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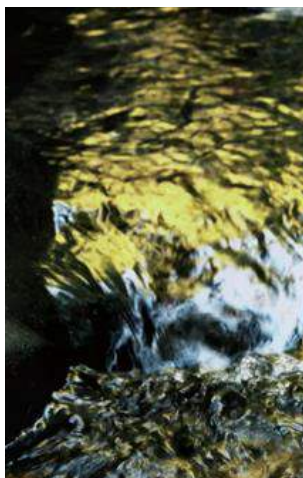
Social relations, individual attitudes and migrant integration experiences in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas in Austria

Country Reports on policy outcomes



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REPORT

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## Executive summary

This report examines post-2014 migrants' reciprocal attitudes, social relations, and integration experiences in four small and medium-sized towns and rural areas in Austria. Based on interviews with migrants, focus group discussions with both migrants and long-term residents, and participant observation conducted in the four selected municipalities as well as results of the analysis of multilevel governance dynamics (Skrivanek et al. 2022a) and on integration (Skrivanek et al. 2022b), the report explores which factors facilitate or hinder positive encounters and shape attitudes, interactions and lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion in a specific local context.

Generally, respondents have been fairly positive about their settlement experiences, although this perception is very much linked to settlement histories, personal expectations and aspirations, which in turn do differ according to localities studied. Across different localities there is also a disconnect between a generally positive appraisal of migrants' overall situation and a variety of negative aspects related to more specific issues, notably housing and employment. The need and willingness to interact with the local population is in some cases consciously sought and seen in direct connection to "arriving". It also becomes clear that the intensity and value of these interactions is very much dependent on the accommodation and support structures. For refugees who are accommodated in asylum shelters and are waiting for their asylum decision, the will to establish contacts seems to decline the longer the asylum process takes. On the other hand, no clear statement can be made that interactions in urban and rural areas have different intensities. This circumstance seems to be clearly dependent on the local framework conditions and the openness of the local population.

Amongst the factor facilitating integration that can be identified based on the analysis of interviews are the following:

- Welcome culture; the first (positive) experiences with the local population can be decisive for the further integration process and willingness to integrate
- The existence of civil society structures, associations and volunteers
- A political orientation supportive of migrant integration, combined with institutional structures (politically responsible person for integration issues (such as in Innsbruck) or a body (Office for Diversity-St. Pölten)
- A good social infrastructure (schools, kindergartens, health care facilities) and public transportation
- Recreational facilities, such as parks and playgrounds

Amongst the factors identified as hindering integration of newly arrived migrants are the following:

- Long asylum processes
- Qualification mismatches regarding jobs, perception of inadequate support from the Public Employment Services
- Negative discourses in media and politics



- Lack of language courses and other services
- There is a paradoxical effect of quick asylum decisions increasing the pressure to work without providing sufficient time to improve one's language skills.

Hindering factors in particular relate to factors outside local communities, especially the broader political framework determined on the national level (e.g. long asylum procedures), migration policies and their implementation (media discourses), or structural aspects (skills mismatches), whereas it is particularly the facilitating factors where the local level makes a difference.

These facilitating and hindering factors are not distributed equally amongst the different localities and also not among the different groups of post-2014 migrants investigated. Thus, in the two smaller communities studied, there are hardly/few mostly civil society-organized strategies and explicit initiatives to integrate migrants, nor are there positive narratives about welcoming migrants. This said, those who "made it" in smaller municipalities are fairly positive about their environment, while many migrants in the larger municipalities still report marginalization and othering, especially when it comes to housing or employment, despite any positive policy narratives. One possible explanation for this difference is that intra-migrant bonding and information exchange is more intense in smaller municipalities, while in larger municipalities there is a certain anonymity and being left on one's own. It also depends to what extent the institutional infrastructure is in place in the locality or informal structures need to be established to access certain information or services.

Generally, the main differences in the case of Austrian municipalities studied relate to the size and position of municipalities (central vs. peripheral, larger vs. small), which shapes the opportunities available for migrants in various regards. These patterns have already been identified in earlier studies (Skrivanek et al., 2022a, 2022b) and are confirmed by the research undertaken for this report. The findings thus do not neatly inscribe themselves in the Whole-COMM typology (Caponio & Pettrachin, 2021), although this may be more of a function of certain types of municipalities identified in the theoretical framework (such as with poor economic performance and high migration) are simply not present in the Austrian context and other axes of differentiation are more important.

Another aspect of the research also addressed the arrival of Ukrainian refugees and how that has affected the experience of integration in the localities compared to post-2014 migrants. Generally, a clear preference for Ukrainians both in public policies and in local policy practices is visible from the perspective of post-2014 migrants. For this group, it is also clear that politics and society differentiates between countries of origin, skin colour, culture and religion and that they are seen as "second-class refugees". This perception leads to frustration and disappointment among many, which in turn can hinder their willingness to integrate in the medium and long term.



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# 1 Introduction

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

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

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

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



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

## National context and key findings from the Whole-COMM country reports

### ***A dynamic migratory situation***

As will be described in more detail further below, Austria has experienced a very dynamic migratory situation in the past decade. Whereas the first decade of the new millennium was characterised by large inflows from other EU member states, in particular Germany and various Eastern European EU Member States, and moderate numbers of asylum applications after a short-term peak in 2002, humanitarian inflows again became more important after 2012, peaking in 2015 at – then unprecedented – levels. Humanitarian inflows, as immigration in general decreased significantly thereafter, but started to rise again in 2021. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, tens of thousands of Ukrainians crossed into Austria, although large numbers only transited it.

By November 2022, 89,244 Ukrainians were registered as displaced persons under the Temporary Protection Directive, of which 56,464 persons were supported by the Basic Care system. In parallel, the number of asylum applications submitted by citizens of other nationalities had grown to 89,867, thus exceeding the total number of applications submitted through the whole of 2015 (88,340). The combination of a rise in "ordinary" asylum applications and the large stock of Ukrainians dependent on support from the Basic Care System this triggered another reception crisis, with 91,500 persons altogether accommodated under the Basic Care system.<sup>1</sup>

Yet overall, the situation during which the bulk of the fieldwork was conducted (November 2021 until Summer 2022) can be described as relatively calm in terms of the salience of migration and integration policy, with overall political debates focused on other issues (the pandemic, the energy and cost of living crisis as a result of the Ukrainian war, severe weather events and climate change, political scandals and party politics, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.integrationsfonds.at/statistiken/> (18.12.2022). The numbers refer to October 2022.

***And an equally dynamic policy debate related to election cycles as much as migration dynamics***

Migration policy, and in particular asylum policy has long been a highly politicised topic in Austria. While the right-wing Freedom Party in its various incarnations had been the main agenda-setter articulating anti-immigrant positions from the mid-1990s to about the time of the migration and refugee crisis, the conservative Austrian People's party under Sebastian Kurz shifted to a decisively anti-migrant position in the wake of the crisis, using migration as a prime ticket to its electoral success and considerable shaping policies on migrant integration on the national level (Gruber & Rosenberger, 2021; Hadj Abdou & Ruedin, 2022). Yet migrant integration policies, and in particular regarding humanitarian migrants are strongly path dependent.

Thus, in our analysis of the multi-level governance dynamics in Austria (Skrivanek et al., 2022a) we observe 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 application stage. Overall, Austria is a prime example of a complex, multi-level and multi-actor integration regime. While (changing) national-level policies and related decisions on allocation of funding and responsibilities to particular institutions undoubtedly shape local integration policy regimes, they are not the only factors and local contexts matter in important ways.

The analysis of multilevel governance dynamics in Austria 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 smaller.

The development and/or expansion of networks to support newly arrived migrants and refugees had a critical role and could be observed in all municipalities. At the same time, local level stakeholders consider themselves to be able to shape policies at higher levels of government as limited. Although, they have a voice in legislative action, they play a minor role in decision-making, suggesting that there is a disconnection between local, provincial and





national policies that varies according to the relationship in particular between the local and the provincial level (cooperative vs. conflictual relationship).

In a second working paper on Austria (Skrivanek et al., 2022b) we examined post-2014 migrants' access to housing, employment and other services. Access to housing has been challenging for refugees in all four localities studied. Importantly, housing as a policy area largely falls into the competence of provincial governments and municipalities, with a key issue being housing transitions from the initial accommodation provided under the basic care regime to independent housing (potentially supported by municipalities).

Regarding employment, the room for manoeuvre for local authorities is limited, as the overall framework is largely a federal competence. Challenges are multiple: This regards the legal framework, in particular the status of asylum seekers and inaccessibility of training for these, the role of German language competences, the transferability of foreign qualifications, the transition from welfare to work and structural disincentives to engage in work, gender-specific aspects (such as norms against the employment of women, care obligations), the positive effects of the current (positive) labour market situation, making employers more willing also to consider employees with a greater need of training or otherwise less preferred, and challenges related to work culture, cultural differences, prejudices and discrimination, working against beneficiaries of international protection, and means of mobility to reach the workplace.

There is a major divide between the two small and medium sized towns under study and the more rural localities, characterized by fewer employers / employment opportunities in the localities themselves and the longer distance to training and other facilities. Also specialized programmes (such as the competence check) are not available in these two communities while, community-based work also seems to have been more important.

## 1.1 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 km<sup>2</sup>, 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 km<sup>2</sup>. 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.

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 individual stakeholders cannot 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 **study area for locality B (a rural area in Tyrol) had to be expanded to include the surrounding municipalities and region** as part of the field research 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 at the time of the research (Q4/2021 and Q1/2022). On the other hand, relevant interview persons, who were essential for obtaining information, were also not present at the locality, but rather on the district level. Furthermore, the reception and accommodation of asylum seekers is organised across municipalities and at times also district boundaries. The core of this loosely defined region are 5 to 6 municipalities located in close vicinity to each other, but also involving a small town home to various relevant infrastructures located a little further away.

The four localities on which this report focuses were selected based on a set of the following variables:

Population size	Medium town: 100,000 – 250.000 Small town: 50,000 – 100,000 Rural area: 5,000 - 50,000 and low population density
Presence of a reception center AND/OR Reception facilities	Time period: 2014-2017
Number of currently residing migrants	Time period: arrived after 2014
Share of Foreign Residents	Time period: in 2005 (SF2005)
Variation of Unemployment level	Time period: 2005-2014 (VARUN)



AND/OR Unemployment Levels	Time period: 2005 and 2014
Variation of number of inhabitants	Time period: 2005-2014 (VARNI)
Regional variation	Choosing localities from different regions, for example: East / West or North / South
Local politics	Parties in government and local political tradition, choosing localities with different political traditions (conservative / progressive)

Table 1: Whole-COMM indicators for case selection

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

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

Table 2: Whole-COMM types of localities

In each locality, primary data was collected through participant observation in four selected sites of interaction between post-2014 migrants and long-term residents, in-depth interviews with 37 post-2014 migrants and 3 focus group discussions with long-term residents and post-2014 migrants. In particular, participant observation sites were selected to observe whether and how post-2014 and long-term migrants interact, and what the barriers or facilitating factors for this interaction are, also considering that Covid-19 might have played a role in changing patterns of interaction. Interviews with post-2014 migrants were aimed at understanding migrants’ experiences of inclusion/exclusion in SMsTRAs and at further analyzing the type of interactions already observed through participant observation. Finally, focus group discussions are aimed at further exploring which variables are more relevant in each locality in shaping positive/negative social relations and individual attitudes.

A total of 37 **in-depth interviews** were conducted, of which 34 with so-called recognized refugees (status holders), one respondent already had Austrian citizenship, one had subsidiary protection status and one came to Austria through family reunification. In the field research, 23 male and 14 female participants were involved. The average age of the respondents ranges from 35-45 years old, of which 4 people are under 25 years old and the oldest participant being 55 years old. The countries of origin of the participants also varied, with most coming



from Syria (18 respondents). The other countries of origin are Iraq (8 participants), Afghanistan (5 participants), Iran (3 participants) and one participant each from Russia, Ghana and Ethiopia. Some of the interviewees had spent up to 7 years in Turkey before coming to Austria. Most of the respondents have lived in the locality for a long time or have moved within the province or district. Furthermore, most of the respondents are married and have children. One female respondent is divorced, and one is in the process of divorce.

Among the respondents, 16 people stated that they had a university degree, 7 had completed high school, 1 person mentioned that he had completed an apprenticeship in Austria, 5 had attended compulsory school and 4 had no schooling. Four respondents did not provide any information about their schooling. More than half of the respondents, 24, stated that they were currently working. Thirteen respondents do not work, although the reasons are very diverse. Some have only been in Austria since recently and are dealing with the language requirements, while others have small children or health reasons. Finally, 23 respondents stated that they had already worked in their country of origin or transit (Turkey). Among people with a university education, only two are working according to their qualification (pharmacists).

All respondents were recruited primarily through organizations that were contacted for Country Reports 3 and 4. Most of these organizations are non-profit service providers, voluntary organizations, or NGOs in the field of refugee support. With few exceptions, all interviews were conducted in public places (cafes, churches or restaurants). In two cases, interviews were conducted in their apartments at the request of the respondents. In Locality B, the facilities of a street-level bureaucrat were made available for 9 of the 11 interviews. Due to the linguistic diversity of the research team, the interviews were conducted in 3 different languages, with the choice left to the respondents. Accordingly, 21 interviews were conducted in German, 14 in Arabic and 2 in Turkish.

In addition to the 37 individual interviews, **3 focus group interviews** were also conducted. The goal of organizing a focus group in all four localities, however, could not be realized in locality D. In Innsbruck, the recruitment was organized mainly through associations and 8 people agreed to participate, although due to last-minute cancellations, 4 people ultimately took part (3 post-2014 migrants, 1 local). In locality B, contrary to expectations, 7 people took part (5 post-2014 migrants, 1 long-term resident, 1 local person). The high number was due to the fact that a local personal service had a strong network of contacts. In St. Pölten, a non-profit service provider was also contacted for recruitment. The personal contact made it easier to organize the focus group. A total of 7 people took part (3 post-2014 migrants, 2 long-term residents, 2 local persons). All focus group interviews were conducted in German.

Finally, **participant observation** was also conducted in all 4 localities. In Innsbruck and in location D, the sites for the observation were fixed relatively quickly, whereas in St. Pölten several attempts had to be made. In location B, the acquisition of information was relatively low. More information on the participant observation in each locality will be provided below.



In addition, this report also draws on expert interviews described in more detail in Skrivanek et. al. 2022b.

All individual and focus group interviews were recorded with a professional recording device. Subsequently, all interviews were transcribed semi-verbatim and translated into English. Subsequently, a coding tree was developed based on the interview questionnaire, which was inductively refined during the analysis. Finally, all transcripts were coded and categorized using the qualitative content analysis software MAXQDA.



## 2 Main findings per locality

This section will first provide a brief overview of the national context, before introducing the four provinces, in particular regarding population size, share of residents with a 'migration background' and the reception of asylum seekers as well as recognized refugees over the past years.

### 2.1 General information on the relevant national and state/regional context/s

As outlined in the above, the focus of the Whole-Comm project is on the integration of non-EU migrants that arrived after 2014. The majority of "post-2014 migrants" that came to Austria in 2015 and 2016 were migrants from countries of political and humanitarian crises. Austria recorded a sharp increase in asylum applications, amounting to 88,300 in 2015 and 42,300 in 2016. Prior to the peak of asylum applications in 2015 and between 2017 and 2021, when the number of asylum applications sharply rose again, numbers were significantly lower, and citizens from other EU member states were the biggest category of immigrants. The humanitarian inflows around 2015 brought new groups of migrants to Austria, with Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis constituting the largest groups. By comparison, 2005 less than 1,000 Syrian residents were registered in Austria in 2005. Their number increased to more than 55,000 in 2021. In case of Afghans, numbers were already higher in 2005 (3,300), following an earlier waves of arrivals and in 2014 (14,000), and have increased to 44,000 in 2021. The number of Iraqis stood at 1,400 in 2005 and grew to 13,400 in 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).

### 2.2 Locality A (Innsbruck, medium-sized town, Tyrol)

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%**. In 2005, 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 are 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 contributes to strong aspirations to stay *“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).”* Yet there is also discrimination, while shifting support structures also make it more difficult to access support (AA6).

#### RELEVANT INFRASTRUCTURE IN INNSBRUCK

With regard to the relevant infrastructure in Innsbruck, the respondents' perception is positive. Innsbruck is located in western Austria and borders Germany to the north and Italy to the south. In addition, Tyrol is a popular ski resort, making tourism ubiquitous. In terms of accessibility by public transport, the rail infrastructure is very good, and the city also has an international airport. This is also reflected in the researcher's experience during fieldwork, as the locality was very easy to reach. This also made it possible to organize appointments





(especially for the focus group discussion) on short notice. In addition to a well-developed public transportation system, Innsbruck also has a well-established "integration-related" infrastructure, as the city has had particularly labor migration from Italy, Turkey, and ex-Yugoslavia since the 1960s. In this respect, "ethnic restaurants" and culture-specific supermarkets are part of the street scene. It was also clearly noticeable that this diversity has become stronger as a result of migration since 2014. Respondents indicated that Afghan and Syrian supermarkets or restaurants are now also present, as are other ethnic businesses, such as hairdressers. The city also has several public parks, sports clubs/sports facilities, churches), mosques - which have proliferated in recent years - and a very accessible non-profit organization structures for refugees and migrants. Respondents did not mention any difficulties regarding the diversity of educational facilities such as elementary schools or high schools, and there seem to be enough spaces for meetings such as public parks or gardens. Finally, in addition to the ethnic supermarkets, there are several shopping centers spread throughout the city. The housing market in Innsbruck is predominantly privatized. Of the approximately 75,000 thousand housing units, approximately 16,000 are community housing apartments. An important issue raised by most interviewees is **discrimination** in the private housing market, even if post-2014 migrants can afford the apartment. According to a member of the local government, one result of these prejudices is that there is a certain **segregation** in the municipal housing, as some locals do not want to live in certain apartment buildings where migrants/refugees also live (AA11).

#### ASSOCIATIVE STRUCTURE IN INNSBRUCK

Innsbruck has an **integration office** within the local administration, which has already been in place prior to 2014 and has **guiding principles its work**. These principles are based on the provincial integration charter. It regards 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.

**Another important actor is the Tyrolean Social Services** (TSD – Tiroler Soziale Dienste), which is the public agency of the province that organizes **refugee reception and support** of asylum seekers in Tyrol. The provision of basic welfare support was delegated to the 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.

With regards to housing other relevant actors are the [Diakonie](#) (the social service of the protestant church), which also acts as an intermediary between refugees and landlords. Furthermore, the Diakonie also provides "starter apartments". In addition, the Diakonie is also the main tenant of about 50 apartments in Tyrol, which they provide to recognized refugees. Also to mention is the Red Cross and an association especially for women, which basically



offers counseling, accompaniment, assisted living options and livelihood assistance to all women who want to work on changing their life situation. (AA3). Informal networks of migrant communities should not be neglected in the search for housing.

