

Sept. 2022

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

Country Reports on multilevel dynamics

By

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REPORT

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101004714



Abstract

This report looks at the multi-level governance dynamics and integration policies targeting post-2014 migrants developed in six small and medium-sized towns and rural areas in Sweden. Primarily based on interviews conducted in each of the selected municipalities, it provides an overview of 1) national and regional integration policies targeting post-2014 migrants in Sweden; 2) policymaking relations among the key actors involved in these policy processes in the six localities and key features of policy networks within which these actors interact; 3) how these actors perceive and define integration. The report finds that the centralized governance of Swedish integration policy limits municipalities' flexibility in developing locally specific policies. Within these confines, however, municipalities differ in how much they go beyond their core obligations, in how broadly or narrowly they approach integration, and in the degree to which they centralize or decentralize the preparation and implementation of integration-related tasks. Some municipalities approach integration purely as a question of labour market integration, while others take a broader perspective that also includes integration in social and cultural activities. These tasks are performed either through specialized agencies, or delegated across the municipal organization through steering documents. While all municipalities carry out the majority of their tasks in-house, they sometimes involve civil society and private sector actors as consulting bodies and service providers. Since 2014, conflicts have developed between actors at the local level, primarily the municipal governments and civil agencies, and state-level actors (the Migration Agency, the Public Employment Service, and the national government). These conflicts revolve around the perception that state-level actors fail to fulfil their functions in the existing multi-level governance structure, that they are inattentive to local challenges, and that the uneven rate of immigration and government funding creates obstacles for local policy implementation. In response, some local governments have scaled back their organization of integration policy implementation while others have come to develop local policies, primarily regarding labour market activation, which effectively overlap with state-level agencies' responsibilities. Whereas the former strategy sees local governments abandoning active local integration policy, the latter shows how local government agencies can expand their integration policies to overlap with what are formally state-level responsibilities.



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1. Introduction

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

This report aims to explore how six small and medium sized towns and rural areas in Sweden have responded to the presence of post-2014 migrants.¹ It aims to assess, first, which policies have been developed and implemented in these small and medium sized towns and rural areas, or, in other words, how have SMsTRA mobilized vis-à-vis the new challenge and in relation to the policies and funding schemes put forwards by other levels of government. In doing so, the project looks at how local actors are embedded in multilevel frameworks where regional, national and EU policies and stakeholders may also play a decisive role in shaping local integration policymaking. Second, the report focuses on the interactions between the actors involved in integration policymaking, asking: what different patterns of interaction can we identify between local (policy) actors and regional/national/supranational authorities and stakeholders? Which factors have led to the emergence of collaborations as well as tensions between actors at different government levels? Are new cooperative relationships eventually emerging and, if so, what are the key features of resulting policy networks? Third, the report asks how the actors involved in these policy networks perceive and frame the integration of post-2014 migrants, under the assumption that frames can play a key role in influencing policymaking processes.

Across the six localities the research team has conducted a total of 91 interviews with 96 individuals involved in various facets of local integration policymaking. The interviewees include elected members of local government, local officials, street-level bureaucrats, and a

¹ Swedish integration policy establishes distinctions between different types of humanitarian migrants. These distinctions are also present in the report. On a general level, these distinctions differentiate between status holders and non-status holders. Within the status holder category are "recently arrived refugees," a bureaucratic category denoting those who have received their residence permits within the last 24 months, and who are therefore eligible for targeted resources and services, and long-term status holders, who are included in the universal welfare system. Within the non-status holder category are undocumented migrants and asylum seekers. Undocumented migrants are largely absent from local integration policies (although they can access some welfare services, such as emergency housing and healthcare). They are therefore marginal to the analyses in this report.



wide range of non-governmental actors. Insights derived from the interview material have been complemented with an in-depth analysis of policy and legal documents.

As the report finds, Swedish integration policy is strongly centralized to the state level, allowing state-level agencies to set the municipalities' primary obligations, and carry out many activities (e.g. parts of social policy and labour market policy) that are otherwise within the capacity of municipal agencies. At the same time, the structure of Swedish public administration, which places large responsibilities for welfare policy implementation on local authorities, greatly limit the involvement of civil society and public sector actors. Within these confines, however the municipalities all vary in the way that they go beyond their core obligations, in their scope of integration-related tasks, and in the manner in which they organize their activities and involve non-public sector actors. In this sense, the report notes the possibilities that do exist for municipalities to go beyond state policy, even within strongly centralized systems.

Tied to the flexibility in policy, the municipalities are also flexible in their framing of what integration is, and why it is necessary. Whereas some perceive integration primarily as a means to bring individuals out of welfare dependence, others see integration as a wider social value, with ramifications for the local community as a whole. These differences are partly mirrored in policy, as some municipalities develop integration policies that are geared strictly toward labour market activation, while others combine labour market concerns with cultural activities and support to civil society associations.

Despite differences in policy and framing, the multi-level governance (MLG) networks look remarkably similar within the municipalities. In all six case studies, the municipal agencies develop and implement most integration-related tasks, with very limited influence from elected politicians and non-public actors. While some municipalities have developed more decentralized approaches, involving representatives of civil society and the private sector, these actors are typically involved solely for consultations and, to some extent, for carrying out particular tasks. Regardless, the respondents generally describe the relationship between municipal governments and non-public actors as collaborative.

Whereas local relations are reported to be mostly collaborative, civil society actors and municipal governments both report antagonistic relations vis-à-vis state-level agencies. Across the six municipalities, respondents address the difficulties that the Public employment service, the Migration agency, and the national government pose to the municipalities, to the migrants, and to the achievement of integration goals. These difficulties include a lack of long-term planning, a perception that state-level agencies' do not fulfil their responsibilities, and a lack of respect for the way in which national-level migration and integration policies impact on local governments. According to the interviewees, key factors behind these conflicts are the slow process of privatization and reorganization of the Public employment service, the rapid rise and decline in migration between 2014 and the introduction of more restrictive asylum policies in 2016, and, as a consequence, a rapid decline in state funding for the implementation of integration policies.



The report proceeds through five chapters. Chapter 2 describes the methodology for the Whole-COMM project in general, and for the Swedish case studies. Chapter 3 describes the national context in Sweden, focusing on policies for housing and labour market integration, and on the general structure of multi-level governance concerning integration policy. Chapter 4 briefly describes the local cases with regard to socioeconomic factors and the localities' prior experience of migration and cultural diversity. Chapter 5, the most extensive part of the report, reports the results for the empirical study, focusing on local integration policy, the frames that local representatives use to interpret integration and migration, MLG networks, and local decision-making processes. Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings.

This Report is a deliverable of the Whole-COMM Project, which focuses on small and medium sized municipalities and rural areas in eight European and two non-European countries that have experienced and dealt with the increased arrival and settlement of migrants after 2014 (for more information about the project see: Caponio and Pettrachin, 2021).



2. Methodology

The empirical data for this report were collected between October 2021 and April 2022. During the data collection phase, the Swedish research team conducted 91 semi-structured interviews with a total of 96 respondents. Out of the 96 respondents, 61 responded to a structured online survey that sought to map their interactions in MLG networks. Potential respondents were sampled based on their (professional) positions, e.g., as local officials working on integration in a municipality or as NGO employees and volunteers offering non-profit services to refugees.² Most respondents were contacted through email first, occasionally followed by a reminder and a call. After establishing first contacts in a municipality, other respondents were identified using the method of ‘snowball sampling’ (Bryman 2016). Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, all but one interview took place over Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or similar video conference tools. All but three interviews were recorded, and then summarized in English. In the cases where it was not possible to record the interviews, the responsible researcher wrote a corresponding summary immediately after finishing the interview. As a complement to the interviews and surveys, the research team also collected locally produced policy documents, research reports, and newspaper clips. Directly referenced policy documents are listed in the appendix.

The six localities were selected based on several different variables. Case selection was conducted in the framework of the broader Whole-COMM project (see Caponio and Pettrachin 2021 for more details) in order to maximize variation among a set of variables. These included population size², the share of non-EU migrant residents before the arrival of post-2014 migrants, unemployment levels before the arrival of post-2014 migrants, demographic trends before the arrival of post-2014 migrants, the political parties in government (conservative or progressive). All localities hosted a reception centre for asylum-seekers or refugees between 2014 and 2017³ and were still hosting some post-2014 migrants in late 2021. Combined, the variables helped identify **four** types of localities:

Type	Characteristics	Selected cases in Sweden
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² The researchers attempted to conduct interviews with anti-migrant actors in all six municipalities. Despite multiple attempts to contact far right activists as well as representatives of the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats, the researchers did not manage to find any respondents in these categories.

³ During this period, virtually every single municipality in Sweden hosted some asylum seekers, and all municipalities accepted refugees with residence permits. Hence, in this regard, the six municipalities do not differ from the Swedish context as a whole.



Type A	Recovering local economy and improving demographic profile, migrants' settlement before 2014	Municipality A: Small town in Scania, Municipality C: Mid-sized town in Jönköping Municipality E: Small town in Dalarna
Type B	Improving economic and demographic situation, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	n/a ⁴
Type C	Demographic and economic decline, migrants' settlement before 2014	Municipality B: Rural town in Blekinge Municipality F: Mid-sized town in Gävleborg
Type D	Economic and demographic decline, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	Municipality D: Small town in Gävleborg

Table 1: The Whole-COMM typology

To ensure regional variation, the 6 communities are distributed across 5 administrative regions, namely Scania, Blekinge, Jönköping, Dalarna, and Gävleborg:

Scania is Sweden's southernmost, and third most populated, administrative region. Most of the population, and the region's economy, are centred on the metropolitan area of Malmö/Lund. With bridge and ferry connections to Denmark and Germany, Scania is the main port of entry for migrants travelling to Sweden through mainland Europe. Reflecting its close connections to Europe, the total proportion of foreign-born residents in 2021 was above 23 %. Excluding those born in the EU and in the Nordic countries, the proportion of foreign-born residents has increased from 8 % in 2001 to 16 % in 2021.

Blekinge, located immediately to the North-east of Scania, is one of the country's smallest and least populated regions. Over the past 20 years, the proportion of residents born outside of the EU and the Nordic countries has steadily increased, from about 4 % in 2001 to 11 % in 2020 and 2021.

The Jönköping region is located at the intersection between Sweden's three metropolitan areas (Malmö/Lund, Gothenburg, and Stockholm). The proportion of residents born outside of the EU and the Nordic countries is relatively high, increasing from 6 % in 2001 to 15 % in 2021.

⁴ It was not possible to identify an unambiguous case of a Type B municipality in Sweden.



The Gävleborg and Dalarna regions are located just North of Stockholm, forming a belt between the Baltic Sea in the East and the Norwegian border in the West. Both regions are predominantly rural, with low population densities. Both regions had the smallest proportions of residents born outside of the EU and the Nordic countries in 2001 (2% for Dalarna, 3 % for Gävleborg) as well as in 2021 (9 % and 11 % respectively). While the proportions have been relatively small in both regions, they have also had the fastest increase in the proportion of foreign-born residents throughout the same 20-year period.

Throughout the period, all five regions have hosted numerous asylum seekers and recognized refugees. Across the period, the proportion of recognized refugees allocated to the regions each year has varied between a few per mille to about one per cent of the total population. These similarities are linked to the national policy of refugee dispersal, which strives to balance the proportion of recently arrived migrants between regions and between municipalities. These policies, and others, are described further in the next chapter.



3. The national context

The findings reveal Swedish integration to be strongly state-centric, involving municipalities primarily in the implementation of centrally decided policies, and largely excluding civil society actors from any comprehensive integration activities. Further, much of what might otherwise be framed within wider integration policies (e.g. concerning housing and social security) reach most migrants through the universal welfare system. It is only in this restricted space that individual municipalities can choose to develop alternative policies, or experiment with cross-sector collaboration.

This section describes the national context for Swedish integration policy. The first part describes how the national integration policy has developed up until today. Focusing particularly on the development of the Introduction program (*Etableringsprogrammet*) and on the Settlement act (*Bosättningslagen*) this part shows how the state has gradually limited the municipalities' discretion in the formulation and implementation of integration policy. The second part zooms in on the MLG structure that surrounds the planning and implementation of integration policies. This part describes a long-standing MLG structure that includes many different state and municipal actors, with varying capacities across different sections of integration policy.

3.1 Swedish integration policy

The first coherent immigrant policy in Sweden was decided by parliament in 1975 (Prop. 1975:26). It had three goals: equality, freedom of choice and partnership. The equality goal implied that migrants should have the same living standards as the native population. Therefore, migrants with residence permits were equipped with (almost) the same rights as Swedish citizens and were included in the welfare state. In the 1980s, as the composition of immigration changed from labour to asylum migration, the municipalities were given the overall responsibility for integration measures (Prop. 1983/84:144). Humanitarian immigrants were judged to have a particularly high need for support, and the municipalities were considered to be able to meet this need better than the Employment Service which was previously responsible. The 1980s thereby set the starting point for comprehensive integration policy in Sweden. The following sections will develop this policy from the perspective of housing and labour market integration.

3.1.1 Housing and settlement

The 1980s introduced the first policy for the dispersal of asylum-seekers and refugees across the country, the so-called 'whole of Sweden' strategy (Prop. 1983/84:144). The idea was to



counteract the concentration of migrants in urban areas and increase solidarity between local governments. The new policy was a response to complaints from high receiver municipalities, who demanded an increased state responsibility for geographical dispersal and for the compensation of migration-related costs. The solution was to introduce two policy instruments that remained in some form up until the 2016 Settlement Act (see below). The number of refugees that a municipality would accept was based on voluntary agreements between the state-level Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*), the County administrative boards (*Länsstyrelsen*), and the municipalities. Civil servants were employed both to persuade municipalities to enter agreements and often to negotiate individual settlement cases with those who signed the agreements.

The Whole-of-Sweden strategy introduced a system of funding that has remained largely unchanged up until today. First, the state compensated municipalities for any social assistance during the reception year and three additional years. This system introduced the first codified distinction between recently arrived and long-term migrants. As the coming sections will develop in more detail, the former was subject to targeted resources, whereas the latter group was included in the universal welfare system (see below). Municipalities also received a one-off compensation payment for every refugee they accepted. The practical provision of integration-related services – for recently arrived refugees – thereby became a local responsibility, whereas the state maintained the main funding. Subsequently, the state's funding responsibilities have expanded to cover the municipality's costs for refugees' reception and practical assistance in connection with residence, schools, education in Swedish, preschool, social orientation, interpretation and other activities. Temporary increases in economic compensation have also been used to persuade municipalities to sign housing agreements with state agencies, for example in relation to the 2005 refugee amnesty (2005/06:SfU5).

