

# Bonne Année

Local realities of migration:  
emotions, institutions,  
conflict and cooperation



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*Lille, Camp des Olieux.*

*Photo: Anne-Sophie Hourdeaux, Croix du Nord, 2016*

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## Acknowledgements

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This project would not have brought out such captivating stories had it not been for a number of project partners who accompanied us on our journey.

We would like to sincerely thank the Open Society Initiative For Europe (OSIFE) for their generous support. Our thanks also go to our Counterpoint associates in the different countries: particularly to Sabine Selchow, Marion Sevrin, Zoe Gorman and Edoardo Zavarella.

Finally, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the local partners in the cities we visited. They connected us with the various people who generously shared their stories, who opened their doors to us and invited us to learn about their experiences. Without them, their efforts and their generosity and frankness there would be no report.

### In particular we would like to thank:

Didier Michel of Association Louis Guilloux in Rennes

Jacques Darlot of Association Bienvenue! in Rennes

Bernard Barré of Secours Catholique in Rennes

Gloria Yabokou in Rennes

Gaston Debard and la CIMADE in Lille

L'École Supérieure de Journalisme de Lille

Christian de la Rocque in Lille

Clément Stellato in Lille

Marian Schreier from the city of Tengen

Liza Khan and Bülent Erdogan from Cologne, Kalk

Federico Tsucalas from Bologna

Leif Dahlin, Henrik Tornqvist and Christina Byström, together with their fellow church members from the church in Bergsjön, Gothenburg

AnnSofie Andersson and Annika Hermansson from Östersund

# Contents

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<b>Executive summary</b>	7
<b>Introduction</b>	11
<b>Case studies as stories</b>	19
<b>Sweden:</b> <i>National imaginary and local experience</i>	21
<b>France:</b> <i>Civil society in the République</i>	61
<b>Germany:</b> <i>The refugees are coming</i>	95
<b>Italy:</b> <i>Managing the crisis to challenge the system</i>	123
<b>Key insights for policy</b>	145



# Executive summary

‘Happy New Year 2016. Thank you for your support’ reads an improvised billboard posted by newcomers in front of their tented camp in the French city of Lille. Reading these heartfelt good wishes for the host community in a context of homelessness and despair might seem absurd – they move us, not least because they take us by surprise.

Over the past eighteen months, we delved into communities across Europe to explore their local and personal experiences of migration: of welcoming strangers to their communities, of successes, challenges and hopes. We asked members of these communities in France, Germany, Italy and Sweden questions they are not usually faced with, so that we might gain a more nuanced understanding of how these communities shape and re-shape themselves according to the arrival and integration of newcomers. We inquired into experiences such as loss, trauma, ambivalence, conflict, cooperation, transition and belonging to make sense of the phenomenon we call ‘migration’.

We spoke to local policy-makers and civil servants, community members who volunteered in welcoming newcomers, journalists, church members, schoolteachers, political activists and many newcomers themselves. We focused on how different types of communities dealt with the immediate impact and requirements created by this ‘crisis’: how people acted and reacted, what shaped these actions, whether they were connected to the national level discussion – and finally, whether we could draw out guidelines or principles for policy-makers struggling to develop a measure of societal consent around progressive immigration policies.

A number of **policy insights** were gained from our discussions and subsequent analysis:

• **Migration is local – and the local is personal.** Migration is as much a local phenomenon as it is a personal experience, for both newcomers and the host community. It is therefore important for policy-makers to focus on the host community as much as on the migrants. The former is going through a process that is life changing. Formal recognition of communities that have been through such a transformational moment seems to be crucial.

• **Conflict is a part of integration.** The integration process is both non-linear and multifaceted, oscillating between hostility and benevolence. Conflicts will therefore arise. Learning to decipher the meaning of tensions and conflict is crucial: factoring them in as valuable information, but also valuable transformational tipping points. Do not sweep conflict under the carpet as ‘a bump in the road’, but reward those instances of conflict and tension resolution.

• **Migration and integration are simultaneous processes.** The recognition of the continuum between migration and integration needs to impact the ways in which governments structure their processes. At the moment, most governments still conceive of arrival and integration quite separately, for example in how access to services is regulated. Evolving a practical understanding of the grey area between arrival and integration means creating services and access to services that cater to this moment specifically.

• **Migration is a physical experience.** The phenomenon of migration and integration is a physical one that tends to be displaced into legal and administrative spheres. Housing is one aspect of this physicality, but other forms of space and connections are also crucially important. It is important to create more physical spaces for encounters between the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their volunteers and to establish official spaces for connections between NGOs and government officials. Provide spaces that are designated as neutral and safe, where conflicts and tensions can be aired. Consider the importance of physical connections between spaces.

• **The importance of agency.** Our interviews with migrants and individuals from the host community focused on our interlocutors’ personal roles and responsibilities in the process of integration. Our experience suggests that the management of migration and integration is overwhelmingly correlated with a sense of agency and political efficacy. Demand contribution, reward those who contribute, provide multiple ways in which they can and recognise the different contributions.

- **Skills.** Across our case studies, a recurring theme centred on the array of skills needed to facilitate the process. Recognising the complex nature of migration and integration – including its emotional and cultural components – should entail the formal recognition of certain skills as valuable and as worth rewarding. The situation has created crucial experts in this field, who are barely recognised, if at all.

- **The difference between national and local narratives.** Our research highlights the dichotomy between national and local level narratives. This is what we expected to find, but the contrast was starker than we thought it would be, especially in certain countries. Good local stories need to be carried at the national level and more effort should be put into harvesting them. More work is needed on understanding the link between citizen responses to surveys, their attitudes and their experience, because there is a disconnection between what is experienced in daily life and the views held at national level.

The following report will provide insights into these local experiences and the nuances that shape them. The aim is to provide a rich understanding of local realities of migration and integration and to offer a multi-layered perspective on the implications these entail for policy-making.

# Introduction

Migration, not for the first time, is changing Europe. It is affecting its demography, transforming its economies and altering its political and social contours. Over the past 30 years, in the context of waves of migration and immigration, the issue has slowly gained in prominence. While it was always contentious – few people, when polled, seemed to be actively in favour of immigration – it was not considered to be voters' top priority.

Over the last fifteen years, this has changed: the issue of migration now ranks consistently among people's top concerns.<sup>1</sup> Much has been written about why this is the case: wage depression and competition, a sense of marginalisation of the native population, an easy scapegoat for the fast pace of change or as the symptom of an often unwelcome and feared process of globalisation. The reasons for the focus on migration as a cause for concern vary from context to context. But overall, European political landscapes are characterised by electorates in which – at the very least – a substantial minority would like to see less immigration and more control over 'who is let in'. There is another large minority who are 'anxious' about the consequences that migration and immigration may bring for them – and in particular for the future of their children.<sup>2</sup> Right-wing populist parties (such as the French Front National, the Swedish Democrats, the German Alternative für Deutschland and the Danish People's Party) have seized on this anxiety, and the issue of immigration is cited by many of their voters as the major driver of their support, for example, for parties.

The success of populist parties, aided and abetted by a media that knows how to sell stories on the back of such a polarising issue, has forced mainstream parties to toughen their stance – the Austrian People's Party under Kurz is a case in point, but so were the French Socialists under Valls – or has led to a dramatic fall in the polls (for example the Social Democratic Party in Germany, the Dutch Labour Party and the French Socialist Party). It has also brought about considerable losses for the Christian Democratic Union under Chancellor Merkel, largely as the result of her open-door policy during the 'refugee crisis' in 2015/16.

## Public perceptions of migration

Given the growing importance of the issue of migration and its role in fostering support for populist political parties, it is useful to examine more closely the evolution of overall public attitudes towards immigration. According to detailed research conducted by the European Social Survey,<sup>3</sup> the growth in the populist vote is not

– as is commonly believed – due to a significant increase in the numbers of people opposed to immigration. Even in countries with relatively high levels of immigration, public opinion is generally not becoming more negative. Rather, the large numbers of arrivals of newcomers<sup>4</sup> in 2015/16 served to polarise opinions and mobilise those people who already held negative views of immigration.

In the last fifteen years, the overall percentages of people in favour of and opposed to migration have remained quite stable, but these attitudes are becoming more entrenched, and the debate more polarised. There are numerous fault lines, including age, social class and ethnic background, with educational attainment being the most significant determinant of attitudes towards immigration. Attitudes also vary somewhat depending on the migrants in question, for example whether they are more or less skilled and which countries they originate from. In general, those who oppose immigration tend to be older, less well-educated, working class and native born. Although the gap between those who strongly support and strongly oppose immigration has been growing, the refugee crisis of 2015/16 heightened these levels of polarisation.

This prompts the question of why increased approval of immigration among the young, well educated and middle classes has not manifested in the same way as opposition to immigration, which has fuelled support for right-wing populist parties. This is because immigration is not a priority for the former group of voters, who are more concerned with other issues. By contrast, populist parties have seized upon the issue of immigration, making it a major driver of their support. Migration is blamed for a wide range of social ills, even when their causes are far more diverse and complex. An end to immigration is offered up as a tempting and simple solution to these challenges.

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The result is that in the public sphere, migration is really spoken only about by its opponents, causing policy-makers to be exposed to a completely skewed picture of public attitudes towards immigration. A glance at the public discourse and national media headlines creates the impression that a vast majority of people is negatively disposed towards migrants. In fact, overall perceptions of migration in Europe have become slightly more favourable, with only a minority of people openly hostile to it.

Interestingly, what unites a significant majority of people surveyed across Europe is a desire for a fair and effective system that allocates refugees across the EU. In particular, people appear to support a system that allocates numbers of refugees according to the capacity of the host country to accommodate them, based on factors such

as economic performance and the number of existing asylum applications. Most respondents prefer this type of system, even when it means that their own countries would see a rise in the number of migrants it hosted. Research conducted by the European Social Survey<sup>5</sup> indicated that this preference was consistent across different countries and among people supporting parties across the political spectrum.

*All of this suggests that European policy-makers can afford to be much bolder and more progressive when it comes to crafting and implementing migration policies*

All of this suggests that European policy-makers can afford to be much bolder and more progressive when it comes to crafting and implementing migration policies. The risk of a public backlash and punishment at the ballot box is much smaller than commonly feared. There is also a strong case for proponents of immigration to discuss this more openly – not only is this likely to galvanise public support for immigration, it also fosters better integration of migrants.

## The aim of our project

Our aim with this project was to focus on how such a global issue – one that is mainly discussed and reflected upon at a national level and through the national media – plays out where it should matter most, namely in local communities. These communities, large or small, rural or urban, wealthy or struggling, are confronted – whether they consented to it or not – with the arrival of groups of migrants and face the challenge of reshaping themselves according to this new

reality for the short or the long term. This reshaping takes place regardless of the length of time that migrants remain in a community, bearing in mind that there may be different waves of arrivals and departures.

*Do European societies have the potential to be more open and inclusive than they currently are?*

The 2015/16 refugee crisis, which, as many have pointed out, is mainly a crisis for the migrants themselves, offered the opportunity to monitor and examine the manner in which a global crisis impacted on and was managed by highly local actors such as institutions, organisations and individuals.

We wanted to focus on how different types of communities dealt with the immediate impact and requirements created by this crisis: how people reacted, what shaped these reactions, how they evolved, whether they were connected to the national level discussion – and finally, whether we could draw out some guidelines or principles for policy-makers struggling to develop a measure of societal consent around their immigration policies.

Do European societies have the potential to be more open and inclusive than they currently are? Are they already more prepared and more willing to face this challenge than policy-makers think they are? And can policy-makers plan confidently, without fearing that any progressive or inclusive measures will lead straight to electoral defeat?

In order to begin to address these questions, we sought to delve into the daily life of host communities to understand their textured, nuanced, personal experiences of migration and evaluate what this might reveal in terms of the public's readiness to accept and to manage such large-scale change. To do so we focused on the interactions between the host communities and the migrants, in an attempt to bring out the specificity of local experience and context.

We viewed this experience as a set of relationships that evolve over time through the actions of all the actors – not without embarrassment and hurt – rather than as two populations that collide once with one another. When migrants set foot into host territory, a number of dynamics are set in motion. The migrant negotiates a shift from escape to arrival and then integration, and the hosts need to move from what feels like collision – and in some cases intrusion – to one of acceptance and integration. Institutional and bureaucratic considerations aside, this is already an enormously tall order for human beings, some of whom may be severely traumatised. The negotiation of this evolving relationship, often through conflict, is the process of integration (which is still far too often thought of as an endpoint rather than as a process).

*... can policy-makers plan confidently, without fearing that any progressive or inclusive measures will lead straight to electoral defeat?*

We inquired into experiences such as loss, trauma, conflict, ambivalence, cooperation, transition and belonging to make sense of the phenomenon we call 'migration'. In this process, we interviewed local community members and newcomers in France, Germany, Italy and Sweden to understand how nuanced and textured these experiences can be and what policy-makers can draw from them. We held discussion groups late into the evening with a mix of people – old or young, elated or angry, depressed or hopeful.

Our report illustrates these experiences across the different case studies; it interprets them in their cultural context but also identifies the patterns that cut across national and local contexts – patterns that might help decision-makers take such realities into account when they shape the migration and immigration policies of the future.

## Our methodology

Between October 2016 and February 2017 our team embarked on a journey to eight different communities across four European countries. In each country, France, Germany, Italy and Sweden, we visited two communities of similar size. These included communities with longstanding experience of immigration and integration, such as Cologne in Germany, and communities with little or no such experience, such as Östersund in Sweden.

These communities were:

- France: Lille (Moulins) and Rennes
- Germany: Tengen and Cologne (Kalk)
- Italy: Bologna and Pizzoli
- Sweden: Östersund and Gothenburg

In all these places, we gathered stories from as many perspectives as possible aiming to gain a comprehensive picture of the experience of migration. We spoke to local policy-makers and civil servants, community members who volunteered in welcoming newcomers, journalists, church members, schoolteachers, political activists and newcomers themselves.

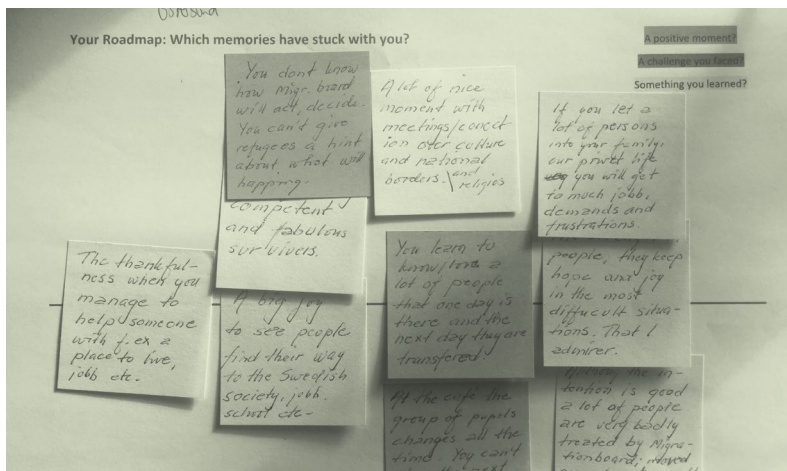
One of the important cornerstones of this work was establishing trust between our team and the community members – we were about to listen in on stories from a local community as outsiders and we were inviting community members to share quite intimate experiences and stories with us. Such experiences tended to centre on vulnerabilities, challenges and taboos. We were therefore committed to work with local organisations and stakeholders on the ground, who helped us set up our conversations in a safe environment and connected us with the right interlocutors in a trustful way.

Our methodology consisted of two parts of qualitative work. We held several interviews and conversations, mostly one-on-one, in some cases with two members of

the community. These interviews were all based on a guided, yet open set of questions. We encouraged participants to reflect on the journey they themselves and their community had embarked on since 2015, moments that changed or shaped their engagement in the community, the challenges and successes they had encountered and the experiences that particularly stood out to them. These interviews would often last up to an hour.

The second element of our gathering of stories was a series of guided forum conversations that brought together newcomers with other community members and volunteers. These forums included around 25 participants and were designed to capture the newcomer's experiences in the community, the experiences of being welcomed and welcoming, as well as their interactions with volunteers and community members. These were not set up as traditional focus groups but, rather, emphasised the creation of trust through an informal safe space. This context was crucial for capturing such complex and intimate experiences.

We developed a methodology for these forums that illustrated participants' personal journeys as a line from A to B. We encouraged participants to place three different moments (on sticky notes) along this journey line: a positive moment for them, a challenge they faced and something they learned. Each participant filled this document out for themselves and we used it as a starting point for our conversation and discussion in the group. It provided a suitable start for the process of reflection and set the context of the discussion as a safe space to share experiences.



Example of a timeline from our forum conversation in Sweden

All conversations were transcribed and coded as the basis for our interpretation. We used a mix of pre-set codes that arose from our research, as well as codes that were generated inductively from within the dataset through cyclical analyses. We ensured the reliability of these codes by cross-coding in the team and by constantly sharing and reflecting codes with other team members. Through this open and qualitative set of methods we were able to capture the nuanced experiences, contradictions and texture that these stories had to offer us.

## Notes

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1. See different waves of the *Eurobarometer* in recent years.
2. See for example the work on the 'anxious middle' by Sunder Katwala and Will Somerville. [https://www.unboundphilanthropy.org/sites/default/files/TCM\\_Trust-UK-FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://www.unboundphilanthropy.org/sites/default/files/TCM_Trust-UK-FINAL_0.pdf)
3. *Attitudes towards immigration in Europe: myths and realities*, European Social Survey, 19 June 2017. See: [https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/findings/IE\\_Handout\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/findings/IE_Handout_FINAL.pdf)
4. In this publication we use the words 'migrant' and 'newcomer' interchangeably, mirroring the words of our interlocutors who are often unclear about the status of the people to whom they are referring. Migrant, in this context, is taken to mean people on the move who have yet to complete the legal process of claiming asylum. A newcomer is someone who has recently arrived and may be a migrant or an immigrant (having completed the legal process).
5. See note 3: *Attitudes towards immigration in Europe*.

# Case studies as stories

Each of our case studies is a story with characters and settings conspiring to create a particular mix of tensions and resolutions. For example, in one of our Swedish case studies, the remoteness of the migrant accommodation and the lightness of the snow around it were almost characters in their own right, given the impact they had on the relationship between the arriving migrants and the community in waiting. They acted as both protection against an outside world that had been largely cruel and unpredictable to the migrants, but also as a barrier to a normal daily existence. Our German case studies came alive with the intricate personal, moral negotiating at the heart of small communities that felt challenged by the responsibility handed to them, and taken aback by the polarisation the new arrivals created or revealed. In Italy, swift, creative, informal but effective adaptation at every level was the name of the game – a combination of ingenuity and sophisticated, albeit stretched, systems. Our French case studies were micro-studies in the tug-of-war between the principles of local solidarity and national political pressures, with institutions looming large (and sometimes looming useless).

We start with these stories, while we end our report with insights that cut across them.



# Sweden:

**National imaginary and local experience**

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**As a European country with a relatively open migration policy, Sweden has been at the forefront of welcoming migrants from early 2015 onwards. In fact, the Swedish government took the decision to grant permanent residence to all Syrian and stateless persons arriving from war-torn Syria in 2013, long before the refugee crisis affected other European countries.<sup>1</sup> Other progressive migration policies were also enacted in 2013, including granting newcomers without permission to stay the same access to subsidised healthcare as asylum seekers. Children residing in the country without permission were also entitled to full healthcare, including dental care. Sweden has therefore long been considered a particularly positive example of how to welcome newcomers.**

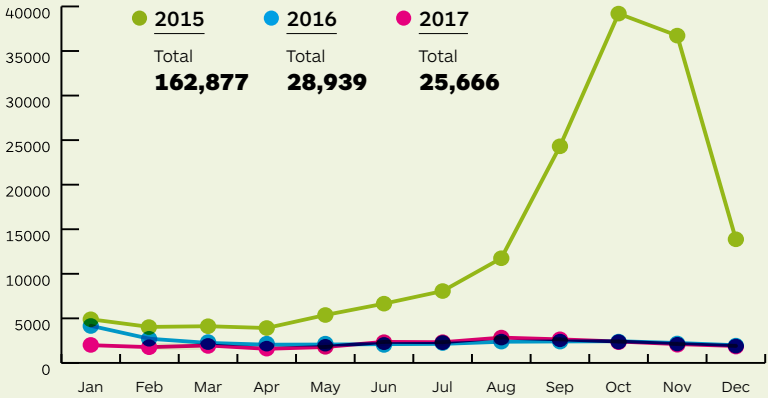
This positive story seemed to start shifting in late 2015, when migration levels to Sweden were perceived as too high. By the end of 2015, a total of 162,877 people had applied for asylum in Sweden, the majority (51,338) of them from Syria. There was also a widespread perception that other European countries were not taking their share of the responsibility for migrants.

On 12 November 2015, the Swedish government introduced temporary border controls with the aim of reducing the number of asylum seekers. In addition, on 4 January 2016, Sweden introduced temporary identity checks. As a result, the number of arrivals reduced significantly – 68,682 people were granted protection after applying for asylum in 2016. In July 2016 these policies were reinforced when the Swedish Parliament adopted a new law which limited asylum seekers' chances of being granted residence permits and bringing in their families.

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This fundamental shift in migration policies marked a significant moment for national experiences with migration – and it established a framework for both of the local communities we visited. Our interviewees in Östersund and Gothenburg repeatedly referred to this shift in conveying what this sense of crisis and the subsequent change meant for them on a local level. Rather than focusing on the reduction in numbers, our interviewees saw this change as a manifestation of how Sweden had changed nationally and how this change related to their own experiences. The following case studies provide insights into these nuanced personal and local realities.

**The total number of asylum applicants in Sweden in 2013-2017<sup>2</sup>**



## **A remote Swedish city reimagined: Östersund and the integration of newcomers**

The sun sets at around 4pm during Östersund's winter. We visited the city in November, when the early darkness is accompanied by drifts of snow covering the streets and pavements. Around this time of year, Östersund is a quiet place and it seems that life is mostly confined to the rooms behind the façades of the old town.

Östersund is a small city with around 44,000 inhabitants, located in the middle of Sweden. To members of its community, Östersund is a city of small businesses and trade as well as some larger companies, while tourists and visitors know it as a Vinterstanden – a winter city. It is a city that feels much quieter and more remote than other Swedish cities such as Gothenburg.

Östersund municipality is split across Lake Storsjön. The area is sparsely populated and surrounded by dense forests. Due to the intense cold and snow, it is difficult to move around. This environment plays a significant role in the way newcomers are welcomed and integrated.

Östersund has not experienced high levels of immigration before, rather the opposite – community members, particularly the younger generation, have been moving out of the city to work and live elsewhere, usually in Gothenburg or Stockholm. As people move south to the larger cities, Östersund is experiencing an overall decline in population. Local policy has therefore focused on ways to make the city more welcoming and increase opportunities for people.

In 2015, with the arrival of many migrants in Sweden, this situation changed significantly. Östersund now hosts several newcomers, predominantly in Grytan, a forested camp area just outside Östersund.

The city receives people according to a national quota system that distributes newly arrived migrants across the country. The government provides accommodation during the waiting period if migrants agree to stay in their allocated city. The Migrationsverket (Swedish Migration Agency) then decides on the future status of each migrant: it receives applications from people who want to take up permanent residency in Sweden, come for a visit, seek protection from persecution or become Swedish citizens. The time needed to reach a decision can last up to several months, depending on the country of origin. During the waiting period, migrants are supposed to report regularly to the Migrationsverket and stay in their allocated city.

Language courses and, in some cases, internships are officially organised by the Migrationsverket, but only after the receipt of a residency permit.

In such a small and remote city, there are inevitable gaps in the services provided to those who do not yet have a residency permit. This fosters the emergence and growth of small, innovative and independent support projects. One of these is Vinnova, a project aimed at providing housing for newcomers and connecting agencies, companies and migrants to organise internships. The project seeks to close the existing gaps that leave newcomers without residency permits bereft of language training or work opportunities. It addresses one of the biggest challenges Sweden faces in terms of integrating newly arrived migrants: its rather rigid labour market. Many migrants do not have the skills or connections to enter the workforce.

Another innovative small-scale project is Hej Främling (Hello Stranger), which reached national prominence. It provides language courses for those who do not yet have an official permit to stay in Sweden, as well as other integration initiatives beyond municipal support. Hej Främling's goal is to connect community members with refugees and migrants through diverse cultural and athletic activities. It is a project of great relevance, because anti-immigration sentiment has grown alongside the migrant population. Both projects aim to fill the gaps left by government. During our stay we discovered how vital these services are to many members of the volunteer community in Östersund.

We organised two forum conversations in Östersund, one in the housing area Grytan, or the 'camp', as some of our interviewees call it, and another with migrants with longer-term prospects, as they had obtained their residency permit and took part in an official language course. We also interviewed the mayor of the municipality and spoke to another policy-maker and journalist. We interviewed a representative of the Vinnova Project and volunteers in Östersund.

## A shift in Östersund and its identity

Precisely because Östersund has not traditionally been a recipient of migration, 2015 presents a key moment in the various stories we heard in Östersund. Before then, Östersund had rarely been confronted with questions concerning integration. Our interviewees mentioned that the arrival of migrants in the summer and autumn of 2015 marked a moment that shifted the way Östersund perceived itself as a city.

In their view, Östersund has moved from being a remote and declining city with the departure of young people towards becoming a more open, outward-looking, welcoming and global community.

Since 2015, there have been two specific moments that stand out for many of our interviewees. The first is the publication of the photo of the young Syrian boy Alan Kurdi lying dead on a Mediterranean beach, which became a striking symbol of the failed political approaches towards migration movements in Europe. This image drastically increased the levels of community help and support in Östersund. Even though there is no measurable correlation between the publication of the photo and the sudden increase in numbers of volunteers, our interviewees link this change to Alan and the accompanying media reaction. It created an atmosphere of compassion and willingness to engage:

*I think last autumn it was the publication of Alan who drowned that had an effect. There were a lot of private initiatives and people volunteering in activities. Before that, the media was negative. But after the publication you had this wave of positive communication.*

The volunteers described how, after this time of intensity, things slowly calmed down and chaos gave way to a sense of normality. It is striking that the volunteers, rather than the policy community, highlight this shift, because they are the ones who could observe this change on the ground:

*It was incredible that so many people wanted to help but it was so chaotic and clear that it wouldn't last. Then it kind of faded.*

The other moment our policy interviewees and volunteers perceived as crucial was a shift of tone in the media in the winter of 2015, from illustrating a welcoming atmosphere in society to the sense of crisis around migration in Sweden. According to several of our interviewees, this changed the way in which members of the community perceived the national sentiment, which seemingly became increasingly critical of newcomers:

*It felt like in autumn the media debated not if but how we should help refugees. But then there was a shift in winter and media turned around and said, 'do we have to help refugees at all?'*

While this shift was perceived by several interviewees, they also felt it had an effect on those surrounding them, for example through increased aggression on social media and less enthusiastic volunteering in Östersund's community.

These key moments provide a framework within which these stories are told. They mark the starting points and the challenges people encounter. One of these stories concerns the way in which the arrival of newcomers to Östersund moved from being a pragmatic solution to being perceived as a problem.

## From an idealised vision to a pragmatic solution

Our first conversations took place with members of the policy community in Östersund. One of the key themes that emerged is the perception of newcomers as a pragmatic solution to the problem of young people leaving Östersund for the bigger cities in Sweden. Over recent years, a gap has been growing in community life and in terms of jobs which Östersund is not able to fill because the skills and people are missing. This trend, which leaves key jobs that are needed in the community vacant, poses a serious political problem to the municipality. The mayor therefore described the opening of the city to newcomers as a conscious and pragmatic decision:

*Several years ago we took the decision that we need immigration. We need these people to grow. And to take the jobs as a nurse or teacher in the future. We see that as a way to grow. It isn't enough otherwise.*

Immigration serves as a means to grow the city. It is perceived as a pragmatic approach to a set of local-level challenges. The mayor of the city told us:

*And you should know that this is a part of the country where we have historically had problems that people have been leaving for Stockholm. They have been heading south. So a lot of people could identify the opportunities presented by newcomers because this is what we wanted for years and years.*

The need for migration to Östersund has led the municipality to establish a system by which the percentage of migrants from other countries living in the city is set to increase, up to a total of 10% of the population. This means opening up not only Östersund's identity but creating a new city – one that is going to be shaped by newcomers in the future.

One of our policy interviewees described the new arrivals in Östersund as a 'positive problem'. This underlines the ambiguity that some of these stories reveal: there is a sense in which this is a welcome development, but at the same time, there is some hesitation and uncertainty about what this might mean for the community.

