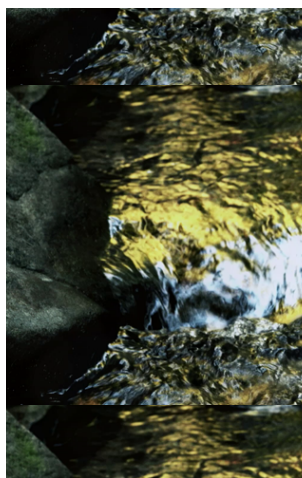


Immigrant integration in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas: local policies and policymaking relations in Austria

Country Reports on multilevel dynamics



By
Isabella Skrivanek,
Tamara
Kerschbaumer, Hakan
Kilic, Albert Kraler
Danube University
Krems



REPORT
<https://whole-comm.eu>





Executive summary

This report examines multi-level governance dynamics, integration policies targeting post-2014 migrants and their implementation in four localities – a small town, a medium-sized town, and two and rural localities in Austria. Based on fieldwork (interviews and an online survey) in each of the selected municipalities, and, where necessary in district capitals and other surrounding localities and complemented by more limited interviews at the provincial and national level and by a document analysis of relevant policy documents and legislation, local media and secondary literature, the report provides an overview of 1) national and regional integration policies targeting post-2014 migrants in Austria; 2) policymaking relations among the key actors involved in these policy processes in the four localities and key features of policy networks within which these actors interact; 3) how these actors perceive and define integration.

In the Austrian case, there is a strong distinction in institutional responsibilities between asylum seekers on the one hand, and humanitarian migrants with asylum and subsidiary protection status, on the other. Initial reception is handled by the federal government, and the provinces are responsible for reception and support of refugees after admission to asylum procedures, but receive funding from the federal government. The local level is not formally involved in the reception and care of asylum seekers, but the establishment of shelters can have an impact on municipalities and they can exert leverage on decisions lobbying or protests. Once a status is granted, beneficiaries of international protection are discharged from the reception system within four months after granting of the status. It is in this transitional phase where local municipalities and other institutions part of the local integration governance infrastructure, such as NGOs, welfare services, or the Public Employment Service acquire a crucial role. This said, municipal and NGO support structures are already relevant during the asylum stage.

The report finds clear differences but also similarities between the studied localities in terms of the challenge of accommodating refugees, implementing measures and dealing with political and social pressure. It is evident that the larger localities already have experience in dealing with migrants and a certain political stability due to an established integration governance infrastructure, while the smaller localities feel the political pressure related to the reception and integration of refugees more strongly and the scope for action is correspondingly smaller.

The development and/or expansion of networks to support newly arrived migrants and refugees had a critical role and was observed in all municipalities, whereas stakeholders see their ability to contribute to policy at higher levels of government as limited. Although, they have a voice in legislative action, they play a minor role in decision-making. In general, it was observed that in all four localities, support from civil society was important to meet the current needs of hosting refugees and providing support during the ongoing asylum process for those migrants still in the procedure.



Contents

Executive summary	1
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Main findings	2
1.2 Methodology	4
2 Introducing the cases	7
2.1 National context	7
2.1.1 Asylum system	9
2.1.2 Distribution of asylum seekers	12
2.1.3 Integration	13
2.1.4 Welfare	15
2.1.5 Policy programmes and instruments	17
2.2 Locality A (Innsbruck)	20
2.3 Locality B	21
2.4 Locality C (St. Pölten)	23
2.5 Locality D	24
3 Overarching Themes	27
3.1 Describing the development of integration policies	27
3.2 Frames of integration (perceptions, discourses)	35
3.3 MLG Dynamics in integration policy-making	41
3.3.1 Mapping the networks	41
3.3.2 Actors' functions and their roles in governance networks	47
3.3.3 Dynamics of cooperation and conflict	49
3.4 Decision-making	55
4 Conclusion	62
5 References	66



List of tables

Table 1: Whole-COMM types of localities	6
Table 2: Net immigration, asylum applications and stock of population, Austria, 2005, 2014-2021	8
Table 3: Overview of main policies and actors	19
Table 4: Dominant frames in different localities	38
Table 5: Dominant factors influencing how local policies are decided and acted upon by actors in different localities.....	61

List of figures

Figure 1: Map of Austrian provinces.....	4
Figure 2: Networks in Innsbruck (Locality A) pre-pandemic	41
Figure 3: Network in Innsbruck (Locality A) post-pandemic	42
Figure 4: Network Locality B pre-pandemic.....	43
Figure 5: Network Locality B post-pandemic	44
Figure 6: Network in St. Pölten (Locality C) pre-pandemic	44
Figure 7: Network in St. Pölten (Locality C) post-pandemic.....	45
Figure 8: Network Locality D pre-pandemic	46
Figure 9: Network Locality D post-pandemic.....	47
Figure 10: Network Collaboration/Conflict Locality A (Innsbruck).....	50
Figure 11: Network Collaboration/Conflict Locality B.....	52
Figure 12: Network Collaboration/Conflict Locality C.....	53
Figure 13: Network Collaboration/ Conflict Locality D	54

The content reflects only the authors' views, and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.



1 Introduction

Over the last few years, Austria has received unprecedented numbers of migrants and asylum seekers, often in an unordered way. This has led to a growing immigrant presence in scarcely prepared *Small and Medium-Sized Towns and Rural Areas (SMsTRA)*¹. The way in which these local communities are responding to the challenges related to migrants' arrival and settlement in their territory is crucial for the future of immigrant integration in Europe. This is even more true if we consider that in 2022 these localities are again on the front line of refugee reception in Europe following the arrival of tens of thousands of Ukrainians in Austria.

This report aims to explore how four small and medium sized towns and rural areas in Austria have responded to the presence of post-2014 migrants². In particular, it takes stock of policies that have been developed and implemented in the selected localities and how SMsTRA have mobilized vis-à-vis the new challenge and in relation to the policies, programmes and funding provided by other levels of government. In doing so, the project looks at the embeddedness of local actors in multilevel frameworks in which regional, national and EU policies and stakeholders may play a decisive role in shaping local integration policymaking. Second, the report analyses the interactions between the actors involved in integration policymaking, asking: what different patterns of interaction can we identify between local (policy) actors and regional/national/supranational authorities and stakeholders? Which factors have led to the emergence of collaborations as well as tensions between actors at different government levels? Are new cooperative relationships eventually emerging and, if so, what are the key features of resulting policy networks? Third, the report asks how the actors involved in these policy networks perceive and frame the integration of post-2014 migrants, under the assumption that frames can play a key role in influencing policymaking processes.

In these localities – which differ in terms of their size, the political affiliation of their local government, their experience with cultural diversity, their economic and demographic situation and that are located in different regions – a total of 72 interviews have been conducted with actors involved in local integration policymaking, including members of local government, local officials, street-level bureaucrats local councilors and a wide range of non-governmental actors. Insights derived from the interview material have been complemented with an in-depth analysis of policy and legal documents.

¹ Small and Medium-Sized Towns and Rural Areas is the term used by the Whole-COMM project(See Caponio & Pettrarchin, 2021)

² The group of migrants that arrived in (Western) Europe after 2014 is very heterogeneous, “but mostly comprises migrants that left from areas of political and humanitarian crises”(Caponio & Pettrarchin, 2021, S. 1–2). The majority of ‘post-2014 migrants’ entered thus as asylum-seekers but may have obtained different legal statuses by now (see for more details Caponio & Pettrarchin, 2021).



1.1 Main findings

Our main findings concern four aspects: the overall structure of the governance framework for (refugee) integration at the national level, the concrete policies developed in regard to integration, the patterns of interactions between policymakers, practitioners and others involved in the area and the frames employed to make sense of integration.

On the national level, there is a **major separation of** institutional responsibilities with regard to asylum seekers on the one hand and beneficiaries of international protection, on the other. Initial reception is handled by the federal government, and the provinces are responsible for reception and support of refugees after admission to asylum procedures. The local level is not formally involved at this stage, but the establishment of shelters can have an impact on municipalities and they can exert leverage on decisions (lobbying, protests). Beneficiaries of international protection have to leave the reception system within four months after a status is granted. It is in this transitional phase where local municipalities and other actors, which are part of the local integration governance infrastructure, acquire a more formal role. The legal distinction of migrants matters on the individual level in terms of integration opportunities, access to integration policy measures and general support for basic needs as well as on the institutional level in regard to division of competences and funding.

The development of **integration policies** is shaped by long-established policy programmes, in particular the National Action Plan on Integration adopted in 2010 (Kraler, 2011). Yet several policies specifically targeting refugees were adopted in response to the 2015 inflows. **integration policies at the local level** largely were a **response to current needs**. Yet these **pressures** were to some extent **created by institutional and market mechanisms shaped at the provincial level**, as the latter is responsible for the refugee reception, and for example concludes contracts for refugee shelters with (local) private property owners.

In terms of policymaking interactions and policy networks, a **commonality** across all municipalities has been the **emergence and/or expansion of refugee support networks** and the crucial role played by these networks. In the two larger localities they complemented, and in the small localities to some extent also substituted local government initiatives. An **important difference** is the **presence of local government structures in the two towns**, both capitals of the respective provinces, and the **absence of such structures in the rural cases**. Similarly, organised civil society – NGOs – has less presence in the smaller localities and associations based on volunteers filled in here and to some extent also framed and implemented local policies. The **opportunities for shaping policies at higher levels of government are experienced as rather limited**. While local level actors do have a say in legislative actions (through providing comments on planned legislation) and sometimes are also consulted, the overall sense is that participation in decisions is limited and moreover, policies on the national level are often experienced as of limited relevance for the practical challenges occurring at the local level. While the local level is formally not involved in reception and support of asylum seekers, the establishment of shelters has impacted on local policy agendas in the two rural cases, triggering interactions with higher levels. **In all four localities, civil society support was relevant for addressing current needs of refugee**



reception and support during pending asylum procedures as well as supporting their integration after they obtained asylum or subsidiary protection status. In case of the towns, the integration offices coordinated with and supported, respectively, local volunteers from civil society, while in the rural cases it were members of the local governments that coordinated with civil society initiatives.

Frames that cut across localities are an observed **welcoming atmosphere/approach** towards refugees in the beginning (2015-2016), which turned into reservations and resentment subsequently; a focus on **“contacts between locals and migrants”** helping to reduce concerns on the side of locals and supporting integration processes; a basic understanding of **integration as “a two-way process” that concerns “both sides” but with different orientations about integration** (mutual acceptance as baseline, acceptance of multiple cultures but requests for dialogue and interactions) and preconditions for **such a coexistence and living together** (basic consensus on norms and rules, residential distribution of different groups). Interviewees of the public sector and from NGOs point also to **“integration” as a policy concept** with relevance for funding applications, project implementation and the situation of migrants (disintegration framework for asylum seekers, integration obligations for certain groups, potential relevance for asylum procedures). A further frame across localities is **(successful) socio-economic integration and knowledge of German** as facilitator for employment and for making contacts with locals. In contrast, only a few interviewees refer to **psychosocial well-being, feelings of attachment and belonging**. Specific frames of the four localities are reducing residential segregation in St. Pölten – the town studied in Lower Austria (and the provincial capital), keeping the number of asylum seekers within acceptable limits in the rural municipality studied in Lower Austria, competing frames of “we are open” versus “people want to stay among themselves” in the rural municipality studied in Tyrol, and fostering encounters and affordable housing in Innsbruck, the town studied in Tyrol and – as St. Pölten, a provincial capital. The rural cases share **concerns on (the arrival/number of) asylum seekers** in their localities. This is in contrast to the medium-sized and small town, where such concerns were not voiced/reported prominently by interviewees.

The report is organized as follows. In the first and second section, the national context and the localities that were investigated are presented in terms of their demographic, economic and political constellation. Section 3 is divided into four subsections. First, the temporal evolution of integration policies in Austria and the four localities, respectively, are described. Next the perceptions of newly arrived migrants are presented on the basis of the interview material. In the following subsection, a network analysis based on an online survey is presented, explaining the connections and interactions between the different actors. In the penultimate subsection, the decision-making mechanisms are presented. Finally, section 4 presents our conclusions.

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 (See for more details Caponio & Pettrarchin, 2021).

1.2 Methodology

In Austria, four cases were selected. To ensure regional variation, the four selected communities are distributed across two provinces, namely Tyrol (Tirol) and Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), as shown in figure 1, below. While receiving fewer asylum seekers than the capital region of Vienna both provinces accommodated significant numbers of displaced persons in the framework of Austria's dispersal policies in force since 2004.

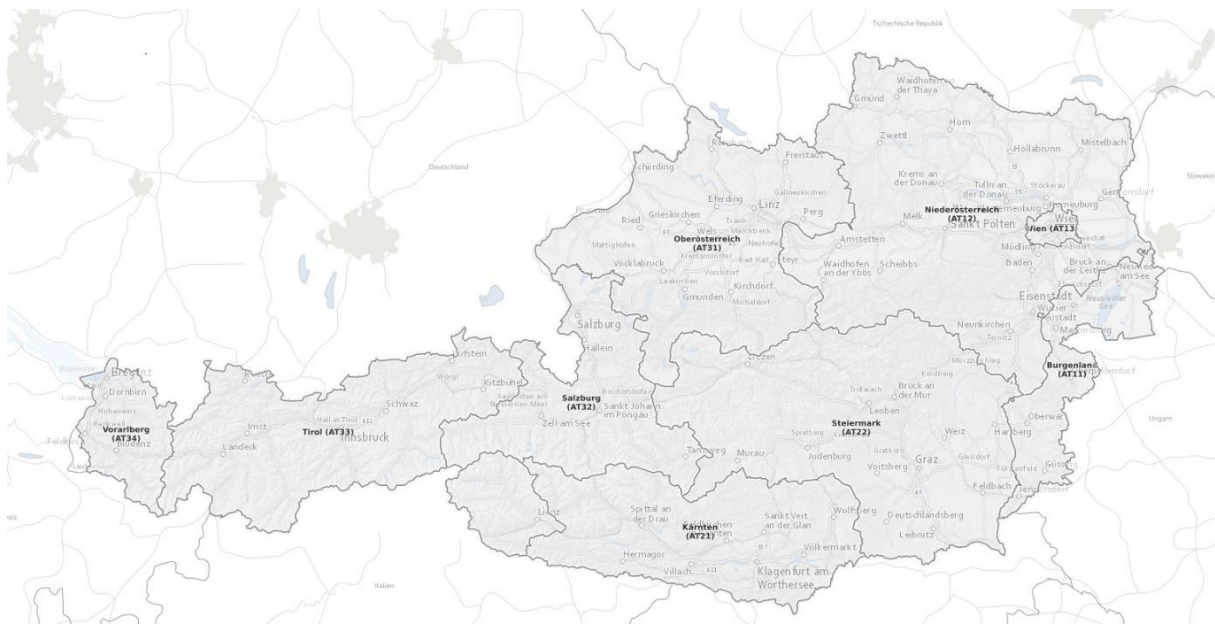


Figure 1: Map of Austrian provinces

Source: STATAtlas, <https://www.statistik.at/atlas/>.

The province of **Tyrol**, located in the West, is the third largest province of Austria with 751,000 inhabitants and an area of 12,648 km², bordering Germany in the North, Italy and Switzerland in the South and Southwest. Tyrol has a long history of migration and has also more recently received significant numbers of migrants reflected in the composition of the population: In early 2021, 19.2% of Tyrol's population was born abroad of which some 60.3% come from EU and EFTA countries. Among third countries, Syria and Afghanistan are amongst the five most important countries of origin (after Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia), having been hardly present in the beginning of the millennium. Tyrol is an economically strong province, although it was recently hard hit by the Pandemic and its impact on tourism. The two localities selected are a medium-sized town (the provincial capital Innsbruck also referred to as locality A) and a rural municipality (Locality B).

Located in the North-East, **Lower Austria** is the second largest province in Austria with 1.69 million inhabitants and the largest province in terms of area with 19,179.56 km². It surrounds the federal capital Vienna and has international borders with the Czech Republic and Slovakia



to the North and Northeast, respectively. Lower Austria has a long history of migration, especially the regions South of the capital and those west of it. At the same time, there are large relatively sparsely populated rural regions with limited migration. As a result, the share of the foreign born population of 13.2% is well below the national share of about 20%. In economic terms, Lower Austria's profile is mixed. Our two case study locations both fare less well in economic terms, in particular compared to the municipalities in Tyrol. The two localities selected are a small-sized town (the provincial capital St. Pölten also referred to as locality C) and a rural municipality (Locality D), which is also the capital of one of Lower-Austria's 24 districts and statutory towns.³

Empirical data for this report was collected in the period October 2021 until April 2022. Data collection comprised document analysis and semi-structured qualitative interviews with respondents at the local, regional/provincial, and national level. Potential respondents were sampled based on their (professional) positions, e.g., as local official working on integration in a municipality or employee in an NGO offering non-profit services to refugees. Most respondents were contacted through email first (in German), occasionally followed by a reminder and a call. After establishing first contacts in a municipality, other respondents were identified using the method of 'snowball sampling' (Bryman 2016). In total, 72 interviews with 74 respondents were conducted. All interviews were conducted in German, except one in Turkish, and recorded. On the basis of the interviews, summary protocols in English were prepared. These were coded and analyzed using MAXQDA text analysis software. In addition, respondents were asked to complete a short online survey asking respondents about the assessment of the situation in their respective municipalities, their networks to and interaction with other stakeholders and institutions. Overall, 53 respondents submitted a response. In this report, the survey results was largely used for the network analysis.

As part of the ethics protocol the project follows, as adjusted for the specific Austrian context all respondents were promised full anonymity. In addition, the names of localities were planned to be withheld to protect research participants. However, as the two towns – the provincial capital of Tyrol Innsbruck, and the provincial capital of Lower Austria, St. Pölten are easy to identify for anyone familiar with the Austrian context and the much denser institutional and organisational 'integration infrastructure' in these localities means that it individual stakeholders cannot be easily be identified given the far higher number of individuals involved we opted to disclose the name of the localities. By contrast, we keep the names of rural municipalities studied confidential, as individual stakeholders are much more vulnerable to be identified.

The four localities on which this report focuses were selected based on several different variables. All localities hosted a reception centre for asylum-seekers or refugees between 2014 and 2017 and were still hosting some post-2014 migrants in late 2021. Case selection

³ A statutory town in Austria also is responsible for providing the functions of district authorities.



was conducted in the framework of the broader Whole-COMM project (see Caponio and Pettrachin 2021 for more details) in order to maximize variation among a set of variables including: population size⁴, the share of non-EU migrant residents before the arrival of post-2014 migrants, unemployment levels before the arrival of post-2014 migrants, demographic trends before the arrival of post-2014 migrants, the political parties in government (conservative vs progressive). Some of these variables were additionally used to identify **four** types of localities:

Type	Characteristics	Selected cases in Austria
Type A	Recovering local economy and improving demographic profile, migrants' settlement before 2014	Municipality A (Innsbruck) = medium size town Province Tyrol, region: West
Type B	Improving economic and demographic situation, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	Municipality B = Rural Province Tyrol, region: West
Type C	Demographic and economic decline, migrants' settlement before 2014	Municipality C (St. Pölten) = Small town Province Lower Austria, region: East
Type D	Economic and demographic decline, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	Municipality D = Rural area Province Lower Austria, region: North-East

Table 1: Whole-COMM types of localities

⁴ The Whole-COMM project distinguishes between medium towns (i.e., provincial/regional capitals with between 100,000 and 250,000 inhabitants), small towns (i.e., localities with between 50,000 and 80,000 inhabitants that are either provincial/regional capitals within rural regions/provinces or do not have any administrative function) and rural areas (i.e., localities with less than 30,000 inhabitants and a low population density).



2 Introducing the cases

2.1 National context

As outlined, the focus of the Whole-Comm project is on the integration of migrants that arrived after 2014. In line with the definition of “post-2014 migrants”, the majority that came to Austria in 2015 and 2016 comprised migrants “that left from areas of political and humanitarian crises”. Austria recorded a sharp increase in asylum applications, amounting to 88,300 in 2015 and 42,300 in 2016. Preceding and until 2021, when the number of asylum applications sharply rose again, numbers were significantly lower and the majority of annual net immigration concerned citizens from other EU member states. Regarding the latter, data show an increase of annual net immigration of Bulgarian and Romanian citizens since 2014. By the end of December 2013, the transitional arrangements on the free movement of workers stopped to apply for these two countries. Table 2 provides an overview of annual net immigration, asylum applications and the stock of population for 2005 and the period 2014-2021.

The **stock of the migrant population** (here foreign citizens) has increased substantially in this time period, rising **from 774,000 foreigners in 2005 to 1.1 mio. in 2014 and 1.5 mio. in 2021**. The shares of foreigners increased from 9.4 % in 2005, to 12.5 % in 2014 and 17.1 % in 2021. While in 2005, almost 62% of foreigners were non-EU citizens and 37% citizens of another EU-member state⁵, the shares have ranged around 50% for both groups in the period 2014-2021.

While the majority of annual net immigration stemmed from other EU-member states since 2006, the humanitarian inflows changed this pattern temporarily. In 2015, only 35 % of annual net immigration stemmed from other EU member states and 65 % from non-EU countries. In 2016, the share from other EU countries was still lower than in preceding years, amounting to 49 %, but returned to and superseded preceding shares thereafter.

The humanitarian inflows around 2015 brought new groups of migrants to Austria in terms of countries of origin, in particular from Syria as well as increasing the number of Afghans and to a lesser extent of Iraqis in Austria. Austria recorded less than 1,000 Syrian residents in its population statistics in 2005. Their number increased to more than 55,000 in 2021. In case of Afghans, numbers were already higher in 2005 (3,300) and in 2014 (14,000) and have increased to 44,000 in 2021. The number of Iraqis amounted to 1,400 in 2005 and to 13,400 in 2021.