Before the early 1990s, asylum seekers awaiting residence permits were housed in the Migration Agency's accommodation facilities. As the number of asylum-seekers increased throughout the 1980s and during the Yugoslavian civil war of the early 1990s, this produced serious strains on the Migration Agency's capacity to host and process asylum applications. In response, the state encouraged asylum seekers to find their own accommodation during the asylum process (Act 1994:137). Popularly known as the Own Housing Act (*Lagen om eget boende*, EBO), this act provides to asylum seekers a housing allowance to cover part of the rent if they choose to live outside of the Migration Agency's accommodation facilities. The reform was motivated by two arguments: to reduce the costs for the reception of asylum-seekers and to reduce social isolation during the waiting period.

Even though the law did not directly involve accepted refugees, the freedom for asylum seekers to settle outside state reception centres did have consequences for municipalities and their ability to control the settlement of refugees. Because migrants could remain in the municipalities where they had originally settled as asylum seekers, the EBO act contributed to the concentration of recently arrived refugees in a number of municipalities, especially in the



metropolitan regions (see Andersson 2003). Thus, refugees could settle outside the system of voluntary agreements between the state and individual municipalities. However, the state still compensated municipalities economically. After complaints from some municipalities with a high number of asylum-seekers living in their own accommodation, the extra economic housing allowance was abolished in 2005 (Prop. 2004/05:28). The aim was to reduce the number of asylum-seekers choosing to reside in their own accommodation during the asylum period. This reform did, however, have little impact on asylum-seekers' choice of housing. In 2021, the national government presented its intention to abolish the EBO act altogether (dir. 2021:71). Depending on the outcome, the abolishment of the EBO act might increase municipalities' discretion in the settlement of asylum-seekers and recently arrived refugees.

After the Whole-of-Sweden strategy, the allocation of recently arrived refugees not covered in the EBO act occurred through negotiations with the Migration Agency and the Country administrative boards. Despite many efforts from the state to incentivize the municipalities to increase their refugee settlement capacity, the number of persons granted asylum who were waiting for housing in asylum reception centres grew — in October 2015, 10,000 were waiting (Prop. 2015/16:54). The government therefore proposed the so-called Settlement act, which made it compulsory for municipalities to accept migrants allocated from the migration agency. At the same time, the economic compensation per settled refugee was increased permanently by 50% from 83,100 (8204 Euro) to 125,000 (12,340 Euro) (Prop. 2015/16:1). The settlement act followed after the introduction of similar compulsory mechanisms for the settlement of unaccompanied minors (Prop. 2012/13:162).

Combined, the EBO and Settlement Acts limit the municipalities' capacity to develop more open or more restrictive migration policies. In 2021, the Swedish Auditing Office (*Riksrevisionen*) found that the Settlement act had met its goal of evening out disparities between municipalities, lowering allocations to the highest receivers, and raising allocations to those with the lowest accommodation before 2016 (Riksrevisionen 2021).

3.1.2 Labour market

In relation to the labour market, the core of Swedish integration policy is the organization of municipal, and later national, introduction programs. As presented in the government bill *From immigrant policy to integration policy* (Prop. 1997/98:16), the municipal introduction programs were two-to-three year measures that would provide the individual with the conditions to become economically self-sufficient and socially integrated. According to the bill, the introduction program should include language training, labour market preparatory activities and civic orientation. The program should be designed in consultation with the individual and documented in an introduction plan. This bill thereby deepened the Whole of Sweden-strategy's distinction between recently arrived (i.e. those who have received their residence permits within 24 months) and long-term migrants, where only the former is subject to targeted resources.



On 1 December 2010, the overall responsibility for the introduction programs for new arrivals was transferred from the municipalities to the Public Employment Service (Prop. 2009/10:60). Before the reform, the municipal introduction programs had been criticized for being too slow, for failing to make participants complete their language training, and various other shortcomings (Emilsson 2008). The transfer of responsibilities toward the Public Employment Service meant centralisation and stricter state control over local integration measures (Emilsson, 2015). The purpose was to facilitate and speed up labour market integration for recently arrived refugees and make the program more similar across municipalities. When the 2010 introduction program was launched, approximately 8 250 adults were expected to be enrolled in the program each year, which means that the program was expected to comprise a total of 16 000 people. The number of participants has been much higher with a peak of over 75 000 persons in 2017 (Righard, Emilsson & Jensen, 2020). The numbers are now declining since the large numbers of refugees during 2015 and 2016 have completed the 24-month program.

The government commission that preceded the introduction reform also included a comprehensive discussion of the distribution of capacities and responsibilities between public and non-public actors. One of the main ideas in the commission report (SOU 2008:58) was to reduce the involvement of the public sector. New arrivals were supposed to be guided and coached by NGOs and other non-public actors throughout their introduction process. The ideas of the commission were largely ignored. The government and parliament considered that the public sector must be in control in order to reduce the risks, to guarantee equal treatment for individuals and for the programs to be similar throughout the country. Eventually, there was a compromise to introduce non-public sector introduction guides as an external actor to facilitate labour market integration. Beyond this point, the public sector maintained its capacities for governance and policy implementation.

Overall, the reform meant a reorganization of the introduction program, rather than a change in policy ideology or goals. The main goal of the new introduction program remained to help newcomers establish themselves on the labour market. The public sector is meant to provide for example, access to language training, information about Swedish society through civic orientation and work experience through access to Swedish labour market. Utilization of existing human capital is to be achieved through the supplementation and validation of education and work experience from the home country. The lack of social networks should be compensated by the Public Employment Service through mediation of contacts with potential employers, for example by organizing recruitment meetings and arranging internships and subsidized jobs.

The content of, or the target group for, the introduction program did not change significantly. The target group includes recently arrived adults aged 20–64 years who are granted a residence permit as a refugee or other forms of international protection, and their relatives who apply for a residence permit within six years. Young people over eighteen years without legal guardians in Sweden are also included. Although the state took over the overall



responsibility and coordination of the work through the Public Employment Service's local offices, the municipalities retained large parts of the implementation, for example language training and the new civic orientation course. The municipalities also maintained indirect costs, through the general responsibility for children's daycare and school, housing, social services, etc.

Most importantly, the reform meant that the introduction program now aimed at improving labour market integration through better matching and stronger economic incentives. Matching between the newcomer's competences and place of residence should be improved through early talks between the Public Employment Service and the newly arrived before a decision about place of residence. A clear limit of a maximum of 24 months in the program was also considered important in order to give a clear signal to the newcomers not to waste their time. The reform also introduced a full-time participation requirement, which was linked to a new system of economic allowances. The previous municipal allowance was criticized for differing between municipalities and for being too similar to the ordinary means-tested social assistance.

The new introduction allowance is individual and designed to increase the financial incentives to both participate in the program and to work. Because the remuneration is individual, households can double their income if both partners participate in the program. This was mainly intended to get more women to participate. With the new benefit, it is also possible to work side by side with the program without losing all benefits, which would provide stronger incentives to quickly gain a foothold in the labour market.

The biggest change to the program occurred on 1 January 2018, when a new regulatory framework for the introduction program came into force (Prop. 2016/17:175). In short, the organisation remained, but the regulations changed so that recently arrived refugees are now managed in a way similar to unemployed in general. Some of the new features are:

- A larger part of the regulations is defined through ordinances rather than laws.
- Refugees will be assigned to a labour market program, i.e. the Introduction Program.
- The individual introduction plan is replaced with an individual action plan.

A proportionate system of sanctions for non-compliance is introduced, which includes, among other things, warnings and termination.

The fact that ordinances, rather than law, now regulate the introduction program represents a harmonization with the general labour market policy. According to the government (Prop. 2016/17:175, p. 32), regulating by law was a "deviation from how the government normally regulate labour market policies", which are mainly regulated by ordinances. The choice of the regulatory instrument is important. In contrast to laws, the government can change ordinances without the need to ask for consent from the parliament. The change from an individual introduction plan to an individual action plan, new sanctions and administration of



economic compensation also means harmonization with the general labour market policy for unemployed.

Aside from the reform in 2018, the Public Employment Service has also abolished the experiment with non-public sector introduction guides. Follow-ups showed that the guides provided social support and that the new arrivals themselves were satisfied with the service, but that efforts to facilitate entry to the labour market were lacking (Riksrevisionen, 2014). Through the abolishment of the introduction guides, non-public actors are further excluded from national integration policy. However, municipalities can still choose to procure some services (especially SFI) from non-public actors.

3.2.3 The multi-level governance of integration policy

The public sector in Sweden has three levels of governing institutions: national, regional and local. The central government is exercising power on all three levels, which gives a relatively complex structure on the local level. At the regional level, regional authorities are responsible for health care and transportation, whereas the state-level County administrative boards mediate between the state and the municipalities on various issues (e.g. refugee dispersal). The municipalities therefore share power and responsibilities with national and regional institutions.

Local integration policies in Sweden are very much influenced by state policies, and there is limited discretion for local governments to diverge from the national framework (Emilsson, 2015). Municipalities cannot control the inflow of migrants and they are obliged to provide a specific set of integration policy measures. On the other hand, municipalities can make decisions that go beyond their core obligations, albeit without secure chances for national-level funding. This section deepens the description of Swedish integration policy through a focus on the MLG dynamics that affect municipal actors' discretion in developing locally specific integration policies and approaches to integration-related tasks.

This complex MLG structure is reflected in the introduction program, which incorporates multiple actors at the national and local level (see Figure). As shown in sections 2.2.2–2.2.3, these involve actors with capacities to steer and implement settlement and labour market integration. Since 1 December 2010 it is the Public Employment Service that is responsible for the coordination of these programs, but they work closely with the municipalities, the Migration Agency, the National Board for Social Insurances and other organizations. The content of the introduction program, and the responsibilities for the national and local authorities, are laid down in the Government Bill Introduction of newly arrived immigrants into the labour market (Prop. 2009/10:60) and additional ordinances. As a general rule, the activities contained in the introduction plan should correspond to a full-time program and contain, at minimum, Swedish for immigrants (SFI), civic orientation and employment preparation activities. Since SFI is not a full-time activity, it must be combined with other activities, such as other studies or labour market measures.

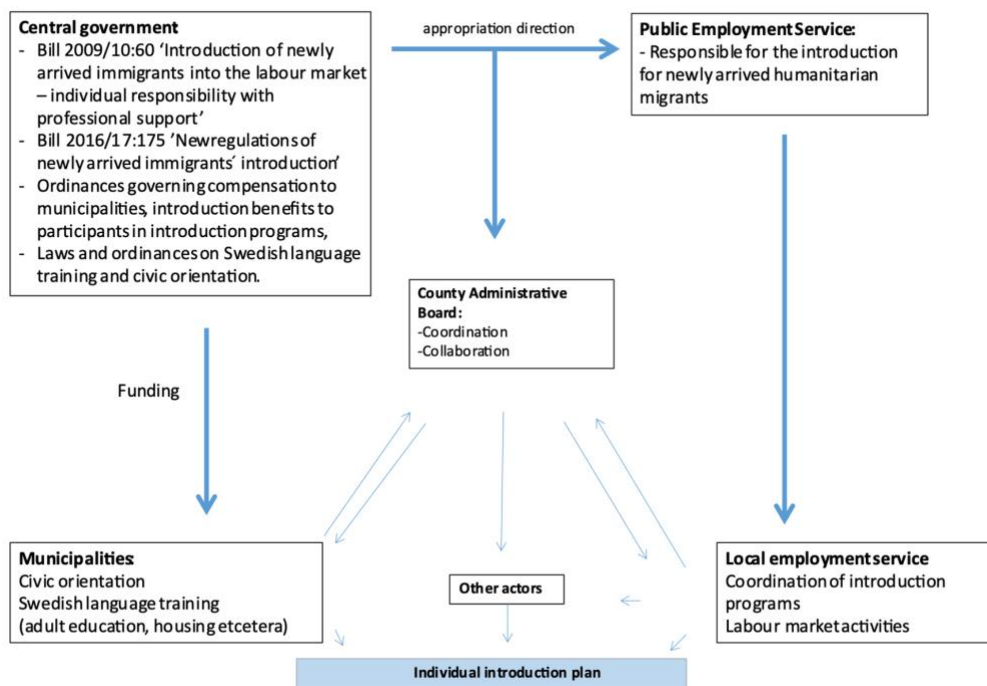


Figure 1 The multi-level governance of Swedish integration policy

Outside of the introduction program, the MLG framework disperses capacities and obligations across a wide variety of actors at the national and local levels. The municipalities are obliged to secure the provision of SFI and civic orientation. While these services can be procured from non-public actor, many municipalities choose to provide these services in house or in collaboration with other municipalities. In addition to the authorities involved in the obligatory activities in the individual introduction plan, there are responsibilities for the settlement (Migration Agency), civic registration (Tax Agency), payment of introduction benefit (Social Insurance Agency) and regional coordination (County Administrative Boards).

Many municipalities extend their obligations voluntarily to complement or support, state-level actors. This is particularly visible in relation to the labour market. Whereas the Public Employment Service has the specific responsibility to organize the introduction programs, and for assisting those seeking employment more broadly, most municipalities organize their own labour market programs to complement the Public Employment Service. The number of municipalities organizing activation programs has gradually increased since the 1990s and today almost all municipalities have their own programs. In a survey in 2015, it was found that 273 of the country's 290 municipalities organized labour market programs (Vikman & Westerberg, 2017). A total of at least 83,000 persons participated in the programs, which can be regarded as a high figure given that 360,000 persons participated in the Public Employment Service's program for different groups of job applicants at the same time. Section 3.1 shows how municipalities use activation programs specifically for recently arrived refugees as complements to the introduction program.



Beyond the introduction program, individual municipalities have the possibility to commit additional funding to labour market initiatives, education, social support, and cultural activities. These activities are sometimes codified in local integration policies. For the most part, however, they develop through agreements within single municipal departments, or in collaboration between the municipality and non-public actors. Funding for these activities comes from various sources, including municipal or departmental budgets, state compensation for refugee settlement, or from project funding at the EU, national, regional, and local level.

Over the years, much effort has been spent to overcome collaboration problems between state and municipal actors in the local settings. As such, there are numerous agreements at the local and regional levels that aim to codify the division of tasks between the state, the municipalities, and various non-public actors. However, there are still many regulatory obstacles that complicate the possibilities for flexible and innovative solutions on the local level. For example, the Public Employment Services has no control over adult education and SFI. To be enrolled in adult education, persons need to be eligible and this requires certain levels of education and language skills, which many refugees do not have. New kinds of collaboration with non-governmental organisations are growing in importance, but these collaborations are seldom related to labour market measures.