The arrival of newcomers is not only a convenient and pragmatic solution, but is also described as a magic, ideal and romanticised solution to a structural problem. Another policy-maker from Östersund volunteers as a 'Gudman', a representative for migrants in legal matters in Sweden, and mentioned how Östersund set up a 'matching project' between migrants and community members. This represents a notion of romance, a dating process that fills an empty gap, promoting the sense that newcomers represent a kind of magical solution:

*So what we did was to get in touch with the integration service for the matching project as well as filing for being 'Gudman', you know what the Gudman system is? In Sweden, and I think in other countries as well, if for instance an asylum seeker is under-aged, they have to have a representative in legal matters. So then you can volunteer as that as well, so I did that and my wife did that and we also went into this matching project.*

The need for such a solution to Östersund's struggles is also reflected when the mayor highlights the efforts designed to make it easier for newcomers to stay in the city. The municipality is also communicating to the Swedish government that it is willing to take more migrants than indicated by its quota:

*Our focus is on helping them to integrate once they have their permit. For example, connecting them to work, to housing, school. But the migration board has the main responsibility. But we can do some things to help out.*

*We want to help people to stay here. We also help them to make a home for themselves. If we don't do that they might move to another place rather than stay here in Östersund.*

Many interviewees, particularly members of the municipality, highlighted the advantages of Östersund as a small, family-centred and open-minded city. It was as if they were painting an idealised version of the city. One interviewee laughed at the impossible aspiration of Östersund to become a cosmopolitan city:

*This makes Östersund more interesting. Getting diversity to Östersund. Someone said to me 'Have you thought about Östersund becoming the little New York?' (laughing).*

These narratives go beyond the arrival of migrants themselves to the visions, aspirations and hopes for Östersund as a city. They are not centred on certain individuals but on Östersund's relationship with itself as a city: they prompt questions about what the city can be today and what it could become in the future.

## Caught between doubt and support

Even though our policy interviewees highlighted how positive migration is for Östersund, they also expressed moments of doubt and the concerns they perceive in the community. The mayor told us anecdotally how she had received calls complaining about the burden placed by newcomers on the welfare system. She mentioned that some citizens feel left behind and showed an understanding of their concerns:

*Often men phoned me, and I asked: but do you want to try to be a refugee for one week? I think of course these people are scared. They don't feel included in the society today. Perhaps you don't even have work. And then we teach newcomers Swedish and so on.*

She recognises that members of the community feel excluded and that there is an unemployment problem in Östersund. A key moment that fostered these doubts is the arrival of many young male migrants in Östersund. This, according to one of our interviewees, caused some concern in the community, which feared an increase in crime and aggression:

*In the fall, I think November 2015 it was, a lot of under-aged Afghan boys came here. We did have problems to handle that in the short term. But we can handle that in the long term as well. Because the numbers aren't that big. We can handle that. People understand that.*

There is an impression that people are convincing themselves that they are able to 'handle' these boys, as if they were a problem. Also, the interviewee repeated the fact that the citizens of Östersund are understanding, again as if they needed to accept a problem.

According to our policy interviewees, these doubts and uncertainties are mixed with a widespread feeling of acceptance across Östersund's community. Even though concerns are raised from time to time, an overwhelming majority of the community is welcoming and open towards newcomers, particularly during the early stages:

*But the interesting thing here was that, when we volunteered for this matching system, we almost immediately got a response that there are too many Swedes who want to be matched with too few immigrants (laughs).*

In terms of the local atmosphere, the volunteers highlighted how welcoming they perceive the Östersund community to be, particularly compared to other Swedish communities:

*There's a general feeling that one wants to be open and welcoming here. A lot of people want to engage in voluntary activities and so on... There is a true engagement and openness here.*

They reflect what the policy interviewees described – an extraordinary sense of involvement and openness. At the same time, some of our volunteer interviewees highlighted that there are also concerns and doubts in the community about the arrival of migrants:

*So people express things like, if the houses are located along the way that their children walk to school, they can't let the children walk alone anymore; this made it possible to draw the conclusion that they are afraid that those who live there will be a risk for their kids in one way or another; that's mainly the thing that we've seen, when it comes to the houses, there have been quite a lot of negative responses.*

In relation to migrants renting houses in the community, some interviewees express feelings of having their space invaded. Alongside a welcoming atmosphere, there exist hesitations and prejudices.

## How Östersund perceives itself

Within this atmosphere of both acceptance and concern and a context wherein newcomers are sometimes described as a magical, romantic solution or as a pragmatic solution to problems, the stories we heard reveal how nuanced the experience of

integration is. Our policy interviewees and the community members they speak about are neither closed nor open – they shift between enthusiasm, conviction, doubts and hopes. It also becomes clear how these stories centre on the city itself and how it perceives itself at a particular moment of history unfolding on its doorstep.

These narratives carefully explore the relationship Östersund has with migration and describe a city dealing with the new experience of welcoming migrants. In addition, community members have tried to understand volunteering from different perspectives – whether it is an attempt at friendship with migrants, a more professional relationship or a way of finding meaning for themselves. One of our interviewees moved from a conviction that his relationship with a migrant was a friendship to realising that they were not truly equals like in a friendship:

*And also not being ... because this matching project should not be charity. And there is also a limit. If you don't get in touch for a couple of reasons, if you do that to a friend, you can sort that out with a text, you know text them and say: 'I had a lot of things to do.' With this, you get in some sense, you feel guilt and you really don't know why you do that and that is hard as well.*

This constant re-evaluation of how to relate to migrants is also reflected in another theme that reappears in these stories: figuring out a way to be honest about certain difficulties in the community, while also promoting a society that is built on agreement and harmony:

*What we still have to work on here is to be open to the existing problems and open to how we are supposed to solve them. Because pretending that there are no practical problems, that's not a way...*

In Östersund, a city without much experience of migration, it is important to find a way to carefully balance a positive and harmonious image while expressing any problems that might threaten this (self-)image. The emphasis on cooperation emerges in the interviews, for example when the mayor highlighted that there is currently no institutional coordination of volunteers:

*There is no institution that coordinates things. We are improvising. But we are trying and working on it together. A few years back it was the municipality but now it changed.*

Indeed, the lack of coordination also comes up among the group of volunteers and church members we interviewed in Östersund.

## Dealing with remoteness and a lack of coordination

For the volunteers, one of the main struggles is the lack of organised cooperation around the reception of newcomers. For example, many community members started smaller projects to support migrants in Östersund and worked independently without sharing their experiences and coordinating their efforts:

*So that was not very good, because many people started smaller projects and no one had this broader view. Many people did similar things, but no one had a broad picture of it. It was a bit chaotic.*

The lack of coordination can also create a strong dependency on individuals rather than an organisation or institution that could fill the gaps. It seems that the remoteness of the city itself makes this need for coordination and cooperation particularly important:

*I hope that when I will be gone, this will go on. Because I am doing this in my free time and it's quite challenging doing it on your own.*

The volunteers seem to have a clear idea about where and how this coordination should take place – for example they suggest locating a physical space to connect existing NGOs in Östersund. Our interviewees mentioned that they feel the municipality has a responsibility to organise this coordination:

*It would be good if the municipality took over the role of coordination. Like talking to the NGOs connecting them.*

In the context of support in the employment sector, we spoke to one interviewee managing the relationships between migrants and job agencies or companies. Interviewees repeatedly highlighted how important it is for institutions that are not at the core of government to cooperate with one another. Excessive autonomy and a lack of structure can be perceived as a burden. One interviewee highlighted how different institutions speak different languages and how coordination between them is challenging:

*The public authorities, private companies and so on all speak different languages. And it really takes time to understand one another.*

As such, cooperation and coordination between different players seems to be at the heart of what our interviewees see as crucial for the integration of newcomers:

*If it's coordinated in a good way then it is good integration. It's very complicated with many organisations working on it.*

This clearly relates to the remoteness described in the stories we heard. Several of our interviewees see Östersund as an isolated city, with limited connections to surrounding areas. Even though there are public transport links, some parts of the city are harder to reach. The 'camp' for newcomers, Grytan, is especially poorly connected to the rest of the city, as it is located deep in the surrounding forest. There is no regular bus service, which is why the volunteers also offer their help in driving.

The lack of public infrastructure has implications both for migrants and the involvement of the volunteers. It makes coordinated efforts more difficult, as they rely on a series of smaller trips. Public infrastructure is crucial for the integration of migrants, on the part of the migrants themselves and the volunteers. This relates especially to the ability for newcomers to establish social networks in the community:

*You need to get to know people who know the system ... native or other people who have lived here long enough so they know the system*

*I think the most important aspect is the social one. That they get a social network for them to integrate.*

## Seeking a balanced relationship with the state

In these stories, the volunteers and church members have positioned themselves and the NGOs they work for as separate from official government institutions, both on the local and national level. They are constructing their own distinct identities to highlight how they bridge a gap left by the state, particularly in helping those migrants waiting for official permission to stay, for example by providing language courses, internships or housing:

*The municipality doesn't really help people without a permit. It's mainly the NGOs that offer, for example, language courses.*

The provision of support for newcomers becomes a space within which different institutions meet. While the municipality is described as an economic actor, which merely performs hard-minded cost-benefit calculations, the NGOs consider themselves to be more flexible. One of our interviewees describes the NGOs as having 'a big heart', gentle supporters who place values at the core of their system.

In this context, volunteers refer to knowing ‘the system’ as a key milestone in integrating into Östersund’s community. ‘The system’ is an abstract notion used when volunteers describe the legal and institutional processes that frame the reception of migrants, but it is never fully explained:

*You need to get to know people who know the system. They need to be with native or other people who have lived here long enough so they know the system.*

## Changing the community through housing

The issues around housing seem to be of crucial importance in the stories of migration in Östersund – particularly in the isolated Grytan camp. Some independent actors have understood this importance, including those running the Vinnova Project. The group bought around 100 cottages in Östersund and rents them out to migrants, including those who have not yet obtained a residency permit.

Vinnova is a unique project within our case studies, as it addresses the housing shortage in Sweden and is run by a private corporation. The project started with the idea to offer housing options beyond those available on the public market. However, it soon expanded into offering internships for newcomers in companies that form part of Vinnova’s network. Vinnova offers these employment opportunities to migrants who do not yet have a permanent residency permit. They also support migrants in other ways:

*We have weekly meetings and help them write CVs, talk about driving licences, the unions etc. It’s open to everybody who is in the programme.*

For the Vinnova Project, this is not only to help the community but to create a business opportunity. The rent is paid by migrants and making connections with companies to offer internships helps Vinnova widen its business networks.

The smaller, independent agencies and companies also described an absence of structural flexibility when it comes to integration. The system is still mainly suited to Swedish people, and is not yet structurally prepared to adapt itself to newcomers and their potential role in society:

*The Swedish work system is very structured. When you are this age, you start doing this. But when someone comes from Afghanistan we don't have the right structures. That is one of our biggest challenges. Because we don't have the system to use all the capabilities.*

## **Östersund in the eyes of the newcomers: a remote transitional space**

Among the newcomers we spoke to in Östersund, waiting for a decision on their residency permit seems to be at the core of their experience. We visited Grytan, a small place outside of Östersund where many of the newcomers stay. Grytan, or 'the camp', hosts around 400 people. Night falls early there. When we visited, the snow was piled high upon the pine trees in the forest. Once a week, the language café takes place here, with tea and Swedish cakes, where migrants learn the Swedish language playfully – in these months they learn about Swedish Christmas traditions.

Grytan consists of several red-coloured barns in the middle of a forest surrounding Östersund. We travelled by car, which took around 30 minutes, longer than usual, because there was a lot of snow on the streets. In Grytan, the barns appeared empty, no one was outside as it was far too cold, only the barn with the language café sign had the lights on. The language café is organised by the local church, and one of the church's volunteers drove us there as public transport is too irregular. We spoke to a number of migrants there, mostly from Syria, Iran and Iraq.

The contrast between the newcomers' homes and Grytan as a transitional space is striking. It is the remoteness of Grytan that our interviewees bring up when they speak about the loneliness and lack of purpose they feel while waiting for the decision on a permission to stay in Sweden. Many of the newcomers highlight how difficult it is to feel connected to Östersund, precisely because the place is so cut off and lacks regular public transportation to the city. The place is almost symbolic of the wait: life takes place elsewhere, it is covered in snow and there is little to do outside the language café courses. Integration becomes difficult because the migrants are physically removed from the community and because they do not have the option to travel to Östersund independently:

*All day being here, far from the city – it's difficult. They don't let me go to the language courses. We have buses for 3pm and after that we can't go out. But we don't have a car, it's very stressful here and it's getting dark here after 3pm as well and it's very depressing here.*

*The location of my accommodation is tough. It's in the middle of the forest and in the middle of nowhere. I like the forest but not all the days. It takes long to get to the city. It's frustrating.*

The early darkness in the winter months adds to this sense of remoteness and a feeling of being lost. This is something the volunteers, policy interviewees or other community members we spoke to did not even mention, but it is central to the experience of these newcomers.

Several interviewees described how this is paired with long waiting times for a residency permit, creating a significant burden. The wait represents a transitional but empty space – one where government support is officially minimised. Language courses, for example, are only permanently and officially offered after a positive decision for a residency permit. Hence, many newcomers stress there is little for them to do but wait. It is both the wait and the physically removed space in Grytan that add to our interviewees' frustration. Some of them express a high willingness to learn, be part of the community and integrate, yet feel disillusioned about the lack of opportunities and the length of the waiting process. In some cases, they voice real feelings of depression:

*Until the court gives us the results I can't go to a language course. They are saying you just have to wait. I was an activist earlier and just waiting is just depressing. And I am taking pills because of being here.*

*They need to tell us if we can stay or not. They should just tell us. Because otherwise we cannot do anything. There is no class for learning. It's a big challenge.*

For some of them, waiting means not being able to participate in community life, in starting to build up language skills or trying to contribute to Östersund's community. Amid the passive waiting, there are some newcomers who still emphasise how active they want to be in the community. There is agency they want to exercise, despite this uncertain waiting period:

*We can't wait for others to help us, we must show them.*

Some of our interviewees describe this sense of agency as 'showing themselves', that is, expressing themselves, showing their identity, background and history to the community to help community members understand and feel closer to them. The notion of 'showing oneself' seems to imply that some newcomers feel invisible, like someone who needs to prove their own existence:

*We want to show ourselves, show who am I. Because many Europeans have little faith in the refugees. Maybe they think most of them are dangerous. So, it's very important that we show ourselves. But there is no opportunity to show and improve ourselves. They don't know us.*

Yet, this desire to introduce oneself is hindered by the lack of opportunities to connect with community members. There is a struggle in finding a balance between waiting, being passive and dependent and actively taking charge of the situation. The experience is a mixture of a very real pragmatic struggle around transportation and remoteness and a deep uncertainty about being able to find a place in a community.

## Personal experiences of integration

Within this context of remoteness, several of our interviewees highlighted how important a personal connection and relationship to some community members is for integrating in Östersund. The volunteers seem to have a very personal and intimate relationship with the newcomers. Some of these volunteers formed part of one of our forum conversations and besides the verbal signs of closeness between volunteers and newcomers, we could observe moments of physical understanding between both parties, such as when a migrant recognises a volunteer in the room:

*When I entered the room I just saw Christina and I remember how welcoming she was. She did that. One of the good memories was the first person who invited me, it was Christina. It was such a good thing from the local community to invite you.*

*For example, I met a lady and she was very patient with me and taught me the language. It was real nice to meet such a nice person. And there were lots more.*

Individuals outside the official government realm stand out to the newcomers. Possibly precisely because they paint a picture of a place that can seem cold and lonely, these personal memories and relationships are key to creating an image of Östersund as a welcoming place. In this context, the newcomers described how welcoming they perceived the atmosphere in Östersund to be. Not only do they recollect stories about community members welcoming them across different European countries, but they see Sweden as especially kind and generous:

*When I arrived here, people were very welcoming. The people welcomed us a lot, also in Germany, and Malmö, they welcomed us. With a lot of appreciation.*

*People are just very kind here in Sweden. I can appreciate this beyond everything.*

Many interviewees explain how important they believe individual contact is for successful integration:

*It's really the individual meetings that make a difference. And they suddenly see the result of this process. That the atmosphere becomes nicer. And they have invited people into their families.*

One housing volunteer told us how community members are slightly hesitant and doubtful in the beginning, until the house is built and the newcomers have moved in. Actual contact with one another, in her view, can break the ice and remove initial concerns:

*So I think people are scared before it actually happens. But then when the house is there it's actually fine. The meeting changes a lot. People start recommending people, can we do something? It's going from 'no, we don't want to', to 'what can we do for them?'*

At the same time, some newcomers expressed fear of those in Swedish society rejecting them:

*Feeling like a refugee is very hard and knowing that there are some people who don't want me here. For example, if I met someone racist I do not know how to react to that. My life already was hard. So, I was a little bit more shy. But I broke that wall now.*

Again, the overall sentiment is nuanced – the newcomers perceive openness and welcome while at the same time feeling uncertain about being outsiders in a remote community.

On a national level, our interviewees also mentioned the closure of borders and the introduction of stricter laws as a personally challenging time. For them, this represented a complete shift from one extreme (a most generous system) to another (a very strict new system):

*I mean we shifted immensely. Before the law change we had one of the most generous systems. But now they totally shifted. We have now one of the strictest systems.*

One of our interviewees described how this shift in law had an impact at the local level, creating more stress for newcomers and volunteers:

*The clients we work with now are much more stressed out. They feel there is a risk to be sent back. And they can't get their spouses here. Even when you have a residency permit. It's an added stress when you come to this country.*

## A city struggling with remoteness

The stories we heard in Östersund from different people seem to paint a picture of a city that struggles with geographical remoteness. Both the newcomers as well as the policy community and volunteers highlight how this small city is characterised by remoteness – for the former this translates into a feeling of distance, for the latter this implies how important it is to make the city more attractive. For the newcomers, remoteness further complicates an uncertain time of waiting, as it makes taking part in community life even more difficult. For the policy community, this means that the arrival of newcomers provides an opportunity for changing the narrative around Östersund and a pragmatic solution to the problem of becoming a city that is always left behind. This is why substantial effort goes into making Östersund more attractive to migrants.

Many of these stories do not centre around the migrants themselves but around Östersund's evolution as a city – it provides the background for an exploration of the city's current struggles and optimism. The newcomers provide a framework within which this conversation takes place, but the focus of these stories is on the relationship of Östersund with itself – exploring what kind of city it can and could be.

## **Bergsjön's search for independence as a vibrant district in Gothenburg**

We arrive on a Wednesday evening. One of the most culturally vibrant communities of Gothenburg, but also marked by high levels of poverty, Bergsjön seems like a place of contradictions. The name 'Bergsjön' translates to 'mountain lake', in reference to the lake in the south of the district. The origins of its dense and cultivated forests can be traced back through Gothenburg's history: by the 18th century the city had depleted all of its forest reserves and Bergsjön, on the outskirts of Gothenburg, became the site of a new tree plantation. The legacy of this time remains – green hills and fresh air surround us when we arrive here.

Bergsjön has been undergoing changes for some time: during the 1900s, many newcomers to Swedish society moved here as it was reasonably undeveloped and affordable. As a consequence, people representing over 140 nationalities live in the area today. More than one-third of all students in Bergsjön's five schools have been living in Sweden for less than four years. For over 80% of students, Swedish is the second language and about 54 languages are spoken in Bergsjön's schools. Ethnic diversity has created a rich cultural life in this district, with many local events taking place and intercultural groups and associations meeting regularly. These different organisations developed over the course of more than two decades with the steady arrival of newcomers in Bergsjön.

At the same time, the district has been experiencing difficulties: cultural diversity has brought challenges. Bergsjön suffers from high unemployment rates, housing problems and segregation. In the early 1990s, planners in Bergsjön recognised the opportunities presented by this unique place and together with local communities, housing companies, associations and the municipality they re-shaped the neighbourhood in an environmentally conscious way. One of the key achievements in this process was the building of meeting places for the community, for members of all ages and all ethnic backgrounds – physical spaces in which to engage with one another, in a place where it is easy to otherwise lose touch with one another.

In Gothenburg, newcomers join the community both through the national quota system, which distributes migrants across the country, and by people choosing to stay in Gothenburg, it being a very diverse city with many opportunities.

To obtain permission to stay, newcomers need to apply to the Migrationsverket (Migration Agency). The Migration Agency evaluates individual cases and in case

of a refusal, newcomers are requested to leave Sweden. During our stay, we also met migrants staying illegally after having received such a refusal. We also interviewed representatives from the Migrationsverket, as well as representatives and volunteers from the actively engaged church in Bergsjön.

We come to Bergsjön to join one of the regular meetings: an invitation from the local church to visit their weekly evening food and clothes market for people in need. The church is a red building with a wooden façade, surrounded by trees. Upon entering, we immediately sense the vibrancy of the community and the opportunity that such a meeting space presents. People from different backgrounds are chatting, laughing, nodding to greet each other, hugging each other as if they were old friends.

On our way to find our contact person, we meet community members with very different ethnic backgrounds, from newly arrived members to Swedes who have been living in Bergsjön for a long time, such as pensioners in need of support. When we finally reach the upper level of the church, we meet the church members and volunteers organising these evenings at the church, among them nurses who offer health advice for refugees and migrants. We meet Leif, the former vicar of the church who shows us around, introduces us to the other church members, including the current vicar Henrik, and tells us about the history of the church.



*Bergsjön's church*

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When Leif was the vicar of the Bergsjön church a few years ago, he decided to open the building to serve as a meeting place for everyone, not only for a specific Christian religious community. This decision seems to be central to the narrative of the church: it was a moment that transformed the building from a physical space to meet and to pray to a space which facilitates encounters between community members and, ultimately, where integration can happen.



*Another area provides all kinds of necessities to community members in need*

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We notice this as soon as we enter the church building. We see friends laughing, people making new friends and church members helping out where they can. The system for the food market is improvised but professional: each family pulls a number hand-written on a little paper, waits for their number to be called and then passes two newcomer volunteers who make sure that only those with the right number go to the food and clothes market downstairs. Swedish specialities are being prepared in the kitchen, people come and go and have food while waiting or chatting.



*The weekly clothes market tries to cater to everyone in need*

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The atmosphere at the church's weekly lunch, which we also attend, is particularly touching, as different people of so many backgrounds eat together, share stories and play with the children, while some community members who used to be newcomers themselves prepare Swedish food. It feels like a big family sharing their food and experiences.

The story told by members of the church reflects the ongoing changes in Bergsjön as a multicultural community. For them, the challenges and opportunities of receiving newcomers have been there for a long time, not only since 2015. Consequently, the stories they tell us are not primarily stories about the newcomers themselves. Instead they seem to be stories about the church's own development and identity, about finding its own place in an ever-changing community and state.

## Views from Bergsjön's church

### **The welcoming of newcomers as a routine**

The church, according to our interviewees, has always been welcoming newcomers and over the years, these arrivals have become a part of life for the members of the community:

*From this church's point of view, the difference [in arrivals] is not so big. For almost 50 years, refugees have come to the church and we tried to support everyone who comes here.*

It is interesting to see how the interviewees do not perceive 2015 to be much different from the past. They describe a sense of routine that has evolved from the constant experience of integrating people. In contrast to the picture that is often portrayed on a national level in Sweden, there is no sense of panic or exhaustion in the local church. Instead, there seems to be a mixture of constancy and routine:

*Just here in this church, it's more or less the same but for the nation it was a huge difference.*

This perception of there being a significant difference between national media reporting and the local experience is repeatedly mentioned in our interviews. Whereas our interviewees view national reporting and political decision-making on migration as constructing and responding to a so-called 'crisis', they highlight how little they experience this as a crisis and how resilient their community is in dealing with the challenges:

*And I work in a hospital and I never saw a collapse of systems or chaos. I think we were doing quite fine. So, I also got frustrated reading about this collapsed society.*

*It's very hard with the media because they want to be selling stories. And it's hard with Twitter and so on, difficult to orientate all the information. But I wish we had a plan to work out for ourselves how to argue in these topics, based on what they have seen. Not on what they have read.*

It seems that local experiences are often very different from or even contradict the national narrative. This is crucial because our interviewees express how, on the one hand, they don't see their real experiences reflected or valued in the national conversation and, on the other hand, they seem frustrated with this pervasive idea being spread in the media of a collapse in Swedish society. The local experience in the church is guided by pragmatism. Rather than feeling a sense of panic, the church is there to deal with the current situation and to handle the challenges:

*It wasn't panic, but we just had to do our best and deal with it.*

Such a pragmatic position, as the church members point out, also sometimes means adjusting the system and acting slightly outside legal boundaries to help others in need, or, as one interviewee puts it, 'outside the normal ways to do it'.

### **The layers of physical space**

This story about integration is as much about focusing on pragmatic solutions as it is about the church as a physical space. Particularly in a place where the community is ever changing, the notion of a physical place to share seems crucial to our interviewees. The former vicar spends a considerable amount of time showing us all the rooms and explaining the infrastructure of the building, such as the new space for more activity rooms and the community kitchen. The space has evolved over time into a form of organisation to meet the challenges it faced.

Our interviewees describe the church as a space with several layers or dimensions. One of them is the church serving as a meeting point for all members of the community. This is about facilitating contact and encounters in a community in flux, a physical space that reflects the multicultural nature and openness of Bergsjön. The vicar tells us:

*I think when people come [...] when we have a meeting point, where not only people in a refugee situation meet each other but where we can form a kind of*

*social context. I think that is the most important... And what we also as a church are trying to create [...] It has been very much about thinking about how do you meet people in an environment like here? How do you work in order to establish contact? Being part of the life here.*

The church further serves as a place of transition, enabling the formation of new paths and trajectories for people. The church members tell us about the access to education or job opportunities it provides, particularly through language learning but also by connecting migrants to other community members in Bergsjön or other parts of Gothenburg.

As such, Bergsjön's church does not merely facilitate connections between community members, but also serves as a gateway into a new life.

### **A church finding its own role**

Even though our conversations around experiences of integration centre on helping newcomers, the key actors in the stories are the church members themselves, negotiating a relationship to what it means to be working in this church and why their work is so important. This includes the idea of a completely open church, a safe space that provides help to those in need. One of our interviewees describes the church as a sanctuary, a place that protects others:

*And just in that moment there was a family who knocked on the door and said we have nowhere to sleep... When Leif said that, he said it was totally impossible to say, 'Sorry, you cannot stay here.' And then to come back to the church the day after and read from the gospel and say there was no room for them in the hostel. It was totally impossible. He couldn't do it. So, he let them stay here. Not for a long-term solution but in that moment, he let them stay here. And it has happened many times after that. People came and said, 'Can you help me, I have nowhere to sleep.' Nowhere to stay. So, we said, 'stay. You are not going anywhere.' They stayed here for nine months and they had a child here, a church child. And they lived in this empty space somewhere, but they had a social context here.*

There is a struggle with the decision to let a family stay in the church illegally. The inherent tension between the expressions, 'he couldn't do it' and 'not for a long-term solution' shows how the interviewee seems unsure about the decision, and how important it was to justify it.

The notion of a sanctuary is particularly relevant because it relates to a central part of all the stories we heard from the church members. Our interviewees create distance between the church and the Swedish state, reinforcing the idea that their role is to care for everyone, to give protection and catch those who fall through the cracks of the political decision-making process. Our interviewees highlight how they provide an informal counterpoint and counterbalance to the more formal state institutions in the reception of migrants and in their integration. One person described it as a distinction between the state as ‘the body’ and the church as ‘the soul’:

*In Sweden, the Swedish model is to – we have the official society, and that means the state, the government, the authorities, the municipality. We have the rules and the law. You have rights, and also things you have to do. You have to pay your taxes. The official society. That is the body. But we have also the civil society, where people meet each other...*

### **Negotiation between independence and interdependence**

This struggle of finding one’s place in such a complex relationship between state and church is at the centre of the stories we hear. The migration agency, for example, is described to us as a formal decision-maker while the church fills the gap its decisions leave by protecting and fighting for migrants, no matter what their residency status is.

