieved from interviews B2-B-1 and B2-D-4.

⁶¹ Information retrieved out of the focus group held in the type D locality.



it is very difficult. There are not so many enterprises which are willing to hire older people⁶²!”

We also note that initiatives that help refugees to integrate often focus on helping young people. In the type B locality, for example, the initiatives working on labour market integration or social network activities are targeted towards young refugees. The integrated trajectory set up (a one-year orientation course with intensive Dutch language, maths and IT classes as well as professional orientation) by the local public centre for social welfare (OCMW) was, for example, created to assist young, or unaccompanied migrants arriving in the type B locality to orient and to follow a training in line with their previous experiences and interests. Furthermore, the reception home, opened in 2019 by the local government of the type B locality, focuses on providing a space of encounter for “young” refugees (up to 30 years old more or less). Moreover, **in the type D locality**, a civil society organisation working in close collaboration with the local government has set up labour market integration assistance for young people, as well as for migrant women. The assistance concerned, for example, the writing of a CV, classes to get a driving license, and the organisation of networking events with potential employers. The coordinator of this labour insertion project in the type D locality mentioned that focusing on young people has the advantage that they are able to work for longer in the future. This “investment” was seen to be more remunerative for the locality, struggling with high unemployment rates⁶³.

3.2.2. The ideational/political dimension

The ideational-political dimension analyses a set of factors connected to discourse in relation to immigration: the framing of migration, asylum, and integration in public and political discourse. The extent to which migration becomes polarised is influenced by the political ideology of local government, the extent to which a political leader surges polarisation on migration, as well as political mobilization (both pro-and anti-migrant). In this section, we investigate the ways in which the ideational-political dimension at the local level fosters or hinders migrant experiences of inclusion or exclusion. In the Belgian context, the extent to which the politicisation of migration plays out at the local level is very much related to the regional context. Since the late 1980s, the **greater politicisation of migration-related issues due to the electoral success of the extreme-right is present in the whole of Flanders (Adam and Xhardez, 2023). Still, the extent to which migration is perceived as a problem, or rather as an added value to the locality, is quite distinct across the Flemish localities. The different presence of anti-immigration politicisation in Flanders and Wallonia also influences local press, local discourses and local policies, as well as regional immigrant integration policies implemented at the local level.**

⁶² Quote from focus group in the type A locality.

⁶³ Interview B-D-3.



Among the four cities studied, it is only the type D locality (one of the two Flemish localities studied) that has known outspoken anti-migrant protests, strongly focused on Muslims. These were organised by the local branch of the extreme-right *Vlaams Belang* party. The protests were more specifically organised at the opening of mosques in this small city. Whilst the local government of the type D locality does to a certain extent invest in spreading the image of an inclusive city identity (especially the alderman of the green party), the other local coalition parties mostly focus on the individual responsibility of migrants to integrate into the receiving society. *Vlaams Belang* captured over 20% of votes in this locality in 2019, and regularly distributes local pamphlets with anti-migrant discourse in the inhabitants' mailboxes, as well as via social media.

The question of 'ethnic clothing' and public appearance of Muslims (not always migrants, many are long-term residents or citizens) was one that came up in several interviews with members of the local government of the type D locality or the *Vlaams Belang* politician, as an aspect that could impede the social integration of what they would call 'migrants'. The respondents in question maintained that wearing clothing of the receiving society showed that 'migrants' are willing to integrate, and that making the choice to dress in the same way as one did in one's country of origin, thus, displayed a lack of disposition to adapt to the receiving society⁶⁴. Post-2014 migrants interviewed in the type D locality, in turn, mentioned that they were often publicly dispraised and yelled at in public spaces because of the way they dressed. Especially Muslim women wearing the veil said to have received openly racist remarks in public spaces (in the street, on the beach or in the public swimming pool). The way in which women wearing the veil were publicly treated was the topic that most frequently came up during the interviews and the focus group held in the type D locality. The politicisation, not so much of migration, but of the expression of Muslim symbols in public space thus seems to clearly influence the experiences of inclusion and exclusion of newcomers in the type D locality.

The politicisation of migration was strongly resented by participants in the focus group. A woman in her 50s with Syrian and Belgian origin who moved to the type D locality in 2015 after the outbreak of the war notes:

"I often hear people saying that here in the social grocer: 'I don't feel safe in this country. Do you see them on the street [talking about Muslim people]? Do you call this a safe country? Or if they see someone who wear a headscarf then they would say what are you doing here in this country? They look down on these people, spit on them"⁶⁵.