Beyond legal obstacles, cutbacks and an ongoing reform of the Public Employment Service has diminished funding for the implementation of the introduction program (Righard, Emilsson & Jensen, 2020). At the same time, many local Employment Service offices have been shut down. This process has produced considerable tensions between the municipalities and the state agencies. Before the current issues arose, however, the employment service was criticized for its lack of individually tailored activities for refugees, especially for persons with short educational backgrounds, and problems with coordination between the local Public Employment Service offices and the municipalities.

The Settlement and EBO acts limit the capacity for lower levels of government to influence the number of refugees to be hosted. According to the settlement act, municipalities are obliged to arrange reception for a designated number of recently arrived refugees. First, the Migration Agency calculates regional quotas based on labour market conditions, size of the region, and the number of asylum seekers and refugees in each locality. The Settlement Act assigned a new role to the Regional County Administrative Boards across the country. While the Migration Agency decides on the number of assigned refugees for each region, it is the County Administrative Board that decides on the number for each municipality. Yet it is within the interests of the County administrative board to oversee the situation so that all refugees can settle in the assigned municipalities.

As a reaction to the conditions imposed in the EBO and Settlement acts, many municipalities have changed policies and invented new classifications and administrative routines. On one hand, municipalities can, and often do, procure housing for allocated refugees in other municipalities. On the other, some municipalities have eased their interpretation of the



quality and length of residence that they should provide to recently arrived refugees. This is made possible through an absence of state-level regulations about the kind of accommodation and its standards, location, rental costs, and the length of contracts. In this sense, the two Acts enable and legitimise a fragmented reception system across the municipalities. The non-regulation opens up for varying accommodation solutions between municipalities, sometimes with far-reaching and detrimental consequences for the individual.

3.1.4 Summary

This section has presented the general characteristics of Swedish integration policy, focusing specifically on the areas of accommodation and labour market integration. As the overview has shown, the Swedish state makes a sharp administrative and definitional distinction between recently arrived refugees on one hand, and long-term status holders on the other. Recently arrived refugees are those migrants that have been afforded a residence permit on humanitarian grounds within the last 24 months. As part of this category, the individual migrant is subject to special interventions, and their integration into the labour, education and housing market is primarily funded and organized through the state-level Public Employment Service. After 24 months, the migrant becomes subject to the general welfare system, and is granted the same rights as any other resident of the municipality. Accordingly, long-term migrants do not make their host municipalities eligible for state compensation.

The bifurcated system is visible in the MLG framework. During the first 24 months, the individual migrant is included in the introduction program, which clearly defines the distribution of capacities and obligations between the Public Employment Service and the municipality. Whereas the former has the main responsibility for coordination, funding, and individual skills mapping and counselling, the municipalities are required to provide SFI and civic education. The municipalities also incur indirect costs and obligations through the provision of schooling, emergency housing, and other general welfare services. This greatly limits the municipalities' discretion to plan and implement locally specific integration policies for recently arrived refugees. This limitation is further enhanced through EBO and the Settlement act, which limit the municipalities' ability to refuse or otherwise steer local migrant settlement. However, the municipalities are free to implement local approaches that go beyond their core obligations in the introduction program, and which target migrants that have stayed for longer than 24 months. At this point, however, integration-related activities are no longer eligible for state funding, and they overlap closely with the general welfare system. As such, these are better described as *de facto* integration policies, reflecting the composition of the target group and the policymakers' motives.

Table 3 summarizes the central policies and actors that structure Swedish integration. The findings reveal Swedish integration to be strongly state-centric, involving municipalities primarily in the implementation of centrally decided policies, and largely excluding civil society actors from any comprehensive integration activities. Further, much of what might otherwise be framed within wider integration policies (e.g. concerning housing and social security) reach most migrants through the universal welfare system. It is only in this restricted space that



individual municipalities can choose to develop alternative policies, or experiment with cross-sector collaboration.

	RELEVANT POLICIES AND LAWS	YEAR OF ENACTMENT	ACTORS INVOLVED	ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	FUNDING
NAT.	The introduction reform	2010/2018	Public Employment Agency	The public employment agency coordinates the program, and implements individual action plans for labour market integration. The introduction program targets recently arrived refugees (up to 24 months from residence permit) as recipients.	National
	The settlement act	1984/2016	The Migration Agency, the County Administrative Boards	The Migration Agency and the County Administrative Boards allocate accepted refugees to the municipalities. The municipalities are obliged to provide welfare services.	National
REG.	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
LOC.	Local integration policies/action plans	Various	Various	Various	Various

Table 2: Overview of relevant policies and actors



4. The local cases

This section introduces the case study municipalities (A-F), and relates them to the typology in chapter 1. For each municipality, the section describes their socioeconomic (unemployment, housing) and demographic situation, their history of cultural diversity, and their political traditions. With regard to the latter, the section describes the ruling majority (social democratic, conservative, or mixed), and the relative electoral strength of the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats (SD), the most likely party to advance an anti-migrant agenda in local government. The section also notes how respondents to the structured survey evaluated the “success” of local integration. This section thereby forms the background to the thematic sections in chapter 5.

4.1 Municipality A: Small town in Scania

The first local case is a small town in Scania. A Type A municipality, it has relatively strong socioeconomic conditions, with low and improving unemployment levels for migrants and for long-term residents, and a long history of cultural diversity. In 2021, the proportion of residents born outside of the EU was approximately 11 %, as compared to 7 % in 2005. Whereas the population increased by 16 % in the period, the number of residents born outside of the EU has increased by 87 %. Notably, the housing market is not as competitive as it is in most of the other municipalities in the sample. On the other hand, the municipality shows signs of residential segregation, as parts of the (mostly rental) urban centre has come to host larger concentrations of foreign-born and socioeconomically vulnerable residents.

Throughout the period, the municipality has hosted asylum seekers in EBO and in the Migration Agency’s accommodation centres. At the peak in 2016, the municipality hosted more than 650 asylum seekers, as compared to roughly 140 in 2015 and 2017, and 40 in 2021. The large number of asylum seekers entering the municipality at that point was partly due to the municipality’s geographical location, making it a main entry port for migrants travelling from mainland Europe. The number of newly arrived, accepted refugees (i.e. refugees that qualify the municipality for state subsidies) peaked at just over 300 in 2017. In 2020 and 2021, the figure was between 50 and 60 each year. Across the period, the proportion of newly arrived refugees in the population was lower than in the sample as a whole, never exceeding one per cent of the total population.

Between 2014 and 2021, the municipality’s political leadership has shifted between social democrat and conservative majorities. In the 2014-2018 mandate period, the ruling coalition consisted of the Social Democrats, the Centre party, the Green party, and a local party. After the 2018 elections, a right-wing ruling coalition formed between the Conservative party and the Christian Democrats. While the Conservative party challenged the then-majority’s accommodation strategies in 2016-2017, the interviewees do not report any significant



political conflicts regarding integration issues in the municipality. At the same time, the survey respondents rate local integration outcomes as quite unsuccessful, at 2.5/5 on average.

4.2 Municipality B: Rural town in Blekinge

The second case is a rural municipality in the region of Blekinge. In chapter 1, the case was listed as a “type C” municipality, meaning that it combines a weak or declining economic situation with a relatively high prior experience of cultural diversity. Economic life in the municipality centres around one large industrial employer. Historically, this employer has recruited prominently among Finns, Italians, and many other nationalities. Many of these chose to stay in the municipality, making for a relatively large share of foreign-born residents. At times, the municipality has also hosted large numbers of asylum seekers in the urban centre and in the surrounding villages. Before 2015-2016, the share of foreign-born residents was 17 %. In 2021, the share had increased to 24 %, making the municipality considerably more diverse in terms of nationalities than its surrounding region.

Due to the municipality’s small population size, the large increase in asylum seekers and recognized refugees in 2015-2016 had a considerable impact on the population of this municipality, as the relative proportion of both groups in the local population rose precipitously from a few per mille in 2014 to several per cent in 2015–2016. Owing in part to the closure of multiple large asylum accommodation facilities in 2017-2018, the number of post-2014 migrants living in the municipality has once again declined. Between 2017 and 2019, the number of asylum seekers living in the municipality declined from roughly 500 to less than 20. The number of newly arrived refugees in the municipality peaked at 250 in 2015, and has since declined to only a handful in 2020 and 2021. In proportional terms, the share of newly arrived refugees in the population thereby declined from nearly 2 % in 2015, to less than 2 ‰ in 2021. The rapid rise and fall in allocations (of asylum seekers and recognized refugees) is a recurrent theme in the respondents’ understanding of local integration policy.

The housing market consists primarily of publically owned rental stock and single-household units, and is highly competitive.

The Social democrats have traditionally been the largest party on the municipal council. Between 2014 and 2018, the Social Democrats ruled on their own. After the 2018 elections, the Social democrats have ruled through a coalition with the Left party and the Christian Democrats. In both elections, the SD was the second most successful party, with a share of votes slightly above its national result. Despite strong electoral support for the SD, none of the interviewees perceive integration and migration issues as salient topics in local political debate, and the survey respondents rate integration and local encounters with migrants as mostly successful (at 3.06 and 3.19 out of 5 respectively).

4.3 Municipality C: Mid-sized town in Jönköping

Municipality C is a mid-sized town in the region of Jönköping. Considered a type A municipality, it combines a long history of cultural diversity with relatively strong



socioeconomic conditions. In 2005, 11.5 % of the population was born outside of Sweden. In 2021, the share of foreign-born residents had increased to 19 %. The share of foreign-born residents has increased more rapidly than the population as a whole. At the same time, the proportion of newly arrived refugees, relative to the population, has varied between 0.5 % (in 2016) and 0.1 % in 2021. As the following sections will show, the municipality has high levels of employment in a diverse labour market. While the proportion of foreign-born residents in employment is the highest in the sample, it remains significantly lower than for the total population. The housing market is very competitive, and the public housing company owns a relatively small share of the rental stock.

The municipality has had mixed political majorities across the studied period. Between 2014 and 2018, the ruling majority consisted in a coalition between the Conservative Party, the Liberal party, the Centre party, and the Christian Democrats. After the 2018 elections, a centrist coalition consisting of the Social Democrats, the Centre party, the Liberal party and the Green party replaced the previous centre-right majority. In both elections, the SD performed worse than in the nation as a whole, and it is currently the fourth largest party in the municipality. The survey respondents perceive integration as moderately successful, rating integration overall at 3/5 on average, and local reactions to migrants at 3.58.

4.4 Municipality D: Small town in Gävleborg

Municipality D is a small town in the region of Gävleborg. As a type D municipality, it combines weak or declining economic and demographic conditions with a relatively low level of cultural diversity before the studied period. The unemployment level has fluctuated across the period, and the total population has decreased slightly. At the same time, the share of foreign-born residents has doubled from 5 to 10 % of the total population. Rental units make up a large share of the total housing stock, and the public housing company is the largest owner on a highly competitive rental market.

Similar to the rural town in Blekinge, the accommodation of asylum seekers and recently arrived refugees has fluctuated significantly across the period. While the municipality used to host large numbers of asylum seekers in accommodation facilities and in special care homes for unaccompanied minors, these have been closed down since 2018. The Migration Agency's allocation of newly arrived refugees (i.e. recognized refugees) to the municipality has been relatively low across the period, peaking at 0.4 % of the total population in 2016 and 2017. From 2018 to 2021, the proportion has declined gradually to 0.14 % of the total population. These changes have had direct consequences for the municipality's ability to maintain a comprehensive organization of integration policy.

The Social Democrats have traditionally been the largest party on the municipal council. In the 2014-2018 period, the Social Democrats ruled through a centre-left coalition with the Left party. After the 2018 elections, the Social Democrats' collaborates with the Conservative party and the Green party. In both elections, the SD was less successful than in the country as a



whole. The survey respondents perceive integration as moderately successful, both in terms of locals' reactions to migrants (3.25) and in overall integration outcomes (3.17).

4.5 Municipality E: Small town in Dalarna

Municipality E is a small, type A town in the region of Dalarna. While it has experienced socioeconomic decline in past decades, since 2005, its economy has expanded and its population size has slowly increased. In the same period, the share of foreign-born residents has increased from 8 to 18 %. Notably, in 2005 as well as in 2021, the municipality had a considerably higher proportion of foreign-born residents than the wider Dalarna region. Aside from humanitarian migration, this is also due to the municipality's biggest private employer, a transnational industrial manufacturing company. Owing to this and other large employers, the unemployment rate is close to the national average, and has declined since 2005. Unlike the other municipalities in the sample, it does not have a shortage of rental housing. Instead, the availability of publically and privately owned rental housing has led the social services in other municipalities to allocate clients there.

Between 2010 and 2016, the municipality had among the highest per capita numbers of accepted refugees and asylum seekers in all of Sweden. Since the number of asylum seekers entering the country has declined, and after the implementation of compulsory allocations of accepted refugees in 2016, both figures have declined rapidly. In recent years, many accepted refugees have also relocated to other municipalities.

The Social Democrats has traditionally been the largest party on the municipal council. In 2014-2018, the Social Democrats ruled through a centre-left coalition with the Green party and the Left party. Since 2018, the Social Democrats rule through a centre-right coalition with the Conservative party. In both elections, the SD was less successful than in the country as a whole. The survey respondents are moderately pessimistic as what concerns local integration. On average, the survey respondents rate overall integration goals and local reactions to migrants at 2.64/5.

A special circumstance in the municipality is the large presence of activists and leaders from the neo-Nazi *Nordic Resistance Movement* (NMR). While this group seldom targeted local integration directly, its presence worried policymakers, professionals and civil society actors, and prompted multi-level collaboration for anti-racist mobilisation.

4.6 Municipality F: Mid-sized town in Gävleborg

Municipality F is a medium-sized type C municipality in the region of Gävleborg. As a type C municipality, it combines a weak or declining economic situation with a long experience of cultural diversity. Between 2005 and 2021, the proportion of foreign-born residents increased from 9 to 16 %. At the same time, the total population increased by 10 percentage. While the demographic situation is improving, however, the municipality has large problems with unemployment, and the local housing market is very competitive.