⁵ EU members states by 2021, i.e. including the accession states of 2004, 2007 and 2013 and excluding the United Kingdom.



<i>Citizenship</i>	<i>Year</i>	2005	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 ²⁾
Annual net immigration of foreigners to Austria										
Foreign citizens		48,195	77,743	118,517	69,720	49,773	40,017	44,956	41,901	
EU-26 (excl. UK)		19,324	47,612	41,211	34,123	33,234	31,730	33,165	30,764	
EU prior to 2004		10,175	10,152	11,690	9,643	9,187	9,626	11,486	12,211	
Germany		8,639	5,562	6,422	5,442	5,587	6,052	7,227	9,008	
Italy		296	2,183	2,566	1,804	1,721	1,503	1,690	1,604	
EU since 2004		9,149	37,460	29,521	24,480	24,047	22,104	21,679	18,553	
Poland		3,909	3,494	2,729	1,929	1,589	819	750	836	
Slovakia		1,478	3,057	2,681	2,239	1,560	1,350	1,229	1,275	
Hungary		1,047	7,798	7,535	5,972	5,550	4,614	4,036	2,824	
Bulgaria		266	3,405	2,542	2,183	2,201	2,181	2,400	1,369	
Romania		1,356	12,710	8,250	7,531	8,416	8,648	8,718	6,318	
Croatia		533	4,022	3,218	2,567	2,701	2,816	2,860	4,770	
Non-EU¹⁾		28,704	29,902	77,005	35,371	16,255	8,015	11,459	10,100	
Afghanistan		557	2,709	18,609	8,992	149	-1,273	-803	157	
Iraq		125	683	10,002	720	-359	-782	-297	-97	
Syria		87	7,128	21,903	7,839	5,842	1,276	1,060	3,286	
Shares					<i>in %</i>					
EU citizens		40.1	61.2	34.8	48.9	66.8	79.3	73.8	73.4	
Non-EU ¹⁾ citizens		59.6	38.5	65.0	50.7	32.7	20.0	25.5	24.1	
Annual asylum applications										
Total		22,461	28,064	88,340	42,285	24,735	13,746	12,886	14,775	38,638
Afghanistan		923	5,076	25,563	11,794	3,781	2,120	2,979	3,137	8,461
Iraq		221	1,105	13,633	2,862	1,403	762	729	724	1,001
Syria		77	7,730	24,547	8,773	7,356	3,329	2,708	5,121	15,796
Stock of population										
Total		8,201.359	8,507.786	8,584.926	8,700.471	8,772.865	8,822.267	8,858.775	8,901.064	8,932.664
Austrian citizens		7,426.958	7,441.672	7,438.848	7,432.797	7,430.935	7,426.387	7,419.852	7,414.841	7,401.592
Foreign citizens		774,401	1,066.114	1,146.078	1,267.674	1,341.930	1,395.880	1,438.923	1,486.223	1,531.072
EU-26 (excl. UK)		283,149	509,377	560,680	606,439	645,156	683,174	719,239	757,420	793,687
EU prior to 2004		125,280	221,437	231,613	243,093	252,435	261,343	270,607	282,264	294,709
Germany		91,194	164,820	170,475	176,463	181,618	186,841	192,426	199,993	208,732
Italy		11,727	20,195	22,465	25,327	27,290	29,186	30,909	32,490	34,266
EU since 2004		157,869	287,940	329,067	363,346	392,721	421,831	448,632	475,156	498,978
Poland		26,554	50,271	54,262	57,589	60,079	62,190	63,429	64,429	65,604
Slovakia		11,322	28,612	32,052	35,326	38,094	40,182	41,957	43,621	45,362
Hungary		15,133	46,264	54,939	63,550	70,584	77,113	82,712	87,516	91,395
Bulgaria		6,284	15,942	19,607	22,411	24,923	27,428	29,920	32,528	34,241
Croatia		61,869	61,959	66,475	70,248	73,334	76,682	79,999	83,596	89,007
Romania		21,314	59,702	73,374	82,949	92,095	102,270	112,684	123,459	131,824
Non-EU¹⁾		477,126	538,745	566,915	642,186	677,201	692,600	699,098	707,780	715,856
Afghanistan		3,306	14,016	16,779	35,618	45,259	45,724	44,420	43,654	44,002
Iraq		1,384	3,240	3,873	13,884	14,802	14,536	13,753	13,482	13,440
Syria		910	4,268	11,255	33,313	41,672	48,103	49,813	51,502	55,372
Shares					<i>in %</i>					
EU citizens (foreigners)		36.6	47.8	48.9	47.8	48.1	48.9	50.0	51.0	51.8
Non-EU ¹⁾ citizens (foreigner)		61.6	50.5	49.5	50.7	50.5	49.6	48.6	47.6	46.8
Foreigners (total population)		9.4	12.5	13.3	14.6	15.3	15.8	16.2	16.7	17.1

¹⁾ excl. EFTA, associated small states, UK, ²⁾ preliminary asylum data for 2021

Source: Statistics Austria, Migration Statistics (Wanderungsstatistik); Statistics Austria, Ministry of Interior, Asylum Statistics; Statistics Austria, Population Statistics (Statistik des Bevölkerungsstands), own calculation of shares.

Table 2: Net immigration, asylum applications and stock of population, Austria, 2005, 2014-2021



Taken together, **Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis represent the largest groups of post-2014 migrants** in Austria “that left from areas of political and humanitarian crises”. While Austria had already a substantial stock of migrants, including EU- and non-EU citizens prior to these inflows, and inflows did not stem from humanitarian migration alone in this period, policy agendas and policy development centred on this group between 2014 and 2020 (before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic).

2.1.1 Asylum system

For the group of migrants that enter through the asylum system, there is a **major distinction between those who applied for asylum** and whose status is still being determined, i.e. asylum seekers, **and those who obtained a positive decision** on their asylum application, i.e. beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection. Since June 2016, **asylum is initially granted for a limited period of three years**. If the grounds for asylum continue to apply after that time, **it turns into a permanent right of residence**. Prior to that, the right of asylum was immediately granted for an indefinite period. **Subsidiary protection** is granted to persons whose asylum application has been rejected for a lack of persecution, but whose life or integrity is threatened in their country of origin. They are not entitled to asylum, but receive temporary protection from deportation. The status can be extended if conditions continue to apply. Subsidiary protection is **initially granted for one year, and for two years in case of renewal** (BMDW, 2022).

These differences in legal status matter on the individual level in terms of integration opportunities, access to integration policy measures and general support for basic needs as well as on the institutional level in regard to division of competences and funding. The broad distinction is between asylum seekers, whose status is yet unclear, and beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection. Over the last years, the **differences in terms of rights** have increased between beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection: While previously beneficiaries of asylum had obtained a permanent right of residence in Austria immediately, asylum is now granted for an initial period of 3 years only, while, subsidiary protection by definition is a temporary protection status. Also since June 2016, the waiting period for family reunification increased for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from one to three years (*Empfehlungen der Kindeswohlkommission, 2021*). Several of the nine provinces (*Bundesländer*) have excluded beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from mainstream social welfare benefits (see below for Lower Austria). Already since 2007, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection obtain family allowance only if they are in employment, while beneficiaries of asylum are entitled irrespective of their employment status and potential welfare benefit receipt.⁶

Since 2004, **labour market access of asylum seekers is restricted to seasonal work and self-employed work** in Austria. Besides employment, asylum seekers can do auxiliary tasks directly

⁶§ 3 Abs 3-4 FLAG 1967 i.d.F. BGBl. I Nr. 168/2006. Cf. also ABZ

related to the refugee shelter (e.g. cleaning, maintenance, in the canteen) or community-based auxiliary tasks for public entities and – if regulated by decree – for NGOs. They obtain a minor remuneration (Anerkennungsbeitrag) for performing such activities.⁷ Given this situation, asylum seekers largely depend on public support unless they have sufficient economic means on their own. **Prior to 2017, there have not been any federal integration policy measures available to asylum seekers.** Since the adoption of the Integration Act and Integration Year Act in 2017 (see below), asylum seekers with a high probability of recognition have access to integration policy measures as specified in the two laws. In contrast to federal level provisions and services, provinces may have provided some form of integration measures to asylum seekers already in the past.

Refugee reception and support is a shared task between the federal level and the provinces (Länder). The basic welfare support agreement of 2004 between the federal level and provinces regulates the provision of shelter, food and medical care to asylum seekers who have not sufficient resources to maintain themselves. In the admission **phase of an asylum procedure, the federal level is responsible for reception and basic support.**⁸ **After applicants are admitted to the asylum procedure in Austria, the provinces** have to provide basic welfare support to asylum seekers.⁹

Apart from satisfying essential needs, **“basic welfare support” (Grundversorgung) includes information, counselling and social assistance for orientation** in Austria and for voluntary return¹⁰, and, if needed, measures to structure daily routines¹¹. Explicit “integration” support is only specified for unaccompanied minors in terms of an integration plan where appropriate¹² and costs for German courses (a maximum of 200 units and 3,63€/person).

In addition to the agreement between the federal level and the provinces, **the latter have their own legislation specifying basic welfare support in their provinces.** For the Austrian cases, the Basic Welfare Support Act of **Tyrol (localities A and B) and of Lower Austria (localities C and D)** apply. While the provisions of **Tyrol go in parts beyond the standards of the agreement** between the federal level and provinces (specifying additional criteria for reception facilities, such as play and recreation environments for minors, trained staff for victims of torture, rape and other forms of severe violence; higher maximum cost rates – capped at the level of minimum income scheme of Tyrol – in single cases to avoid severe social hardship; Art. 5, 9 Tiroler Grundversorgungsgesetz), the **provisions of Lower Austria follow the specified standards of the agreement and include additionally provisions on**

⁷ Art. 7 para 3, 3a, 5 Grundversorgungsgesetz (Federal Care Act)

⁸ Article 3 para 1 Grundversorgungsvereinbarung (Federal Care Agreement)

⁹ Article 4 para 1 Grundversorgungsvereinbarung

¹⁰ Art 6 para 1 n 8

¹¹ Art 6 para 1 n 11

¹² Art 7 para 3 n 5



employability and integration obligations. The latter is related to the fact that beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are excluded from mainstream social assistance benefits of Lower Austria since April 2016. They can only get core benefits of the province's basic welfare support scheme. Additionally, beneficiaries of asylum are entitled to basic welfare support within the first four months after they obtained a positive decision. The following provisions apply to both groups in Lower Austria: They have to set all measures to increase their 'employability, ability to work and social stabilisation' by e.g. taking German courses. Furthermore, the province and municipalities can provide temporary community-based auxiliary tasks unless the Public Employment Service has mandated measures. Furthermore, they have to fulfil the integration obligations as specified in the Integration Act (value and orientation course, German language competences from A0 to B1, each level within six months). If they do not meet the obligations in due time through their own fault, basic welfare support benefits are cut by 25% for at least three months.¹³ A further difference in legislation of the two provinces regards the granting of basic welfare support. It is granted upon application or ex officio in Tyrol and only upon application in Lower Austria.¹⁴

Costs of basic welfare support for asylum seekers are shared between the federal level and provincial level. The **federal level has to cover 60% and provinces 40% of costs.** Thereby costs are shared between the provinces according to their population size.¹⁵ If asylum procedures last more than 12 months, costs have to be covered by the federal level alone. Additionally, province specific provision can apply. In case of Tyrol (localities A, B), the municipalities have to cover 35% of the costs of the state (based on their financial strength, determined by tax revenues and duties).¹⁶

Until June 2020, the provision of federal basic welfare support could be delegated to third sector (humanitarian or religious organisations) or private sector organisations. Since July 2020, a newly established Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services (Bundesagentur für Betreuungs- und Unterstützungsleistungen - BBU) is responsible.¹⁷ At the provincial level, provinces can provide basic welfare support themselves or delegate it to third sector (humanitarian or religious organisations, charities) or private sector organisations.¹⁸ In Tyrol, the provision of basic welfare support was delegated to the **newly established agency "Tyrolian Social Services"** (Tiroler Soziale Dienste – TSD) in 2015. It is 100% owned by the province of Tyrol. The decision for outsourcing the provision of basic welfare support was taken by the provincial government in July 2014 and thus already prior to the subsequent increased refugee inflows (Landesrechnungshof Tirol 2017, 15). **In Lower Austria, third sector**

¹³ Art. 7a NÖ Grundversorgungsgesetz i.d.F. LGBl. Nr. 90/2020

¹⁴ Art. 2 para 1 Tiroler Grundversorgungsgesetz, Art. 16 NÖ Grundversorgungsgesetz

¹⁵ Article 10-11 Grundversorgungsvereinbarung Bund-Länder

¹⁶ Art. 15 Tiroler Grundversorgungsgesetz i.d.F. LGBl. Nr. 138/2019

¹⁷ Art. 4 Grundversorgungsgesetz – GVG-B 2005

¹⁸ Art 4 para 2 Grundversorgungsvereinbarung

(humanitarian or religious organisations, charities), private sector organisations and private individuals were commissioned by the province (Department for Citizenship and Elections – IVW2) to provide shelters, the province did not run shelters itself (Landesrechnungshof Niederösterreich, 2020, 44).

2.1.2 Distribution of asylum seekers

Regarding the **distribution of asylum seekers** across provinces, the basic welfare support agreement specifies to **account for the respective population size of the provinces** (Article 1 para 4 Grundversorgungsvereinbarung), to **follow a collaborative approach** (partnerschaftlich) and to **prevent regional overburdening** (regionale Überlastung).¹⁹

Tyrol aimed for a distribution of asylum seekers **based on consensus** (government decision of September 9, 2015). The province faced rising numbers of asylum seekers already in 2014 and organised an asylum summit in October 2014 with the eight district commissioners, 36 representatives of the association of municipalities and the city of Innsbruck. In this framework, a **benchmark was set** for the distribution of asylum seekers across Tyrolean municipalities, corresponding to 1.5% of the resident population of the district and municipalities. This benchmark has become known as **“refugee quota”** (Flüchtlingsquote) in Tyrol. (The provincial Court of Auditors noted in an audit in 2017 that the province does not have the constitutional/legal competences to establish mandatory quotas for districts or municipalities.) Municipalities should nominate suitable shelters to district authorities for a preliminary check. These lists were then forwarded to the province for concluding contracts. After delegation to TSD, it has been a department within the agency responsible for identifying and establishing refugee shelters. To support the provision of shelter, the responsible provincial councillor held several talks with the association of municipalities (Gemeindeverband), with mayors and he participated in meetings with local residents. The provincial governor held personal talks with mayors and convoked extraordinary meetings of district officials urging to convince municipalities to provide shelter. (Landesrechnungshof 2017, 181-183) While the responsible provincial councillor for municipalities announced financial incentives for municipalities and the provincial parliament called for a financial compensation (accounting for the extraordinary needs of refugee reception), the province did not provide any such compensation that accounted specifically for refugee reception until June 2017 (period covered by the report of the provincial Court of Auditors, Landesrechnungshof 2017, p. 183). Between January 2015 and December 2016, the share of municipalities providing shelter increased from 15% to 44% as of 31 December 2015 and stood at 56% as of 31 December 2016 (Landesrechnungshof Tirol, 2017, 189).²⁰

¹⁹ Art 1 para 1 Grundversorgungsvereinbarung Bund-Länder

²⁰ In Vorarlberg, 97% of municipalities hosted asylum seekers as of 31 December 2015 (Landesrechnungshof Tirol, 2017, S. 186).

In Lower Austria, the representatives of municipal associations and responsible members of provincial government agreed to limit the number of asylum seekers per municipality to 2% of the municipal population. Data at district level indicate that – at least for the districts - actual shares remained below this threshold, amounting to 0.23 on average (across the districts of Lower Austria) in 2014, reaching 0.79 in 2016 and declining to 0.23 in 2019. The highest shares recorded in a district amounted to 1.48 in 2014, 1.80 in 2016 and declining thereafter to (1.62 in 2017, 1.04 in 2018, 0.91 in 2019, see Landesrechnungshof Niederösterreich, 2020, 33f).

2.1.3 Integration

Two main laws regulate the integration of migrants in Austria **since 2017**. This is on the one hand the **“Integration Act” (Integrationsgesetz)** and the **“Integration Year Act” (Integrationsjahrgesetz”)**. Additionally, the **Asylum Acts includes provisions on the integration of humanitarian migrants**.

The Integration Act applies to foreign citizens and makes a distinction between beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection on the one hand, and “third country nationals” (Drittstaatsangehörige) on a settlement track on the other. Third country nationals are defined as those who are not EEA or Swiss citizens (§ 3 IntG with reference to § 2 Abs 2 NAG for third country nationals). In practical terms, the Integration Act includes specific provisions for beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection and specific provisions for other groups of third country nationals. This is rooted in the evolution of the regulatory integration policy framework of the federal level. Prior to 2017, beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection were not subject to regulatory integration requirements.

The stated **objective of the Integration Act is to speed up the integration of legally resident persons** in Austria by **providing integration measures on the one hand and demanding active participation in the integration process on the other hand** (§1 IntG). Integration measures should provide for participation in social, economic and cultural life in Austria. Thereby the law defines as major aspects participation in employment, education, gender equality and speedy economic self-sufficiency (§2 Abs 2 IntG). In terms of instruments and tools, the Integration Act regulates language training and some form of civic integration (§3 IntG).

On the side of integration support measures, **German languages courses** have to be provided to beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection, ranging from literacy courses to German language competences at B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Thereby courses need to include values and “orientation knowledge”. The minister for integration has to ensure the provision, while the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) is responsible for implementation, including curricula for A1-B2 (§5 Abs4). ÖIF can contract educational providers for the German courses. (§4 IntG) Despite German language courses, so-called **value and orientation courses** have to be provided by the Austrian Integration Fund to this group. These courses should impart democratic order and its derived basic principles (fundamental values of legal and social order) as well as the rules for peaceful coexistence to

participants. Thereby, the law explicitly names human dignity, equality of all humans and the right of each individual to a self-determined and independent life as such fundamental values (§5 IntG).

On the side of **integration obligations**, the Asylum, Integration and Integration Year Act specify the integration obligations of beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection. Refugees who obtained asylum or subsidiary protection status **must take an appointment at the provincial integration centre of the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF)** without delay for the purpose of “integration support” (Integrationsförderung)²¹ (§67 AsylG). In this framework, **they have to sign a so-called “integration declaration”** (Integrationserklärung) (§6 IntG) declaring that they will **adhere to fundamental Austrian values and complete German as well as values and orientation courses** as specified in the Integration Act.²² Non-compliance with fundamental Austrian values can result in fines, imprisonment and even withdrawal of residence status. Non-compliance with the course requirements can result in cuts of welfare benefits. (cf. BMEIA/ÖIF Integrationserklärung 2019)

Other groups of third country nationals have been subject to a so-called **“integration agreement”** since 2003. Regulations were initially included in the Aliens Act²³, then transferred to the newly established Residence and Settlement Act²⁴ and shifted to the Integration Act in 2017²⁵, requiring third country nationals to acquire German language competences at A1 level (CEFR). Language requirements were raised to A2 by 2006 and to **B1** by 2011. These language competences are a **prerequisite to obtain a permanent residence title. Since October 2017, German language exams need to test language competences and knowledge on values and they were renamed to integration exams**. In contrast to the integration measures for humanitarian migrants, the law does not specify any explicit political responsibility for the provision of German courses (as it is the minister for integration in case of humanitarian migrants). Until September 2017, the required German language competences could be documented by attending so-called ÖIF integration courses (provided by ÖIF or commissioned and certified course providers) and passing the final exam or equivalent language diplomas (e.g. Austrian language diploma, Goethe certificate). While **German courses are free of charge for humanitarian migrants, other groups of third country nationals can only obtain a partial refund of course costs**. This hinges on certain requirements and is limited to reaching A2 level. There is no refund for B1 courses. The reform of 2017 (amending and shifting the provisions to the new Integration Act) abolished equivalent language diplomas (as e.g. the Austrian language diploma) as legal proof of the necessary German competences. Instead, German language exams need to test language competences

²¹ Regulated in Article 67 Para. 1 of the Asylum Act 2005, BGBl. I Nr. 24/2016.

²² Article 6 Integration Act 2017 as set out in BGBl. I Nr. 42/2020

²³ §50a-c Fremdenengesetz 1997 i.d.F. BGBl. I Nr. 126/2002

²⁴ §14-16 NAG i.d.F. BGBl. I Nr. 100/2005

²⁵ §7-15 IntG i.d.F. BGBl. I Nr. 68/2017



as well as knowledge on values and they were renamed to “integration exams”. Course providers and examiners need certification by the Austrian Integration Fund.²⁶

The second new and explicit law on integration addresses labour market integration of humanitarian migrants. The **Integration Year Act** (Integrationsjahrgesetz) of 2017²⁷ prescribes **modular labour market policy measures for beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection, who are unemployed after they obtained their status and do not find a job**. In cases of non-compliance, financial sanctions (cuts of social assistance benefits) are possible.²⁸ Asylum seekers with a high probability of recognition can be included. These measures are basically **intended for one year and include a range of active labour market policy instruments** (competence clearing, guidance and preparation for job interviews, measures preparing for employment, community-based work that contributes to employability), new instruments specifically adopted for humanitarian migrants (value and orientation courses) as well as support instruments for migrants (information and support with the recognition of foreign qualifications, German language courses). The provision of measures according to the integration year act are **subject to the organisational and financial resources of the Public Employment Service**. This concerns the listed active labour market policy measures and language courses at A2 level and higher, while the provision of value and orientation courses has been in the responsibility of ÖIF. **Specific funds were made available for the provision of these measures between 2017 and 2019, but were phased out by the coalition government of the Conservatives and the right-wing Freedom party** (Rosenberger & Gruber, 2020, 119). Since January 2020, the provision of German courses (from literacy to B1) is in the sole responsibility of ÖIF for beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection.

