



## 9 Identity and Belonging

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### 9.1 Introduction

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This chapter provides an overview of research evidence on integration policies and practices that address newly arrived migrants’ identities and feelings of belonging. It includes research published between 2011 and 2021, with a focus on Europe (EU and Schengen associated countries) that address identity and belonging as part of integration processes, and how receiving societies aim to shape a (collective) identity and belonging among newly arrived migrants and receiving societies (governance). Newly arrived migrants are defined as those who arrived after 2014, and the focus is on integration policies and practices that address the first phase of adaptation and inclusion.

Scholarly interest in identity and belonging represents an established field of research, which is linked to the evolution of social sciences and social theories (May 2013, 12ff; Yuval-Davis 2011, 11ff.). Similarly, issues of identity and belonging represent a central aspect in migration studies

based on the changes in society due to migration and conceptualisations of observed processes, including social interaction, adaptation, conflicts, and its outcomes. In this vein, questions of identity and belonging represent central and underlying, respectively, features of conceptualisations of integration, acculturation, majority-minority relations, race relations, et cetera (Park and Burgess 1921; Gordon 1964; Berry 1970; Esser 1980). Identity and belonging concern the position and relationship between “individuals” and “society(ies)” (May 2013). Viewing the “self” and “society” as relational means that the self evolves in relationship with, and in relation to, other people. In this perspective, “society” represents the outcome of dynamic human interactions and relationships between individuals. Thereby, researchers stress the processual character of identity and belonging and argue to focus on the processes and outcomes of social relations, narrations, practices, and representations, extending the focus beyond groups, identities, and culture (Anthias 2009, 14). Building on identity would risk to group people into identity categories, defining and reducing individuals to membership in these categories (May 2013, 7f.). This is used in identity politics, as “unity is produced by pointing out what is ‘not us’” (Mattes 2017, 94) and has been deployed by minority (Lähdesmäki et al. 2021, 26) and majority groups (Noury and Roland 2020). Treating a person or group as “not us”/“them” in contrast to “us” has been described as “othering” (Schenk 2021) For example, attributing to migrants an inferior status due to their cultural and ethnic identities (Khan 2014, 289) devalues migrants by the “white” majority (Amelina, Schäfer, und Trzeciak 2021, 5). Migrants are also “othered” in research; they are separated from the “natio-ethno-cultural mainstream”, as it has been described for the statistical category of “migration background” (Will 2019, 553) (Spencer and Charsley 2021).

At the individual level, identity is “an individual’s narrative of self, that is who they think they are, and in relation to others, and therefore an identification process” (Khan 2014, 286)<sup>37</sup>. Belonging is “the process of creating a sense of identification with, or in connection to, cultures, people, places and material objects” (May 2013, 3). Thereby, belonging (and nonbelonging) is defined as a relational configuration (Amelina, Schäfer, and Trzeciak 2021, 1; Anthias 2009, 10) and thus a “dynamic process of establishing, maintaining and transforming relations with and attachments to people, places, practices, and institutions” (Nunn, Spaaij, und Luguetti 2021, 2). Belonging involves on the one hand identifying oneself as an individual “with” (self-identification), and being identified by others “as” (categorisation) on the other (May 2013, 4; Yuval-Davis 2011, 12ff.). Belonging comprises an individual’s identification and feeling of attachment to a community (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 242; Kannabiran, Vieten, and Yuval-Davis 2006; Simonsen 2018; 2016, 1156). It can take place at different scales and different (intersecting) spheres that

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<sup>37</sup> With reference to (Anthias 2009), See also (Yuval-Davis 2011, 14).

shape a person’s sense of belonging and manifest in different forms of objective and subjective attachment (emotional, formal, practical, embodied, ethical, sociocultural, and historical). Linking belonging to political, economic and social membership, it

“can include an attachment (to place, community), claims (for place, community), attributions (of place, community), formal membership to places through meeting criteria of such membership, as a commitment or practices of consensus to a state/social system.”(Anthias 2016, 178)

As a relational configuration, belonging involves processes of seeking/rejecting and granting/excluding among “those seeking to belong”, and “the politics that govern whom belonging is granted” (Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021<sup>38</sup>; s. Amelina, Schäfer, und Trzeciak 2021).

In a relational and processual perspective of belonging, conflicts over migration can be viewed as “classificatory struggles over (dominant institutional) definitions of belonging and membership”<sup>39</sup>. Thereby, belonging can be a positive or negative relation, including spheres that one identifies and values or not (Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021; Anthias 2009; Amelina, Schäfer, and Trzeciak 2021).

This review is structured as follows: Section two maps the research landscape with regard to identity and belonging and introduces how it is discussed within research. Subsequently, section three addresses the integration situation of post-2014 migrants in regard to identity and belonging, while section four sheds light on the framing interventions and policy objectives in relation to identity and belonging of migrants. Section five summaries the instruments and tools, which research has studied in regard to identity and belonging of migrants. This is followed by an overview of reported effectiveness of implemented policies and practices. The chapter concludes with a summary in section seven.