*I have discussed with the migration board so many times how they handle situations. Many times, people can come and say: ‘well, I belong to a Christian group... I have got a letter in my post-box saying, “you are a Christian, you have to go.” And so on. And the migration board says, it has happened, but you cannot prove it. Can you prove it? What are people going to say about that? ‘No, I cannot prove it. I belong to a group. I cannot prove it. But I am afraid for my life.’*

It almost seems incomprehensible to our interviewee that the migration agency can insist on proof of being threatened in one’s home country – instead, he takes the side of the newcomer. The church also actively positions itself against such decisions, acting almost as the migration agency’s conscience:

*We once sent a huge box with 2,800 cases to the migration board and said: ‘this is wrong. You cannot do this.’ And they had to look into everyone. And I think 40% they changed their mind.*

This distancing by church members does not just take place in relation to institutions as a whole, but also to politicians taking certain decisions:

*My experience is that they (the politicians) don't have the courage to work hard to create an open society. Which is very bad. Instead of standing up for their basic values. Standing up versus giving in.*

Besides such a strong feeling of distance, the church members recognise that this independence also offers a possibility to fulfil a unique and meaningful role in society:

*And this is the way the church works as a social actor in the community. And I think that the municipality or the state can in many ways not have that role that we as a church have. That the meeting space is not so easy for the state to create. But we can do it.*

But despite this process of distancing, there is also a recognition that there is a level of interdependence with the state. There is a need to find a balance between independence and interdependence:

*And the body cannot live without the soul, it would just be a body. And the soul cannot live without the body. So, we need each other but we are two different things.*

This also becomes clear when church members talk about the fine line between bypassing the law and abiding by the law. They sometimes have to play a role in reinforcing the official decisions taken by the migration agency:

*Where people asked us for hiding, we said we cannot do that. And we sit down and... we talked to them and they complained to the European Court, we supported them in the process. And as long as it worked we had them. And then it was a 'no'. And I said: 'I think you have to go back. Because the future for you and your children to live here as hidden people, that is not a solution.'*

It is important to the interviewees to highlight that the church is indeed abiding by the law, that the church members are not behaving illegally. This shows the delicate nature of the process of negotiating distance to the state. One of the key aspects in this dependence is the state's unofficial support for the church in helping undocumented migrants, which forces the municipality to use means outside the law:

*And when we talk to the municipality, we say that: 'remember that a child does not have the possibility to choose the way. An adult can say, well I am not allowed to stay here but I decide to. But a child cannot do that.' So, the municipality gives us money to support the children. Outside of the normal ways to do it.*

The choice of words is particularly interesting here, as the church member avoids calling this an illegal act but finds a more euphemistic way of describing illegality. This might illustrate how the church and state are keen to protect each other. Our interviewee even highlights that such support should become official:

*Because in order to support the people we support, they have to break the rules. They give us money and say use it in a good way. Which is crazy! They should change the rules, so they could help.*

This has profound consequences for the ways in which the church and state should, in the view of the church members, increasingly cooperate to join forces. Not only in terms of opening up financial support but also in other ways of liaising:

*But things have changed – they used to not interact with us and Migrationsverket are now much more open to interact with NGOs than they used to be. On a national level, there are regular meetings between the church, Red Cross and civil society and the government.*

### **The importance of having a place to belong**

According to church members, increased cooperation between church and state is a key necessity for successful integration. The importance of bringing together newcomers and other community members does not only extend to the church but also to the wider community. Our interviewees highlight how important it is to meet a newcomer in person to decrease and overcome fears of 'strangers':

*The best way to counter rumours is to meet the stranger yourself. See that it is a human being. So you should be exposed to the refugee in an active way. We need to talk with the person rather than talk about them – that is a very big difference.*

The church can act as an interlocutor to enable such encounters. The vicar spells out the four ingredients he sees as crucial for integration:

*I think every person needs trust. At least one other person I can trust. I think it is totally necessary to have at least one person. That's the first word. The other word is social context. Somewhere I can go, some group of people where I feel I belong. I have a context there, that is my context. This one. It can be the working place, or education. And the third one is meaning. There must be a reason I get up from my bed today. If we should have a day off it should be wonderful. But then day after day after day, nothing happens. And if I had no place in the world. It would be an awful situation. Everyone needs meaning. That is the third word. And the fourth word is faith. And maybe you think that is not surprising of a priest to say that we need faith. But I do not say it must be religious faith. I have it. But I can also say some people have faith for the future. Or in other things.*

Our interviewees highlight that in order to build a sense of belonging, they decided to create an open meeting place for everyone. Building a community and integrating newcomers means seeing migrants as fellow humans above all:

*A refugee is not only a refugee. It's a human being, it's a woman, it's a man, it's a child with a social background. With families. With all things. We have to meet there. And if we could meet there I think this is key for integration. You do not meet a refugee, you meet a human being.*

Besides creating such safe spaces of belonging and trust, all our interviewees highlight the importance of obtaining permission to stay as a major milestone on the journey of integration. This period of waiting is marked by tension and poses one of the key difficulties in integration. It seems to be a key moment in the stories we hear, the news that one is now able to stay in Sweden permanently and officially.

The main difficulty that our interviewees outline is associated with being in limbo, which creates frustration and exhaustion for the newcomers.

This is a challenge that comes up in many interviews across different institutions in Sweden: the idea of having or not having 'papers' as a symbol of obtaining residency is crucial. In many ways, the illegal status that some newcomers drift into because they are rejected is perceived as dangerous by some of the church members. One of the problems with such an illegal status is the lack of healthcare, which also pushes some of the migrants into criminality.

*They have very low chances of getting healthcare from the Swedish government, so they start medicine themselves. Self-medication, including tablets, alcohol and drugs. It's a wrong situation to be in as a country.*

### **Key moments in the journey of integration**

In our interviews we asked about moments that shifted the journey of integrating newcomers, both locally and nationally. One of these was the arrival of a large number of newcomers in the autumn of 2015. Even though the church has constantly been facing challenges associated with migration, members did observe an effect from this 'wave' on the community, which responded with an unusual 'wave of support' to the arrivals:

*I remember there was a meeting here at this church where there were so many people who wanted to volunteer just in this church for helping refugees. General people from the area. And people signed up for volunteering and we had too many volunteers. So we had to put them on a waiting list. Which seemed like a new situation for us.*

One of the main triggers for this shift was the publication of the photo of the young boy Alan on the shore. This image had a significant impact across Sweden in that it encouraged more community members to help.

Another trend which impacted the church members is the decline in compassion after this 'wave of support' in late 2015. The church members attribute this to another significant moment for Sweden: the decision to 'close' the borders to some migrants in early 2016. This had several consequences across the country, both in terms of official decisions on immigration, but also a wider societal change in terms of normalising the idea of being a 'closed country'. Our church interviewees tell us that this shift meant Swedish society had to adjust its own identity from having always been exceptionally open to newcomers. In their view, the new sense of a closed Sweden resonated fairly soon within society. The closure of borders, according to them, also made extreme right-wing politics more acceptable in society:

*In 2015, the situation was much more welcoming than now. Now it's completely different. I think because so many came and in September 2015 the government said welcome. I think those in favour of an open society are more quiet now. For instance, here, in the local paper you can see that they speak with another voice than four or five years ago. And of course, they do it because they adapt.*

*Changing norms. It made me feel sad because it was also much easier to be racist then, and say this person can go home. Wanting closed borders. And it's growing.*

This resonates with members of the migration agency who also observed this societal shift once the government rules had become stricter. In the view of our interviewees in the migration agency, attitudes have been hardening:

*The government made the rules harder one year ago – before that, there was a friendly and welcoming tone in society. I think we had less xenophobia a couple of years ago.*

Our interviewees in the church tell us that this shift is being perceived as a very radical change – from the most generous asylum country to the harshest, and they feel like this change was too challenging on an emotional level:

*The new law hurts; it's a bit schizophrenic – from the most generous asylum policies to the harshest.*

## Views from the migration agency

### **A crisis for whom?**

The interviewees from the migration agency experienced a spike in applications from late 2015, which constitutes a contrast to the continuity the church members describe. Later on, they realised that the increase in arrivals was not temporary but permanent, and the duration of this pressure is difficult for some to manage:

*But now that we all realised that this is not temporary, that it is going on for a long time, people are more fed up with it.*

For many migration agency members, this is still a crisis rather than a routine. One of the key reasons for this is that the processing of applications from 2015 was still taking place when we conducted the interviews, while new newcomers continued to arrive, albeit in smaller numbers:

*We are in the middle of a crisis and people have been doing this in the same way for 40 years. I wouldn't mind doing things differently. But I can understand why people would do that. I think that could save time.*

This difference in perceptions about the nature of a crisis between church and migration agency reflects the distance between these two groups revealed by our interviews. The experiences are very different on both sides, particularly in terms of the role they play within the community.

### **An economic lens**

This difference also becomes clear in the lenses the newcomers are seen through. While compassion with people in need prevails among the church members we spoke to, this shifts with interviewees of the migration agency. In the stories we hear from their employees, they see the newcomers as clients, where providing permission to stay is a service.

Members of the migration agency find themselves in a pressurised situation, where they need to process applications quickly. Their experience of integration is therefore shaped by this drive towards efficiency. Our interviewees express how limiting this can feel because there is often no time or space to properly engage with the newcomers. Instead, there is a tendency to mainstream the process.

So, our department leader tells us there are 200 applications for an internship and we have one month, and then we just focus on getting it done. So, we just call all the different employers but don't have time to think it through. Whereas instead we could help them apply for a specific opening. We inform them about our decision to get permanent permission and we give them a lot of information during an hour.

One of our interviewees had only recently joined the migration agency and highlighted how, on the one hand, she questions the process but, on the other hand, there is little time for her to change things:

*So, when you're new like me you start questioning things and they got used to it. To them it is just natural. I guess it's easier when you're new. But I also realised there is so much to do, I cannot question everything.*

This also creates a sense of distance from the people 'outside', those who work on the ground with newcomers and the migrants themselves:

*It's just that sometimes we do not get much contact with people outside. Maybe that's something that happens in a lot of big organisations. And sometimes people in these four walls get a bit isolated and lose touch with the reality that is out there.*

The fact that there is minimal engagement with the newcomers is also reflected in the language our interviewees use to describe them, mostly referring to an abstract 'them'. Along with this perspective comes a view of the newcomers as independent individuals who should stand on their own feet, who should be supported, but not too much:

*They key is to not help asylum seekers too much – the best way to be integrating in society is about what you can do on your own to make your living.*

The emphasis on how processes are currently being structured and how these should improve, as well as the moments of reflection among our interviewees on the migration agency's role, show that they think about how and in what ways they belong or relate to the institution they work for. The main strands in the stories revolve around a reflection of the migration agency's role, rather than the newcomers themselves.

Another key element of this economic lens is the formality of the application and integration process. There are rigid selection criteria that help standardise the process, which helps mainstream the application procedure, but also prevents flexibility to decide on difficult cases. Efficiency seems to win at the cost of a lack of individual care.

This standardisation is not very surprising, but it does constitute a strong counterpoint to the experiences of the church members who emphasise the provision of space for each individual, seeing and welcoming everyone with their own story.

Both church members and employees of the migration agency see a need for deeper collaboration between diverse institutions to improve the integration system:

*What really stands out is communicating with external actors, local communities and so on, so that we can work together. To collaborate. That really helps a lot. Because we cannot stand as a single actor as the migration agency.*

Furthermore, the migration agency interviewees recognise that there needs to be more space for members of the community and newcomers to meet, as well as for the different actors, including companies and institutions, to gather and exchange information. Meeting newcomers is vital to foster integration into the community. However, such spaces are still lacking in Gothenburg, particularly those that pay attention to providing meaningful contact. One of our interviewees at the migration

agency suggests organising exchanges like this around commonalities that people share, for example their profession, rather than separating them into ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘community members’:

*Opening up more spaces for people to meet, for newcomers to meet Swedes. You don't want to be identified as an asylum seeker necessarily but maybe you are a doctor and you want to know doctors, or you are a farmer and want to meet farmers. There could be platforms for different levels of society. So, people could meet around their shared interests. That could be very good.*

In response to what makes integration easier, one of our interviewees describes how being used to cultural differences is crucial to being tolerant towards newcomers.

*In bigger cities you experience more foreign influences and that makes it easier to be tolerant, to tolerate people who are different.*

Another key aspect in helping or hindering the integration of newcomers is knowledge of the Swedish language. For the migration agency, this is particularly important because the contact with an asylum seeker is closer:

*It is actually quite difficult when people don't speak that much Swedish. We always have a translator. So, I don't feel I have that much close contact.*

Knowing the language can be crucial in a context where the situation is already very formalised. However, language courses are rare and officially allowed only for those who have permission to stay permanently.

Furthermore, the migration agency interviewees also highlight how disabling the waiting period can be for newcomers and how it makes integration more difficult. This is because it causes frustration among newcomers and prevents them from starting a new life or becoming part of the community, for example by denying access to official language courses:

*They are waiting for grants or money, or they applied for a language course and they don't hear back or didn't get one and they just get frustrated.*

Another core challenge for integration in Gothenburg is physical separation, in terms of housing areas dedicated to newcomers that tend to be separate from the rest of the community, largely because of cheaper housing prices:

*They tend to go to places that are cheaper. And this leads to segregation. Also in other cities like Malmö. That makes integration harder.*

Separation also affects schools, where groups of Swedes and groups of newcomers tend to socialise apart from one another. A lack of platforms or spaces to connect Swedes with newcomers fosters such separation:

*I think it is because of a lack of platforms or places where something could be done. Like we have these organisations where language courses are available, but they don't meet as many Swedish people in these places.*

Apart from experiences on what hinders integration, the stories we hear in the migration agency contain a sense of struggle over a lack of resources in the application process. This creates situations in which processes become standardised and more impersonal because of the increased numbers of arrivals. The economic lens that our migration agency interviewees seem to apply feeds into this process of standardisation.

## Newcomers' perspectives in Bergsjön

### **Waiting for a new home**

Pragmatism tends to prevail in these experiences, a notion that is also conveyed in our forum conversation with newcomers and volunteers. We meet the group of mostly Syrians and Iranians in one of the church rooms. Volunteers provide food and drinks and participate in the conversation. There is a strong sense of how active these newcomers want to become in Bergsjön and how willing they are to contribute to the community. Some help out in the church themselves.

The newcomers in our forum conversations highlight a number of struggles they are facing, mostly around the shortage of housing in Gothenburg. One of the key challenges is the lack of official housing provided by the local government, which pushes them into using expensive private housing companies or into relying on the black market.

This creates frustration, an emotion that comes up in many stories the newcomers tell us. There are long waiting times for housing and other services, but the most difficult wait is between their arrival and the decision on a residency permit. This causes problems in terms of finding a place in Gothenburg's community,

for example by preventing access to official language courses or university. Many of the newcomers express how keen they are to learn and make an effort to integrate into the community, but sometimes they have to wait for months to be able to channel their energy:

*You don't have any opportunity to study in university when you wait for your permit. So I think we have an opportunity to change this.*

Our forum members also tell us about the long waiting times for doctor's appointments. Again, there is frustration and anger surrounding this, but also helplessness about being passive receivers:

*For example, my son, he had an urgent heart condition, and they said it is very urgent. But he had to wait for three months.*

When our interviewees speak of passivity, they often refer to the abstract notion of 'the system'. This seems to refer to the way things are done in Sweden. Our interviewees repeatedly refer to it as 'the system', as if everyone knew what it was in its entirety. When we asked, 'why do you think you have to wait so long?' our interviewee responded:

*This is the system. It's the system.*

It seems that this abstract 'system' encapsulates how difficult it is for the newcomers to become part of society, how they remain outsiders who repeat these words but will not really be part of the system. Yet, at the same time, there is a desire to be close, to accept the standards and norms, to learn 'how things are done'. As such, the notion of 'the system' seems to imply reflection on how one can belong to this society and expresses the tensions between being inside and outside. It also shows how crucial an understanding of how things work is for the newcomers.

### **Making a new home**

Alongside this frustration, the newcomers we spoke to also highlight repeatedly how exceptional Sweden is. More to the point, they defend or protect Sweden in their stories. When one of the volunteers talks about the high number of racists in Swedish society, two newcomers come to the defence:

*Volunteer: There are many racists here.*

*Newcomer 1: But there are not that many, actually.*

*Newcomer 2: I know a couple of people who voted for the Swedish Democrats in the election, but they are not racist. I respect them, they respect me.*

Another newcomer highlights that he constantly hears about Swedish society having become more racist, but has never had a bad experience or encounter himself, therefore countering the narrative around attitudes increasingly hardening in Swedish society. This illustrates how some of the newcomers stand up for Sweden, and take a generous and warm position towards it:

*I just hear that Swedish people became racist like that. But I don't see this. Four years I have been living here. I have contact with different people here, I travelled to the north, to Stockholm, so I don't see a really racist person.*

This warmth is also conveyed when newcomers and volunteers speak about how welcoming Swedish society is. At many points in their stories they tell us how touched they were by the generosity they have benefited from, particularly as some of them haven't had such experiences in their home countries:

*I met very nice people, our neighbours. Very sweet people. I was welcomed very nicely, they help me to find work and very helpful. I learned a lot of culture.*

*For example when we arrived and we filled out the papers and when I cried, many people came, hugged me and said don't you cry. And very nice, it is very good, you know. Really.*

For some migrants, there is growing distance from their countries of origin. While being enthusiastic about Sweden, they communicate with scepticism when talking about their home countries:

*In Iran we have the exact opposite situation. I am from Iran, if someone comes to our neighbour, I think Iranians don't behave like this. We are just racist, I think. We don't like foreigners as our neighbours. They think something bad, and I am very sad about this.*

The constant switch between admiration for their new – even if temporary – home and the distance they express towards their home country illustrates how difficult the process is of attaching yourself to a new community while staying deeply connected to your country of origin. In some sense, this process reveals how some ties need to be painfully cut in order to arrive.

There is also a willingness to build a true connection with members of the community. In our forum we see strong mutual understanding between the volunteers and the newcomers. One volunteer tells us:

*I have a grandchild and his father is from Gambia. And I adore this child. And I can see the future for him. And for you [addressing a newcomer]. And what you are fighting against.*

### **Distance to the migration agency**

In contrast to the warmth between the volunteers and the newcomers in the forum conversations, both sides repeatedly portray the official governmental agencies, particularly the migration agency, as cold-hearted. The official bodies are accused of not treating everyone and every decision equally. In one particular case in our forum, there was a young woman who had already been in the country since 2014, but her children were still not allowed to join her:

*One person and another person are treated differently. For example, she applied for her children to be brought from Syria in 2014. Beginning 2014. And she knows of other cases where they got the permission to bring their children after three or four months. She is still waiting. This is her opinion about the board, they are not treating people in the same way.*

The main emotion is one of confusion, that this approach is inexplicable – many of the newcomers we speak to don't understand the logic of how a decision is taken on residency. Another newcomer reinforces that the processes and decisions taken by the migration agency seem not to be standardised at all but dependent on the case officer. This is interesting, particularly given the emphasis placed on standardisation by the migration agency members. It reveals a gulf between both perspectives: an efficient process by one party is inexplicable and unfair to the other. It also seems as though the frustration newcomers are experiencing about long waiting times is projected onto migration agency officers.

*It depends on the case officer. In my own opinion they are very moody guys. It depends on their mood. She [the young woman from Syria] always tries to reach her case officer. She doesn't answer the phone, she doesn't talk to her. She just sends the message: Wait, wait, wait.*

These frustrations can seep into the world of the volunteers as well:

*I have a challenge. Not to take people's frustrations or feelings to myself. This is what I am trying to learn. It depends on whether I slept well, if I am tired. Some people's experiences touch you more than others. And then it's easy to bring the feeling to yourself...*

The volunteers are worried about being overwhelmed by feelings such as despair. These emotions can become a burden that they need to be careful about. Amid the tight connection with newcomers, there is therefore also a need to separate oneself from others' suffering.

When we asked the forum members about the moments that shaped their journey of integration, personal memories rather than political or national events came to the fore. One of the key moments several newcomers referred to is receipt of papers and obtaining permanent residency status in Sweden. This is when the unsure waiting period comes to an end. It also means that their efforts to become part of the community can be realised: they are allowed to take language courses and can try to get an internship.

Another important point in the journey is having the chance to move into permanent housing. It also means a choice for the newcomers in terms of the place they want to spend their time in Sweden, and can also present an obstacle to successful integration. One of our interviewees tells us:

*They asked me where I wanted to stay. I said here. So they told me that here in Gothenburg it will take a long time to get a place. Whereas when you apply for a house in another part of Sweden, for example in the north, it will be much easier.*

Often such housing options are available in the north of Sweden, such as in one of our other cases, Östersund, where there is a demand for newcomers to come and join the rather empty community. However, these places often don't seem very attractive to newcomers in contrast to the larger cities.

## **Negotiating belonging**

The stories we hear from church members, volunteers, the migration agency and the newcomers in Bergsjön reveal how migration serves as a lens to focus on the personal negotiation behind belonging to a Swedish community, as a state with specific constellations of responsibilities and relationships, a sense of responsible commitment to making integration work and a working through of your relationship with your home country or the institution you represent.

These are stories about what it means to be a church in secular Sweden, what it means to be an organisation dealing with a high number of applications and having the power to take life-altering decisions, as well as stories about how to relate to a new space and place without letting go of one's roots.

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### **Notes**

1. <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/Facts-and-statistics-/Facts-on-migration/History.html>
2. Data from the Swedish Migration Agency

# France:

## Civil society in the République

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**According to the analysis of migratory flows published by the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (Insee), net non-French migration rates in recent years have been relatively insignificant, rising from 60,000 in 2006 to a maximum of 130,000 in 2013.<sup>1</sup> But currently, 5.8 million immigrants (people who were born abroad but live in France without French citizenship) live in France, roughly 8.8% of the total population. This is the result of previous waves of migration rather than recent ones.**

Numbers show that migration to France was ‘slow’ between 2006 and 2013 and the institute also clarifies that migration to France is increasingly from other European countries: the main countries of origin being Portugal, Italy, Spain, Germany and Great Britain.<sup>2</sup>

Immigration flows from European countries (mainly Portugal and Spain) began to rise in 2009, and rose constantly in the triennium of the financial crisis, increasing by +12% every year, and culminating in 2012 when EU entrants made up 46% of the total.

The fact is that the refugee crisis has not had as significant an impact on France as on other countries in Europe. According to the Statistique Publique,<sup>3</sup> in 2015, the year in which an estimated 1 million migrants arrived in Europe, France granted refugee status to just a few thousand more people than in 2014. Commenting on the report (issued in January 2015), the progressive newspaper *Le Monde* noticed that ‘the refugee crisis [was] invisible in French statistics’, and that ‘in 2015, France recorded 79,000 asylum applications when Germany in the same period recorded 400,000’. The newspaper concluded that the ‘importance given to migrants in public debate is inversely correlated to their actual presence’.<sup>4</sup>

And yet at the local level, numbers materialised and what we were interested in was how – in the run-up to a presidential election that would be fought on the issue of migration and integration, in the aftermath of major terror attacks – the hundreds of young people who did find their way to France had fared in the local communities they had chosen or, simply, landed in.

## Moulins: working-class, activist, vibrant

Our first story takes place in Moulins, a neighbourhood in the south of Lille in northern France. The existence of numerous mills or ‘moulins’ dating from the 12th to the late 19th century gave this former industrial neighbourhood its name. Its once glorious, now waning, industrial past characterises the neighbourhood, presently a low-income, working-class district. In the 1950s, the neighbourhood saw major social housing developments and regeneration policies to deal with large-scale migration to the area<sup>5</sup> (especially from Italy, Algeria and Morocco). Despite sustained policy attention and targeted regeneration, the later part of the 20th century saw the emergence of the characteristic wastelands of industrial decline.

Characterised by a bold, militant spirit during the Second World War, the area sired its own leftist, underground press and, in 1941, the first issue of *La Voix du Nord*<sup>6</sup> (one of France’s few powerful regional newspapers) was published here, acting as a major catalyst for resistance against the Nazis.

These different traits from the past – pride, working-class activism, vibrant egalitarianism – continue to play an important part in today’s narrative and still accurately describe the neighbourhood. Moulins and Lille have traditionally been left wing and were once strongholds of the Communist Party.

*The stories told ... reflect both the deep institutional inadequacies ... as well as the resourcefulness of its population*

Today, Moulins is a ‘priority neighbourhood’: 38.9%<sup>7</sup> of the population (20,101 inhabitants)<sup>8</sup> is classified as ‘low income’, the share of households in social housing stands at 33.1%.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Moulins is the neighbourhood with the city’s second-largest foreign-born population. Meanwhile, 63.3%<sup>10</sup> of young adults have either no diploma or a qualification lower than the French Baccalaureate.

Despite all this, Moulins is also a dynamic neighbourhood with 149 registered civil society organisations (*associations* in French) with aims ranging from social solidarity to integration, via culture, sports, environmental activism and human rights. A community centre, numerous shelters for the homeless, an excellent Law School and one of France’s most prestigious Journalism Schools, as well as the National Confederation of Labour (a radical French trade union) all share this district.

Even though the city of Lille is geographically close to Calais – a hotspot for migration since the 1990s – the story we heard in Lille does not reflect this proximity. The migrants who settled in Lille did not come via Calais, nor do they wish to travel to the UK. As such, this story is not just ‘an extension’ of what has happened in

France's northern region over the past 20 years: it begins in 2014 with a massive and extraordinary arrival of young migrants, most of them minors from Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Ivory Coast and Niger.

The stories told by local civil society organisations, by volunteers and by the migrants themselves<sup>11</sup> reflect both the deep institutional inadequacies in dealing with this event as well as the resourcefulness of its population.

The extent of the arrival of unaccompanied minors in Lille was unusual. Given this extraordinary situation, how should it have been managed and by whom? How should local actors have reacted, and how else could they react in the future? What was/is their room for manoeuvre?

France runs on a highly formalised and intricate set of institutions that are both centralised and yet reflective of local contexts. So, this institutional involvement – and in some cases the lack thereof – is at the heart of the French story.

Institutions, even when they are too weak or paralysed to act, are fully fledged characters in the Lille/Olieux story and characteristic of the French situation. They possess 'personalities' driven by historical legacy, by the law and by a polarised political system. A web of constraints, in which the arrival of these young migrants was treated mainly as an administrative and welfare issue by institutions, allowed NGOs to fill the gap.

## Reversal of roles: weak formality sets the stage for informal power

### Local institutions

The *mairie* (city council) has wide-ranging authority over its territory.<sup>12</sup>

The *mairie* has sufficient power and scope to allocate resources and translate them into public policy.

The *département* is the main authority for social welfare management (this accounts for more than 50% of its total budget). Of crucial relevance, unaccompanied minors depend on child welfare, especially for protection and support (including education).

Finally, the *préfecture* – whose major function is to ensure respect for the rule of law<sup>13</sup> – is the central actor when dealing with migration issues at the local level. In the city of Lille, the core interlocutor in our story – however invisible – is the Delegate Prefect for Equal Opportunities.

### **Local actors – formal and informal**

Lille is home to many organisations that provide assistance to migrants. But they have been somewhat slow to act – or at least act effectively – because their activities have only recently had to focus on migrants.

The first organisation, La Réconciliation, is perhaps the most important, as it coordinates a large number of activities and was the first to open its doors to migrants. It is a church, a place of worship and a chaplaincy for the city's most deprived. This church is at the centre of the creation of ABEJ (Baptist Association for Assistance and Youth), another major local civil society organisation with different facilities: a reception centre, a shelter and a medical centre. Alongside reception, accommodation and health services, they also organise cultural activities and multi-service assistance (laundry, professional integration workshops, etc.).

In contrast to ABEJ, L'accueil Frédéric Ozanam (AFO) is a centre with a broader remit: it caters to anyone with or without a home, with or without children, whatever their nationality and resources. People can access different types of social support (basic rights information, financial aid and advice, administrative document tracking, help with CV writing) and a range of services (food and clothing allowance, hygiene services, hairdresser, relaxation classes, French classes, psychologists, etc.).

Finally, another major local actor in our Lille story is the lawyer in charge of defending unaccompanied foreign minors. Though her formal role takes place in court, in fact her personal involvement and dedication in this story has been a crucial resource.

### **Complex informal networks: a space for new actors**

What we discovered through our research is that this story is one of *reversed* responsibilities: local institutions, far from being the main characters, actually provide a space, or a stage for local actors. By engaging only very lightly, formal institutions allow local actors to gradually fill the gaps and eventually become the main characters.

## **The silent *mairie***

The Mayor of Lille is not unfamiliar with immigration: she has written or co-written several books on the positive aspects of immigration, solidarity and the North–South divide. In September 2015, she announced that her city would be part of the solidarity city network for receiving and hosting refugees, launched by François Rebsamen (Mayor of Dijon). She called for solidarity and humanity, reminding people that one should not wait for the death of a young boy (Alan Kurdi) to act. Following her announcement, more than 180 families volunteered to host Syrians in Lille. A special-

*By engaging only very lightly, formal institutions allow local actors to gradually fill the gaps and eventually become the main characters*

ised educator we met in Lille recognised that, officially, there is a desire to be welcoming and to integrate migrants via municipal services such as language training, access to housing and employment. However, the city's 'desire to practice integration' did not extend to unaccompanied foreign minors in Moulins, with a visible gap between public pronouncements and actual policy.

When the Olieux camp<sup>14</sup> appeared in June 2015, representatives from the Lille *mairie* came to assess the situation. They approached it cautiously, asking the police not to intervene and implementing free garbage collection around the camp. This was a first step, but for local organisations, who were concerned about housing, it was too slow and cautious a response. Reacting to pressures from local organisations, the *mairie* suggested that they might speak to young migrants to explain how to submit their asylum applications. However, according to local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) 'this was not at all the issue'; rather these were minors who could not apply for asylum before they reached the age of 18. The main priority was to meet their basic needs: shelter and education.

When local NGOs asked the *mairie* to circulate a list of the families willing to host refugees, it refused to do so, as very few Syrian people had arrived in Lille. Moreover, when the camp in Calais was dismantled and people were moved, 20 minors from Calais were rapidly placed in shelters, while minors from Lille/Olieux continued to sleep rough.

*The response to national issues seemed relatively effective, but less attention was being paid to local problems, leaving volunteers feeling upset. The mairie grew increasingly silent on the issue.*

*The city of Lille has a clear policy: no additional accommodation in Lille. Their argument is that they already do a lot to combat exclusion, but in reality it's not the mairie but civil society organisations that do a lot [director of a day care centre].*

### **The reluctant *département***

Once a minor is officially recognised as such, the *département* becomes responsible for the unaccompanied foreign minor under child welfare regulations. But there is a long delay between recognition of responsibility and the provision of effective care. During this period, these very young people – some of them children – still need material, educational and psychological support: this gap is filled by NGOs to the best of their abilities and capacities, but that is not enough. According to some, the slowness of the official reaction is a clear sign that this ‘is not top of their agenda’. Others cite the *département*’s financial difficulties as an explanation: ‘in order to return to balanced budgets, cuts have been made, particularly to social welfare and youth’.<sup>15</sup>

Another major issue was the difficulty in finding the ‘right person’ to talk to in the *département*. No one is specifically in charge of unaccompanied foreign minors, in contrast to other places such as the Pas-de-Calais,<sup>16</sup> which created a ‘Head of Mission for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors’ post. Therefore, no one really has the authority to manage the situation in this *département*, and this partly explains the blockages and dysfunctions within the system.