With the Integration Year Act, refugees who have obtained asylum/subsidiary protection status have to contact the ÖIF for an appointment to sign the integration declaration and get an appointment for the values and orientation course. Then the German courses follow. From A1 onwards, they can register with the AMS (PES) as job-seekers and must complete German courses within the requirements. These are the requirements for receiving social assistance in Lower Austria (AD10).

2.1.4 Welfare

While rights of asylum seekers are limited (more rights and support apply to minors, such as access to education and additional provisions for unaccompanied minors) and support is mainly covered by specific provisions on “basic welfare support”, **beneficiaries of asylum have equal status with citizens in terms of access to mainstream welfare benefits in case of need**. It represents a last-resort benefit for those who have not sufficient own means and no entitlements to other benefits. Support mainly regards cash benefits to maintain one’s living

²⁶ Integrationsgesetz-Durchführungsverordnung – IntG-DV

²⁷ [BGBl. I Nr. 75/2017](#)

²⁸ Art. 3 Para 2 Integration Year Act as set out in BGBl. I 75/2017

and complementary benefits for housing. Prior to 2015, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection were among the entitled groups. Non-EU migrants (foreign citizens) have only access with a long-term residence title, i.e. earliest after five years of residence (IOM Vienna, 2014, 31).

Basically, **welfare legislation is in the competence of the provinces** in Austria. Between 2010 and 2016, there was an agreement in place between the federal level and provinces on common standards for a minimum income scheme (Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung).²⁹ It actually reformed the existing social assistance scheme aiming to reduce the segregation between employment policy and social assistance, harmonise schemes across provinces, and promote activation. The agreement was not continued after that period and regulations relied again on provincial provisions. In **2019**, the Federal Government adopted a so-called **“Basic Social Assistance Act”** (Sozialhilfe-Grundsatzgesetz)³⁰, which brought a return to the general orientations prior to 2010/11. Provinces had to adopt corresponding implementing acts. The federal reform included explicit provisions aiming to reduce and prevent migrants from receiving benefits. It introduced a so-called **“work qualification bonus”** (Arbeitsqualifizierungsbonus)³¹. **Migrants were only eligible to receive the full amount if they could demonstrate their “employability”** (“Vermittelbarkeit am Arbeitsmarkt”). Indicators for “employability” were, among others, language competences (at least B1 German or C1 English competences) and completed integration requirements according to the Federal Integration Act. If this “employability” was not given, social assistance benefits were reduced by 35%. **The Austrian Constitutional Court repealed the provisions on the “work qualification bonus” in December 2020**, but the integration requirements of the Integration Act (adopted in 2017) have remained in place. Beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection status need to sign an integration declaration, complete a value and orientation course and are required to pass a “B1 integration exam” (B1-Integrationsprüfung). Non-compliance can involve benefit cuts of at least 25% for at least three months.³² Furthermore, the act reduced the benefit level for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, stating that they are to be granted only core social assistance benefits that do not exceed the level of basic welfare support benefits.³³

Lower Austria was among the first provinces implementing these provisions into provincial legislation (adopted in July 2019, into force by January 2020). Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection had already been excluded from minimum income benefits by April 2016 and they are excluded from social assistance now. They receive only core benefits of the basic welfare support system. Already in January 2017 and thus prior to the Federal Integration Act, Lower

²⁹BGBl. I Nr. 96/2010 Vereinbarung zwischen dem Bund und den Ländern gemäß Art. 15a B-VG über eine bundesweite Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung

³⁰ [BGBl. I Nr. 41/2019](#)

³¹ Art. 5 para. 6-9 Sozialhilfe-Grundsatzgesetz

³² Cf. Sozialhilfe-Grundsatz Gesetz i.d.F. BGBl. I Nr. 41/2019

³³ Art 4 para 1 Sozialhilfe-Grundsatzgesetz i.d.F. [BGBl. I Nr. 108/2019](#) (VfGH)



Austria introduced an “integration agreement” (renamed to “integration declaration” by August 2017) for recipients of minimum income benefits, who resided in Austria for less than five years within the last six years.³⁴ The agreement/declaration required recipients to attend measures that improve their integration, i.e. a “value and orientation course” and A2 German language competences. In case of non-compliance, financial sanctions applied (cuts by 30% in a first step until mid August 2017, increased to 50% from mid-August onwards, total cuts were possible). Since January 2020, the provisions of the Integration Act apply (implemented in provincial social assistance regulations for beneficiaries of asylum and in state basic welfare support regulations for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and beneficiaries of asylum in the first four months after they obtained their status).

Tyrol has not adopted a corresponding implementation act yet and maintained its minimum income benefits scheme. Consequently, there is no distinction in benefit levels between beneficiaries of asylum and of subsidiary protection. Both receive minimum income benefits. Furthermore, the integration requirements are lower in regard to German language competences, requiring the acquisition of A2 German competences.

2.1.5 Policy programmes and instruments

In **July 2015, members of the Federal Expert Council for Integration issued an expert paper on the integration of beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection**, which included **ten key recommendations** for integration measures in the domains of work, education, cohesion (Zusammenleben) and governance (local responsibilities for integration, role of civil society). (Expertenrat für Integration, 2015) This was followed by the so-called “**50 Points Plan for the Integration of beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection in Austria**”, which was presented by the Minister for Integration and Chairman of the Expert council in November 2015 and had been established in collaboration with eleven members of the Federal Expert Council for Integration. This 50 points plan listed 50 measures along the lines of the National Action Plan for Integration (adopted in Austria in 2010), addressing language and education, employment, rule of law and values, health and social affairs, intercultural dialogue, sports and leisure, housing and regional integration as well as general structural measures (BMEIA 2015). Thereby it defined as the main **goal of refugee integration** (targeting beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection) **as enabling swift economic self-sufficiency, and involving opportunities as well as the willingness of refugees to actively strive for their development and participation in society** (BMEIA, 2015, 5).

³⁴§ 7c Integrationsvereinbarung, Niederösterreichisches Mindestsicherungsgesetz (NÖ MSG) i.d.F. [LGBl. Nr. 103/2016](#), §7c Integrationserklärung i.d.F. LGBl. Nr. 63/2017



At provincial level, **Tyrol** was the first province in Austria that established a **provincial integration charter (Integrationsleitbild) in 2006**, setting out the main principles, objectives and framework for integration policy in Tyrol. It **was revised in 2019**, accounting for changes in society and related changes to requirements for the integration charter. Overall, it extended its scope from migrants and supporting their integration (charter of 2006) to the “majority population”, focusing on the whole population residing in Tyrol and promoting social cohesion (Zusammenleben) under increasing diversity (Land Tirol, 2019). **Larger municipalities in Tyrol put in place integration officials (Integrationsbeauftragte)** for a few years (e.g. Innsbruck, Telfs, Wörgl, Schwaz, Reutte, Jenbach). The provincial government pays 50% of staff costs, the other 50% have to be covered by the respective municipality, assuming that such a position involves 20 hours per week.. Prior to that, there were only persons in charge of integration in Telfs, Innsbruck and Wörgl. (AT1)

Lower Austria adopted its first **integration charter (Integrationsleitbild) in 2008**, including general objectives (promoting equal opportunities, self-development and dialogue), overarching strategic measures and concrete recommendations for action in the areas of politics and administration, education and upbringing, culture, encounter and communication, health and social affairs, housing, work and economy as well as social cohesion (Zusammenleben) in the municipality and region ((Land Niederösterreich, 2008) It was complemented by an “integration manual” (Integrationsleitfaden) in 2012 that accounted for recent economic, demographic as well as federal policy developments (National Action Plan for Integration 2010, State Secretariat since 2011), and outlined the main elements of the integration charter including good practice examples. (NÖ Landesakademie 2012). In response to the refugee inflow, Lower Austria adopted an “**Integration Plan 2016-18**”, which defined priority domains and measures (including housing, language training, employment, education and training, collaboration of authorities, data for monitoring and planning). The plan and its measures should target all possible groups of “legal migrants” in Lower Austria, but put an emphasis on beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection given the specific challenges related to the refugee inflow ((Land Niederösterreich, 2016) In **2018, the new provincial councillor for integration (the portfolio had shifted from the Conservatives to the Freedom Party) mandated a new action plan for 2018-2023** under the heading “**Refugees and Integration with Security**” (Flüchtlinge und Integration mit Sicherheit), aiming to combine issues of basic welfare support and integration (Landesrechnungshof Niederösterreich, 2021, S. 31)



	RELEVANT POLICIES/LAWS	YEAR OF ENACT-MENT	MAIN ACTORS INVOLVED	ROLE/ RESPONSIBILITY OF ACTORS	FUNDING
NATIONAL LEVEL	Integration Act	2017	Ministry for Integration ÖIF Welfare authorities/AMS	Ensure provision of German courses Provision of German courses and value and orientation courses Take signature for "integration declaration" and monitor progress Sanctions	
	Integration Year Act	2017	AMS, ÖIF	Provision of (labour market) integration measures	
	Basic Social Assistance Act	2019	Provinces, welfare authorities	Implementation acts Implementation	
	Basic Welfare Support Agreement,	2004	Federal level, provinces	Refugee reception during asylum procedures	60% Federal level, 40% provinces
	50 Points Plan	2015			
REGIONAL LEVEL	Minimum Income Act (Tyrol)	2011			
	Social Assistance Act (Lower Austria)	2019			
	Basic Welfare Support Act (Tyrol)	2005			
	Basic Welfare Support Act (Lower Austria)				
	Integration charter (Tyrol)	2019			
	Integration plan 2016-2018, Integration plan 2018-2023 "Refugees and Integration with Security" (Lower Austria)	2016 2018			

Table 3: Overview of main policies and actors



2.2 Locality A (Innsbruck)

Locality A (Innsbruck) is the capital of the province of Tyrol and is the most populated study area in our sample. According to the statistical data used for the case selection, the **size of the population in 2014 was 125.000 and the share of foreign residents was 20%**. The resident population has been steadily growing in recent years. In 2021, the locality recorded **131.000 inhabitants**. The **share of foreign residents** also significantly increased in recent years to **28.1%**, and is **significantly above the national average of 17.1%**. Also in the 2005 survey period, the share of foreign residents was 13.4%, higher than the national average of 9.4%. According to an expert from an institution active in the field of refugee support, immigration since 2014 "makes locality A more diverse and comprises migrants from Germany (as the largest group) and migrants from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia (AA3). According to a member of the local government, the locality offers an attractive life, with good job opportunities. According to him, persons with a migration history are more concentrated in some quarters of the city, but this is not negatively perceived by the public. The locality is geographically located at the **crossroads of local, regional and long distance train and road connections and also has an airport** (AA11). The biggest problem, he said, is the **high cost of rent and housing**, which many newly arrived migrants can hardly afford. In addition, the high prices would push also the middle class into the surrounding smaller municipalities, where the purchase prices of real estate is cheaper.

Regarding the **economic situation**, based on the survey, the locality can be described from very good (1 respondent), rather good (4 respondent), neither good nor bad (3 respondent) to rather bad (1 respondent). The **unemployment rate in 2014 was slightly below the national average of 7.3%**. The locality also **benefits from the winter tourism of the region**. With regard to access to the labor market/work opportunities for post-2014 migrants, the restrictive access to the labor market, which is further complicated by the sometimes long asylum process, were mentioned by the interviewees (AA3, AA4, AA11, AA17).

The political constellation has changed in recent years. The **conservative People's Party has lost votes** and several seats in the municipal elections in 2018, while the **Green Party has made gains and the leader of the Green election campaign was elected mayor**, leading a coalition government. The **coalition has recently been dissolved, but continues under the lead of the Green Party under a flexible coalition arrangement**. The cooperation and collaboration with the city government is assessed as good by interviewed NGO representatives (AA6, AA8). The locality has also an integration office, where counseling and support services for migrants are offered.

Many of the respondents particularly highlight the NGOs and volunteer organization that have been very active and supportive especially in 2014/2015. Since the location is a university city, many students were also involved in refugee/migrant support organizations or volunteered in buddy projects and in providing language support. According to a street-level bureaucrat of a leading organization in refugee coordination, this leads to, that *"most want to stay because the (own) community is larger and thus there are more living, working and leisure*



opportunities. It is rare that people want to leave. The activities of the voluntary organizations and associations also take place most in locality A (AA4)." On the other hand, the prejudices in society against migrants are also addressed, which would need intensive information work. In addition, there was also criticism of the shifting support structures. The leader of a pro-migrant group pointed out that long-time migrants and asylum seekers were receiving less and less support, especially with regard to language learning, and that the focus was being placed on recognized refugees (AA6).

The survey shows a similar result regarding the attitude of local people toward refugees. Four respondents described the attitude towards refugees as rather positive, four other respondents described it as neither positive nor negative, and one street level bureaucrat described it as rather negative. The respondents came to the same conclusion with regard to the integration of refugees since 2014.

2.3 Locality B

Locality B is a small municipality in the easternmost district of Tyrol (Bezirk Kufstein). The project team decided to **expand the study area for locality B (a rural area in Tyrol) beyond the municipality** in order to obtain relevant information. Focusing on the locality (i.e. the selected municipality) alone would not have provided an accurate representation and answer to the research questions. The reason for expanding the study area was, on the one hand, that there were/are not enough asylum seekers/recognized refugees at the location. On the other hand, relevant interview persons, who were essential for obtaining information, were also not present at the locality. Furthermore, the reception and accommodation of asylum seekers is organised across municipal and at times also district boundaries, involving stakeholders from the entire subregion.

Locality B is the **smallest** locality in our sample. According to the statistical data used for the case selection, the size of the population in **2014 was approximately 3.500 to 5.000** and the **share of foreign residents was around 8%**. The size of the resident population has changed little in recent years. According to the numbers of Statistic Austria of **2021, the locality had around 4.500 to 5.500 inhabitants**. The **share of foreign residents/foreign citizens** in the locality has also increased more strongly in comparison to the population in recent years to **approximately 10%**, but remains significantly below the national average of 17.1% in 2021. By comparison, in 2005, the share of foreign residents was around 8%, lower than the national average of 9.4%. According to the mayor of a neighboring municipality of locality B *"You can notice immigration, no matter whether it is a German citizens or someone who came as a migrant. As long and the more skilled workers and care workers are scarce, we need controlled immigration (AB3)."* A representative of a pro-migrant group provided a similar observation, saying that demographic changes have been underway for 20 years. Land/property would become more and more expensive. Locals would have to move away because of this and wealthy people would have moved in (AB2). Another representative of a pro-migrant group points out that the inflow of fleeing people did not have an impact on demography and there are more inflows of Germans than of refugees (AB1).



Regarding the **economic situation**, based on survey, the locality was described by respondents from very good (2 respondent), rather good (4 respondent), neither good nor bad (2 respondent) to rather bad (2 respondent). The **unemployment rate in 2014 was 3% in the district³⁵ and therefore significantly below the national average of 7.3%. In 2021, the unemployment rate in the district stood at 4%**. Nevertheless, the **economic development of the locality is assessed rather negatively by the interviewees**. Economically, there would have been no relevant changes. The interviewees clarify that there are **actually only a few businesses and it is rather a dormitory town**, whose residents work in other places (AB2). In addition, it is emphasized that large pharmaceutical companies invest in the region, however, there is not enough qualified personnel due to the shortage of skilled workers (AB1).

The **political constellation has changed marginally** in recent years. The **conservative parties still form the majority** in the municipal council, while the **Greens are in the minority**. However, there was change after the last municipal elections. The **candidate of the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) was elected as the new mayor of the locality.**³⁶

In the locality itself, **two reception centres for refugees were established and one was active afterwards**. The volunteer organization active in the whole region was leading in assisting the refugees. However, according to a representative of a non-profit service provider, the accommodation caused discomfort amongst the population and was also portrayed negatively by the media (AB7). In the region and not far from locality B, there is a larger shelter where more than 60 refugees lived in 2014-2015. According to the representative of a pro-migrant group, there was no willingness on the part of the municipality to accept and accommodate refugees (AB1, AB3). Regarding the integration of refugees, the situation was challenging according to some interviewees. On the one hand, asylum seekers who were accommodated in small numbers and in small villages were well received and integration was easier (AB1). In locality B, however, the readiness was much lower: *“nothing was really done for integration. There were no German courses, no programs for children, no programs for women. People just relied on activities and support from volunteers (AB7)”*.

With regards to the attitude of local population towards refugees, the survey shows a rather conservative picture for the study area. While six out of ten respondents see the attitude as neither negative nor positive, 3 respondents see it as rather positive and one rather negative. The picture is similar with regard to the question about the assessment of the integration of post-2014 refugees. Most of the respondents see integration as neither failed (1 respondent) nor successful (1 respondent).

³⁵ Data on unemployment rates are not available for the local level, therefore data for the district are provided here.

³⁶ Mayors are elected separately from municipal councils.



2.4 Locality C (St. Pölten)

Locality C (St. Pölten) is the provincial capital of Lower Austria and has a **long tradition as an industrial and working-class town**. According to the statistical data used for the case selection, the size of the population in **2014 was 52.000** and the **share of foreign residents was 13%**. The population has been steadily increasing in recent years. In 2021, the locality recorded **56,000 inhabitants**. The share of foreign residents in the locality has increased to **18.5%** in 2021, and is thus slightly above the national average of 17.7%. This is similar to the 2005 survey period, when the share of foreign residents was around 10% in the locality and only slightly above the national average of 9.4%. The share of foreigners from EU member states increased from 28% in 2014 to 33% in 2021. The locality has a long tradition of labor migration, which began back in the 1960s with guest worker migration from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. The fact that migrants are a part of the cityscape is also made clear by a member of the local government:

“Locality C has an average population growth of 0.7-1.2%. Of course, migration plays a role here. But we also have to contend with aging and have low birth rates. Many municipalities can therefore only grow if people immigrate from abroad or from within the country. Just by looking at the names, you can see that the population development of people with a migration background is increasing” (AC16).

The economic situation is assessed as rather positive, neither positive nor bad in equal parts (4 respondent each), and rather bad (1 respondent). The **unemployment rate in 2014 was with 10%** above the national average of 7.3%. However, the unemployment rate has declined markedly in the last two years, **falling to 8.3% in 2021 and currently stands at 5.8%**. The interviewed member of the local government **also sees a positive development** and a high growth potential and says that more jobs than job seekers would be available (AC16). The influx of migrants is viewed cautiously positively by the representative of the Employers' organization:

“Economically, one can say that there is more purchasing power and labor force, with more population there is more turnover, more customers. That can be seen as a positive development due to the influx, but whether that is sustainable is a second question. I would see it as value neutral, cautiously positive. Given the current demand for labor, more potentially available employees are definitely good. Whether the skills of newly arrived migrants fit, is another question (AC15).”

This cautious attitude is shared by a street-level bureaucrat who stresses that the feared competition between refugees and Austrian workers did not take place. However, there has been displacement between long-established and newly arrived migrant groups (AC5).

The political orientation in the locality can be described as **social and liberal**. In terms of electoral outcomes, the **social democrats** had an **overwhelming majority for decades**.



According to a representative of a pro-migrant group, the **issues of migrants and migration are not politically played up by any political group** and are not part of political discussion (AC1). Nevertheless, the representative of the far-right opposition has a clear opinion on migration, migrants and integration:

“I can tell you that in the locality, already in 2020, more than 72 percent of the basic income (Mindestsicherung) recipients were foreigners, among them many refugees, the term economic refugee is more appropriate. In the locality, too, there are thousands of locals who live at the poverty level These people should be helped first. We demand benefits in goods instead of cash for economic refugees. It would be even better to help these people on their own continent, this is cheaper and does not uproot anyone. [...] Immigration of different, partly hostile peoples also brings many problems and criminality to our country. The locality is becoming an ISIS hotspot in Austria There have already been repeated problems with ISIS sympathizers and Islamists in the locality in the past (AC6).”

With regards to integration, the respondents rated the situation in 2014/15 as good. The **refugees were well accepted by society and there was a welcoming culture** (AC14, AC4, AC16). According to a leading street-level bureaucrat, the first phase was about getting the refugees into basic services quickly, i.e., providing food and shelter. Later on, the employment service was concerned with identifying the refugees' skills and profile (AC5). With regard to the employment of refugees, a head of a personnel office also sees difficulties in the transferability of qualifications, which makes access to the labor market more difficult (AC13). According to the interviewees, the positive situation at the beginning changed over time, partly to the negative: *“A lot is going wrong and there are fears, also due to media reports that feed such sentiments”*(AC14).” The interviewed member of the local government also emphasizes that the readiness of the broad society was given at the beginning and has changed due to political and media debates. However, the city administration managed to contain tensions:

“I am certainly not the first to say that it changed very quickly. One part of the population continued to be active, the other part became inactive due to the refugee discussion. [...] We did not have any large quarters for permanent accommodation and tried to disperse people throughout the city. In this way, we have prevented "hot spots," which has also led to a relaxation in the population. This has also led to more acceptance”. (AC16)

2.5 Locality D

Locality D (a rural area in Lower Austria) is the **second smallest locality** in our sample. According to the statistical data used for the case selection, the size of the population in **2014 was approximately 6.000 to 7.000** and the share of **foreign residents was around 7%**. The **number of inhabitants has hardly changed** in recent years and has remained also in 2022 in



the same range as in 2014. However, the **share of foreign residents/foreigners in the municipality** has increased in recent years, but is still considerably lower than the national average of 17.1% at **about 9% in 2021**. In the 2005 survey period, by comparison, the number of foreign residents was around 5% and thus considerably below the national average of 9.4%. **Locality D is also district capital**. The locality has hosted asylum seekers after 2014 and **had a reception center with about 110 places. At the time of the research³⁷, there are 3 smaller accommodations with 12 places each, which are rather decentralized**.