## **9.2 Research on identity and belonging**

Research on identity and belonging in migration and refugee studies links on a theoretical and conceptual level to the classical canon of sociological theories on the “individual”/“self” and “society” (May 2013, 12ff; Pickel 2021, 186ff; Yuval-Davis 2011, 12ff) and to conceptualisations of “integration”, including pleas to rethink and revise the latter. Critique on migration and integration research regards underlying colonial/nation-state centred visions of society (Schinkel 2018; Favell 2019; Wimmer und Glick Schiller 2002), the reproduction and essentialisation of such nation-state and ethnicity centred conceptualisation, and categories by research itself (Dahinden 2016; Amelina, Schäfer, and Trzeciak 2021). A focus on nation states as a unit of analysis has been

<sup>38</sup> With reference to Nira Yuval-Davis, *The politics of belonging: intersectional contestations* (London: Sage, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Amelina, Schäfer, und Trzeciak, 2f.

criticised as “methodological nationalism”, limiting identity to a fixed place and, in regard to assimilationist approaches, tying it to a fixed and unitary social core (Anthias 2009, 6). Some scholars suggest to “de-migrantise” migration research (Dahinden 2016), de-essentialise notions of migration, mobility, and integration (Amelina, Schäfer, und Trzeciak 2021, 2), and for example, redefine integration based on lived experience, involving non-migrants and migrants in a process of “co-production” (Gilmartin and Dagg 2021). Integration research has also been criticised for neglecting migrants’ points of view and focusing too much on functional indicators (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 242). Ager and Strang (2008) pointed to the role of social connections for integration, distinguishing between social bridges (with other communities), bonds (with family, co-ethnic, co-national, co-religious or other groups), and links (with structures of the state). Recent research has also addressed facets of contemporary integration policy and practices that hinder migrants to “integrate” and participate in social (sub-)systems, resulting in “disintegration” on the one hand (Hinger and Schweitzer 2020). On the other hand, focusing on “disintegration” does not mean per se, that “integration has gone wrong” (Meissner and Heil 2020, 3). Instead, it could allow focusing on power asymmetries in contexts of superdiversity, and uncertainty and instability of everyday situations, which do not necessarily lead to loss of control (feared and put forward as arguments for integration policy (Meissner and Heil 2020). However, others argue to stay with the concept of integration and address the challenges in a reflexive way (Spencer and Charsley 2021). Besides the concept of integration, further publications address concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism (de Waal 2020; Meer, Modood, and Zapata-Barrero 2016), links between US perspectives (critical race studies/intersectionality) and European integration literature (Magazzini 2021), migration-related classifications and powerful discourses of othering (Amelina, Schäfer, and Trzeciak 2021), and links between migration, citizenship, and identity (Brizić, Katharina; Şimşek, Yazgöl; Bulut, Necle 2021).

Research on the integration of post-2014 migrants in regard to identity and belonging covers different groups, in particular forced migrants (Khan 2014; O’Reilly 2018; Maggie O’Neill u. a. 2019; Buber-Ennser u. a. 2016; Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020; De Martini Ugolotti 2020; Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021), children/youth (Etsel 2021; Allsopp and Chase 2019; Nunn 2020; Rorato 2020; Chen and Schweitzer 2019), family migrants (Charsley u. a. 2020; Charsley, Bolognani, and Spencer 2017) and women (Chikwira 2021; O’Neill u. a. 2019; Krummel 2015; Goulahsen 2017; Lindqvist and Wettergren 2018; Morrice 2017b). Thereby, the specific situation of forced migrants represents a broader area of research (being subject to a country’s asylum regime and involving a [substantial] period of uncertainty, and its impact on forced migrants’ identity and feelings of

belonging). Research findings published between 2011 and 2021 include post-2014 forced migrants<sup>40</sup> as well as earlier groups of forced migrants (Khan 2014; O’Reilly 2018).

While (national) policies reflect underlying understandings of who has a right to belong, which is rather limited during pending asylum procedures and involves specific normative orientations and social expectations in civic integration policies, some research studies how migrants challenge and resist to these policy frameworks and orientations (Khan 2014).

A further focus of research is on the governance of integration policy measures that address the identity and feelings of belonging of (recently arrived) migrants. This regards approaches on identity and belonging at different levels of government, the type of actors involved (beyond public actors, e.g., third sector organisations, private actors, and forms of self-organisation), potential tensions and conflicting logics in the adopted policies between levels and the impact of existing policies, and potential conflicting logics on issues of identity and belonging among migrants (Manatschal, Wisthaler, und Zuber 2020; Wisthaler 2021). This strand of research accounts for belonging to the (nation) state and belonging on lower scales, such as the regional or local level, and identification with a certain geographical area or place (Manatschal, Wisthaler, and Zuber 2020).

Further studies specifically focus on policy tools and instruments as well as activities and opportunities that (aim to) shape migrants’ identities and feeling of belonging and have an impact on migrants’ identities and feelings of belonging, respectively. Researched policies regard, on the one hand, civic integration and citizenship policies (Morrice 2017a; Onasch 2017) (stemming to a larger extent from the national level), and subnational manifestations and struggles for socio-cultural integration and policies and activities in different social spheres and subsystems on the other hand. Research subsystems comprise education (Banas 2020; 2019; Brizić, Katharina; Şimşek, Yazgül; Bulut, Necle 2021; Collett 2019; García-Mateus and Palmer 2017), health (Lindqvist and Wettergren 2018), leisure, arts, sports, culture (De Martini Ugolotti 2020; Nunn 2020; Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021; Islam 2018; Singleton 2021; Lewis 2015; Spracklen, Long, and Hylton 2015; Singleton 2021) and religion. Citizenship policies are thereby often viewed as “institutional realisations of national boundaries” (Simonsen 2016, 1155) that indicate underlying understandings of “us” and “them”, and represent a formal barrier to belonging, as they set requirements that must be met to be included in the national community (Simonsen 2016, 1156). Since the 2000s, many European states have introduced civic integration policies that extended

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(Buber-Ennser u. a. 2016; Perron 2020; Etzel 2021; Allsopp und Chase 2019)

the strata of membership to further legal status (from entry to permanent residence) preceding citizenship (Goodman 2010; 2012; 2014).