In the other Flemish locality, the **type B locality**, on the other hand, the local government strongly fosters a **local discourse and policy of multiculturalism**. The question of wearing certain clothing or religious symbols in public space was not questioned by the local government. Rather, ethnic expressions, be it religious, cultural, culinary, or vestimentary are promoted by the local government, which funds ethnic associations, public ethnic festivities,

⁶⁴ Interviews B-D-15 & B-D-16.

⁶⁵ Quote from focus group in the type D locality.



and religious spaces. Post-2014 migrants interviewed, for their part, mentioned to generally feel accepted in the public spaces, and **did not give accounts of discrimination regarding their clothing or appearance**. The absence or presence of strong welcoming multicultural discourses and policies versus the presence of radical-right opposition to ethnic diversity thus seem to correlate with more positive or negative experiences of local inclusion by migrants in the context of Flanders.

In Wallonia, migration is less politicised than in Flanders (Adam, 2013). This was also discernible at the local levels. In **the type A locality**, there was a hands-off approach towards immigrant integration and the question of migration⁶⁶. In this small town, the cultural or religious expression of migrants has not been mentioned or politicised by members of the local government. There is no specific local discourse relating to immigration and related to ethnic diversity. Our respondents did not express experiences of negative discourses, although there were a few accounts of post-2014 migrants to have felt discriminated against by city employees. **Most post-2014 migrants interviewed mentioned that they experienced inclusion in the locality**. The solidarity of locals was often mentioned as one factor that improved their sense of inclusion. The local government of the **type C locality**, on the other hand, took a stronger position regarding the presence of migrants, mentioning that they were part of the ‘DNA of the city’. This means that the overall discourse regarding migrants is one of acceptance of diversity. **This public discourse, however, does not seem to have been sufficient to foster positive social interactions in public space or the experience of inclusion by post-2014 migrants**. Other dimensions, such as the governance dimension (a lack of engagement in immigrant integration initiatives by the local government and the lack of specific services for migrants such as language courses), the spatial dimension, and more general conditions of the city (such as little employment opportunities) hindered migrant experiences of inclusion.

3.2.3. The governance dimension

When looking at the factors that influence migrants’ experiences of inclusion at the local level, their decision to remain living in the locality or leave is closely related to the local governance dimension on integration. More specifically, the impact of housing, labour market, and specific immigrant integration policies and practices, and their implementation at the local level affects post-2014 migrants’ experiences and social interactions.

First and foremost, **well-maintained housing** is an important dimension that affects post-2014 migrants’ experiences of inclusion. In Belgium (in both Flanders and Wallonia), there is a blatant lack of policies and clear responsibilities for long-term accommodation for refugees. The reception policies for asylum seekers are organised by the federal government. Once recognised as refugees, the regions are responsible for immigrant integration policies and housing policies, including social housing. However, Belgium is known for its **very low share**

⁶⁶ See the WP3 report for the Whole-COMM project; Hantson, Westerveen, Adam (2022), “Immigrant integration in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas: local policies and policymaking relations in Belgium”: https://whole-comm.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2_Belgium.pdf



of social housing in comparison to other countries⁶⁷. In Flanders, the share of social housing in relation to the total housing market is 5.6 %, in Wallonia 5.3 %, and in the Brussels-Capital region 7% (figures at the end of 2015; source: Anfrie & Gobert, 2016). This is very low compared to, for instance, the Netherlands where the share of social housing in relation to the total housing market is 34,1%¹ and to France, where the share of social housing in relation to the total housing market is 18,7 %.

On top of this relatively low housing share in Belgium, there are **no particular social housing systems in place for refugees** in Belgium. Knowing that ethnic discrimination in the rental market is high⁶⁸, refugees are thus disproportionately impacted by the lack of a substantial social housing policy. Moreover, in the existing social housing policy, they are legally discriminated. In comparison to nationals, migrants have to comply with certain conditions **to get access to social housing**. Since 2017, new social tenants must prove linguistic knowledge of Dutch at level A1 of the European Framework of Reference for Languages (ERK). The social tenant must demonstrate that they have attained language level A1 of the ERK for Dutch within one year of the start of the tenancy agreement. Social housing agents are responsible for taking these **language tests**. At the same time, the Flemish government also imposes other obligations on social tenants. Social tenants are, for instance, **required to register with the VDAB** (the Flemish employment agency) **as a job-seeker in order to get access to social housing**.