The economic situation is assessed as rather positive, neither positive nor bad in equal parts (3 respondent each), rather bad (1 respondent), and very good (1 respondent). The **unemployment rate was at 6% in 2014** and below the national average of 7.3%. However, the unemployment rate has declined markedly in the last two years, falling to **5% in 2021 and currently standing at 3% in 2022**. According to the respondents, **immigration has had little to no impact on economic and demographic development** since 2014 (AD11, AD1, AD9). **Many refugees who received a positive decision would have left the locality**. According to one employer, families with children in particular have stayed in order to provide the children with a good education (AD12). Economically, a few newly arrived migrants have established one-person businesses, predominantly in the service sector and gastronomy. Therefore, from the point of view of a local official: "... *it was very positive and important that refugees stayed*" (AD1).

The political orientation in the locality can be described **conservative with an overwhelming majority of the People's Party**. The sum of all members of the opposition parties (social democrats, Greens and right-wing party) is about half of the ruling party in the municipal council. According to the interviewees, there was **political pressure on the part of the federal government to accommodate refugees and from parts of society to accept fewer/no refugees. There were no public protests, but according to a member of the local government, "silent protests" at the regulars' table meetings**. Anyways, there was also support by private individuals by accompanying refugees to the authorities, providing informal language courses, helping with accommodation and organizing get-together events. These events were supported by the participation of an Imam, a Catholic priest and a Protestant priest. However, they had to be stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic, which also delayed inclusion. There were also rounds of talks between municipal politicians, Public Employment Service, and NGOs with the society to raise awareness. The local government engaged in the initial phase against the planned large shelter, while integration related care and support was to a larger extent provided by an association³⁸ that is still active in the region. The municipality supported the association's activities and had a balancing/steering role, as the member of the

³⁷ Late 2021 and early 2022 and thus before the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

³⁸ The name of the association is not mentioned for reasons of anonymity.



local government described in the interview, speaking of political and social pressure and defining his role in the following way:

“I am the mediator and the one who balances so that the system continues to function. [...] I have to balance and buffer, I have to see that I connect people. [...] In the case of conflict, I am the constant in the middle that leads the way. Nothing is worse than a cowardly politician who shies away from decisions. Every decision not taken is a bad one. You have to give a clear direction in such phases (AD2)”

All interviewees made it clear that there was **great concern and fear in society when the first asylum seekers arrived in 2014**. False information, such as that the foreigners will overflow the country and culture, was spread. In addition, the accommodation of dozens of young single men in the locality would have caused more worries. Also, at the beginning, the local population was insufficiently informed and left alone. **Only when the refugee shelter closed in 2017, the situation calmed down** (AD6, AD9, AD11, AD14, AD16). With regard to the integration and reception of refugees, the interviewed member of the local government highlights the situation as follows:

“The measures of the so-called integration experts, who only have an academic title but have never experienced this on the ground over a long period of time, sound great, but they don't work. All these integration courses are pointless. I am a fan of small units because society is healthier and a healthier society can simply take more (AD2).”

With reference to the survey, the attitude of local people toward refugees is mainly rated as neither positive nor negative (3 respondents), following by rather positive and rather negative (2 respondents each) and very positive (1 respondent). The evaluation regarding the integration of refugees since 2014 is neither positive nor negative rated by 5 respondents, while one respondent rated it as very successful.

3 Overarching Themes

3.1 Describing the development of integration policies

In response to the arrival and settlement of migrants after 2014, **integration policies focused on employment, civic integration, housing and social integration**. The measures adopted can be categorised into **three groups**. This comprised on the one hand (1) new measures and instruments that were **specifically established for the group of humanitarian migrants**. On the other, **existing mainstream measures, in particular (2) labour market policy** measures and (3) **existing integration policy measures** were used and adapted, respectively, to the group of post-2014 migrants.

As regards **labour market policy measures, this is a national domain and implemented by the Public Employment Service** (Arbeitsmarktservice – AMS). The AMS has regional branches, which are mainly located in district capitals. Thus, there are no local level AMS offices. To register at AMS, **job seekers and unemployed need to go to the corresponding regional office, while labour market measures may be provided more decentralised**, e.g. in the district capital and other main towns/areas of a district or might be available in other districts and the provincial capital.

A comprehensive integration policy has been institutionalised at the federal level only since 2008, culminating in the National Action Plan on Integration (NAP.I), adopted in 2010 (Kraler, 2011). Yet humanitarian migrants have been formally included only after 2015. The **Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichische Integrationsfonds – ÖIF) is the responsible federal agency for implementing federal integration policy measures**. This comprises the provision of **German courses and so-called “value and orientation courses” to humanitarian migrants as well as letting them sign the “integration declaration”**, and monitoring and communicating its progress to welfare authorities and the AMS, respectively. The ÖIF **has a subnational representation in the provinces**, running so-called integration centres in the provinces’ capitals. Temporarily, these integration centres could also have outlets (monthly/weekly office hours) in regions/districts with higher numbers of humanitarian migrants.

In the following, the local integration policy repertoire is described for each of the four localities:

Locality A

Locality A (a town in Tyrol) has an **integration office** within the local administration, which has already been in place prior to 2014. **Locality A has guiding principles for the work of its integration office**. These principles are based on the provincial integration charter. It views integration as continuous process and a cross-cutting issue for society as a whole, involving all political levels and municipal domains. Thereby, it has a focus on education, housing, public administration, urban development and the general public, fostering and coordinating the implementation of awareness raising activities on integration issues, information and counselling, exchange on integration issues between different units within local public



administration as well as among external stakeholders, etc. (Document_A1) The integration office sets activities that address the broader public and mainstream society. It sees as one of its tasks to create spaces where different social groups can meet, e.g. by organising a diversity festival (AA1). Post-2014, the integration office interacted with other departments of the local administration and external stakeholders. **Within the municipal organization**, they raised awareness and fostered mutual understanding after the integration office received calls reporting rather unfriendly frontline workers in one of the municipal departments. In that case, the integration office contacted the department concerned, established their perspective and then organised round tables to foster awareness and mutual understanding (AA1:31-32). Furthermore, the integration office contributed to improve the available data on recipients of minimum income benefits, e.g. including indicators such as origin. **In regard to external stakeholders**, the integration office has **cooperated with the Tyrolean Social Services (TSD)**, which is the public agency of the province that organizes **refugee reception and support** of asylum seekers in Tyrol. (AA1:50-51) In regard to employment, it has **collaborated with the AMS and Business Chamber, organising a job fair since 2017** where job-seeking refugees can meet potential employers. From 2016-18, the focus was on apprenticeship, since then the focus has been broadened (AA:27, AA17:45). The outcomes of the job fair range from internships, apprenticeships, unskilled and skilled jobs (AA17:25-26). Furthermore, the integration office interacted with local volunteers and **provided training to them**, e.g. on German language support, role of volunteers and what they could contribute, as well as reflection workshops including how to deal with situations of deportation or hiding. (AA1:10-10) A further role of the **integration office is to (temporarily) step in, when gaps pop up that are not (yet) addressed by (mainstream) service providers**. This was also the case **after 2015 providing social work to refugee families**. The office observed some gap for services for refugee families, which need support that is outside the scope of the 'authority' (i.e. Kinder- und Jugendhilfe). The Kinder- and Jugendhilfe intervenes in severe situations, e.g. violence in families. To address this gap, the integration office initially worked with volunteers and then started a project with a charity (called 'mother tongue buddies') to support families. The buddies are settled migrants that work as volunteers and receive a small lump sum (Aufwandsentschädigung) to cover their expenses, such as for public transport. (AA1:12-12) Due to the **Covid-19 pandemic, the integration office had to start other projects, e.g. providing laptops** to children in refugee shelters for 'home schooling'. Furthermore, mobile family support is seen as very important due to the Corona pandemic. There is also a project by the locality to involve young people, also because of Covid-19. Efforts have also been made to reach people with a migration background with information on the Covid-19 disease and public health measures. (AA1:48)

The AMS provides **general training measures for jobseekers in the locality** (to entitled Austrian and foreign citizens alike), which are provided according to needs, including refugees. This includes trainings e.g. for jobs in tourism, in the metalwork sector, and other sectors (AA17). Furthermore, the AMS commissioned a specific counselling and support desk. It was co-funded by the EU, two times for three years. It has been the main point of contact for people entitled to asylum supporting their labour market integration (job, training, etc.). The



main task was job placement. There were high success rates in job placement, but often short-term, which was also due to seasonality (AA2).

The **'Mentoring for Migrants' programme is a joint project of the AMS, the Business Chamber and the Austrian Integration Fund** that had been initiated by the federal representations of the three organisations in 2010 and implemented across the provinces. It targets migrants with vocational qualifications and high and good German skills and is also available to migrants of the locality. It aims to support finding employment appropriate to their qualification through a mentoring/buddy system. It was opened to refugees. (AA17:19, 45).

The locality has basically an **open and liberal orientation towards the topic and immigrant integration is among the priorities of the current mayor**. The locality has a broad range of existing mainstream services and services for migrants, which are also accessible to the post-2014 migrants, such as counselling desks for women. (AA3) We also found **some civil society initiatives** in the locality. Private people (volunteers) and cultural initiatives provided German courses (AA3). Some measures were specifically provided for refugees and further developed, e.g. an NGO started with a space near a large refugee shelter providing a place to play, learn and support for children and for their parents (learn German, counselling). It was observed that some still need support at home after they obtained refugee status. This resulted in a mobile support service with one employee, who goes to families in their homes. (AA1)

Locality B

In locality B (a rural area in Tyrol), **measures centred on addressing needs related to the refugee shelter and their residents. A member of the local government coordinated measures and had the role of being a main point of contact** for any issues related to the refugee shelter. **Support by volunteers has been very relevant** for providing language courses, finding employment using own networks, and e.g. accompanying refugees to job interviews (AB3, AB19). **Private people of the locality and of a neighbouring village** organised (individual) German language training alongside regular courses (AB2). The municipality also **offered work in the framework of "community work" to asylum seekers**, and there were similar initiatives elsewhere in the district. (AB19, AB1)

However, mainstream services and specific integration support measures were not in place in the locality, but in the district capital and one of the larger towns of the district. As mentioned, the **AMS has no local offices** but representations (usually) in the district capitals. This is also the case of the locality. **However, labour market support measures have been also established in more decentralised manner**. As in locality A, there has also been a **specific counselling and support desk** focusing on job placement in the district (nearby larger town). As part of the "integration year" refugees have to undergo German courses, value and orientation courses (provided by the Austrian Integration Fund, ÖIF) and the range of measures of the AMS include training, as well as subsidies to companies (Eingliederungsbeihilfe) and short term work placements (Praktika) (e.g. one week in a



company, the PES pays an allowance to the client, insurance and, if applicable, travel costs). (AB9)

Volunteers and NGOs are mentioned as very relevant for initial refugee reception and support and many initiatives of private people would have tried to help. **Buddy systems** are seen as important. **Here also NGOs partly took the role of coordinating and matching** (AB1).

Locality C

Locality C (a town in Lower Austria) **has an office** within local public administration that addresses integration. It has been established already prior to 2014 and its **scope is broader than integration**, including also attention to women, people with disabilities, sexual identity, religions and beliefs (AC2:12). **Post-2014, measures focused on current needs and addressed different facets of socio-cultural integration**. This comprised swimming courses for children (after a tragic accident with young people who drowned in a local river), German summer courses for children as well as remedial German courses during the year (AC2:22, 33), and discussion groups for migrant women (exchange on various topics including medical issues, contact points, dealing with authorities, partnership/divorce) (AC3:22). It has **subsidised a civil society initiative that aimed to foster encounters between migrants and locals, established a regular space to meet, and organised activities** according to needs, ranging from different leisure activities to German language support and activities for different groups (e.g. a 'men's café'). In a current initiative they are planning to collaborate with an NGO that runs a refugee shelter. The civil society initiative would provide German courses and those migrants who were new in 2015 could now pass on their knowledge (AC1:57, AC2:19, AC3: 15, AC4:15, 18). The general **approach of the office can be described as inclusive**, communicating that everyone is welcome irrespective of asylum status (AC:22).

As indicated, the **AMS** is a mainstream provider of **active labour market policies (ALMPs)** and the basic approach of AMS is (as stated by our interviewees – AC5:19) to provide measures to their clients according to needs. Thus, the general repertoire of ALMPs was also available to post-2014 migrants in the locality, including programmes to get a Lower Secondary School Diploma, to obtain a VET qualification (apprenticeship), counselling and placement support (e.g. how to write a CV in Austria) (AC5:19, AC13:23-24). In terms of specific measures for migrants, the AMS office offered a specialised language course for the care professions. (AC8:45) Furthermore, it adopted specific measures for post-2014 migrants that came to Austria for humanitarian reasons. The AMS cooperated with the Chamber of Agriculture placing refugees in the agricultural sector. (AC5:19) At the organisational level, the AMS office designated front-line workers that worked exclusively with humanitarian migrants. This step was implemented in the period of high numbers between 2015 and 2018, aiming to provide more counselling time per client (about 1 hour instead of 15-20 minutes on average). (AC8: 10-12) Furthermore, the AMS has cooperated with a non-profit service provider/counselling centre, which is present with staff members at AMS twice a week, providing mother-tongue support to clients in their AMS (PES) appointment. (AC8:55, 64, AC5:19)



On the level of **social integration**, there were **initiatives by cultural institutions of the locality**, e.g. a **choir** in which more than 70 people from different walks of life and including refugees participated. Since the pandemic, there are **singing groups in parks**. (AC2:20, AC8:10-12) Furthermore, there is a civil society initiative (described above). There are **also small associations that are open to refugees, e.g. for urban gardening, and a bicycle repair workshop**. A **parish is also active, and was so especially in 2015**, and also the surrounding communities, although it was people from the parish, the parish council or religion teachers who got involved here out of their faith. (AC4:18, AC8:10-12) Furthermore, the locality has **many migrant associations**. Once a year, there is an **intercultural festival** in the locality. (AC4:15)

Furthermore, there are **several non-profit service providers** in the locality that have provided specific support to migrants, e.g. **legal advice, a therapy centre with interpreter supported psychotherapy, a centre for women** (with interpreters) (AC4:18).

Additionally, there are **mainstream programmes and services** that can be relevant for humanitarian migrants and their children, such as a **housing advocacy group, youth coaching, measures for young adult women, the youth education centre**. The ÖIF has many offers, both at its regional office and online. (AC4:18-18)

Whilst the **business chamber and trade unions** do not have local offices, they are represented a district level. With regard to the locality, the **district branch of the business chamber did not set any specific measures in response to the arrival of humanitarian migrants in 2015**. However, the office is a general service provider to its members and deals with concrete enquiries and problems, with hiring, and sometimes also with the termination of contracts of employment. It provides information and legal advice to employers (when contacted) that want to employ refugees/migrants (AC15:11,49). The interviewed representative of trade unions described their role as complementary, making sure that there are no disadvantages in terms of labour and social law/rights. But they do not have any special programmes or projects targeting migrants/refugees, such specific measures would be mainly in border regions of Austria. (AC14:45)

Locality D

The locality D (a rural area in Lower Austria) **does not have a specific integration office** within its local public administration. In regard to a local integration approach, the municipality **largely relied on an association that evolved from a group of local volunteers** supporting refugees in the shelter and after they obtained asylum/subsidiary protection status. The **municipality (mayor) has ensured exchange with the association of volunteers and supported their activities, mainly in the form of in-kind donations**, e.g. volunteers could copy learning material for German courses free of charge in the municipal office. (AD2:12, 28) Thus, the **municipality rather delegated integration issues to civil society**, as the interviewed member of the local government put it: *“We rather supported and stepped out and we were glad that the association was in charge of that.”* (AD2:36) The municipality took in asylum



seekers for community-based auxiliary tasks at their municipal “Bauhof” (maintenance of municipal infrastructure); but faced on the one hand bureaucratic hurdles (AD1:26-26) and reported lacking commitment on the side of asylum seekers on the other hand (e.g. with arriving punctually, working for a whole day, and interruptions due to Ramadan). (AD2)

German courses were provided by the AMS (AD16:42) and the ÖIF (AD10:21-21). Furthermore, the **association of volunteers and some private individuals provided German language support/courses**, e.g. some **teachers** provided extra lessons to young refugees at schools (AD6:19). **Today, there are hardly any German courses in the area anymore and private initiatives for German courses have declined** (AD6:6). Additionally, there had been German courses for asylum seekers in the region that were funded by the provincial government, but this was stopped when integration affairs shifted to the Freedom Party and the FPÖ member of the provincial government in charge of integration, Gottfried Waldhäusl (AD3:23-24).

In regard to employment (and as the interviewed AMS representatives of the other localities stated), **the** programmes and services of AMS are available to entitled Austrian citizens and foreigners alike. Specific measures for humanitarian migrants included mainly German courses and training for the gastronomy sector (kitchen staff, bar staff). The regional AMS did not implement the „competence check“ (AD6:35), a skills assessment and training programme specifically developed in the context of the refugee crisis (Pfeffer, 2017). The interviewee of AMS stressed AMS’ essential role in job placement, but also highlighted the role of informal networks of volunteers that help to establish contacts and find jobs. (AD6:30) Furthermore, there have been specific labour market-related courses in the provincial capital that were also available to humanitarian migrants of the locality, such as for the catering industry, and there have been job fairs where employers from Western Austria could look for workers. (AD6:38)

A **non-profit service provider** based in the provincial capital used to have a **monthly mobile counselling service in the locality** focusing on employment. It implemented such mobile desks also in two other districts. (AC8:66)

Volunteers founded an association to support refugees. Former teachers and publicly known people have joined. (AD6:16) The local association of volunteers has provided support where needed, being a first point of contact (AD3:60). It has **organised German courses for asylum seekers**. They do not have access to official German courses or only those with a high probability of recognition. (AD3:20) It **organised a monthly ‘café’ since 2016 aiming to foster contacts between refugees and the local population**. (AD10:21) In the beginning, it attracted (according to the association) up to 200 people and then 70-100. This activity was interrupted and very limited, respectively in 2020-2021 due to the pandemic. (AD3:9) Furthermore, the association **helps refugees in finding their way in Austria** (“*we provide support in adapting and living in Austria*”), e.g. providing information on how the authorities work in Austria, supporting them with their correspondence, finding accommodation and related issues (fee for TV and radio, other fees), and finding work (applications, arranging jobs through their networks) (AD3:12-13, 20). Furthermore, they **organised various leisure activities**, including



a sports group (football), sewing, cooking, in the cultural sector, as well as a children's play group and learning support (AD3:20-20). They also **introduced refugees into local clubs and associations**. The volunteers of this association are themselves members of various other clubs and have **taken refugees into their clubs, e.g. sports clubs, such as soccer, tennis, acrobatics, the fire department, the Red Cross, also the Kameradschaftsbund**. There have also been some fundraising activities (AD6:16-16). Further activities were organized by the **police, which held courses on security and de-escalation** (AD6).

Comparing local policies and structures for post-2014 migrant integration

When comparing local policies and structures, one **commonality between the rural cases** (B and D) is that both had to deal with the **establishment of refugee shelters** in their localities. The establishment of reception centres is basically a competence of the province. In view of the resistance of provinces and municipalities to the accommodation of asylum seekers the federal government had reserved the right to install reception facilities even without the consent of both levels of government in 2015 (Rosenberger and Gruber, 2020, 50). In both localities under study, the initiative to establish shelters came from higher levels of government, leaving the municipalities in the initial phase aside, although not invoking the federal clause (mainly directed at provincial governments refusing to accept refugees). In both cases, this required the management of local sentiments and interests of the municipality towards higher levels as well as after the establishment to addressing needs related to the shelter and their residents. In both cases, **volunteers** were relevant in supporting refugees already during the asylum procedure (language learning, daily routines, contacts) and after they obtained asylum or subsidiary protection status (finding housing, work, settling in Austria and dealing with e.g. authorities and necessary registrations).

“Neighbourhood help is not a buzzword and we have a completely different social system. We have a lot of people who are active in associations (sports, social work, etc.) We are a healthier society here. And here there is simply a willingness to do more, and then more people help out here. But not because they live in a bubble called social romanticism, but because they definitely relate to these people. The local pro migrant group knows the fates and how to deal with the refugees. Every family has a contact person there. If they have problems, there is someone who goes with them to the authorities.” (member of local government, locality D)

In regard to a local agenda and policy, there is a clear difference in how integration policy is organized based on the **size of localities**. Both towns (**locality A and C**) have staff in place that is responsible for integration within their local administration. These offices had already been established prior to 2014 and initiated and coordinated, respectively, measures in their localities in response to the arrivals of 2015. The **two rural cases (locality B and D) do not have corresponding local officials**. In case of **locality B, a member of the local government was the main official point of contact and coordinator** of local responses, supported by local civil society. It involved in the beginning the management of local sentiments against the establishment of (initially one and followed by a second) shelters for asylum seekers in the



locality and subsequently addressing needs of residents of the shelters and fostering contacts between refugees and locals (AB19, AB2). In **locality D**, the municipality engaged in the initial phase of refugee reception in 2015. It prevented the establishment of a large shelter by offering a smaller facility and lobbying successfully against the initially planned shelter at provincial and federal level, and gathering respective media coverage (Document_D1, Document_D2, AD2). **Local support of humanitarian migrants** (asylum seekers and after they obtained asylum or subsidiary protection status) **was mainly delegated to a local civil society initiative** that evolved from a group of volunteers that founded an association for that purpose. The municipality engaged selectively.