Unlike many other municipalities in the sample, and in Sweden as a whole, the accommodation asylum seekers and recently arrived refugees in the municipality peaked before the high point of asylum immigration in 2015-2016. In fact, the rate of accepted refugees allocated to L6 peaked in 2014, and continued to drop throughout the period. The early peak in the settlement of accepted refugees is a recurring element in the interviewees' narratives.

Since its inception, the Social Democrats have been the largest party on the municipal council. During the 2014–2018 period, the municipality had two ruling coalitions. First, the social democrats ruled through a coalition with the Left party and the Green party. In 2016, a centre-right coalition consisting of the Conservative party, the Centre party, the Liberal party and the Christian Democrats gained passive support from the SD to form a new budget majority. Since 2018, the Social Democrats once again rule the municipality, in coalition with the Liberal party, the Centre party and the Green party. While the interviewees claim integration has not been politicized in the municipal council, the survey respondents report a quite negative perception of integration and of locals' reactions to migrants, at 2.91 and 2.28 out of 5 respectively.



5. Overarching themes

5.1 Development of local integration policies

Despite the centralized character of Swedish integration policy, all case study municipalities go beyond their core obligations. In going beyond these obligations, each municipality has developed their own version of local integration policy, differing in comprehensiveness, scope of activities, and degree of centralization. As such, the case studies show the possibilities of designing local approaches to integration even in a context of strong centralization of governance and implementation capacities.

As developed in chapter 3, the governance of Swedish integration policy is centralized to the state level. The state then distributes implementation capacities to state-level agencies (primarily the Public employment services) and the municipalities. The municipalities exercise these capacities largely through existing municipal agencies. As a consequence, the municipalities have limited discretion to set terms and goals for local integration policy, and civil society and private businesses typically play a limited role in carrying out integration-related activities. At the same time, municipalities are free to go beyond the core obligations to provide additional or complementary services. They can also develop policy responses to the integration of longer-term migrants, i.e. those that are no longer eligible for targeted state funding and interventions. Such extensions are sometimes, but mostly not, included in local integration policies. To capture the differences that exist between Swedish municipalities, this chapter will therefore focus on three areas: the contents of codified integration policies (to the extent that they exist), the organization of integration-related tasks (e.g. what actors are involved), and the extent to which the municipalities go beyond their core obligations.

The following sections present local integration policies for each municipality respectively. Every presentation begins with a description of the municipality's integration policy (if there is one), and then continues to discuss the organization of integration-related activities, the specific design of obligatory tasks, and the extent to which the municipalities go beyond the obligations of the introduction program. Each presentation also includes reflections over the salience of integration within the local policy process. The section ends with a general description of main tendencies, dividing lines, and trends, and how these relate to the national policies described in chapter 3.

5.1.1 Municipality A: Small town in Scania



The small town in Scania does not have a specific integration policy, and it does not have a specific unit within the municipality tasked specifically with integration-related issues. Nevertheless, the municipality has among the most comprehensive *de facto* integration policies, involving numerous municipal units and largely taking over many of the capacities otherwise exercised by the state-level Employment service. This approach to integration, however, focuses solely on labour market integration, and the municipality does not promote e.g. cultural activities, social integration activities, and so on and so forth. This limited approach is also reflected in the representatives' framing of migration and integration, as shown in chapter 5.2.

The municipality's labour market activation program for refugees has been in place since the summer of 2015, and it was last reformed in 2016. The municipality's labour market activation programs closely overlaps with the Employment Agency's Introduction program. When a refugee arrives into the municipality, they are immediately put into personal contact with a team of representatives from the relevant units. The team assesses the migrant's skills and needs, and supports the migrant in accessing education and providing labour market contacts. The combination of labour market and educational services is continued into SFI, which combines vocational training with language education, as well as a compulsory social orientation course. Although cross sectorial in character, the organizational apparatus is contained entirely within the labour market administration, under the political responsibility of the labour market board, and combines the municipality's labour market, adult education and commerce units.

The labour market activation program is closely tied to the municipality's restrictive interpretation of the social services act. By tying income support to an "integration duty" – including expectations of language acquisition and labour market participation – the municipality can limit payments to refugees. With the exception of the integration duty, however, the restrictive interpretation of the social services act is not specific to migrants.

The municipality organizes no integration-related activities beyond the introduction program. Unlike in many other municipalities, the public housing company does not use housing quotas for refugees, and the municipality does not act as bondsman in order to guarantee long-term housing for recently arrived refugees. The municipality offers limited support for civil society organizations and cultural activities directed toward the integration of recently arrived refugees. With limited municipal funding, civil society organizations and popular education associations have offered additional language training and cultural activities through other sources of funding (e.g. at the national level). The municipal leadership has recently attempted to further limit migrants' special material and cultural rights by proposing a ban on employment for people who refuse to shake hands on religious grounds, and by offering only temporary housing for migrants in the introduction program. Whereas the latter was voted down on the municipal council, the former was challenged and rejected in the administrative courts in May 2022.



5.1.2 Municipality B: Rural town in Blekinge

The development of integration policy in the rural town in Blekinge is closely linked to the precipitous increase and decline in asylum seekers and recognized refugees after 2015. During the peak years, in which the municipality had several accommodation facilities and a large proportion of asylum seekers in the wider population, the municipality used state funding to organize a separate integration unit with three employees, which could provide various services for migrants and facilitate interactions between migrants, the municipality, and civil society. In addition, the municipality funded civil society associations to organize cultural events, additional language training, and other integration activities. As state funding for these activities declined in 2016, the municipality gradually dismantled most of its services that were targeting recently arrived refugees directly.

When the municipality disassembled its integration unit, it replaced it with an integration policy that is supposed to steer activities across all municipal departments. According to its integration policy, “integration occurs incessantly, and is a prerequisite for peace, democracy, and for a good and safe life for everyone.” Integration does not only concern migrants, as “the goals of Swedish integration policy encompass everyone working or living here.” However, the integration policy does not proscribe any particular tasks or modes of organization, suggesting only a broad engagement with various facets of integration, across the municipal organization, including questions of employment, access to resources, housing, cultural activities, and so on. Each department is then responsible for defining how integration is to be adopted as part of its wider tasks. The extent to which each department actually works with integration is therefore uneven across the municipality, and varies across time.

With the exception of the labour market unit, which receives its clients from the other administrations, there is no formal cross-sectorial collaboration with regard to migrant services. The education administration is responsible for adult education, while the labour market unit organizes labour training and internships, and subsidizes employment for migrants and others that are far from the labour market. The social administration administers care for families and unaccompanied minors, and provides income support after the end of the introduction phase. However, many interviewees note the close informal collaboration that occurs between civil servants at the different units and administrations.

Despite the absence of a central integration policy, each unit in the municipality does go beyond its minimum obligations in complementing the Public Employment Service. The education administration provides extra funding for language training in preschools and secondary education, and the labour market unit organizes labour training and internships. With regard to the latter, it is unclear whether the municipality offers special services to migrants. However, the over representation of post-2014 migrants among the unemployed makes them a *de facto* target group. The municipality has not adopted more comprehensive means-testing to limit income support for migrants or others.

5.1.3 Municipality C: Mid-sized town in Jönköping



The mid-sized town in Jönköping differs from the others through its comprehensive engagement with civil society, and through its very decentralized organization of integration-related tasks. The municipality's approach to integration is formulated in five "integration goals." The integration goals stipulate that the backgrounds and personal properties of the municipality's staff should mirror its population, all residents should have shorter paths to employment, the municipality should collaborate with civil society, the municipality should counteract segregation, and all municipal departments should strive toward social sustainability. As in the rural town in Blekinge, and in the small town in Gävleborg (below), these five goals are to permeate work in all departments. Each department, however, is free to define and design its own approach. To coordinate and inform about the activities of the different departments, the municipality publishes and discusses a yearly "integration report," measuring its progress for each goal.

The municipality has specialized staff working with integration policy and integration-related tasks across several municipal units. There is currently a special refugee and migrant unit under the social administration, and the education and labour market administrations, city office, and the public housing company all employ integration councillors. In addition, the municipality procures language education from external actors, and representatives of the municipality has formalized collaboration with civil society actors to identify needs, to act as consulting bodies, and to provide contacts for labour market needs.

Within and across agencies, the municipality approaches integration through a wide range of routine and project-based methods. Within the labour market and education administration, the municipality organizes subsidized employment in collaboration with the Public Employment Service and the private sector. Within the social services, the municipality offers transitional housing and counselling to recently arrived refugees, along with income support and other general welfare services to which recently arrived refugees are also eligible. The city office coordinates state- and municipality-funded projects, and brokers contacts between the municipality and the civil society network. Within a wide range of public-private and idea-driven partnerships between the municipality, civil society, and private business, these networks attempt to provide access to employment, subsidies for new businesses, and cultural and recreational activities.

The integration strategist at the city office coordinates a public-civil society partnership network in support of refugees and integration. This network has grown out of the wider "civil society network," which facilitates collaboration between municipal and civil society actors across a range of policy areas. Within the civil society network, which comprises about 100 associations and meets on a bimonthly basis, the specialized integration network allows civil society associations to coordinate their activities and collaborate with each other and with the municipality. Municipal bureaucrats launched the network, but it has since become an independent body. The integration network acts as a consulting body vis-à-vis the municipality, and coordinates the provision of basic resources (e.g. language training, emergency services) vis-à-vis migrants.



In addition to its other activities, the municipality has used housing and city planning actively as means for integration. This reflects the widely shared recognition, among municipal representatives and in the news media, of residential segregation as one of the municipality's greatest social and political challenges. When the number of accepted refugees allocated to the municipality rose in 2016, the municipality built seven housing units in well-off areas with few migrant residents. This strategy was meant both as a means to initiate meetings between long-term residents and migrants, and to avoid the further crowding of migrants in the municipality's socioeconomically vulnerable areas. Aided by the provision of funding from the state level Delegation against segregation, city planning and efforts to combat segregation thereby bleeds into local integration policy.

In recent years, internal reviews have suggested moving away from the decentralized approach to integration, arguing for a more centralized approach focusing on labour market integration. In the most recent integration report (2019), the authors argue that decentralization limits the municipality's possibilities to collaborate with the Public Employment Service, and that it creates unnecessary processing times for migrants moving between different interventions in the introduction program. They also note that the municipality has not followed others in adopting stricter requirements for income support after the end of the introduction phase. Referring directly to the small town in Scania (Municipality A), the authors of the report suggests ways for the municipality to instruct its social workers to tighten expenditure in favour of "proactive labour market investments." The municipality has since adopted this stricter interpretation of the social services act, although it has not reformed the organization of integration policy overall.

5.1.4 Municipality D: Small town in Gävleborg

The small town in Gävleborg does not have a formal integration policy. In the years immediately surrounding 2015, the municipality used state funding to support non-public language training, cultural, and recreational activities. Today, the municipality does not have any formal collaboration between the municipality and non-public sector with regard to integration on a broad scale. However, the city office, the social services, and the main municipal employers have collaborated extensively with civil society associations in order to secure housing and employment for former unaccompanied minors. For the most part, these activities are organized on an informal basis, building on close personal relationships between civil servants and civil society associations.

In the absence of any centralized integration policy, the municipality uses steering documents as a means to have integration goals permeate public-sector activities more broadly. This approach is formalized in the municipality's policies on hiring and anti-discrimination, and in steering documents regarding housing, employment and education. In a wider perspective, integration-related goals are included in the municipality's social sustainability policy. In relation to the social sustainability policy, integration-related issues such as discrimination and equal opportunities are included in a social sustainability "checklist" that is meant to accompany policy makers in all decision-making processes.



Despite the decentralization of integration policy, the brunt of integration work is carried out within the social administration. At the social department are councillors that provide new migrants with their first contacts within the municipal apparatus. After the end of the introduction phase, the social department is responsible for income support payments. The administrators also have some cooperation with SFI and the Public Employment Service to follow the development of single individuals.

5.1.5 Municipality E: Small town in Dalarna

The small town in Dalarna has one of the oldest integration policies, instated in 2009 (and updated in 2019). The policy document defines integration broadly as a set of goals and values that should permeate all parts of the municipal organization. Whereas the original version stressed cultural diversity and social inclusion in wide terms, the updated policy from 2019 focuses more narrowly on access to employment, housing and education. To date, however, the small town in Dalarna remains committed to a broad range of integration goals, pursuing labour market integration alongside social integration and others, often in collaboration with civil society associations. Like the mid-size town in Jönköping, the municipality combines steering documents with a more immediate, formal and informal organization of integration-related tasks.

The main responsibility for integration-related tasks in the municipality falls under the labour market and integration unit, an administrative body that is organized under the municipal board. The labour market and integration unit coordinates activities across municipal departments, between the municipality and civil society organizations, and between the municipality and the state agencies. It also organizes labour market programs such as vocational training and internships for anyone in long-term unemployment. The unit has an office in the town centre, which is accessible to the public.

Beside the labour market and integration units, the culture and community development on one hand, and the social and education department on the other, also carry out some integration-related activities. Traditionally, the culture and community development department has focused on “soft” issues, including the allocation of resources for cultural associations and activities, while the social and education department has worked with welfare provision and adult education.

Together, the three departments collaborate to complement the Public Employment Service’s introduction program. At the moment of arrival, the recently arrived refugee is put into contact with a team from the integration unit, SFI, the social services, and the business unit. The team maps the migrant’s competences, and puts them into a combined vocational and language training track in collaboration with the SFI and private sector actors. At the moment of fieldwork, the municipality was adding more vocational tracks to the model. While specified for recently arrived refugees, the same program is obligatory for all recipients of income support. As in the small town in Scania, the model coincides with a turn toward a more restrictive interpretation of the social services act.



The municipality's integration policy, and its organization has developed gradually through a comprehensive shift of focus, funding, and capabilities from issues of cultural diversity to labour market inclusion. As noted above, this is visible in the comparison of the 2009 and 2019 integration policies. It is also visible as a shift in the allocation of responsibilities between the municipal departments. In 2015, state funding for integration-related activities in 2015 produced a budget surplus. Representatives of the local opposition and some public administrations publically contested the allocation of funding to the cultural department, suggesting it should go to adult education and the social services instead. This led to the creation of a new allocation model, in which funding to the education and social department increased considerably vis-à-vis the cultural department. As a consequence, the culture department made cutbacks to its service centre, and to some integration-related projects. The culture department also lost its responsibility for the residential care of unaccompanied minors. This process continued through a reorganization of the municipal organization in the years leading up to the 2018 elections. In 2016, the municipality created the labour market and integration unit, which would gradually take over most of the culture department's past responsibilities. At this time, the education and social department also created two units working specifically with the integration of migrants and migrants' families. Around the time of the 2018 elections, the culture department was merged with the community development department.