The [Integration and Education Centers \(IBZ\)](#) of the Diakonie also offer housing counseling. The city government, which owns around 16,000 municipal apartments, is also seen as an important stakeholder.

#### PRO AND ANTI MIGRANT MOBILIZATION

No relevant pro- and anti-migrant protests took place in Innsbruck during the fieldwork period (November 2020 and November 2022). As already explained in the WP3 and WP4 reports, protests and attempts to intervene in the city's politics took place again and again on the part of the FPÖ. In this context, certain party members also repeatedly spoke out against refugees and migrants. On the social level, it was reported that a few smaller protests took place, which, however, could not be traced back to a specific group or association. However, some stakeholders reported that anti-migrant placards and posters were repeatedly put up. In addition, negative media coverage also plays a role in this context. Nevertheless, according to the statement of a politically responsible person, "What the media write, or the opposition says doesn't really matter." In the individual interviews for this report, however, pro-Palestine protests took place, in which some of the interviewees also participated.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF CONDUCTED FIELDWORK IN INNSBRUCK

The **participating observation** in Innsbruck was conducted in two different locations between August 01 - August 05, 2022. For the selection of locations, initial sightings were made during the previous field research. In addition, stakeholders and interview respondents with whom the research team was in contact were asked to suggest possible locations. Finally, two locations were considered suitable for the observation. The first location is a large public park with an attached shopping mall, which is located close to the main train station and therefore very frequented and visited by a large number of people, regardless of their background. The park contains 2 playgrounds for children, a place with sports equipment, a basketball and a small soccer field. Furthermore, there is a large pond and large green areas. Finally, there is also a table tennis court with 3 tables, which was very interesting from a research perspective. The first partial observation took place between 12-16 o'clock and the second between 19-22 o'clock. Thus, the first place was observed on two different days for a total of 9 hours, which allows a convenient statement from the point of view of the research team. During the first observation period, about 50 people (including children), with and without migration background, were sighted in the park. During the second observation period in the evening there were about 200-300 people with almost exclusively migrant background, of which post-2014 migrants made up the majority according to perception of the research team. It should be noted that more than half of the people were children. Around 9 p.m., people began to leave the park.



In addition to the park, the researchers were also suggested to visit the train station area and the public swimming pool. The train station area was not considered suitable, as a brief observation showed that interactions between locals and migrants were hardly visible and the place was not far from the first observation site. Therefore, it was decided to visit the public swimming pool, where the researchers were also concerned about attracting negative attention, which was not the case. The swimming pool is about 15 minutes walk from the train station. In addition, the area is a fairly populated neighborhood, so accessibility by public transportation is very good. Furthermore, an asylum shelter is located not far from the site. The observation in the swimming pool took place between 13-17 o'clock on a very sunny day with 32 degrees celsius. The swimming pool was very crowded by different people during the observation. There were also numerous migrants (as well as post-2014 migrants according to the researcher's own estimation), mostly with children. In order to get a more precise picture of the interactions in the swimming pool, a conversation was held with the manager at the end of the observation. He was asked about his assessments and observations regarding interactions between locals and migrants, as well as how the situation has developed since 2014. This detailed information made it possible to improve the value of the observation.

In Innsbruck, a total of **9 in-depth interviews** could be conducted, of which 6 were men and 3 were women. A total of 8 respondents had a positive asylum decision (permanent residency), and one interviewee came to Austria through family reunification. Four of the respondents have been in Innsbruck/Austria for just over a year and the others have been living in the locality for up to 8 years. The following table shows the characteristics of the respondents in detail.



No	Country of origin	Age	Gender	Legal status	Family status	Level of education	Employment in locality	Residence in the locality	Interview Language
AAM1	Syria	24	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married, one child	Compulsory education	Paid employment	3 years	Arabic
AAM2	Syria	29	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married, wife and children in Syria	University	Language Course	<2 years	Arabic
AAM4	Syria	28	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married, wife and three children in Turkey	University	Paid employment	<2 years	Arabic
AAM5	Iraq	40	Female	Recognised Refugee	Married, husband and children	Compulsory education	Housewife	7 years	Arabic
AAM6	Syria	48	Female	Recognised Refugee	Divorced, 4 children	High school	Paid part time employment	7 years	Arabic
AAM7	Syria	26	Male	Recognised Refugee	Single	Apprenticeship in Austria	Paid employment	7 years	German
AAM8	Syria	42	Female	Family Reunification	Married, 4 children and husband	High school	Paid part time employment	8 years	German
AAM9	Syria	20	Male	Recognised Refugee	Single	Primary School (6 years)	Language Course	<2 years	Turkish
AAM10	Syria	33	Male	Recognised Refugee	Single	University	Language Course	<2 years	Turkish



On the part of the research teams, it was primarily attempted to interview newly arrived migrants who arrived in Innsbruck after 2014. Furthermore, an attempt was made to create diversity in terms of country of origin and gender. However, the recruitment process proved to be a major challenge. Initially, stakeholders with whom the research team was already in contact were contacted and asked to contact potential interviewees. This approach was not very effective, since many non-profit service providers, NGOs and associations, according to their own statements, currently have fewer clients from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, etc. and are more concerned with the support of displaced persons from Ukraine. Nonetheless, two respondents were recruited through a non-profit service provider. Four respondents were able to be interviewed through the support of a post-2014 migrant who works for a social service organization. Furthermore, an announcement was placed on a private Facebook page, which was founded by post-2014 migrants in Tyrol and serves as an information and exchange platform. Through this, two people could be won for an interview. One interviewee was met during a visit to a Syrian restaurant and agreed to be interviewed. Two interviews with women were conducted at their request in their apartments by a female member of the research team in Arabic. The remaining interviews took place at cafes/restaurant.

Similar to the individual interviews, organizing a focus group in Innsbruck proved to be very challenging. The research team tried to recruit participants for the focus group in different ways. Again, interview partners and stakeholders from WP3 and WP4 were contacted and asked for support. In addition, different associations and voluntary organizations that also have language cafes and learning groups were contacted and asked to approach their own clients about the possibility to talk about their own experiences. Despite these efforts, only 4 people participated in the focus group discussion. Two migrants from Afghanistan and one from Iraq participated. Additionally, a young Austrian woman who is involved in a volunteer association that provides language support for refugees/migrants also agreed to participate. The discussion took place in the facilities of an association that also offers various support programs for migrants and refugees. The atmosphere of the discussion was very positive and the participants spoke very openly and in detail about their experiences. No particular reservations or shyness could be observed.

After describing the fieldwork conducted in municipality A, we now turn to the analysis and discussion of the data collected, highlighting the main factors influencing local social interactions, attitudes and lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

#### SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES, AND MIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES

This section of the report focuses on the various factors and dimensions that shape lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion and the social interaction between post-2014 migrants and locals. The analysis and discussion are primarily based on nine individual interviews conducted in Innsbruck, Austria. Additionally, results from participant observation and focus group discussion are included.



## SPATIAL DIMENSION

With regard to the **spatial dimension**, respondents indicated that they felt very comfortable in Innsbruck. Many of the research participants appreciate the manageable size of the city, the job opportunities, the infrastructure in terms of shopping options and public transportation, and would like to stay in Innsbruck in the medium and long term. In addition, the leisure opportunities in the city center, such as public parks and nature, are also mentioned (AAM1, AAM7, AAM8).

*“Regarding the old town it’s a historical place with nice historical antiquities, as for the rest of the places here the beauty of nature at the river, but also the mountain areas, its ways, the cleanliness of its streets (AAM6)”.*

Furthermore, the family or the children and their school education and future also seem to play a role in the decision to stay. The children would feel comfortable, would have learned the language very well by now (including the Tyrolean dialect) and would not want to move to another province. It should be noted that some of the respondents rated not only Innsbruck but the entire Tyrol as worth living in (AAM8, AAM7). One interviewee even made it clear that moving to Vienna, for example, was out of the question because there were too many "foreigners" living there and he basically would not need German in his everyday life because many people there now speak Arabic. However, he wants to learn German - and according to his own statement, he has to - and that is why he wants to stay in Innsbruck (AAM9). Nevertheless, some could imagine moving away from Innsbruck for various reasons. On the one hand, the high rent prices in Innsbruck and the surrounding area are mentioned, on the other hand, job opportunities in terms of self-employment, which would involve a lot of bureaucracy (AAM2, AAM5, AAM6). The post-2014 migrants who participated in the focus group discussion and who have been living in Innsbruck for several years also confirm that they would like to stay in Innsbruck, although they would have liked to visit the other larger cities in Austria (Vienna, Linz, Salzburg). However, it also becomes clear that the existence of a network of friends and acquaintances and the knowledge of certain structures (e.g., the people working in associations, NGOs, and government agencies) of Innsbruck contribute to staying. In addition, the need to *"finally feel at home"* in a place is also emphasized as being very important (AAFG).

## SOCIAL DIMENSION

With regard to the **social dimension**, many of the respondents stated that they had contacts with locals and that they considered them important people to trust, at least during the arrival phase in Innsbruck.

*“There was a lady who helped me from the beginning. With any papers and authorities ... She was always there for me. But this happens very rarely. [...] She went hiking with me, etc. We went to Switzerland and Germany together (AAM7)”.*



It is also reported that friendships have developed with certain reference persons who are active in associations, NGOs or non-profit organizations, or whom one got to know during the asylum application phase, and that these friendships still continue and are also fostered (AAM6, AAM8). Basically, it should be noted that although new friendships with local people have developed, the circle of friends is predominantly made up of people from the same cultural group or country of origin. In addition, it was also mentioned that acquaintances/friendships with long-time migrants (people of Turkish origin) have developed (AAM2). The intra-migratory support structures are also pointed out. In this context, post-2014 migrants who have already lived in the locality for a longer period of time and are familiar with certain and relevant bureaucratic requirements act as a great support for newly arrived migrants (AAM4). Some respondents who have only been in Innsbruck since a short time also confirmed that they currently do not have the opportunities to get in touch with the local society. On the one hand, they mentioned that they do not yet speak the language or that their language skills are too limited, and on the other hand, they mentioned time constraints, as they are mainly busy with German courses (AAM2, AAM4, AAM9). According to two respondents, the low level of contact with the locals is also due to discrimination or spatial conditions.

*“I do not have any contact with the locals, and neither with the neighbours (although they are nice but we just say hello, I have 1 German neighbour, 1 family from China, and the rest are Austrians). I do not have Austrian friends, all my friends are Arabs (Syrians and Iraqis), because the locals do not interact with us. Some Austrian guys once said that every person with black hair is a thief (AAM1)”*,

Or,

*“Not really, as there hasn’t been a chance or a place to interact with them, I only interacted a bit at the restaurants with the waitresses like hello how are you and that’s it. At the camp they are all refugees, but around us live Austrians but they don’t interact with us (AAM4).”*

Negative experiences became more apparent, particularly during the focus group discussion. It was reported that people (newly arrived migrants) are quite willing to get in touch with the locals and want to have conversations. However, this would be almost impossible, especially if one came from Afghanistan. In this regard, one participant reported being asked by a German teacher whether he would carry a knife. The participant from Iraq also emphasized the difficulties and said that only locals with a high level of social engagement would allow contact (AAFG). The statements also stand in a certain discrepancy to the individual interviews, where a rather positive picture was drawn. With reference to the participant observation in the park, both perspectives/assessment were confirmed from the point of view of the researchers. In the 1st partial observation, it was observed that both native and migrant families with children were present in the park, but did not interact with each other and the children did not play with each other. In a short conversation with a native couple, it was said



that they had no particular reason not to interact with others present. One would come by to let the children play and go home again. In another short conversation with a family father from Somalia, who was in the park with his three children, said that they are more often in the park because he is afraid of possible conflicts if the children would make noise at home. However, the children would always play with other children in the park. The 2nd partial observation showed a completely different picture with regard to social interaction. People - mainly women and mainly post-2014 migrants according to the researchers - who were in the park with their children had rolled out carpets on the lawn and talked to each other while the children were playing. Interestingly, no intermigrant interaction was observed and the migrants remained "among themselves". However, it could be observed that the children with different migration backgrounds played together and the common language of communication was German. An even more surprising picture emerged at the table tennis court with three table tennis tables, located about 200m away from the playgrounds. Several people playing table tennis in rotation and mostly in teams showed an enormous diversity in terms of origin, mother tongue and migration history. The group of about 20 people - 4 women - consisted of post-2014 migrants (Syria, Iraq Afghanistan) as well as long-term resident migrants (Turkey, ex-Yugoslavia, China, Italy) and locals of various ages. In conversation with some people, it was conveyed that the focus is on what they have in common and that it is not an issue at all who comes from where, what their mother tongue or religion is. The only thing that is important, according to them, is that people spend time together here in all friendship and respect. This group has spontaneously emerged over the last 3 years and there is also a Whats App group, through which one is in constant communication. In the meantime, good friendships have also developed from this leisure activity. They help each other, for example with jobs, apartments and other official matters. With reference to the social interaction in the second observation site in the outdoor swimming pool, it can be said that the number of people who were estimated to be migrants or post-2014 migrants was relatively limited. There were some families with small children - father or mother. Interaction of adults with local visitors could not be observed. The parents acted more as observers of their children, who were also playing with each other. From this observation, however, it cannot be concluded that no interaction takes place at all. However, the discussion with the operations manager provided some insights into how the atmosphere has developed since 2014. He emphasized that the number of migrants visiting the open-air swimming pool has increased, but immediately added how one should know who a migrant is and who is a refugee and that it does not matter. He spoke of sporadic "conflicts" in 2014/15 with young men, because some female bathers had felt observed. In addition, there had been occasional complaints about female bathers wearing a burkini swimsuit. However, this circumstance would have been clarified after talks, since this is allowed. In summary, he emphasized that the atmosphere had developed positively over the years and no major conflicts had been observed.





Social interaction also seems to be influenced by the self-perception of newly arrived migrants and by the perception of natives. In this regard, some respondents stated that they did not feel welcome or also spoke of perceived and actual experiences of discrimination.

*“For example, if I am to ride the bus and I sit next to an old lady or an old man or a young guy who have a bag they would hug their bag and make me feel as if we are here to steal from them. And if there is an empty seat next to me, they would rather stay standing than sit next to me. My personal experience in the everyday life in Innsbruck is negative (AAM1)”.*

Or,

*“... there is very few racist people here. I usually ignore it, but deep inside it bothers me, the most thing that bothers them and triggers them is my scarf (AAM5)”.*

On the other hand, others reported that they felt very welcome and were grateful to Austria and Austrians and received a lot of help.

*“There are many good people, some Austrians helped me when I first arrived, and we are still in contact, I invite them sometimes for dinner at my house and they come (AAM6)”.*

Others reflected that social interaction essentially depend on language skills and that there is a risk of being misunderstood, so that newly arrived migrants are more likely to disengage (AAM10). Another interesting aspect mentioned by a recently arrived in Innsbruck was that people - whether migrant or not - do not necessarily feel the need to interact with others. He said that Innsbruck is a big city like Damascus and also there not everyone would greet each other on the street and start a conversation. This might be different in rural areas, but not necessarily in big cities (AAM2).

## IDEATIONAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSION

With regard to ideational and political participation, there seems to be a certain sensitivity among some of the newly arrived migrants interviewed, especially for pro-Palestine activities. For example, three interviewees from Syria stated that they had participated in such support events (AAM1, AAM2, AAM7). One stated that during such a demonstration, the situation escalated after a pro-Israel counter-demonstration also took place. There had been verbal disputes, after which the police had intervened. The disappointing thing from his point of view was that after this incident some Austrians who had participated in the pro-Palestine



demonstration left the event. Such incidents would also negatively influence the perception of migrants and refugees (AAM7). Another interviewee from Iraq also stated that she had participated in a rally for Iraq 2-3 years ago, although she could not remember what it was about (AAM5). Another interviewee stated that he had taken part in an anti-Covid demonstration. He said that he was not against vaccination per se and had already been vaccinated twice, but that the whole thing was becoming increasingly masqueraded (AAM4). Another respondent stated that he was neutral and generally did not participate in such organizations.

*“No. There have been many demonstrations here for Palestine, Syria. ... I am a neutral person, even back in my country I was a neutral person. I wasn't on any sides and did not have any political opinions (AAM6)”.*

The - low - motivation to deal with political events in Austria or to follow daily politics, however, became much clearer in the focus group discussion. A fundamental distrust of politics and the administration was expressed. One of the participants, who has been waiting for his convention passport for years, said: "Why should I follow politics? I've been in Austria for years and haven't even been abroad. I was 20 years old when I came to Austria and now I am 30. I have heard "I am sorry" so many times, I have not heard it so many times in my 20 years in Afghanistan. There is no explanation for it either (AAFG)”.

In this respect, it also becomes clear that difficulties and hurdles faced by newly arrived migrants or difficulties with the authorities are associated with Austrian (integration) policy and that there is basically no trust in it. In this context, the significance of Austrian citizenship also appears to be relevant when it comes to political participation. However, one focus group participant sees citizenship more as a pragmatic instrument and emphasizes that, in his view, it has no influence on how one is perceived and treated as a migrant.

*“Citizenship would not make me change or feel different. It's just a piece of paper. But I could take a vacation. I have dark skin and black hair and that stays forever. With citizenship you don't become native. I will never become native and I accept that (AAFG)”.*

A female respondent who has lived in Austria for seven years also emphasizes the advantages of Austrian citizenship, but also the possible obstacles to obtaining it.

*“I no longer want the citizenship, as long as I have a work permit that allows me to travel back and see my mother this is enough for me, .... I am not in need of the Austrian citizenship, and also have to wait 3 years and get the B2 to get the citizenship, and maybe get it and maybe not, and we don't know what new laws they come up with (AAM6)”.*



## GOVERNANCE DIMENSION

The living and housing situation, the available services and support mechanisms, and the employment situation, combined with access to the labor market, are among the most important areas that influence the lives of newly arrived migrants. While national legislation leads the way in this regard, local regulations at the provincial level also play a crucial role. Issues such as distribution of asylum seekers, access to language and integration courses, simplified or more difficult access to the labor market, local or regional labour market structures and opportunities, or access to municipal housing, are some elements among many. All these factors and policy implementations in turn shape migrants' local experiences of integration and living together.