Despite a focus on identity and belonging on the side of migrants, a further strand of research involves the host society. This regards discourses, narratives (including the role of media) and attitudes. Studies investigate here what these discourses and narratives can tell us about the underlying understanding of national membership and corresponding criteria for belonging (Ammaturo 2019) Studies also demonstrate what impact public discourse, narratives and attitudes have on migrants’ identities and feelings of belonging (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020; Mattes 2017; Simonsen 2016, 1156) as well as in what ways these underlying (national) paradigms are reflected in integration policy and influence and change integration policy (Perron 2020), respectively. Furthermore, research on identity and belonging of post-2014 migrants refer to (national) integration policy paradigms, in particular assimilation, multiculturalism, interculturalism, and social cohesion, shifts and changes in these paradigms and corresponding implications for concrete policies, narratives on identity and belonging, including migrants’ feelings of belonging. A further research focus is on the role of transnationalism and diasporas on identity and belonging (Binaisa 2013; Erdal and Lewicki 2016; Sigona u. a. 2015; Cohen and Kranz 2015; S. Park and Gerrits 2021).

### **9.3 Integration situation in regard to identity and belonging**

Research on identity and belonging highlights the specific situation of refugees as asylum seekers in host countries, which includes being in a (prolonged) “liminal situation” (O’Reilly 2018) and subject to the institutional regime of the host country’s asylum system, referred to as being in “legal limbo” (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 242; Yijälä and Nyman, o. J.). The period seeking asylum implies waiting for verification or refusal of refugee status and represents an “in-between existence” in spatial and temporal terms. The accommodation during this time is usually a highly controlled and monitored space, lacking of freedom over basic and intimate details of everyday life and routines, due to, for example, shared rooms, overcrowding, a lack of space, different routines, bad sleep, noise, and a lack of control over food and eating times (O’Reilly 2018, 8,10). Waiting for verification or refusal of refugee status involves a “‘punitive’ aspect of waiting” due to lacking information of how long they must wait (Khosravi 2014). Waiting can erode a sense of the present (O’Reilly 2018, 12). The reception centres can become “a ‘limbo’, an in-between space, inside the host country but outside of the host society”<sup>41</sup>, as, for example, asylum seekers are not allowed to work or access education, resulting in “deskilling”, and being “unable to do

<sup>41</sup> O’Reilly, „Living Liminality“, 14.



anything for years at a time”.<sup>42</sup> Being in a “legal limbo” can involve fear and anxiety, a state of worrying, and a sense of lethargy. Among forced migrants (asylum seekers, beneficiaries of asylum or some other form of protection status) in Vienna and Istanbul, the two main themes concerned uncertainty about the future and the feeling of being a partial member of society “who cannot decide about his/her own destiny” (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 246). Being a refugee (asylum seeker) can involve the feeling of life-on-hold, embodied feelings of suspension and immobility, isolation, boredom, suspension, uncertainty, hierarchies of human worth (De Martini Ugolotti 2020, 8), being in a “limbo-like stage of the migration process while waiting for the decision on their request for international protection” (Yijälä and Nyman, o. J., 119), as well as “uncertainty and anxiety about the future and limited economic and social access to the host society” (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 242).

Spheres of belonging of young refugees include: the family; friendship and recreation; education and employment; ethnic community and culture; religion; local community, culture and place; homelands and country of asylum; and the resettlement country (Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021; Nunn 2018; 2020). Research points to challenges of young and often unaccompanied refugee migrants due to growing up in two cultures and the traumatic experiences related to their flight (Banas 2020; Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021), adding onto the experiences of (non)belonging that young people face in their transition to adulthood (Nunn 2020). Furthermore, a study finds that unaccompanied migrants and refugee minors must plan for different scenarios in their futures as the common EU policy discourse is that they “‘belong’ back in their ‘country of origin’” (Allsopp and Chase 2019, 12). This would be linked to the assumption that family reunification is in their “best interest”, neglecting that minors’ migration might be part of a “family life project”, due to family-related persecution, the family as part of a diaspora, or other reasons. This would impact differently on their lived experiences of membership and belonging, including those with a strong affinity to their home country and intention to return, those with multiple belongings and a feeling of belonging to the host country, as well as those with no sense of belonging (Allsopp and Chase 2019, 12).

Overall, migrants and refugees in particular may face a “downward class journey”, and can be forced to leave previous work experience and qualifications behind<sup>43</sup> and negotiating past professional identities (Ennerberg and Economou 2021), affecting past identities of class and professional status (Etzet 2021, 12). This is also reported for migrant children in school in regard to their bilingual or multilingual background (Brizić, Katharina; Şimşek, Yazgül; Bulut, Necle 2021).

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<sup>42</sup> O’Reilly, „Living Liminality“, 14.

<sup>43</sup> (Etzet 2021, 12) With reference to: (Holm Pedersen 2012)

In regard to the mental health and well-being of migrants, a study on migrant women in Sweden finds that social suffering in the post-migration phase can bring migrants into contact with psychiatric care, seeking “to be seen and confirmed as the person you are, and need to be, in the new host society” (Lindqvist and Wettergren 2018).

Research on identity and belonging points to the role of public discourses for identity and belonging. This regards public statements, political struggles and media reports involving anti-immigrants discourse (Botterill, McCollum, and Tyrrell 2019) and construction of identity in the media (Datta 2017; Drüeke, Klaus, and Moser 2021), which impact on subjective belonging.

A study on persons seeking refuge in Austria in 2015 found that women tend to be more religious than men (defining religiosity as the intensity of religious practice and/or belief); 18% of female respondents claimed to be very religious compared to 9% of male respondents. Overall, more respondents stated not being religious (20%) than being very religious (11%) (Buber-Ennser u. a. 2016, 17). As regards the gender gap in religiosity, Trzebiatowska and Bruce (2012) attribute this gender gap to social differences, identifying five main explanatory factors. These are: a time lag in secularisation effects (affecting men earlier than women); vicarious religion<sup>44</sup> (taking responsibility for the religious commitment and morality of others) and patriarchy; control of sexuality; secular gender roles; and the body, health, and illness. While these factors can overlap and reinforce each other, they attribute most explanatory power to a time lag in secularisation, concluding that a general decline in gender differences would also gradually decrease the gender gap in religiosity.