### **The ambiguous *préfecture***

The *préfecture*’s role has been an ambiguous one: it has made its presence felt, it has spoken formally and maintained a level of visibility, but it has not really involved itself beyond emergency provisions, nor has it acted as an ‘enabling’ force.

When the clearing of the Olieux camp was ordered in September 2016, various organisations offered to accommodate unaccompanied foreign minors. However, these were rejected by the *préfecture* who, instead, set up its own action plan: unaccompanied foreign minors were to be allocated to shelters across the region. In the end, this plan was accepted by NGOs, on condition that there be regular reporting on the situation.

In order to implement its action plan, the *préfecture* asked the lawyer in charge of unaccompanied foreign minors in the Olieux camp to provide a comprehensive list of people. However:

*The préfecture only took into account priority cases and disengaged from the others. On top of everything, the bus arrived at 8am, while many people were at the day centre to have breakfast or take a shower, and missed the opportunity to get proper shelter [day centre manager].*

Reporting responsibilities were respected and weekly meetings with representatives from local organisations were arranged with the *préfecture*. However, over time, discussions failed to move forward, and long-term decisions were not taken, so some organisations (including the church) decided to withdraw from the committee. Confronted with institutional failure, the NGOs became increasingly involved – with their role evolving from providing occasional support, to fulfilling key functions: from filling the gaps, to managing the entire situation.

## Civil society: from filling the gaps to making history

### The contribution of the churches

As mentioned above, La Réconciliation, ABEJ and AFO have been central stakeholders in the Olieux camp. Their involvement started even before the camp was formally established. From 2013, La Réconciliation opened its church to accommodate young migrants who were sleeping in the area, until summer 2014 when they started to find hosting families. However, in consideration of the growing number of unaccompanied minors who kept arriving, they decided to re-open the church until June 2015.

*in an emergency situation, in spite of France's dense and complex network of formal institutions, informal norms and new stakeholders are central to the management of the situation*

At the same time, ABEJ and AFO opened their doors or tried to find emergency solutions. Thus, the churches became increasingly organised, albeit informally, as members of La Réconciliation, ABEJ and AFO became 'social actors' and entered into negotiations with families, institutions and public services to find solutions. Moreover, La Réconciliation provides a range of measures and systems to improve people's circumstances and facilitate their integration: they have created a system of '*familles de proximité*' (hosting families).<sup>17</sup>

From March 2015, churches also negotiated free school registration with Catholic schools so that unaccompanied foreign minors could attend school. However, because of the growing number of unaccompanied minors in the area, the network of schools had to be expanded.<sup>18</sup> AFO offers free sandwiches and organises clothing distributions every week from Monday to Friday.<sup>19</sup>

The increasing effectiveness of the churches shows that in an emergency situation, in spite of France's dense and complex network of formal institutions, informal norms and new stakeholders are central to the management of the situation. And, that they rise to the occasion.

### **A spontaneous collective project: 'le Collectif des Olieux'**

At the end of 2014, as churches were reaching the limits of their accommodation capacity, the lawyers in charge of unaccompanied minors and many of the locals decided to take a stand and highlight the outrage of these young people sleeping rough. This marked the creation of the Collectif des Olieux. To raise awareness, they decided to settle in the Olieux garden together with young migrants, creating the camp in June 2015.

The collective, made up of locals, lawyers, migrants, individuals and civil society groups, quickly started to organise itself, with regular meetings during which they discussed housing, education, food and other issues. They also tried to raise their profile with advocacy work, sometimes bringing in the media.

The enormous wave of solidarity and the creativity of the collective members allows young migrants to escape their routine and participate in a range of activities: dance, soccer, cooking, video workshops, listening to and recording music, etc. The collective decided not to deal with local institutions and to organise their own initiatives. However, members of the collective are present when there is institutional involvement (such as an eviction) in the camp.

Although the Olieux camp is physically visible, it has not received much media coverage and many residents of the Lille region are unaware of the situation. Thus, activism stems mainly from physical proximity and word of mouth.

We met different individuals who decided to volunteer. One of them, A, is a local restaurant manager who started to bring food to Olieux after a friend told him that young people had settled in a camp nearby. He rapidly met AT, a young migrant who told him of his desire to learn how to cook. Some days later, AT became an apprentice in the restaurant and was even temporarily housed by A.

B is a college teacher. She heard about the Olieux camp and wanted to help but did not know how. When she discovered that one of her friends was already teaching classes to young migrants from Olieux, she contacted the Collectif des Olieux and started teaching literacy classes. She also became the unofficial guarantor for a young woman, S, who attended the same college. S found a place to live in a flat share with young professionals. One of them, R, told the churches that they had a spare room in their flat.

*Churches, civil society organisations, lawyers, volunteers, professionals and individuals ... who could not bear to witness young migrants being left alone in the streets wanted to 'do something'*

M also wanted to help, but she works and has three young children. Thus, M and her husband decided to become a '*famille de proximité*' for A. M also cited her wish to raise her children by teaching them certain values: 'I wanted to teach my children some important values, including solidarity'.

These stories reflect the wave of support and solidarity that rapidly developed around the Olieux camp. Churches, civil society organisations, lawyers, volunteers, professionals and individuals, a huge number of people who could not bear to witness young migrants being left alone in the streets, wanted to 'do something', whatever the reason (personal, humanitarian, patriotic, political, etc.). Together, they managed to create a reception and integration system.

## Relationships with and between institutions

This story is about relationships among different institutions, but mainly between institutions and local actors. Major change is often brought about by an institutional decision (for example an eviction) that causes other local actors to react and take matters in their own hands – they then become the principal players. How do these local stakeholders manage to take the lead and how do local institutions react?

### **Bypassing institutions (except when you rely on them)**

How did local and informally organised actors manage to replace formal institutions as the key protagonists alongside the young migrants? To answer this question, we need to look at their initiatives. In some cases, they have tended to bypass institutions, while in others they have relied on and used formal institutions extensively.

The system of '*familles de proximité*' described above is a good example. It highlights the capacity of a group of people (who are not professionally qualified in this area) to find lasting solutions. According to one volunteer, 'we do not exactly "bypass" institutions – but we do take the lead'.

With regard to providing minors with education, local stakeholders also decided to bypass institutions because the official procedures took too long. Instead, they negotiated directly with school directors, with amazing results. However, the Regional Board of Education asked school directors not to accept any unaccompanied minors before they were effectively taken on by the *département*.

This decision complicated the work of local actors, as school directors had to take a risk in accepting an ‘un-vetted’ unaccompanied minor, which they did.

Moreover, the Collectif des Olieux does *de facto* bypass institutions because they simply do not deal with them and organise their own activities. According to the lawyer in charge of unaccompanied minors, ‘the state’s deficiency and the *département*’s deficiency are visible, but the situation in Lille proves that it is absolutely possible to bypass the national level’. And according to some members, it is possible to remain unaffected by national decisions and keep organising your own activities once you have built up and can rely on a strong network. The caveat, however, and as explained to us by a member of AFO, is that ‘because they do exactly what they want, the collective is thought of as anarchists who are irrelevant to local institutions’.

As such, bypassing institutions does have some limits, and local stakeholders also have to rely on institutions to lead their activities. Faced with critical situations (for example, when an unaccompanied minor who had been recognised as such had to wait an excessively long time to be effectively taken care of by the *département*) they turn to institutionalised legal help.

### **When the *préfecture* takes – too much – control**

The reactions of local institutions towards strong local stakeholders are diverse. They can be supportive and react rapidly, or be slow and hamper local initiatives.<sup>20</sup>

When the clearing of the Olieux camp was announced in September 2016, the *préfecture* devised an action plan so that unaccompanied minors could be accommodated quickly. Moreover, the *préfecture* also agreed to organise a weekly coordination board meeting to discuss the situation of unaccompanied minors who were spread out across the region and to start reflecting on long-lasting accommodation solutions. Thus, on the one hand, we encountered a dynamic *préfecture* taking control of the situation.

On the other hand, the *préfecture* seems to leave little room for local stakeholders, often opposing their activities. For instance, the ‘*familles de proximité*’ system has been criticised by the *préfecture* because families are not legally allowed to host minors at home. The *préfecture* bases this opposition on security concerns.<sup>21</sup> By being active and taking control – the *préfecture* effectively takes over and leaves little room for local stakeholders.

## **A département that both supports and hinders**

Through the system of '*familles de proximité*', a young migrant costs the *département* €350 per month, compared to €1,500 per month for 'official' support. This could be seen as relieving some of the pressure on the *département*. However, according to La Réconciliation, the *département* is deeply ambivalent:

*They are glad to benefit from the system, but at the same time they don't offer any support. The legal guarantor is always named very late, so families cannot do anything since the guarantor has to sign all the papers related to the minor. Moreover, any disbursement to families is always delayed and families do not receive support from the département.*

However, the growing number of unaccompanied minors in the North *département* (the numbers grew from 960 in 2016 to 1,300 in 2017), and the unavailability of accommodation, required the *département* to find new and cheaper alternatives to handle this issue. Since 3 July 2017, the system of '*familles de proximité*' has been formally adopted by the *département*. Indeed, from autumn 2017 onwards, unaccompanied minors are accommodated by volunteer families who receive €380 per month, with the help of La Réconciliation.

It is interesting to see how a system that was created informally could eventually be taken over by formal institutions and expanded. Other *départements* have already adopted this initiative, such as the Pas-de-Calais and the Bas-Rhin.

## **Institutions: can't live with them, can't live without them**

As mentioned above, local stakeholders do not always agree on the way they should relate to institutions. We distinguish between three categories of people: those who think institutions must always be part of the discussions, those who want to cease dialogue with institutions and those who move between the two positions depending on the situation.

For some local stakeholders, involving formal institutions is essential. They are aware of the difficulties in negotiating with them or even in obtaining an answer to a specific question, but they believe that bypassing institutions ultimately weakens their initiatives:

*I don't want to avoid the politics, I think we have to work with them. We have to go and talk to the mairie, even conduct a sit-in there, but we have to put the mairie back in the loop in order to have a stronger strike force.*

For most stakeholders, the decision to involve institutions depends on the situation. In this case, there is no principled opposition to institutions: local stakeholders have tried to build relationships and if they act on their own, this tends to be the exception rather than the rule. A number of individuals also acknowledged that when they bypass institutions, they feel they give a bad example to young migrants who will be the future adults of the country:

*The message we convey to the minors we accompany is that we do not care about institutions, but we know perfectly well that it is very bad for them and their future integration to consider that laws and institutions are not binding [a member of La Réconciliation].*

The third category of stakeholders – especially members of the Collectif des Olieux – has decided not to contact institutions. They believe that institutions hinder their activities and had decided from the start not to deal with them. Their own organisation is based on this principle, as they did not nominate any representative or spokesperson for the group.

This story concerns the relationships between stakeholders and in which migrants seem to have little space. Indeed, the main characters of this version of the story are local institutions. The discussions we conducted in Lille focused mainly on these institutions, while migrants seemed to be passive characters. Yet, if we look deeper into each character and grasp the texture and nuance of our discussions, migrants are obviously at the heart of this story. Their fate underpins all actions, which are motivated by a huge mix of emotions. This ‘hidden wiring’ explains why people engage, why relations are tense, why people are ‘fighting’ on both sides. The complexity of the situation is linked to the complexity of stakeholders’ emotions and feelings.

## Beneath institutions: emotion

### The victories

**Acceptance and open-mindedness:** According to our NGO interviewees, integration is driven by personal contact. Even though people are reluctant to welcome migrants to their city or are scared of ‘foreigners’, once people meet a migrant face to face, this changes everything. The ‘migrant’ becomes ‘a person in front of me who has a name’ or ‘this person who could be my child.’

*Once people have overcome the fear of the unknown, they want to reach out to others [hosting family].*

The city of Cassel, where unaccompanied minors from the Olieux camp were resettled in November 2016, provides a gritty and joyful example of acceptance and open-mindedness triumphing over reluctance:

*In Cassel, contrary to what was said at the beginning (rumours circulated that the mayor was against the arrival of migrants and that anti-migrant leaflets were being distributed), the neighbourhood is supportive and pleasantly surprised by their courtesy and calmness. The mayor is cooperative. Meeting these young people swept aside all the fears people had at the beginning [director of a day centre].*

**Giving the best of one's self:** The encounters between young migrants and volunteers in Lille have had an extraordinary impact on both sides, creating situations where people feel that the best of themselves was revealed to them. Migrants' tenacity, their progress in learning French on their own or at school and their overall integration levels are impressive. We heard so many remarkable stories:

*S did not speak French when she arrived in 2015. Now she is fluent. She is exceptionally motivated [a volunteer who teaches classes with le Collectif des Olieux].*

In our meeting with her, S wrote on a post-it that she gave to us at the end of the evening. It was the answer, that she was too shy to give out loud, to our question, 'what did school change for you?' On the post-it note, which will continue to grace our bare Counterpoint walls, she had written 'I exist':

*Young migrants are hugely appreciated at school because – although they sometimes have to make up for lost time and some face a real challenge with respect to language skills – they are conscientious, they are really keen to work, they bring calm to the classroom [volunteer in a local association].*

*A did an internship in July, then he wanted to do an apprenticeship and A is a fighter. I have been very impressed by his behaviour at work, he is 17 and is already an adult. I want to support people like him who didn't get a chance [a restaurant manager].*

Indeed, one of the first things young migrants ask about when they arrive in Lille is school. They have a thirst for knowledge and a huge respect for their teachers.

For many volunteers, the situation has led to a will to go ‘above and beyond’. Professionals have seen their daily life change, because they volunteer during their free time. Those who teach classes with le Collectif des Olieux face difficult working conditions, as classes take place in a cultural squat (La Ferblanterie) where they have to remain standing for up to 3–4 hours. Moreover, some people decided to volunteer on several fronts: they teach classes, bring food, host migrants at home and ‘fight’ to improve the migrants’ circumstances:

*I feel I'm doing something. I could not bear to do nothing. I get the impression that I will leave a little mark, even though it is little. I haven't made the leap of hosting someone, but of course I think about it. Once you get involved in this situation, you are driven further [a teaching volunteer].*

**Hope:** Even though the situation is tense, people still have faith and hope in their counterparts. Many of them spoke about the creation of a ‘wave of solidarity’ in Lille, citing the concept of ‘solidarity’ when they are asked how they manage to maintain their commitment over time:

*It is incredible to see the Christian mobilisation, but not only that, also citizen mobilisation. When they come into contact with young people, people come back, become involved. This situation has ultimately changed the lives of many. Today, more than 25 parishes and 400 volunteers take part in this initiative [director of a day centre].*

More broadly, some interviewees argue that French society is not unresponsive:

*I feel that at the individual level, there is an increasing and positive but slow understanding of this issue [volunteer in a local association].*

If we look at most media, they depict a tense situation, which does exist, but the coverage fails to examine specific local situations in which there is real involvement among local citizens and mayors, as well as cohabitation – even integration – with newcomers.

**Gratitude:** The feeling of gratitude was one of the most prominent emotions in our story, coming from both sides. Young migrants are grateful towards volunteers and associations, because they gave them faith, hope and better living conditions. The first words they uttered when we spoke with some of them about the situation in Lille were in praise of these volunteers:

*AFO was the first hand extended. Then I met Ad from the Collectif des Olieux, she taught me how to write a CV and a cover letter. Thanks to her, I could find an internship and then obtain an apprenticeship in a restaurant. I met the manager of a restaurant nearby, who accepted me and also offered his couch for one month. I found that really incredible, that someone would just lend me a hand [A].*

Volunteers are also extremely grateful towards young migrants, saying that they changed their lives, their minds, opened their eyes:

*S is exceptionally motivated. After 35 years of work, it's overwhelming to see young people with such potential to succeed, to learn, to integrate. It has revolutionised the way I teach [a volunteer who teaches classes to migrants and whose primary occupation is as a teacher].*

### **The challenges**

**Fear:** There are different levels of fear among the volunteers. They fear for migrants and for themselves. As they become increasingly close to young migrants, they fear for them:

*We are scared because despite all the solidarity we can observe here in Lille, we will never be their parents, and we are scared that if something happens, for instance a refusal of immigration papers, we won't be able to do anything despite all our goodwill [a volunteer, manager of a restaurant].*

They also fear for those young migrants who have yet to arrive and end up in the same situation. According to one volunteer, 'the number of migrants does not decrease, it is very distressing to let them go back to the streets every time'.

Moreover, volunteers fear the impact of legal changes at the national level. Even though they have bypassed local institutions, they will not be able to bypass immigration laws if they're toughened. Linked to this, we observed a fear to be caught breaking the law as a result of helping migrants:

*My worry is to have the URSSAF (Unions de Recouvrement des Cotisations de Sécurité Sociale et d'Allocations Familiales)<sup>22</sup> coming to my place. A is not allowed to have a fixed-term contract, just a free internship. A celebrity chef in the region experienced many difficulties since he decided to hire migrants in his restaurant, and this has been highly publicised. That's why I try not to be known here [a volunteer and manager of a restaurant].*

But local institutions also fear the reactions of local residents. The Hauts-de-France is a specific case: the region is particularly vulnerable to the far-right Front National (FN). In the last few elections, municipal (2014), regional (2015) and national (2017), the FN won substantial support in Lille.

Even though the FN vote during the last presidential elections was contained in Lille – big cities are not representative of the voting tendencies of the country – the pressure of the far right is critical and visible and may explain the timidity of many institutions who are more often than not willing to act, but not in manifestly public ways that could fuel the FN vote.

**Despair:** More than fear, both migrants and volunteers expressed despair when confronted with a bureaucracy that takes so long to evaluate people's situations. The evaluation of a minor's situation leading to the provision of shelter is supposed to take five days. However, in practice, this evaluation generally takes months; months during which minors are not allowed to go to school. The main feeling they expressed is not the fear of failing to receive immigration papers, but rather the despair associated with having to wait for so long without being able to access education. 'It was a real nightmare, I've been surprised by France' (L). They waste their time, and according to a specialised educator, 'just when we should be shaping them and training them, we bend them out of shape by making them wait'.

*... despite all the solidarity ... here in Lille ... if something happens, for instance a refusal of immigration papers, we won't be able to do anything despite all our goodwill*

On the NGO side, people express despair because they observe a dangerous repeat of the situation that occurred in the 1970s with '*les grands ensembles*'.<sup>23</sup> Young migrants have a strong will to integrate into French society, they want to learn, they want to open themselves to French people, they do not want to stay on their own. However, placing unaccompanied minors in shelters where they do not have strong social and psychological support, and sometimes far from the metropolitan area, is a repeat of past mistakes.

## Invisibility and hidden wiring

Our story is mostly invisible. It's the most important thing that has happened in the lives of both the migrants and the residents, yet in the city of Lille, where it takes place, it is barely there. But if we go deeper into the story, we encounter a vibrant place where people surpass themselves to offer better living conditions, faith and hope to unaccompanied minors.

It is almost like looking at an anthill: you have to look very closely, perhaps even step into it, to see the interwoven nature of actions and relationships between different actors. Looking at it from above, you will not grasp the story.

In order to understand the story and decipher people's reactions, we had to take into account all these 'hidden wirings', these elements that are not visible, but which nonetheless make the story evolve in a certain way. This is what makes up the true lived reality of migration in this small part of Lille.

## Rennes: from confrontation to cooperation

Our second French story takes us to Rennes, Brittany's regional capital.<sup>24</sup> Brittany is one of the French regions with the lowest number of immigrants,<sup>25</sup> because, traditionally, Brittany has been a land of emigration rather than immigration. As such, relative to the rest of France, the immigrant population in Brittany belongs to a recent stream. Since 1962 the share of immigrants in Brittany has risen fivefold, with most arrivals having come in the early 2000s. While many initially came from Morocco, Algeria, Portugal and Italy, since 2013, Rennes has taken roughly 1,200 people from Syria and other parts of Africa (300 of whom were transferred to Rennes after the dismantling of the Calais camp).

Unlike Lille, Rennes has mainly been dealing with families rather than individuals. This has meant providing different types of housing and support. Politically, however, Rennes is quite similar to Lille: a hotbed of left-wing activism and social movements, with a Socialist Party mayor since 1977. These traits play a central role in our story. Rennes, and Brittany in general, is also an area of strong Catholicism – another prominent feature in our story because organisations linked to the Catholic movement are very trusted. It is a young and dynamic city, which gives considerable space to the voluntary and NGO sector. In fact, in 2012, Rennes tallied nearly 6,000 voluntary organisations<sup>26</sup> that form a significant part of the landscape and act as major stakeholders in our story, along with an extremely active *mairie* (city council).

*In order to effect change in the city of Rennes, stakeholders use activism and visible initiatives: they need to speak up and be seen*

### The long road to cooperation

A relatively successful form of integration has taken place in Rennes. But for this to occur, it clearly required three distinct steps or phases. All of these phases have been necessary to create the strong integration system currently found in Rennes. Each step is based on a type of relationship towards other stakeholders, characterised respectively by confrontation, negotiation and cooperation.

#### **Confrontation**

The first thing we noticed in Rennes was the fact that emergency situations drive people to act with whatever means they have at their disposal – and they often use the pressure of confrontation to get their way.

## The power of activism

In order to effect change in the city of Rennes, stakeholders use activism and visible initiatives: they need to speak up and be seen. Activist organisations – especially Un Toit C'est Un Droit (UTUD),<sup>27</sup> Collectif de Soutien aux Personnes sans Papier (CSPSP)<sup>28</sup> and le Conseil des Migrants<sup>29</sup> – have a long tradition of sit-ins in public spaces to show discontent or voice demands. Since the election of the new mayor of Rennes in 2014, activists have regularly used this method of protest.<sup>30</sup> Le Conseil des Migrants started with public speaking events, sit-ins and then rapidly moved to full-fledged public occupations.<sup>31</sup>

UTUD also usually uses occupation as a strategy to gain visibility and influence. They broke into an abandoned church in the winter of 2012 in order to house homeless migrants. Six months later, during summer 2013, they occupied a park with mainly the same migrants. During the summer, people in the squat were subject to an attack from extreme-right movements who destroyed tents and materials. UTUD made a formal complaint. According to a member of UTUD,

*This event had an impact on the mairie, who started to be afraid. If people were injured, it would have been their responsibility. When the start of the school year approached, the mayor requested the eviction of the camp but in parallel she stated that the mairie would put everyone up in hotel rooms.*

This example demonstrates how pressure from one side [an organisation] can lead to the creation of a system by the other side [the *mairie*]. More recently, UTUD settled in a disused retirement home, 'Les Jardins de la Poterie', to create a squat for 180 people.

A collective of 32 civil society organisations – including those mentioned above – also decided to protest for migrants' rights in the streets of Rennes once a month.

All these initiatives were implemented to put pressure on local institutions and force them to react and find quick solutions for migrants. Alongside these initiatives, activist organisations also relied on another element to increase their impact: the media.

## The power of the media

To increase their visibility and that of their cause, organisations routinely use the media. In fact, according to a volunteer at CSPSP, we use 'the media to keep frightening the institutions, including the *préfecture*, and keep them on their toes'.

For instance, in 2010, UTUD occupied a disused funeral parlour for a few families. But it rapidly became overcrowded and dangerous. So, as a last resort, UTUD decided to trigger media coverage of this place. They called the Open Care Hospital Network (Réseau Ville Hôpital),<sup>32</sup> which came to inspect the site and filed a report with the *mairie*, in which they described living conditions as worse than in a refugee camp in Africa. At the same time, UTUD called the local media, which broadcast a national television report entitled, *A Slum in the Centre of Downtown Rennes*. According to UTUD, 'the problem was solved 24 hours later'. Both the *mairie* and the *préfecture* decided to intervene and relocated everyone who was occupying the old funeral parlour.

In September 2016, when UTUD decided to open La Poterie, the squat in the disused retirement home, they knew that it would be a publicised initiative. The squat would highlight the number of empty spaces left abandoned in the city of Rennes while many migrants were sleeping in the streets with no support from local institutions.

However, volunteers recognise that using the media is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can act as a supporter, but on the other it can also create misleading impressions. At the local level, the media tends to act as an enabler, as we have seen above, whereas at the national level, the media sometimes conveys a distorted image of migrants and of their situations. The media is usually more interested in refugees who obtained asylum and are housed in reception and guidance centres (CAO) than in failed asylum seekers, thus conveying the impression that there are 'good' and 'bad' migrants: 'People think that if migrants fail their asylum application, they do not deserve to stay in France and should go back to their country' said one of the UTUD volunteers. Moreover, speaking about 'migrants' in general erases the distinction between the different situations that exist, the different profiles of people, and paints everyone with the same brush. 'They are terrorists, they come to France to beg' (is the summary media caricature by a member of Le Conseil des Migrants).

*Activism and media pressure are useful vehicles to create change for migrants at the local level. The final pressure point is institutions. Both are underpinned by a recognition of the role of formal politics and the necessary understanding of its workings for anything to happen on the required scale.*

Using the media to enhance visibility of initiatives at the local level has proven to be effective, although the national media can sometimes hinder local initiatives.

## **The power of formal politics**

Activism and media pressure are useful vehicles to create change for migrants at the local level. The final pressure point is institutions. Both are underpinned by a recognition of the role of formal politics and the necessary understanding of its workings for anything to happen on the required scale.

In 2014, during the municipal elections, the Socialist Party merged with the other left list for the second round. One of the conditions exacted for the alliance from the rest of the left, was that the governing Socialist Party would agree to identify empty buildings that could be used for asylum seekers in the metropolitan area. The election created the framework for the negotiation of a real immigration policy. In 2014, the new mayor of Rennes, Nathalie Appéré, announced that ‘the days of children sleeping in the street are over’.

More recently, the Community Social Support Centre (funded by the *mairie*), at the request of the Mayor of Rennes, produced a note on the involvement of the local community and on emergency accommodation needs. As a result, 114 spots have been made available by the Housing Ministry. Such examples are a reminder of the necessary role that formal political negotiations have to play, even in situations where informal institutions and NGOs fix a problem or effect rapid change. When there is a political will, roadblocks disappear.

Strong activism, the use of the media and formal politics have yielded great results and helped to implement a set of initiatives to welcome migrants in the city of Rennes. These power relations have made it possible to build initial contacts between different stakeholders in the sector, and they paved the way for the next step in the progression of the relationship: negotiations.

## **Negotiation**

This part of our story captures the negotiations that have taken place in Rennes between different stakeholders – *mairie*, *préfecture*, and activist and non-activist organisations.

### **From principled opposition to agreement**

The different types of occupations and initiatives we described in the previous section often lead to negotiations between different parties. In 2013, when an abandoned church (Saint Marc, in the Villejean area of Rennes) was occupied by migrants under the auspices of UTUD, the organisation staff managed to speak to the second Bishop of Rennes. The Church and Le Secours Catholique refused to

go along with the proposed expulsion and sought a negotiated settlement. They initially tried to find housing and asked parishes all over the *département*, but their attempts failed. They then decided to contact the *préfecture*, who agreed to relocate the migrants – individuals for three months and families for six months – in hotel rooms or with hosting families. Despite shared concerns, Le Secours Catholique and UTUD had never talked to each other:

*At the beginning we stared at each other blankly. They [Le Secours Catholique] considered us bad people because we organise illegal activities, and we believed that they [Le Secours Catholique] could only do a bit of charity. In fact, it was a revelation for both sides: they were impressed by the way we organised our initiatives. On our side, we realised that Le Secours Catholique did not only organise humanitarian interventions but was also able to make strong protests. This has been an important step that has had lasting effects [a member of UTUD].*

This step also marks the coming together of two strong actors who managed to convince the *préfecture* to act.

Moreover, after having occupied the *préfecture*, representatives of Le Conseil des Migrants managed to establish direct relationships with them, resulting in the better treatment of migrants. For example, migrants can now seek a personal appointment with the General Secretary, without having to queue at the *préfecture* for long hours anymore. According to a member of Le Conseil des Migrants, 'migrants are now welcomed by the *préfecture*. This is the result of long, hard work.'

Initiatives organised mainly by activist organisations have often been followed by negotiations with local authorities. However, extreme activism has been counter-productive: activists had to moderate their actions in order to be able to negotiate with local institutions. The occupation of Les Jardins de la Poterie discussed below provides a good illustration of this dynamic.

### **A tipping point: Le Squat de la Poterie**

This event is a tipping point in our story. It marks the establishment of real cooperation between – a priori – incompatible actors that managed to find an agreement to fulfil a common goal: housing for migrants.

Le Squat de la Poterie is one of the most significant events that occurred in the recent immigration story of Rennes. UTUD decided to occupy an unused retirement home called 'Les Jardins de la Poterie', housing around 160 people, of whom 80 were

children. The squat was heavily publicised and thanks to this, it received a large number of offers of assistance. In parallel, UTUD launched a major initiative with the *mairie*. The retirement home's landlord announced that the squatters would be expelled. The *mairie* did not support the expulsion, but did not want to fund an illegal squat either. It managed to convince the landlord not to take legal action

*For most organisations, the city of Rennes is an enabler and people recognise its efforts.*

and offered to sign an agreement between the landlord and the organisation (a free rent contract). In parallel, UTUD had to sign an agreement with the Community Centre for Social Action (CCAS), which would finance the facility, and another agreement known as a 'partnership protocol' with Le Secours Catholique, Fondation Abbé Pierre,<sup>33</sup> CCFD,<sup>34</sup>

the City of Rennes and the CCAS in order to ease relations with the *préfecture*. 'The *mairie* really did everything possible in order to find a legal arrangement. This is the result of all these past years of negotiations and better relations with the *mairie*' (a member of UTUD).