With regard to labor market access, all participants stated that there is enough jobs in Tyrol, but that language is seen as the biggest problem. The interviewee from Iraq also stated that most employers would require a B1 or B2 language level. After 8 months in retail, she gave up work because the work pressure was too high. She also could not have continued with the B1 language course because it was too difficult for her (AAM5). In addition to language, two female respondents (one wears a headscarf) also indicated that the headscarf can be a barrier to finding work. This statement is also in line with statements made by stakeholders for the WP4 report and still seems to constitute a certain acceptance problem (AAM6, AAM8). The importance of the work was also underscored in the focus group discussion. Two participants stated that they had received a negative decision 2 times and therefore had no access to the labor market. One participant from Iraq emphasized *"To build relationships you would have to get the decision faster and be allowed to work. I also have to earn money to pay for the German courses (AAFG)"*. Moreover, during the discussion, it was also agreed that a quick access to the labor market is also beneficial for the state, as it would mean tax revenues. In addition, the years of waiting for a positive decision would have a negative impact on the work moral. *"At some point, you don't want to work anymore if you have to wait 7 years for the decision"*, one of the participants stated. From the perspective of the local participant, it is also *"not profitable for anyone, neither for the refugees nor for the state. If people were left to work, especially with the labor shortage, because workers are wanted everywhere. To speak of a living together there is very much air to the top (AAFG)."*

In terms of work experience before fleeing, five respondents revealed a common characteristic. They all come from Syria and spent between 1.5-7 years in Turkey before coming to Austria. The respondent (AAM1) worked as a construction worker and in agriculture for 6 years and now works in a restaurant, (AAM4) worked in a bakery for 2 years and also works in a restaurant. The respondent (AAM7) already worked in Syria as a cook and continued to do so for 1.5 years in Turkey. After arriving in Austria, he did an apprenticeship and is now chef of a restaurant. Respondent (AAM9) left Syria at the age of 12 and spent 7 years in Turkey



working as a helper in a car mechanic. He recently received a positive decision and is currently attending a German course and wants to become a programmer. Finally, the respondent (AAM10), who worked as an English teacher in Syria, worked as a tourist guide for Arabic speaking guests in Turkey for 6 years. He also got his positive decision recently and wants to do an apprenticeship in the tourism sector. However, this commonality also shows that staying in Turkey for the long term is not desirable - at least for this sample - and that the perspectives there are viewed negatively.

*"I couldn't go to school in Turkey. I had to work to live. Here I am doing a German course. I have the opportunity to do an apprenticeship or to go back to school. Would you have stayed in Turkey or would you have come to Austria (AAM9)"?*

*"Turkey is a good country but the future was very uncertain. Life is difficult for young refugees. It also happened that young people were deported to Syria. I had friends who went to university in Istanbul and were deported (AAM10)".*

With regard to satisfaction with the current work and the relationship with co-workers and superiors, all respondents stated that they were satisfied. The relationship with the employees, some of whom also have a history of migration, is described as *"Very good, we have a family working atmosphere (AAM1)"* and *"... they were mostly from Turkey and from Austria as well, and they were all very nice, and they all helped me especially with the language, as when I joined my language was weak ... (AAM5)"*. Many respondents also indicated that the work was very valuable for language learning and improvement, but especially important for social interaction. For example, one focus group participant stated that he hardly found time to socialize with locals in his free time because he would be doing shift work. Through work, he would at least have the opportunity to interact with colleagues (AAFG). Finding a job can also be somewhat challenging, according to all respondents. Most said they found their jobs either through the labor market service, but especially through intra-migrant networks.

Compared to the rather optimistic expectations regarding access to the labor market, access to housing, especially affordable housing in Innsbruck, seems to pose a certain challenge for newly arrived migrants. For most respondents, an asylum shelter in Innsbruck and surrounding was the destination after they arrived in Austria and the initial reception was carried out. Some respondents stated that they were bussed to Innsbruck together with about 50 other people, mostly from Lower Austria, Vienna or Burgenland (AAM9, AAM10).

Since the duration of stay in asylum accommodation depends on the length of the asylum procedure, it can sometimes happen that people have to live there for several years and thus do not come into contact with the extremely privatized housing market in Tyrol. Life in the asylum center is viewed rather negatively by the interviewees, since on the one hand people



have to live in a room with six people, which can lead to conflicts, and on the other hand there is no privacy. One respondent, who still lives in an asylum shelter, reflects the following, *“I currently am sharing a room with 5 Syrian people at the camp. And this causes a clash having 6 men in 1 room, if someone says something it will initiate trouble. [...] The whole camp is divided the same, the room has 6 beds and 2 tables (AAM4)”*.

The leaving of the asylum accommodation is basically regulated with the reception of the positive decision. However, in most cases a 3-month period is given so that the people can find private accommodation. Due to the fact that the housing market in Innsbruck is predominantly privatized and registration for a municipal apartment is only possible after five years of residence in Innsbruck, paradoxically many recognized refugees - especially from Syria - who receive a quick positive decision face a major challenge. The housing shortage and especially the housing prices in Innsbruck are mentioned as the biggest and most difficult challenge and hurdle. Especially for families with several children this challenge seems to be bigger.

*“The apartments are very expensive. Our apartment has a living room and a bedroom. With 4 children it is very difficult. The problem is also that if you do not work full-time, you cannot afford the apartment. You also have to show pay slips and without full-time employment this is not possible (AAM8)”*.

In addition, it was also noted that many private apartment owners do not want to rent their apartments to welfare recipients. This circumstance in turn causes additional hurdles, since families in particular are dependent on social welfare benefits in the first period after the positive asylum decision.

*“The first barrier was the lack of space and number of rooms I wanted, even if I found a house, they wouldn’t allow for less bedrooms. The girl has to be in a room and the boys in a room, so the big houses or houses with multiple bedrooms the prices were very high. I found a lot of houses when I first started looking, the prices were minimum 1350 euros up to 1800 euros, and this amount the social will not cover at all. The maximum amount they would give for a family of 5 members is 1050 euros, and you are allowed only to cover the difference in maximum 100 euros, so the house to be found has to be maximum 1150 euros otherwise you get a rejection, unless you agree with the landlord (AAM6)”*.

*“This is also a problem for landlords to rent you a house if you’re on the social, especially if the landlord is Austrian, and they know I’m still on the social they won’t rent me (AAM4)”*.

Apart from the families that have to deal with bigger hurdles, single men in our sample also emphasize that the rental prices are very high. On the topic of housing access, a respondent says that it is a *“ridiculous issue”* (AAM7).



In particular, housing prices in the city would be very high and he would have been looking for a suitable apartment for 7 months. What additionally increases the costs of a move-in are transfer payments for kitchen and/or pieces of furniture, which one basically has to pay to get the apartment.

*“A 2 room apartment costs 1.200€, or you get a bad apartment around 1.000€. Right now, I can't afford it. Also in 2017 I searched for a long time and suddenly a friend told me that someone wanted to give up his apartment but demanded 1,700 € transfer costs [...] There were other 4 people there to look at the apartment and wanted to pay the transfer fee immediately and take the apartment. I had no other choice and paid the transfer and took the apartment (AAM7)”.*

Another respondent, who recently received a positive decision and moved out of the asylum center, currently lives as a subtenant with a family in his own room. The rent of 425€ would be paid by the social welfare office and he would receive an additional 550€ per month (AAM9). According to another respondent with the same status, who is still living in an asylum shelter, he would look for his own apartment and the social welfare office would pay the rent up to 582€ (AAM10).

Another difficulty in accessing housing that was associated with apartment dwellers was raised primarily in the focus group discussion and was also a central theme at the WP4 report. One Afghahistan-origin participant reported that he had applied for more than 100 apartments and was rejected every time after he was asked for his name and country of origin. He would have heard the phrase *“I'm sorry”* or *“the apartment is already taken”* every time. A real estate agent had also said that the landlords had had bad experiences with tenants from Afghanistan and that the willingness to rent their apartments was therefore low (AAFG).

Apart from these difficulties, all respondents are generally satisfied and have a good relationship with neighbors and landlords. Although living in an asylum shelter is associated with restrictions, two respondents report that relationships with other housemates are relatively good. *“If you are good to others, you will be treated well”*, confirms one of the respondents (AAM10). Another respondent is also very grateful to the home's management, because he is still allowed to stay in the accommodation, although he had received the positive decision more than 4 months ago. He had applied for family reunification for his wife and 3 children, who are still in Turkey, and was allowed to stay until it became clear when his family would arrive, so that he could look for a rented apartment. *“The boss at the camp she's really nice, she's Austrian. [...] although it is up to her to just tell someone to leave (AAM4)”.*

Furthermore, one respondent reflects that his apartment owner - a police officer - has meanwhile become his friend and helps him with each of his issues. *“[...] he helped me with*



*so many things, when I call him he comes, anything I ask of him he delivers (AAM2)*". The relationship with the other residents would also be very good, although no Austrians would live in the house, most of them would come from Serbia, Turkey, Somalia, Syria and Ukraine (AAM2). The Iraqi female respondent also stated that an elderly neighbor living alone had helped her son in particular with his homework and had welcomed the family when they moved in (AAM5).

Nevertheless, some respondents also mentioned conflicts or disagreements with neighbors/apartment owners. One respondent reported a neighbor who complained about the smell, saying *"why are you frying potatoes instead of eating a pizza, I have asthma"*. However, the landlord of the apartment would have told him not to listen to the neighbor, which settled the matter for him (AAM6). Another emphasized that he was treated strangely by the neighbors and by the landlord at the beginning.

*"In the beginning, the neighbors were a bit more cautious... a stranger and such. The landlord also came by every week at the beginning and looked at the apartment to see if everything is ok. That was annoying. In the meantime, however, it's ok. She calls once a year and asks if everything fits. She gets the rent transferred to her account and everything fits (AAM7)"*.

In summary, it can be said in this context that almost all respondents want to stay in Innsbruck or in Tyrol.

In terms of **access to services**, there were both positive and critical/negative testimonials. With regard to health services, one respondent expressed an overwhelmingly positive opinion (AAM6).

*"Its excellent, my son had 2 operations for his eye and thankfully everything is okay and now my husband is visiting the hospital due to his back and everything is good (AAM5)"*.

Another respondent on the other hand criticized the appointment procedures and inadequate services at the hospital, which would lead to frustration and longer waiting times.

*"[...] if you need to undergo an operation an urgent one for example, they give you an appointment after 1 month, and then after 1 month due to language barrier they don't understand what I need. They then give me another appointment after again 1 month. This is what they did with me, and they don't provide any translators in the health sector, so you pay money and take a translator with you. (AAM1)"*.

The language barrier and the lack of infrastructure in certain facilities is a major problem in the view of some respondents. One respondent saw the language problem as the reason why she had to wait 2.5 hours at the dental clinic to get a painkiller (AAM2). The language barrier



was also present when it came to legal matters, as language support was not available on site. Long-established migrants or reference persons with sufficient knowledge of German had to be taken along so that they could do the translation (AAM2). The importance of language learning thus does not seem to serve communication only, but to have a fundamental importance also in access to services and to be able to find one's way in life.

*“The most important thing is the language, before getting a residency it is impossible to go to the courses, we are not allowed to attend courses, we are not allowed to get a job, and before the residency we only had the asylum ID, we had volunteers come to the camp to teach us German, but every day it was a different teacher and different context, so we didn't benefit (AAM5)”.*

As mentioned before, it seems counterproductive to grant asylum seekers residence permits relatively quickly without building up their language skills in the meantime, so that they can look for employment on the one hand and carry out the administrative procedures themselves on the other. In addition, the administrative landscape seems to pose a challenge to newly arrived migrants too. One respondent stated in this regard *“It is also a problem that you do not get any support after the asylum decision. You have to do the administrative procedures alone, but the language skills are not enough to do it alone. It's also embarrassing when you can't speak German enough and can't respond to the questions (AAM7)”.*

During the focus group discussion, the frustration with the authorities was much more noticeable. One interviewee, who has been in Austria for 10 years and is always waiting for his foreigner's passport and does not receive one either from the Federal Office for Foreigners (Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen/BFA) or from the Afghan Embassy, made a clear criticism.

*“I was at the BFA yesterday and had applied for an alien's passport a year ago. I was also at the Afghan embassy a month ago. I can't get a passport from them either, and I can't get one here either. The official just says "I'm sorry, it's not possible". What is this? The waiting has also an end. [...] I feel like a prisoner. Tyrol is a paradise, but for me it is like a hell. That is the truth (AAFG)”.*

Another participant also referred in his criticism to his status in Austria and no longer knew what to do.

*“I also had 2 interviews so far and both were negative. The first one was in 2018 and the second one was in 2020. The court said that I am not integrated enough. I don't know what integration is supposed to mean. Nobody can answer that for me. I worked at the retirement home, I work for the Red Cross, I do volunteer work. What else should I do? My lawyer doesn't know either (AAFG)”.*





## 2.3 Locality B (rural area, Tyrol, type B)

Locality B is a small municipality in the easternmost district of Tyrol (district of 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 institutional stakeholders, 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 citizen or someone who came as a migrant. As long 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 German migrants than of refugees or other groups of migrants (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 district<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup> Data on unemployment rates are not available for the local level, therefore data for the district are provided here.



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 in February 2022. The **candidate of the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) was elected as the new mayor of the locality.**<sup>3</sup>

#### RELEVANT INFRASTRUCTURE IN LOCALITY B

Locality B is a very village-like place. Alongside the railway station is a children's playground, there is a larger supermarket and a smaller town centre with two cafés, a pharmacy and a town hall. In addition, places away from the infrastructure provided, such as the river, could also be identified that would be suitable as meeting places.<sup>4</sup> The neighbouring municipality, a small tourist centre where more public life took place was also observed because it is very close to locality B, but also because the railway stop there is used by residents of locality B.

#### ASSOCIATIVE STRUCTURE IN LOCALITY B

In locality B, there is no corresponding local official for integration issues, so a member of the municipal administration was the main official contact and coordinator of local actions, who was supported by local civil society. In locality civil society plays a prominent role in meeting the current needs of newly arrived migrants (language acquisition, general and cultural orientation, attitudes, access to housing and work through social networks, etc.). TSD also deserves mention in locality B when it comes to housing asylum seekers. A voluntary organization active in the region, which was established as a "circle of friends", is the first point of contact for refugees. Diakonie is also active in the region where the site is located with its counseling services. The services of the IBZ (*Integration and Education Center - A facility of the Diakonie Refugee Service*), which actively assumes responsibility, are particularly active in housing counseling. They also have 15 "starter apartments" in various municipalities in the region.

In the locality itself, **two reception centres for refugees were established and one was active afterwards**. The volunteer organization, which is active in the whole region, was leading in assisting the refugees. 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).

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<sup>3</sup> Mayors are elected separately from municipal councils.

<sup>4</sup> Thus, one of the researchers involved in the fieldwork could observe some young people chatting and smoking on the river bank.



## PRO AND ANTI MIGRANT MOBILIZATION

Anti-migratory protests or mobilizations did occur sporadically in the locality, but they stopped over time after the number of asylum seekers became increasingly smaller. This is also due to the fact that most of the recognized asylum seekers did not prefer to stay in the locality. The protests or "discussion rounds" were mostly organized not only in the locality itself, but also in the surrounding municipalities by members of the Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs/FPÖ). In this context, it must also be mentioned that the FPÖ, which was in opposition, provides the mayor of locality B after the run-off elections for the office of the mayor in Tyrol in March 2022. To what extent the political change is linked to the party's anti-migrant stance, however, cannot be stated. On the other hand, it is also worth mentioning local newspapers that have taken an anti-migrant stance through their reporting. In most cases, this concerned housing for asylum seekers in the locality or in surrounding communities.

Pro-migrant mobilizations were primarily organized by voluntary organizations in the region. These tend to include volunteer support for refugees, coordination meetings to provide a forum for volunteer exchange, and simply bringing together people who openly and actively participate in activities with/for refugees.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF CONDUCTED FIELDWORK IN LOCALITY B

The observation of locality B was conducted on Monday 01.08.2022 at about 10:35 in the morning and lasted about 4.5 hours. Choosing a Monday as the day of the week had more practical reasons than any other considerations. Our team was accommodated in locality A for one week and had interview appointments in locality A as well as in locality B. Since no interviews were scheduled for Monday, the observations were to take place on this day due to time constraints. For the observation in locality B, we had chosen Monday. In order to carry out the observation in locality B, we had to travel from locality A by train. Since locality B is a smaller place with a more village-like character, the decision was made to observe several places starting from the station in order to gain an overall impression. While walking from the station to the centre of the village, it could already be noticed that only a few people were out and about on that day and at that time of day. Those who could be met were to be found at the supermarket and all seemed familiar with each other. Every now and then, a few tourists could be seen cycling by. Persons who could have been identified as migrants on the basis of their appearance were not seen. Even when asked where migrants would stay in locality B, locals on the spot could not give a clear answer. According to a waitress in a café, as soon as school starts again (at that time it was summer holidays), female migrants and their children could be found at the playground near the railway station. After 4.5 hours of observation, it could be established that locality B was a place used exclusively by long-term residents on that day.

With regards to the in-depth interviews in locality B, the head of a non-profit labour market policy organisation (abbreviated in the report as LMPO) that helps refugees integrate into the labour market helped us organise the interviews. Not only did he provide us with the premises



in his office, but he also took care of the whole process, for example by setting up a schedule for the interviewees. So we had no difficulties at all in organising the interviews as far as Site B is concerned. However, it was a challenge to conduct some of the interviews in German, as many of the interviewees had a low language level (A2, even A1). In these cases, the language level had an impact on the whole interview conversation. On the one hand, the polite form "Sie" in German was dispensed with in favour of "Du" in order to create a more pleasant atmosphere and to cushion fears and uncertainties on the part of the interviewees due to their language skills. On the other hand, some questions (for example: How does your personal background affect your experiences and daily life on the ground?) were phrased more simply because of difficulties in understanding.



No	Country of origin	Age	Gender	Legal status	Family status	Level of education	Employment in locality	Residence in the locality	Interview Language
ABM1	Iraq	47	Male	Recognised Refugee	single	University degree	Job-seeking	3 years	German
ABM2	Syria	33	Female	Recognised Refugee	In divorce, 2 children	Primary school (6 years)	Language Course, Job-seeking	5 years	German (A2 level)
ABM3	Afghanistan	32	Female	Recognised Refugee	Single, three children	No education	Paid employment	1 year	German
ABM4	Russia (Chechnya)	30	Female	Recognised Refugee	Married, three children	Vocational education (dental technician)	Marginal employment	9 years	German
ABM5	Syria	38	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married, five children	High school, 1 year police school	Paid employment	6 years	German
ABM6	Iraq	40	Female	Recognised Refugee	Not married, has children	University	Paid employment	5 years	German



ABM 7	Afghanistan	30	Male	Subsidiary Protection	Married, one child	Started to work at the age of 7 years	Paid employment	5 years	German
ABM8	Syria	55	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married, five children	University	Paid employment	2,5 years	German
ABM 9	Syria	33	Male	Austrian Citizen (since 2021)	Married, two children	University	Paid employment	8 years	German
ABM 10	Syria	40	Male	Recognised Refugee	Single	High school degree	Paid employment	2 years	German
ABM 11	Ghana	36	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married	Apprenticeship in Austria	Apprenticeship position	8 years	German



For the recruitment of the focus group discussion participants, the research group also received the support of the head of LMPO. As with most of the individual interviews, the group discussion took place on the offices of the organization. The advantage of contacting the head of this organization with the recruitment had two advantages from the researcher's perspective. First, there is the personal connection, which from the participant's perspective means a significant amount of trust to participate in a discussion group. Furthermore, according to the assessment of the leader, the probability of not wanting to participate for a non-trivial reason is significantly reduced, when he is asking for it. On the other hand, there is the time perspective. Contacting several potential recruitment channels would have taken considerably more time. Furthermore, the research team already noticed with regard to the recruitment process in Innsbruck that previously contacted stakeholders did not have any more time available and showed a certain research fatigue. On the other hand, the research team was aware that a bias could arise due to the personal relationship between the participant and the leader of LMPO. However, such a bias could not be identified during the discussion. Thus, a total of 7 people participated in the focus group. In order to reflect the perspective of the local population, one Austrian woman participated, one long-time resident of Turkish origin (meanwhile Austrian citizen), two pre-2014 Afghan persons with refugee experience and three post-2014 migrants (two from Syria and one from Afghanistan). The atmosphere during the discussion can be described as very pleasant. The people were very eager for information and talkative, so that all relevant questions and discussion points could be covered in their entirety. Moreover, the research team was even thanked for the opportunity to discuss issues that are of great relevance to these people.