In **locality A (medium sized town) and locality C (small town) integration policy measures were available in the localities themselves**. In contrast, **integration policy measures were only partially available in locality B and D (both rural cases) themselves**. This included temporarily provided measures in the localities (e.g. monthly/weekly counselling hours), which were discontinued after the number of humanitarian migrants had declined again in the locality or region. In locality B, a range of measures has been located in one of the main towns of the district as well as in the district capital, and in some cases in the provincial capital. In locality D, part of integration measures were available in the locality and nearby municipalities within the district, while migrants were also referred to a neighbouring district capital and the provincial capital for language courses, training measures, and civic orientation measures.

A continuous case for illustration of the challenges in the division of competences regards the provision of **German courses**. In Tyrol, they recently set up a coordination group to provide an overview for stakeholders in the field (what is available to whom, eligibility criteria, costs, etc.).

The integration official of locality A reported that refugees were easy to reach for the municipality (integration office) during the asylum procedure via refugee camps. Since they obtained a status, they are very difficult to reach for the municipality. Most register/have contact with the authority responsible for the minimum income scheme. Due to data protection issues, these data cannot be shared with the integration office as it is no authority. The integration office can only reach recognised refugees via NGOs (AA1).



3.2 Frames of integration (perceptions, discourses)

Across localities interviewees report a **welcoming atmosphere/approach** towards refugees in the beginning (2015-2016), manifesting in openness and a “good mood” (AC8) towards refugees and many people from civil society volunteering to support initial refugee reception and further support. This turned into reservations and resentment subsequently. (AA17, AC14, AC8, AC4, AD6, AB19)

"At first, there was a big welcome, as in Austria in general, and there were many volunteers. In the beginning it was this 'welcoming culture' with a lot of action, associations and volunteers. There was also a lot of praise for our services and volunteers who wanted to work with us. Now there are a few left. As volunteering has decreased, resentment has also risen and we have received negative calls as well." (AC4)

A dominant frame that cuts across the localities is “**contact between locals and migrants**”. Thereby several functions are attributed to such contacts for migrants and locals. On the one hand, it could help reducing prejudice (AA11:17), mistrust (AC14:13) and fears (AD16: 11,13) on the side of local host populations. On the other hand, it would foster integration by e.g. learning German much faster (AC16:23, AB2:19) and help adapting to the local way of life:

"That would be participation in public life and not just being among themselves, that they also go to the cinema like we do, to pubs and live with us. Immigration was sudden, now there are also those who live here, have a job, have made friends. Establishing contacts is a big thing, that's why we need associations." (AD10)

Some interviewees of the middle-sized town (locality A) assumed that it is easier to get in contact with different social groups in the country-side, when e.g. a doctor and workers are members of the local fire brigade. In locality A, the liberal middle class (e.g. doctors, lawyer) would not have (much) contact with migrants. This is, however, linked with the observation that “*we increasingly live in our own bubble*”. (AA1:20) Based on these observations, some interviewees demand **specific measures**, including more encounters between locals and migrants (member of local government, locality A), providing spaces for encounters (integration office, locality A), reducing residential segregation (member of local government, locality C), trying to establish contacts between locals and refugees (pro migrant group, locality D) and introducing refugees e.g. to local senior citizens at a Christmas party (AB3).

The focus on “contacts” links with two further frames that have been raised across the localities, pointing to the pre-conditions/requirements for contacts. These are on the one hand statements that **integration is “a two-way process” and concerns “both sides”** (AC3, AC4, AB3, AC4, AA3, AA17), respectively, as well as explicit references to the local population stressing that it requires a certain **openness of locals to get in contact with migrant newcomers**. (AB2, AB3)



“Integration is not a one-way street, both sides have to make an effort. There are migrants that make an effort but cannot establish themselves, they do not succeed because they are not accepted. It is understandable if they then stay among themselves. (...) It is not a one-way street. It can only work jointly, no matter if it is a German, Polish, or Turkish citizen.” (AB3)

“For me integration is give and take. It’s not about assimilation, but about trying to live together. It’s a two way process”. (AC3)

While the references to “contacts” rather address the individual level and individual encounters, a further group of statements refers to the **make-up of society and host-migrant relations**. Several statements can be grouped into a category of “**coexistence**” (AB1, AA11, AD9, AD11, AD14, AC5), meaning mutual acceptance as baseline and indicating a *multicultural perspective*.

“When you say refugees/migrants have to accept our culture, it doesn't work. There has to be space in our community and society that allows to maintain their culture. However, basic principles, like democratic principles in Austria, must be accepted. (...) From the side of migrants, it would mean to accept our system and culture, and from the side of Austrian society that we also accept their culture.” (AC5:11,13)

Some indicate a more *intercultural orientation*, including not only the acceptance of multiple cultures but also requiring or aiming at dialogue and interactions (AB7), e.g. *“living together in peace”* (AC3), moving towards each other and approaching each other (AD1) and in case of one interviewee (trade unions, locality D) seeing space for both, i.e. *“Successful integration is where everyone can live in peace next to each other and also with each other.”* (AD14)

This points to the **framework that allows for such a coexistence and living together**, respectively. Two frames appear here. This includes a normative dimension on a **basic consensus on norms and rules**, and a structural dimension in regard to the **residential distribution of different groups**. Residential segregation is generally viewed as a problem, this is mainly put forward for locality C (AC14, AC4, AC16), while interviewees of locality D highlight instead that there is no residential segregation/clustering of migrants in their locality (AD6, AD2, AD3). Resolved residential segregation would allow for encounters between migrants and (native) locals, take out tensions (AC 16), provide for more equal opportunities, e.g. access to services and educational career prospects (AC4), and require migrants to learn German (faster) (AC16). The rural cases share **concerns on (the arrival/number of) asylum seekers** in their localities. Both faced the establishment of shelters for asylum seekers after 2015 and did not have such facilities prior to that. In case of locality D, both interviewed policymakers (member of local government, member of opposition) stated that the number of asylum seekers had to be within the limits of what the population can reasonably be expected to bear. Differences in views regard the thresholds. While for the member of the local opposition 100 men were too much for the locality (corresponds to approx. 1.5% of the population) (AD9), the member of local government (AD2) agreed with 100 but not more as acceptable for the



resident population. This is in contrast to the medium-sized and small town, where such concerns were not voiced/reported prominently by interviewees.

For the **normative dimension of norms and rules**, stated views show a range of positions from general statements (*“Integration means respecting rules, respecting laws”*, AD1; *“It is important that everyone abides by the law and also enables these people to participate and does not place hurdles in their way”*, AC8), liberal views (*“My claim is that we have to agree on a basic consensus in society, and that is the Austrian constitution and the Austrian laws. (...) ... and they apply equally to everyone”*, AA11) as well as paternalistic views/observations, including references to “culture”. (*“Their upbringing (Erziehung) and attitudes do not permit what is normal in Austria”*, AC13).

A further frame across localities is **(successful) socio-economic integration**. This means adults are in employment and children/minors in kindergartens and schools. Both can be framed differently. Arguments for the relevance of work comprise individual economic self-sufficiency (AB19), participation in a central domain of society (AC15, AD6, AB12) and having equal opportunities, e.g. being employed according to one’s qualifications/strengths (AA17, AC5, AD3), being economically better off (higher income from work than from welfare allowing to find e.g. better housing conditions) (AC3), as well as corresponding to a common status of that age group (*“Integration means that children should be integrated in schools and migrants have a job”*, AD9; see also AB3). Apart from work, **knowledge of German** is repeatedly stressed as relevant for integration, viewing language skills as facilitator for integration into the labour market as well as for making contacts with locals. (AB19, AA17, A14, AC13, AC3, AD9)

In contrast to socioeconomic indicators of integration, only a few interviewees refer to **psychosocial well-being, feelings of attachment and belonging**, e.g. integration *“means settling, feeling comfortable”* (AB2), finding *“a new home”* (AD10), *“when I feel part of this society”* (AC1), *“to have found one’s place, where you feel safe and stable, and you can realise your full potential”* (AA3). This includes the observation that integration was primarily understood as learning German and then finding a job, while other aspects, such as mental health and needs of minors are neglected (AC4). Moreover, attachment can be linked with specific expectations and pointing to the process character of integration:

*“Integration is that refugees manage to **find a new home and can identify with our way of life**”. The eight-hour values and orientation course is not enough to get across our values and way of life. Integration is not a course, it takes years.”*
(AD10:14-14)

Interviewees of the public sector and from NGOs point to a further dimension of **“integration”, being a policy term/concept** (AB9, AB12, AB19, AC1, AC2, AC3, AC4, AD6) with implications for organisations and migrants. This comprises at the organisational level using the term when talking to the ministry, writing funding applications and implementing projects (AC2, AC4). In case of the AMS, integration has primarily a different meaning, in the sense of integrating unemployed/jobseekers into the labour market, comprising eligible Austrian and

foreign citizens alike (AD6). Furthermore, policy concepts of integration impact and are relevant for the situation of migrants, creating a disintegration framework for asylum seekers who are not allowed to work (AB19), simply being a relevant term as refugees with status have to sign an “integration declaration” (AC3), as well as having potentially an impact on the outcome of asylum procedures:

"Integration is important because they have to prove in the asylum procedure that they are well integrated. They ask us for a confirmation that they have attended the café, documenting that they have had contact with Austrians." (AC1)

A further frame that local policymakers voiced is **“integration works (better) with families/children”**. Integration would work well through kindergartens and schools and can provide an opportunity to reach parents with integration measures, e.g. by providing German courses to mothers (AC16). Observations from the two rural cases are that rather families stay in the locality/region and thus participate and start to integrate, also by having children in schools/kindergartens, including hopes that *“through the children I hope that integration will work.”* (AD2:15)

	Dominant Frames used by local policymakers	Dominant frames used by other actors
Locality A	Agreeing on a basic consensus in society Fostering encounters between migrants and locals	Enabling encounters Affordable housing, avoiding segregation
Locality B	“We are open” vs. “People want to be among themselves”	Enabling encounters Participation in work, education and local community life
Locality C	Reducing residential segregation	Residential segregation
Locality D	The number of asylum seekers must be within acceptable limits (Member of local government, member of opposition). Integration works better with families/children.	Enabling contacts Support were needed Participation in work, education and local community life
National Officials	Ensure speedy economic self-sufficiency (50 Points Action Plan)	
Regional Officials	Promoting social cohesion under increasing diversity (Tyrol, integration charter, regional official) Integration as reciprocal, continuous process that requires individual efforts and support (Lower Austria, regional official)	

Table 4: Dominant frames in different localities



Comparing frames across localities

In regard to the **specificities of views of integration according to the size of the locality**, there is a **general difference between views on integration in “small municipalities”, “villages”, “in the countryside” and “towns”**.

Comparing the four cases, we can make a **distinction between the “rural cases” and the small and medium-sized town**. Respondents of civil society considered **integration as easier in smaller localities and in localities with a smaller share of migrants/refugees** (AB1, AB2). Respondents from civil society, street-level bureaucrats as well as local policymakers (members of local government and opposition, AD2, AD9, AB15) described integration as establishing contacts with locals and/or social integration via clubs and associations, including social expectations that refugees participate in local associations and community life (AD6) and assimilate (AD2). It would require only a few locals that were open to newcomers to enabling contacts between migrants and locals (AB2). While everyday encounters may arise just due to the small scale, a further observation is that **scepticism is relatively high in rural areas**. An interviewee of a non-profit service provider observed, however, that a municipality could stand behind them a lot, if migrants/refugees managed to overcome this obstacle (AB7). Showing individual efforts and engaging in local community life is mentioned as a means to reach some form of belonging (“...if you help out in organisations, you are seen. Refugees also helped during the flood disaster. If you help out, you will be seen and will belong at some point”, AD1).

“My observation is that the smaller the municipalities were and the smaller the number of arriving refugee, the easier it was that these people were considered as part of the village. Thereby public (media) discourse frames integration as an obligation of migrants (Bringschuld).” (AB1)

“The locality is a very small municipality, everybody knows something about everybody else. (...) The pressure is certainly higher to assimilate, to adapt to the local conditions, to adopt the values of the society that lives here, or at least to respect them. What does that mean? You greet people, men and women are equal, you don't do any harm.” (AD2:24)

“So when acceptance is there, ‘when migrants/refugees have proven themselves’, then something good comes back. The community then opens up and they can benefit from it, but it is a rocky road until then.” (AB7)

Interviewees of the rural cases and two towns share the **view that a certain distribution/dispersion of migrants/refugees across municipalities and within municipalities would be beneficial for integration**. While in the rural cases, this includes views on the distribution across municipalities, e.g. *“It think it would be important to disperse refugees, a few people in each municipality.”* (AB2), the reception of refugees per se is not specifically addressed by interviewees of the small and medium-sized towns. It rather seems a matter of fact that there have been shelters in the towns. In contrast, residential segregation is



mentioned as a challenge in both “town” cases, which would be difficult to tackle due to tense housing markets and limited options for interventions. (AC14, AC16, AA3)

“The housing market is difficult. Space is limited and the locality is among the most expensive towns in terms of rents. This raises questions on affordable housing and avoiding segregation.” (AA3:21-22)

A further **difference between the studied “rural” and “town” cases concerns the role of volunteers** from civil society supporting refugees. They were mentioned by interviewees across the localities as an important resource, but stand out in the rural cases due to the different integration infrastructures and opportunities on a smaller scale, as e.g. the following quote illustrates:

“In rural municipalities, in small municipalities, there have been volunteers that have made successful integration possible. In cities there are support facilities, but in the countryside volunteering is in the foreground, excursions and other activities have been made.” (AB12: 18)

In case of the studied **small town in Lower Austria, comparisons in regard to size are made with Vienna**. It would be still more manageable and not as anonymous as in larger cities (AC15, AC13, AC8). One interviewee even attributes some *“kind of village character that makes it possible to get to know people across the city.”* (AC15) A further observation is that in small towns fewer segregated neighbourhoods and cliques existed. This would also apply to the locality, with a few exceptions. (AC13) However, one respondent observed also reservations against migrants and expectations to assimilate in the locality:

“Nevertheless, there are then conservative forces that strongly reject the new. For example, as far as jobs are concerned. It would be hard to imagine a woman wearing a veil in a bakery. The country is conservative and people aren't that modern and innovative when it comes to integration. There is a lot of fear. The people who arrive here have to adapt very strongly to the prevailing image.” (AC8)

Local attitudes towards post-2014 migrants are perceived rather similar across the four studied cases. Interviewees rate the attitudes of locals towards refugees on average at 3.1 (on a scale from 1-5, with 1 “very negative”, 3 “neither nor” and 5 “very positive”). There is some difference in the assessment on the integration outcomes of post-2014 migrants in their locality. Here locality C scores best with an average 3.2, followed by locality A and locality D (both on average 3.1), while interviewees rate the integration in locality B (and for municipalities/the situation in the district) with 2.9.

3.3 MLG Dynamics in integration policy-making

3.3.1 Mapping the networks

In the following subsection, a network analysis based on an online survey is presented, explaining the connections and interactions between the different actors.

Innsbruck (Locality A)

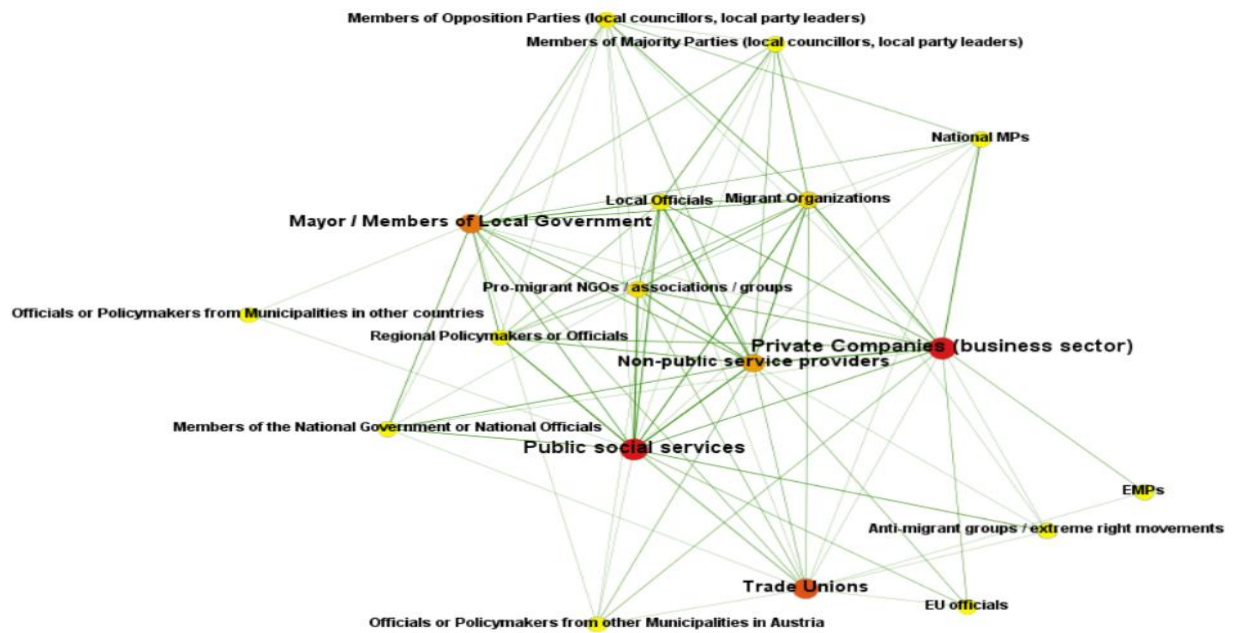


Figure 2: Networks in Innsbruck (Locality A) pre-pandemic

Interviewees were asked about cooperation and exchange with other actors in relation to the integration of migrants after 2014, before and after the Covid pandemic. Reference was made to the frequency of exchange as well as their perception (from not relevant to very cooperative). In a first step, the network analyses will be described and then substantiated with data and statements collected during the interviews.

In Innsbruck (locality A), the main central actors are "public social services", "private companies", "mayors/members of local government" and "non-public service providers". It can be seen that the actor "Public social services" had the most frequent interactions with other actors. In terms of intermediate centrality, the actors "Pro-migrant NGOs/associations/groups", "Regional decision-makers or officials" and "Non-public service providers" are in the intermediate field. Actors who had hardly any connections to others are, for example, "EMPs", "Anti-migrant groups/extreme right movements", "Eu officials", "Members of Opposition Parties", "Officials or Policymakers from other Municipalities in Austria".

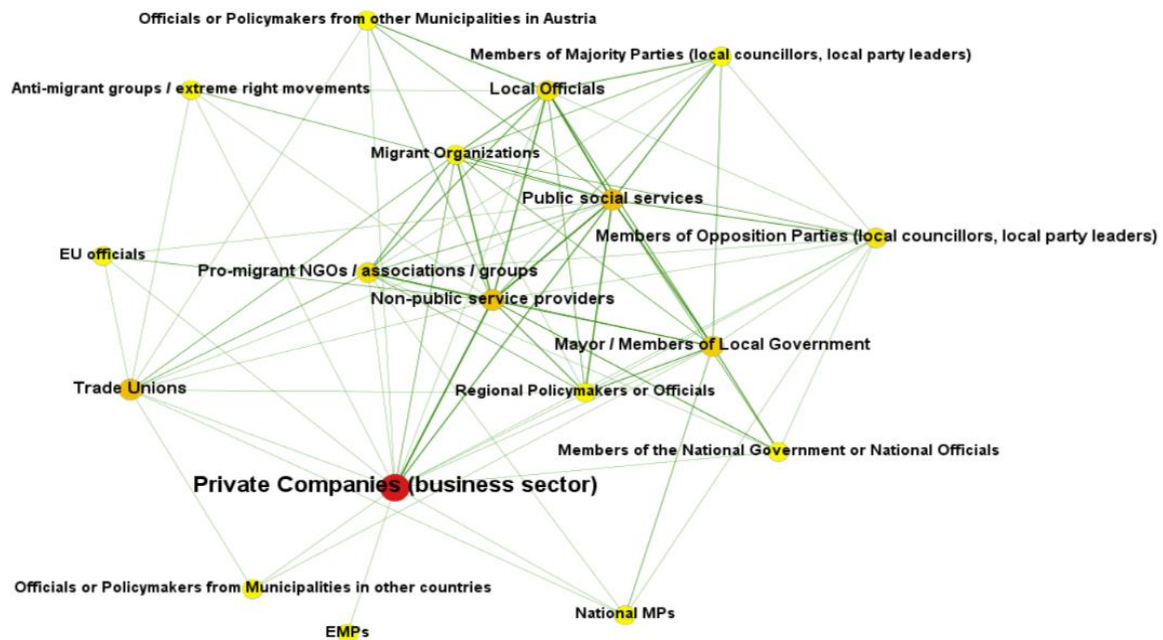


Figure 3: Network in Innsbruck (Locality A) post-pandemic

Compared to the network in Innsbruck before the pandemic, we now see that the actor "Private Companies" has emerged as the main actor. The actor "non-public service providers" has moved to the centre after the pandemic and frequently interacts with the actors "pro-migrant NGOs/associations/groups", "migrant organisations", "public social services", "mayor/members of local government", "regional policymakers or officials" and "private companies".

Locality B

As the study area for locality B had to be expanded, including surrounding municipalities and stakeholders at district level, the following figures give some indication on the network in the area/district and therefore go beyond the local level and locality B.