Throughout the period, the small town in Dalarna has frequently gone beyond its core obligations. This is visible in part through the organization of a municipal introduction program. Even before that, however, the cultural department funded extracurricular language training, provided integration funds for cultural and sports' associations, and offered a 10 000 SEK award yearly to select individuals and/or organizations whom had contributed to local integration. Beyond funding, the municipality has also collaborated extensively with civil society associations through co-organization of extracurricular activities, the organization of transition housing for unaccompanied minors after they have turned 18, and joint protest mobilisation against local far right events. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the labour market and integration unit also participates in multiple cross-sectorial networks alongside local businesses, civil society associations, and ethnic and religious associations. These networks serve to identify needs, pool resources, and coordinate integration-related activities.

5.1.6 Municipality F: Mid-sized town in Gävleborg

The mid-sized town in Gävleborg has not had a specified integration policy since 2018, when the municipality subsumed integration under a broader social sustainability program. Under the heading of social sustainability, the municipality works to promote personal safety, equality, political participation, and to combat discrimination. These goals are supposed to permeate planning and day-to-day activities across all municipal services. The social sustainability program does not single out specific target groups, but the social sustainability



unit employs one integration strategist focusing primarily on how the municipality works with recently arrived refugees.

The decentralized policy is reflected in the municipality's organization of the introduction program. There is currently no formal cross-sectorial collaboration between the social services and the education department. Within each department, however, there have recently been set up individualized approaches reminiscent of those previously seen in the small towns in Scania and Dalarna. At the social services, all recipients of income support are paired up with a "change leader" to set up a personal vocational plan. The rationale, according to the interviewees, is to promote labour market participation and to limit welfare provision. In adult education, SFI has developed combined language/vocational training tracks, following on the heels of a previous pilot project where students were offered internships as a means of on-the-job language training.

Aside from the introduction program and the integration aims that permeate the municipal organization, L6 collaborates extensively with civil society associations to provide extra resources for recently arrived refugees. This includes, among other things, an agreement with adult education to allow supplementary language training and tuition from civil society associations, and participation with civil society associations in the planning of outreach events in socioeconomically vulnerable areas. As the latter example suggests, these wider efforts link integration to broader concerns for social sustainability. Civil society organizations were also included in the planning of the social sustainability program.

5.1.7 General trends and patterns

Despite the centralized character of Swedish integration policy, all case study municipalities go beyond their core obligations. In going beyond these obligations, each municipality has developed their own version of local integration policy, differing in comprehensiveness, scope of activities, and degree of centralization. As such, the case studies show the possibilities of designing local approaches to integration even in a context of strong centralization of governance and implementation capacities.

All municipalities, in different ways, go beyond their minimal obligations. In some municipalities, this means providing scattered resources, such as extracurricular language training, vocational training within SFI, support for civil society associations, or the provision of internships with or without the private sector. In others, particularly in the small towns in Scania and in Dalarna, it means the development of *de facto* municipal introduction programs, where teams of municipal public servants collaborate extensively to guide individual migrants to employment and education. While these programs are typically offered to all recipients of income support, connected to more restrictive means-testing, the interviewees describe the programs against the background of poor integration outcomes and worsening relations vis-à-vis the Public Employment Service.

Overall, the small town in Scania, the small town in Dalarna, and the mid-sized town in Jönköping have developed extensive and mostly formalized approaches to local integration.



The policies in the two towns in Gävleborg and the rural town in Blekinge are mostly limited to non-binding steering documents, leaving the question of how and when to implement local policy each individual agency. Notably, the municipalities with comprehensive integration policies are all in the “Type A” category, meaning that they have strong socioeconomic conditions and a long history of cultural diversity. The municipalities with less comprehensive policies all face more difficult socioeconomic conditions, and all three had a very rapid decline in the number of new migrants (asylum seekers or recognized refugees) moving into the municipalities after 2016.

Regardless of how comprehensive their policies are, the municipalities also differ in the scope of their integration policies and integration-related tasks. On one end, the small town in Scania focuses exclusively on labour market activation. While they do so comprehensively, they allocate no resources to any other type of integration-related task. On the other end, the small town in Dalarna maintains a varied repertoire of integration policies, ranging from support to cultural activities and awards to the most committed associations and individuals, to similar labour market activation programs. In between, most municipalities engage in some mix of additional language training, cultural activities, and financial support for civil society associations. With the exception of the small town in Scania, the scope of activities is clearly linked to how comprehensive the municipalities’ overall integration policies are.

Finally there are differences in the degree of centralization of integration policies and integration-related tasks. The small town in Scania centralizes all integration-related activities to one single municipal unit. While the small town in Dalarna maintains a decentralized model, it appears to move toward centralization. The mid-sized town in Jönköping, on the other hand, has maintained its decentralized structure despite a gradual shift toward a stronger focus on labour market activation. In the remaining three cases, the use of steering documents and the absence of any officials tasked with the primary responsibility for integration, the implementation and planning integration-related tasks have become even more decentralized after 2016. Still, it is only the mid-sized town in Jönköping (and, to an extent, the small town in Dalarna) that has any comprehensive involvement of civil society associations. Even in municipalities where there is extensive communication between civil society and the municipality, civil society associations mainly provide services that go beyond the core obligations. In terms of governance, civil society and other external actors are only present in a consulting capacity.

Beyond specific integration policies, developments in other policy areas also deeply affect municipal approaches to integration-related tasks. While these developments go beyond the purpose of this report, it is possible to draw some wider conclusions. First, the municipalities demonstrate the increasing emphasis on labour market orientation in the provision of income support. This immediately affects migrants outside of the introduction program, as this group is over represented among recipients. Second, the development of *de facto* introduction programs within the municipalities relate to the current reformation of the Public Employment Service, and the way in which cutbacks to state-level employment services has



affected the possibility for individual consultation and guidance. Beyond these issues, however, it is notable that none of the municipalities has attempted to make any serious restrictions in integration policy, despite the growing politicization of migration and integration issues.

5.2 Framing integration

Like the policies they inform, the framing of integration varies within limits. The interviewees agree that integration is either a question of becoming self-sufficient, or of creating more diverse social relationships at the community-level. As some of the interviewees show, these frames are not mutually exclusive. The interviewees also agree that integration is desirable, and that it should not require too much adjustment on the side of the migrants

The ways in which policy makers and other actors understand integration is a central aspect in the development and implementation of integration policies. As established in chapter 3, state actors narrowly define integration as the introduction of recently arrived refugees into the labour market. This frame establishes *who* it is that should be integrated, what integration *is*, and, to some extent, *why* integration is necessary at all. This section traces how actors at the local level make sense of these questions. These frames are visible in the interview data, both in responses to direct questions (“how do you define integration?”) and in the interviewees’ answers to more general questions about the governance and experiences of migration into the locality. In addition, the analysis includes different ways of framing the special conditions for integration that exist in small and medium-sized communities, and frames concerning the local populations’ reactions to migration.

The section presents 14 recurring frames.⁵ The first five frames answer to *what* the interviewees believe integration is, or should be. A sixth frame determines whether the framing of integration concerns other groups than migrants (e.g. other vulnerable groups, or society as a whole). The seventh, eighth and ninth frames concern the purpose of integration. The twelfth frame identifies the lack of demands on the individual migrant as a similar

⁵ The section is based on an inductive frame analysis. This means that the various frames have emerged from the data, and not from predefined categories. In the first step of analysis, the research team conducted an “open” coding of the data, noting every sentence in which the interviewee said something about what integration is, whom it concerns, what it is good for, how the conditions for integration differ in small and/or medium-sized localities, and how the local community has reacted to migration since 2014. In order to make the material comprehensible, each individual frame was then merged into a more comprehensive thematic category. For local reactions, the wider categories were supplied beforehand.



constraint. Frames thirteen and fourteen, finally, concern differences between small and medium sized vis-à-vis larger municipalities.

Before continuing into the full description of what is contained in the analysis, it is important to note what is not. First, there is no frame that describes integration as an unwanted outcome. While they do not always specify what integration is supposed to be good for, no interviewee in the entire sample describes integration as something negative or unwanted. Second, the interviewees generally do not frame comprehensive political or economic changes as necessary for successful integration. When they do speak of political and economic matters, it is more closely attached to the decision-making process.

The remainder of this section develops through three parts. The first part details the fourteen frames, including illustrative quotes from the interviewees. The second part briefly presents the interviewees' perceptions of locals' reactions to migrants. The third part compares the distribution of different frames between the six municipalities, and between different types of interviewees.

5.2.1 Framing integration: what, whom, why, and how

The respondents present five distinct frames of *what* integration is. Mirroring the labour market focus of (some) state- and local-level policies, respondents often frame integration as the **individual achievement of self-sufficiency**. In this framing, "successful integration is when a migrant arrives at the Public Employment Service, makes a plan and moves on to either education or employment within the first 24 months" (MA int. 9). This frame is particularly dominant in the small town in Scania.

In contrast to the self-sufficiency frame, some respondents frame integration in relation to wider social values. This frame occurs in three variants. The first variant frames integration as **active participation in the local community**. In this frame, "it's not only that I should be able to talk to my neighbour, but I should be able to take care of my country, of our democracy" (MF, int. 9). As this quote illustrates, the participation frame often co-occurs with the second variant which sees **integration as acquiring a sense of belonging, or "a feeling of affinity and acceptance"** (MC, int. 2). However, these frames can also occur independently of one another. Finally, some respondents frame integration as **the creation of social relations between newcomers and long-term residents**. Unlike the other frames, this definition of integration cannot be reduced to the experience or situation of a single individual. Instead, it involves "a process of reciprocal and mutual learning" (MD, int. 3) that goes beyond the individual migrant to encompass the community as a whole. "Instead of having a big group of people that is only activated, people are actually integrated into society, and into what we do" (MB, int. 10). While some interviewees mention that self-sufficiency may be useful as a means to achieve this larger goal, they do not perceive it as an end in itself. Notably, this is the most common frame in the dataset as a whole.

While the first four frames draw a direct line between integration and migration, some respondents attempt to broaden the frame to **include other groups than refugees**. This



framing mirrors the shift from “integration” to “social sustainability” or “inclusion” in local steering documents. These “other” groups range from youths, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups, to “Swedes” or the community as a whole. While it is most commonly combined with the framing of integration as the creation of social relations, it also occurs in combination with the other frames.

Definitions of what integration *is* occur throughout most of the interview data. The interviewees less often elaborate on **its purpose**. To the extent that they do, they tend either toward **the achievement of an economically or socially sustainable society**, or **the achievement of personal gains for the individual migrant**. In this context, economic sustainability refers to the lowering of welfare expenditure (e.g. from the social services), whereas social sustainability means “participation, influence, safety, and trust. The basic parts to feel good, thrive, and live in society” (MB, int. 1). The gains that an individual migrant can draw from successful integration include better health outcomes, lower economic vulnerability, and, more broadly, being able to “freely choose for themselves what they want to do” (MF, int. 5). Notably, individual outcomes are the least common purpose of integration in the interviews. Instead, those interviewees that do openly reflect on the point of integration tend to focus on larger-scale, societal-level outcomes.

The interviewees develop different frames of **the demands that society should place on migrants**. Some interviewees (column twelve) frame integration as **a process that requires migrants to play a more active part in the labour market or in education, and that the authorities should actively pursue those that do not**:

“Those who want to work, they do so. Those who don’t want to work... they just don’t give a shit. The national government hasn’t done anything there. How long are we supposed to feel bad for them? Forever, according to the government” (MC, int. 13).

Others claim that cultural differences must be overcome in order to facilitate integration. As column ten shows, however, most interviewees do not frame demands as important, particularly with regard to cultural difference. On the contrary, most interviewees stress their **rejection of “assimilationist” modes of integration**, suggesting that integration should be “about people becoming a part of their society where they live – without forcing assimilation” (MF, int. 11).

The interviewees present a nuanced framing of **the difference between integration processes in small/medium-sized vis-a-vis larger municipalities**. On one hand, they frame the small municipality as a place where everyone knows everyone, where contacts are many, and where it is possible to see and care for the individual. In this frame, integration is easier in the small town, as authorities and others can more easily identify and solve the needs of the individual migrant: “in a smaller municipality, you cannot become invisible” (MB, int. 13). On the other hand, they frame the small municipality as a place where resources are lacking. What these resources are varies between interviewees, but includes skills (among bureaucrats), funding,



and employment opportunities. The smaller absolute size of the migrant community in smaller municipalities exacerbates these problems, as it makes it difficult to achieve an economy of scale. This frame is particularly present in localities like the small town in Blekinge, where the number of migrants has declined steeply after the sudden increase in 2015-2016. In periods where total migration is low, "It is probably easier for a larger municipality to maintain a working operation connected to migration" (MB, int. 1).

5.2.2 Framing local reactions to migration

Very few interviewees frame local reactions to migration as hostile. Instead, the perception of local reactions range from welcoming to divided. When describing positive reactions in practice, some interviewees speak of "considerable local mobilization" (MC, int. 3), while others only mention locals being "welcoming toward migrants" (ME, int. 1). For the neutral reactions, these range from Swedes' guarded behaviour to signs of white flight: "The Swedish parents make sure to send their children to other schools, so the only Swedes that are left are those with social problems. Some of these have parents that are racists. That doesn't make for a good environment" (ME, int. 13). Hence, even when the interviewees perceive the locals' reactions as neutral, they suggest that seemingly neutral responses might mask more hostile attitudes and behaviours. Finally, in locations where there have been more considerable anti-migrant mobilization, particularly in the small town in Dalarna (with a large neo-Nazi presence), the respondents emphasize the conflict between those locals who favour migration, and the "minority" that opposes it.

5.2.3 The distribution of frames across localities

Different frames dominate in different settings, and among different types of interviewees. Table 4 (below) shows the distribution of frames according to two dimensions: between municipalities (vertical axis), and between types of interviewees within each municipality (horizontal axis). This section presents and reflects on some of these differences.

	Dominant Frames used by local policymakers	Dominant frames used by other actors
MA: Small town in Scania	Integration means achieving self-sufficiency. Integration primarily concerns migrants.	Integration means achieving self-sufficiency. Integration primarily concerns migrants.
MB: Rural town in Blekinge	Integration means achieving self-sufficiency. Integration concerns other groups than migrants. The purpose of integration is to create social sustainability. Closer social ties make integration easier in smaller municipalities. Local reactions to migration have been largely positive.	Integration means creating social relations. Integration concerns other groups than migrants. The purpose of integration is to create social sustainability. Local reactions to migration have been largely positive.