## **SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES, AND MIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES**

With this section, the different factors/dimensions that are shaped by the personal experiences of the interview participants in terms of inclusion or exclusion, as well as the social interaction between post-2014 migrants and the long-established, are outlined. In Locality B, the analysis and discussion is based on 11 interviews conducted in the next largest municipality (14,308 inhabitants 2022)<sup>5</sup>. Due to the situation already described, the reason for conducting the interviews in this municipality was that the head of the former described non-profit labour market policy organization (abbreviated in the report as LMPO) was able to organise 10 interviews for us in his premises. One interview was organised through a private person in the neighbouring village of Locality B. Not all of the people interviewed live directly in location B, but work and live within a radius of about 15 km. The conclusions for locality B are also influenced by this fact, which is why locality B should be thought of with reference to the surrounding area and communities.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.citypopulation.de/de/austria/tirol/kufstein/70531\\_w%C3%B6rgl/](http://www.citypopulation.de/de/austria/tirol/kufstein/70531_w%C3%B6rgl/), 2022-11-28



## SPATIAL DIMENSION

First impressions regarding the **spatial dimension** were that almost all respondents were satisfied with living in this neighbourhood. The size was even one of the reasons for some to move here with their family, since there might be decent schools, for example, or because they would be the only "foreigners" in the town and the children therefore would have to get in touch with locals right away (ABM6).

Most of the interviewees, reported about **daily life** that they are either busy with work and/or family. In their free time, some would go for a walk, visit playgrounds or the local events such as festivals, or even go swimming with the children. One woman also said she liked to travel (for example to Germany) (see ABM6). A young man (cf. AMB11) also stated that because he is a runner, he became active in a running club and through running and running events, he came into contact with Austrians very quickly. Some of the interviewees (ABM10; ABM3) also indirectly stressed the importance of having their own car that they would also use in their free time to visit different places. When asked if there were places they would rather avoid, the interviewees stated that there were no places they would not visit (cf. ABM2).

This positive attitude was also reflected in the focus group discussion, so that all participants were satisfied with the places where they live. Above all, living in a small/manageable municipality with all its advantages, such as easier socializing, nature and outdoor recreational opportunities are highly valued. Some participants also emphasized that they enjoy the peace and quiet, so living in a big city like Innsbruck or even Vienna would be out of the question. Therefore, all participants want to stay in Tyrol in the medium and long term, especially since they rate the job opportunities in Tyrol better. One participant reported that her sister, who lives in Vienna, had to look for a job for a long time. From the perspective of the participants, the Tyrol is somewhat more expensive - especially in terms of housing costs - but the wages are correspondingly higher. For many, an important criterion for remaining is also the better estimated perspective of the children. In the countryside/smaller communities, the children would have better conditions to learn the language better and to socialize more easily (ABFG).

## SOCIAL DIMENSION

The next section refers to the questions that primarily address the **social/societal, group-related dimensions**.

When asked about the **relationships** the interviewees would maintain in the place, some stated that they had **close relatives** in the area (cf. ABM3), that they quickly came into contact with other **colleagues at work** (cf. BM5) but also that, as one young mother emphasised for example, the focus was first on learning the language and being allowed to discover everything for herself (cf. ABM6). One interviewee, comparing location B with the Austrian federal capital Vienna, noted that it is more difficult to establish relationships in the big city (ABM3). This view was also expressed in the focus group discussion. Due to the smaller size of the place of residence, the opportunities for interaction with the local population are greater. One participant reflected that there are a few Austrian families living in his village and that they





often meet with them. Another participant emphasized that other migrants from Romania, Iraq and Turkey also lived in his village and that the interaction there was also very good. Only the local participant indicated a different perception. She said that "many Austrians did not think about the refugees and did not want to have anything to do with them." In terms of less contact, she also emphasized that "Refugees get into conversation with Austrians much less. It is also understandable that people primarily talk to people who come from the same cultural background. Austrians would also try to talk to Austrians more if they emigrated to the US. Xenophobia has also become more (ABFG)."

Answering the question of who the most important local confidants were, some interviewees (ABM1, ABM5, ABM10) stated that the head of the LMPO was a great support in everyday life: "[NAME] helps us with everything. Not only with work, but also with invoices, applications and contracts" (ABM5). Others also mentioned people like German teachers (ABM3): "I have a good German teacher. She was German and English teacher and is now retired. [...] She always learns German with me and my children." One interviewee (ABM 2) also mentioned her daughter's teacher: "My daughter's teacher is an important person in my life". Others also found the contacts made with work colleagues very helpful (ABM5). According to one interviewee, she found her way around very quickly on her own due to her independence and good English skills: "If I had needed help, I would have got it. But I wanted to do everything on my own - I looked at the school on my own, talked to the headmaster, went to the parents' meeting. I also helped myself a lot with English. Others who don't know English and don't know German have a really hard time. They are dependent on help" (ABM6). One respondent told of receiving a lot of support from a woman and her husband, where the woman was also known as "Mama [NAME]" (ABM8). Another interviewee also mentioned a private person who helped him in difficult situations: "My apartment owner in Vienna [NB before moving to Tyrol] was a great help to me. She helped me a lot in difficult times when I was alone. We also learned German together. I also got the apartment relatively cheap and I just had my peace and quiet and was able to do the nostrification quickly. You can't forget that. We are still in contact. Such persons are not forgotten" (ABM9).

When asked about **contact with locals**, some said that they would only greet each other (ABM1, ABM2), while others (ABM4) said that they got along very well with the neighbours. One mother reported a neighbourhood conflict with Turkish neighbours due to her children being too noisy for the neighbours, but also that she would not have a conflict with the Austrian neighbours (ABM5). Another interviewee said that the neighbours would say hello, but he had the feeling that they were talking about him behind his back at the same time (ABM10). One interviewee said that one had to overcome the barrier of insecurity in order to get to know people. Only then could you relate to them (AMB11).

When asked what **difficulties** there were in the relationship **with locals**, one person (ABM9 19:19) answered that **origin and religion** played a significant role: "Origin and religion certainly play a major role. My wife feels it even more because she wears a headscarf. It was very unpleasant in [...]. She was looked at very unpleasantly and was not spoken to once in a year. She had no way to get in touch with anyone."



This view was also expressed in the focus group discussion. Due to the smaller size of the place of residence, the opportunities for interaction with the local population are greater. One participant reflected that there are a few Austrian families living in his village and that they often meet with them. Another participant emphasized that other migrants from Romania, Iraq and Turkey also lived in his village and that the interaction there was also very good. Only the local participant indicated a different perception. She said that "many Austrians did not think about the refugees and did not want to have anything to do with them." In terms of less contact, she also emphasized that "Refugees get into conversation with Austrians much less. It is also understandable that people primarily talk to people who come from the same cultural background. Austrians would also try to talk to Austrians more if they emigrated to the US. Xenophobia has also become more (ABFG)."

None of the interviewees in location B had been volunteering at that time, nor had they taken part in a demonstration.

When asked how personal background would affect everyday life, some stated that it was probably easier for men than for women (ABM2, ABM6), another person (ABM4) stated that she was happy to be a woman and she could not perceive any differences.

In response to the question of how the interviewees perceived the **reaction of the locals** to their arrival, the response was mainly neutral to positive: "I was welcomed and the people are friendly in my opinion" (ABM10), yet also that some were unsure of how to get in touch with them (AMB11) or extremely helpful, as one interviewee (ABM9) describes "We forgot the flat key in the flat and all the neighbours came and wanted to help. They were all very nice." Three interviewees stated that they had also had negative experiences (ABM10, AM2, ABM9). For example, ABM10 reported that he had the feeling that people were talking about him behind his back. ABM9, on the other hand, perceived that his wife was being avoided because of her headscarf, while ABM2 had perceived both good and bad reactions from the locals towards him. ABM1 reported fainting on the train and being greeted at the hospital with the words "Welcome to Austria" (ABM1).

Related to the living situation (**housing**), the **support structures** provided as well as the labour market conditions (**employment**) have to be considered in a broader, even national context. After applying for asylum, the person seeking protection has to pass the relevant asylum procedure. Following the initial interview, a so-called prognosis decision is made by staff of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA), after which the asylum seeker is transferred to an initial reception centre or directly to a distribution centre.

Answering the question of how they found work in Locality B and the surrounding area, some reported that they found a job or apprenticeship very quickly and through acquaintances (AMB11, ABM3). "My boss's wife was the afternoon caregiver of my children at school. That's why I always talked to her. Then I asked her if they needed staff. She said her husband needed someone to clean up. The relationship with the boss and with the other work colleagues is very good" (ABM3). Some people said they found (new) jobs through the head of the



organisation (LMPO) (ABM5) or the PES (ABM7). Most of the interviewees mentioned **knowledge of German** as a **hurdle**, but also the **lack of a private car**.

*"If you have a driver's license and a car and speak a little German, one has no problems finding work. There is enough work in Tyrol. If you want to work" (ABM5). "At the beginning it was a bit difficult in Austria until I knew German and people got to know me and helped me with housing and work. When I came to location B, I registered at the AMS in [district] and immediately wrote applications. I wanted to work right away and the company where I work now was the first to call me and I started immediately" (ABM7). "The biggest problem to find a job is the German language. If you can German well, you can find a good job. Whether in cleaning, gastronomy or construction site. Many say that you don't need a German in the cleaning industry. Why not? You have to learn and have contact with others. You live in Austria. You don't think that you work for 1-2 years and leave again. My opinion is that you first have to learn German" (ABM7).*

One interviewee reported that she had received **poor support** from the Public Employment Service (PES), which only offered the interviewee jobs in the hospitality industry despite her education (chemist), "She wanted me to work as a waitress. I didn't want that and then changed counsellors" (ABM6). ABM7 (30:30) also stated that it was more difficult to find a job in bigger cities like Vienna because there was more competition among foreigners. One would have to work more and be paid less. With regard to **hurdles and difficulties**, ABM1 mentioned, for example, that he was not allowed to speak English at his workplace and could only take a German course after receiving a positive asylum decision, "They said I had to speak German and not English". AMB11 reported, for example, that he had already worked in this profession in his home country but had to catch up on his compulsory education and apprenticeship in Austria. For an interviewed person (ABM2), the most **difficult problem** is to reconcile work and childcare. The working conditions are not ideal for her, as she works either from 4:30 to 13:30 or from 7:00 to 17:00, and is responsible for her children alone due to her divorce from her husband. "The children then have to do everything on their own, - I just hand them the key".

ABM6 reported in the interview that she had experienced **discrimination** from her colleagues at work, but also that she had received immediate help from her employer, "I had colleagues in the nursing home who were racist and treated me badly, and I also complained about them and had many witnesses. But my employer stood up for me and the person was dismissed. The others were then afraid of losing their jobs and left me alone".

**Regarding the work experience** in Locality B, one interviewee (ABM2) told us that she found the work very difficult and stressful, "Here I worked in a bakery. But it was very difficult and stressful for me. I had to run and was bossed around a lot". Others (ABM7), for example, also reported working 6 days a week in order to be able to finance their lives. Some interviewees (ABM4, ABM8, ABM10) told us about being able to work in a very international work environment and also being able to use language skills other than German. One interviewee



(ABM9) reported having difficulties with his work colleagues in the first company he found work in: "In the first company it was ... my colleagues in my department were nice, but it bothered the others that I was there. My presence ... I don't know what they were thinking, but my presence just bothered them. They have been with the company for a long time. This means that the management stood by them and we parted amicably". However, the same person also said that he was very happy in his current company, "In the current company, it is very good. I am very satisfied and I like working with my colleagues. My colleagues are all Austrian. In the last 4 years we have not had any conflicts regarding origin, religion, etc. My predecessor even proposed me as his successor, and I became the new head of department. I am the only one in the department who is not from Austria. Religion and origin are not an issue with us". Most of the interviewees (ABM10, ABM3, ABM4, ABM5, ABM6, ABM7, ABM8) stated that they had good to very good relations with their colleagues and superiors.

**Regarding the search for housing**, the interviewees stated on the one hand that they had received help themselves (ABM6) (via an online platform), via acquaintances (ABM12, ABM6), work colleagues or superiors (ABM2), an organisation (ABM1) or via the municipality (ABM4). ABM7 reported being rejected several times because of her origin, "*When I said that I was from Afghanistan*", some people said "*I'm sorry*" or "*the flat is already taken*", and also having to pay 3 months' rent in advance. ABM8, for example, reported having no chance of finding a flat on their own (via internet research). The person would not even get an answer to his enquiries. In addition to their origin, interviewees (ABM5, ABM1, ABM7, ABM8) also mentioned the costs involved (commission or transfer fee) as well as the prerequisite of a longer period of employment as **difficulties in finding accommodation**.

Access to housing was addressed intensively also in the focus group discussion. One participant even linked the search for housing to social relationships with the locals. "You can see that relationships are difficult from the fact that you get in trouble when you are looking for housing. The first question is usually, "*Where are you from?*" If you answer with Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq, you get to hear that the apartment is already taken." Some landlords are simply afraid that the apartment will be demolished after a few years and do not want to rent to welfare recipients. "*If you don't work and can't prove pay slips either, it is additionally more difficult to get an apartment,*" said another participant. In this context, Syria (meaning migrants and refugees) is "*equated*" with "*Islam, ISIS and that's all very bad ...*" according to the local participant. In addition, she emphasized that landlords also do not want to disturb the house community. "Some just don't want foreigners in the apartment building. I myself experienced, as a national, when my children were small, that I did not get an apartment for a long time because I had small children. There are certain blocks of apartments where the proportion of foreigners is now low. Then again, there are areas where there are more privately owned apartments, where there are more natives and long-established migrants with Austrian citizenship. The migrants are also living more in the municipal apartments."

Access to municipal housing was also a topic of conversation in the focus group discussion. Municipal housing was considered attractive, as rents are cheaper compared to the private



market and, hence, more affordable, especially for families with children. However, the demand for these apartments has been very high and the waiting times very long, one participant noted. "You have to know someone at the municipality," the local participant gives as an explanation. But the politicians say anyway "our people" should first get municipal apartments, which would be a pure right-wing policy.

In addition, some interviewees (ABM2, ABM3, ABM4) also complained about **poor housing conditions (mould)** as well as insufficient maintenance or intervention on the part of the landlords. One interviewee (ABM2) stated that she had been visited by her landlord three times a week and had always been checked and insulted. Another person (ABM10) also told about having lived in the car for the period of three months before he could find a flat again. ABM1 also told about how it was especially difficult for single men to find a flat. Assistance with housing difficulties was provided either by the municipality or by non-profit organisations (ABM5, ABM3). The relationship with the neighbours was described by most of the interview participants as quite trouble-free (ABM4, ABM6, ABM7, ABM8, ABM9). ABM1 reported that no Austrians lived in the building.

Yet one interviewee reported that her Turkish neighbours constantly called the police because of her newborn child, but she had no problems with the other neighbours. ABM10 (21:21) feels controlled and observed by his landlord. In terms of being satisfied with the housing, several mentioned that they appreciated the quiet location compared to the big city (ABM3, ABM2, ABM5). ABM6 emphasised in the interview that she would appreciate being the only foreigner in the place, as her children would be forced to interact with local children and thus learn the language faster. ABM9 also pointed out that he was supposed to send private photos of himself when looking for a flat. Some interviewees want to stay at the same place of residence (ABM1, ABM2), change the flat because of certain problems (mould) (ABM4) or look for a new flat that is closer to the workplace (ABM6) or more in line with their expectations (cheaper/larger) (ABM10). One person could imagine moving back to the federal capital (ABM9).

For those who had children of school age, they were very satisfied with the schools (ABM2, ABM6, ABM4). There were also no unpleasant incidents with other **social institutions**, such as the Public Employment Service, with limited exceptions (ABM6, ABM5, ABM11). ABM7 pointed out the difficulty that according to the PES his wife would only get a German course after six months of working, "I was also at the PES with my wife and asked if she could get a German course or unemployment benefits. They said that she is only entitled after 6 months of employment. But, how is it supposed to work? She can't speak German, but she's supposed to be working. They said that I had to pay the German course myself. I then paid for a course privately." As far as German courses are concerned, some report longer waiting times for German courses (ABM4) or long journeys (ABM2, ABM6, ABM8).

*"I had trouble with language courses. I had to commute 2 hours by train. I had long waiting times in between. But everyday life still goes on and I have to learn the*



*language. Sometimes I had to wait an hour for a connecting train. That was really not good for me (ABM6)”.*

Concerning the medical care at the local place of residence, some persons felt well cared for (ABM8, ABM2), one interviewee stated that he had to wait a long time for the E-card for the child (ABM7).

## 2.4 Locality C (St. Pölten, small town, Lower Austria, type C)

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 2005, 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 **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 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.

#### RELEVANT INFRASTRUCTURE IN ST. PÖLTEN

As the provincial capital, the city of St. Pölten is also the political center. The public transport connections are - especially for the train - very good. The city is also very close to the University of Continuing Education Krems, which made it possible for the research team to make appointments at short notice. Like Innsbruck, the city has a long tradition of migration since the 1960s through labor migration from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey. In this respect, the "ethnic diversity" is also noticeable in the cityscape. However, an excessive concentration of ethnic-related infrastructure (supermarkets, hairdressers, but also neighborhoods) tends to be located north of the main train station. In the old town, with the political center of the city government, the town hall square is the public hub. It is a rectangular square that is surrounded by buildings on all four sides, which host the local administration, the city tourist information, several cafés/restaurants, a cinema, a theater and a bank. Part of the buildings are currently not in use/under construction (owned by real estate developers). While respondents did not mention any difficulties in terms of diversity in educational institutions such as elementary schools or high schools, it was noted that in some schools in the city center, the representation of migrant children is disproportionate. The city also has a university of applied sciences, which makes it an important educational hub for the region. Furthermore, there seems to be enough spaces for encounters such as public parks or gardens. Like Innsbruck, the housing market in St. Pölten is predominantly privatized, but with 1,200 municipal apartments there are far fewer available. An important issue raised by most respondents is discrimination in the private housing market.