The access to social housing in Flanders has also become stricter on other fronts. From January 2023 onwards, the Flemish government plans to merge Flemish social housing companies and social rental offices into one Flemish housing company, which means that there will be an adjustment in the allocation criteria for social housing. Now social housing companies (which

⁶⁷ (Figure of 2016). Source: http://www.armoedebestrijding.be/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/cijfers_sociale_huisvesting.pdf, consulted on 6/5/2022.

⁶⁸ Results of a nation-wide survey in 2014 show that there are “important discrimination rates against rental candidates with North African or Sub-Saharan African names. In 23% of cases, male North African and female Sub-Saharan names were unfavourably treated in comparison with male French names. The percentage drops to 21% for male Sub-Saharan names and 12% for female North African names. Besides ethnic origin, the source of income is another important ground of discrimination. Candidates with unemployment benefits were rejected 30% more than with a similar income from paid wage.” Furthermore, recent study also shows that municipal socio-economic composition matters as well. Martinello, finds, housing discrimination higher in predominantly white neighbourhoods in Belgium. As soon as more than 30% of a neighbourhood is made up of ethnic minorities, discrimination decreases.



build and renovate social housing and manage that patrimony themselves) allocate houses and apartments chronologically, whilst social rental agencies (which rent housing on the private market and re-let it), allocate according to people's housing need, which is organised by a point system. People who have the highest housing need, or have most chance of becoming homeless will move up on the waiting list and get faster access to social rental housing. Having children is also a criterion that increases one's chance of being allocated housing from the social rental agencies. **With the planned merger of the two agencies, however, the points system according to the highest housing need will be abolished. Instead, the Flemish government intends to give priority to people who have a 'local connection'.** Applicants for social housing will from 2023 onwards need to demonstrate to have had an uninterrupted connection to the municipality in which they apply for social housing for at least 5 years in the previous 10-year period⁶⁹. Only in a very limited number of cases this condition will be overlooked. **The local connection requirement will most likely cause increasing difficulties for newcomers to obtain social housing in Flanders, as well as for other tenants in a precarious situation. Migrants access to housing is thus hindered by unlawful ethnic discrimination on the rental market (Verhaegen, 2017), but they are also unequal in front of the law who sets higher access criteria for new residents than for long-term residents in the already very limited social housing.**

This different access to housing for migrants often leads to precarious housing conditions and interrupted, insecure housing pathways for refugees. Indeed, the greatest obstacle to social integration mentioned by our respondents was the housing situation. Many refugees interviewed as well as migrants with different residence permits mentioned that the lack of affordable, well-maintained housing and the long periods, for months sometimes years on end, to find a stable housing situation, meant that they were unable to settle emotionally, to start building a social network, or to work on other aspects in their lives.

At the local level, some actors jump in to fill this policy gap, such as local governments, civil society actors or migrant communities. The local government of the type B locality has taken the most active stance on battling obstacles for refugees on the housing market, notably by working to combat discrimination from real estate agencies through sensibilisation campaigns. Moreover, the local governments of the type B locality set up programs to fight slumlordism and bad housing conditions by renovating housing, as a response to abuses of the most vulnerable tenants on the local housing market⁷⁰. These efforts have, however, also contributed to housing having become far more expensive, with the (unintended) effect of pushing migrants and refugees out of the city, as many of them are unable to pay the rent after renovations have been completed. **Because of the housing scarcity both on the private market as well as for social housing, anti-discrimination measures by local governments seem necessary, so that migrants are not so strongly disadvantaged compared to long-term**

⁶⁹ Source: <https://sociaal.net/achtergrond/hervorming-sociale-huur-duwt-mensen-in-handen-van-huisjesmelkers/>, consulted on September 19th 2022.

⁷⁰ Information retrieved from interview B-B-2.



residents. However, only anti-discrimination policies are insufficient to counter the difficult access to housing of migrants.