## **9.4 Framing interventions and policy objectives**

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Onasch (2017, 578) states that creating immigrant integration programmes actually requires the definition of the elements of national belonging<sup>45</sup>, revealing who is perceived as an immigrant and what distinguishes migrants from the national community. Furthermore, political debates about integration “oftentimes evolve around immigrants’ willingness or capability to belong to a nationally defined society” (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 241). Since the 2000s, Western European countries have increasingly introduced measures and requirements that address country knowledge, language proficiency, and liberal and social values (Goodman 2010, 754). They are commonly referred to as “civic integration policies”, and have become tools that define national understandings of membership and belonging (Goodman 2012, 659; 2014). The novelty

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<sup>44</sup>“notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand but approve of what the minority is doing” (Davie 2007)

<sup>45</sup> „in creating immigrant integration programmes, policy makers must define the elements of national belonging“ (2)



compared to existing North American requirements for citizenship is that, in Europe, these requirements concern “various strata of membership” (Goodman 2010, 754), ranging from entry to permanent settlement. As in the case of the UK, these policies should “equip the individual with the linguistic and cultural capital to participate in all spheres of life in their community and the polity” (Khan 2014, 289) In the Netherlands, first civic integration measures date back to 1998 and were not only introduced as “vague” integration measures, but to increase the economic self-sufficiency of newcomers<sup>46</sup>. Thereby, pre-entry requirements are largely governed by immigration control objectives (in particular family-based migration), which Goodman has termed “membership regulation at the border” (Goodman 2014, 228).

A study on unaccompanied migrant and refugee minors finds that in EU policy and discourse, the underlying assumption is that they “‘belong’ back in their ‘country of origin’” (Allsopp and Chase 2019, 12). This would be linked to the assumption that family reunification is in their “best interest”.

Overall, language, culture, and values have become markers of national identity (Khan 2014, 290), and venues of negotiation for belonging and based on which features (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 242). Thereby, research finds that boundaries in liberal democracies have been increasingly deployed in terms of “value compatibility” (Triadafilopoulos 2011, 867). Onasch sees boundary drawing in integration programmes as “racialisation”, whereby markers of race are not limited to phenotypical characteristics, but instead based on a contrast on many dimensions of difference, and operates in integration discourses and programmes in terms of language, culture and religion (Onasch 2017, 3f., 15). Religion can be used to produce in- and outsider groups, and draw symbolic boundaries, which create a binary distinction between a majority (“we”) and an outgroup (“the other”), upholding difference based on religion. A study (Mattes 2017) on German and Austrian integration policy development finds three patterns how religion has been used as a symbolic boundary. This is “muscular liberalism” (defining the majority as “unified by liberal values” and Muslims as the outgroup with lacking willingness to implement liberal norms), “Christian ancestry” (constructing secularism and liberalism as historical product of Christianity and thereby linking it to Christianity, doubts that Muslims are able/willing to adapt to these norms), and “universal religion” (constructing a religious community and an illiberal group that misconceives religion) (Mattes 2017, 97–100).

Viewing belonging as a relational process, it addresses and involves the host society and underlying paradigms and policy shifts. Such was seen in Great Britain, which turned from multiculturalism to

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<sup>46</sup> Dutch Ministry of Justice cited in (Goodman 2012, 664)

an assimilationist focus, framed within a social cohesion agenda and an imagined homogenous Britishness since the mid-2000s (Khan 2014; Morrice 2017a). Social cohesion would be seen as the “new panacea to the societal ills” caused by multiculturalism and increased asylum-seeking migration, requiring to use the social capital among migrants (manifesting in bridging, bonding, and linking social capital). Policy would favour bridges (intergroup relations) over bonds (intragroup relations) (Khan 2014, 288). For Germany, a study reports that the founding narrative on flight and expulsion was reframed by leading politicians and media in 2015-16, making links between Germany’s own past experience of forced migration at the end of and after the Second World War and the “refugee crisis” unfolding in 2015. This shift broke the previous general understanding that this experience of “flight and expulsion” was different from migration and the decreased constructed borders between native Germans and all other newcomers, reminding “the German[s] that migration has been an integral part of German society for decades and reinforces the new self-perception of Germany as a country of immigration” (Perron 2020, 11f.). Etzel speaks of a new model of conditions of integration that focused on post-2014 humanitarian migrants in Germany, and which is linked to the German welfare state and migrants that were granted international protection (Etzel 2021, 2).

Research findings that relate to identity and belonging also point to differences in policies between “ordinary regions” and so-called “Rokkan regions”<sup>47</sup>. The latter are regions with a distinct history of statehood and/or cultural and linguistic identity (Wisthaler, Verena 2021). Rokkan regions would have heightened concerns on regional identity, culture and language. It makes Rokkan regions in their approach more similar to assimilationist national level approaches, while ordinary regions are rather similar to the local level, with more pragmatic and less symbolic policies than the national level (Manatschal, Wisthaler, and Zuber 2020, 1477, 1480).

Leisure activities vary to a large degree in their institutionalisation and direct link to integration policy goals regarding identity and belonging. In the Nordic countries, nature-based integration has received increasing attention, which is linked, on the one hand to Nordic lifestyle which highly values outdoor recreation and living close to nature, and on the other hand, the expectation that “a connection to nature can be a channel to Nordic culture and language using the entire palette of senses” (Pitkänen u. a. 2017, 8).