#### ASSOCIATIVE STRUCTURE IN ST. PÖLTEN

At the administrative level, St. Pölten has the institution "**Office for Diversity**", which not only addresses the concerns of migrants, but also aims to promote the coexistence of people in their diversity and strengthen their equal treatment. The declared goal is to enable all people to participate equally in society. Therefore, public relations and networking activities are carried out, projects are developed, and workshops are held. In addition, there is an intensive exchange with institutions, associations and clubs. In recent years, the Office for Diversity has



been particularly active in language programs for newly arrived migrants in cooperation with associations.

Important actors in terms of housing access are **Caritas and Diakonie**, which not only offer counseling, but also actively arrange rental housing. The **IBZ** is also actively involved in housing provision. In the first 1 to 1.5 years after arrival they offer apartments for recognized refugees, who can save money for their own apartment during this time or take over the apartment provided by the IBZ after this period. Last but not least, "[Verein Wohnen](#)" a housing association should also be mentioned, which as a partner organization of the province of Lower Austria accommodates people during the ongoing asylum procedure within the framework of basic care. In addition, the association also offers support in finding housing for people entitled to asylum and provides assistance in dealing with authorities (schools, kindergartens, health, finances, etc.).

With regards to language acquisition, several actors were involved in the provision of German courses in St. Pölten. For example, the Diakonie, the Public Employment Service, the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) and other education and training providers, e.g. (ZIB-Trainig) were mentioned in the interviews. Yet in this location, too, the ÖIF played the central role in allocating the German courses. The AMS also offers specialised language courses, for example for nursing professions. The Office for Diversity also plays a major role, focusing on a broader range of courses (Mama lernt Deutsch [Mum learns German] courses) and, before the Covid-19 pandemic, also providing language learning measures in the framework of the Diversity Café, a social service provider.

#### PRO AND ANTI MIGRANT MOBILIZATION

According to findings from previous research, the topics of migration, integration and refugees is not an important issue for most parties in elections/political debates. This may also be related to the fact that the Social Democrats have been the municipal government for decades and have taken a more active role on this issue. On the other hand, it was also reported that local media coverage tends to be selective and incidents involving migrants and refugees are portrayed in an overly negative manner. In addition, there were smaller protests organized by the right-wing opposition party after 2015. However, no civic initiatives or associations against refugees have ever been formed.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF CONDUCTED FIELDWORK IN ST. PÖLTEN

Participant observation in St. Pölten included various site visits by two of our researchers between the 30th of July to the 2nd of August 2022. They observed three sites (one of the sites was visited by both researchers on different dates and timings of the day). St. Pölten's major public space is the Rathausplatz, which is also known as the town hall square and is a walking distance from the train station. In addition, the city's media and culture service as well





as other magistrate departments are located here. From baroque through renaissance and gothic, the St. Pölten town hall features a variety of architectural styles (Mostviertel, 2022<sup>6</sup>).

The Rathausplatz is unquestionably a site of encounter; it is not an exclusive location for migrants (of any kind), but rather a place where everyone can be found. Reasons include its central location and status as the town hall, as well as the variety of restaurants and cafes serving a variety of cuisines (Austrian, Italian, Greek, and also a shisha place). The first site visit at the Rathausplatz took place on Saturday, July 30 between 17:30 and 19:30. After a rainy afternoon, the sun was out and warm again. That day, a public outdoor exhibition was held, which encouraged more people to visit the location. It appeared to be a place where people gathered, and children played. It is also worth noting that due to its central location, the Rathausplatz serves as a transit point for individuals walking from one side of the city to the other. At that time on a Saturday, there were many people present, including Austrian families (men, women, and their child/children) and migrant families, some of which were single mothers with their children. The only interaction observed was between children engaged in play; no adult interaction was observed. Nonetheless, the general environment was pleasant, everyone appeared to be enjoying the afternoon, and the location encourages social interaction; no barriers or hostile behaviour were observed. The location's architectural design makes it an enticing spot to congregate.

In addition to the main square, the researcher was also advised by some interview respondents to visit the Hammerpark. The Hammerpark is located within the city of St. Pölten, just near the economic centre and the Traisen river. It is a popular meeting place for families. This site was observed on Saturday, July 30th at 15:00. It was a cloudy afternoon and seemed like it was going to rain. The park was well-structured with a big children's playground, a separate animal farm within the park, many benches and seating areas. There was a mix of Austrian families, particularly moms with their children, Afghan and Kurdish women with their children, and a Ukrainian family. The Kurdish mothers were dressed in non-Western clothes (scarves and abayas) and were drinking tea while sitting in the gazebo. The Afghan woman was also wearing a scarf with her western attire as she sat on a bench and watched her children play. Many languages were heard being spoken, but there was no interaction amongst the people, including the children who were playing, in contrast to the observation made at the Rathausplatz, where children played together. The Hammerpark is a site of encounter, attracting a diverse group of people, and is not exclusive to any group, but is utilised by all people, locals and migrants, in contrast to the Rathausplatz, where some tourists were sighted. This park is around 15 minutes' walk from the train station and is not very visible to visitors, which may explain the lack of tourists. On that day, the researcher did not notice any public activities taking place in the park, and after speaking with a few locals, they learned that most public events in that area take place at the main square Rathausplatz.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mostviertel.at/en/all-sights/a-rathaus-st-poelten>



The final site observed was the Kremser Landstrasse, based on the recommendation of interviewees with migrants from the locality. It is the street that leads from the train station to the hospital. It comprises of a number of administrative buildings (health insurance, pension insurance, occupational accident insurance, and trade unions), additionally, some shops are also allocated on that street, including a small oriental supermarket that is closer to the train station and a laundry shop, a bank, a café, a hairdresser, some shops that sell physical health needs, a tobacconist. Some buildings are also residential, one looks quite new, and the other was under construction, while others dated back to the beginning of the 20th century. The owners of the shops also varied; some were migrants and others non-migrants. According to the researcher, this site visit is pertinent in terms of housing in the locality, particularly when linking it to some of the statements of the interviewed experts on segregation and transformation (investment, bringing new groups in and potentially pushing out others) in the locality, e.g. two ethnic supermarkets in the street and a cheaper supermarket chain versus new residential buildings, an existing café-restaurant with Austrian pensioners and a new café-restaurant in the building of the bank. Moreover, the researcher found it interesting to observe that the Austrian pensioners (assuming of the working class) go to the café-restaurant run by the Turkish family (keeping in mind that there is reluctance/prejudice towards Turkish migrants in Austria), and some possible reasons for this could be either acceptance, or due to a lack of alternatives in the neighbourhood.

In conclusion, it has been apparent that the researchers were not being noticed as observers in the field during all the site visits, and they were able to conduct the participant observation; the type of observation conducted could be called covertly or disguised observation, and this enabled them to capture the natural behaviour of people in their daily life conduct without being noticed. All sites had a relatively good atmosphere, no signs of hostility was experienced.

In St. Pölten, a total of 7 in-depth interviews could be conducted, of which 4 with men and 3 with women. All of the respondents had a positive asylum decision (permanent residency), except one interviewee came to Austria through family reunification. The respondents have been living in St. Pölten between 4 and 8 years. The following table shows the characteristics of the respondents in detail.



No	Country of origin	Age	Gender	Legal status	Family status	Level of education	Employment in locality	Residence in the locality	Interview Language
ACM1	Iran	41	Female	Recognised Refugee	Married, two children	University	Paid employment	4 years	German
ACM2	Iraq	40	Male	Recognised Refugee	Single	University	Paid employment	7 years	Arabic
ACM3	Iraq	45	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married, three children	University	Paid employment	5 years	Arabic
ACM4	Iraq	38	Male	Recognised Refugee	Separated, wife in Iraq, no children	Trained electrician	Paid employment	8 years	Arabic
ACM5	Iraq	39	Male	Recognised Refugee	Single	University	Paid employment	4 years with interruptions	Arabic
ACM6	Iran	19	Female	Recognised Refugee	In relationship	High school (actually studying at the University)	Paid part time employment	6 years	German
ACM7	Iraq	36	Female	Recognised Refugee	Married, two children, pregnant	No school education	House wife	8 years	Arabic



Based on the difficulty to recruit respondents for individual interviews through organisations in Innsbruck, the research team decided to not to use already existing contacts to different stakeholders were not utilized., but to recruit participants through an initiative aimed at bringing migrants and natives together in an informal café round in order to improve language proficiency of participants, but also to strengthen social ties. For this purpose, the initiative's management was contacted and an informal visit made by two researchers. The "café" takes place every Saturday. During the visit it was observed that people from different countries of origin (Syria, Iraq, Iran, Ukraine, etc.) were present. However, it was also observed that the meeting was not only for the improvement of language skills, but also for social exchange and especially for the exchange of information. People were discussing about working and living conditions and asking each other about official matters. It should also be noted that during this time a childcare service was on site, which carried out activities with the children in the adjoining sports hall. This allowed the participants to have undisturbed exchanges. It is also important to mention that many local volunteers not only personally supported this initiative on site, but also assisted the migrants with their affairs and questions. However, it was also noticeable that groups of people from the same country of origin tended to keep to themselves and sit at the same table. However, this may not be the rule, although the language café was visited a total of three times. During one visit, it was also observed that a German teacher invited people to a table and the language was practiced under his guidance. Finally, a total of 7 people could be interviewed in St. Pölten. Five interviews were conducted in Arabic and two in German and all took place in cafes/restaurants.

Based on the difficulties experienced in the organization of the focus groups in location in Innsbruck and locality B, the recruitment of participants for the focus group in St. Pölten was carried out with the support of a non-profit service provider, who invited participants personally. The focus group discussion was held at the premises of the service provider and lasted two hours.

A total of 7 people participated in the focus group discussion, among them 2 post-2014 migrants, 2 long-term residents, and 3 local persons volunteering in integration support activities since 2015: One male participant came to Austria as a refugee from Iraq, the other female post-2014 migrant from Kirgizstan. Prior to moving to St. Pölten, she was seeking asylum in Poland with her family, but moved to Austria due to health problems. Both arrived to Austria in 2015 and obtained their permanent residence status 2021. Among the 2 participating long-term residents, one male participant came to Austria from Australia in 1991, having UK and Australian citizenship. After Brexit, he obtained permanent residence status. The other long-term resident has Italian citizenship. She moved to Austria already in 1985. The three male local volunteers have been joining the non-profit service provider in 2015 and offer regular meetings aiming at bringing locals and migrants from all backgrounds together. The atmosphere of the focus group discussion was very positive and participants seemed to be excited and curious about the exchange. The participants already knew each other quite well, which is why they started discussing very openly and in detail about their experiences and assessment of social interaction and integration.



The discussion started out with the individual ideas of a good local community and positive experiences in terms of social interactions and relations between post-2014 migrants, long-term residents, and locals. Another important part of the discussion concerned possibilities, opportunities, and spaces for interactions, but also factors that hinder exchange between migrants and locals. A high general degree of diversity – instead of segregation and concentrations of certain ethnic groups – and high(er) educational backgrounds (of migrants) have been identified as driver for social interaction. Finally, the importance of (local) integration policies and the general political orientation for social cohesion has been discussed. Based on the experiences of the participants, interaction between migrants and locals does not come about by itself, but has to be supported through institutionalized structures (e.g. clubs and associations, schools, kindergarten, work places) or specific integration measures.

#### SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES, AND MIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES

This section of the report focuses on the various factors and dimensions that shape lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion and the social interaction between post-2014 migrants and locals. The analysis and discussion are primarily based on nine individual interviews conducted in St. Pölten, Austria. Additionally, results from participant observation and focus group discussion are included.

#### SPATIAL DIMENSION

With regard to the spatial dimension and the general satisfaction with St. Pölten as place to live, a positive evaluation was expressed by the respondents (ACM6, ACM7). The interviewee's husband from Iran would have preferred to move to Vienna at the beginning in order to "pursue his passion", she stated. However, she herself very much enjoyed the diversity in St. Pölten which she experienced at the diversity café (ACM1). That is why they decided to stay in St. Pölten. Another respondent even stated that he did not want to accept another job in order not to have to leave St. Pölten.

*"I would never move, I'm very comfortable here socially and mentally. It's close to my work. I might change my place of living but not the town (ACM4)".*

In the focus group discussion, a similar evaluation was made by the participants. The city would be optimal and manageable in terms of size. On the other hand, it would also be "compact", so that all the things could be done in the city center or in the surrounding area. However, the support structures would also be important, since voluntary organizations and associations would be very actively involved in the support of newly arrived migrants and thus a relationship to the locality would also be established. One participant (post-2014 migrant), who got a job in a city 30 km away and therefore moved there, even moved back to St. Pölten after three months. He said "I am used to living here and am familiar with the city. I have everything I need here. The bakery is right there, I can do all my daily errands within 30 minutes, and everything is centrally located". In the other city, everything would be decentralized, starting from the shopping centers and stores of daily use (ACFG).



The places that people like to visit in their free time were also highlighted during the interviews. There was consistency with the observation sites, namely that most respondents liked to spend time in the city center ("Rathausplatz") and in public parks ("Hammerpark"). Places that were deliberately avoided were not explicitly mentioned, except for another public park where drug use by young people would occur (ACM4).

With reference to spatial segregation, the issue was particularly addressed by locals and long-time residents during the focus group discussion. In particular, they criticized the fact that segregation can be observed especially in schools, so that migrant children are overproportionally represented in some schools and classes, and Austrian parents would be concerned about whether this would be a disadvantage for their children and would therefore look for other schools (ACFG). This fact was also clearly emphasized by the stakeholders in the WP4 report. In particular, the "embattled" affordable housing market would lead to the fact that in certain parts of the city, locals would move to the surrounding smaller municipalities or to the suburbs, so that diversity of residents cannot take place. In this respect, so-called "transit apartments" would be created, where guest workers from Turkey would have lived until the beginning of the 2000s, who were replaced by Chechens. Then, from 2014, refugees from Syria and Afghanistan would have arrived and taken over these - mostly shabby - apartments. Thus, there would be a generational change, so to speak, whereby certain neighborhoods would be visibly and predominantly populated by migrants and so-called "poor neighborhoods" would be formed.

#### SOCIAL DIMENSION

In contrast to the fact that the respondents feel rather comfortable in St. Pölten, the interaction with the local population seems to be relatively moderate. Some of the interviewees described their relations with the locals as "very limited" (ACM2), while others felt that they would have more contact with Austrians if they lived in a smaller locality (ACM1). For many of the respondents, the language café [*diversity café*] is therefore sometimes the only place where they can get in touch with locals (ACM5, ACM7, ACM1).

Many of the respondents spoke also of a great deal of support, especially that they receive from private individuals. In this respect, two interviewees emphasized that they had very good relations with Austrians, but with those who had supported them when they arrived in Austria. "When we first arrived in 2015 the interaction was amazing especially with the Austrians, they were helping and supporting [...] until this day I am in touch with them (ACM3)."

"There is also an older Austrian lady in (name of the municipality) where I was who helped us a lot when we first came. I always visit her and she always visits me. Also, there are more than 4 Austrian families in the village that I am in touch with, and I visit them in their houses and they visit me (ACM4)". To the following question whether he would call these people friends, the respondent answered with "Very much, more like a family". In this context, the first contact and the experiences with Austrians seem to be formative for further social interactions. Another respondent who spent some time in the province of Vorarlberg before



coming to St. Pölten emphasized in this regard *"To be honest my interaction with people in Vorarlberg was more than in St. Pölten, because I arrived there first and the people I met became like family to me (ACM5)"*. The interviewees who had similarly positive initial experiences also emphasized that they hardly have any, "normal formal relationship, good morning and hello" (ACM3) or no *"I have no interaction with the neighbors, each are on their own"* (ACM5) contact with their neighbors.

An interesting perspective in terms of interaction with the locals was also shared by the 19-year-old young interviewee from Iran. She mentioned that her circle of acquaintances is very multicultural and that she is in constant contact and exchange with Austrians, whether in church, at university or with neighbors. However, she also emphasized very clearly why close friendships do not arise and brought the *"cultural differences"* into play.

*"I don't have any friends from my former school. I still have 2 girlfriends, one comes from Afghanistan and the other is of Turkish origin and was born here. Personally, I more friends with foreigners because we understand each other better and have the same mentality. You can understand how our family works or when I don't understand something because of my migration background. Things I couldn't discuss with an Austrian. [...] I also tried to make friends with Austrian women, but it didn't work out most of the time. I think it's because of the cultural difference, or the way we're raised. We get along very well but a close friendship has never developed (ACM6)"*.

The only exception would be her boyfriend, whose mother is Austrian and father from Serbia. He would therefore be able to take on both the migrant and the "native" perspective.

As a result of these statements and in this context, the personal self-perception of newly arrived migrants - whether country of origin, religion, age or gender - also seems to play a crucial role in relation to interactions and relationships with the locals. Two of the interviewees mentioned the long waiting time for a positive decision and the resulting language deficits, although they would be confident.

*"... everyone who does not have a residency, no work and no courses, and that's why many Iraqis here have a low level of language, because most Iraqis here get a delayed response regarding their residency, for me it took me 5 years to get a residency, and for those 5 years I had nothing except the voluntary work (ACM2)"*.

*"Because of the language, because I have self-confidence, and I can do anything, but unfortunately my language is not good and this does not allow me to reach what I want. [...] (ACM7)"*.

The respondent mentioned earlier, who spent some time in Vorarlberg, also sees the natural circumstances as responsible for the fact that people basically come into less contact. In Vorarlberg, he would have been in a small village and it had been good. St. Pölten, however, would be a city and everyone would be busy with their own lives and would be just different.



He himself is *"from Baghdad city, and if someone arrived there it would not be any of my business, but in villages its different"* (ACM5), he mentioned. However, at the same time he emphasized that the background is a part of the personality and definitely influences but also limits the interaction with others.

*"For sure my personal background affects my experience, I think this is a weird question and I don't know how to answer it, but any background is part of the personality, and this will definitely affect the interaction with people, but also limits me from going to certain places because of my religion, but also I have to check out what kind of food I eat. Also because of my religion and this is a problem (ACM5)".*

The young respondent from Iran sees the problem in prejudices and in media reporting. For young people (Austrians) it would not matter where people come from. *"The background is not in the foreground"* she mentions, only to emphasize right away that it would already make a difference for the older ones. Questions like *"Where are you from? or, Why did you come?, and Why do you know German so well?"* would disturb the interaction. This attitude, however, is a kind of normality, as even her boyfriend's mother asked her if she is a Muslim. *"I am not, I am a Christian. But... for most Austrians it matters whether you are Muslim (ACM6)".*

People's subjective sense of security is also influenced by prejudice, she highlighted. *"There are prejudices, most of which spread by the media. [...] A 20-year-old Afghan is perceived quite differently and many prejudices play a role. One thinks that he could be dangerous or criminal. As a 19-year-old Iranian, I am not confronted with these prejudices when I meet someone (ACM6)".*

#### IDEATIONAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSION

With regards to the participation to public/social/political life some of the respondents reported to be active in volunteer activities. In the case of interviewee ACM2, however, this activity was based on the fact that he had to wait five years for his positive asylum decision, so that he could at least pursue some kind of activity in the meantime, because the waiting time also put a psychological strain on him.