In this context, local officials (district level), and the actor "Members of Opposition Parties" can be identified as the most important node in pre-pandemic times.

Other actors with a higher weighting in Locality B are "Public social services" and "Local Officials", whereby these two actors show a strong level of Degree Centrality. In terms of degree centrality, "migrant organisations", "pro-migrant NGOs/associations/groups" and "public social services" should also be mentioned, which are more strongly connected to the "local officials".

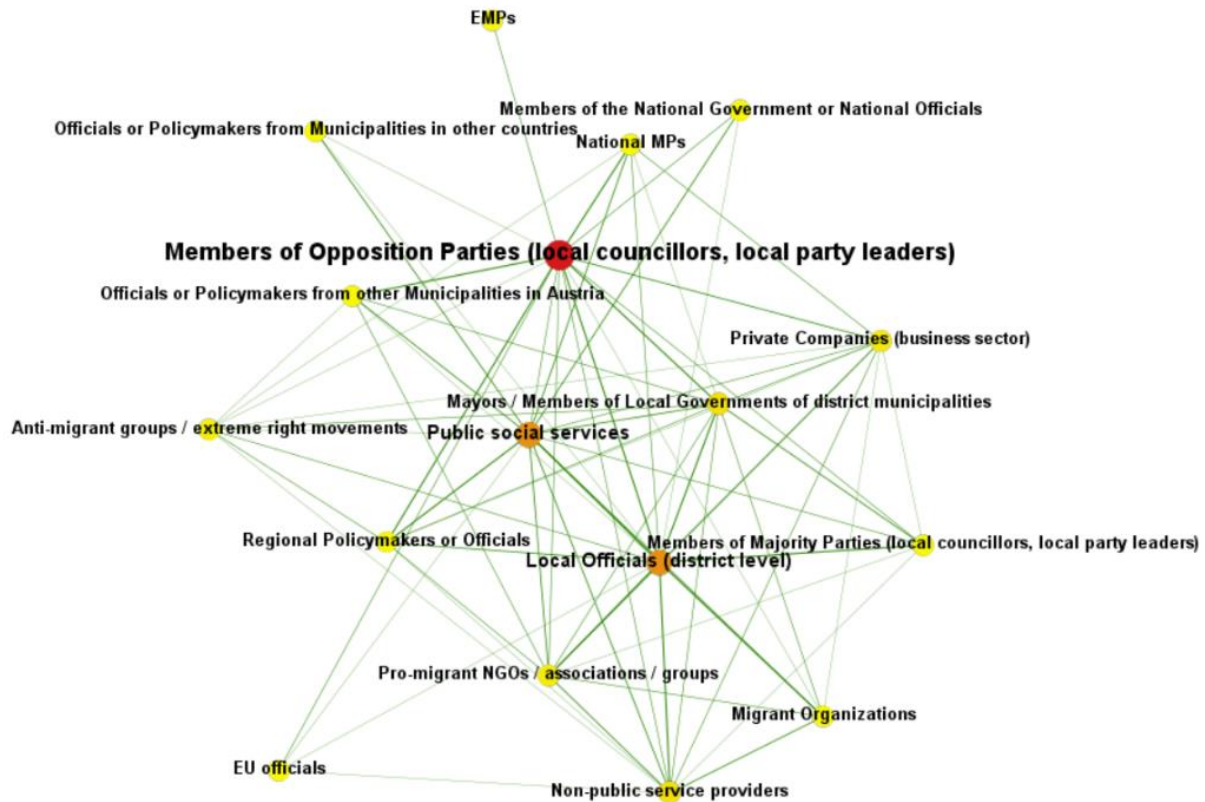


Figure 4: Network Locality B pre-pandemic

What has changed in Locality B after the pandemic is that the density of the whole network has decreased, with the "public social services" actor becoming more prominent. The actors "members of opposition parties", "public social services", "local officials", "non-public service providers" and "mayor/members of local governments of district municipalities" have moved closer together in terms of Closeness Centrality. As far as Betweenness Centrality is concerned, the actors "public social services", "non-public service providers", "local officials", "pro-migrant NGOs/associations/groups" and "members of opposition parties" have the most interactions.

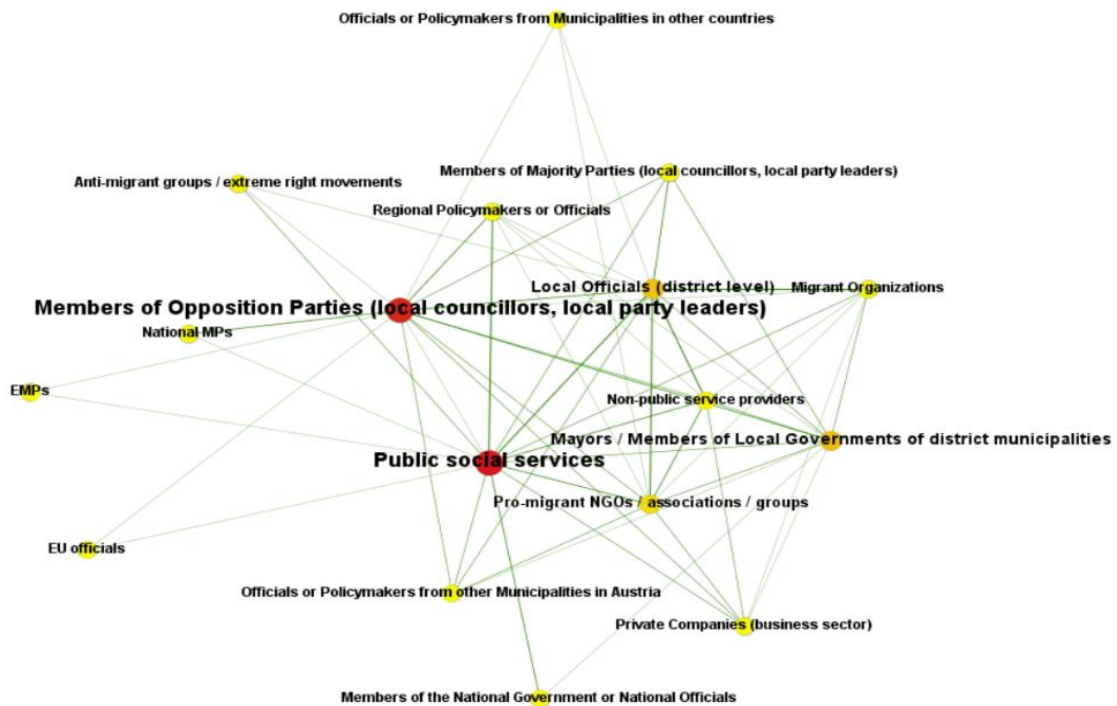


Figure 5: Network Locality B post-pandemic

St. Pölten (Locality C)

In St. Pölten, the actors (“Mayor/Members of Local Government”) were at the centre of the network in pre-pandemic times.

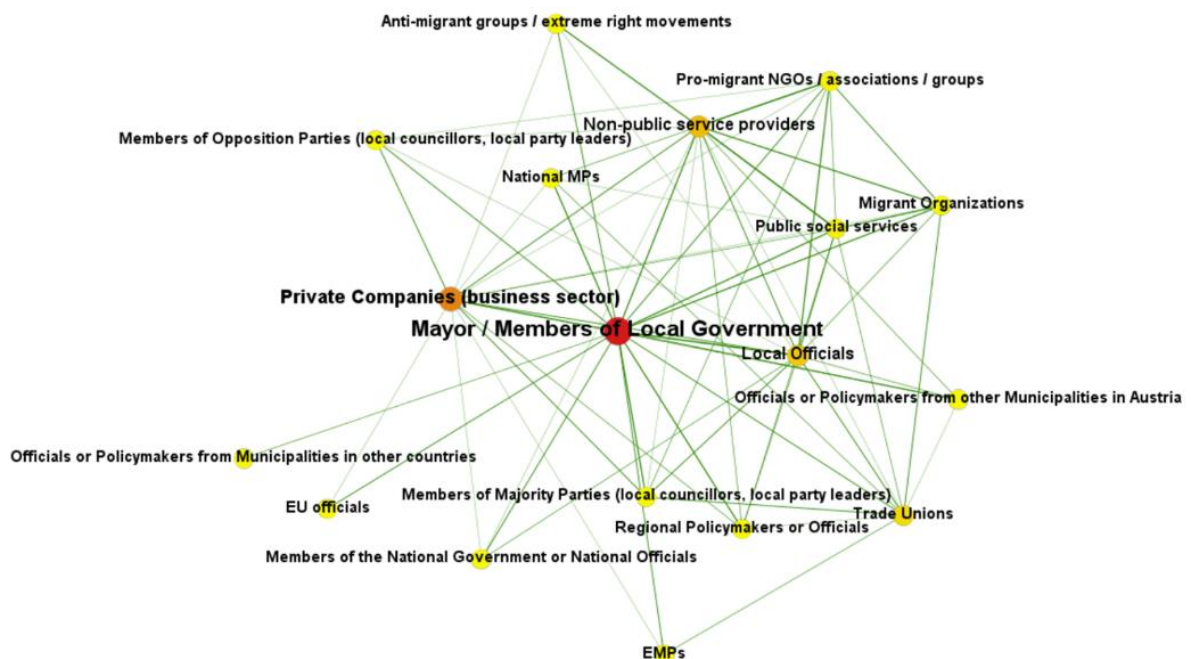


Figure 6: Network in St. Pölten (Locality C) pre-pandemic

This actor also forms the highest degree of intermediate centrality and could thus also be assumed as a link between individual actors. In contrast to Locality D, in Locality C the actors "Private Companies" are more in the centre and the actors "Pro-migrant NGOs/associations/groups" are further away in terms of proximity centrality. As far as network density is concerned, in addition to the actors "Mayor/Members of Local Government", the actors "Local Officials", "Migrant Organisations", "Non-public service providers" and "Trade unions" also show multi-layered connections.

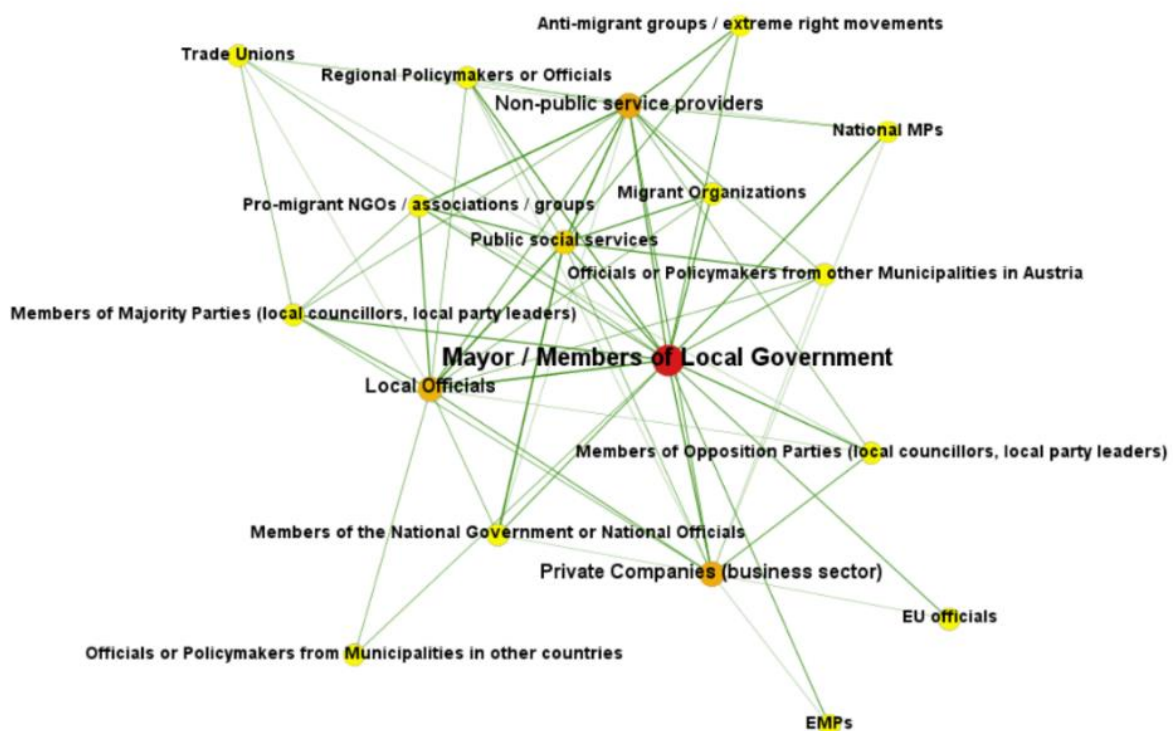


Figure 7: Network in St. Pölten (Locality C) post-pandemic

On a long-term basis, after pandemic times, other connections have become stronger, for example, in terms of Degree Centrality, the actor "Mayor/Members of Local Government" is still in the middle field, with the actor "Public social services" also appearing more intensively. As far as the density of the network is concerned, the connections of the actors "Public social services", "Non-public service providers", "Local Officials" seem to have condensed. A significant difference can be seen with regard to the Closeness Centrality - the actors "Pro-migrant NGOs/associations/groups", "Non-public service providers", "Migrant Organizations", "Officials or Policymakers from other Municipalities in Austria", "Members of Opposition Parties", "Members of National Government or National Officials" and "Local Officials" seem to be connected more frequently after the pandemic, while the actor "Private Companies" has moved further away.

Locality D

In Locality D, the actors "Members of Opposition Parties", "Members of Majority Parties" and "Mayor/Members of Local Government" form the highest Betweenness Centrality. The "Members of Majority Parties" achieve the highest values in the areas of Degree Centrality and Between Centrality, although no further details are given as to whether the connections originate from or are directed at an actor.

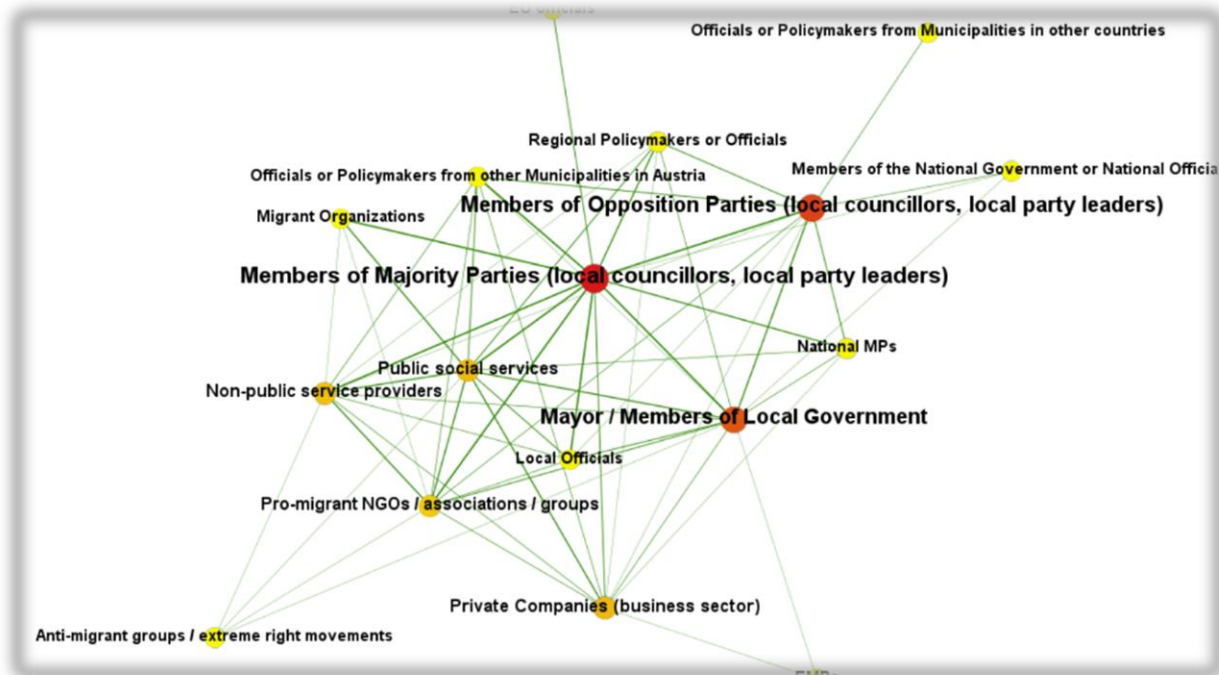


Figure 8: Network Locality D pre-pandemic

According to the network analysis, "Members of Majority Parties" seem to be networked both with the members of the municipal council or the mayor and the members of the opposition parties in the municipal council and, albeit to a lesser extent, with the actors "Public social services", "Local Officials", "Pro-migrant NGOs/associations/groups" and "non-public service providers". As far as Closeness Centrality is concerned, actors "Public social services", "Officials or Policymakers from other Municipalities in Austria", "Local Officials", "Mayor/Members of Local Government" and "Members of Opposition Parties" are at a similar distance from "Members of Majority Parties". As far as the Density of network connections is concerned, it can be seen in Locality D that the actors "pro-migrant NGOs/associations/groups", "private companies", "non-public service providers" have many connections to the previously mentioned central actors "Members of Majority Parties", "Mayor/Members of Local Government".

In the long term, significant differences from the pre-Corona pandemic network can be observed. While before the pandemic the network seemed to be more condensed, after the pandemic some connections have become stronger ("Members of Opposition Parties",

"Members of Majority Parties", "Public social services", "Pro-migrant NGOs" and "Non-public service providers"), while other previously central actors have faded into the background ("Mayor/Members of Local Government").

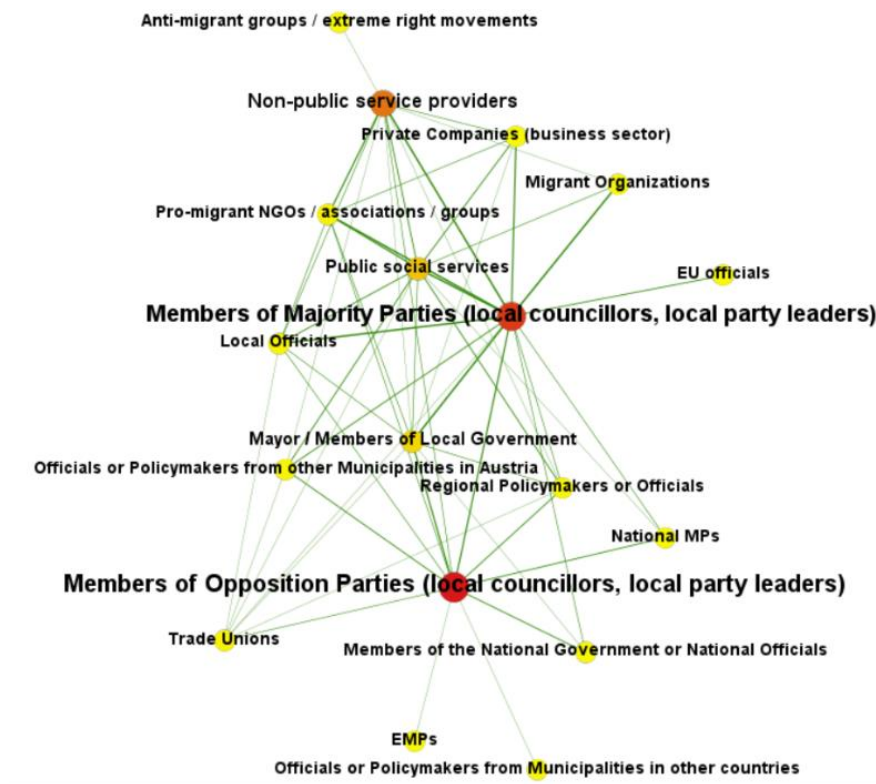


Figure 9: Network Locality D post-pandemic

3.3.2 Actors' functions and their roles in governance networks

Locality A

In locality A, there is an integration office within the municipal administration that worked with both external and internal actors. The integration office has sometimes also intervened in complaints against unfriendly staff in a municipal department (AA1:31-32). The Integration Office collaborates with the Tyrolean Social Service (TSD), which is responsible for the reception of refugees and the care of asylum seekers in Tyrol. Meanwhile, the Integration Office also provided offers for volunteers, such as trainings to support them in teaching German or reflection workshops. Furthermore, the Integration Office collaborates with the AMS and the Chamber of Commerce. A job fair for refugees was organised from this working group in 2017. If there are bottlenecks in social matters or gaps that cannot be covered by (regular) service providers, the Integration Office often takes on tasks that go beyond their area of responsibility in cooperation with volunteers. There was another cooperation between the AMS, the Economic Chamber and the Austrian Integration Fund, the programme "Mentoring for Migrants". The AMS (Public Employment Service), the public agency administering unemployment benefits and active labour market policy measures, including



refugees, has commissioned, among other things, a special counselling and care centre for refugees, which was co-financed by EU funds.

As for volunteers, they have offered many German courses and other cultural activities.

Locality B

In locality B, measures had been designed mainly to meet the needs of the refugee shelters and their residents. These measures were coordinated by a member of the local government who also acted as the main contact person for all issues related to refugees in the municipality. As far as local support measures are concerned, it was mainly volunteers who took on tasks such as providing language courses, finding jobs through their own networks or accompanying refugees to job interviews (cf. AB3, AB19). The municipality itself offered work to asylum seekers within the framework of community work. Due to the municipality's administrative status (being one municipality among others in the district) and its size, regular mainstream services and specific measures to promote integration were not available in the locality itself. For example, the AMS does not have a local office, but is (mostly) represented in the district capitals. Refugees have to travel to a nearby larger city to access specific counselling and care services. Therefore, volunteers and NGOs are important local actors both in the initial reception and in the further support of refugees (cf. AB1).