MC: Mid-size town in Jönköping	Integration can mean achieving self-sufficiency or building social relations with natives. The purpose of integration is to create social sustainability (linked to segregation). There is no difference between smaller and larger municipalities. Local reactions to migration have been positive or neutral.	Integration can mean achieving self-sufficiency or building social relations with natives. The purpose of integration is to create social sustainability (linked to segregation). There is no difference between smaller and larger municipalities. Local reactions to migration have been positive or neutral.
MD: Small town in Gävleborg	Integration is not about achieving self-sufficiency. Integration means building social relations and creating equal opportunities. Integration concerns other groups than migrants. The purpose of immigration is to create social sustainability. Migrants should not have to abandon their cultural identity. Local reactions to migration have been positive.	Integration is not about achieving self-sufficiency. Integration means building social relations and creating equal opportunities. Integration concerns other groups than migrants. The purpose of immigration is to create social sustainability. Migrants should not have to abandon their cultural identity. Local reactions to migration have been positive.
ME: Small town in Dalarna	Integration means building social relations between groups, and to participate in society. Integration concerns other groups than migrants. Migrants should not have to abandon their cultural identity. Local reactions to migration have been positive.	Integration means building social relations between groups, and to participate in society. Integration concerns other groups than migrants. Migrants should not have to abandon their cultural identity. Local reactions to migration have been divided.
MF: Mid-size town in Gävleborg	Integration means building social relations and creating equal opportunities. Integration concerns other groups than migrants. The purpose of immigration is to create social sustainability. Migrants should not have to abandon their cultural identity. Integration is more difficult in smaller municipalities, owing to smaller resources. Local reactions to migration have been neutral or positive.	Integration means building social relations and creating equal opportunities. Integration concerns other groups than migrants. Migrants should not have to abandon their cultural identity. Integration is more difficult in smaller municipalities, owing to smaller resources. Local reactions to migration have been neutral or positive.
National Officials	Integration means getting recently arrived refugees into the labour market within 24 months.	Not applicable
Regional Officials	Mixed	Not applicable

Table 2 Frames by locality



As shown in the sub-chapter on local integration policies, the small town in Scania has the most centralized and narrowly defined approach to integration. This is reflected in the frame analysis. Nearly all of the interviewees frame integration as the process of becoming self-sufficient. Beyond this point, few interviewees specify what integration is good for, or how it might affect other groups than migrants. The dominant frame is thereby narrow in two ways: in its focus on self-sufficiency, and in its lack of wider elaboration. This frame holds for nearly all interviewees, regardless of type. Only one interview, representing a civil society organization defines integration in broader terms.

The rural town in Blekinge is split between the self-sufficiency frame and a broader framing of integration as the creation of social relations. Whereas the self-sufficiency frame dominates among policy makers and municipal employees, the social relations framing dominates among civil society organizations, non-profit service providers and other actors outside of the municipal sector. Beyond this difference, however, most interviewees see integration as part of the creation of social sustainability, with relevance to a broader range of groups than recently arrived refugees. Notably, interviewees in this municipality frame small-town conditions for integration, and local residents' reactions to migration, in positive terms.

There is no single frame that dominates among interviewees in the mid-size municipality in Jönköping. The interviewees define integration variously as becoming self-sufficient, or as creating social relations across groups. This variation cuts through categories of interviewees. Notably, the interviewees agree that integration concerns social sustainability more broadly, and that it affects groups outside of the migrant community. In the interview material, this framing is typically linked to the municipality's problems with residential segregation.

In the two towns in Gävleborg, and in the small town in Dalarna, the interviewees frame integration primarily as the creation of cross-group social relations, the creation of equal opportunities, and as a counter-weight to racism. As such, integration does not only concern migrants, but is something that should include all members of the community. While the interviewees mostly do not reflect upon the higher purpose of integration, they thereby tend toward the social sustainability frame. This is perhaps most pronounced in the small town in Dalarna, where integration is contrasted to the problem of local neo-Nazi mobilization. The interviewees also stress that migrants should not have to abandon their cultural traditions. The interviewees mainly frame local reactions as positive. As in the mid-size town in Jönköping, there are no clear differences between representatives of the municipality and the other interviewees.

Like the policies they inform, the framing of integration varies within limits. The interviewees agree that integration is either a question of becoming self-sufficient, or of creating more diverse social relationships at the community-level. As some of the interviewees show, these frames are not mutually exclusive. The interviewees also agree that integration is desirable, and that it should not require too much adjustment on the side of the migrants. Finally, the interviewees share an understanding of local integration as something that is both easier and more difficult in the context of small municipalities.



The differences that do exist are more prominent across municipalities than it is between the different types of actors within them. To an extent, these differences are related to the specificities of integration policies in each case. When the interviewees in the small town in Scania frame integration primarily in relation to narrow labour market goals, they reflect that municipality's closely labour market-oriented asylum policy. Likewise, the interviewees in Blekinge and Gävleborg, with their focus on social relations and comprehensive integration, reflect their municipalities' embedding of integration within wider social sustainability goals. At the same time, the comprehensive framing that the interviewees in these municipalities use do not reflect the general trend toward narrower implementation of the introduction program. Neither do the interviewees' frames in the small town in Scania, with their narrow focus on migrants, reflect that municipality's individualization of labour market and welfare program more generally.

It is clear that external factors colour the interviewees' answers. As mentioned above, the frames that emerge within each case tend to reflect municipalities' integration policy. Furthermore, just as frames in Jönköping reflect the problem of residential segregation, the frames in Dalarna correspond to the problem of local neo-Nazi mobilization. As in the discussion of integration policies, these differences reveal some of the flexibility that exists for municipalities to approach integration according to local circumstances.

5.3 MLG dynamics in integration policy-making

Two institutional factors greatly limit Swedish municipalities' latitude in how they organize and carry out local integration policy. In a direct sense, the introduction program sets the baseline obligations that any municipality must follow in its provision of services and resources to recently arrived refugees. In a broader sense, the centralization of welfare capacities to the municipalities makes sure that local governments and public servants carry out most integration-related tasks without external actors. Even when other actors are involved, they do so mainly through public procurement.

This section uses survey data on respondents' interactions to map the full networks that go into integration policy making. It thereby captures the formal and informal relations that matter in the preparation and implementation of policy, and whether these relations were collaborative or conflictual.

5.3.1 Mapping the networks

*MLG networks are largely similar across the six municipalities. This is notable given the considerable differences in actual local policy. In other words, **whereas the municipalities differ prominently in the formal organization of integration-related tasks, they in fact appear to be quite similar once one includes other types of interaction.** This points to the importance of making an*



analytical separation between the formal mode of policy implementation, and the informal networks that go beyond it.

In the structured survey, the respondents were asked to rate the intensity of their interactions vis-à-vis other types of actors at the domestic, national and transnational level in matters regarding integration policy before and during the pandemic. Drawing on these responses, this section reconstructs the networks that surround integration policy in the six municipalities. The section thereby displays both what actors are involved in the MLG of local integration, and which ones are not. Owing to very similar results, the presentation does not make any distinction between networks before and during the pandemic.

The networks that surround integration policy look largely similar across the six municipalities. Each network is organized around a core of local officials, local government representatives (from the majority and from the opposition), social servants and other street-level bureaucrats, and representatives of private business. This network is then connected, more or less comprehensively, to a network of non-profit service providers, pro-migrant NGOs, and, in some cases, migrants' organizations. The central actors occasionally interact with representatives of national and regional government. Notably, ties to the national level generally pass through the municipalities' elected leadership, whereas ties to regional officials also run through non-elected officials. Finally, local actors seldom interact with representatives from the EU (MEPs and officials), of other municipalities, or from other countries. Figure 2 illustrates this pattern with the post-pandemic network in the mid-sized town in Gävleborg.

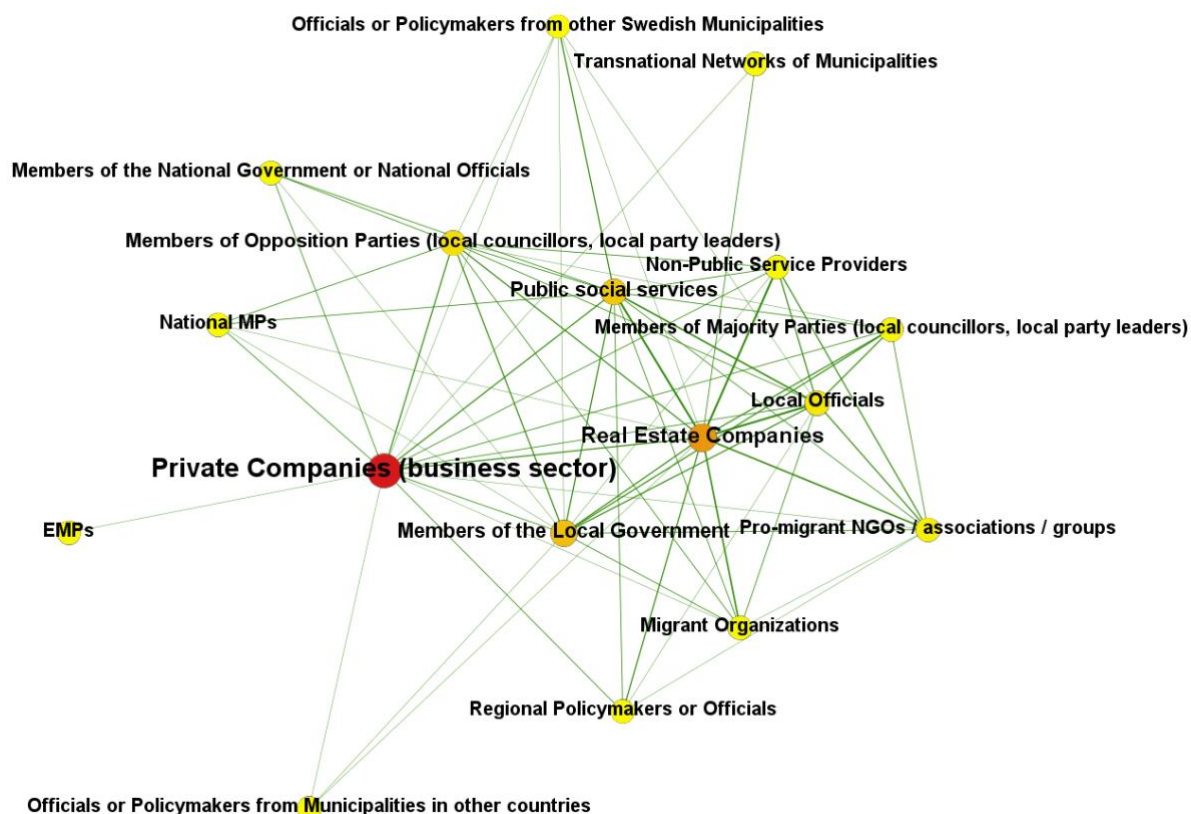


Figure 2 MLG network, mid-sized town in Gävleborg

The relative lack of ties to state-level politicians and public officials is notable in relation to the design of Swedish integration policy. Whereas the main facets of Swedish integration policy emanate downwards from the national level, the networks show such vertical ties to be comparatively rare in the day-to-day practice of integration policy and integration-related tasks. As one shifts the geographical scale from the local to the regional, national, and transnational level, the frequency of interactions diminishes accordingly. Particularly surprising is the relative infrequency of contacts between the municipalities and state-level public officials. In light of the large responsibilities of the Public employment service and the Migration agency in the introduction program and in migrants' dispersal, one would expect state-level officials to be more central to interactions in the network. Their absence might be linked to the gradual disassembling of state-level actors at the local level, and the development of *de facto* municipal introduction structures.

Pro-migrant civil society actors are peripheral to the formal design and implementation of integration policy. In network terms, however, they are structurally central, forming clusters alongside non-profit service providers and migrants' groups. To a large part, the groups that make up this category in the case study locations are well-known, formal organizations such as the Red Cross, Save the Children, and the Church of Sweden. However, the category can also include more conflict-oriented pro-refugee and anti-racist organizations. In some locations, this cluster is separate from the core municipal actors. In others, it is closely embedded in the latter.

In contrast to pro-migrant groups, anti-migrant actors are structurally peripheral, and the ties that they do have consist of infrequent encounters. This pattern is consistent despite large differences in the actual degree of anti-migrant mobilisation across the local cases.

Beneath these similarities, there is a number of case-specific idiosyncracies. These differences, however, also reflect differences in sampling and response rate. Therefore, they must be interpreted cautiously.

In the small town in Scania, non-public service providers and migrants' organizations both fall outside of the central networks. Further, while pro-migrant CSOs are in frequent contact with the core network, their contacts are brokered through the municipality's street-level bureaucrats. This pattern is to be expected, given the very strong tendency toward centralization in that municipality's integration policy and integration-related activities. At the same time, given that the data for this municipality only builds on four survey responses, it might very well be a methodological artefact.