*"Because I was not allowed to do anything else or work, and I had so much free time, and my mental health was declining, and this was giving me some purpose, and try to learn the language (ACM2)".*

He worked for the so-called "meals on wheels" offered by the city of St. Pölten. This service is for elderly citizens who are ill or in need of care and therefore not able to prepare a warm lunch for themselves and who do not have relatives who can do so.

Respondent ACM5 also did voluntary work during his asylum seeking phase and also emphasized that one could not pursue regular employment during this phase. Due to the fact





that he is a pharmacist, he worked in a pharmacy in Vorarlberg for three months. He was also active as a volunteer with the Red Cross for two years in St. Pölten.

In the case of the young woman from Iran, her social commitment even had a significant influence on receiving a scholarship. She stated that during an event she was informed by journalists on site that she had the opportunity to apply for a program that supports migrants to finish high school. The prerequisite, however, would have been to do some volunteer work, which she was already doing.

*“In 2019, I held German courses for migrants and worked for a psychotherapy group. They were women who had gone through trauma experiences while fleeing or here in Austria. There were also two trained therapists. I used to be active in the church and translated again and again (ACM6)”.*

She also mentioned that the Iranian community in St. Pölten is very active and has an association with about 200 members and also organizes demonstrations. Furthermore, she was the only respondent who stated that she had already participated in demonstrations.

*“Occasionally, there are demonstrations because of the events in Iran. These are organized by the Iranian association in St. Pölten. So far there have been 2-3 demonstrations. There was also a demonstration because of the war in Ukraine. I was present at the Iranian demos and also briefly at the Ukraine demo (ACM6)”.*

## GOVERNANCE DIMENSION

Also in St. Pölten, the issues around living and housing situation, available services and support mechanisms, and employment situation related to access to the labor market are the most important topics discussed both by respondents during the interviews and in the focus group discussion.

In particular, the interviewees with a university degree emphasize that they have to accept jobs that do not correspond to their qualifications. One respondent emphasized that the training opportunities offered locally, such as *“women into engineering”*, do not match her qualification, as she is an artist. She had written over 200 applications, but had been rejected each time because she did not meet the requirements. At some point she would have been advised not to mention her qualifications in her CV because *“if you mention a lot of skills, they were afraid to take you (ACM1)”*. Furthermore, she emphasized that the Public Employment Service shows no interest in the qualifications and only offers jobs in the cleaning sector. Finally, she also stressed that *“Over time it just became important to get a job, no matter what job (ACM1)”* so that she now works in a supermarket.

Another interviewee who studied mathematics and now works in a supermarket also has a qualification mismatch. Staying in St. Pölten would be possible with an appropriate job and emphasized *“To be honest, if I stay, it’s because of work, and if within the next 2 to 3 months*



*I can't find a job, I will move to Innsbruck. I have friends there and they told me there is work there (ACM2)*". However, the biggest problem would be the language, even if he would have his qualifications recognized, because at least a B1 language level would be required for further trainings and since his current job has 3 shifts, he simply would not have the time to improve his language skills.

What these two interviewees have in common, on the other hand, is the fact that they want to obtain Austrian citizenship as soon as possible and therefore also accept jobs that do not correspond to their qualifications.

According to the respondents, the biggest challenge to find a suitable job is the language (ACM2, ACM3, ACM7) and the biggest hurdle for labor market access is the permission to work (ACM2, ACM3). The respondents also see both as being linked to the residence permit, so that a major dilemma arises here in this regard. Because the asylum procedure can sometimes take up to 5 years for most of them, they have - according to the interviewees - no access to language courses. Because, *"before getting the residency, it's impossible to get the language courses (ACM2)"*. After that, the problem arises that you get access to language courses, but you have to work in order to earn a living. Thus, it seems to be a difficult undertaking for the respondents to overcome their language deficits. *"The residency or residence permit, this is the only thing that can be an access or a barrier both, if you have it, you have access, if you don't, it's a barrier (ACM5)"*. Furthermore, one respondent complains that the PES required her to take courses that did not match her education or qualifications. She said that she was sent to a "project management" course once and a "nursing assistance" course another time. When she complained that this did not meet her expectations, she was told, *"... you have to, otherwise you'll get a fine (ACM1)"*.

There were also mixed messages regarding satisfaction with current employment and relationship with co-workers/supervisors. While a general satisfaction is reported, also certain conflicts with colleagues (ACM1) and repeatedly the qualification mismatch (ACM3) are mentioned. The first respondent reported conflicts based on language, so that colleagues complained to the supervisor, who, subsequently, transferred her to another store. *"They only spoke dialect to me and then they went to the manager and they said she doesn't speak German. [...] Then my boss sent me there. It was a 40-minute bus ride. [...] After three months my boss sent me back to the previous store. Still, I had a lot of stress with the colleagues there. They were not so friendly, ... (ACM1)"*. The second respondent also emphasized his basic satisfaction with the job, which is located 30 km away, and speaks of a multi-ethnic group of colleagues (Bosnia, Czech Republic, Turkey). The only concern he has is that he has not yet been hired permanently, since he found the job through an employment agency, which usually issue contracts limited to six months. Finally, the respondent, who has a university degree and worked for years in management in Iraq, answered to the question on what he would like to change in terms of the job, as follows: *"The whole job, I would like to find a job that fits my qualifications (ACM3)"*.

As it was already pointed out in the WP4 report, especially the high rent prices, language barriers and prejudices are some of the biggest obstacles for newly arrived migrants to access the housing market, although there is a relatively good housing availability in St. Pölten.



According to the respondents, the searching strategies for an apartment were very different. Some of the respondents (ACM1, ACM6, ACM7) found apartments through their personal network. Others (ACM3) received institutional support from the Diakonie. Also, social media, different Facebook groups or online search were applied, as well as former landlords or real estate agents were contacted to find an apartment.

For example, one of the respondents stated that he lives in a 6-room apartment with other men and also lived in this apartment during the asylum seeker phase and that is advantageous, *"When I didn't have a residency I found it reasonable to live there as the rent was low. If you live in a camp they give you 180€ and pay your rent, but if you decide to leave and live private they give you 365€ (ACM2)"*.

That the housing situation can have a significant influence on one's life satisfaction, motivation and enjoyment of life and the extent to which personal networks are essential in this context is reflected in the statement of another respondent who, when she came to St. Pölten with her family in 2016, did not have to live in an asylum shelter and says that she was *"simply lucky"*.

*"My cousin and aunt were already here. We also got an apartment near St. Pölten before we applied for asylum. [...] Having my own apartment had a big impact on my future and learning success and career. Because I had a clear head and didn't have to constantly think about whether we would be moved to another accommodation, I was able to motivate myself more for school. I had friends who had to live in the shelters and were therefore less motivated to go to school or learn German or do an apprenticeship. They were just disappointed (ACM6)"*.

Other difficulties mentioned include the fact that in most cases landlords require pay slips (ACM1) of the last 3 months, and these cannot be presented if one is not working or registered with the PES, is in training, or is a welfare recipient. In such a case, the landlords are also more unwilling to rent their apartments. Furthermore, the respondents (ACM2, ACM3) also mentioned the settlement permit, without which it is impossible to rent an apartment in most cases. *"The residency, because if you don't have a residency they will not rent you, because how will you pay them (ACM3)?"* Finally, the deposit, the commission for the real estate agent and the transfer fee for items in the house (kitchen, furniture, etc.), which must be paid in some cases, were also mentioned (ACM6). It would be possible to find an apartment without a real estate agent, however, these are usually *"very low quality (ACM5)"*.

Although some difficulties were mentioned with regard to access to housing, the respondents generally have a good relationship with neighbors and landlords. One of the interviewees describes the relationship as *"All my neighbors are migrants, it's okay"* and even reports that *his former landlord was an Austrian and in the meantime a refugee from Syria, who has the Austrian citizenship now, has bought the whole apartment building (ACM2)*. Two interviewees confirmed that their landlords are *"Turks"* and that the relationship is very good (ACM3) and that they even got the apartment relatively cheap (ACM6). The interviewee (ACM4) judged the relationship with the landlady so good that he even went to her funeral and emphasized,



"... this was the simplest thing we could have done for her, because she really helped us (ACM4)". However, the same interviewee also emphasized that although most of the neighbors are Austrian and the relationship is "great," he gets into trouble with an elderly neighbor as soon as he invites friends over. "I don't know why but she doesn't like us. For example, when my friends come and visit me, as guys we play some PlayStation or have shisha at home and listen to music, but not on a loud volume. She comes and rings the bell and tell us, 'lower your voice and let me sleep' (ACM4)".

With regard to access to social services or services concerning health or residence, there were different views. Three respondents saw Diakonie in particular as a very helpful organization. "I usually go to Diakonie if I need something (ACM2)", "they are really helpful and provide support (ACM3)", "[...] I only had support and got my information from Diakonie (ACM7)". The respondent ACM2 even sees the city government as responsible for the fact that she does not get any suitable courses/trainings and is not allowed to work, because the asylum procedures - in her opinion - also take a very long time, especially for refugees from Iraq. In the time of the asylum procedure, one would get financial support, but "the amount is 365€ and I have to pay rent, food, and clothing with this amount, and not allowed to work, and not allowed to move to another province before you get a residency (ACM2)".

With regard to health services, rated as "excellent" (ACM4) by one respondent, two respondents emphasized that, especially when visiting a doctor or hospital, language barriers and deficits, can be a significant hurdle.

*"... language can be a barrier sometimes, but I try my best to reach my point to the doctor or whoever I am dealing with, and I try to prepare myself in advance by using an interpreter. The language is the basis for everything here (ACM2)".*

*„I had a lot of difficulties with the doctors here, because of my language. They don't understand what I want, and I don't understand what they are saying (ACM7)".*

## 2.5 Locality D (rural area, Lower Austria, type D)

Locality D is the **second smallest locality** in our sample. It recorded **approximately 6,000 to 7,000** inhabitants in 2014 and the share of **foreign residents was around 7%**. The **number of inhabitants has hardly changed** in recent years and has remained in 2021 in the same range as in 2014. However, the **share of foreign residents/foreigners in the municipality** has increased to about 9% in 2021, but is still considerably lower than the national average of 17.1%. In 2005, 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 100 places**.

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 interviews with institutional stakeholders,



**immigration has had little to no impact on economic and demographic development** since 2014. **Many refugees would have left the locality after they obtained a positive decision.** However, some newly arrived migrants have established one-person businesses, mainly in the service sector and gastronomy. Therefore, from the point of view of a local official rated as “... *very positive and important that refugees stayed*”. The political orientation in the locality is **conservative. The Peoples’ Party (ÖVP) holds the majority in the local council.** 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. (Skrivanek et al., 2022a, 2022b)

#### RELEVANT INFRASTRUCTURE IN LOCALITY D

The available range of **schools** reflects the locality’s role as district capital. Apart from an elementary and lower secondary school, it hosts several upper secondary schools with vocational and general academic tracks. In regard to **means of transportation**, mobility within the centre takes place on foot and by bike, whereas cars represent the main means of transport for getting around. There is one local bus line that runs from Monday till Friday (five connections in the morning, three around noon). There are several regional busses and the locality has a train station with connections to Vienna and St. Pölten. The locality has a small **shopping** centre in its outskirts. In the centre, there are some supermarkets, two pharmacies, banks, and some retail shops and a couple of restaurants. There are no Arabic shops in the locality.<sup>7</sup> (ADM2) Some of the latter are run by migrants and have provided employment opportunities for post-2014 migrants. The locality hosts a range of **clubs and associations** in the field of sports, culture, self-help groups, and focused topics, including a local association supporting migrants/refugees that evolved from local civil society after 2015 (see below).

Interviewed institutional stakeholders did not refer to a specific neighbourhood and residential segregation, respectively, in the locality. General challenges concern the costs of **housing** for welfare recipients, whereby rents are low compared to the other three localities studied and other regions in Austria. Furthermore, several institutional stakeholders pointed to reservations on the side of landlords, being reluctant to rent to foreigners and welfare recipients. (cf. Skrivanek et al., 2022b) The locality hosted a **refugee shelter** for about 100 persons between 2015 and 2017. This shelter closed down as a consequence of declining asylum applications and less demand for shelters (Document\_D3), but smaller shelters were maintained.

#### ASSOCIATIVE STRUCTURE IN LOCALITY

**A local civil society engaged in initial refugee reception and support and established itself as association in 2016, focusing on refugee/migrant support** and arising needs, in particular

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<sup>7</sup> “If we want Arabic bread we bring it from Vienna” (ADM2, Syrian, 30-39 years, male)



dealing with formal issues and authorities, providing informal language courses, finding accommodation after status acquisition and fostering encounters. They organised a monthly 'café' since 2016 aiming to foster contacts between post-2014 migrants and locals. In the beginning, it attracted (according to the association) up to 200 people and then 70-100. The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted and limited these activities in 2020-2021. Furthermore, the association 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. Locals of the association also introduced refugees into local clubs and associations, being themselves members of various other clubs/civil society organisations (e.g. sports clubs, fire brigade, the Red Cross). The activities of the association have found support of the municipality and local religious leaders (Catholic priest, Imam, Protestant pastor) in the form of in-kind support and on the symbolic level, e.g. providing a room for activities/meeting and joining events of the association. (Skrivanek et al., 2022a)

#### PRO AND ANTI MIGRANT MOBILIZATION

The locality experienced anti-immigrant mobilisation due to the planned establishment of a large shelter with about 400 places. Interviewed institutional stakeholders did not report **open public protests, but a general reluctance, fear and concerns, among others voiced at regulars' table meetings** (Stammtisch). Interviewees mentioned in particular the arrival of young single men as a cause for concern, while it would have been easier for families. Consequently, **the municipality lobbied successfully** (through its political networks and media) **against the planned establishment of a large shelter** with about 400 places. Instead, it provided shelter for about 100 asylum seekers. (Skrivanek et al., 2022b)

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF CONDUCTED FIELDWORK IN LOCALITY D

With regards to the participant observation in locality D, two different sites were observed on Thursday August 4th, 2022, and August 12th 2022. The locality has a type of centre that spans from the main square (Hauptplatz) to the church square (Kirchenplatz), with the main church and a cluster of buildings occupying most of the space. The first observation took place between 11:15 – 12:00, it was a sunny warm day about 30+ °C, and the second part of the observation took place August 12th between 14:00 – 15:30. The Hauptplatz which is near the fountain, is a place dominated by parking lots, near the fountain there are some benches and small planted trees. On one side of the site, there are some shops (organic food shop, a book shop, and a clothing shop), while on the other there is a pharmacy, a hearing aid shop, and a café. On the other observation spot (Kirchenplatz), there were also some shops such as a supermarket and an optician, but also a bench next to a lion statue. The researcher had just concluded an observation in locality C before arriving to locality D, prompting them to compare the main squares. At locality C, the main square was an open space, but in this location, the church and buildings occupy the majority of the square. Moreover, the main square in locality C is a pedestrian zone, whereas in location D cars drive by and people stroll on the sidewalks. Since both places were observed on a similar day (weekday) and at the same



time, there were fewer individuals there, and it appeared that many came by car to run errands and then left.

By observing both locations (because, as indicated, it extends from the church to the main square), few people were observed in the square, although the parking lot was packed. The public benches in direct sunlight were unoccupied, while those in the shade were occupied by persons who did not engage with one another. Nonetheless, the researcher also observed that, in general, there was no interaction between people in that area. The people wore western clothing and none of them appeared to be members of a visible minority group, migrants, or even tourists; the predominant language spoken was Austrian German.

The general atmosphere was pleasant, the areas observed were well maintained; however, it does not seem so much to be a place of encounter or a social hub, but more of a shopping district where people would pass by with their cars to shop and leave.

The second site observed was Stadtsee, and it took place on August 4th between 12:15 – 14:30. Stadtsee is the new public pool area of Horn that reopened this year (2022). The existing public pool was renovated and replaced with two artificial ponds. This location is accessible free of charge because it is intended to be a year-round leisure space. The day of the observation was warm and sunny, with temperatures above 30 °C. One of the artificial ponds is used for swimming and is bordered by a grassy strip, a paved path, and trees around providing some shade. Between the two ponds is a restaurant with approximately 20 outdoor tables and a bar-bistro. A large lawn with trees on one side and a playground on the other flank the restaurant. Additionally, there were public benches on either side of the swimming pond.

Upon the arrival of the researcher, the grass strip and lawn area were already full of people lying down. The researcher managed to find a table in the shade to conduct the participant observation, and was very impressed with the location, and how the open space seemed really spacious and that is because there were no gates or fences for entry. During the time spent there, it became quite crowded compared to other public pools, yet it felt quite pleasant.

The vast majority of people wore swimwear and enjoyed swimming. As it was lunch time, the restaurant was likewise packed. There were people of various ages present. There appeared to be families, couples, individuals, and friends of various types. At 14:30, a group of 15 children arrived (about 7 to 10 years old) who appeared to be participating in a summer camp programme. All people seemed to be Austrian, other than German, no other languages were detected. Nothing unusual occurred in any of the encounters witnessed, which is to be expected in a public swimming location. The general atmosphere was good. The researcher left the location as it became crowded, and on the way to the train station noticed that the town was rather empty.

In conclusion, this place piqued the researcher's interest after hearing about it from a member of the opposition. Another researcher joined the observation; however, their presence was only noted by the adjacent table because they were conversing in English and not as



observers. Given that it is a rural area and the second-smallest locality in the sample, all the sites in this area appeared to be far more tranquil and emptier than those in other areas. In all sites, there was a pleasant environment and no signs of hostility.

In locality D, the researchers conducted nine interviews with five male and four female migrants. We reached our interviewees with the help of a local association supporting refugees and a post-2014 migrant entrepreneur. Both of our facilitators we had interviewed in the preceding project stage. Two of our male respondents do not fulfill all predefined selection criteria, which we found out in the course of the interview. One interviewee arrived at the end of 2014 (ADM1). The following table shows the characteristics of the respondents in detail.