This event was turning point: it ushered in a new relationship between different stakeholders working on behalf of migrants (directly or not – like the landlord), even though relations had started to improve before this event. It paved the way for a third level of interrelations in our story: cooperation between stakeholders.

### **Cooperation**

Over time, cooperation increased dramatically in Rennes, thereby improving the process of integration by allowing for more fluid and trusting relationships, and speeding up the emergence of more and more relevant initiatives. So, what made this possible?

### **The openness of the *mairie***

The growing openness of the *mairie* in Rennes towards more initiatives for migrants is clear. In contrast to Lille, the city contract for the period 2015–20 clearly mentions the presence of migrants and the need to house and support them, for instance by giving priority job access to migrant women.

Moreover, in January 2017, the mayor restated that Rennes' twin aims were economic development and solidarity, and that these should go hand in hand with concrete initiatives to support the position taken by the *mairie* (from the creation of housing to the creation of posts dedicated to migration issues).<sup>35</sup> According to a member of the Health and Solidarity Directorate in Rennes, 'these people are here, on our turf, 70% of them will certainly stay. We have a vested interest in integrating them well.'

As such, the *mairie* is willing to tackle the issue of migration in a positive way.

According to a member of Le Secours Catholique, ‘the city of Rennes has always listened to people when they protest, they have always agreed to meet with people and enter into dialogue’. For most organisations, the city of Rennes is an enabler and people recognise its efforts.

### **The commitment of the *département* and the *préfecture***

The *département* of Ille-et-Vilaine contributes to the reception and integration system developed in Rennes. Families with children, even though they have not yet received official refugee status, are granted €300 in child welfare. The *département* also supports 320 unaccompanied minors, providing shelter in hotels or foster families. ‘Our *département* is caring and tolerant’ (a member of Le Secours Catholique).

In addition, the *département* has also signed an agreement with the *préfecture* according to which they will cover transport expenses for refugees that will then be reimbursed by the state. The *département* also ensures right of access to school transportation and funds the Active Solidarity Income (RSA) programme for refugees. In addition, in partnership with a social landlord, they are considering the use of empty flats for refugees who do not have access to housing due to limited availability. In parallel with the collaboration agreement they signed with the *département*, the *préfecture* cooperates with the Centre Louis Guilloux (a health organisation in Rennes) so that migrant families with children can benefit directly from maternal and child care. According to a member of the *mairie*, ‘this is not just political. There is real humanity in Rennes.’

### **Solidarity above all else**

During our interviews with different stakeholders, the majority of them, whatever their position, described a sense of solidarity. This solidarity sometimes overtook any political positions or individual interests, particularly with respect to the support that emerged when Les Jardins de la Poterie was occupied by migrants.<sup>36</sup>

According to a head of mission at the city of Rennes, ‘all the hotel staff I work with are human rights activists, beyond what it is they do as a profession. For instance, a hotel manager employed a woman as cleaner once she had been “regularised”. Another hotel manager installed a kitchen so that people could cook hot dishes for themselves.’ This head of mission was yet another person to mention a surge in solidarity from local elected officials, who do not hesitate to call her when they encounter migrants in the streets.

Moreover, according to a member of Le Secours Catholique, there is no right or left political position when it comes to solidarity and emergency situations. He told the story of two politically opposed mayors who did not hesitate for a minute when it came to reserving housing for people once they've been granted the right to remain.

In Rennes, we observed significant political voluntarism that supports the hard work of organisations on the ground. This balance emerged thanks to the evolution of the relationships between stakeholders – from confrontation to negotiation to cooperation. However, none of our interlocutors believe that this equilibrium can be taken for granted: according to UTUD,

*We retain broad discretion to occupy spaces if needed. We did not say that we would give up, and the mairie knows it. For the moment, we do not plan to occupy anywhere in the city of Rennes, but we might clash again someday. Clearly, if we hadn't occupied the Squat de la Poterie, the mairie would not have acted.*

Moreover, depending on each organisation's environment and nature, the processes differ: Le Secours Catholique will enter into negotiations as a first step, whereas UTUD used confrontation to gain attention and negotiated later. The *mairie* tends to play with these different steps depending on the interlocutor. They will use negotiation only with Le Secours Catholique but could respond to confrontation with UTUD. Moreover, some organisations prefer confrontation and do not want to enter into negotiations, mindful of retaining their independence.

Even though this progression from confrontation to negotiation to cooperation is observable, it should not be taken for granted and stakeholders may revert if they believe that a situation is stuck in a status quo.

## Towards deeper integration

### **Formalising the NGO network**

Once cooperative relationships have been established, the work of integration can begin. We previously described how relationships between organisations and local institutions came to be structured. Another important feature in the integration system in Rennes is the increasingly structured nature of initiatives and sharing of tasks *between* organisations.

When the organisation Bienvenue ('welcome' in French) was created in 2013 to greet and manage newly arrived Syrian families, its members met the different existing organisations working for migrants, in order to signal their presence in the NGO landscape. They sought good relations with everyone from the outset, 'even with the most militant organisations' (a member of Bienvenue). Overall, Bienvenue offered more long-term housing solutions than other organisations (usually three months), and good partnerships with other groups would enable them to direct people with no access to accommodation.

*we were struck by the determination and strength on display, the determination to live 'a normal life' and to make a contribution.*

Over time, each organisation specialised in a type of support (housing, food, clothing, etc.). According to a member of Le Secours Catholique, 'it is a bit informal, but still there is good coordination and distribution of aid'.

The Squat de la Poterie added another dimension to the structuring of the NGO network. A few days after the occupation, UTUD organised a cross-organisational meeting with about 30 groups. According to a member of this organisation, 'we needed to do something together, it was no longer possible to work in our own corners'. They rapidly managed to set up initiatives together, with the most activist organisations accepting to moderate their demands so that each organisation could easily join. This network of organisations gave added importance to the Squat de la Poterie and prompted the *mairie* to find quick arrangements.

We observed an informal but strong structuring of the NGO sector in Rennes, participating in the creation of an effective integration system. However, integration does not only come about thanks to the work from the NGO or institutional sector. Indeed, the reason they are trying to create a functioning system is because migrants have a real will to integrate.

### **Involvement and integration**

The migrants, both families and individuals, we met during our visit in Rennes ask for nothing more than to be integrated and involved in French society. In the forums we organised with members from the NGO network and with migrants, we were struck by the determination and strength on display, the determination to live 'a normal life' and to make a contribution. And there was no language barrier: people whose first language was not French have made incredible efforts to learn the language quickly and well.

Many migrants had become volunteers themselves, saying they had the chance to be helped and now wanted to do the same in return. Even when they themselves were still in precarious conditions, even though some of them have not yet been granted asylum. Many of them stressed that this was what kept them sane as they waited to hear back about their status.

Of all the impressive people we met, G was particularly so. She has been living in France for more than five years, her status is still pending though. In the meantime, she wrote two books to tell her story – a story that took her from Togo to France, and from living on the streets of Rennes to her current, more ‘stable’ situation. Her books have been sent to local senators who recognised they were a fantastic source of information to understand the lives of migrants. She has since been invited to different conferences and speaks at various colleges. In short, she is involved, integrated and engaged in a country that does not quite yet reciprocate officially to the same degree.

### **The city’s evolving attitude**

The integration of migrants in the city of Rennes is twofold: on the one hand, as migrants become increasingly involved in the city, they are more integrated. On the other hand, and maybe because of the extraordinary openness of migrants and their will to integrate, we observed a change of attitude in the city. This change of attitude comes from local people, as well as local institutions. When Le Squat de la Poterie opened its doors, there was a wave of offers of help, with lots of material gifts, language classes, activities and workshops. This place is now a place of action, which offers cultural and educational activities to people of all ages. For instance, young people can learn photography while their parents improve their French. According to G, an increasing number of people understand what is going on in Rennes and what migrants have to endure. People say, ‘it is because I read your book that I have decided to welcome people at home’.

And there has also been a major shift since a representative from Le Conseil des Migrants was invited to participate in city-level institutional consultation and negotiation. It means that migrants are able to bring their point of view to the management of migration issues at the city level.<sup>37</sup> However, even though great efforts are made, the integration processes in Rennes still contains flaws and loopholes.

## Persisting flaws

Though at the local level action is sustained and focused, activity at the national level sometimes hinders local action. France's dense and complicated bureaucracy has a significant impact on local capacity and initiatives.

### **Lost in the (lost) state apparatus**

Even though efficient initiatives have been set up, these usually deal with people who are seeking asylum or have not been granted asylum and are trying to remain in France through other means. Both the NGO networks and the migrants describe a tentacular and complicated bureaucracy, with dozens of procedures to follow and a sluggish system. During our forums we heard from dozens of people – both migrants and their guarantors – about the nightmare of having to cope with the documents, the procedures and the limbo created by the delays, all of them core to the asylum process.

People face difficulties when filing an asylum application:

*It took me some time to understand the procedure. I thought I could go directly to the offices of the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) and the National Court of Asylum (CND).*

Then, once they have submitted their application, they have to wait, especially when they have to appeal the decision before the courts. For instance, G has not yet been granted asylum. She has been waiting for more than five years now. During this period of time, people are not usually allowed to work.

Moreover, migrants do not understand the 'lottery' aspect of the whole system: many people we met did not understand why some people are granted asylum and they are not, when in fact both come from the same country and faced the same hardships. NGO workers are actually convinced that an element of a lottery does exist and this gives hope and despair in equal measures: 'this time, it's got to be my turn' can turn into 'why do they have it in for me?'.

Organisations describe a public service apparatus that does not take the realities of life into account. Sometimes, people are placed in accommodation that is far from their children's school, far from their social network and far from any of the relevant institutions. However, if people leave the accommodation or decline housing for any of the reasons above, they are punished by the system: it takes days to obtain further accommodation as they no longer have priority.

Another migrant woman explained that she had to change accommodation every three days with her little boy, all over the *département*. She underlined the difficulties she faced, as she did not want to refuse accommodation but was not able to keep her social network or maintain any sense of continuity for her and her son. In the same vein, a volunteer told us the story of a little boy she knew who called his mother 15 times a day while at school in order to know if she knew where they would be sleeping that night yet.

*Rennes provides a prime example of how successful and hard-won integration initiatives at a local level can be frustrated by national-level policy*

Mental health issues are of the most obvious consequences of such a system. This came up repeatedly. A member of Centre Louis Guilloux told us that they were trying to provide psychological support for migrants. However, they have very few means, and ‘those who should receive treatment cannot because treatments are tough and people would need stable accommodation to receive it – that they do not have’.

Mental health issues were mentioned indirectly by several of the migrants we met. But it’s a catch-22: many have the impression that as their health improves, the chances of obtaining papers and accommodation decline. According to a 17-year-old boy who was granted asylum but whose mother was not, ‘the better her health, the less the chance that she will be accepted’. Even though he is reassured by his mother’s improving health, he fears being separated from her sooner or later because of a negative state decision.

### **The national level versus the local level: tensions between the *préfecture* and the city**

According to a representative at the City of Rennes, ‘the aim of the state is to get rid of these people’. There is tension between the state – and the *préfecture*, its representative at the local level – and the city that tries to provide integration solutions. Because of this tension, the City of Rennes tries as much as possible to avoid publicising its activities.

The question of publicity has been mentioned several times. Even though the media can have a positive impact,<sup>38</sup> it also gives a negative image of immigration. According to a member of Le Conseil des Migrants,

*the media is broadly instrumentalised by politicians and politics. Nowadays, journalists mostly relay words and stories which give a negative image of migrants, as beggars, or as terrorists. There’s the pervasive idea that we have no idea who is coming in.*<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the national level may create counter forces that hinder initiatives at the local level. People feel concerned about the positioning of the state and this raises questions about how they can relate to migrants. According to a member of Bienvenue, an organisation with a Catholic background in Rennes, 'I have been raised to take great pride in our state, but the state does its utmost to not be respected'.

The local integration process has evolved through a difficult and complex journey of confrontation and conflict, through to negotiations and finally, cooperation. However, the example of Rennes provides a prime example of how successful and hard-won integration initiatives at a local level can be frustrated by national-level policy.

## Notes

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1. Chantal Brutel, 'L'analyse des flux migratoires entre la France et l'étranger entre 2006 et 2013: Un accroissement des mobilités', Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, Insee, 2015, available at: [http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref\\_id=ia22](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref_id=ia22)
2. [http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?reg\\_id=O&ref\\_id=ip1524](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?reg_id=O&ref_id=ip1524)
3. Statistique Publique, *L'admission au séjour – Les titres de séjour*, 8 July 2016, available at: [www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr](http://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr)
4. 'La crise migratoire, invisible dans les statistiques françaises', *Le Monde*, 16 January 2016; see [http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/01/16/la-crise-migratoire-invisible-dans-les-statistiques-francaises\\_4848444\\_3224.html](http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/01/16/la-crise-migratoire-invisible-dans-les-statistiques-francaises_4848444_3224.html)
5. However, migratory waves in the area date from the late 18th century, with movements from Belgium, then from Poland in the first quarter of the 20th century, and from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Algeria and Morocco in the second half of the 20th century.
6. Local newspaper, still existing today.
7. Insee, 2009. This data includes three priority neighbourhoods in Lille including Moulins.
8. 2009 census.
9. Insee, 2009.
10. Insee, 2007. This data includes three priority neighbourhoods in Lille including Moulins.
11. We spoke mainly to people from the church, the civil society sector (professional and non-professional), lawyers and volunteers. We faced many difficulties in reaching institutional stakeholders.
12. The city contract in Lille is based on a social and urban cohesion project that is divided into four areas, one of which is 'An inclusive city': reinforcing inclusion mechanisms and fighting exclusion. However, the issue of migration – whether integration, coordination, or management of migrants in the territory – is not raised, meaning that this is not a priority area to be run by the *mairie*.
13. It provides state services within the region, guarantees public order and protection, manages relief operations and plays an essential role in the regulation of conflicts, tensions and crises. It also delivers all identity documents, ensuring that rules on entry and residence of foreigners are respected and combats exclusion. It oversees the harmonious development of economic, social and cultural life in its area of responsibility.
14. The Olieux garden was originally a playground of 8,000m<sup>2</sup>. Unaccompanied minors settled in a small part of the playground, known as the 'Olieux camp'.
15. Whatever the reason for the delays, in July 2016 the French Conseil d'Etat (the equivalent of the supreme court) ordered compensation to be paid out to a minor for the *département's* failure to comply with the judge's decision.

16. Part of the Hauts-de-France region.

17. Thanks to this system, an unaccompanied foreign minor (with priority given to the most vulnerable) is welcome to join a family, which then acts as his/her referee. A part-time employee was hired to manage this particular housing system in November 2016, as the church managed more than 40 families (for about fifteen young people). Indeed, in order to help families, an unaccompanied minor can split his/her time between different families (sometimes across four families with whom the young migrant spends one week per month).

18. The pastor of La Réconciliation started to engage in case-by-case requests, taking an unaccompanied minor with him and going directly to meet the school director. He obtained very good results and many young people were accommodated. Volunteers from the churches also teach French lessons to unaccompanied minors, especially to those who cannot access schools.

19. In order to run all these systems, La Réconciliation brought in two volunteers -Ulrike to confirm change is okay>. The organisation and daily monitoring that are required are time and resource consuming and are a major strain on finances. The whole enterprise is run on a shoestring.

20. The *mairie* is left out of this chapter because it withdrew quite early from the story.

21. While hosts are visited by representatives of the Church, the contract they sign is not official or legally binding, making it potentially dangerous for minors. According to La Réconciliation, 'we replied to the *préfecture* that migrants hosted by our families are not minors but are over the age of 18, since the majority of them have not yet been recognised as minors. We also asked them how sleeping in the streets was more secure for these young people.'

22. Collection agency for social security contributions.

23. 'Les grands ensembles' refer to huge buildings that were created during the 1970s in the French suburbs to accommodate immigrants and those on low income. These buildings were disconnected from city centres, creating feelings of abandonment among their inhabitants.

24. Insee, 2014. There are 420,717 people living in the Rennes area (metropolis), Insee, 2012.

25. The 1999 census records 46,267 immigrants in Brittany, representing 1.6% of the regional population, whereas they make up 7.4% of the overall population in France.

26. Of which 13% are dedicated to humanitarian and charity work, 13% to the promotion of human rights and 12% to social work.

27. A roof is a right.

28. Collective for the support of undocumented workers.

29. The migrants' collective.

30. The CSPSP occupies different public spaces at the same time so that activists have multiple locations and more time to protest and raise their voices. They also carry out 'friendly occupations' in supportive organisations such as community centres or trade unions, to broaden their support base and find more volunteers. They also come with banners and megaphones to detention centres and try to speak with detainees and organise informal street exhibitions on 'immigration myths' once a week.

31. Together with CSPSP and UTUD they occupied the *préfecture* building. They occupied a diocesan house with migrants who were homeless to put pressure on Catholic networks to find homes for migrants.

32. This network is funded by the *mairie*.

33. Abbé-Pierre Foundation for Access to Housing for underprivileged people.

34. Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development.

35. The city created a hotel facility which costs about €800,000 per year. This facility was initially devised to take over from emergency provisions when these were overstretched, but nowadays it is central and supplements the state's facilities. In addition, in order to manage this facility, the *mairie* has created different positions dedicated to migrants: employees at the *mairie* are in charge of rights, emergency housing and language learning. Three years prior to the election of the current mayor in 2014, another facility was created in connection with the dismantlement of a squat: CooRUS (social emergency coordination network). It offers emergency municipal housing for homeless people (asylum seekers as a priority, but not only). Furthermore, throughout our story the *mairie* has played the role of mediator, enabling people to work with and accept one another, for example, by striking the different agreements ('commodat' and partnership protocol) signed for Le Squat de la Poterie. Moreover, the *mairie* also provides financial support to some organisations dedicated to migrants, such as Le Conseil des Migrants. 'We are subsidised by the *mairie* for operating costs. It is not a lot, but still, this is a significant gesture' (a member of le Conseil des Migrants).

36. Les Jardins de la Poterie was abandoned in July 2017.

37. This change of attitude also occurred in the *département* of Ille-et-Vilaine (part of the Brittany region). After the dismantlement of the Calais Jungle in autumn 2016, the French government spread migrants across different reception and guidance centres (CAO) in France. The city of Cancale, some 70km away from Rennes, was supposed to transform an old hospital into a CAO designed to welcome 60 people. When the decision was taken, anti-CAO demonstrations occurred in the city. The *préfecture* agreed to close the CAO by the end of June so that it would not impact on tourist season. However, by the time the CAO effectively closed on 30 June, the citizens of Cancale recognised that the arrival of migrants had created an openness in the city, and were no longer in favour of its closure.

38. The picture of Alan Kurdi, the little boy found dead on the beach, had an impact on people who decided to act or engage from this moment onwards. They had to 'do something', such as intervene in Le Squat de la Poterie even though residents are not Syrians.

39. When the media is used by a political party, it has an even greater impact. G, one of the migrant women we met, was shocked by the Front National campaign conveying the idea that migrants were living like kings and were given priority over French people. She felt 'dehumanised'. Alongside this campaign, national statistics can be used to convey false ideas, for example publicising the number of foreigners arriving in France, without distinguishing between the diversity of arrivals: people coming to study, for work, for family reunification, together with people who are fleeing conflict and persecution in their country of origin. Or even just publicising the number of arrivals without subtracting the number of persons leaving the country, which completely changes the migration balance.



# Germany:

## The refugees are coming

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**During the night of 18 April 2015, the refugee crisis arrived in Germany, an event that would fundamentally change the course of the country's future. That night, some hundred people died in the Mediterranean Sea while attempting to seek refuge in Europe. While this was not the first time refugees had drowned on their way to European shores, this event had a lasting impact: it was simply one boat too many. Foreign Minister Steinmeier said it was a 'tragedy' that rendered one 'speechless', while Chancellor Merkel stressed that everything needed to be done to avoid 'such suffering'.**

For the government, this mainly meant strengthening measures against human traffickers. But the public discourse had now changed: what happened in the Mediterranean Sea mattered. Dramatic scenes were unfolding on Germany's doorstep: in refugee camps, in train stations in Budapest, culminating in the march of hundreds of people from Hungary towards Germany. These images shaped the reality of the refugee crisis in Germany. On 4 September 2015, Chancellor Merkel was confronted with an urgent decision on how to react to the arrival of all these people at the Germany's border: stop them there or allow them to enter German territory?

The German government decided to let them in. A few days prior, referring to the challenges of the European refugee crisis and Germany's overall role in it, Merkel said: '*Wir schaffen das*' (We can do it). This reassurance has since become a soundbite, criticised, cited and misappropriated in countless ways, especially by the far right.

Because of the controversy surrounding migration and the uncertainty the arrival of such a large number of people created, the decision to 'open the border' became Merkel's decision. The extent to which this event became linked to Merkel as a person was striking – reflected in the unprecedented personalised and hostile rhetoric of right-wing protesters. More broadly, public discourse was shaped by the polarisation between two conservative positions: Angela Merkel stood for a liberal opening, also supported by the left, while Horst Seehofer, her coalition partner and leader of the conservative sister party in Bavaria, became the champion for concerns about an uncontrolled stream of people coming to Germany and changing the country.

Without question, the number of people seeking asylum in Germany during the past two years is considerable: 476,649 people in 2015 and 745,545 people in 2016,

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the highest annual number of applications since the establishment of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in 1953. In both years, around 36% of applicants came from Syria. It became apparent that public agencies were overwhelmed, and institutional gaps increasingly came to be filled by civil society actors.

On the one hand, resentment and open hostility against foreigners grew: in 2015, the Bundeskriminalamt (Federal Criminal Police Office) registered four times more attacks on refugees and refugee homes than in 2014. On the other hand, there was an unprecedented outpouring of hospitality. People welcomed refugees at train stations, donations exceeded the demand, people took refugees into their homes and volunteered to teach German. Many reasons drove this level of engagement, one of which was a desire to oppose fear and narrow-mindedness. And maybe this display of German openness also served as a way to correct the image of a 'ruthless' Germany gained during the Euro crisis. This might not have been a conscious motivation, but the way positive international reviews were received in Germany indicates that the image of a compassionate and generous society was valued. The word *Willkommenskultur* (welcoming culture) became the label to describe the high levels of hospitality and volunteerism in the wake of September 2015.

From April 2015 on, the refugee crisis took over from the Euro/Greek crisis as the focal point for the media. The media's role in the portrayal of this crisis was complex. On the one hand, the mainstream media, including the tabloids, actively supported the *Willkommenskultur*. On the other hand, the issue was simultaneously framed as something that pushed Germany and its bureaucracy to the edge of chaos.

The refugee crisis also created a struggle between two Germanys: the 'light' and the 'dark'. The same country is home to the *Willkommenskultur* and attacks on refugee homes. The public negotiation of the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees presented a dichotomy between two kinds of Germans, a polarisation that did not leave much space for the – probably more realistic – complicated nuance in between these poles and for thoughtful engagement with the arising challenges. The following two case studies illustrate the negotiation between these two poles, and demonstrate that real, lived experiences of migration often involve a mix, sometimes contradictory, of attitudes and emotions.

## Tengen: the importance of the local reality

When you look up Tengen on Google Maps and zoom into the centre of this small town, you are taken straight to the Catholic Church. Although the church forms the focal point of the physical space occupied by this community, it is not the main character in Tengen's migration story. This role falls squarely to the ordinary men and women of the town who took it upon themselves to fill the gaps in support for migrants that had been left by institutions unable to cope with the large numbers of people needing help.

Tengen is a small town in Baden-Württemberg, just six kilometres from the border with Switzerland. It is formed of a cluster of once independent villages. As such, it is not easy to travel from one village to the other without a car. It can be difficult to go to the supermarket or the nearest city, as there is no train station in Tengen and only an infrequent bus service.

Tengen officially has 4,587 residents, of whom 301 are 'foreigners'.<sup>1</sup> When we travelled to Tengen in November 2016, we were able to meet our interviewees at the assembly room of the town hall. The mayor has his office here, together with the rest of the town's administration. Tengen's current mayor has been in office since May 2015. When he took up his position, he was only 25 years old, Germany's youngest mayor at the time. His election was seen as somewhat of a surprise – he is young, a Protestant and a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), while Tengen is located in a deeply Catholic and conservative area. Interestingly, he ran on an independent ticket, despite his affiliation to the SPD. We initially approached him to see if Tengen could be a case study in our project. Our idea was greeted with plenty of enthusiasm and administrative support – reflected, not least, in the provision of this central meeting venue.

In 2015, a total of 54 migrants who arrived in Germany were allocated to Tengen. This was in accordance with the national *Verteilungsschlüssel* (distribution key), which distributes migrants between and within the federal states in Germany.



*8 minutes to Tengen*

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*5 minutes to Tengen*

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*20 seconds to Tengen*

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In parts of Tengen, existing properties were identified as appropriate *Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte* (shared accommodation; GUs). These accommodation facilities house newly arrived asylum seekers after they have been registered in the initial reception facility. They stay in GUs while they wait for a decision on their application for asylum or for a maximum of 24 months. In short, these facilities are for temporary use and not meant to house people permanently. As such, the newcomers who arrive in Tengen will leave again – making space for others to arrive, and eventually to leave again.

In spring 2015, when it was announced that 54 migrants would be allocated to the town, citizens in Tengen formed a *Helpferkreis* (helpers' circle). At times, this circle of volunteers had around 65 members. The volunteers took on a diverse set of tasks. They served as advisors, helped to teach German, provided carpools to enable new arrivals to go to the supermarket or to the doctor, organised material donations and provided various activities for children and young adults. To understand the story of Tengen, one needs to understand that the volunteers of the *Helpferkreis* did not support any existing infrastructure at first. Rather, they managed the reception and initial integration of those who arrived in their villages autonomously and through self-organisation – albeit in close cooperation with the mayor, the head of the school and other relevant local actors.

However, the existence of the *Helpferkreis* cannot conceal the fact that there was also resistance to the plan to host refugees and migrants in Tengen. There was a petition, a poster was put up on a house saying '54 are too many', and we were told that somebody sold their house on the grounds that they felt their spouse would not be able to walk the dog safely at night once the migrants had moved in. As one of our interviewees explained, hostility is still there but normality has taken over. The ongoing, if only latent, hostility and perceived indifference of the wider public towards the migrants in the village was an issue that regularly cropped up in our conversations.

We wanted to learn more about how the Tengeners dealt with the arrival of migrants in their villages. To that end, we spoke to people who were, in one way or another, actively engaged: the head of a school, a local journalist, a person from the charitable organisation Caritas, as well as the mayor, though engagement was primarily driven by his professional responsibilities. Our main focus, however, was on those locals who were engaged in the *Helpferkreis*.

Our in-depth interviews provided fascinating, colourful and personal accounts of an exceptional time in Tengen's story. They provide two central insights. First, the

‘refugee crisis’ is made up of two different phenomena. Second, integration forms a multi-dimensional disruption of the local environment. Before elaborating on these two findings and their broader implications, we set the stage by describing some of the central observations gleaned from our conversations in Tengen.

## Reflections from the Tengerer volunteers

### **Motivations and personal experiences of integration**

We did not ask explicitly what drove the volunteers of the *Helferkreis* to become involved in the reception and integration of the refugees and migrants that arrived in their community. Yet, our conversations revealed a set of diverse motivations, including a wish to counter the perceived hostility among fellow citizens towards migrants:

*And then there was an announcement that 50 refugees, approximately, would come [...] And there was much resistance in the village and – umm – in the face of this mad resistance and this almost obsessive hate-filled spiralling, I said to my husband: ‘[you know what] now we are offering something for the kids’.*

The perceived intolerance and xenophobia drives this volunteer’s engagement in the *Helferkreis*. Her explicit engagement with migrants helps to set herself apart from these attitudes. But the express wish to *live* in accordance with openness and liberal values is not the only motivation of the Tengerer volunteers. There was curiosity, a sense of citizenship duty, the belief that one had distinct expertise that could be usefully applied, as well as the interaction with migrants:

*I actually pretty much wanted to keep myself out of it, because the population ... I mean, it was simply that we did not approve that we got 54. But then I got the task of registering the refugees [in the official position the interviewee held]. And through this I actually really got involved. And I also then found them to be nice ... one knew the people. And that was really super. And then I also helped with other things.*

This account shows an initially reluctant citizen who wants to engage with the *Helferkreis* on the basis of initial ‘forced’ personal interactions with migrants and the unexpected emotion of sympathy that arose from these interactions. In fact, personal interactions and even friendships recur constantly in our conversations. This personal experience ranked highly when we asked our interviewees if there

were 'positive moments' that come to mind when reflecting on the time of their engagement: 'personal encounters', 'the time with refugees', 'personal contacts', 'friendship with families' were all cited as positive memories.

Alongside personal relationships and friendships, there are two other kinds of positive moments that our interviewees mention. The first relates to the migrants, for example when 'refugees came to village fetes'. One interviewee, who was involved in teaching German, mentions the 'enormous engagement of the pupils in the course'. Others mention the 'hospitality' among the refugees or instances when 'the women simply dropped by, without words and smiled at us'. Our interviewees referred to some of these events as 'touching moments'.

The second set of positive moments relates to the citizens in Tengen, for example 'the good relationship between helpers and migrants, and the general willingness to help'. In a similar vein, somebody highlighted the 'encounters and cooperation with fellow citizens' as 'positive'; 'new contacts with people from Tengen' was mentioned by another volunteer. Somebody else recalled the 'positive reception [of the refugees] in the school'.