In 2015, the type D locality has started similar projects as the type B locality (also located in Flanders) focused on renovating housing in the city. Whilst these renovations intend to improve housing conditions for the inhabitants, they are slowly but surely raising the housing prices. In the Walloon type A locality, housing was equally mentioned by all the respondents as the main issue affecting their ability to settle in the locality and impeding them from feeling “established” in the town or to focus on other aspects of their lives, such as making friends⁷¹. In the type C locality, post-2014 migrants especially mentioned issues of unhealthy housing situations, with mould and humidity, and the lack of spacious housing, as well as discrimination on the housing market as affecting their experience of inclusion in the city. **A large part of the interviews in the four cities thus shows that the lack of adequate housing and discrimination on the housing market impedes migrants’ experience of inclusion at the local level.**

A second 'governance factor' of particular importance is the local approach towards immigrant integration as well as the local practices applied by non-governmental actors. Our respondents perceived the following factors as important for fostering positive experiences of inclusion: the opportunity to engage in volunteering work (in the type B and D localities, and to a lesser extent in the type C locality); the organisation of buddy projects (i.e. long-term residents who assist newcomers in the process of settling in the town) (in the type B and D localities); the availability of a space to meet up and engage in activities (in all four localities). These spaces include, for example, a welcoming home in the type B locality, or neighbourhood spaces (offered by the local government, social service providers, or civil society organisations).

3.2.4. The spatial dimension

In many EU countries, national dispersal policies have been used not only to distribute reception tasks for refugees and, in a less migrants across the national territory (Boswell 2003) but also to compensate for depopulation trends in small and medium sized towns and rural areas (SMSTRAs). In Belgium, however, no strict dispersal mechanisms for recognised refugees have been installed after the asylum procedure has come to an end. Recognised refugees can thus choose where to settle in the country. Nevertheless, **“indirect dispersal mechanisms”, imposed through the allocation to a reception centre in peripheral areas during the asylum procedure** do limit the movement of refugees and fix their arrivals outside of large urban centres in the first period after their arrival (El Moussawi & Schuermans 2020: 12). This might

⁷¹ Information retrieved from a participant in the focus group in the type A locality.



influence where refugees choose to settle in the long term⁷². On top of that, also other mechanisms, such as exclusion and discrimination on the housing market, and the different language in the Belgian region can restrict migrants' access to certain localities and neighbourhoods.

In Belgium, the place of settlement of migrants is not formally imposed by any level of government and that there are no strict dispersal policies in place for recognised refugees. This is different in other neighbouring countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany, where refugees are directly dispersed. In this context, we noted that by far the smallest and least connected locality of the four cases, the type A locality, became a sort of pass-through town for refugees, who commonly choose to move to larger cities after their asylum procedure has come to an end. Most asylum seekers having resided in the asylum centre just outside of the type A locality chose to settle in larger, and better-connected towns, this for various reasons, such as the presence of migrant communities, or labour market opportunities. One respondent of the type D locality had resided in the asylum centre in the type A locality and mentioned to have chosen to move to the type D locality because there were people from his home country in the town that he knew from before. These contacts also helped him to find housing. Another reason mentioned by this respondent was that he had heard that there were more work opportunities in Flanders⁷³.

This account is exemplary for many people. Most refugees and migrants interviewed chose to settle in a town where they already had contacts from their country of origin, other migrants, or friends made in the asylum centre, who commonly helped in the process of finding housing. In fact, migrant communities and "arrival neighbourhoods" (urban areas with a high number of migrants) have proven to be of crucial importance for migrants to settle in Belgium (Schillebeeckx, 2016)., especially in light of the lack of policy on long-term housing for refugees, but also in the circulation of crucial information, labour market opportunities, and access to services. However, neighbourhoods where there is a high concentration of migrants are very differently experienced by different post-2014 migrants. One Syrian-Kurdish refugee living in the type C locality complained about the fact that there were "nearly no Belgians" in the area where he and his family lived and argued that this "impedes them from learning the language and from feeling socially integrated⁷⁴":

"In the neighbourhood where we live you only find Moroccan people, Turks, and people from Arabic-speaking countries. There are no Belgians around, and I never have the opportunity to meet someone from Belgium and to practice my French. I would love to move to a place where there are more Belgians so I could practice the language and to be able to make Belgian friends. The fact that I don't speak French also means that I

⁷² This especially when we consider that the asylum procedure can take months and even years. During this time, refugees will already have started to learn the language of the region, which makes their move across the linguistic frontier of the country harder.

⁷³ Interview B2-B-1.

⁷⁴ Quote from interview B2-C-5.



cannot get a job, which then again has a lot of consequences for myself and my family⁷⁵”.