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<sup>47</sup> Named after the Norwegian social scientist Stein Rokkan.

## 9.5 Overview of commonly used instruments and tools

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### in identity and belonging

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#### ***(1) Regulatory (based on legislation: laws, regulations, directives) / or command & control***

On the regulatory level, there are **two main areas** that address and impact, respectively, on migrants' identity and feelings of belonging. This includes the regulatory framework of the asylum regime, and legal provisions on civic integration and citizenship.

With regard to forced migrants, the asylum regime represents a strong regulatory framework that limits migrants' opportunities for membership as long as they are asylum seekers. This regards restrictions in access to different sectors of society and available services, in particular the labour market and educational programmes. Research points to the impact on daily life due to these legal restrictions and consequences on belonging. Indirectly, these legal restrictions can limit further opportunities for participation, if forced migrants cannot generate income from employment and do not have the financial resources to afford, for example, public transport and participation in leisure activities.

Research on identity and belonging views civic integration programmes as tools “for protecting and defining the boundaries of belonging across Europe” (Onasch 2017, 2) and they are linked to the acquisition of legal status, ranging from first entry permits (e.g., language pre-entry requirements) to permanent residence and citizenship (Goodman 2012, 664). In other words, civic integration requirements can define criteria on how to achieve higher levels of belonging in legal terms. The tools and instruments include, on the regulatory level, prescribed levels of language competences, specifications on written commitments that immigrants are required to sign (e.g., “Reception and Integration Contract” in France (Onasch 2017), “Integration Agreement” in Austria (Pöschl 2012)) and types of proofs to document the required criteria, such as specifications on course curricula, language tests, citizenship tests, and oaths. Thereby, requirements have increased since their introduction in many European states, increasing, for example, language competences and knowledge on the laws and values of the receiving societies, required proof of these competences, as well as the groups of migrants subject to such civic integration requirements (Goodman 2010; 2012). Furthermore, civic integration programmes include regulatory and economic sanctions. Regulatory sanctions and consequences in case of failure to fulfil civic integration requirements can regard the right to immigrate (e.g. integration requirements prior to immigration for family migrants) (Onasch 2017, 6), the right to obtain an

extension or long-term residence permit, as well as removed access to citizenship as long as the requirements are not met. Research points here to differences between the levels of government and highlights that subnational levels can turn migrants into “regional citizens”, despite a restrictive national framework (Manatschal, Wisthaler, and Zuber 2020, 1477, 1480). Additionally, civic integration requirements are found to be more pronounced in regions with a distinct history of statehood and/or a cultural and linguistic identity (so-called “Rokkan states”), adding an additional regional layer to integration requirements and expecting immigrants to adopt to regional languages and culture (Wisthaler, Verena 2021).

A further topic addressed in research on identity belonging can be resumed under the heading of “access to mainstream services”. This involves, on the regulatory level, the right to access services, such as the health care system (Lindqvist and Wettergren 2018) and draw on its services (see next section).

***(1) Economic or market-based (incl. financial incentives and sanctions, funding, financial support)***

Economic and market-based tools and instruments that research addresses in regard to migrants’ identity and belonging include the provision of language courses, some forms of work (community service, voluntary work), and minor or basic educational programmes. Despite general legal restrictions in access to different sectors of society during pending asylum procedures, research points to initiatives and approaches (at the subnational level) that provide specific/sectoral opportunities within general restrictions, such as access to community service activities, voluntary work, and basic vocational training as some limited activities in the host society, which provide a sense of normality within a period of general uncertainty. Leisure activities as part of integration policy are discussed for the Nordic countries, in particular in regard to “nature-based integration (NBI)”, such as guided walks in the nature (Singleton 2021; Pitkänen u. a. 2017).

In education, research suggests for students learning the language of instruction, to provided activities that correspond to the their level of cognitive development and allow them to fully express themselves, achieved using semiotic systems other than language, such as image, photo, and video (Pickel 2021).

Further mainstream sectors and services can be relevant for migrants’ identity and belonging, as seen in a Swedish study which reports for access to psychotherapy (Lindqvist and Wettergren 2018).

Linked to regulatory civic integration requirements are certain economic and market-based tools and instruments that are provided to migrants in order to fulfil these criteria, in particular language

courses and some forms of orientation courses. In some countries, such courses were specifically introduced for post-2014 migrants, as seen, in Austria, with its value and orientation courses for refugees that obtained refugee or subsidiary protection after 2014 (Skrivanek and Faustmann 2019, 104f.).

**(2) Informational / communication- based (information campaigns, public statements, events, social media, videos)**

Narratives on migration and integration (as part of city branding efforts) are named as a potential tool at the local level to foster “more inclusive, integrated and cohesive communities” (Kierans 2019, 6) and shift the boundaries of belonging by redefining who is and who is not welcomed to the public space (Kierans 2019, 6; Belabas, Eshuis, and Scholten 2020, 14). Thereby, telling past and present stories about the place, history, and values is suggested as a way to create a sense of identity and belonging and contributing to a place-based narrative (Kierans 2019, 33; Hadj-Abdou 2014). Research on forced migrants found that an understanding and knowledge on local culture and history can create a sense of belonging and rootedness to that place, despite a limbo-like situation during pending asylum procedures (O’Reilly 2018, 18). A current project (2017-2023) on city level initiatives is “Inclusive Cities”<sup>48</sup> in the UK, where Kierans (2019, 34–49) provides an overview of initiatives in different European and North American cities. Public events can address migration related diversity in a country or locality. For example, “Refugee Week”<sup>49</sup> is an annual UK-wide festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary, providing refugees a space to share their experiences, perspectives and creative work. It was founded in 1998 and is an umbrella festival that includes arts festivals, exhibitions, and film screenings as well as museum tours, football tournaments, public talks, and activities in schools alongside media and creative campaigns (Khan 2014, 291).