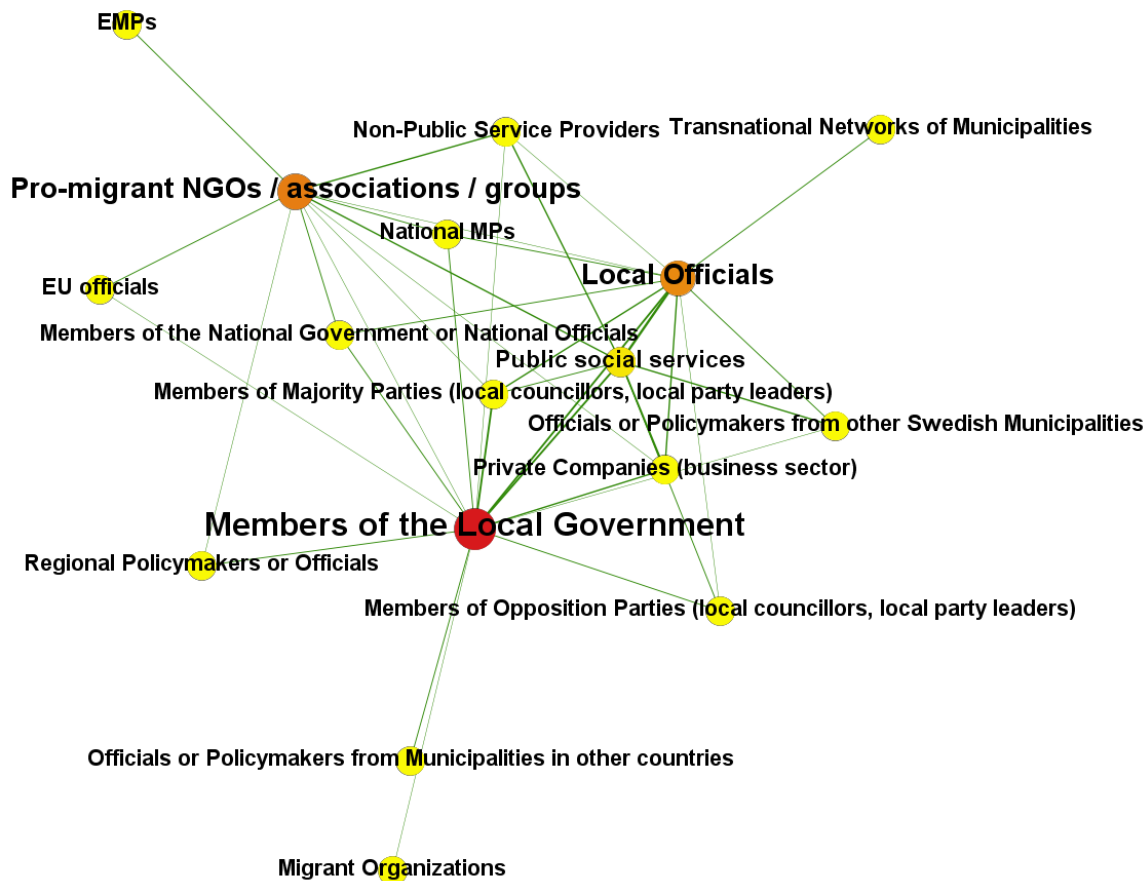


Figure 3 MLG network, small town in Scania

The small town in Dalarna is the only municipality where anti-migrant actors are meaningfully tied to other actors. These interactions are mainly conflictual, and target municipal street-

level bureaucrats, migrants' organizations, and pro-migrant CSOs. This pattern clearly reflects the municipality's wider problem of local far right mobilization.

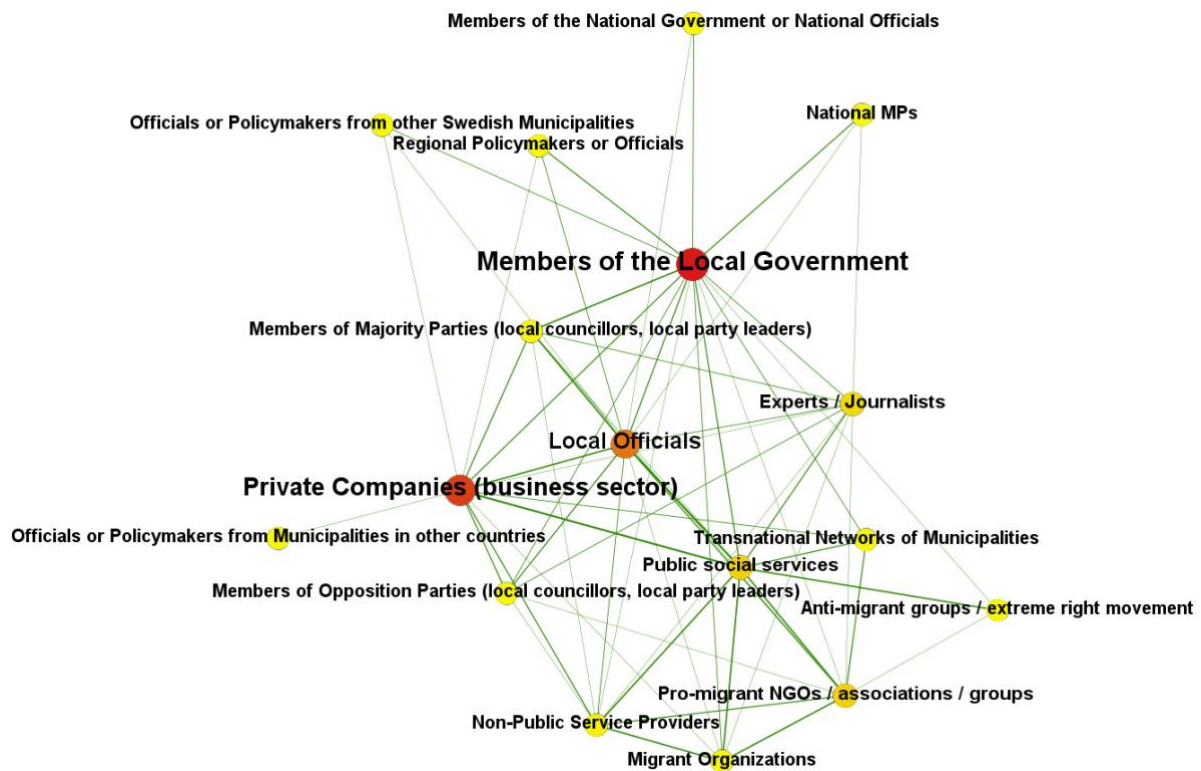


Figure 4 MLG network, small town in Dalarna

MLG networks are largely similar across the six municipalities. This is notable given the considerable differences in actual local policy. In other words, **whereas the municipalities differ prominently in the formal organization of integration-related tasks, they in fact appear to be quite similar once one includes other types of interaction.** This points to the importance of making an analytical separation between the formal mode of policy implementation, and the informal networks that go beyond it.

5.3.2 Actors' functions and roles in MLG networks

This sub-section focuses on the different functions and roles of actors involved in the governance of immigrant integration. Because of the comprehensive and varied role that the municipal government plays in these matters, a large part of the section focuses on the relationship between different levels and sections of the municipal apparatus. It will then go on to present the roles of non-public actors, especially in relation to the governance networks identified in the previous section.

In the Swedish system, municipalities are obliged to fund and organize tasks related to schooling, (parts of) healthcare, and social welfare. However, the municipalities are free to procure many of these services from private actors. In terms of integration, most



municipalities carry out their obligations in-house. Only in Jönköping does the municipality procure services to any significant degree.

While it is elected politicians that have the ultimate responsibility for governing local integration, most municipal governments give considerable discretion to non-elected officials. According to the interviewees, this is due both to a lack of issue-specific competence among elected politicians, and the routine character of many integration-related tasks. In each of the six case studies, elected politicians influence integration governance through the funding and general organization of the municipal apparatus, whereas public officials contribute through operative decisions in relation to specific tasks. As a former member of the municipal council in the mid-sized town in Jönköping puts it, “there are probably good examples where politicians have taken the lead, but of course, our civil servants are those who live closest to ‘reality,’ so many initiatives come from their side” [...] “It is only when there is a visible problem that there is room for political initiatives” (MC, int. 3).

Above the municipal government, the main actors involved in the MLG networks are the Public employment service, the Migration agency, and the county administrative boards. In part, these function as funding bodies. However, they also impose on the municipalities’ discretion in integration policy. Within the introduction program, the Public Employment Service takes some of the municipalities’ responsibilities for the funding and organization of labour market programs and welfare provision. The county administrative board, in turn, collaborates with the Migration Agency in allocating refugees to the municipalities. Since the introduction of a series of compulsory legislations for refugee dispersal in 2014 and 2016, it is not possible for municipal governments to refuse allocations.

Pro-migrant organizations and non-profit service providers vary in their functions vis-à-vis integration governance. In most municipalities, they can access municipal or other funding for integration-related activities such as language training, social activities, and so on. However, their participation in governance networks is typically limited. Across the six cases, civil society actors overall are therefore best conceived as service providers and occasional consulting bodies. As service providers, however, their services mostly extend to legal support, social activities, and language acquisition. In Jönköping, Dalarna, and to an extent in both towns in Gävleborg, civil society organizations were included as partners in the planning of the municipalities’ integration and social sustainability policies. In Dalarna, but even more so in the mid-sized town in Jönköping, there are also formal structures through which the municipalities can consult pro-migrant organizations and non-profit service providers, and where the latter can raise concerns and demands to the municipality. In the small town in Scania, civil society actors overall are excluded from integration governance as well as other integration-related tasks.

Private sector actors participate in local integration governance in direct and indirect ways. However, this impact is mainly informal, as representatives of the municipality seek out business leaders through private contacts or during networking meetings (e.g. business lunches and similar events). This is most visible in the governance of adult education, where



municipalities consult local businesses to assess demand and plan for vocational tracks. However, the private sector has also participated in the development of local integration policies and in funding integration-related activities alongside civil society actors. In Dalarna, individual businesses also participated in the formation of a cross-sectorial network against racism, following the increase in local far right activity.

5.3.3 Dynamics of cooperation and conflict

The survey respondents describe most of their interactions as collaborative, regardless of centrality or intensity. The few conflictual relations that exist are largely the same across all municipalities. Overall, the respondents report conflictual relationships vis-à-vis state-level agencies, the national government, and anti-migrant groups, while relations with local-level actors (NGOs, businesses, and elected and non-elected local officials) are generally positive.

The survey allowed respondents to indicate whether their interactions with other actors were mostly conflictual or mostly cooperative. This makes it possible to assess the character of relations within the networks. The survey respondents describe most of their interactions as collaborative, regardless of centrality or intensity. The few conflictual relations that exist are largely the same across all municipalities. Overall, the respondents report conflictual relationships vis-à-vis state-level agencies, the national government, and anti-migrant groups, while relations with local-level actors (NGOs, businesses, and elected and non-elected local officials) are generally positive. This section will detail the interviewees' arguments against the Public Employment Service and other state-level actors, and the interviewees' relationship vis-à-vis anti-migrant groups. The section will then briefly describe the cooperative relations that exist between the majority and opposition on the local council, and between the municipal organization and pro-migrant civil society organizations.

Across all six municipalities, interviewees describe interactions with the Public Employment Service as rigid and difficult, and the division of responsibilities in the introduction program as unclear. Following cutbacks and a subsequent process of reorganization, the Public Employment Service has lost staffing as well as local offices in smaller municipalities. According to the interviewees, this has exacerbated existing difficulties to collaborate with the agency. The interviewees also believe it has increased waiting times and made the Public Employment Service less capable to help individual migrants find employment and/or education. Some policymakers and public officials question whether the Public Employment Service is able to fulfil its obligation in the introduction program. As a representative of the municipal government in the mid-sized town in Jönköping puts it,



The Public Employment Service's reorganization has been below all criticism. It's chaos in that area right now, and that's really a shame. I think that's to the behest of the migrants. They don't get any help, they have to do everything by themselves. I think they need someone who can speak for them, who can coach them, who can talk to [employers] that have never spoken to anyone from a different country. [...] The Public Employment Service's reorganization is much too slow and they don't even know themselves what people are supposed to do in the meantime (MC, int. 14).

In the small town in Scania, the reorganization of the Public Employment Service has led representatives of the municipality to request further responsibility for the introduction program (MA, int. 10).

Whereas the Public Employment Service has the formal responsibility to provide income support and other services for migrants during the introduction phase, representatives of the municipalities note that the two years that migrants spend in the introduction phase are not enough to become self-sufficient in the long term. The Public Employment Service's perceived failure to fulfil its responsibilities then puts the *de facto* responsibility on the municipalities. This is also why, in the small towns in Scania and Dalarna, the municipalities decided to develop introduction programs that overlapped with the Public Employment Agency's formal responsibilities for labour market activation. A bureaucrat at the social services in the town in Dalarna notes,

...then the [introduction reform] came, which stated that the Public Employment Service should be responsible for the introduction phase. What we saw [here] was that about fifty per cent of those that came through the introduction phase ended up with us, as welfare recipients (ME, int. 9).

The interviewees are also broadly negative to what they perceive as the national government's uneven allocation of funding for integration-related tasks. Most often, the interviewees reflect critically on how the distribution of state funding has shifted since 2015. In 2015, the state rapidly increased funding for integration-related tasks, including support to non-governmental organizations. However, the interviewees note, these funds were not earmarked, and they had to be used within the year. Once the number of recently arrived refugees decreased, these funding opportunities diminished rapidly, even as the allocation of accepted asylum seekers increased: "economically, [integration] has been an expensive affair, aside from 2015-2016, when the state was pouring money over us, but that just turned into a bunch of meaningless projects. We could really have used that money now, but it wasn't designed in a way that allowed us to save any" (ME, int. 10). This issue is closely associated with the uneven rate of allocations (of asylum seekers and recognized refugees), which particularly affected the development of integration policy in the socioeconomically weaker towns in Gävleborg and in Blekinge.



Beyond the national government, the respondents consistently describe conflictual interactions in relation to anti-migrant actors. Whereas interactions with state-level agencies were more frequent for policymakers and public officials, interactions with anti-migrant groups to a larger extent encompass pro-migrant CSOs and non-profit service providers. In the small town in Dalarna in particular, the respondents report hostile, threatening, and sometimes violent interactions with far right organizations: "Well for one, there was a series of arson attacks. There was never any proof, but that's the talk of the town. [...] That created fear in the streets, not just for the migrants, but for coloured people... many of those who raised their voices for human rights were targeted with death threats. It was the same for the politicians and the civil servants. People at the integration unit were really exposed" (ME, int. 13).

With regard to integration issues, the interviewees note that the SD now tends to follow the other parties. To the extent that the SD takes a more hostile stance on migration issues, it has more to do with migration in general, and less with local integration. Further, the interviewees find that the SD are "keeping the conflict in the political arena" (ME, int. 3), as opposed to the more disruptive and violent methods that they associate with the NMR and other far right organizations.

The respondents describe the relationship between pro-migrant groups and the municipality as mostly cooperative. This pattern holds for all municipalities except for the small town in Dalarna. Even there, however, the relationship is weak rather than conflictual. Overall, the structural separation of non-governmental organizations from the municipal institutions should therefore be read as an expression of the organization of integration governance, rather than as a reflection of more conflictual relations. At the same time, this separation marks the limits to cooperation between the municipality and external actors more generally.

5.4 Decision making

Asking what factors determine municipal actors' decision-making is interesting in the Swedish context, where these actors are strongly constrained by state-level policies. As this section shows, the most important factor is the respondents' personal values and ideas. Respondents in different municipalities afford different weight to concerns for the local economy, to local business, non-elected officials, and civil society actors. These differences mirror the distinctions in integration policy and in the framing of integration that have emerged from the previous sections. Notably, state-level actors are relatively absent from the respondents' answers.