*... the actual work of integration is done by people who do not get anything for this in return except for recognition from politicians*

When asked if they faced any challenges over the past months, our interviewees referred to the logistical task of looking after newcomers, especially at the beginning of the process: 'every few days new people – no overview anymore'; 'the beginning a bit overwhelming – too many people – very unfamiliar – insecure'. There was also a perceived 'lack of interest in the population beyond the *Helferkreis*' and the 'rejection [of the interviewee's engagement] in parts of [their] circle of friends and the[ir] own family':

*[A]t the beginning, I was so disappointed that nobody was interested [...] And it is not that I thought they would have to thank me, or so ... but I actually almost had to hide [...] For some people life simply went on and one was not to mention those refugees.*

Furthermore, witnessing the 'conflict between [refugee families of] different religions [in the GU]' – somebody else spoke of 'personal conflicts in the accommodation' – was mentioned as a 'challenge'. So was finding the right personal distance in interactions with the newcomers to avoid excessive emotional involvement. Finally, and importantly, the challenges of overcoming bureaucratic hurdles were

mentioned. At the start of the experience, most challenges revolved around the arrival of the migrants, while bureaucratic hurdles became the main problem later on.

We asked the volunteers, what, in their view, made integration possible. In general, as the head of school stressed, integration is about human resources:

*Financial means are nice and necessary, but, at the end of the day, it is people who do the work, make contact, build friendships, 'arrive', integrate and get involved. [...] the actual work of integration is done by people who do not get anything for this in return except for recognition from politicians.*

On the side of the newcomers, it is the (eventual) ability to speak German that is perceived as necessary for integration. On the side of the home community, it is an openness towards and personal engagement with arriving people:

*The personal interaction. The individual socialising and to talk to each other. It only works like this, if one then communicates in English or semi-English and semi- 'who knows'... it doesn't matter. But if one does not know the people, integration does not work. ...it doesn't take much, if everyone just made a small effort.*

The value of personal interaction comes out through various anecdotes and accounts of how past events unfolded:

*And then it started [...] and the first family that was dumped on us was a family that was kicked out of [name of a nearby village]. So, it already had a bad start. [Interviewer: Did anything change?] Yes, because among them were really nice families. As soon as one knows them personally. That's just how it is. Then, one is also happy to help them.*

*Well, and then it was that we were supposed to familiarise [the refugees] a little bit with Fasnacht (carnival), what it stands for and what it means. I then asked somebody from the association to come, and then I noticed that these were people who were a little taken in by stereotypes, and, yet, they were very affected. Attitudes do change if one brings together refugees and the people. But the problem is that the interest is not really there. So, there are possibilities but the interest is not really here.*

## The role of volunteers in the community

A central insight we gained listening to the Tengerer volunteers was that they are much more than civil society volunteers who provide services. They are brokers in their community. This does not simply refer to their active role, to possible advocacy work on behalf of migrants or the earlier observed explicit 'living' of openness and liberal values. Rather, it captures something subtler. It captures a distinct kind of 'identification' with the migrants. This 'identification' is apparent when, as seen above, the openness of fellow citizens towards migrants is perceived as a 'positive moment' that is worth mentioning. It is also apparent in the excitement with which some of our interviewees introduced us to and told us about the scholarly success of one of the Afghan girls. And it is apparent in the expressed frustration with the bureaucratic challenges that the migrants face, with the lack of working opportunities – 'when I think of the [policy] issue of the occupation of refugees – that is a catastrophe, nothing works in that respect' – and experienced shortcomings in joining a German language course.

Following from the above, the volunteers can be seen as 'linchpins': they are not really working for integration, but they are integration. To be clear, the kind of 'identification' that we observe is not equivalent to blind compliance and non-discriminatory bestowment of charity. It is precisely not just a performance of tolerance, but the lived reality of migration with all its contradictions, dilemmas, closeness and distancing. It brings out nuanced stances towards migrants and critical distinctions between and attitudes towards individuals and their behaviour – not without prejudices, forms of 'othering' and the production of hierarchies, for example, when there is the explicit or implicit expectation that migrants should show gratefulness for the support they receive. These are embedded in a lived reality of constant negotiation and reflection. When we asked if there were things that our interviewees learned in the process of their engagement, 'cultural differences' and 'differences within cultures' ranked high as an answer alongside self-reflective insights, such as 'diversity is very interesting', 'tolerance', 'the prejudices that I have', 'openness without judgement' and 'punctuality is good – but things also work without'.

*the volunteers can be seen as 'linchpins': they are not really working for integration, but they are integration*

The central role of the volunteers around the *Helpferkreis* in the context of integration is apparent; they are more than service providers or dogmatic promoters of an abstract idea of integration, but brokers and linchpins with a subtler and more complex function.

The important role volunteers play in the context of integration increases the significance of the fact that there was a relatively high level of frustration and demotivation among our interviewees. When we contacted them again, some months after our initial visit, it became clear that some of them had reconsidered their engagement and, in one way or another retreated. We sensed real frustration and disenchantment related to the relationship between the volunteers' engagement and official institutions or 'the bureaucracy'.

### **How the town of Tengen shapes its experience of integration**

As indicated earlier, there are three things that shape the life with and efforts to integrate migrants in Tengen. First, Tengen is a relatively small and remote town. Second, in 2015, the *Helferkreis* stepped in to fill an institutional vacuum; initially, the volunteers did not support an existing infrastructure but – to a significant extent – had to come up with and provide this infrastructure. Third, as there are only GUs in Tengen, migrants come to leave again.

The transient nature of the migrants' presence means that there is not much long-term motivation for building up relationships and embracing individual newcomers within the town. 'Established contacts cannot be deepened', bemoaned one of our interviewees, and another one found it challenging to understand that 'families that had already arrived in the community, local associations and school had to leave again and move to a different town'. It means that invested time and personal efforts do not necessarily have long-term consequences or rewards within and for the community in Tengen.

Nonetheless, many of our interviewees kept in contact with 'their' families when they moved away to nearby cities. We heard of ongoing personal commitment, real friendships, and, in fact, a sharing of lives:

*I was very, very happy that Z was accepted at a Gymnasium (secondary school), will receive additional language courses there and also additional support in various subjects. [...] Despite the fact that I personally did not contribute anything to Z's intelligence, I am somehow really proud that a girl from our group made it to the Gymnasium. I had a desk and a chair and a lamp from my children still at home and together with my husband we brought the furniture to Z. This also made me happy.*

What we observe is more about individual and personal affairs than about the community in Tengen, which turns into a place of transit. Reflecting on the challenges

and extra tasks the school and its teachers were facing regarding the integration of migrant children, it was the head of school who vocalised the inevitable risk of disenchantment and dulling in the face of a steady stream of arrivals and departures: 'in order to achieve sustainability, people need to be able to see the fruits of their work and engagement', he argued. In the case of Tengen, this is not given. As obvious as this shortcoming is, it is difficult to resolve, because it is not just in the hands of the Tenger authorities. It is a relatively small and remote town, so it is likely that only a few newcomers would choose to stay there long-term.

### **The role of the bureaucracy and its effect on volunteers**

But it is not only the consequences of these structural problems that cause frustration among our interviewees. In fact, in the stories we heard, a bigger role was played by the perceived mismatch between the work of the volunteers and 'the bureaucracy'.

We started each of our conversations with an open question: please tell us how things unfolded in your village over the past year. The openness of our question meant that we received a diversity of very personal stories related to a variety of issues that each interviewee perceived as particularly relevant. This gave us an understanding of the richness of the individual experiences. And, yet, there was something similar among many of the stories we heard. In the broadest sense, they all unfolded along a similar timeline with similar sections. There was a 'before the refugees came', a first phase in which the *Helferkreis* formed and the respective interviewee became involved, in their individual way, in dealing with arrivals; a second phase, in which 'the bureaucracy' stepped in; and a 'now', that is, an 'after'.

Listening to the stories that our interviewees shared with us, two interrelated points particularly struck us. First, the eventual stepping in of 'the bureaucracy', after the initial phase in which the *Helferkreis* worked within a relative institutional vacuum, constituted a turning point in our volunteers' stories. The second and interrelated point was that the existence of migrants in the village actually played only a minor role in our interviewees' stories. Of course, the story of Tengen is about 54 migrants and refugees arriving in a small town in Germany, hostility bubbling up and volunteers spending considerable resources on looking after the newly arrived. Yet, in many of the various stories that we were told, migrants appear either as a number or, in the context of anecdotes, as individuals with names but not as the main characters. The main characters in our interviewees' stories are the helpers and 'the bureaucracy', the *Landrat*, the 'lady' from the *Landratsamt*, etc.

*we noticed a sense of nostalgia and sadness that something has ended and was taken away once the official institutional structure was in place*

Strikingly, in their narrative accounts of what happened, the Tenger volunteers struggled less with the migrants who arrived than with ‘the bureaucracy’ that eventually stepped in. At one point, ‘the bureaucracy’ became ‘rampant’, one interviewee explained to us. The sudden change of migrants in the GU without ‘appropriate notice’ from officials was highlighted by another interviewee as a challenge. It became clear from our conversations that the volunteers felt that there was a lack of institutional support at the beginning of the process, and it was just as apparent that the eventual stepping in of official institutions was perceived as a ‘taking over’. ‘They don’t help – they do everything alone’, was one way in which the eventual engagement from officials was captured.

*‘the bureaucratically prescribed procedures run counter to common sense in a little town like Tengen where people know each other personally’*

This turning point between the first phase of dealing with migrants through the *Helferkreis* and the eventual stepping in of official institutions is significant for the story of Tengen because it marks the point at which something was lost for those involved. Although our interviewees acknowledged the practical challenges and personal burden of dealing with the arriving newcomers – many point out that they were overwhelmed at the beginning and wished they had more support at that point – we noticed a sense of nostalgia and sadness that something had ended and was taken away once the official institutional structure was in place. Reflecting back on the time when the volunteers were the main driving force of integration in Tengen, an interviewee assessed: ‘it was really a very nice time. [...] I found, it enriched our life.’ When we asked what they would wish for in this very moment, another volunteer said:

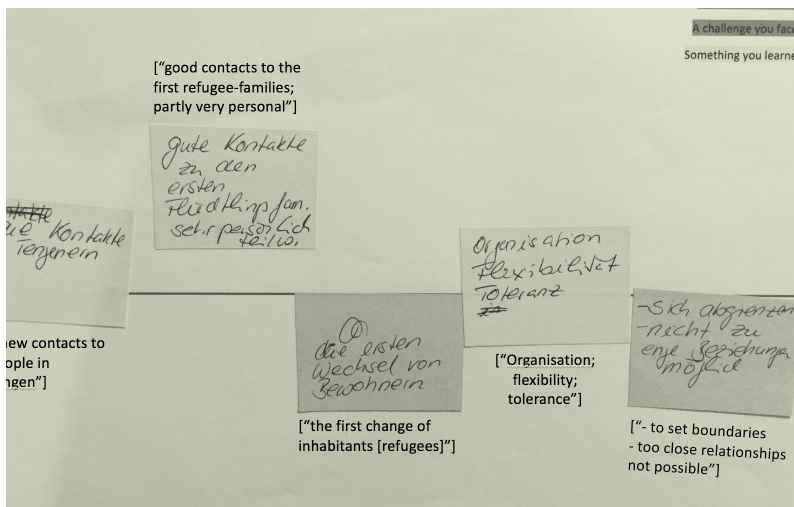
*Umm ... now everything already has become a habit again... [pause] ... now I wish that there were again more [refugees] here ... [laughs] ... That everything is as it was back then ... [laughs] ... strange ... right?*

What all this conveys is the complex personal dimension of the experience of integration in Tengen, which is not just any aspect of the story but a central one. The timeline, which one of our interviewees prepared, reflecting on the time between October 2015 and November 2016, illustrates this in a simple and beautiful way. The interviewee recalls two ‘positive moments’ at the beginning of their engagement, namely the new contacts they built up with fellow Tengerers and the good and even ‘very personal’ contacts with migrant families. The first challenge they recall is that migrants moved away – due to the structural arrangement that Tengen only has a GU. Further down the road, they face the challenge of finding the right personal distance, to establish boundaries because they feel that ‘too close

relationships are not possible'. This is a short but complex and remarkable story. The timeline shows us how personal the journey was and how deeply it entered the interviewee's life – reflected in the challenge to negotiate their personal distance to the newly arrived in order to manage the emotional implications and costs of it, given that they would leave again.

The challenge of negotiating personal distance and emotional space was a recurring theme in our conversations: 'I have to personally keep my distance, as I am always sad when a family "moves on"' answered another interviewee, when we asked if there was anything they learned in the process. The use of the word 'move on' (*weiterziehen*) is remarkable here, because it puts the newly arrived in an active position and the Tengerer is 'left behind', making us aware of nothing less than a vulnerability not only among those who newly arrived, but among those who are actually 'at home'. 'A sad moment was when the family [...] moved away. Not very far, still reachable, but not anymore in the realm of our responsibility', another interviewee told us.

Given the above, the perceived turning point caused by the stepping in and perceived 'taking over' by 'the bureaucracy' is not only relevant because of the potential unproductive mismatch between inflexible institutional structures and the reality of a closely knit community – 'the bureaucratically prescribed procedures run counter to common sense in a little town like Tengen where people know each other personally' – and because it affects deeply personal lived realities, in which meanings and subjects are negotiated and produced.



Inevitably, this short account of how volunteers in Tengen recall the life with and integration of migrants in their town does not do justice to the richness and nuances of the experiences that our interviewees shared with us. A much denser description could be written, highlighting the complex aspects of the specificities of the case of Tengen and its volunteers. Nonetheless, our interviews in Tengen provide *specific* insights into the experience of migration in Tengen, as well as two, more general, insights: first, the ‘refugee crisis’ consists of two different phenomena. Second, migration is a multi-dimensional historical disruption of the local reality.

## General insights from Tengen

### **The ‘refugee crisis’ as two different phenomena**

By engaging with volunteers in Tengen we learned that the ‘refugee crisis’ or, rather, ‘migration’ is not one single phenomenon but the label for at least two different, albeit interrelated, realities: a mediated, national phenomenon and a distinct local reality.

Since April 2015, the issues of ‘refugees’ and ‘migration’ have impacted the German public and political discourse to an unprecedented degree. As the mushrooming of various opinion polls on these topics illustrates, it matters what ‘the Germans’ think. Are they willing to welcome more refugees? Or is the recent rise in support for the populist party AfD an indication that people have had ‘enough’?

Our research in Tengen makes clear that these questions completely miss the mark – at least for the purpose of generating insights into possible future behaviour under changed policies. This is not simply because of the notorious – albeit statistically ‘solved’ – challenge of determining who ‘the Germans’ are, but also because they do not address the actual phenomenon under consideration. There is a mediated phenomenon around ‘refugees’ and ‘migration’ and a separate, if related, lived reality around ‘refugees’ and ‘migration’. These are not the same phenomenon nor are they modifications of each other. Understandings of and attitudes towards each are separate from each other.

The mediated phenomenon ‘refugees’/‘migration’ is about the abstract idea of ‘the other’, about events such as the coordinated sexual assaults committed by migrants, mostly of North African origin, during New Year’s Eve 2015/16 in Cologne, it is about government policy, about ‘*Wir schaffen das!*’, which are inevitably shaped and re-shaped by mediated cultural texts. The distinct lived, local reality is shaped by the dilemmas, negotiations, personal decisions and emotions that are apparent

in the stories that our interviewees shared with us. It centres on very different issues than those in the mediated phenomenon, such as the conflict between institutional settings and the volunteers' engagement, which played a central role in Tengen.

Of course, the two phenomena are not completely separate, but feed into each other. As one of our interviewees reported when asked if national (inevitably mediated) events have an impact on the local attitudes, national events do have an impact:

*Very clearly. At the moment, there is again a negative hit, because some look like – how shall I put it now – because some look like those from Cologne [...] [It is] only subliminal, though. This is then temporary but then it also goes away again.*

More generally, we learned that there was a fear before the migrants arrived in Tengen that they would all be 'single young men', which is an image that seems to have arisen from the mediated phenomenon.

Nevertheless, despite interacting with each other, these two phenomena do not merge into one – it is unproductive to take a cognitive shortcut and presume that they do. As our conversations in Tengen make clear, it is misleading to assume that the close, productive and committed engagement with newcomers in a community has a direct impact on the perception of the mediated phenomenon 'refugees'/'migration', just as instances in the mediated phenomenon do not have a direct impact on personal decisions and commitments regarding the lived reality. Bluntly put, it is not helpful to assume that an attitude towards the lived reality correlates with a distinct attitude, hence providing an answer to a question about the (abstract) mediated phenomenon.

*... the 'refugee crisis' or, rather, 'migration' is ... the label for at least two different ... interrelated, realities: a mediated, national phenomenon and a distinct local reality*

The mediated, national phenomenon and the distinct lived and local reality are different phenomena that happen to be captured and blurred under the same label. Hence, asking for 'German-wide' perceptions of and attitudes towards the mediated phenomenon – as has come to be a popular exercise – might provide lots of interesting insights. What they do not easily provide, however, are answers to questions on how newcomers might be accepted and integrated into communities. To gain insights into this, the second phenomenon needs to be addressed and captured in relevant questions. Given the nature of the second phenomenon, the distinct lived reality, this is a much harder task.

## **Migration and integration are multi-dimensional disruptions of the local reality**

The second general insight that we gained from our interaction with volunteers in Tengen is that integration constitutes a multi-dimensional disruption of the local reality. Migration is not just about 'outsiders' entering a homogenous 'inside', but a disruption of lived realities on multiple levels, affecting multiple subjects. One of the most striking impressions from our interviewees' stories concerned the com-

plexity of emotions that were connected to them as citizens of Tengen who had decided to volunteer in the reception of migrants. Migration is not just about a disruption of an existing social setting and the practical and resource/technical challenges that this brings, but about personal lives, relationships, held beliefs and expectations, trust, etc. And it became clear that this complex disruption does not just arise in the interaction between the 'outsiders' coming 'in' but within the 'inside' – this is what we mean by 'multi-dimensional'.

*Migration is not just about a disruption of an existing social setting ... but about personal lives, relationships, held beliefs and expectations, trust, etc.*

It was striking how much this disruption was actually the product of relationships between tolerant and non-tolerant Tengerer and the interaction between 'the bureaucracy' and the volunteers.

*It was as if one was offending me personally. I could still cry about it ... that friends of mine were capable of speaking in such a hate-filled way. [...] I have to say, I would have liked to move away.*

Integration must not solely be understood as a multi-dimensional but as a contextual disruption. The challenges that the volunteers in Tengen spoke about were partly generic; to an important extent, however, they were specific to the Tengen context. A prime example for this was the legacy of distrust in regional institutions that we saw and that was shaping the lived reality, the disruption that is migration in Tengen. When we asked an interviewee about the fears that existed in the village before the migrants arrived, we were told:

*[O]f course, we started on the assumption that we would get 54 single men ... [Interviewer: Ah, was that clear from the beginning?] Some did say that it would also be families, but nobody believed it. Because one always gets lied to. One then realised it was really families.*

What is interesting here is the indication that it was obvious that one would not trust the official announcement. It is these kinds of particular aspects that give this multi-dimensional disruption in places like Tengen its distinct flavour. Without a fundamental understanding of these, the lived realities of integration can simply not be fully grasped.

### **Missed opportunities**

This brings us to a final point in this story. Of course, there is nothing inherently negative about disruption; there is potential in disruption. Yet, it was striking in the case of Tengen that this potential was hardly taken advantage of. For instance, the frustration and dissatisfaction of the volunteers when official institutions stepped in did not translate into political activism that critically and productively challenged institutional settings and behaviours. The stories we heard in Tengen were much more about a retreat back into the private sphere and an acceptance of the status quo than about a translation of the existing disappointment into a demand for change – if not even a vibrant civil society platform.

Even more importantly, the distinct kind of expertise that was generated through the self-organised help in the first phase after the arrival of migrants in Tengen was not acknowledged as such. As we have heard above, the situation in Tengen was one in which official structures eventually took over and replaced the volunteers dealing with the migrants. And yet, they did not fully replace the volunteers; they kept accessing practical help from the side of the volunteers, such as carpools, etc. What did not take place, however, was a comprehensive knowledge exchange, transfer and fusion between ‘the bureaucracy’ and the volunteers. It seems that the volunteers’ expertise was not recognised as a valuable resource to begin with, nor was their role as ‘linchpins’, that is, as more than service providers. As a consequence, a valuable resource was left unused and the potential implied in the disruption of ‘migration’ in Tengen evaporated.

## Cologne/Köln (Kalk): integration in an urban multicultural environment

On the day before Christmas Eve 2015, the first group of migrants moved into the Kalk gymnasium. This basic sports facility would become their home while they waited for a decision on their asylum applications. When we visited in late 2016, there were 120 men staying at the gym, with some of them having lived in this facility, known as ‘the camp’ by migrants and volunteer helpers, for ten months. By then, this space was a tinderbox of stress and frustration, a place where strangers collided with one another without any personal space to retreat to.

Kalk is a district of the city of Cologne. With just over 1 million inhabitants, Cologne is the fourth biggest city in Germany, with around 119,000 of people living in Kalk. Since 2005, almost 12,000 people have moved to this district, which makes it the fastest growing district of Cologne. What is notable about Kalk is that around 50% of the population falls into the category ‘*mit Migrationshintergrund*’ (with ‘migration background’);<sup>2</sup> in Cologne as a whole it is 36%. As one of our interviewees, who migrated to Germany some years ago, laughingly told us: ‘The other day, when I got out of the underground at Kalker Hauptstrasse [main shopping street in Kalk], I asked myself: “Can you spot a German?”’

The district of Kalk is led by the Social Democratic Party. It has commonly been seen as a ‘problem district’ in Cologne. A local newspaper described it as a place of contradictions: ‘an “in”-district and meeting point for criminals’. In 2015, the unemployment rate in Kalk was 13.6% (Cologne: 8.8%).

The neighbourhood Kalk – part of the broader district Kalk – has a population of 23,638 and is relatively densely inhabited. In 2016, when we visited the neighbourhood, 659 refugees and migrants were housed there. Due to the sudden need to accommodate a relatively high number of people and a lack of purpose-built properties, migrants were provisionally housed in hotels, flats and gyms of public schools. Over the course of 2015, with the number of arrivals increasing, the city of Cologne repurposed a total of 24 gyms for housing migrants. Each of the gyms offered space for 50 to 200 people. Since June 2017, all gyms have been vacated; renovations are under way to turn them back into sports facilities.

As was the case with many other facilities, the German Red Cross was in charge of the gym. Containers were set up in front of the building to provide cooking facilities and offices for management and security staff. In order to preserve the migrants’

privacy, we were not allowed to enter the accommodation. Yet, as one of the young migrants we met told us, there was actually not much privacy for the inhabitants in any case. The gym was filled with camp beds. Fire regulations prevented divisions between beds being installed. We were allowed to sit down with our interviewees in the gym's common room: the former changing room, left in its original design with sports benches but equipped with an additional table.

Since the city of Cologne set up the first provisional housing facility for migrants, such as the gym in Kalk, there has been debate about the appropriateness of the setting; the NGO Kölner Flüchtlingsrat *argued* that the conditions under which migrants were housed in Cologne were 'increasingly degrading and against international and European law'. However, as we were told, there were differences between gyms, depending on their management and who lived in them. The gym that we visited was occupied by single men who attracted less support from the public than families who lived in other gyms. There was the perception that the situation was 'more bearable' for single men, as one of our interviewees explained.

Unsurprisingly, the stress levels in 'the camp' were high. A volunteer from a citizen group explained that the gym hosted a random configuration of people who were not only strangers to one another but also came from different cultural settings, ways of life and social, religious and political backgrounds. They lived in conditions with little personal space, let alone meaningful occupations or even just distraction. And this does not even take into account the psychological burdens that people's past experiences have produced, and the insecurity and fragility of their existence in Germany. We talked to two young men, one from Iraq, the other from Afghanistan, reflecting on several months in different 'camps' in Germany: 'it is not a life. You sleep, you go out, you come back and sleep – like a robot.'

In visiting Kalk, we were interested in how people dealt with the exceptional arrival of a relatively high number of migrants in particular, and with integration in general. Obviously, the issue of arrival and migration is not new to Cologne, let alone to Kalk, and there has long been an established network of initiatives – public, non-profit and voluntary – that deals with migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and, broadly speaking, the newly arrived. Above and beyond these initiatives, the multicultural nature of Cologne means that there are different ethnic community networks in place.

Yet, the situation of 2015 and 2016 was unusual. As the head of one of the community organisations we visited summarised: 'A lot of people had a lot of questions.'

Both people who wanted to work as volunteers and people who arrived. But there was also lots of positive energy.' This 'positive energy' was reflected in additional initiatives that emerged to deal specifically with the newly arrived migrants. The website '*Köln hilft Flüchtlingen*' ('Cologne helps refugees'), which was set up by the city of Cologne, shows the diversity of initiatives. It also demonstrates that there is a long-term perspective for initiatives and commitment, as well as a high degree of professionalism.

From the many people we could have talked to, we decided to meet two volunteers from the private initiative Willkommen in Kalk, one long-term German resident of Kalk, who has been actively involved in the initiative KalkGestalten, as well as full-time members, volunteers and visitors at the Integrationshaus e.V. in Kalk. As we discovered, all three initiatives are linked; people knew one another or, at least, of one another.

KalkGestalten is a community foundation that supports citizen projects in Kalk, founded in 2005. From 2014 to 2016, the foundation chose to focus on supporting community projects related to the arrival of migrants, including award-winning project that encourages migrants to engage in civil society activism and volunteer work.

The initiative Willkommen in Kalk was established in February 2016 and developed from a Facebook group. The number of volunteers varies; at the time of our visit the initiative had seven committed people and three migrants who joined occasionally. The group offers activities and support, from language courses and exchanges, to bringing together potential employers and employees or interns.

The Integrationshaus e.V. was established in 2010 by two women from a migrant background. The Integrationshaus provides a variety of free services, such as bureaucratic assistance and courses. It does not currently receive public funding; the integration courses that the organisation offers are funded but everything else beyond depends on individual one-off funding and private donations.

The Integrationshaus provided us with space to meet our interviewees. Besides the various activists, we also talked to two young migrants, one from Iraq and one from Afghanistan. Both of them had stayed at the 'camp' for several months but recently moved to a flat; one of them moved into a shared flat of one of the volunteers from Willkommen in Kalk, a graduate student, whom we interviewed and who placed us in touch with our Iraqi and Afghan interviewees.

Our visit to Kalk created a collection of diverse stories around the lived reality of arrival, migration and integration in a multicultural urban setting. Our conversations provided insights into the distinct challenges for migration and integration that come with a city environment. We also learned how important it is to migrants to have a sense of agency, to feel they are equal members of the society into which they are integrating, and to have the opportunity to contribute. Another finding of our study relates to the significance that time has in the context of migration and integration.

## Reflections from migrant volunteers in Kalk

### The importance of agency

Many of the people we talked to in Kalk had a 'migrant background' and were associated with the Integrationshaus. In most cases, they worked with migrants and refugees. One interviewee came from Iraq four years ago to be with their spouse who had already migrated years earlier; they recently took up a part-time administrative role in the Integrationshaus. Another interviewee migrated to Germany more than 25 years ago as a student from Iran and teaches integration courses, while another came from Poland four years ago. We also talked to an interviewee from Senegal with an Italian spouse, who had lived in Germany for a few years; and we interviewed people who came to Germany from parts of the former Soviet Union in the 1990s.

One of the questions we asked, especially of those who had arrived more recently, was if there was anything that would make their life, their integration in Germany, easier. The answers were surprisingly homogenous. The interviewees referred the question to themselves and their personal role in the integration process. They responded that integration would be served by improved language skills and a good job.

The immediate focus on this personal role and responsibility in the process of integration, rather than, for instance, on institutional changes or other demands of the environment, was striking. This indicates a sense of agency. In fact, the proactivity and energy devoted to learning German and finding a way into German society were striking:

*... they have to learn the language – but, then, learning the language is not enough. I would tell them, if they had a talent, to show it ... 'I am here, like you, and we all come together to do something together.'*

*If you want to you can integrate without difficulties. The challenge is that you have to exchange and meet with people. But without interaction you cannot learn the language. You need to meet with people and exchange. We have a tandem partner. This is very interesting because we also go to see a lot of places. We went to a cafe, to a museum, and the cathedral. You can learn from the book but if you do not have the practice you cannot speak. I have said that to a lot of other students, you have to speak. Dialogue is necessary to learn.*

Another interviewee told us how they arrived and felt that a language course was not enough to enter German society, and that more contact with Germans was needed. They joined a project initiated by the Integrationshaus, through which they regularly visited senior citizens in care homes.

Assumptions about what ‘the Germans’ think about migrants and linked assumptions about what was expected from the newly arrived framed our conversations in various ways. It was obvious that the perceptions ascribed to ‘the Germans’ play into self-perceptions and constructions. Yet, it became clear to us that the wish to integrate was not just about blending in. It was about playing an active role, as a unique and equal part of society. ‘Integration works if people are taken seriously’, said one of our interviewees, pointing to the challenge of regularly being treated in a patronising way.