No	Country of origin	Age	Gender	Legal status	Family status	Level of education	Employment in locality	Residence in the locality	Interview Language
ADM1	Syria	33	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married, one child	High School	Paid employment	8 years	German
ADM2	Syria	35	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married, no children	University	Paid employment	6 years	Arabic
ADM3	Syria	38	Male	Recognised Refugee	Married, two children	3 years of University Education	Paid employment	5 years	Arabic
ADM5	Afghanistan	26	Female	Recognised Refugee	Divorced, two children, pregnant	No formal education. Was married at age 13	minor employment	5 years	German
ADM6	Ethiopia	33	Female	Red-White-Red Card Plus <sup>8</sup>	Married, living seperated	University	Paid employment	6 years	German
ADM7	Afghanistan	43	Female	Recognised Refugee	Married, 3 children	High school	Housewife	6 years	German/English
ADM8	Afghanistan	19	Female	Recognised Refugee	Single	Lower Secondary School	Paid employment	6 years	German
ADM9	Iran	30	Male	Recognised Refugee	Single	High School	Unemployed	<2 years	German

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.migration.gv.at/en/welcome/?no\\_cache=1](https://www.migration.gv.at/en/welcome/?no_cache=1)



Given the proximity to the specified arrival time and the fit with the other selection criteria, we decided to include the interviewee's experience in our analysis. Another interviewee arrived in 2013 and does not live in the locality (ADM4). Due to this, we excluded him from the analysis. Our female migrant interviewees arrived in Austria in 2015 and 2016, three came from Afghanistan, one from Ethiopia and they were between under 20 and 40-49 years old. Our male respondents (included in the analysis) arrived between the end 2014 and 2016 in Austria, three came from Syria and one from Iran. In terms of age, the range is smaller among our male interviewees, being all in the age group 30-39 years. We reached out four female interviewees (ADM5-ADM8) and one male interviewee (ADM9) with the help of the local association of volunteers, the other three male interviewees we reached with the help of the post-2014 migrant entrepreneur. The interviews took place in the space of the local association supporting migrants/refugees, the parish hall of the local protestant community and in the back room of a local hairdresser.

With regard to the focus group discussion in locality D, although efforts were made on the part of the research team, unfortunately none could be organized. In this regard, the researchers contacted stakeholders with whom they had already collaborated for the WP3 and WP4 reports, but these attempts remained without a positive result.

#### SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES, AND MIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES

In regard to the **social interactions, individual attitudes and migrants' experiences of inclusion and exclusion** our interviews reflect a range of experiences and different types of social interactions linked to different opportunity structures. The latter comprise in particular the world of **work, housing, institutional childcare/schools**, and **leisure activities** (including religious practices), activities of local religious communities and broader local civil society (the association and individuals) supporting refugees.

#### SPATIAL DIMENSION

With regard to the spatial dimension: many of the respondents feel comfortable and happy in the locality and want to stay in the medium and long term. In particular, those who "worked in the locality" stayed and the others would have preferred to "move to Vienna" because they considered their job opportunities to be better there (ADM1). On the other hand, the advantages (language, the quietness etc.) of a smaller village compared to a big city were also emphasized.

*"I do not like big cities, there are more foreigners and if they talk to us they speak our language. That's why I do not like it because perhaps I forget German then and that's why I do not want to move to a big city. In a big city, it is very restless. It's quiet when you live in a small village (ADM8)".*



On the other hand, the established friendships, the environment and the acclimatization to the location also play an important role. One interviewee emphasized that it was very difficult for him to constantly change his place of residence after he had to leave Syria with his family and "start from scratch". In the meantime, he said, he has friends and a job in the locality. In addition, his wife and daughter have also found friends and he does not want to put his family through the efforts that he himself had to go through (ADM1). In addition, many refugees have settled down and are entrepreneurs in the gastronomy and service sector. Finally, a young Afghan woman emphasized that she would like to leave the locality at some point after she has finished her education and obtained her driver's license. But, *"I don't really think I will, it's probably easier for me to get a job here. But at the moment I don't have a plan. I'm happy here at the moment (ADM8)"*.

It was already emphasized in the previous reports, that there is no residential segregation/clustering of migrants in the locality, since the locality already has experience with migrants. In the locality there is a manageable Albanian community, which also has a mosque community and also post-war refugees from Yugoslavia/Bosnia wars have settled in the locality. Since the locality D is also close to the border with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there are also many temporary migrants who work in the locality.

#### SOCIAL DIMENSION

**Work** represents a relevant opportunity structure for social interactions and building up relationships, i.e. being colleagues at work, expanding one's network and helping/advising in situations, others have already experience with. One of our male Syrian interviewees (ADM1) found his first jobs in the catering industry and then opened his own restaurants. For this endeavour, he could draw on help from a Turkish friend, who has lived in Austria already for 30-35 years. He found friends and built up contacts among his colleagues and meets a lot of people since he is a restaurant owner himself. Similarly, another of our male interviewees runs his own hair salon (ADM2) now and reports of a lots of relationships with people. Besides instrumental relationships evolving from work, friendships can result from social interactions at work (ADM1, ADM5).

*"It depends on what I need, within my profession as a hairdresser I have a lot of relationships with people. (...) If I walk in the street, or go to the Magistrat, or to the police station, I have my customers there that come to my salon and get a haircut, I know them all; so it depends on what I need, I know that I have a customer in that field/area. Once I had an incident where they wanted to break down the main door of the salon, I didn't know how to react, I have a customer who is a policeman, I called him and he sent an investigation team and helped me a lot, and I didn't have to do anything. (...) Where I am today was with the help of my customers, my relationship with my customers, anything I need they help me (ADM2)"*.

*"I found work for 20-30 people. I can ask friends and acquaintances, make phone calls and then send them there (ADM1)"*.



*“Yes [I have Austrian friends], but I do not go out with them, my relationship and interaction is all through the hair salon, my Austrian friends would come to the salon we sit and have coffee, they always invite me to go out with them but since all their outings are in bars [and] I do not go ... to such places (ADM2)”.*

Having children in **institutional childcare and schools** provides opportunities to meet other people (locals and migrants) and receive support based on current needs on an individual basis. However, it were only female interviewees who referred to experiences in this institutional context, pointing to **gender differences in opportunity structures for social interaction**.

*“For example, at the parents' evening in the kindergarten, they have a lot of patience with us (ADM7)”.*

*“Staff in kindergarten and primary school is very friendly (ADM5)”.*

*“I have made friends and have many Austrian acquaintances. I got to know them through my kids and my Austrian partner. Two friends are the mothers of friends of my son (ADM5)”.*

Several interviewees (ADM5, ADM6, ADM7, ADM9) report contacts with their **immediate neighbours and linked to their housing situation**, respectively. This contacts can be on the one hand distant (only greeting each other) or can develop into good neighbourly help and even friendships. One interviewee mentions his landlord as important go-to person in case he needs help (ADM9).

*“My ex-husband had beaten me up in front of my children four times. The neighbour called the police (ADM5)”.*

*“I live in a house with three flats. The neighbour that helps me a lot lives in one of the other flats. (...) I have a lot of contact with my neighbour. But some people stay at home and are alone. Generally speaking it would be good if people would be more open so that people are not alone (ADM6)”.*

*“We lived in this flat for one year. Then we planned to move out, looking for a bigger flat. A neighbour found a bigger, three-room flat for us in the same building. She did not want us to move out. When we moved in the first flat, our first daughter was 7-8 months and we were the only family in the building. The other residents are old women and the neighbour has been like a grandma for our daughter. The neighbour contacted the owner of the flat we are living in now. She did not want to rent her flat to foreigners. Our neighbour told her that she would not have any problems with this family. We got the flat and have been living here since 2016 (ADM7)”.*

*“[Our relationship with our landlady is] [v]ery good, we always say hello to her, she owns a car company, and recently I wanted to buy a car so she sent me some links and helped me, and I will buy the car from her (ADM2)”.*



**Religious affiliations and practices can provide opportunities for social interaction**, meeting new people, spending one's leisure time, getting support and having a network to ask for support. Furthermore, **local religious communities** can engage in civil society activities supporting refugees, as e.g. activities of the local civil society association supporting refugees have been joined by the leaders/member of the local religious communities. In the case of our interviewees in locality D, members of the local Protestant church funded the education of one interviewee when she was still an asylum seeker. She attends the services of the Protestant local church and sings in the local choir of the Catholic church. (ADM6) For one of our male interviewees, the local catholic community represents a relevant space and place for social interactions and support:

*"I have a lot of contacts with members of the church and I could find a flat. (...) Otherwise it is difficult. The rent is too high for one person, for 2-3 persons it is easier. (...) "I have a lot of contact with the secretary in the vicarage (Pfarrhof) and the priest. (...) They knew for example of a hotel that was looking for a helper (Hilfsarbeiter), or a mechanic looking for a labourer (Hilfsarbeiter) (ADM9)".*

**Local civil society** has played a central role in initial refugee reception and support, involving individuals from local civil society as well as the association that established in 2016 and locals affiliated to this initiative. Their role regards e.g. organizing German courses for asylum seekers of the locality, general awareness raising for the cause of people on the flight and activities fostering encounters, among refugees/migrants and with residents/locals. Thereby only our interviewees that we found via our contact at the local association have referred to the role of the association, while our other interviewees (ADM1, ADM2, ADM3) have not been in touch with the association, but reported different opportunities for interactions with locals (in particular through work after status acquisition and during the asylum phase).

*"Before the pandemic, there was a coffee meeting on Saturdays organised by the local group of volunteers. I went there (ADM5)".*

*"I could do my job everywhere, but the people are more important. People of the locality supported me, in particular my German teacher, my neighbour and the association of volunteers (organising German courses) (ADM6)".*

*"Two members of the [local civil society initiative] are my most important go-to persons. Apart from them, there are none. I have 2-3 Afghan friends and 2-3 Austrian friends, who I got to know at the monthly coffee meetings that the [local civil society initiative] used to organise before the pandemic broke out (ADM7)".*

*"If you have problems, you can turn to [members of the local civil society initiative]. I have a friend in Vienna and what I hear, it is different there. People are very busy and no one has time to talk to you. People are nice here and there are opportunities to talk. You find that in a village but not in a large city (ADM7)".*



*“Before I lived in a small village in the area. In 2020, I moved to Vienna but it was too difficult because in the beginning there was quarantine and I could not find a job. I had many contacts with people from the locality and I decided to come back. I got in touch with people from the locality attending the ‘coffee meetings’ that a local civil society initiative organised (ADM9)”.*

Additionally, the **refugee shelter(s) and period during pending asylum procedures** is among the first opportunities for social interactions in Austria/in the locality, where interviewees have gained friendships and contacts.

*“My friends who were at the camp with me, we all stayed here in [the locality], and thankfully they have all established their lives here, one has three restaurants, I have a hair salon, and two other guys also have hair salons in [other localities]. So anything I need they can help me (ADM2)”.*

*“I have made friends at church, at school [doing a vocational training for social work], in the chorus [of the Catholic church], in the local social market (Sozialmarkt) (ADM6)”.*

#### IDEATIONAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSION

With regard to ideational and political/public and social participation, few respondents addressed this topic. While no one participated in a demonstration, “I have not seen or heard of demonstrations in the locality (ADM9)”, two respondents reported that they were involved/had been involved in voluntary work. In this context, a female interviewee from Ethiopia referred to the long asylum process and the fact that, in principle, no training is allowed during this process. However, she emphasized that she received great financial support from her German teacher and from the members of the Protestant church, so that she could do a private 2-year training to become a “Fachsozialarbeiterin” (specialized social worker for elderly/disabled persons) and made during that time voluntary work in the nursery home (ADM6). Another female respondent from Afghanistan volunteers at an NGO's second-hand store sorting, tagging, and ironing clothes (ADM8). Another respondent stated that although she was not active in any organization or association, one of her daughters does play soccer (ADM7).

For some of the respondents, the first time at the location was a great challenge. Apart from the sometimes long waiting times for a positive decision, the language deficits and sometimes also the loneliness affected their self-confidence, which would have improved over time.

*“In the beginning, it was difficult, really. I did not have any friends, did not speak German. After 1-1.5 years, I learned German, met people and made friends. Now it is good, I have my job, my family, my house. It was difficult, with becoming an entrepreneur, with German, taking the driving licence, but I have managed everything (ADM1)”.*



*“The first period I was in Horn there was a difficulty, and after some period I integrated with the people here, and started having a lot of relationships and encounters with people here [...] (ADM2)”.*

*“I feel like the most successful person in Horn, because I started off from below zero, while everyone else here started from above zero, financially (ADM3)”.*

Furthermore, a female respondent from Ethiopia reported additionally cultural differences, which would have made the first phase of adaptation difficult, but which she overcame with the support of local people.

*“In the beginning it was difficult due to the language and cultural differences between Austria and my home country. Furthermore, you can see that I am different [i.e. as women of colour]. My German teacher and neighbour supported me. I managed to adapt and accept my situation (ADM6)”.*

Another female interviewee also speaks of cultural differences, which, however, shape her more extensively and also seem to influence her actions, and speaks of the fact that “We lost time” to integrate.

*“It is not easy. It is a different culture, for example people go for swimming here, but I cannot. I go there with my children but I stay with full clothes (ADM7)”.*

The young Afghan woman sees her life in Austria as an opportunity for self-fulfillment that she would never have in Afghanistan, which seems to have had a significant impact on her self-confidence.

*“For me here in Austria, I can go without worries for shopping, to school, to work. That is the positive side. I can stay outside until 8 pm without worries. Women are free in Austria and have the choice (ADM8)”.*

Another respondent pointed out how intra-migratory and, in particular, male-dominated cultural norms influence women's actions, possible participation in society and self-confidence. She stated that many Afghan women were not allowed to leave the asylum shelter and were not allowed to attend German courses. She also reported that men in the asylum shelter would spend nights getting drunk and playing cards, and that there were also sexual insinuations. She made it clear that if she wanted to live such a life, “Then I could have stayed in Afghanistan (ADM5)”.

## GOVERNANCE DIMENSION

With regard to job search, respondents emphasized that there were basically enough job opportunities in the locality. The question would be, however, “Those who want to work get a job. I found work here quickly because I wanted to work (ADM1)”. One of the respondents even stated that he moved to the location from Vienna for the job. He had a university degree



and had worked for years in the oil industry in Syria, but had lost all his certificates and diplomas, so he had to reorient himself. He emphasized that he had already looked for a job as a barber in Vienna, but had always been rejected because of his language deficits. In the meantime, he has been working as a barber in the locality (ADM2) for five years. For another interviewee it is important to become an entrepreneur and his own "boss" one day.

*"I will open my own restaurant one day, in [name of the locality] or any other locality. For me its important to be my own boss, as I don't want someone to give me orders just because they have money (ADM3)".*

Regarding the difficulties in accessing the labor market, the inadequate job placements of the PES are mentioned. The mediated jobs would be "bad" on the one hand and on the other hand they would not correspond to the qualifications of persons.

*"For example, I have experience in painting, while studying in Syria I used to work part time as a painter. Why don't they send me to such jobs? Then they, that I would need a training for such a job. But they didn't provide me with the language education, so I can do another training. What am I supposed to do (ADM3)"?*

From this statement it seems clear that language skills and formally verifiable qualifications are seen as key, but also as an obstacle to employment.

*"I can not work because of the language and I do not have any certificate. I can do small jobs and cleaning is the only thing you can do. [...] I do not have any certificate that I obtained in Austria (ADM7)".*

Other hurdles that primarily affect women were also highlighted by two respondents. On the one hand, it would not be compatible for single mothers to pursue further education and training due to childcare (ADM5). On the other hand, in addition to language skills, the headscarf is seen as an obstacle to access the labor market.

*"I think with my mum, it's because of her headscarf and because of the language. These are the only reasons why my mum cannot easily find a job (ADM8)".*

What all respondents had in common was that they all found their work through intra- and intermigrant networks or through the help of volunteers, German teachers or the Diakonie. Sometimes it was "a Turkish friend who has been living in Austria for 30-35 years" (ADM1), sometimes it was Diakonie staff (ADM2), another time it was a friend who was already working at the place of work. Only in one case did a respondent mention that she had found a 2-month internship through the placement (ADM5).

With regard to access to housing, some respondents stated that it is not a problem to find suitable housing in the locality (ADM1, ADM2, ADM3). Two of the respondents stated that they had already moved to a larger apartment or single-family house in the locality because they had married in the meantime.





*“I had different flats, first a small flat (35m<sup>2</sup>). After I found a job and got a salary, I rented a big flat (60m<sup>2</sup>) and then we got married, stayed in the flat for a year and then I found the house. With all the flats, friends helped me to find them (ADM1)”.*

Similar to finding employment, local support structures and networks play an important role in housing access, according to respondents. It was stated that Caritas (ADM5), members of a local association (ADM8), neighbors (ADM7), members of the local church (ADM9), and friends (ADM1) were very supportive in the search for housing. Also the search on the Internet and in a few cases, finding housing through a real estate agent, was mentioned.

*“When I needed a flat for me and my kids, an Austrian who is member of the local association of volunteers found a flat for us. [...] We lived there for one year and we did not have to pay rent, only electricity (ADM5)”.*

*“We found our first flat in the locality online. It was a two-room flat, we moved in when we had one child. [...] We lived in this flat for one year. Then we planned to move out, looking for a bigger flat. A neighbour found a bigger, three-room flat for us in the same building. She did not want us to move out (ADM7)”.*

Nevertheless, some difficulties and hurdles are also mentioned, especially with regard to the affordability and maintenance of housing. Although access and availability seem to be easy, the high rents are mentioned (ADM2, ADM5, ADM9). One respondent states that, *“(...) if someone wants to come here from Vienna, they all see Horn as a small village so they expect that the rents are cheap, and on the contrary the rents are expensive here. Horn is a place where there is work, and movement, and it’s a nice city, so they get surprised from the rent. I have a 1-bedroom apartment and I pay 550 €. People think they can find an apartment for 200-300 € since it’s a village (ADM2)”*. Additionally, high/increasing electricity and heating costs were also mentioned by one respondent for driving up rents (ADM8).

Finally, the overwhelming majority of respondents also indicated that they were satisfied with both housing conditions and relations with neighbors. One respondent stated that he lives *“in a great apartment”* and that he has a very good relationship with all his neighbors (all of them are Austrian), except one couple, who would complain about *“alleged”* noise.

*“(...) in my opinion music is not noise. I’m a musician and an artist and this is my hobby. I like to play music, and this has affected me negatively as my music skills have declined. I used to be a professor in playing not anymore, due to the neighbours (ADM3)”.*

Access to services and support structures shape satisfaction with living conditions on the one hand and integration into society on the other. The interviewees in location D stated that these structures are certainly in place. On the one hand, the support structures of the Diakonie were again mentioned and that *“even individuals who pass by and ask if we need anything (ADM2)”*. In addition, it is also appreciated that certain basic infrastructure (schools, stores,



swimming pool, hospital) (ADM7) is available in the locality and access is not associated with barriers, “I have used all the services here in *[name of the locality]* and I did not find any barriers (ADM3)”. However, it was also reported that certain structures, such as education and courses in the locality are offered less or by volunteers and that these structures are more available in St. Pölten. In particular, language courses were mentioned, which would also be offered by the PES, ÖIF or on a voluntary basis in the refugee shelter (ADM6), but “if you want to learn the language in *[name of the locality]* its difficult (ADM2)”, reflected one of the respondents. One female respondent also mentioned a service offered by the local PES, where specifically women are supported in terms of education/training and access to employment.

“There is a women’s centre in the locality of the PES. You can go there without prior appointment on Tuesdays. They help you with finding a job, a training, writing a job application. You can get all that there (ADM5)”.