The survey allowed respondents to rate the impact of different pre-defined factors on their decision-making processes. These included the state of the local economy, pressure from pro- and anti-migrant mobilisations, and direct requests and pressuring attempts from different representatives of local, regional and national government, civil society, and non-governmental organizations. Responses ranged from 1 (no impact) to 5 (very strong impact). In most municipalities, few factors received more than 3 on average.⁶ Asking what factors determine municipal actors' decision-making is interesting in the Swedish context, where these actors are strongly constrained by state-level policies. As this section shows, the most important factor is the respondents' personal values and ideas. Respondents in different municipalities afford different weight to concerns for the local economy, to local business, non-elected officials, and civil society actors. These differences mirror the distinctions in integration policy and in the framing of integration that have emerged from the previous sections. Notably, state-level actors are relatively absent from the respondents' answers.

Combining all municipalities and actor types, the highest-rated factor is personal values and ideas. This is unsurprising considering the broad range of actors, and the very different ways that they participate in integration governance. Not all actors have to be concerned with the local economy, nor become the targets of external pressuring attempts. However, they do have values and ideas that influence their actions in various ways. Further, it is likely more tempting to answer that one's decisions emanate from personal values than from external pressure.

For the policy makers, which include elected members of local government and non-elected public officials, the most highly rated factors are directly tied to government institutions. Ordered by declining rate, these factors are requests from majority parties, suggestions from public officials and public servants, and requests from the national government. In addition, policy makers stress the impact of the local economy on their decisions.

For civil society organizations and representatives of opposition parties in the local council, i.e. actors who might attempt to influence policy indirectly, the most important factors aside from personal values and ideas are pro-migrant mobilisations and attitudes within the local population.

For the actors that provide migrants with resources (e.g. educational institutions, aid associations, and some religious associations), no factor aside from personal values and ideas has an average rating above 3. The result for the resource providers likely mirrors the extreme diversity of this category.

The policy makers' responses are largely the same within each of the municipalities. With the exception of the two towns in Gävleborg, policymakers stress the impact of requests from

⁶ Some of the populations are very small. There are also considerable differences among the types of actors that are involved in each category.



public officials and representatives of local government, either through the government itself or through the majority party. In most of the municipalities, respondents also give a high rating to requests from the national government. This recurring pattern is reflective of a national policy that places the main responsibilities and capacities on local government, and a local reality in which the design of specific integration policies is often left to bureaucrats in the non-elected departments. Only in the mid-sized town in Jönköping, where civil society involvement is relatively advanced, do policymakers stress the impact of requests from civil society organizations and pro-migrant mobilisations. This might suggest that policymakers only perceive requests “from below” to matter insofar as there are institutional avenues for these requests to reach policymakers.

Despite broad similarities, there are case specific differences that merit further attention. Just as the municipalities differ in the specific design and implementation of policy and integration-related tasks, in the framing of what integration means, and in the shape of the relevant networks, some factors appear to matter more in some municipalities than in others. These differences relate both to local modes of integration governance, and to the municipalities’ wider socioeconomic conditions.

In the small town in Scania, integration policy and its implementation are centralized to the municipality’s labour market department, and the interviewees consistently frame integration narrowly as a matter of individual resource provision. The influence of the labour market department is visible in the high ratings that all respondents give to requests from public officials. To the extent that non-governmental actors matter, it is private companies that receive the highest rating. Local NGOs and pro-migrant mobilisations are absent from the highest-rated responses. The results suggest a mostly bureaucratic decision-making process, with a labour market focus. This impression is reflected among the interviewees: “The politics have not meddled with things, perhaps because the organisation has had successful results” (MA, int. 4).

In the rural town in Blekinge, it is only the policy makers that report high enough ratings to support a meaningful analysis of the survey responses. While the respondents give high ratings to requests from elected and unelected policy makers, and national government, the single most important factor on their decision-making is the state of the local economy.

It is only in Blekinge and in Dalarna that policymakers rank the state of the local economy as a priority among the factors that influence their decisions on integration. In the interviews, representatives of both municipalities stress the impact of rapidly shifting volumes of migrants. At the beginning of the period, both municipalities received relatively large groups of migrants from the Migration Agency, leading to a rapid expansion of state- and municipal-level integration services. To some extent, these services could be maintained with state funding. As the number of migrants decreased after 2016, as allocated migrants moved to bigger cities, and as the settlement act evened out the allocation figures across the country, both municipalities saw their numbers diminish sharply. As the number of newly allocated migrants decreased, so did the amount of state funding that the municipalities could receive



for integration. At the same time, the relative costs for integration-related activities increased, as the municipalities could not maintain an economy of scale. In the small town in Dalarna, interviewees add the growing pressure for income support that developed once the initial, largest, migrant cohort passed through the introduction program. Notably for the case in Dalarna, this occurred despite generally improving socioeconomic conditions, with declining unemployment rates and a growing population.

The broad inclusion of civil society actors in the development and implementation of policy makes the mid-sized town in Jönköping stand out from the other cases. As mentioned with regard to the policymakers, this character is reflected in the survey responses. Across actor types, suggestions from local NGOs and associations, as well as pro-migrant mobilisations, are rated as the most important factors for decision-making. Policy makers in the municipality also give a high rating to suggestions from the opposition. Whether external actors do in fact influence policy or not, there is an obvious and unusual willingness to extend integration governance outside of the core group of elected and unelected local officials and representatives of national government.

In the small town in Gävleborg as well, policy makers and others rate pro-migrant mobilisations and local NGOs as among the most important factors affecting decisions on integration policy. Unlike the town in Jönköping, this municipality does not have an extensive formalized relationship between the municipality and civil society in general. However, the interviewees note intense but primarily *informal* relationships between civil society actors and the elected and non-elected municipal leadership.

Anti-migrant groups are notably absent from any influence on policy-making. Across the dataset as a whole, respondents rate the influence of anti-migrant groups at 1.57 on average. In the municipality in Dalarna, where the far right was a primary driver for pro-migrant mobilisation, and for cross-sectorial collaboration, the average rating is slightly higher at 2.09. Judging from the interview data, the influence that the far right has had in that municipality has mainly consisted in the creation of anti-racist projects and collaborative protests among leading parties and local pro-migrant groups. The responses fortify the broader observation that anti-migrant groups are largely marginal actors in integration policy, socially as well as in terms of direct influence.

The survey responses for the interviewees in the mid-sized town in Gävleborg stand out mainly in their idiosyncrasy. First, the policy makers do not report any consistently impactful factors aside from personal ideas and values. Instead, it is the resource providers that report influences from factors such as upcoming elections, the local economy, and requests from local and national government. While these findings can be methodological artefacts, it is also possible that they reflect a local model of integration where service provision is more closely embedded in local policy making than in the other cases.



6. Conclusion

This report has described the development of integration policies in Sweden, focusing on the MLG dynamics between the local and national levels of government. As the report shows, **Swedish municipalities have limited flexibility in developing local integration policies for the establishment of recently arrived refugees**. Within the first 24 months of a migrants' residence permit, the introduction program specifies a detailed distribution of capacities and obligations for labour market integration between the municipalities and various state-level agencies (particularly the Public Employment Service). At the same time, the EBO and settlement acts greatly limit the municipalities' ability to steer the settlement of recently arrived refugees. Still, the introduction program and the settlement act also allocates the main responsibility for funding to the national level. To the extent that municipalities can develop locally specific integration policies, these consist either of voluntary extensions of responsibility beyond the introduction program, or the adoption of integration policies targeting longer-term migrants. Doing so, however, does not make the municipalities eligible for state funding, and it frequently creates overlaps between integration policy and more general welfare services. The close overlap between integration and other policy areas is particularly visible in municipal approaches to limit income support allowances, and in attempts to stifle segregation.

Despite limited municipal discretion, **the six cases reveal differences in the organization and capacity for integration-related activities**. The first difference concerns **the municipalities' organization of their obligations within the introduction program**. Across the case studies, all municipalities take some measures to compensate or support the Public Employment Agency. This support ranges from decentralized support to the Public Employment Service through extracurricular language training, vocational training and employment opportunities, including the creation of municipal integration councillors and coordinators, to *de facto* municipal introduction programs, in which municipal departments effectively take over the Public Employment Service's responsibilities.

The extension of services beyond the obligations of the introduction program stem from widely **shared dissatisfaction with the Public Employment Service**. Across all municipalities, interviewees report difficulties in cooperating with the agency, and poor integration outcomes. Whether comprehensive or not, the municipalities have therefore added **complementary services as a means to improve the Public Employment Service's outcomes**, and to compensate for the lack of meaningful cooperation. This conflictual relationship vis-à-vis the state level also concerns the municipalities' relationship to the Migration Agency and to the central government, both of which are seen as indifferent to the municipalities' challenges.

Whereas Swedish integration policy is closely tied to the public sector, in governance and in implementation, the case studies show **a variety of ways that single municipalities can**



include non-public actors. In the cases from Jönköping and Dalarna, the municipalities collaborate extensively with civil society associations through consulting networks and – in the cases from Jönköping and Gävleborg – through the procurement of some service provision. In most of the case studies, the municipalities also collaborate with civil society through funding of extracurricular language activities, cultural events, and so on and so forth. Importantly, no cases involve civil society directly in governance, and there are no comprehensive civil society structures that can function as an alternative to public sector resources. In the small town in Scania, non-public actors are excluded from integration policy altogether. Importantly, **however, non-public actors are never fully included in the development of integration policy.**

After an individual has passed through the introduction program, they become eligible for universal welfare services. Owing to the over representation of this group among recipients of income support and other benefits, local reactions to this group can also be included as part of an emergent integration policy. In many municipalities, the response has consisted in **labour market activation programs and more restrictive interpretations of the social services act.** In the small town in Scania, it is directly tied to an "integration duty." Some municipalities have also included efforts against residential segregation in these, more indirect, measures. In Blekinge and in the two towns in Gävleborg integration-related goals and values are supposed to permeate all municipal decisions.

Despite the aforementioned differences, the municipalities covered in the study are remarkably similar in most respects. This is due in part to the limitations stemming from national-level policy, and to the overlap between integration and more general welfare services. As seen in the previous sections, however, it must also be understood in relation to **the limited differences that exist with regard to the framing, and to the fact that local integration policy is largely dependent on the decisions of public officials.** As more comprehensive changes in integration policy is dependent on political decisions, **the lack of politicization** should therefore contribute to the very slight changes that are visible across the municipal cases.

With some exceptions, **differences that do exist between the municipalities generally do not correspond to the distinctions between municipality types in section 1.** To the extent that these differences show, it is primarily in the comprehensiveness and scope of integration-related activities. Whereas the more well-off municipalities in Dalarna, Scania and Jönköping have all developed relatively comprehensive local integration policies, covering a broad range of activities (with the exception of the labour market focus in Scania), all of the type C and type D municipalities have disassembled most of their integration policies in the wake of declining state funding and a shrinking client base. In terms of locals' reactions, there does not appear to be any impact of past cultural diversity.

The lack of correspondence with wider socioeconomic, demographic, and cultural differences **does not mean that locally specific conditions have no impact on the development of local policies.** However, these conditions are **more idiosyncratic, and have a more immediate**



relationship to the development of policy. In the case from Blekinge and in the small town in Gävleborg, the decentralization of integration policy and the dismantling of the central integration unit reflect the virtual disappearance of migrants from the municipality. In the case from Jönköping, concerns for social sustainability are directly linked to the municipality's problems with residential segregation. In the small town in Dalarna, finally, the emphasis on anti-racism is obviously linked to a number of far right protest events, and the overall presence of far right activists. The adoption of a stricter labour market orientation in integration and social policy, in turn, is justified as a response to an increased burden at the social services.

The development of integration policies is widely described as an apolitical process. Within the municipal leadership, most political decisions have been made unanimously. There are **few discernable differences in the integration policies of centre-left and centre-right majorities.** Overall, there appears to be **a tendency toward bureaucratization,** as the municipalities allocate much decision-making capacity onto non-elected officials. **To the extent that elected politicians matter, it is through the formulation of wide policy goals, and through the funding and organization of the municipal bureaucracy.**

The apolitical character of local integration policy is also visible in **the collaborative relationship between the municipal government and various external actors, particularly pro-migrant groups.** While pro-migrant groups and other civil society actors have little direct influence on local integration policy, their interactions with the municipal organization are mostly friendly. Hence, instead of challenging local integration policies, civil society associations primarily complement the municipality through formalized or informal collaboration in language training and other types of extracurricular resources. Anti-migrant actors, on the other hand, are widely peripheral, and have few interactions with representatives of the municipalities.

In order to improve the outcomes of local integration policies, the case studies primarily point to the need of **improving the relationship between the municipalities and the Public Employment Service.** This could be done either through the strengthening of the Public Employment Service, or through the expansion of the municipalities' capabilities. Whereas the former would be a continuation of the path set in the introduction program, the latter would be a return to the more decentralized pre-2010 model of integration.

With regard to the cases from Blekinge and Gävleborg, **the report also suggests the problems that may come out of uneven allocations of migrants.** In both cases, rapid increases and decreases in the number of accepted refugees across 2015-2017 made it difficult for these municipalities to meet their basic obligations. When the number of migrants increased, the municipalities needed to expand their capacities. When the number of migrants decreased, the lack of state funding and a critical mass of recipients forced the municipalities to shut down services instead. While this factor is in part the outcome of trends in migration streams, it is also the result of state-level settlement and dispersal policies.



Between each other, the cases also suggest how to organize and define integration policies differently. The trends in the small towns in Scania and Dalarna point toward the advantages of centralized and comprehensive approaches to integration. Through the development of cross-sectorial collaboration, these municipalities are able to limit waiting times and to better follow the individual migrant (and other welfare recipient) over time. At the same time, and particularly in Scania, the narrow focus on labour market outcomes means that the municipality risks missing other aspects of integration, aspects that are better maintained in the case from Dalarna. Further, it is important to note the importance of local socioeconomic conditions for allowing municipalities to develop more comprehensive structures.



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SOU 2008:58 Egenansvar – med professionellt stöd.

8. Appendix

Municipality	Type of document	Year (last updated version)
Rural town in Blekinge	Integration policy	2015
Mid-sized town in Jönköping	Integration report	2019
Small town in Gävleborg	Steering document for employment policy	Missing (accessed 2022-04-28)
Small town in Gävleborg	Checklist for social sustainability	2018
Small town in Dalarna	Integration policy	2019
Small town in Dalarna	The ME model (slideshow)	2019
Mid-sized town in Gävleborg	Social sustainability program	2019

Table 3 Local policy document



<https://whole-comm.eu>



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101004714