For our interviewees integration was more than gaining the ability to function in society, to get along and pursue their own business. It was about not just being a *functioning* but an *active* part of the community, in fact, of German society. In our interviewees’ understanding, migration and integration were about reaching a point where it is possible to *collaborate* with those who have been born in Germany. It was about the ability to contribute something valuable and unique to society. This became apparent when we talked about what our interviewees considered important for arriving and integrating in Germany successfully. We asked the open question: ‘Is there anything you would advise a newly arrived person?’ One interviewee told us:

*The first thing I would say is that they have to learn the language – but, then, learning the language is not enough. I would tell them, if they had a talent, to show it. To show: ‘I am here, like you, and we all come together to do something together.’*

## **‘We’ and ‘you’**

Listening to the stories of our interviewees showed us that truly arriving in Germany is not easy – not even in the case of people who had been in Germany for decades. We noticed that a ‘we’ and ‘you’ distinction is deeply ingrained in the perception of their reality and themselves. As our interviewee explained, who came to Germany as a student 26 years ago:

*I wish my children did not have to deal with this ‘where-are-you-from?’ This should not play a role. Out of interest, ok. If one already knows one another a bit better. But not as a first question. I am disappointed that time and again I am made an outsider. I, too, want to be a part of it. Because for us, Germany is like Heimat. [...] I feel like Germans. When something happens to a German soldier in Afghanistan, I feel exactly the same like you. But sometimes I have the feeling that I belong to the outside. Of course, I don’t want to be included out of pity. No – to be on a par with everybody else. Yes, that is what I am disappointed about. One can overcome everything else. But give me the feeling that we are both building up this country together. That is very important to me.*

Again, this quote suggests an idea of migration and integration as being about collaboration, about ‘building up this country together’. At the same time, it is obvious that this produces a world of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Every so often there were instances in our conversations, such as the one below, in which we became aware of how much this reality is perceived as natural and inevitable:

*Of course, we won’t become ministers, or managers or I-don’t-know-what. The path to positions like these is hard. And maybe one does not even need this. But at least one can stand on one’s own two feet and not be taken advantage of, or so.*

The language of ‘we’ and ‘you’ was a central device for many of our interviewees to capture their reality. In the stories we were told, it was the migrants, no matter where they came from and when they arrived, who constituted the ‘we’ and ‘the Germans’ who were the ‘you’. Automatically, two different worlds and realities arose. One interviewee, a teacher of an integration course, spoke of their course, in which there are migrants from all over the world, including the EU, as a ‘family’ and as ‘their world’.

## Local realities and creating identities

But there is not only a different German lived reality, importantly, there is also a *mediated* reality that does not correspond with the one in which our interviewees lived. As one of them explained: ‘The term “refugee crisis” is a word that is not realistic for me. For me, Kalk has always been colourful, hence, I did not really see a big difference.’

*On TV, every day there is a debate about Islam and religion ... and danger. But then when I work here [in the Integrationshaus] with refugees and migrants ... foreigners, I do not see any danger. We see here the positive – what is actually going on in society.*

The interviewee suggested that it was the lack of first-hand experience with the lived reality of migrants and refugees, such as in Kalk, that allows prejudices to

flourish and fear to grow. But the mediated reality also has an impact on our interviewees’ lives. It is seen as something that produces ‘the Germans’ perception of migrants and, given the us–them dichotomy, shapes our interviewees’ existence in Germany. The concern about a mediated link between crime and migrants and a perceived stigmatisation came up in a number of our conversations.

*On TV, every day there is a debate about Islam and religion ... and danger. But then when I work ... in the Integrationshaus ... I do not see any danger. We see here the positive – what is actually going on in society*

As outlined above, most of our interviewees were engaged with the newly arrived. Our conversations highlighted that the sharing of expertise was important for them. ‘I know how

it is to arrive alone in Germany’, was a sentence we frequently heard. In this sense, the sharing of expertise was about identifying with the newly arrived and providing them with support and motivation:

*I enjoy helping them. The nicest thing is when people are thankful and warm when one helped them and when one did not approach them [in a rude way] but somehow in a nice manner and just take them as they are. So, not looking down at them and welcoming them here with us – but, rather, we take people as they are. And they feel comfortable and one can feel relationships developing and one can see in their eyes that they are totally happy [...] and one can see how motivated they are.*

But it was also expressed in other and more obvious ways, for instance, when one of our interviewees pointed out:

*these days people are much more confident. Maybe because of the global networks they have. [...] 'We have expectations.' [...] 'We want an education.' [...] That is good because it changes the discussion.*

When we asked what motivated them to go on with their work at the Integrationshaus they said:

*The amazing people [...] Everybody is distinct and that is so nice. [...] and that I now notice that people grow and demand their rights and get active and stand up for another world.*

Again, what becomes apparent here is a vision of helping newly arrived in Germany to become an active and critical part of society, political agents. This also points to the important role that an organisation like the Integrationshaus plays. It does not only provide services, but also the space for developing self-confident identities in Germany. Above and beyond, it provides long-term motivation for building relationships. In fact, it was the idea of supporting people beyond the restricted time-frame of a language course that prompted the initiators to create the Integrationshaus and sustain it:

*People who arrived a year ago now start their studies or an apprenticeship. Having finally received their papers, they are allowed to attend an integration course. That is what is special about working with people. That you see the effect immediately.*

### **Kalk as a multicultural setting for integration**

As discussed earlier, Cologne in general, and Kalk in particular, are multicultural places with a relatively high percentage of migrants and foreigners. This has the advantage that there is an established network of initiatives and services that helps the newly and not-so-newly arrived to find a way into society.

At the same time, however, it became clear that the multicultural, urban setting of Kalk also presents distinct challenges. As one of our interviewees explained, there are parallel societies, which make it hard for the newly arrived to build up contacts and relationships. Having migrated to Germany some years ago themselves, they found it hard to enter existing ethnic communities, which they described as closed. Reflecting on their work in the Integrationshaus, they actually saw a difference between people who came 'ten years ago' and refugees who fled the wars and violence 'in Syria and Iraq who came to Germany during the past two

years' – those who 'carry the trauma of what they have experienced', as the interviewee put it. For the latter, our interviewee observed that they 'really want to integrate. [...] The people start immediately with integration. We offer free courses and the people come every day – every day. Even if they are not officially registered – they come every day – that's determination.' In contrast, the interviewee noticed that it is those who had arrived a decade ago who have difficulties in integrating. 'They have built up their parallel societies. This is the biggest problem – that everybody for themselves has their own societies.' But as our interviewee also pointed out, 'one cannot force people'.

The second challenge that an urban setting presents is that the newly arrived remain invisible. People simply blend into the multicultural mix of people living in Kalk.

*For Kalk, it is hard to say whether or not the integration of refugees works because there have always been more foreigners here than Germans. [...] I did not notice anything new. [...] The appearance of Kalk has not changed.*

This was echoed by the volunteers from Willkommen in Kalk, who primarily engaged with the migrants in one of 'the camps'. They pointed out that newcomers and their houses are literally 'invisible', blending into the urban landscape and its anonymity:

*It is impossible to identify [the refugee housing]. For months, you pass something without knowing what is behind the wall. [...] There are always some indicators; usually you see a lot of bikes, like in front of student accommodation, one can see that. And one can see it in front of gyms and one can see that it is a bit different and that is then the point when one is able to identify the refugee homes... One can see lit up buildings but one can hardly see people.*

This urban setting demands a high degree of initiative among volunteers. One of our interviewees, a graduate student volunteer with Willkommen in Kalk, talked about how they began working with the migrants in 'the camp'. It started by chance, while they were on vacation in Hungary and witnessing migrants camping at the train station in Budapest. They spoke of a 'first big step' that had to be taken to overcome the 'distance', and interact, 'and then one realises that it is something normal, that one can do this'. In this case, the 'big step' was to ignore the police presence at the station in Budapest and provide these people with food. Back in Cologne, our interviewee became involved in volunteer work, such as

repairing and providing bikes for migrants. They talked of another ‘big step’ and ‘distance’ to overcome, namely to physically enter ‘the camp’ in Kalk. Although in the middle of the neighbourhood, ‘the camp’ initially seemed ‘far away’, not least, as we were told, because of its setup. Initially, there was no common room. This meant, as our interviewee explained, that there was no space for meeting. The actual gym, with its 120 beds, was too private, and the outside was ‘too far away’, somewhat ‘detached’.

### **The problem of invisibility**

It was the invisibility of ‘the camp’ and its people, as well as the fact that there was less concern about single men than migrant families, that meant that there was only limited help from volunteers for this particular ‘camp’. A challenge that was identified by our interviewees from Willkommen in Kalk was how to sustain their activities over time without running out of steam. Finding the appropriate personal distance to the volunteer work and also to the fate of the migrants in ‘the camp’ was also identified as a challenge.

In the case of Willkommen in Kalk, this difficulty was particularly acute because the initiative changed its function over time. Initially, the volunteers set out to provide services for people expected to be in ‘the camp’ for only a short time. When it turned out that some of the men stayed in the gym for months, the demands placed upon the volunteers changed. Suddenly, they were more deeply involved in the migrants’ lives than they had expected or planned. They were confronted with administrative questions and asked to help with bureaucratic issues. These questions did not only come from migrants but also from the management of ‘the camp’, which was overwhelmed. Crucially, relationships developed between migrants and volunteers with all their complexity and emotional implications.

As a consequence, Willkommen in Kalk ended up engaging much more in advocacy work than they had initially intended. In December 2016, the initiative wrote a public letter to Cologne’s Mayor Henriette Reker to demand that fewer people live in ‘the camp’, that people should leave ‘the camp’ sooner and be rehoused in alternative accommodation, and that ‘the camp’ should be closed as soon as possible. ‘Initially, we wanted to be apolitical. But we found we could not keep out of it. We had to do something’, our interviewee explained. Because some of the people had been living in ‘the camp’ for ten months, ‘the mood shifted; one notices that it shifts more and more. Something builds up. Which is totally normal when people are stuck in one room for such a long time.’

## The role of time

In addition to the many aspects above, listening to the various stories of our interviewees made us aware of the multifaceted role that time plays in the context of migration and integration. The newly arrived migrants have not only spent weeks and months of their life *en route* to Germany but are then put on hold, waiting for their cases to be assessed, dealing with bureaucratic forms and waiting to attend integration courses. Temporary housing turns into a ‘permanently temporary’ setting, making it difficult for people to plan for a future and producing new and unexpected realities.

A twenty-year-long commitment to Germany and its society does not necessarily mean that somebody has arrived and is acknowledged as a German. A future perspective and hope play a central role in driving people and motivating them to keep going. Crucially, there are perceived and real expectations in terms of which steps must be taken in what timeframe, so that an integration process can be considered satisfactory and successful.

At the same time, the complex human dimension of arriving, migrating and integrating into a foreign society demands time. In particular, the lived reality of migrants, their experiences, their disrupted lives and the healing of trauma need time. And this is where the different roles of time in the context of migration and integration clash and give rise to unproductive contradictions and realities. As one of our interviewees put it:

*People need time. They need to be able to mourn. But they do not have time. They have to get qualified. [...] People need help and warmth and not a qualification. [...] It would be good to hold on and look what somebody needs who has lost everything.*

This requires a re-evaluation of time and an appreciation of integration as a more complex and nuanced process: it is not a linear process with a predefined goal to be reached but, as one of our interviewees puts it, ‘first and foremost a feeling’.

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## Notes

1. As of 2015; see [http://www.tengen.de/pb/\\_Lde/Startseite/Leben+in+Tengen/Tengen+in+Zahlen.html](http://www.tengen.de/pb/_Lde/Startseite/Leben+in+Tengen/Tengen+in+Zahlen.html); the category ‘foreigners’ is not defined.

2. For a definition of ‘migration background’ see *Statistisches Jahrbuch Köln* 2016: 42.

# Italy:

**Managing the crisis to challenge the system**

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**The stories we heard in Italy, both in Bologna and Pizzoli, have their roots in the period pre-dating Europe's migration surge of 2015. Italy has been dealing with the so-called refugee crisis for far longer than other places such as Germany or the Nordic countries. The numbers began to rise from 2005, but they rose dramatically from 2011 as an immediate consequence of the aftermath of the Arab Springs (from 4,000 in 2010 to 62,000 in 2011; then to 170,000 in 2014 and 171,000 in 2016). It is worth keeping in mind that Italy has traditionally been one of the great lands of emigration (between 1861 and 1900, 7 million people left Italy, between 1900 and 1914 another 9 million Italians left, and finally another 1.5 million during the fascist regime). As a result, there is a pervasive awareness of migration as an issue with which people are acquainted as a matter of – often close – family history.**

Italy is often compared to Greece given its geographical features that make it a natural landing point for migrants. But the profile of the migrants differs: whereas in Greece roughly 50% of migrants were Syrian or Afghan, in Italy they come overwhelmingly from Nigeria, Eritrea and Guinea and 88% of them arrived via Libya.

Italy took early measures to try and curb the brutality of the crossings from Libya. In 2013, after 360 migrants drowned off the coast of Lampedusa in Sicily, the government introduced operation 'Mare Nostrum', which during its year of operation in 2013/14 rescued 290,000 migrants. At the same time, the government decriminalised illegal immigration and created a system of emergency reception centres.

Italy is highly decentralised country – powerful regions have significant means and infrastructure at their disposal, as did provinces and '*comuni*' (towns) until their

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funding was drastically cut. As a result, small towns like Pizzoli offer some obvious advantages (easier to be in touch with the mayor, more direct contact with locals), but also some distinct disadvantages (poor transport links, fewer services – including language services). Cities like Bologna – which is also the regional capital – offer a richer mix of public and private resources and a denser web of services. However, the anonymity that goes hand in hand with cities of that size may shield from conflict, but can also slow down processes of social integration.

As pointed out by numerous observers, the numbers arriving in Italy should not constitute a crisis in a developed economy. The fact that they do results from a number of factors. As pointed out by Giulia Lagana, some of the crisis is generated by the fact that placing arrivals in emergency reception centres in what are deprived areas that cannot cope with the administrative burden increases the potential for processes to fail. Also, despite the rhetoric, Italy's agricultural sector is highly dependent on a source of cheap and unregulated labour, which means that there is little incentive in some areas to set up a more regulated and transparent system. Finally, the border closures in France, Switzerland and Austria that have led to amassing of migrants on Italy's territory have contributed heavily to the impression of a country being stretched to breaking point.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the inherent differences between our two case studies – Bologna, a large northern, wealthy city and Pizzoli, a small town of 5,000 people in the much poorer Abruzzo region in the southern part of the country – they also display some remarkable similarities.

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## Bologna: innovating through crisis

Bologna dazzles its visitors with history, majesty and beauty. Yet, at the heart of ‘*Bologna la Rossa*’ (‘Bologna the Red’ – red for its colour and red for its Communist past) flourishes a web of social initiatives and institutions. These are constantly experimenting with innovative ways of fostering the integration of newcomers to the city. There is an atmosphere of excitement and curiosity here, in a city so deeply anchored in – and so proud of – its history.

Bologna is the capital of the wealthy region of Emilia-Romagna in northern Italy, with a population of around 376,000. Though the city has been dealing with the arrival and integration of newcomers for decades, the unprecedented migrant numbers in 2014 prompted it to experiment with new methods in the hope of finding better integration solutions. One of these initiatives revolves around the ‘*cooperative sociali*’. These social cooperatives specialise in different areas: some of them are connected through their membership of a consortium, while others collaborate within the structures provided by the local administration. During our visit we spoke to members of the Camelot cooperative, which is pioneering an approach to assist migrant teenagers and young adults by placing them with Bolognese families.

Our story in Bologna centres on the arrival of migrants in 2014. This was a crucial moment because various institutions had to adapt quickly and prioritise management of the ‘crisis’ over other challenges and continuous tasks.

### Routine crisis

Interviewees in Bologna describe this point as a crucial time for their city, but also for their country, redefining who they are as Italians. The longstanding experience with migration and integration in Italy helped various NGOs develop, including in Bologna. Among them are innovative organisations such as the Vesta Project, which arranges for newcomers to live with a local family in the city.

#### *In Italian we say*

*‘compagno di viaggio’;*

*‘someone who is travelling with you’.*

*Someone you meet along the road, and shares a bit of the journey with you*

We spoke to members of the Vesta Project, NGOs in Bologna, a local cabinet member on social policy and a group of newcomers in forum conversations about how this moment impacted them, as well as how they perceive the overall experience of migration in Bologna. The arrival of newcomers in 2014 presents a lens through which these interviewees

re-evaluated their community's situation. Even though Italy had been taking in migrants since well before then, our interviewees highlighted how the numbers were significantly higher, putting them in an unprecedented situation:

*You have to imagine, let's say before 2011, we were a country where just a few asylum seekers and refugees were arriving, compared, of course if you compare the amounts I am naming now, if you compare it with the amounts of other countries; for example, if you compare Italy to Germany, or Sweden or even England and so on or Great Britain, there was no comparison possible. Now we are really facing migration. That is what I mean. Now we are really facing people who are coming.*

There is both a sense of a constant experience of 'crisis', and, paradoxically, of being used to the challenges that go along with it; but also a clear shift in 2014. Most importantly, for the NGOs involved, this shift meant being confronted with chaos and with a loss of oversight and planning capacity:

*Before – let's say, the last two years – we were working for refugees, but we could plan our job a little better. And maybe know, for example, how many people we could assist for how much time and so on. Now we are responding to a European, at the very least European, but I would say a global crisis, so we have many difficulties to understand exactly what's happening. I don't know if I am clear. This is the real situation.*

## Shared journeys and opportunity

Along with this experience and routine, our interviewees describe the process of integrating as something quite conventional and relational – as sharing a journey together. It is both the description of integration as an every day act, as well as the notion of a transient but significant experience, one that will come and go, and that illustrates the experience Bologna has with the arrival of newcomers:

*I don't know if I find the proper word in English. In Italian we say 'compagno di viaggio', 'someone who is travelling with you'. Someone you meet along the road, and shares a bit of the journey with you.*

Migration then does not become a crisis, but an opportunity for the community in Bologna to develop:

*What we call 'migration crisis', it has also been for us one big opportunity. For example, to share ideas with other organisations, to get in touch with them.*

There is a strong atmosphere of optimism and enthusiasm among our interlocutors in Bologna – the community is learning and growing with experiences around integration.

We stay with the ones opening the doors. It is our idea. If you look to this community, you can smile a little bit. You can be a little bit more optimistic because that community is growing up.

This mixed atmosphere of optimism, enthusiasm and a sense of 'routine crisis' transpires in some of the conversations we have with newcomers in Bologna. When asked about some of the barriers and challenges along their journey of integration, our interviewee jokes:

*Courses in Italian worked. But as we said, bureaucracy is crazy! You Italians are worse than Nigerians in this!*

The newcomers we spoke to in Bologna were hosted by another cooperative, called Lai-momo. Like the other cooperatives, Lai-momo is engaged in reaching beyond the frameworks provided by public authorities and serves as a space to combine public initiatives with NGO work and private sector connections. One of the results of this unique role is a project in which migrants are given the opportunity to work for prestigious fashion firms as paid employees. This enables migrants to learn new skills, be in work and contribute to the community. When we ask one of the newcomers what her journey has been like she responds:

*It's been good! We like it when we learn skills. You know we are participating in this programme and we're learning a lot. We all want to stay in Bologna and work here. Better here than at home. No jobs at home.*

## Living with uncertainty

However, there is also a sense of uncertainty for some of the newcomers, particularly those who have been denied permission to stay and are remaining in Italy illegally:

*The traineeships are good. The way the system works is bad! You never know if you are going to stay here or not.*

This sense of uncertainty is also reflected in concerns about the lack of information some migrants are given by the public authorities. Like in our case study in Sweden, they refer to the abstract notion of ‘the system’ describing processes that are opaque to them:

*Italians aren't very good with bureaucracy. Also, there are so many rules, and nobody teaches us anything about the rules! How I am supposed to know what I need to do if nobody tells me how the system works? We need to be given more information.*

Our NGO interviewees also face a series of problems. The increase in numbers of migrants resulted in much less planning capacity and required more flexibility as well as spontaneous adaptation. The situation described to us is one of chaos. Particularly, the lack of information NGOs receive about concrete numbers, times or arrivals and the support required is seen as a key challenge.

However, according to another interviewee from the policy community, no specific moment shifted the situation in Bologna. The summer season always sees numbers of migrants arriving on Italy's shores increase. Again, there is a sense of routine being conveyed in our conversations, which relates to the longstanding experience the country has with migrants:

*The coming of the summer [was a decisive moment]. No joke. For us there's not a single event. It is simply the seasonal migration that takes place when migrants to embark on the trip across the Mediterranean.*

## **All hands on deck: the blurring of functions and merging of roles**

The feeling of chaos and crisis is mirrored in the merging and blurring of different roles and responsibilities – as though disruption provokes a deeper reflection on where they position themselves as NGOs, without necessarily providing answers. These questions surface during our interviews. This extent of the merging of the role of NGOs as both ground actors and policy advisors through the social cooperatives is peculiar to Italy:

*We are changing our face every day, I could say. We are like, one day maybe we are politicians and our duty is to think and to try to write down and to organise all the hosting and integration systems, so try to get suggestions and to help the public administration to fix the system, I am talking about. But on the other hand, maybe we are like one international NGO living in a refugee camp, which is completely another thing. It is completely another kind of job. I think it is something really specific to Italy.*

*It's like the role of what we call 'cooperative sociali', so social cooperatives, which are agencies existing in this way only in Italy. It is a very strange kind of company, which is on one hand sometimes a substitute which can also help in the public administration and on the other hand, we are also doing, let's say, the hard work, the work on the field, the really concrete work.*

As uncovered by our questions around the experiences of integration in Bologna, the role and identity of the cooperative sociali are key – our interviewees explore which role they play in society and how this is unique to Italy. Their stories are about finding a role as a social worker in a difficult context and finding ways in which to separate private life and job challenges:

*It is like a place where we go where we want to breathe a little bit more, smiling a little bit more. Because a very small part of our life, and our job, as you know very well when you work in the social field, the difference between life and job is very hard to be found anyway.*

## **An opportunity to change institutions**

'Fixing the system', as one of our interviewees put it, is a central theme in the stories we were told. Migration seems to provide an excuse to question and shine a light on the many shortcomings of the Italian state, and all the stories – however local – have a central national question: how can Italy put in place a system that works in a coordinated, ordered way? For many of our interviewees on the NGO side, the peak of migration levels in 2014 onwards is an opportunity for discovery and 'tinkering'. Much more than in other case studies, where the focus has been very local, the emphasis here is on Italy experiencing a crucial moment that can influence longstanding engagement with migration and provide an opportunity to improve the way the process works:

*It is a changing moment for the country and for Europe itself, but for the country where I am living in this moment, it is really one important moment because we are now 'negotiating', let's say, a proper system for hosting and integrating asylum seekers and refugees.*

Migration and integration have become an experience through which our interviewees reassess the ways in which national processes and institutions are structured, looking at both their blind spots and their opportunities. For example, one interlocutor describes the barrier of language for newcomers – but rather than focusing on them learning the language, like it is the case in our field trips in Sweden, our interviewee reverts to the institution's role in this process: the education system still being designed for students with proficient Italian, from history to maths.

### **Changing education**

There is a willingness to engage fundamentally with the system that underlies how processes are structured in Italy:

*Currently, 40% of the Bologna primary and secondary school population is non-Italian (first and second-generation migrants); in spite of this, Italian is still taught as if it were everybody's native language – you spend half of the time studying Medieval Italian literature: Dante, Petrarca, and so on – and as if at home you heard nothing but Italian; your books in mathematics, science and other disciplines are written as if everybody had A1 proficiency in Italian. So how do you think the journey of integration is going?*

It is quite astonishing how far the criticism goes – namely as far as the education ministry.

*When it comes to education strategies, there simply are none. The Ministry of Education has no overall strategy. Things go slightly better with schools themselves, which understand the importance of equipping themselves with cultural and linguistic mediation services, and in Bologna, despite everything, the environment is favourable for our work. But there's still a long way to go.*

When asked about some of the challenges the policy interviewee sees for his work on integration, he does not only reflect on the current ministerial approach, but suggests alternative ways of placing integration more at the core of Italian society:

*This is how I would like the Ministry of Education to think: 40% of the school population are non-Italian native speakers. Good. This means that they speak other languages. Why don't we capitalise on this diversity? Maybe we can create linguistic exchange programs in which non-native Italian speakers teach Italian native speakers their own native language. They would be empowered, Italian speakers would be enriched, and everybody would have much more fun. That's what could make my life easier. Also, if more resources were allocated to linguistic and cultural mediation.*

One of our interviewees said it had made them think more fundamentally about how learning the Italian language is helpful for integration. Language is mentioned often but generally it is evoked as 'a key skill'; in Bologna there seems to be a rather more philosophical and fundamental reflection on language and what it means in a specific cultural and political context:

*The first conceptual leap people need to make is this: language is not just a discipline among others. Language is the foundation of all learning. You will not learn math or biology if you lack linguistic proficiency. The second leap is perhaps the most difficult: what is linguistic proficiency? What does it consist of? Here is when the trouble and misunderstanding also involves education experts – schoolteachers, professors, school chairs, and so on. Learning language does not mean learning grammar rules; it means learning a whole way of interacting with your environment. Language is first and foremost a pragmatic and interactional activity. You don't simply read a book; you interact with it. Hence the book can be repulsive or appealing to you. Language plays a big part in this.*

### **Improving SPRAR**

Another example of such innovative and systemic thinking comes from a policy interviewee who believes that the journey of integration is an opportunity to develop and test new systems, for example the SPRAR (Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati) system.

SPRAR is a system designed to encourage local authorities and municipalities to take more ownership in the decision-making process and in integration measures and will ensure that they receive more tailored support for the provision of integration services. It was introduced as a way to add to the primary emergency assistance provisions on a national level by including a more personal and tailored secondary

assistance system on a local level. This local assistance involves social workers who ensure migrants are not only welcomed but are also involved in local communities. The interviewees we spoke to took pride in this innovative and unique system. They also recognised that their extensive experience allows them to learn from the past and try out new approaches. There is an atmosphere of calm and tranquillity in our interviews in Bologna that stems from this experience and expertise.

*Things are getting better. Bologna now has almost ten years' experience with 'prima e seconda accoglienza' [primary and secondary assistance]. Roughly speaking, primary assistance is provided and run by the government; secondary assistance by municipalities through SPRAR infrastructures and funding. Primary assistance is conceived to provide essential assistance, hence is less personalised, more emergency-like. Secondary assistance involves social workers more deeply and is more migrant-centred. SPRAR for secondary assistance is way more effective [than anything at state level].*

Because the system is slowly being tested and improved, it is in a state of constant change. And because it is constantly under pressure, it is always being tested and improved. Bologna has been trying new approaches beyond SPRAR that have allowed the community to improve on local processes as well. Our interviewee tells us:

*The problem is that so far only 30% of migrants are managed through SPRAR, because the view so far was that SPRAR is costlier and populations were not ready to accept that their town volunteered to host migrants. Things are getting better right now, the trend towards SPRAR has been constantly growing in the past years. And even first-degree assistance is changing, evolving towards SPRAR methods. In Bologna, for instance, we transformed the CIE (first assistance centre) into a 'migration hub' in which migrants are provided services they normally get in SPRAR centres. It's working so far. We are the only northern Italian city which can be compared to Sicily [where they have had to deal with huge numbers and have set up impressive and necessary systems] in terms of organisational efficiency.*

Again, there is pride in the development of such innovative projects in Bologna. This is a story about a local community discovering how they can become a progressive role model in the handling of new arrivals.

## The role of 'associazionismo'

In all our interviews, a sense of activism, agency and creation is applied to the national *associazionismo*, an Italian word that does not translate easily into English. It describes the cultural habit of and enthusiasm for creating or working for associations, charities and non-profit organisations. As our conversations illustrate, Bologna has a strong sense of *associazionismo* and its most visible consequence is the web of associations, non-profit organisations and charities that pride themselves on collaborating both with one another and with the local administration. We encountered a vibrant community of social entrepreneurs in Bologna who see themselves at the innovative forefront of Italy's engagement with newcomers and the management of integration.

One example of such innovation is the Vesta Project in Bologna, which connects newcomers with families in the community, who host the newcomers at their home. Rather than focusing on complaints around housing, projects like Vesta take charge to try to solve the problem. The project developed through constructive cooperation between NGOs and the municipality, who have taken the project on board, who support it financially and advertise it, recruiting more families to host newcomers. In fact, the municipality took the project from Ferrara to Bologna after another NGO had introduced it to them:

*Collaboration with the local préfecture is excellent. Collaboration with the web of cooperatives operating in Bologna and in the whole Emilia-Romagna is excellent. So excellent in fact that when a coop, Camelot from Ferrara, proposed the very innovative Vesta project to us, we accepted enthusiastically.*

One of our interviewees from the Vesta Project tells us:

*In the next weeks, it will be 30 people, 30 guys hosted in the territory of Bologna. And now we are proposing to the municipality to extend the project with at least another 20 or 30 families.*

Most of our interviewees mention 2014 as a moment when they were caught off guard by the unprecedented scale of migration. Social workers are thinking very creatively about the problems that this change in magnitude poses, but they also conveyed their realistic worry that their efforts are not enough given the scale and complexity of the problem. There is a set of challenges and concerns that our NGO interviewees point to repeatedly.