Another Syrian-Kurdish woman living in the same area in the type C locality, however, mentioned that she and her family were able to make a lot of friends. “I have Syrian friends, and my Italian neighbour at times comes over for dinner⁷⁶”. Another young man from Afghanistan with a refugee status notes that:

“In the apartment block where I live half of the people are from Belgium, half of them are migrants. People say hi and are generally kind, but I never really talk to them more than that. Most of my friends here I met in the asylum centre, some of them also Afghans. We shared the same rooms, the same lives. We were able to share stories. That created a deep bond between us. I am happy to have some of those friends here. Before I wanted to leave for Flanders, but now I feel good here. I know people, and I know the city. I no longer feel new here. I do hope to move to the outskirts of the city in time, not to the centre. There is too much fuss over there. I would like to live in a calmer place once I will be able to buy a car.⁷⁷”

This type of racialized socio-economic disparities between neighbourhoods was thus not experienced in the same way by all post-2014 migrants interviewed. The presence of a pre-existing migrant community was nevertheless viewed as an important condition for people to have access to services and information. This especially during the first stage of settling in a new locality⁷⁸. In fact, many post-2014 respondents mentioned to have found their housing thanks to the help of somebody from their community, through other migrants or people they met at the asylum centre or in the city of arrival (Interviews B2-D-B-1, B2-D-1, B2-D-2, B2-D-5, B2-C-6). Furthermore, several interviewees mentioned to have forged meaningful relations with other migrants, and how this made them feel included. The presence of a worship community⁷⁹, ethnic associations, or pro-migrant groups were mentioned by respondents across the four localities as important in fostering experiences of inclusion. These accounts are in line with research on social integration. In the work of Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019: 124), for example, we read that “different types of social relations, often formed with other migrants of various national backgrounds, can change a newcomer’s course of settlement, and that migrant might be well embedded within migrant social networks, which sometimes enable pathways into housing or work”.

⁷⁵ Quote from interview B2-C-5.

⁷⁶ Quote from interview B2-C-6.

⁷⁷ Quote from interview B2-C-7.

⁷⁸ Interviews B2-B-1, B2-D-1 & B2-D-2.

⁷⁹ Interviewee B2-C-7 & B2-D-1.

4. Impact of Ukrainian refugee crisis on social interactions, individual attitudes, and integration experiences in SMsTRa's

The Russian military invasion of the Ukraine in February 2022 caused massive displacement of civilians. In Belgium, as is the case in other EU countries, Ukrainian refugees have been received through the temporary protection scheme⁸⁰. The beneficiaries of temporary protection have the right to a **residence permit** for the entire duration of the protection (which can last from one year to three years). They also have access to appropriate **information on temporary protection offered in Ukrainian** and guarantees for access to the **asylum procedure**. In addition, they have access to **employment**, subject to rules applicable to the profession and to national labour market policies and general conditions of employment. Finally, they have access to suitable **accommodation or housing**, access to **social welfare** or means of subsistence, if necessary, access to **medical care**, as well as access to **education** for persons under 18 years to the state education system, **amongst other rights**⁸¹. **Whilst some rights granted to those who have access to the temporary protection status are the same as those offered to asylum seekers and refugees from other countries** (Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, Burundi, amongst others), such as the access to **medical care**, and access to **education**, other rights, such as the immediate access to the asylum procedure, employment, and suitable access to accommodation and housing, are not. Furthermore, a systematic housing **response** has been initiated at the Belgian federal level for Ukrainian refugees. In the first three months of the influx of Ukrainian refugees, more than 10,000 housing spaces have been made available in Belgium following the request from Sammy Mahdi (i.e. the federal secretary of state for asylum between October 1st 2021 and June 28th 2022) for residents and municipalities to offer temporary shelter. Flanders, moreover, built 15 emergency villages for Ukrainian refugees⁸² and financially supports municipalities that host Ukrainian refugees⁸³. This stands in strong contrast to the response

⁸⁰ Temporary protection is an exceptional measure to provide immediate and temporary protection in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of displaced persons from non-EU countries who are unable to return to their country of origin. Source: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en, consulted on October 26th, 2022.

⁸¹ See the full list of rights to beneficiaries of the temporary protection scheme: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en.

⁸² Source: <https://www.tijd.be/dossiers/oorlog-in-oekraïne/vlaanderen-bouwt-15-minidorpen-voor-oekraïense-vluchtelingen/10372792.html>, consulted on 3/6/2022.