Locality C

In locality C, an important player for integration is the corresponding office, which operates within the local public administration. Thereby its areas of responsibility go beyond the topic of integration (women, people with disabilities, people of other origin, sexual identity, religion and ideology). Among other things, the office has also cooperated with civil society actors who have founded an encounter café for the purpose of bringing migrants and locals together. The AMS (Public Employment Service) offered specific measures for migrants in locality C, including special language courses for health care professions. There was also a cooperation between AMS (Public Employment Service) and the Chamber of Agriculture regarding the placement of refugees in the agricultural sector (cf. AC5:19). Another cooperation was between the AMS (Public Employment Service) and a service provider/counselling centre, which offers the refugees mother-tongue support during the AMS appointment. As far as social integration is concerned, cultural institutions also play a role (example world choir). Another cooperation has also been pushed between the AMS and an NGO that runs a refugee shelter with regard to German courses. Furthermore, other smaller associations are also open to refugees (urban gardening, a bicycle workshop), and there are also migrant associations. Non-profit service providers in locality C also offer services such as legal counselling or interpreter-supported psychotherapy, which are intended to provide targeted support to migrants. The district office of the Chamber of Commerce has not taken any specific measures at the local level in locality C.

Locality D

In locality D, a local civil society initiative (organised as association) has evolved as important player and took over many tasks, such as assisting with the accommodation of refugees, providing German language courses, but also assisting with job search. The association worked together with the municipality and was also supported by the mayor in this locality (mainly with donations in kind). The local association of volunteers provided support when needed and was a first point of contact (AD3:60). The municipality itself employed³⁹ a few asylum seekers in the municipal building yard, German courses were initially also offered by the AMS and the ÖIF, but this had tended to decline in the region (cf. AD6:6). Other integration measures funded by the provincial government were discontinued when integration affairs passed to the FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria). The association of volunteers also intervened in a supportive manner when it came to job placement with the AMS. A non-profit service provider based in the provincial capital offered a mobile job counselling service once a month in the native languages of the local refugees.

Other activities were also organised by the police, who held courses on safety and de-escalation (AD6).

3.3.3 Dynamics of cooperation and conflict

Innsbruck (locality A)

In locality A, despite the fact that all actors would be "connected" (AA1: 64-66), criticism of the **federal government's actions** was voiced by a local official. As a local official argued, these would be planned and implemented without regard to whether or not they make sense at the local level (AA1: 38-39). Furthermore, the same actor also stressed that **cooperation at European and national level can be difficult**. Local decisions are often not in agreement with the federal government, "*The mayor has advocated to take in refugees from Moria. The federal government is not very helpful here*" (AA1: 37). Representatives of locality A **participate once a month in the Networking Asylum (Vernetzung Asyl) meeting⁴⁰ with around 30 participants** from different organisations in Tyrol. The same actor emphasises in the further course of the interview that the official channels in locality A are short and that there is good cooperation with all actors involved.

³⁹ Within the corresponding legal framework of community-based auxiliary tasks (gemeinnützige Tätigkeiten) (see for further details chapter 3.1.1 Asylum system)

⁴⁰ The Platform Asyl - FÜR MENSCHEN RECHTE arose in 2011 from supporters of the independent legal advice service Tyrol and evolved into Plattform Asyl in 2017. This platform's mission is to raise awareness about flight, asylum and human rights, to educate young people in workshops, to provide encounter spaces for refugees and people who have been living in Austria for a longer period of time, and to provide objective information. Plattform Asyl participates at several networking bodies in Tyrol. These include, for example, the Networking Asylum and the Tyrolean Integration Forum.

"There are short communication channels and very good cooperation with everyone (city, province, NGOs, religious communities). We know each other in person, which makes it easier. Once a month there is the Network Asylum with about 30 participants" (AA1: 24).

Cooperation with the Austrian Integration Fund, which is responsible for implementing the Integration Agreement in Austria, proved to be difficult because the legal framework is not considered practicable. This mainly concerns the implementation of language courses and the transfer of data between responsible actors, such as the AMS (PES).

"Cooperation is difficult because the ÖIF can only exchange data directly with the AMS. But the ÖIF commissions education providers for the German courses and that is extremely time-consuming. It is very tedious, much more tedious than if the AMS would commission the education providers. That's not because of the ÖIF staff and the language trainers, it's because of the legal framework. It is very time-consuming and to everyone's dissatisfaction" (AA2: 14).

Another measure, which is also reflected in the network map (Collaboration/Conflict), is the organisation of the job fair "Chancenreich" between AMS (PES), Chamber of Commerce and Locality A.

"In 2016-18 the focus was on apprenticeships, now it is broader again. The contribution of the Chamber of Commerce was to attract employers from the regions where refugees are accommodated" (AA17: 25).

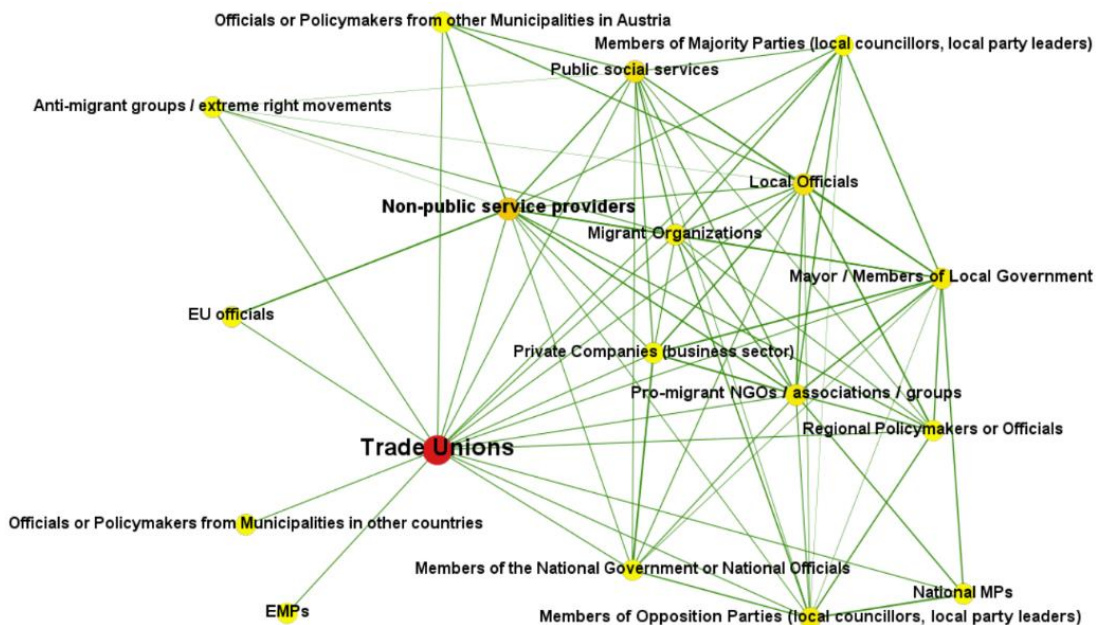


Figure 10: Network Collaboration/Conflict Locality A (Innsbruck)

Locality B

Dynamics of conflict evolved in locality B with the planned establishment of a refugee shelter and affected multilevel governance relations in regard to the provincial level. Basically, the provincial level is responsible for the reception and support of asylum seekers and in case of locality B, it concluded a contract with a private property owner, transforming a small boarding house into a refugee shelter. According to the interviewed member of the local government, the municipality heard only about it, when the establishment of the first shelter was already in full swing:

"Without information. I don't think it can be done without information. Imagine a village in Tyrol, without information, a thirty-seater bus comes, all these black people get out and go into a house, and there are 700 inhabitants in the village. You can't do that, you're not allowed to do that. Then, of course, they call the municipality. Who is responsible for everything in the municipality and who has to fix everything? It's the mayor and his people, of course. It's like that in rural communities. And the mayor is also responsible for everything. Then people call 'Why don't you know that? ... That's not possible, that you don't know that.'"
(AB19: 81)

"I didn't let up until I had the state councillor on the phone and told her that I hope she never does that again with the locality, because that's bad for a municipality. Then the communication got better again. Exactly what they wanted to prevent happened, this complete refusal by municipalities, except for a few welcoming municipalities, and you could hear saying 'You have to resist long enough, then you won't get any'." (AB19: 83)

Part of the tensions in refugee reception and support seems to be linked to organisational changes. Already prior to the inflows of 2015, the province of Tyrol decided to delegate refugee reception and support (basic welfare support) to a newly established agency (Tiroler Soziale Dienste). Its establishment coincided with the large humanitarian inflows, and needs to provide shelter and basic support for large numbers within a short period of time.⁴¹ In regard to multilevel governance relations in general, interviewees refer to a larger extent to interactions at the subnational level.

"I have not observed any measures by the EU. If you take the different levels, we are at the very last level. Also measures of the federal level did not always affect us, but measures of the provincial level matter a lot for us. The province pays staff for integration" (AB1: 37).

Besides the provincial level, there has been exchange at district level with the mayors of the district (Bezirkshauptmannschaft). (AB19: 71) A pro migrant group also mentioned that so-

⁴¹ Opposition parties criticised the establishment of this new agency repeatedly in state parliament, including the set up of a committee of inquiry and the provincial court of auditors carried out a special audit of TSD in 2017. (Landesrechnungshof Tirol, 2017)

called "circles of friends" (civil society movements) have been formed, which have become **better organised over time**, involving translocal meetings for exchange between the initiatives three to four times per year (AB2: 39). In case of locality B, there is a "circle of friends", which is attached to a larger refugee shelter in the district and whose members live in municipalities of the district and a neighbouring district. Some members live in locality B and organised support and activities in the locality. . The AMS office (Public Employment Service) provided information on the the legal framework, planned and adopted measures and organised networking meetings.

Besides dynamics of cooperation and conflict at subnational level, the observed consequences of changes in the provision of German courses points to tensions between conceptualisations at national level and its implications for the subnational/local level: Street level bureaucrats mentioned **bureaucratic hurdles that become visible with the Austrian Integration Fund**. Since the Austrian Integration Fund has taken over the central role in the provision of German courses after 2019, there would now be more waiting lists and greater bureaucratic hurdles. Refugees would also have to travel longer distances to attend a German course (cf. AB12: 24).

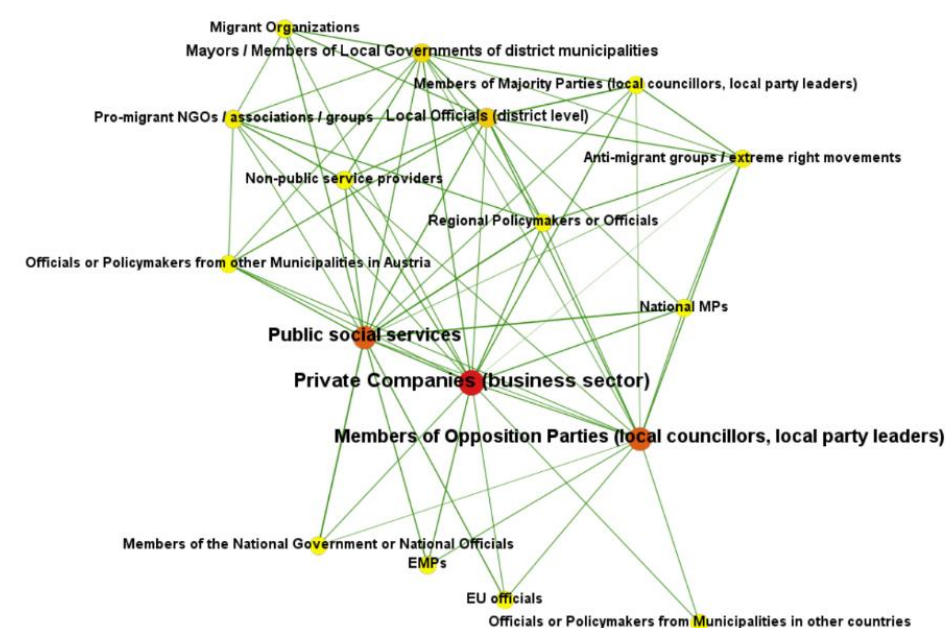


Figure 11: Network Collaboration/Conflict Locality B

St. Pölten (Locality C)

In St. Pölten, interviewees emphasized the **good cooperation between the different actors**, as well as "a mostly common basic **understanding**" of integration by the members of the **municipal council, the mayor and the Office for Diversity**. In contrast, several interviewees described the **relation between the municipality and the provincial councilor for Integration (who is a right-wing politician) as conflictual** (cf. AC2: 46). Among other things, the new Social

Assistance Act (NÖ Sozialhilfe-Grundsatzgesetz, which came into force in January 2020) affects locality C and, had existential consequences for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Lower Austria. The **city has tried to counteract restrictions coming from the federal/provincial level**. In some cases, there were complaints in some neighbourhoods, and pressure was then put on the city via the provincial government. Local media reports (NÖN, Heute) would have been selective. On the one hand, incidents were exaggerated and other things were not reported at all. It was also mentioned that the **political stance taken by the federal government of the time (People's Party and Freedom Party) was perceived as problematic in relation to the issue of integration** and that a **counter-movement was forming in Locality C**.

"The NGOs and also the municipal government in St. Pölten, and above all the SPÖ [Social Democrats], were then able to take a counter-position" (AC8: 58).

Furthermore, interviewees mentioned the Lower Austrian Advisory Board for Integration as a forum for exchange, bringing together actors from different sectors working on integration issues:

"The Lower Austrian Integration Advisory Council is an institutional network. Then there is the Lower Austrian Integration Advisory Council (NÖ Integrationsbeirat), which was set up by [the provincial councillor for asylum and integration], member of the provincial government, and in which various stakeholders from Lower Austria participate. Among them, one group is dedicated, for example, to the topic of housing or work, or social issues" (AC2: 46).

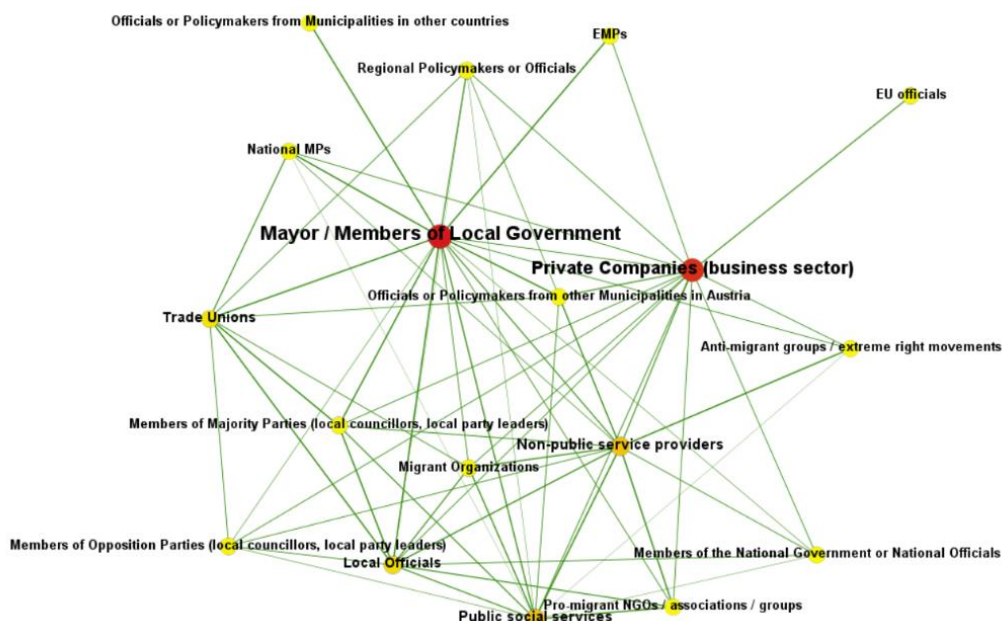


Figure 12: Network Collaboration/Conflict Locality C

Locality D

Similar to the rural locality B in Tyrol, the planned establishment of a refugee shelter caused tensions in the rural locality D in Lower Austria. About **400 asylum seekers were to be accommodated in the barracks. The municipality was informed late or not at all** or were presented with a fait accompli. The municipality claimed that they had not been informed and only found out about the fact through the media. This initially **created tensions and the mayor lobbied at the provincial level to accept fewer asylum seekers**. During an information meeting, some volunteers came together and founded an association that was to play a central role in supporting refugees in this locality. In locality D, it was emphasised several times that the provincial requirements were often difficult to implement or did not correspond to the reality in the municipalities.

“The measures of the so-called integration experts, who only have an academic title but have never experienced this on the ground over a long period of time, sound great, but they don't work. All these integration courses are pointless. I am a fan of small units because society is healthier and a healthier society can simply take more” (AD2:25).

The **cooperation with a volunteer association was considered very fruitful by all actors** and it was mentioned several times that without this association of volunteers was crucial for integration in this locality.

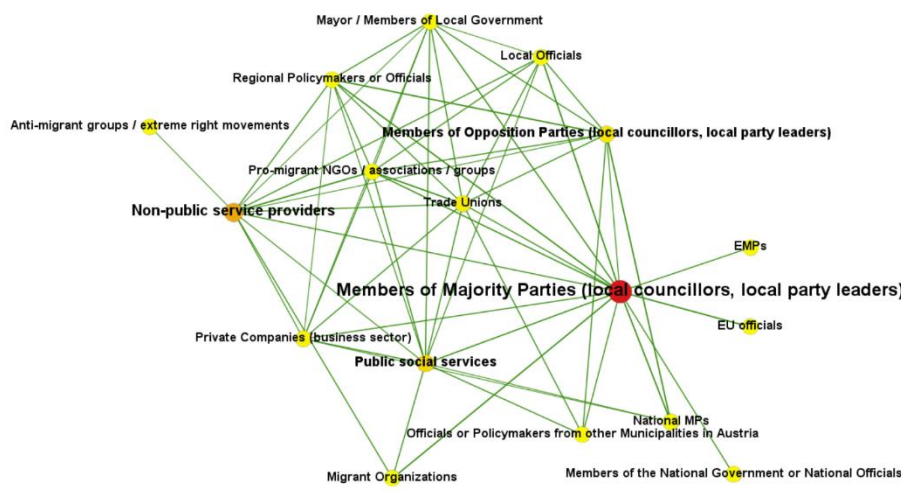


Figure 13: Network Collaboration/ Conflict Locality D

In Locality D, it was emphasised several times that the **provincial requirements were often difficult to implement or did not correspond to the reality in the municipalities**.



3.4 Decision-making

Federal integration policy in Austria has been governed by [National Action Plan for Integration/NAP.I 2010](#) and has focused on labor market integration as well as language acquisition and the so-called "Austrian values". Parallel to the Expert Council for Integration (Expertenrat für Integration), an [Integration Advisory Council](#) (Integrationsbeirat) **was established in October 2010**. It **includes representatives of the federal government, the provinces and the social partners, as well as the Association of Municipalities and Cities, the Federation of Austrian Industries and NGOs**. The NAP.I still serves as a guide for Austria's integration efforts today. It identifies a number of thematic areas, including language and education, work and employment, legal framework, cultural values, intercultural dialogue, health and social affairs, sports and leisure, and housing. In addition to this overarching and fundamental plan, there are more targeted integration plans that focus on the integration of recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Austria. The most recent [50 Action Points-A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria](#), was published in 2016. In addition, the **Austrian federal government appointed two integration coordinators at the national level** as government officials for the provision of decent housing for refugees. This office was **established in October 2015 and continued until the end of September 2016**. Regardless of the fact that a set of rules regarding the integration of refugees existed at the national level, there were differences in the implementation and distribution of competencies at the province and local level, which will be outlined in the following.

According to the respondents, there are a **number of factors that influence local integration policies**. Multiple and explicit references concern a **confusing distribution of responsibilities, non-consideration of local conditions and possibilities for receiving and accommodating refugees, insufficient or no data sharing, and few opportunities for shaping and steering policies**. In addition, the **low or lack of financial and structural support** from the national and provincial governments regarding the implementation of initiatives and measures, counterproductive legislation, as well as political changes at the national level were mentioned. **Since 2013, there have been seven different federal governments** in Austria, resulting in shifting of responsibilities at the national level regarding migration and integration policies. As a result, responsibilities and support structures also changed. On the one hand, this led to communication problems and, on the other hand, it affected long-term and sustainable implementation of integration policies and measures at the local level.

Decision-making processes in policymaking and the defining role of politics were also raised in interviews at the provincial and national levels. **At the national level, interviewees highlighted changing structures due to frequent changes in government and governance arrangements between coalition partners**, as important factors influencing policy design and implementation. The national officials interviewed clarified that *"we are not satisfied with all the political decisions, but we are charged with implementing them. We have the possibility to give opinions, but we are bound by the political guidelines and thus the possibilities to shape*

or influence the laws are very limited” (A1). **One of the provincial officials also addressed the difficult relationship between the national and provincial level, pointing to differing approaches and emphasis:**

“Cooperation and coordination with the national level has always been difficult. We focus on potentials and the federal level has more of a deficit-oriented approach. The federal level often focuses on Islam, Islamism, violence, terrorism in integration issues. We can't achieve much with that” (AT1).

Referring to the governance and design of integration policy, the provincial official says that the legal framework is clear and narrow. However, the design at the provincial level is largely open. As a province, one can set one's own priorities with one's own and with EU funds. The law is not restrictive in this respect.

Innsbruck (Locality A)

Prior to the in-person interviews⁴², respondents were also asked, through an online survey, to identify **factors that influence their actions and decisions** related to immigrant integration between 2016 and 2021.