One of the challenges mentioned to us is a perceived lack of skills and flexibility within public authorities. One of our interviewees describes:

*To me, what could be helpful, is for example, that we have people and workers in the public authorities at least as skilled as the NGO workers. Because in the last years, we had public authorities completely unprepared, so not skilled enough, concerning the topic.*

On the challenge of a lack of flexibility our interviewee tells us:

*But we really need a change concerning skills and, also, ways to approach the job. Just to be clear: if you are a public body in Italy, you have a very fixed working time for example. You have some moments in which you are not working because of the tradition of our public system. The NGOs, as you know, are much more flexible.*

### **The relationship between public authorities and NGOs: symbiotic but not easy**

From the NGOs' point of view, despite a good and crucial working relationship with public authorities, there is a palpable distance between them. The NGOs describe themselves as experts on the ground, who can flexibly adapt to the situation and workload, while the public authorities tend to be perceived as rigid and removed from reality. On the other hand, the relationship is profoundly symbiotic: the public authorities would be entirely overwhelmed without the NGOs, but the NGOs depend on funding from public authorities.

This is not always comfortable or efficient, and it is something that comes up repeatedly in our interviews, especially as NGOs reflect on the best way to position themselves and their roles in the public space, both formal and informal, and specifically in relation to public authorities when the lines can become so blurred. Our interviewees regularly highlight this blurring when it comes to responsibilities and roles – a deeply positive occurrence such as being granted the funding for a new initiative simultaneously brings with it concerns about a lack of role clarity and blurred lines between what the NGO can provide and the 'services' that a public authority expects in return for the funding:

*Maybe the relationship is not so 'clean' between us. Because the authority telling you [what to do] and asking you questions to justify what you did, is the same authority which is financing your project. But they need your project! So, this is something, it always needs to be taken into consideration because it is important.*

The establishing of a certain distance between NGOs and public authorities, and finding some space to negotiate this tricky relationship results from the increased involvement of public authorities in Bologna, after a period during which they had left most things to the NGOs. One interviewee explains:

*We had like a movement in the 1990s and beginning of the year 2000, public authorities were taking a step back concerning this situation. They were asking NGOs to do almost everything. They were really at the back of this. Now they are taking part because they also understood there is a situation around money.*

## **The inevitable and unwanted influence of politics**

The necessary and unavoidable distance between NGOs as separate from government institutions also crops up when our interviewees speak about recent political decisions in Italy that they believe have shifted the country more towards a more closed attitude with regard to control and security concerns. There is a deliberate intent to distance oneself from such political decisions among the NGOs:

*We are not public officers, we are not police, we are not these control authorities. Since there is this feeling of control, which is increasing and increasing, you know concerning terrorism and so on. We are also defending an idea of us [Italians], which is changing a bit.*

Such decisions have an impact on NGO members in Bologna. One of our interviewees mentioned the introduction of a law that would transform social workers into public officers, again blurring the distinction between NGOs and public authorities. He spoke about how public authorities are associated with control – while the NGOs do not want this connotation attached to them. Our interviewee is strongly against this, highlighting how important it is for them to be perceived and seen as a separate entity with a social focus:

*Just to give you an example. In the next weeks, our government is going write a new law, which is transforming social workers in public officers. Why is it happening? Because, I think, it is my opinion, it is happening because of the reasons I told you before. Because our job is really changing much more towards the security idea. Which is also true. Of course, hosting people and helping people is also letting the security of one community grow if those people are assisted. But on the other hand, we are not public officers, we are not police, we are not these control authorities.*

*We want to organise a really big protest against this law. Because this is not the idea that we have of ourselves [...] not how we represent ourselves as workers. This is also done by a government that should be centre-left wing, which is the government we have now. Just to give you the complete scenario.*

Again, this illustrates how interviewees aim to position themselves as an NGO, exploring which role they can play and becoming political, even if that means to separate oneself decisively from the political realm.

## **‘Difficultly beautiful’: introducing a new reception system and integration in Pizzoli**

L'Aquila, the province which is home to the town of Pizzoli, combines Renaissance and Baroque buildings with wide piazzas. The main city features a lively atmosphere typical of a southern Italian city. Situated on a hill in the middle of a valley, and surrounded by mountains, the city feels like a protected place.

But L'Aquila's history is strewn with crisis: sandwiched between the Appenines and the Gran Sasso mountain, the walled medieval city is rocked regularly by major earthquakes. In 2009, the town was the epicentre of an earthquake that killed 300 and made over 40,000 of its 70,000 citizens homeless.

A mere seven years – and many tremors – later, in June 2016, the little town of Pizzoli (500 inhabitants and part of L'Aquila municipality), learnt that it would soon be hosting almost 100 newcomers. The local population reacted mostly with dismay and with protest – or so we are told. Public meetings were organised in an attempt to explain the decision to local citizens. But the meetings only seemed to make the situation worse.

For most of the people to whom we spoke, the journey of integration in Pizzoli came like a bolt out of the blue – shaking a different kind of foundation. Before then, the community was living a life largely removed from the challenges around migration. They had little experience of receiving newcomers, let alone such a – relatively – significant number of people. Therefore Pizzoli poses an interesting case of a community struggling to integrate newcomers for the first time; a close-knit community regularly under other forms of physical stress, it was less used to the challenges of opening its doors.

### **The advantages and disadvantages of SPRAR**

The local government in L'Aquila had decided to participate in the SPRAR system and volunteered to take in a number of newcomers. With no established tradition of receiving migrants, the experiences around integration were rather unfamiliar to the community in Pizzoli. But the town has been receiving a significant number of newcomers since 2016 through SPRAR.

## **The benefits of volunteering through SPRAR**

As part of the SPRAR system, local administrations can *volunteer* to host asylum seekers. In such cases they notify the prefecture (the local governmental agency) and gain almost complete control of the process. But given the size of the migration phenomenon in Italy in recent years, the state can, separately from the SPRAR system, use an emergency procedure to allocate migrants to specific locations. In this emergency context, the state does not enter into dialogue with the local administration or local NGOs, but can pick and choose whomever it wants to enter into a deal with (hotel owners, farmers, individuals who own facilities that might be useful such as gyms or warehouses).

Crucially, we are told, two incentives make this option palatable to local administrations. Firstly, through SPRAR, the local administration decides how many migrants can be hosted – with a minimum of one newcomer for every 1,000 residents. The second incentive is that they have a choice over which organisations can implement the plan. As summed up by our contact at l'Aquila's Council for Social Policies:

*If you volunteer, you have much more control of the whole process. If you volunteer, you get to decide on the two critical and tension-generating issues: (1) the number of asylum seekers you will host and (2) the type and features of the organisations, NGOs, charities, and so on, that will take care of the integration process.<sup>2</sup>*

Many of the stories in Pizzoli centre around the SPRAR system and the advantages of moving away from the ad hoc way of working to this newer, more systematic setup. Decision-makers are struggling to convince citizens to receive more newcomers and to show them the advantages of a volunteering system that provides more independence and autonomy to the municipality. Especially in the context of a country where everyone is aware that migrants will come, it is a question of whether or not you want some say over how:

*The main challenge is to make people understand it's in their best interest to volunteer.*

## **SPRAR: the increasing permanence of a temporary system**

In Pizzoli we spoke to several NGOs involved in the SPRAR system; we also interviewed social workers and members of the policy community, as well as newcomers themselves. We also spoke to members of ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana), the organisation that runs the SPRAR project in the city.

Strikingly, one social worker describes the newcomers as 'guests'. SPRAR is meant to be a first-response system: it is there to facilitate the first few months of a newcomer's life. As such, there is a legitimate reason behind such expressions that betray an expectation of temporariness, which corresponds to the role that SPRAR is supposed to play as a transition solution. Yet, as one of our interlocutors tells us:

*Initially it takes four to five weeks for us to familiarise with each of them and vice versa, which is not little if you think that a SPRAR cycle is officially only six months (I say officially because in the majority of cases they are renewed and in fact some of our current assisted have been here for twelve to eighteen months).*

### **SPRAR and the transition from arrival to belonging**

The newcomers we spoke to also seem to place SPRAR at the core of their stories. Some of them highlight the advantages of the initial support system, but are also concerned about where it leaves some of them afterwards.

In these stories, the SPRAR programme seems to be a symbol of transition into a new life though in some cases it seems to act as a bridge to newfound stability and well-being, while in others it acts as a tunnel from which the newcomer exits with little preparation for what awaits him or her in the immediate aftermath. While necessary and welcome, SPRAR as a transition between short-term help and the long-term creation of a new life in another country does not quite work.

Newcomers who are taken care of by ARCI in Pizzoli and L'Aquila tell us of a very efficient, productive, highly skilled and friendly environment, hence their first experience with Italian institutions is quite positive. Problems, according to our interviewees, begin when they leave the SPRAR programme. As there are high levels of unemployment in the region, and despite opportunities to complete internships and attend language training, Pizzoli and its surroundings do not have the capacity to absorb any new members into the workforce. Our interviewees struggle to find jobs that can enable them to make a living.

The transition from SPRAR into a regular job and a normal life worries many newcomers:

*I haven't found anything for two years! I have finished the SPRAR programme, done the traineeship programme, and that's it. I save 300 euros in three years! How can I live like this?*

Another newcomer tells us:

*I had to leave the SPRAR house when I completed six months in the SPRAR programme. Andrea [a social worker] helped me find a cheap house in L'Aquila, but the problem is that I had no job to pay even for a cheap house.*

The excitement around SPRAR is mixed with the realisation that the newcomers' futures are out of their control. They express these mixed emotions in the way they describe the complexities of Italian bureaucracy and in the loss of control they experience when their individual cases are evaluated and judged upon by far-removed institutions that seem to know very little of their lives while they are in L'Aquila. For example, one of our interviewees speaks of the judge who evaluated her asylum request, who sits 200 kilometres away in Ancona. For the newcomers, positive experiences within the SPRAR system are tempered by their struggles and challenges around building a new life in Pizzoli and L'Aquila, mainly around finding work.

### **All-encompassing SPRAR**

SPRAR, its shortcomings, the hopes and opportunities it creates, as well as the struggles of introducing it in a small town with little experience in receiving newcomers, is therefore one of the key pillars in the stories shared with us.

But beyond its practical and administrative role, SPRAR also fulfils a number of psychological collective functions: it is the real, but also the imagined, vessel and channel for all resentments, hopes and unexplained decisions. In a small community where it is difficult to fall out with your neighbour and conflict is unsustainable in the long term, where decisions are often taken quite close to home but in ways that seem opaque and perhaps unfair – the lack of control – and sometimes of fairness – can be compensated for by pinning one's understanding and hopes onto something more abstract and yet more official and more removed. SPRAR channels the conflicts away from the community, whose members have no choice but to get along.

Interestingly enough, SPRAR is also the one experience that newcomers and the community can share de facto – it is a point of convergence, including convergence of puzzlement. Both existing community citizens and newcomers can feel that they are the victims of this system, just like both can feel empowered by it. SPRAR can be the great interpretive framework that both groups share and through which both can be reflected.

## Opinions about public opinion: does the community know itself?

Even though SPRAR presents an incentive for municipalities to accept a fair number of newcomers and welcome them into their community, when L'Aquila decided to volunteer (and Pizzoli became the recipient), the local population reacted negatively at first. One of our interviewees responsible for social policies tells us:

*The reality, however, is that local administrations have to explain to their citizens/voters why they are volunteering to host asylum seekers and this is not easy. Common people don't have an ear for the subtleties of bureaucracy. They become immediately suspicious: 'politicians are profiting from this', they think. The opposition party does the rest: imagine how difficult it must be to volunteer for a local administration in which the [right-wing populist] Lega Nord is the opposition.*

*Here in L'Aquila we had difficulties at the beginning, because people's default attitude is suspicion. But thanks to the work of ARCI [the local NGO], which is very professional and committed, the developments were positive.*

*Pizzoli's population was in revolt, understandably enough. My question, however, is: was this event really 'out of the blue'? Local administrations knew it could happen, though it was quite unlikely. Paradoxically, since then the situation has improved: common people understood it's better to be informed, local administrations, after the first reaction of complete denial and rejection, became more malleable – though this applies to Pizzoli, much less to other councils – and generally speaking there wasn't any major problem.*

It is interesting how even the phase of initial shock is described as a phase of change: institutions become malleable and the initial sense of rejection shifts into a sense of acceptance – the interviewee even ends up highlighting that there was 'no major problem'. Our conversations suggest that shifts in community perceptions are possible.

Perhaps more to the point, the accounts of the difficulties encountered early on and the gradual acceptance of the newcomers, just as the stories that stress the immediate perception of an opportunity, are not so much conflicting as they are about necessary conflict and its evolution. S, a local policy-maker, tells us how he perceived the local population to be very sceptical. He suggests that there was an atmosphere of suspicion, and distances himself from them ('common people'),

assuming most local citizens were opposed to the idea of integrating newcomers into Pizzoli. There is a gulf between the 'migration professionals', whatever their function, and citizens in Pizzoli, with each making explicit assumptions about other citizens' inclination to reject the integration of migrants.

However, our conversations and interviews, taken together, paint a more nuanced and textured picture. One policy interviewee explains that the initial shock in the local population was exacerbated by an absence of any information ahead of the decision and a lack of involvement by the local population in either the decision or the reception process. This reinforces how fragmented the organisation of the local population was during the initial arrival of newcomers. In the words of D, a social worker:

*The situation was very bad a few months ago. The population was shocked when they found out that we were supposed to host 100 migrants. How did that happen? Simple: a cooperative that runs programmes in Rome managed to obtain permission to use a reception structure in Pizzoli; they contacted the local prefecture in L'Aquila, and said they could host 100 in Pizzoli. Period.*

This points to another gap between social workers on the ground, local authorities and members of the community in Pizzoli. Our interviewee describes this process as two institutions, an NGO and the local authority, making decisions without entering into dialogue with the local population. Some of the attitudes we came across in our interviews seemed hardened, with interviewees making explicit judgements of others. One social worker tells us:

*I expected more from local politics. I was really disappointed. Politicians remember migrants only when it's about getting votes. But when it comes to involving them as active citizens, as participants? Forget about it.*

There are several perceived separations and fragmentations in the local community. The population is not mentioned much in our interviews beyond this phase of initial rejection. There is a sense that the situation calmed down, but the most active participants in the stories we heard were the NGOs, most importantly ARCI, and local authority members.

However, most of our interviewees described their perceptions of the community in very nuanced terms – a mixture of suspicion and welcoming attitudes are observed, even within one person. Contradictions merge into one experience around the arrival and integration of newcomers in Pizzoli:

*The popular concern in Fossa and Pizzoli, for sure, that puts lots of pressure. For the rest, I must say that the news acts differently on people's perceptions. Once residents are more familiar with migrants, they partially overcome their diffidence. They may still think that 'migrants in general are criminal' and stuff like that, but then add 'these ones are good people'. I think generally residents are likely to think they have been lucky because 'their' asylum seekers are not that bad. They may be willing to admit that perhaps even the others are not as bad, but that will take more time.*

The acceptance of newcomers is described as a process that might start with initial suspicion. A moment of shock serves as the starting point of a journey in the city, of integrating into the community.

Throughout the conversations that we had in Pizzoli, people's accounts of the same events changed, and their acknowledgment of this fact when we pointed it out to them was symptomatic of a deeper truth that is often edited out of a wishful thinking approach to integration: the necessity of conflict as an intrinsic part of the integration process. A process characterised by the fact that neither party wants to be in the situation in which they find themselves. Neither the newcomer nor the host society have chosen this – SPRAR and other types of systems can channel this reluctance and convert it into something more positive, but the fact is that this is a situation that is forced on both parties.

In small, semi-rural communities in particular, where there are fewer NGOs and organised civil society actors, and where official structures are also relatively inexperienced in the management of migration and integration, conflict is an inevitable part of the negotiation of integration. SPRAR can be the part-recipient of resentments and frustrations, but the rest is shouldered by the community itself and most of the time that initial period of conflict mutates into a different, more positive type of relationship.

#### Notes

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1. Giulia Lagana, 'Curbing immigration from Libya: are the EU and Italy heading in the right direction?', *The Progressive Post*, 14 December 2017.

2. SPRAR has rules that regulate the organisations that may apply for receipt of support. Bidding NGOs need to undergo preliminary checks, as well as budget and expenses checks throughout.

# Key insights for policy

## 1. Migration is local – and the local is personal

One important insight from our research is that the phenomenon of migration, which is usually discussed in global, or at least national terms, with images of large numbers of people marching across borders or crammed into boats, traversing long distances on their way to safety, is at least as much a local phenomenon. And while the journeys – and the distances involved – are a defining element of what constitutes migration, at its core, migration – as a phenomenon rather than as a headline – is localised and context-dependent. Not only is the experience of migration highly localised and specific to each context, it is also extremely personal.

### Migration is personal for everyone

The arrival of newcomers is a life-changing event, not just for the migrant, but also for members of the relevant host community, whether they are volunteers, neighbours or officials. Some of our interlocutors expressed real feelings of vulnerability and sadness at times, because migrants may have moved on to other locations or because they felt for migrants and their struggles, for example with local bureaucracy. But many of them also reflected on their simultaneous feelings of resentment, jealousy or unease. Navigating these very mixed, nuanced and complex feelings is part of the process of this negotiated transition that makes up the experiences of migration and integration.

### Face-to-face interaction changes everything

Everyone we spoke to referred to this, and across each case study: everything changes once there is face-to-face interaction. For example, one of our German volunteers described being quite reluctant to be involved with migrants at first, even hostile, until he ended up having to meet some of the newcomers through his work. These personal interactions completely changed his outlook, and he became heavily engaged in volunteer work. This, crucially, means that people's preferences are not fixed.

### Policy insights

It is important to focus on the host community as much as on the migrants. The former is going through something that is life changing as well. Many of our interlocutors, in every country and in every context, brought up the fact that 'The Arrival of The Migrants' (with the capital letters very much audible) had been an incredibly significant moment for their community, and that there had been a 'before' and an 'after'. This was the case whether or not the community had experienced tensions or conflict around the issue, whether solidarity was

immediate, or whether – as in most cases – it was a mix of both. Policies that recognise the enormous significance of the event for the hosts are crucial. Is it time to consider formal recognition of communities that have been through such a transformational moment?

## **2. Conflict is a part of integration**

Such recognition demands an appreciation that while people's preferences can change, these don't evolve in a neat arc from hostility to benevolence or vice versa. They oscillate between these outlooks – and a host of others – in unpredictable and complex ways. It is important to support this process in a manner that acknowledges the relevance of both the 'ups' and the 'downs', and not to fixate on a single understanding of success as a one-way arc of progress.

And because this process is non-linear, multifaceted and made up of myriad conflicting emotions among diverse populations (all of them slipping in and out of attributed roles, real and imagined functions), there is bound to be conflict. But in all our case studies, the conflict is an intrinsic part of the process of arrival and settling, whether or not there is an aim towards long-term integration. Conflict performs a set of functions and therefore cannot and should not be bypassed. Certainly, not all conflict or tension should be taken as a sign of failure. Rather, it needs to be understood as the symptom of a complicated and demanding process that is changing many lives in its churn.

### **Policy insights**

It is important to learn to decipher the meaning of tensions and conflict and to factor them in as valuable information, but also valuable tipping and transformational points. Do not sweep conflict under the carpet as 'a bump in the road', but reward those instances of conflict and tension resolution.

## **3. Migration and integration as simultaneous processes**

Migration is also often described as a linear process that begins with a departure from a place of origin, continues with a difficult journey to reach safety and/or better prospects, arrival in a new place, and finally, integration into a host society. Integration is an endpoint in this story – the culmination of a successful process,

and separate from that of migration. Yet our research on the lived experience of migration – from both the migrants’ and hosts’ points of view – suggests that migration and integration occur simultaneously.

Arrival is part of the integration process. Migration begins the moment a person moves permanently away from their home with a vague destination in mind (this vagueness is often misunderstood by the host community). Meanwhile, integration begins the moment a person sets foot in a place, in which they may or may not stay. This is the case for both parties – the migrant and the host. The fact that the new-comer may not know whether this will be ‘home’ shapes the experience – for both parties – but does not detract from the fact that this is a version of integration. Dealing with these blurred distinctions between departure, arrival, transit, settlement, adaptation and belonging needs to form the basis of a real understanding of migration and integration – especially in a world where transience may become the norm and, paradoxically, we can no longer assume that it will be temporary. Both parties are participating in a constant negotiated transition, and all aspects of this transition are what constitute migration and integration.

### **Policy insights**

The recognition of the continuum between migration and integration needs to impact the ways in which governments structure their processes. At the moment, most governments still conceive of arrival and integration quite separately. This is reflected in the ways that access to services is regulated – for example access to education for children. Even if these are made available as soon as a migrant is ‘processed’ into the ‘system’, that moment between arrival and access is effectively ignored as a crucial moment of integration. Right now, the range of accessible services is dependent on clearing a set of administrative and legal hurdles. This places some organisations, such as schools, in difficult situations, because doing the right thing often involves breaking the law and taking real risks. Evolving a practical understanding of the grey area between arrival and integration means creating services and access to services that cater to this moment specifically.

And, finally, while this is well known, the distinction maintained between the two phenomena is the result of the amount of time required to process claims at every step. The experience of waiting, of administrative limbo, that characterises every single story we have heard, underpins the maintaining of the artificial distinctions between these processes of arrival, settling, integration and belonging. This is created by serious administrative delays that have a major influence on people’s status and lives, and which present an obstacle to naturally occurring processes of settlement.

## 4. Migration is a physical experience

In our conversations in the host communities and newcomers, the notion of physical space came up repeatedly, whether it was the remoteness of Östersund and Tengen, the invisibility of the gym in Kalk, the various forms of occupation that occurred in France or the lack of meeting places. Much of the confusion experienced by both the migrants and the hosts seemed to stem from a lack of physical and online structures through which processes could be explained and made more transparent. The phenomenon of migration and integration is a physical one that tends to be displaced into legal and administrative spheres – which in turn appear to be remote planets to which no one has access and whose ‘civilisations’ and ‘language’ (as several people mentioned) no one understands. Bringing these processes closer should be a priority.

### Policy insights

The emphasis has understandably been placed on the provision of shelter. But there are other major infrastructure needs that should be addressed for migration to be managed and integration to be successful. These are not new, but they are worth emphasising: create more physical spaces for encounters between NGOs and their volunteers and establish official spaces (physical, online, administrative) for connections between NGOs and government officials. Provide spaces designated as neutral and safe, where conflicts and tensions can be aired and can occur without fear of reprisal or escalation. Furthermore, remoteness is a major issue – for the host communities and for the newcomers – an absence of good transport links is a major difficulty, both practically and emotionally. Place more emphasis on physical connections between spaces.

## 5. The importance of agency

In our interviews, both migrants and individuals from the host country immediately focused on their personal role and responsibility in the process of integration. What pervaded our forums and discussions was a strong sense of agency and the need to make use of it. Whether this was about the volunteers noting that their involvement constituted ‘the most important thing’ they had ever done, or the various migrants who cited the need to help others in order to feel useful and more in control of their lives – despite all the difficulties and disruptions – the importance of contributing, of shaping, of having an impact was colossally important. This was the case for everyone we spoke to.

In one of our cases, agency was described as ‘showing oneself’, that is, expressing oneself, showing one’s identity, background and history to the community to help community members understand and feel closer to them. The notion of ‘showing oneself’ seems to imply that some newcomers feel invisible, like someone who needs to prove their own existence. This is particularly relevant in an urban, multicultural setting such as Kalk, where migrants easily blend in with the rest of the residents, but also applies to remote locations such as Östersund. Our interviewees highlighted how important a personal connection and relationship to some community members is for integration.

As for the hosts, whether on a professional level or a volunteer basis, the need for involvement, the need to feel as though this was a process that was not simply being done ‘to’ them, but one in which they had a role, was overwhelming.

### **Policy insights**

Taking back control can be a positive stance. In an era in which the most popular political slogans are a version of ‘taking back control’, it is worth considering migration and integration as areas in which there is a much more constructive and positive way of granting people this wish. So far, politicians and policy-makers have addressed the issue of migration as either something entirely good, which has made native populations feel taken for granted and disrespected in their own struggles with daily hardship or change, or as situations to be managed much as a natural catastrophe with some official financial and legal support. Indeed, in some cases, it has been addressed as something to be taken on, but whose impact needed to be minimised at all costs – literally. In fact, the one angle that has not been explored is to present migration as an opportunity to reshape a community, as an area in which various organisations or individuals can leave a mark and exercise their judgements and their preferences. This is despite the fact that our conversations and forums suggest that there is deep satisfaction and meaning to be drawn from contributing.

Perhaps it is time to switch perspectives on this: to demand a contribution, to create a space for such contributions and to reward them properly. Our experience suggests that even in communities that are not wealthy, shaping the life and the life of the community through involvement in the management of migration and integration is overwhelmingly correlated with a sense of agency and political efficacy. Reward those who contribute, provide multiple ways in which they can, and recognise the different contributions. In addition, encourage the formation and development of ‘migration and integration entrepreneurs’.

## 6. Skills

Across our case studies, one recurring theme centres on the array of skills needed to facilitate the process of arrival and of integration. Many volunteers reflect on how much they have learned, while many policy-makers reflect on how much more complex their tasks are than their job description gives them credit for. All of them note that a recognition of these skills would both empower them, but also more accurately reflect the processes in which they are involved – the various stages and intrinsic needs of the situations with which they are confronted.

### Policy insights

Understanding the complex nature of migration and integration, including its emotional and cultural components, should entail the formal recognition of certain skills as valuable and as worth rewarding. The situation has created crucial experts in fields such as ‘cultural mediation’, which are barely recognised, if at all, but certainly not recognised enough to warrant the creation of positions. This needs to happen, and those who carry out these functions need to be recognised as crucial to the formal processes of migration management and integration.

## 7. The institutional space – a bridge and a tunnel

Depending on the context and the moment, institutions were either too distant and difficult to reach or they were too overbearing and intrusive. In Sweden, the church volunteers sought to distance themselves from state institutions, which they perceived as cold-hearted and making decisions based on economic rationale. They saw themselves as having to care for all people, regardless of their immigration status, and to offer support and protection to make sure no one would fall through the cracks of political decision-making. Many of the interviewees felt they provided an informal counterbalance to the more formal state institutions in the reception of migrants and in their integration. One person described it as a distinction between the state as ‘the body’ and the church as ‘the soul’, a metaphor which was also used in one of our Italian case studies to describe the difference between NGOs and official institutions. In France, the institutional presence was the main focus of attention: in Rennes they were depicted as partners, and in Lille they were depicted as ubiquitous but ultimately cowardly.

Given this difficulty of connecting to institutions, we came across time and time again NGO actors who noted that their responsibilities are incredibly blurred: that they constantly cross the line between providing a public service and private one, between a volunteer function and an official one. In the case of Italy, it is far from clear where the state ends and then NGOs and the volunteers begin.

### **Policy insights**

The relationship between NGOs and formal institutions needs to be formalised via agreed touchpoints and through the creation of specialised posts, whose functions will be to provide the necessary bridges. The functions and capacities of volunteers need to be recognised and their contributions clarified. None of this need be heavy-handed, but at the moment the lines of responsibility are too often blurred, thus leading to unstable relationships and frustration.

## **8. The difference between national and local narratives**

Our research highlights the dichotomy between national and local-level narratives. This is what we expected to find, but the contrast was starker than we thought it would be, especially in certain countries. For example, our German case study concluded that migration is not one single phenomenon but the label for at least two different, albeit interrelated, realities: a mediated, national phenomenon and a distinct local reality. Despite interacting with each other, these two phenomena do not merge into one. It is misleading to assume that the close, productive and committed engagement with newcomers in a local community necessarily has a direct impact on the mediated phenomenon of migration, just as narratives portrayed in national media do not have a direct impact on personal decisions and commitments regarding the lived reality.

In Sweden, many interviewees described the emphasis on national media stories as problematic and wanted more local stories to be shared with a wider audience. Local experiences are often very different from or even contradict the national narrative. This is crucial because our interviewees express how, on the one hand, they don't see their real experiences reflected or valued in the national conversation and, on the other hand, they were frustrated with the idea being spread in the media of there being a 'collapse of Swedish society'.

More importantly, they also spoke about the way in which national-level political decisions affect them, practically and emotionally. In Sweden, the shift from a very open and generous migrant policy to one that is very strict was difficult to process for everyone. It created more stress for migrants, in turn impacting on the volunteers, but also confused volunteers, as this change deeply shook up their Swedish identities. They had always considered Sweden to be one of the most tolerant and open countries, and the radical shift was emotionally challenging.

### **Policy insights**

Good local stories need to be carried at the national level, while more effort should be put into harvesting them. Incentives such as prizes could be set up so that the stories are well investigated and reported. It is important to make the distinction between national-level snapshots of attitudes and local ones. Finally, more work is needed to understand the link between citizens' responses to surveys, their attitudes and their experience. There is a disconnect between what is experienced in daily life and the views held at national level. This makes it difficult to truly understand preferences and elaborate policy reflective of those preferences.

Over the past eighteen months, Counterpoint delved into communities across Europe to explore their local and personal experiences of migration: of welcoming strangers to their communities, of successes, challenges and hopes. We asked members of these communities in France, Germany, Italy and Sweden questions they are not usually faced with, so that we might gain a more nuanced understanding of how these communities shape and re-shape themselves according to the arrival and integration of newcomers. We inquired into experiences such as loss, trauma, ambivalence, conflict, cooperation, transition and belonging to make sense of the phenomenon we call 'migration'.