⁸³ Flanders has already decided to give 1,000 euros to local authorities per place that they make available for at least three months. The intention is that Flanders will now also give 500 euros per place - not directly, but via the municipalities - for the reception of children in private homes. Source: <https://www.tijd.be/dossiers/oorlog-in-oekraïne/vlaanderen-bouwt-15-minidorpen-voor-oekraïense-vluchtelingen/10372792.html>, consulted on 4/6/ 2022.



regarding long-term housing for other recognised refugees in Belgium. No governance level is responsible to provide long-term accommodation for refugees once the asylum procedure has come to an end.

Nevertheless, whilst the initial reaction to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees was highly coordinated in Belgium, with a much more effective response for housing than for other refugees, in the past month this housing response has started to stock. Some reception centres have also closed their doors in the past months. Many Ukrainian refugees reside in transitory accommodation centres that were opened by Fedasil. Only half of the requests for emergency accommodation by Ukrainian refugees is supplied by the federal Fedasil, in charge of the emergency accommodation⁸⁴. There are too little spaces available in reception facilities, which makes that many Ukrainians have to find other solutions. Some look for accommodation on the private rental markets, many also went back to Ukraine. Others choose to look for accommodation in other countries of the EU where there are still spaces available. For many Ukrainian refugees, accommodation centres or transition houses, often lacking the required infrastructure for a long-term accommodation, have become permanent housing given the lack of other spaces⁸⁵. Also, for other applicants for asylum there is a poignant shortage in spaces in reception centres in Belgium. This has left many single men, and in the month of October 2022 also families, without a roof above their heads.

All four small and medium-sized Belgian towns have been involved in the reception and settlement of Ukrainian refugees. In the focus group discussions in the type A and D localities, the reception of Ukrainians was a topic of discussion. In the type A locality one Ukrainian woman took part in the focus group discussion. Both the Ukrainian respondent as well as the other respondents mentioned the positive response from the local community. This was not perceived as impeding the access to resources for other refugees or long-term residents⁸⁶.

In the focus group in the Flemish type D locality, on the other hand, the reception of Ukrainian and other refugees was hotly debated. One long-term resident mentioned that several people had to leave their social housing because they had to be cleared for Ukrainian refugees. We did not find any data that confirmed these accounts. On another account, this respondent mentioned that this “preferential treatment”, was unfair to other people living in poverty. In addition, Ukrainian refugees receiving information in their native language was perceived as unfair, because other refugees or newcomers only receive information in Dutch by the municipality. This especially since information dissemination to newcomers was perceived as a problem affecting migrants in the type D locality⁸⁷. Another long-term resident in the focus group, who also works for the local government of the type D locality, mentioned that these “preferential” decisions were taken by the EU and the Belgian federal government, and that the city was not responsible for them. Nevertheless, it was the local government of the type

⁸⁴ According to the account of an employee of the Red Cross, of all Ukrainians arriving to Belgium only about a third request emergency accommodation. Source: https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20221010_97544609, consulted on the 31st of October, 2022.

⁸⁵ Source: https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20221023_97633593, consulted on October 31st, 2022.

⁸⁶ Information retrieved from the focus group in the type A locality.

⁸⁷ Information retrieved from the focus group in the type D locality.



D locality that was blamed by the respondents, and mainly for the lack of services provided to people in poverty.



5. Concluding remarks

In this report, we have discussed reciprocal interactions between post-2014 migrants and long-term residents as well as experiences of inclusion and exclusion of post-2014 migrants across the four localities in Belgium. We have found that **in the type A and B localities post-2014 migrants experience have more positive experiences of inclusion and social interactions than in the type C and D localities**. In these localities, post-2014 migrants more often mentioned to feel excluded and to find it harder to interact with long-term residents. One of the key differences between the type A and B localities versus the type C and D localities is that in the type A and B localities a large number of post-2014 migrants mentioned to have experienced **bottom-up solidarity from long-term residents**. Several respondents mentioned that people had come to help them with practical issues without there being an intermediary organisation involved in stimulating the encounter. Still, several respondents in the type A locality, especially those who did not have members of their ethnic community present, mentioned that these interactions and experiences of solidarity did not lead to strong friendships. Out of the accounts of respondents (both post-2014 migrants and long-term residents) in the type B, C and D localities we learned that in many cases **civil society initiatives** set up initiatives that foster **deeper and more stable bonds, or more lasting friendships**. **These initiatives also contribute to positive experiences of inclusion**. In particular in the type B locality, the local government and civil society organizations are engaged in setting up spaces and activities that foster conviviality. Respondents in the type B locality mentioned that these initiatives had been of particular importance for them to create a group of friends and to feel at home in their city. In the type A locality, the local government is less engaged in setting up initiatives for migrants and long-term residents to meet. In this locality, pro-migrant organizations take the initiative to set up such encounters.