Based on the analysis of the surveys, the **most important factors for policy makers and members of the local government are ‘economic situation of the locality’, ‘suggestions of representatives of public authorities’, ‘attitudes of residents towards refugees’, ‘concerns/initiatives or pressure from NGOs, associations, political parties, national and federal governments’, and ‘engagement for refugees’.**

Political actors highlighted ‘next elections’, ‘concerns/initiatives or pressure from the national government, political parties’, ‘protest against refugees’, and the influence of ‘local media’ as the most influencing factors in their decision making. For the non-political stakeholders, ‘concerns/initiatives or pressure from parties that make up the majority in the local council, provincial government, national government’, ‘local media’, ‘engagement for refugees’, ‘own values and ideas’, and ‘protests against refugees’ are the most valuable factors. These variously mentioned factors can be summarized in the statement of the interviewed member of the local government of the locality:

“The most important thing is the basic attitude you have. Of course, it is helpful if the local council is also aware of the human rights obligations. What the media write or the opposition says doesn't really matter. [...]. My claim is that we have to agree on a basic consensus in society. This is the Austrian constitution and the Austrian laws (AA11).”

⁴² Some of the interviews had to be conducted online due to COVID-19 measures.



The engagement for refugees is underlined by all interviewees and also relates to their 'own values and ideas'. An important factor, especially in the implementation of measures, according to a senior street-level bureaucrat, is the legal framework and mandate: *“For us, the most important influencing factor is the legal framework in which we operate”* (AA14).

Locality B

Based on the results of the survey for locality B⁴³, **the most important factors for policy makers and members of the local government are, ‘next elections’, ‘own values and ideas’, ‘economic situation of the locality’, ‘suggestions from representatives of public authorities’, and ‘concerns/initiatives or pressure from parties that make up the majority in the local council, provincial government’.**

The main difference compared to locality A, is the **mention of the upcoming elections by all survey respondents**. As already mentioned in chapter 2, the mayor has recently changed after the municipal elections. Thus, this factor seems to be central for locality B and for the political development and implementation of refugee-related measures and support structures.

Political actors highlighted ‘attitudes of residents towards refugees’, ‘engagement for refugees’, ‘local media’, and also ‘next elections’ as the most influencing factors in their decision making. For the non-political stakeholders, ‘engagement for refugees’, ‘own values and ideas’, ‘concerns/initiatives or pressure from private companies’, ‘next elections’, and ‘local media’ are the most rated factors. As already mentioned in chapter 2, the area of investigation of locality B was expanded to the surrounding municipalities and region, since the challenges also affect the entire region. With regard to decision-making processes, the former chairperson of a pro migrant group, which is active in the region in refugee support, and at the same time the mayor of a municipality in the region, highlights:

“Of course there were exchanges on problems, legal framework conditions (access to apprenticeship, basic income regulations). Of course, that has been reported back through the network to MPs ..., but until that is implemented, if it is implemented at all, it takes time and I have to find a solution until then. The problem is now and I can't wait until a solution comes (AB3).”

To what extent decision-making processes depend on the political will of the most diverse decision-makers is illustrated by the politically responsible person of locality B:

“There were meetings with all the mayors of the district at the district administration. The managing director of (name of the institution)⁴⁴ was at a meeting. That was interesting. At first there was silence and then I asked what the situation was with the German courses because it was so difficult. Then things

⁴³ Including interviewees of locality B, surrounding municipalities and the district capital.

⁴⁴ Institution responsible for refugee accommodations in the relevant federal state



started to move and you immediately saw who withdrew and some said 'Great that we are finally addressing this'. You could observe a two-class society, also among the mayors" (AB19).

St. Pölten (Locality C)

Based on the analysis of the surveys regarding locality C, where there was the least feedback, **the most important factors for policy makers and members of the local government are 'own values and ideas', and 'concerns/initiatives or pressure from parties that make up the majority in the local council'.**

Political actors highlighted the factors 'engagement for refugees', and 'concerns/initiatives or pressure from NGOs, associations, political parties, national and federal governments' as the most valuable. For the non-political stakeholders, 'concerns/initiatives or pressure from NGOs, associations, political parties, national and federal governments', and 'recommendations from Authority representatives' are the most influencing factors in their decision making. For the mayor of the locality, it is clear how and according to which requirements decisions should be made. The important thing thereby should be to put the people in the center:

"(The locality) has always been affected by refugee crises. During the Hungarian crisis, 14,000 refugees were in (the locality). The refugee crisis in the early 1990s was also a major challenge. We have always asked ourselves what necessities these people have, what it looks like with kindergartens and schools, etc. We have always tried to adapt our offers to the requirements of people" (AC16).

Nevertheless, according to the member of the local government, local governments are bound by federal regulations and requirements in the decisions and actions they wish to implement. What is important with regard to integration would be openness and willingness to hand over responsibility. However, certain freedoms are available, which are also being exploited. But, it is not possible to intervene in certain matters, such as residence status.

According to the interviewees, the topic of migration, integration and refugees is not a major issue for most parties in elections/political debates. This may also be related to the fact that the social democrats have been forming the city government for decades. According to a street-level bureaucrat, the city government has tried to counteract restrictions at the federal and provincial levels, which has been followed by pressure through the federal government (AC3). On the other hand, it is also reported that coverage in the local media tends to be selective and incidents where migrants and refugees are involved are reported in an overly negative way. Furthermore, according to the interviewees, there were smaller protests organized by the opposition right wing party. However, no citizens' initiatives or associations against refugees have ever been formed.



Locality D

Based on the results of the survey for locality D, the **most important factors for policy makers and members of the local government are ‘attitudes of residents towards refugees’, ‘concerns/pressures/suggestions of the neighboring municipalities’, ‘local media’, ‘concerns/initiatives or pressure from parties that make up the majority in the local council’, and ‘engagement for refugees’**. For the non-political stakeholders, ‘attitudes of residents towards refugees’, ‘own values and ideas’, and ‘concerns/initiatives or pressure from national and federal governments’ are the most rated factors. According to the interviewees, the **situation in locality D was conflictual at the beginning**. There was a lot of **skepticism about refugees arriving**. The member of the local government, who sees the ‘own values and ideas’, and ‘attitudes of residents towards refugees’ as the most influencing factors, describes his role as very difficult:

“..., I have a balancing role to play. Between the welcome committees and the ‘we are who we are and screw the other folks’ mentality, I represent the middle ground, the center. [...] I can't take in more refugees even if I wanted to. There were also mayors who wanted to take in families at all costs so that they could keep their primary school. There are so many different influencing factors. But the ministers in the Ivory Tower in Vienna can decide more soberly. In my opinion, this is wrong because they lose touch with the people” (AD2).

Also in this locality, decisions of certain actors are bound to national and provincial laws and regulations, so that there is no room for initiative. *“Our work is determined by provincial and national legislation, the Basic Welfare Support Act, the Asylum Act, the Integration Act. [...] The influence of NGOs lies in personal support of refugees and legal support against negative asylum decisions” (AD10).*

The most influential factor in the locality is 'attitudes of residents towards refugees' and was mentioned by all respondents, both in the survey and in the interviews. Opinions differ in this regard. While the member of the opposition party sees the refugees as practically non-existent and living in parallel society, the representative of the pro-migrant group sees the situation more neutrally and mentions that *“There were never really any problems. [...] ... open hostility is rather rare” (AD3).*



	Factors that crucially influence local policymakers' actions and decisions	Factors that crucially influence the actions/decisions/mobilisation of 'political actors'	Factors that crucially influence the actions and decisions of street-level bureaucrats / non-profit service providers / trade unions / private employers /employers' organizations
Locality A	<p>Survey (1 respondent)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic situation of the locality Suggestions of representatives of public authorities Attitudes of residents towards refugees Concerns/initiatives or(direct/indirect) pressure from NGOs, associations, political parties, national and provincial governments Engagement for refugees <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local media Attitudes of residents towards refugees National laws 	<p>Survey (2 respondents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Next elections Concerns/initiatives or(direct/indirect) pressure from the national government, political parties Protest against refugees Local media <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement for refugees Own values and ideas 	<p>Survey (6 respondents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns/initiatives or (direct/indirect) pressure from parties that make up the majority in the local council, provincial government, national government Local Media Engagement for refugees Own values and ideas Protests against refugees <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement for refugees Legal framework
Locality B	<p>Survey (3 respondents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Next elections Own values and ideas Economic situation of the locality Suggestions from representatives of public authorities Concerns/initiatives or (direct/indirect) pressure from parties that make up the majority in the local council, provincial government <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation needs Attitudes of residents towards refugees 	<p>Survey (3 respondents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitudes of residents towards refugees Engagement for refugees Local Media Next elections <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement for refugees Own values and ideas 	<p>Survey (4 respondents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement for refugees Own values and ideas Concerns/initiatives or(direct/indirect) pressure from private companies Next elections Local Media <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement for refugees Own values and ideas



	Factors that crucially influence local policymakers' actions and decisions	Factors that crucially influence the actions/decisions/mobilisation of 'political actors'	Factors that crucially influence the actions and decisions of street-level bureaucrats / non-profit service providers / trade unions / private employers /employers' organizations
Locality C	<p>Survey (1 respondent)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own values and ideas • Concerns/initiatives or (direct/indirect) pressure from parties that make up the majority in the local council <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement for refugees • Own values and ideas 	<p>Survey (1 respondent)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement for refugees • Concerns/initiatives or(direct/indirect) pressure from NGOs, associations, political parties, national and provincial governments <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement for refugees • Own values and ideas • Attitudes of residents towards refugees 	<p>Survey (2 respondents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns/initiatives or(direct/indirect) pressure from NGOs, associations, political parties, national and provincial governments • Recommendations from Authority representatives <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns/initiatives or(direct/indirect) pressure from NGOs, associations, political parties • Local media • Own values and ideas
Locality D	<p>Survey (2 respondents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes of residents towards refugees • Concerns/pressures/suggestions of the neighboring municipalities • Local media • Concerns/initiatives or (direct/indirect) pressure from parties that make up the majority in the local council • Engagement for refugees <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own values and ideas • Attitudes of residents towards refugees 	<p>Survey (no respondent)</p> <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns/initiatives or (direct/indirect) pressure from NGOs or associations • Attitudes of residents towards refugees 	<p>Survey (3 respondents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own values and ideas • Attitudes of residents towards refugees • Concerns/initiatives or(direct/indirect) pressure from national and provincial governments <p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own values and ideas • Attitudes of residents towards refugees • Concerns/initiatives or(direct/indirect) pressure from national and provincial governments

Table 5: Dominant factors influencing how local policies are decided and acted upon by actors in different localities

4 Conclusion

The analysis of the interviews and survey shows that the localities investigated have clear differences but also commonalities. The two urban municipalities were/are more used to deal with the challenge of accommodating refugees, implementing measures, and with political and social pressure. Both localities already have many years of experience in dealing with migrants and were already destinations, such as the "guest worker" migration. In addition, locality A is a university town and is located in a tourist region. Thus, based on the interviewees' statements, the locality is used to "strangers". On the other hand, both localities show a certain political stability. Although Innsbruck has seen repeated minor political upheavals in the last few years, it is possible to speak of stability for the most part, despite the fragmentation of political parties. In St.Pölten, the ruling party is much more stable and has been in power for decades, which means that there is continuity in integration policy.

In localities B and D, social and political pressure related to refugees' reception and their integration has been felt more strongly. There was also less room for maneuver in these localities, possibly due to their size and less political influence, while taking a (temporarily) prominent role in local politics. This may have contributed to political changes in locality B, where the conservative mayor was voted out and a right-wing mayor was elected.

In general, and for all localities, the local decision-making power is relatively limited due to provincial and national laws. As a result of the fact that many measures, such as housing for asylum seekers or support payments, are in the responsibility of the provincial level, the room for decision-making at the local level is limited.

In the latest edition of the [Migration Integration Index \(MIPEX\)](#) for 2019, Austria's integration approach classified as "temporary integration" and "halfway favorable". This means that non-EU citizens enjoy basic rights and equal opportunities, but do not have the long-term security to settle permanently and face major obstacles in family reunification, access to citizenship and political participation. Austria scored 46 out of a maximum possible 100 points and ranks 37th out of 52. Austria's integration policy is below both the EU average (49 points) and the OECD average (56). In contrast, Austria has relatively good positions in the areas of health (rank 5th out of 52), education (rank 16) and labor market mobility (rank 17).⁴⁵ In regard to post-2014 migrants, a recent study on the situation of refugees in Austria⁴⁶ calls for greater involvement of experts and researchers in decision-making processes and in the design of measures. Experts from ethnic communities should also be involved in advisory and

⁴⁵ <https://www.mipex.eu/austria> (last accessed: May 30, 2022)

⁴⁶ LODA-Loslassen-Durchstehen-Ankommen: Eine transdisziplinäre Studie zur rezenten Situation Geflüchteter in Österreich (Letting Go - Getting Through - Arriving: A Transdisciplinary Study on the Recent Situation of Refugees in Austria), conducted within the framework of the ÖAW (Austrian Academy of Sciences) - „[Network for Refugee Outreach and Research](#)“ (ROR-n)

organizational processes in order to draw added value from their contextual knowledge. (Bauer-Amin et al., 2020)

Why have specific integration policies been decided upon and pursued in specific localities?

On the national level, the development of integration policies is shaped by long-established policy programmes such as the National Action Plan on Integration (Kraler 2011). Framed as a technical framework for integration policy, it lends itself as a framework for policy implementation, including monitoring and evaluation. This said, most recent changes in integration policies respond to political dynamics on the national level.

In regard to the development of specific integration policies in the localities, this has been on the one hand a response to current needs. On the other hand, these evolving problem pressures were initiated to some extent by institutional and market mechanisms as the provincial level is responsible for the refugee reception and support and it can conclude contracts for refugee shelters with (local) private property owners.. Furthermore, the two towns could build on existing integration infrastructures and the already existing integration offices set some initiatives to addressing current needs (e.g. swimming courses and extra-curricular/remedial German courses for children in locality C, training/support to locals volunteering in refugee support in locality A). In locality B and D, civil society took a prominent role in addressing current needs (language learning, general and cultural orientation, attitudes, access to housing and work through social networks). Local governments supported these initiatives. Both offered some forms of employment for asylum seekers within the legal framework of community-based auxiliary tasks.

How have the localities/actors engaged in policymaking processes regarding the settlement and integration of post 2014 migrants?

A commonality across all municipalities has been the emergence and/or expansion of refugee support networks and the crucial role played by these networks. In the two larger localities they complemented, and in the small localities to some extent also substituted local government initiatives and also otherwise were frequently involved in local level policy-making.

An important difference between the two larger and the two smaller localities is the presence, or conversely the absence of local government structures in charge of integration. Similarly, organised civil society – NGOs – had limited presence in the smaller localities and associations based on volunteers filled in here and to some extent also framed and implemented local policies.

The opportunities for providing input to policies at higher levels of government are overall experienced as fairly limited by local stakeholders. In relation to the provincial level, major differences exist between the Tyrol and Lower Austria: local level actors are embedded in a wider provincial network of actors in Tyrol and report a good relationship with the provincial government office in charge of integration and therefore being able to influence policies on



the provincial level. By contrast, there is a conflictual relationship between the provincial government office responsible for integration the local approach of locality C in Lower Austria, reducing local level actors to norm-takers and implementers with little if any influence on provincial policies. Even more so are national policies experienced as ‘external’, with local – and in the case of the Tyrol also provincial – actors feeling unable to influence policy frameworks, except by selective refusals to implement policies. This also applies to institutional structures which at times (such as in the case of ÖIF) are experienced as difficult and cumbersome to work with.

While local level actors do have a say in legislative actions (through providing comments on planned legislation) and sometimes are also consulted, the overall sense is that participation in decisions is extremely limited and moreover, policies on the national level are often experienced as of limited relevance for the practical challenges occurring at the local level.

How have localities established network relations (local, translocal, across levels of government) and interactions regarding the settlement and integration of post 2014 migrants?

Generally, there is a major distinction in regard to institutional responsibilities between asylum seekers and humanitarian migrants with asylum and subsidiary protection status. While initial reception is a federal domain, responsibilities for refugee reception and support shift to the provinces when applicants for asylum are admitted to asylum procedures in Austria. The local level is formally not involved in reception and support of asylum seekers, but the establishment of shelters can impact on municipalities as the two studied rural cases have shown in terms of local policy agendas and responding to observed needs. In both rural localities (B and D), the (planned) establishment of refugee shelters entered local policy agendas and triggered local mobilisation and concerns. In both cases, members of local governments engaged with higher levels of government to prevent the planned large shelter (locality D) and get involved already in the decision-making and preparatory phase of the establishment (locality B).

In all four localities, civil society support was relevant for addressing current needs of refugee reception and support during pending asylum procedures (i.e. addressing asylum seekers and e.g. providing German language support) as well as supporting their integration after they obtained asylum or subsidiary protection status. In case of the towns (locality A and C), the integration office (i.e. actors from municipal public administration) coordinated with and supported, respectively local volunteers from civil society, while in the rural cases it were members of the local governments that coordinated with them.

Proactive information of stakeholders and local residents seems to decrease resistance:

The Provincial Court of Auditors of Tyrol refers to the approach of Vorarlberg (neighbouring province of Tyrol) in regard to the distribution of asylum seekers across the province and measures to increase the willingness of municipalities to provide refugee shelter. In contrast to Tyrol, Vorarlberg did not set an indicative or mandatory quota for municipalities. At the



political level, provincial parliament concluded unanimously in 2015 that in close cooperation with the association of municipalities, all municipalities should further on make their fair contribution to the accommodation of asylum seekers and get support in the best possible way. The association of municipalities passed a resolution in 2015 that all municipalities take on humanitarian responsibility, but it was against a mandatory quota. Subsequently, the province of Vorarlberg and Caritas (both responsible for refugee reception in Vorarlberg) and the Association of Municipalities of Vorarlberg launched an information campaign, holding 77 information events on refugee reception within three months in autumn 2015. Furthermore, a website provided further information to citizens in Vorarlberg. The provincial councillor responsible for refugees and the president of the Association of Municipalities of Vorarlberg contacted municipalities encouraging to engage in refugee reception. As of 31 December 2015, 93 out of 96 municipalities in Vorarlberg hosted asylum seekers. Due to declining needs, the number decreased to 74 out of 96 as of 1 August 2017. Although Vorarlberg did not impose a quota on municipalities or districts, the province was successful to generate a high level of participation and solidarity of municipalities. (Landesrechnungshof Tirol 2017, 185f.)

5 References

- Bauer-Amin, S., Kohlbacher, J., Lehner, M., Rasuly-Paleczek, G., Schiocchet, L., & Six-Hohenbalken, M. (2020). Empfehlungen für integrationspolitische Best-Practice-Strategien und -Maßnahmen. ISBN. [https://doi.org/10.1553/RoR-n_Plattform_Vol_01\(1\)](https://doi.org/10.1553/RoR-n_Plattform_Vol_01(1))
- BMDW. (2022, Mai 30). *Allgemeines zum Asyl*. https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/leben_in_oesterreich/asyl/Seite.3210001.html#AB
- BMEIA. (2015). *50 Punkte – Plan zur Integration von Asylberechtigten und subsidiär Schutzberechtigten in Österreich*. https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Integration/Nationale_Integrationsfoerderung/50_Punkte-Plan.pdf
- Caponio, T., & Pettrarchin, A. (2021). *A whole-of-community approach to study post-2014 migrants' integration in small and medium sized towns and rural areas State of the art, concepts, theory and methodology*. (Whole-COMM Working Paper 1). <https://whole-comm.eu/working-papers/working-paper-1-2/>
- Empfehlungen der Kindeswohlkommission*. (2021, Juli 13). <https://orf.at/stories/3220883/>
- IOM Vienna. (2014). *Access to social security for third-country nationals. Policies and Practice in Austria*. https://www.emn.at/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Social-Security-AT-Final_revised.pdf
- Kraler, A. (2011). Austria. In *Migration Policymaking in Europe: The Dynamics of Actors and Contexts in Past and Present*. Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_401760
- Land Niederösterreich. (2008). *Leitbild zur Integration von Migranten und Migrantinnen in Niederösterreich*.
- Land Niederösterreich. (2016). *Integrationsplan 2016—2018. Koordination der Integrationsangelegenheiten*. LR Mag. Karl Wilfing.
- Land Tirol. (2019). *Gemeinwohl und Zugehörigkeit stärken. Leitbild zum Zusammenleben in Tirol. Kurzfassung*. https://www.tirol.gv.at/fileadmin/themen/gesellschaft-soziales/integration/Leitbild/20-02_Leitbild_zum_Zusammenleben_in_Tirol_kurz_-_web.pdf
- Landesrechnungshof Niederösterreich. (2020). *Grundversorgung in Niederösterreich* (Nr. 11). https://www.lrh-noe.at/images/pdf/2020/11-2020_-_grundversorgung_in_niederosterreich.pdf
- Landesrechnungshof Niederösterreich. (2021). *Integrationsangelegenheiten* (Nr. 8). https://lrh-noe.at/images/pdf/2021/8-2021_-_integrationsangelegenheiten.pdf
- Landesrechnungshof Tirol. (2017). *Sonderprüfung „Mehr Transparenz und Kontrolle: Prüfung der Tiroler Soziale Dienste GmbH“*. https://www.tirol.gv.at/fileadmin/landtag/landesrechnungshof/downloads/berichte/2017/Sonderpruefung_TSD.pdf



Local references

Document_A1: Description of guiding integration principles of integration office in locality A (no date)

Document_C1: Description of local integration office (2022)

Document_D1: News report on planned local refugee shelter (2015)

Document_D2: News report on planned local refugee shelter (2015)



<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