In regard to post-2014 policy responses, Perron (Perron 2020) shows how Germany’s founding narrative of flight and expulsion was reframed by leading politicians and media in 2015-16, making links between Germany’s own past experience of forced migration at the end of and after the Second World War and the “refugee crisis” unfolding in 2015. This shift would have broken with the previous general understanding that this experience of “flight and expulsion” was different from migration and decreased constructed borders between native Germans and all other newcomers, reminding “the German[s] that migration has been an integral part of German society

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/inclusive-cities/>

<sup>49</sup> <https://refugeeweek.org.uk/about/>

for decades and reinforces the new self-perception of Germany as a country of immigration” (Perron 2020, 11f.).

### **(3) Participatory (based on volunteering, mentorship, community building initiatives)**

Tools and instruments related to **leisure activities** can largely differ in their form and degree of institutionalisation, ranging from informal and self-organised forms of fandom and practicing a leisure activity (e.g. football), to some basic institutional support from non-public organisations as in-kind benefits (such as providing a room where people can meet), and small financial subsidies (e.g., to rent a room, afford public transportation to reach the place) and state funded leisure activities. The latter, focusing on nature-based activities, has increased in prominence in Nordic countries (Gentin u. a. 2019; Singleton 2021; Pitkänen u. a. 2017).

Research also points to the role of religious **communities** for migrants’ identity and feelings of belonging. It can provide opportunities to establish social relations within the local community (e.g. go to church, mosque) as well as being part of a transnational community (O’Reilly 2018).

## **9.6 Effectiveness and Outcomes of instruments and tools**

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### **in identity and belonging**

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In regard to the effectiveness and outcomes of integration policy instruments and practices, research states that belonging can create, at the individual level, a meaning and feeling of safety (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 241; Lambert u. a. 2013). This can contribute to overall well-being (Chase 2013, 867f.; Marksteiner, Janke, and Dickhäuser 2019, 46) at the individual level and social cohesion at the societal level (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 241; Schiefer and van der Noll 2017).

Research highlights that being subject to a specific institutional regime can transform an identity, as “the need to conform to an institutionally imposed stereotype can both reinforce control and transform an identity” (Zetter 1991, 45). Here, research points to liminal situations of asylum seekers (whereby these observations seem relevant for further groups of migrants with uncertain or irregular status). The period of seeking asylum implies waiting for verification or refusal of refugee status and represents an “in-between existence” in spatial and temporal terms.



Internalising this limbo situation can lead to feeling liminal, which O’Reilly has termed “ontological liminality” (O’Reilly 2018). Ontological liminality describes “the ways in which a chronic sense of fear, insecurity, invisibility, and a highly controlled existence are lived and internalized”-(O’Reilly 2018, 3). In other words, the “in-between existence becomes part of one’s identity and everyday lived experience” (O’Reilly 2018, 14). Despite these transitional, in-between situations, which can prevent asylum seekers from becoming part of the host society, forms of belonging, attachment and connection can evolve with places and people where asylum seekers are accommodated. These connections can stem from voluntary work, access to (certain) educational programmes, religious practices, and familiarity with the history and culture of the place where asylum seekers are accommodated. Voluntary work and (limited) educational programmes (which asylum seekers are permitted to access) are found, as such “loopholes to integration and belonging in a system which discourages both” (O’Reilly 2018, 17), helping to occupy the minds during long and undefined periods of waiting and preventing “deskilling”. Religion has also been mentioned as a source and space to develop some forms of belonging. Churches and mosques are found to provide a sense of community as well as transnational links and membership in an inter/transnational community (O’Reilly 2018, 18). Furthermore, “an understanding and knowledge of the history and culture of where one lives creates a sense of belonging to that place, a certain ownership over it and rootedness with it”. This is attributed to an understanding and knowledge of local history and culture (O’Reilly 2018, 18).

While the observation that a specific institutional regime can transform an identity has been made in regard to national asylum systems, other institutional regimes can have similar impacts, as a study shows for practices within the German welfare state and labour market administration, which devalued degrees and previous work experience of Syrian refugees in Germany and expressing “the superiority of cultured people over those who are not cultured” (Bourdieu 2014, 158). The study finds not only neglect in bureaucratic practices as job centre agents to do not draw on national foreign labour credentials accreditation infrastructures, but also stresses that neglect and dismissal of previous experiences and skills devalues refugees’ habitus and “hope to return to a version of their previous selves” (Etzel 2021, 12)<sup>50</sup>, encouraging them to give up past identities of class and professional status. Regarding health and belonging, a Swedish study finds that migrants in psychotherapy seek belonging in symbolic terms (formal access and right to health care), as well as in a deeper emotional sense (therapist as a local adviser) (Lindqvist and Wettergren 2018). A “social-belonging intervention” at German universities finds that such “mindset interventions” can support disadvantaged migrant students with tools to better manage

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<sup>50</sup> With reference to (Jackson 2005; 2008).

the challenges of the host society and culture (Marksteiner, Janke, and Dickhäuser 2019, 54). Citizenship policies represent a formal barrier to belonging by setting requirements (Simonsen 2016, 1156). While research highlights on the one hand, that settler societies and early democratisers rely on attainable boundary markers for national membership (such as language skills, respect for the country’s institutions and laws, and simply feeling as part of the nation) that allow boundary crossing (Simonsen 2016, 1156), there are also findings that point to a cultural bias in citizenship regimes, such as the British, which would exclude the most vulnerable groups of migrants from actually accessing citizenship, creating “stratified tiers of belonging for migrants” (Morrice 2017a, 606). Research points to difficulties to actually cross boundaries when the host country’s values are kept as distinct and superior to migrant values, as found for the French civic integration programme (Onasch 2017, 14)<sup>51</sup>. It reflects and reproduces existing racial hierarchies of the French nation into which migrants are assumed to integrate as post-colonial migrants, reflecting the historical and contemporary contrast to construct a European, French nation:

“The program discourse thus racialized participants by assigning them essentialist, differentially valued characteristics and locating them in the long-standing relationship between Europeans and non-Europeans.”(Onasch 2017, 13)

However, inclusive integration policies<sup>52</sup> can have a positive impact on the naturalisation intentions of EU/EFTA citizens and on immigrants from less developed countries “after a certain period of exposure” (Bennour 2020, 8), acting as material and symbolic means to influence immigrants’ naturalisation intentions. They define material resources, such as access to societal domains and support measures to meet requirements for long-term residence titles and citizenship, such as language competences. On the symbolic level, they send signals from authorities to non-citizens who have legitimate membership with the national community (Bennour 2020, 2f.)<sup>53</sup>.

Thereby, research points to the role of subnational levels to foster belonging and establish a sense of embeddedness. Against partial exclusion from the national level, such as excluding asylum seekers from integration policies and restricting labour market access, subnational policies can be more inclusive and provide local opportunity structures for (forced) migrants to establish a sense of embeddedness and belonging. This is evident among the various inclusive city level policies providing minor employment, language courses, and some educational programmes (e.g., basic VET). These can provide some normality and naturalness in contrast to waiting, sleeping, boredom

<sup>51</sup> With reference to (Balibar 1991, Lewis 2005).

<sup>52</sup> Inclusiveness was derived from an “Integration Policy Index” (established by (Manatschal 2011).

<sup>53</sup> With reference to (Witte 2014, 195,205)

and lonesome life in reception facilities (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 246; O’Reilly<sup>54</sup> 2018, 16f.). Subnational integration policy making can turn migrants into “regional citizens” and provide alternative loci for emotional belonging and identification, by granting (some) access to labour markets, social benefits, political rights, recognition of cultural diversity, and strengthening their identification with and political engagement in the respective regions (Manatschal, Wisthaler, and Zuber 2020, 1481f.). While subnational levels can foster some sense of belonging and social normality in an otherwise exceptional or exclusionary situation, it can create an increasing dilemma at the individual level due to conflicting policy logics. Individual integration efforts at the local and regional level may be disregarded by national immigration authorities, such as in decisions on a right to stay (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 247f.).

Furthermore, research finds actions of (forced) migrants that resist to prescribed forms of identity, for example, as imposed by civic integration policies. Khan speaks of processes of “disidentification” (Khan 2014, 286). Khan views British civic integration policies (termed as “citizenship classes, tests, and oaths’ policy”), which have evolved since the mid-2000s, as technocratic attempts to manage diversity by constructing “an ‘imagined’ British identity”. Furthermore, Khan finds different forms of social actions that forced migrants (asylum seekers and refugees) deploy in order to challenge and resist public misconceptions of asylum seekers and refugees, reconstructing stereotypes and communicating their diverse ethnic and cultural values and experience to locals. This includes arts, culture, volunteering, befriending, and parenting (Khan 2014, 285f., 291). Taken together, measures and activities that disrupt the daily routine of waiting and uncertainty bring some sense of normality and dignity to forced migrants. This involves state provided/supported opportunities, such as some forms of employment (occasional work, voluntary, work, and community service activities), educational programmes (language courses and basic vocational training), as well as self-organised activities supported by public and non-public actors (charities) (O’Reilly 2018).

Several studies focus on the role of leisure activities for feelings of belonging and identity of (forced) migrants. They find different outcomes. Leisure activities, such as football or music making (De Martini Ugolotti 2020; Lewis 2015; Khan 2014), can be a local sphere of belonging as well as a resource for belonging across nations and localities (Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021, 4; De Martini Ugolotti 2020, 3, 12, 41). For forced migrants, leisure activities can provide a possibility to “disrupt apparently unescapable subject positions, such as ‘refugee’, ‘service user’, and ultimately ‘guest’” and experience a form of belonging that goes beyond the relationalities of host-

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<sup>54</sup> With reference to: Saskia Sassen, „The Repositioning of Citizenship: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics“, *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, Nr. 2 (2003): 41–66, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2003.0028>.