In the type C and D localities, positive experiences of inclusion and interactions were less experienced than in the type A and B localities. The local integration and housing governance, the spatial characteristics (the presence or absence of racialized socio-economic disparities between neighbourhoods), and ideational dimensions (the extent to which migration was politicized at the local level) are of importance to understand the factors that influence the diverging experiences across the Belgian localities. While positive social interactions do emerge in the type C and D localities, this is mostly when civil society actors, social services, or the local government takes the initiative to stimulate encounter. In addition, we have shown that the type C and D localities have in common that they are cities with bad housing conditions and with racialized socio-economic disparities between neighbourhoods. These two same localities are however characterized by diverging local political discourses on migration and integration. In the Walloon type C locality, a universalist and inclusive discourse is dominant, and it is governed by a leftist local government. In the Flemish type D locality, however, there is a polarized public discourse on migration, especially forwarded by the Vlaams Belang party. Moreover, in the type C locality, no anti-immigrant protests have taken place, whereas in the type D locality public protests against Muslim migrants have occasionally been organised. Despite these differences in local political migration discourses and anti-



immigrant mobilisation, the experiences of post-2014 migrants are similar in the type C and D localities in the sense that many respondents spoke of a feeling of isolation and exclusion. Nevertheless, in the type D locality, we observed more outspoken racist slandering in public spaces. In the type C locality, only one respondent mentioned to have received blatant racist remarks. Other respondents in the type C locality mentioned to have experienced more indirect racism, in the way in which people treat or look at them in public space. Furthermore, in the type C locality, feelings of unsafety together with racialized socio-economic disparities between neighbourhoods also led to migrants often experiencing exclusion. Unlike in the type C locality, in the type D locality the local government and civil society organisations have engaged in a more active way to counter the rising polarisation regarding migration in the city. Several civil society organisations have set up volunteering opportunities, multicultural encounters, and other events to foster experiences of inclusion. These activities or platforms can temper the negative experienced caused by the difficult structural conditions and/or the racist political climate. Several post-2014 migrants interviewed mentioned to have felt much more welcome in the type C and D localities because of these initiatives, and to have been able to build a social network thanks to these⁸⁸. Still, the structural and socio-political conditions keep on affecting the lives of post-2014 migrants interviewed in the two localities in question in a profound manner.

Furthermore, also socio-demographic variables influence experiences of inclusion by post-2014 migrants. More particularly, **the type of education received**, and **age** are important factors that influence the extent to which post-2014 migrants experience inclusion. Regarding socio-cultural capital we note that **post-2014 migrants with a university degree, and especially those with a diploma in a practical domain** (engineering or programming, for example) in which country-specific knowledge and language knowledge is not of great importance, generally have **easier access to the job market**. Access to the labour market, in turn, facilitates their housing opportunities as well as possibilities to create a social network⁸⁹. This was especially the case in the type B locality, where a lot of labour opportunities for highly skilled profiles are available in English due to the presence of higher education institutes and other enterprises. Yet, other highly educated post-2014 migrants brought up the difficulties involved in finding a job that is in line with their previous work experience and level of education. Several post-2014 migrants mentioned to have been pushed into badly paid and low-skilled jobs even if they feel that they could take on jobs much better aligned with their previous experiences. Furthermore, the trap of continuous volunteering has also been mentioned by several respondents, particularly in the type D locality. Whilst volunteering opportunities were often appreciated by refugees and post-2014 migrants in the type B and D localities as experiences that allowed respondents to make friends and to feel useful in society, respondents also mentioned that they felt **trapped in volunteering work** and without the possibility to get a job based on their acquired skills⁹⁰.

⁸⁸ Interviews B2-C-2, B2-C-4, B2-C-5, B-D-4, B2-D-

⁸⁹ Claim based on interview B2-B-2.

⁹⁰ Information retrieved from focus group in the type D locality.



Secondly, **age**, also plays **an important role in the extent to which post-2014 migrants can socially integrate at the local level**. Young migrants often find new contacts through school and are generally able to forge social relationships much more easily than older migrants. Older migrants interviewed in the four localities struggle to master the new language. This affects their potential of getting a job, which at times means that they become further isolated. Furthermore, we note that in all the four Belgian localities the Covid pandemic and the subsequent periods of quarantines and impediments to social contacts, has had an impact on the interactions between migrants and long-term residents, and on their potential to learn and practice Dutch or French. In the type B locality, the Covid pandemic seems to have had the lowest impact. The local government took the decision of not closing the reception home (*onthaalshuis*) for young refugees, which meant that they were able to keep on practicing their Dutch language skills and maintain social contacts, albeit with strict physical distance rules. Several respondents mentioned that the reception home remaining open during the quarantines had been important for them to not become socially isolated.

Lastly, based on our collected data, we have noted that the arrival of Ukrainian refugees was received differently in the four different localities. In the type D locality, the Ukrainian refugee crisis has a considerable impact on the experience of post-2014 migrants and on social relations more generally. Indeed, several post-2014 migrants and long-term residents with a low income mentioned that they felt that Ukrainian refugees were getting a preferential treatment, especially on the housing market, which left them feeling discriminated against. In the other three Belgian localities, the arrival of Ukrainian refugees was perceived less negatively and seems not to have affected social relations between long-term residents and post-2014 migrants, or amongst post-2014 migrants.



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ANNEX I Tables with information on interviews



Locality	Interview code	Number of interviewees	Gender	Country of origin	Age range	Year of arrival to the locality	Status
A	B2-A-1	1	Female	Netherlands (not a refugee or post-2014 migrant, interviewed because we only got to know this actor after the fieldwork for WP3 and WP4 had come to an end ⁹¹).	Early 60s	2015	EU resident
A	B2-A-2	1	Female	Moroccan	Late 30s	2021	In the process of asking for family reunification
A	B2-A-3	1	Female	Syrian		2014	Refugee status
A	B2-A-4	2	Male & Female	Syrian and Moroccan	Late 20s	Man arrived in 2014 in Belgium and in 2020 in the type A locality. Woman arrived in	Refugee status
A	B2-A-5	1	Male	Asian country	Early 50s	2016	The Syrian man refugee status, the Moroccan woman, family migrant
A	B2-A-6	1	Male	Asian country	Early 50s	2016	Refugee status
B	B2-B-1	1	Male	Somalia	Late 20s	2015 in Belgium, 2017 in the type B locality	Refugee status
B	B2-B-2	1	Male	Iran	Early 30s	Since 2018 in Belgium, since 2019 in the type B locality	Refugee status
B	B2-B-3	1	Female	Syria	Late 30	Since 2015 in Belgium, since 2017 in the type B locality.	Refugee status
B	B2-B-4	1	Female	Turkey	Mid 20s	Since 2020	Refugee status
B	B2-B-5	1	Female	Iran	Early 30s	Since 2020	Family migrant



B	B2-B-6	1	Male	Somalia	Late 20s	Since 2015	Refugee status
C	B2-C-1	1	Female	Algeria	Late 30s	2010	Family migrant (divorced)
C	B2-C-2	1	Female	Morocco	Late 40s	2020	Family migrant (divorced)
C	B2-C-3	1	Female	Morocco	Early 50s	2010	Family migrant (divorced)
C	B2-C-4	1	Male	Burundi	Early 30s	2020	Refugee status
C	B2-C-5	2	Male & Female	Syria	Husband and wife in their early 50s	2015	Refugee status
C	B2-C-6	2	Male & Female	Syria	Mother in her 50s, son 19 years old	2015	Refugee status
C	B2-C-7	1	Male	Afghanistan	Early 20s	2017	Refugee status
D	B2-D-1	1	Male	Sudan	Late 20s	2018	Refugee status
D	B2-D-2	1	Male	Afghanistan	Early 20s	2017	Refugee status
D	B2-D-3	1	Female	Belarus	Early 40s	2018	Family Migrant
D	B2-D-4	1	Female	Iraq	Early 50s	Unsure	Refugee status
D	B2-D-5	1	Female	Peru	Late 40s		Family migrant
D	B2-D-6	1	Female	Ukraine	Early 40s	2021	Refugee under the temporary protection scheme
D	B2-D-7	1	Female	Eritrea	Early 30s	2016	Family migrant (husband got refugee status)

⁹¹ This interviewee works as a volunteer in the nearby asylum center in the type 4 locality and set up, together with another woman, a pro-migrant group for migrant women in the type A locality.



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