refugee relationships and experiences of hostility and exclusion (De Martini Ugolotti 2020, 40f.). The researched activities mainly evolved from below, by migrants themselves and with some support from (non-public) actors, providing in-kind benefits, such as a room to meet, or small subsidies to rent a room or afford public transportation to reach the activities. Performing such leisure activities can be a source of continuity and confidence that migrants bring with them on their migration journey and can draw on during displacement and then settling in a new country (Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021, 7). However, outcomes on belonging range, as described for football, from “bounded engagement” (limited to the activity not transcending beyond) to institutionalised community programmes and transnational intragroup belonging (Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021, 8–10). A further study (on participatory arts-based research) points to challenges in how such activities can create an inclusive sphere of belonging, in particular if working with marginalised groups, whose belonging is often constrained and contingent (Nunn 2020; 2018). In the concrete participatory arts-based project, a 15-year-old Syrian woman had written and sung a song, but subsequently developed concerns how the evolving Syrian refugee community around her would perceive that. While she did not sing in a following exhibition event and just played the drums, her family was approached by several Syrian community members voicing concerns and showing incongruencies between the young woman’s transformation and “a community still grappling with ethno-religious and gendered politics of (non)belonging in a new, post-migration socio-cultural context”. (Nunn 2020) Similarly, limitations are reported in football, being gendered, addressing mainly young, abled bodied men, and finding uneven recognition by receiving societies due to classed, racialised, gendered, and autochthonic politics (Nunn, Spaaij, and Luguetti 2021, 11). Furthermore, research points to the role of discourse and everyday interactions with members of the majority population for migrants’ sense of belonging, which can be more important for subjective belonging than legal policies (e.g., citizenship policies). This is explained by the fact that immigrants engage less frequently and directly with formal boundaries (of a citizenship regime), compared to experiences of informal and subtle boundary drawing in everyday encounters (Simonsen 2019; Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 243). A study on how media discourses on Muslims impact on Dutch Somalis’ sense of ‘belonging’ in the Netherlands finds that current media discourse is predominantly experienced as negative and exclusionary in nature, but migrant responses vary, reproducing and reconstructing boundaries. This includes increased in-group solidarity and affirmation of religious bonds as Muslims, disengaging from simplistic media discourse and claiming a right to belong, while others showed fluctuating belonging that intersects with class, religion, and ethnic hierarchies (Kassaye, Ashur, and van Heelsum 2016, 783ff.). A study in Istanbul and Vienna finds that forced migrants are sensitive to public notions of “us” and “them” with regard to Islam in both localities. National political discourses largely differ, referencing a shared cultural heritage and religious brotherhood

in Turkey and showing high scepticism towards Islam in Austria. The framing in Austria is perceived as racialised, and a marker of difference, while in Turkey it builds a basis for reducing differences between Turks and Arabs (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 244ff.). High scepticism of Islam in national discourse in Austria generates a sense of alienation and anger among forced migrants in Vienna towards national authorities, who they perceive as being more concerned with individual religious affiliations than “what one is doing in terms of integration efforts”, and furthermore perceiving politicians as “promoters of negative discourse on migrants, ... creating stereotypes and setting them in a criminal context” (Rottmann, Josipovic, and Reeger 2020, 248f.). Described real life experiences included welcoming encounters as well as incidents with “normal” people that had adopted the negative discourse. A study on Anglo-Saxon immigration countries and European nation-states (Simonsen 2016) finds differences in the welcoming capacities of Western societies due to different historical roots. Criteria of nationality would rather involve attainable and loose criteria in settler societies (USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), and early democratisers (Great Britain, France, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) that allow for easier boundary crossing and mutual identification among newcomers and established majorities. This concerns criteria such as language skills, respect for the country’s laws and institutions, citizenship, and feeling as part of the nation - in contrast to (more) rigid markers such as ancestry, religion, birthplace, and having lived in the country for most of one’s life (Simonsen 2016, 1156, 1167f.). These findings suggest that the focus on migrants’ feelings of belonging to the host society and national community need to go beyond policy regimes and national models. Furthermore, the study finds a strong positive effect of the level of belonging in the majority population on migrants’ belonging. In “patriotic” societies, immigrants seem more encouraged to belong (Simonsen 2016, 1168). For Germany, a study (Perron 2020) finds for the period of 2015-16, that the leading politicians and the media made links between Germany’s own past experience of forced migration at the end of and after the Second World War and the “refugee crisis” unfolding in 2015. This would have: legitimised government decisions to open the borders; reiterated trust, reminded that Germany managed large inflows under more difficult circumstances in the past; helped to minimise the exceptionality of the current phenomenon; and challenged the common metaphor of “being rooted” as proper way of living. Taken together, it decreased constructed borders between native Germans and all other newcomers, supporting the rather new self-perception of Germany as a country of immigration (Perron 2020, 11f.).

## **9.7 Conclusion**

Overall, issues of identity and belonging represent a fundamental and central domain for integration policies and practices as they concern the position and relationship between

individuals, or “the self”, and society. Debates on migrant integration have become important venues of negotiations of who belongs to a society and under what conditions. Put differently, integration programmes reveal who is perceived as an immigrant and what elements define national belonging. However, research highlights that belonging is a relational and dynamic process that can take place at different scales and (intersecting) spheres, and manifesting in different forms of objective and subjective attachment. Furthermore, belonging can be a positive or negative relation, and one may or may not decide to identify with certain spheres.

Thus, while research points to the complexities of what determines an individual’s identity and feelings of belonging, explicit integration policy measures are rather selective and have been increasingly focused on country knowledge, language proficiency, and adherence to liberal and social values. Moreover, institutional mechanisms can impact substantially on individual identity and feelings of belonging, keeping migrants in a limbo-like situation, devaluing past experiences and competences, reproducing racial hierarchies, and causing contradictions between migrants’ aspirations and policy goals and logics (including conflicting logics between levels of government). Apart from explicit policy instruments and institutional dynamics, research findings emphasise the role of discourse and everyday interactions with members of the majority population for migrants’ sense of belonging, which can be more important for subjective belonging than legal policies.

However, research also finds forms of belonging, attachment, and connection evolving with places and communities where migrants live, as well as social actions of (forced) migrants resisting prescribed forms of identity, challenging and resisting public misconceptions. Arts, culture, volunteering, befriending, and parenting are reported as such venues to challenge misconceptions and develop a sense of belonging and attachment. Different leisure activities can provide such a local sphere of belonging as well as a resource for belonging across nations and localities. This is also reported for religious communities, providing opportunities to establish social relations within the local community (e.g., going to church or to the mosque) and being part of a transnational community. Against partial exclusion from the national level, subnational policies can provide local opportunity structures for (forced) migrants to establish a sense of embeddedness and belonging, as seen with inclusive city level policies providing minor employment, language courses, and some educational programmes (e.g., basic VET), providing alternative loci for emotional belonging and identification.



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