## 3 Main findings in comparative perspective

Based on the individual interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the four localities as outlined, the following section elaborates on the most influential findings from a comparative perspective. In doing so, the first subsection focuses on mutual interactions and attitudes as well as migrants' experiences, trying to identify common patterns or significant/clear differences between different locations and also taking into account the temporal dimension by referring to whether and how relationships have changed or developed since 2014. The content of the second subsection addresses the social/ideal/political/state/spatial dimensions and what value they have in explaining and understanding interactions/attitudes/experiences in different localities. The final subsection attempts to address the recent Ukrainian refugee crisis and to show whether and to what extent this influx has affected social interaction, individual attitudes and integration experiences in the four localities.

### 3.1 Reciprocal interactions and attitudes, and migrants' experiences of integration

Based on the results of the research, some common patterns were observed in the localities regarding the mutual interactions and attitudes between newly arrived migrants and long-term residents. In this respect, it becomes clear that, first of all, language competence has a fundamental impact on the interaction and relationships of post-2014 migrants with long-term residents. In this context, the influence of the Covid-19 phase, where many people did not have the opportunity to attend a regular German course, should not go unmentioned. Although courses were offered in some cases online, accessibility to learners was relatively limited, either due to the lack of technical resources or the lack of familiarity with them. Regardless of language skills, perceived and existing cultural differences, discrimination and exclusion processes in the housing and labor market, also lead to less interaction with the native population and show a tendency to focus on the own cultural circle. This is particularly visible in the larger localities. The perception is even clearer from the point of view of the interviewees, that in Vienna, where the German language is not needed at all in everyday life.

However, and this was also mentioned in all localities, some do not see themselves affected by these exclusion processes and consider the connection to their own cultural circle or community rather as an obstacle on the way to social integration. Furthermore, it must be



emphasized that these components have a negative impact on the self-confidence of post-2014 and that contact is visibly less sought after.

In all four localities, women in particular reported that the language deficits had a negative impact on their lives, both in terms of relationships and interactions, and in terms of employment. The reasons for this are mostly related to obligations such as childcare or the lack of/low level of prior schooling. In a few cases, the perception was also mentioned that the headscarf is judged negatively by the local population and that this does not lead to more interaction. However, there are also contradictory statements from women, as in locations B, C and D, who see life in Austria as an opportunity for self-development and to break away from the normative ideas of the communities.

In this context, the interviewees also view their own community in a differentiated way. In terms of access to housing and work, it is viewed positively. Because of the common cultural understanding and language, it is also easier for many to talk about problems and feelings. In addition, intramigratory relationships are also present in all localities in different levels. Mostly there are also people with migration history from Turkey, former Yugoslavia, etc., who have lived in Austria for years/decades, who are either neighbors, work colleagues or acquaintances with whom one has regular contact. However, also in this context, some respondents emphasize avoiding their own community with statements such as "otherwise you won't learn the language" or "I want to integrate after all".

Finally, the importance of Austrian citizenship is emphasized in all localities. It is not primarily seen as a door opener for more interaction but rather as a guarantee to be allowed to stay in Austria "forever" and to participate socially and politically. Of course, it would also have a positive impact on migrants' perception of Austrian society, which would also improve interaction.

After presenting the interaction patterns between the studied localities, the divergent patterns are described below. When comparing attitudes towards post-2014 migrants and mutual interactions between communities, we find a rather positive and welcoming atmosphere in the larger localities A (Innsbruck) and B (St. Pölten). In contrast, a rather negative (locality C) and reserved (locality D) attitude prevails. Regardless of size, population and political structures, there are also clear differences in the institutional landscape in the localities. Innsbruck and St. Pölten have already had experience with migrant societies (mostly labor migrants and so-called "guest workers") since the 1960s and also have institutionally anchored structures. In both localities there are politically responsible persons/offices dealing with questions of integration and migrants. Thus, these localities also have a certain scope of competence where they can act actively. In localities C and D, these formal structures do not exist (locality C) or are not structurally present (locality D). In addition, Locality C cannot build on experience in dealing with migrants and/or refugees, which makes dealing with and interacting with them correspondingly more difficult.



A similar picture emerges with regard to association and support structures. In Innsbruck, there is an established (migrant) association structure that is active primarily in the area of language teaching and is also financially supported by the city government through projects. In St. Pölten, too, the city government actively intervenes and promotes the language skills of newly arrived migrants with "Diversity Cafe". In this context, it should be mentioned in particular that through these institutional structures, local people and long-term migrants also get involved, which promotes interaction – albeit selectively. In Locality B, these support structures through volunteers are also present, but not in comparable diversity or intensity. In location D, these structures are more present because the location also has a certain experience with migrants and refugees and associations, volunteers and the church are active in the integration process of newly arrived migrants.

With regard to the temporal dimension the discussions on asylum seekers, their integration process, access to the labor market and housing have increasingly been a topic of discussion in the national context in recent years and have also been part of daily media news. Although this topic has been pushed into the background for some time with the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, it is more topical than ever, also due to the war in Ukraine.

During the individual interviews as well as during the focus group discussions, the research team raised, among other issues, the question of how relationships with long-time residents have changed in recent years and whether they have become better or worse. The responses to this question were very different and relatively similar, which is also due to personal experiences of newly arrived migrants in the respective localities.

Some of the respondents emphasized that *"everything has become much worse (AAM1)"* and that the atmosphere in the society is developing to the negative and the refugees *"are not welcomed as they were in 2014/2015 (AAM7)"*. In particular, the waiting times and the long procedure for a positive decision are mentioned, which particularly affects people - mostly single young men - from Afghanistan and Iraq (AAM5), which certainly seems to have an effect on self-perception and to influence the willingness to get in touch with the local community (AAFG).

*"From the Austrian perspective, it has improved because fewer refugees are coming. From a migrant's point of view, it has become worse because the procedures have become much more complicated. I can understand that a country does not want migrants. But when people are already there and have to wait years for a decision, I don't understand. This affects people from Iraq, etc. People in Syria do not need so long, although in the meantime they also have to wait a little longer. I know people who have been waiting for 6 years. What should they learn the language for (ABM9)?"*

Based on this statement, it can be said that for those who are still waiting for a positive decision and sometimes have already received a negative decision 1-2 times and for those



who still have language problems, relatively little has changed in terms of interaction and relationships. A relevant and, from a research perspective, interesting assessment on the part of the interviewees was also that people who are now employed, have a family and an everyday structure basically no longer have the time to make new acquaintances or to interact (ACFG). On the other hand, in contrast to the smaller localities, "all persons are affected by the anonymity in the larger cities" so that no one necessarily has the need to "talk" to anyone (AAFG). Although negative experiences were mentioned more often, there are also positive developments in all localities that have been noted in recent years. For some, new friendships have been formed or extended, so that acquaintances have also become friends (ACM2, ACM3, ADM2).

### 3.2 Value of social/ideational-political/governance/spatial dimensions/factors in explaining and understanding interactions/attitudes/experiences

#### **Social dimension**

The initial reaction or reception of the local society towards newly arrived migrants has a formative influence on the interaction and integration of refugees. Refugees who felt welcome and received support from official bodies or associations and NGOs, but especially from volunteers, maintained their friendship and have a significantly different attitude towards life in Austria. In this context, from the perspective of the respondents, it is important and valuable to be able to "just call person X and ask", which again underlines the importance of reference persons. Often these are people who are no longer formally in charge of caring for individuals, but who nevertheless offer their support and are repeatedly contacted by refugees. These people, members of associations and NGOs but also volunteers, not only provide the migrants with information but also act as companions in a new environment. In this context, for example, the " Diversity Cafe" in St. Pölten should be mentioned, which primarily has the goal of offering refugees and migrants from all over the world a platform where they can improve their language skills. However, it was very clear to observe that this constellation gave rise to much more than just pure language support. Both the organizers, who are mostly volunteers, some with their own migration history, try to be helpful in any context. This in turn creates a climate of welcome, which has a clearly positive influence on the attitude of the newly arrived migrants.

In addition to official and unofficial support structures, inter- and intramigrant contacts and networks also play an important role in terms of experience and living together. In all localities, relationships were mentioned in this light, also with long-term resident migrants, which were interpreted as very helpful. These networks are primarily very helpful when it comes to finding work or access to housing. However, they also testify to a certain social cohesion and exchange



of experiences and information. In addition, the similar experiences (the flight itself, life in the asylum shelter, the search for work and housing) form a basis for further exchange and friendships.

### **Ideational and political dimension**

Another important component that shapes people's interactions, attitudes, and experiences is ideational and political representation or discourse. Self-perception and how one sees oneself through the behavior of society has a clear impact on the attitudes and interaction of newly arrived migrants. Also, self-doubt, especially among women and people who have had little or no schooling, or who do not have the opportunities to develop themselves due to childcare, or who have gone through a divorce, it is more noticeable that they have a more pessimistic attitude towards society, politics and life itself. The statement of a young Iranian woman about her mother, who had a career in her country of origin and was successful, makes this clear.

*“My mother is very disappointed about her life. She couldn't learn German as well as she wanted to. In Iran, she was head of department in a real estate company. She was a strong and independent woman. I see that she is withdrawing further and further here in Austria. One reason is that she doesn't speak the language well. Basically, she is very communicative, but here she cannot articulate herself. She also failed the driving test several times. This also made her very depressed. She is no longer the person she was. She thought that she could continue to do her profession. She also trained as a hairdresser and worked as a hairdresser for a while. But that didn't go well because she is a bit older and the AMS did not finance an other training. She has been working in a production company for 2 months (ACM6)”.*

Age also seems to play a role in this context. People who have had careers in their countries of origin are confronted with a downgrading of their skills and person. This also leads to frustration and to an increasing withdrawal from social life. A few times the headscarf was also seen as a sign that women are seen differently in public and that it has an influence especially on finding a job.

The fact that origin and " physical characteristics" play a decisive role was mentioned with varying intensity in all localities with regard to access to housing. One of the respondents reflected a particularly unique experience:

*„I was even asked to send photos of myself, my wife [she wears a headscarf] and children. With three offers everything was fine and after I sent the photos, I got a rejection. Although the brokers told me that I had a very good chance of getting the apartments as I had a good salary (ABM9)”.*



Lastly, while there were no reports of large-scale or organized protests in the localities, there were reports of selective negative media coverage of migrants and refugees.

### **Governance dimension**

Finally, legal and regulatory factors play another important role in shaping people's experiences. Finally, legal and regulatory factors play another important role in shaping people's experiences. Both, in the individual interviews and in the focus groups, particular mention was made of the long asylum processes, which can sometimes take several years. While refugees from Syria - refugees from Ukraine are not affected by this - receive a positive decision relatively quickly and thus gain access to the labor market, refugees from Afghanistan or Iraq describe that they have to wait a very long time and usually spend this time in overcrowded asylum shelters. For most, it is a "lost time" in which they are relegated to "doing nothing." From the perspective of some interviewees, it is therefore no wonder that some "lose the desire to live" and also do not want to learn the language because they are not allowed to work for the foreseeable future anyway.

For many of the interviewees, employment not only means earning one's own living, but is also an important part of obtaining Austrian citizenship, which is of great concern to many respondents. In this context, citizenship is definitely seen as an element that should enable political and social participation. However, it has a much greater significance for families with children in particular, who want their children and themselves to have a secure and guaranteed future in Austria.

Although localities have different competencies with regard to the implementation of national regulations, the political composition plays an important role in the implementation. In this regard, it should be mentioned that different political parties are in power in all four localities. While in locality A and C a social-liberal political orientation (Greens and Social Democrats) prevails, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) won the election in locality B after the recent local council elections in Tyrol and provides the mayor. Die politische Orientierung in der Lokalität D ist konservativ und wird von der Peoples' Party (ÖVP) gestellt. The political orientation in locality D is conservative and is provided by the Peoples' Party (ÖVP).

### **Spatial dimension**

With reference to the spatial dimensions, based on the research findings, it can be said that size, population, geographic and related infrastructural characteristics can have a weighty influence on understanding and explaining the different experiences of inclusion and exclusion of post-2014 migrants. Simple-sounding factors, such as the presence or absence of public transportation, recreational opportunities (parks, playgrounds), or educational facilities, cannot be disregarded.

In the Austrian context, study area A (Innsbruck) is a large city with very good infrastructure and also a popular tourist destination. It also has an international airport, university and very





good rail connections to the rest of the country and neighboring states. The quality of life is appreciated and the recreational opportunities are quite good, although the rental prices in Innsbruck were the highest in our survey. There is an established support structure and also associations and NGOs are active in the field of refugee and migrant support. The cityscape has changed since 2014/15 due to immigration. However, as the locality is also used to a certain diversity due to tourism and the university, it is not judged negatively. According to the interviewees, the employment opportunities, especially in the immediate surroundings, are good. Therefore, most of them also prefer to stay - at least in Tyrol - because nature is also very much appreciated.

In locality B (the study area was extended to the surrounding communities), which is also located in Tyrol, the situation is partly assessed differently. The rural locality does have a train station - shared with the neighboring community - but the local transport system can be described as "typical rural", which makes the presence of a car indispensable, which is hardly affordable for many newly arrived migrants. Certain offers, such as language courses or further education, or visits to authorities must be taken up in the nearest city or in Innsbruck. Although the locality and its surroundings are appreciated for their natural beauty and quietness, the opportunities for employment are limited. In the extended study areas, these opportunities were rated somewhat better.

St. Pölten, location C in our sample, has years of experience with immigration, similar to Innsbruck. Accordingly, support structures, which are also supported by the city, are in place, even if the civil society organizations are not as pronounced as in Innsbruck. The infrastructure is appreciated by the respondents. The location is ideal in terms of size and also compact, so that all tasks can be completed without a great deal of time. In addition, the migrant community has been growing steadily since 2014/15 and has the infrastructure (ethno-markets) accordingly. Leisure facilities, such as parks or public bathing resorts, are also available in the city or in the immediate vicinity. Based on the statements of the research participants, however, there is also a certain segregation with regard to housing and school situation.

In the last locality, working and living opportunities are considered good. Due to the fact that the locality is the district capital, it has a good infrastructure. The civil society organizational structure is also very active in supporting refugees and migrants, and the church was mentioned several times in this context. For many of the interviewees, especially families with children, moving away is out of the question because the locality and its facilities (hospital, schools, etc.) are appreciated.



## 4 Impact of Ukrainian refugee crisis on social interactions, individual attitudes and integration experiences in SMsTRAs

The reception, housing, and support structures and opportunities provided to war refugees from Ukraine were mentioned not only during the interviews and focus group discussions conducted for this report, but also during the field research phase for Country Reports 3 and 4. As mentioned above, the research team was informed by stakeholders during its recruitment processes that the client structure has largely changed, with more Ukrainian refugees now being assisted.

Newly arrived migrants from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq are aware or certain that refugees from Ukraine are treated differently. While all interviewees had to wait several months or years for a positive decision and were denied access to the regular labor market, they find it difficult to understand why many Ukrainians are granted immediate access to the labor market. At this point, it should be mentioned that while most of the respondents addressed this issue, they mostly shrugged their shoulders, shook their heads or smiled slightly at the questions. This indicates – from the researchers' perspective – that they wanted to express their lack of understanding on the one hand and their frustration on the other. The perceived preference of Ukrainian refugees primarily concerns, as mentioned, the shortened waiting time in terms of residence and the different welcoming culture.

*“If you compare the procedures for Ukrainians or other migrants, its different. ... within 2 days they get a residency. We on the other hand have to wait for 9 months and others for 1 years and 1.5 years, and add to that another year for family reunification. [...] This is apart from the mental pressures and the financial pressures (AAM4)”.*

*“Ukrainians are received much more friendly and are supported by the state. I am very happy for them. But I don't understand why politicians perceive them differently. There are certainly a few reasons for this. The war is right here. When the war is far away... it's bad... but not so bad (ABM9)”.*

In terms of access to housing, the interviewees also identified a preference for Ukrainian refugees on the part of political leaders and authorities, as well as on the part of society and private housing providers. "The shelter for Ukrainians is like a hotel" (AAM4) emphasizes one interviewee and would be reserved only for them. Other refugees who were in need of housing would have even leave their apartments, which they got through associations/organizations, so that Ukrainian refugees could move in.

*„They got a flat straight away. For example, an acquaintance of mine lived in a flat. She got a negative decision, she was a single mother with two small children. The*



*association told her she had to get out, they had to give the flat to a Ukrainian family (ACM1)".*

*"There was the possibility for private individuals to take in refugees in their own homes. Many have said that they only want to accept Ukrainians. For some, it didn't matter, but for some it didn. Why?(ACM6)".*

However, support and preferential treatment by the population is also declining, according to the local participant in the focus group in locality B. She said that many Ukrainians were given apartments for free, many of whom would now work and earn money. "This puts the apartment owners in a dilemma" she emphasized, because they don't know whether to charge rent or not. Her conclusion is, "The mood is slowly shifting (ABFG)."

This distinction also became clear with regard to access to language courses, because *"...Ukrainians don't require a language, but if they wanted to the German courses, they are open for them (ACM7)",* emphasized one respondent. This statement was also confirmed in the focus group discussion in Innsbruck by a participant from Afghanistan.

*"I once talked to Caritas about German course. The first thing they asked was whether I came from Ukraine. They told me that there are no German courses for Afghans. Ukrainians get a course immediately. They said that the laws are like that. The laws should be the same for all people (AAFG)".* Another participant from the focus group in locality B has another explanation for the facilitation for the Ukrainian refugees. He reflects that many Ukrainians speak English well and that would help them in the work. They too would have communicated in English at the beginning, but would have had to learn German. *"Maybe these facilitations for the Ukrainians are also made because it is believed that the war will end quickly and they will go back (ABFG)."*

However, some respondents think that people are not the same for everyone. Some of the research participants believe that Ukrainian refugees are treated differently because they are Europeans or considered to be European (ADM6, AAM10). Other respondents think that the reasons are deeper and the different treatment has to do with skin color and religion.

*"They have the same religion and skin colour that makes it easier for them. They do not have to pay for trains. They easily go to school and university. No one asks them how much they earn to afford a flat or how many people would live in a flat. They do not speak German and get a job easily. All is easy (ADM7)".*

It should also be mentioned here that although many respondents were critical of the different treatment, these statements did not refer to Ukrainians per se. It was noticeably clear that the criticism and frustration was directed on the one hand to politics and on the other hand to social attitudes. Other participants made this frustration clear.



*„Ukrainians are "noble refugees". They get everything immediately. [...] It also has to do with religion, I think. Ukrainians are Christians and we are Muslims. What were the Muslims doing here? I didn't come to Austria with a gun (AAFG)“.*

*“It's embarrassing. When talking about humanity, one should not distinguish between people. People are people. It has been said that Ukrainians have blue eyes, etc. (AAM7)“.*

## 5 Concluding remarks and final considerations on the Ukrainian refugee crisis

This country report focused on the experiences of post-2014 migrants in terms of settlement and integration in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas in Austria. The fundamental question that arose during the field research was what factors and circumstances facilitate or hinder integration at the local level and to what extent processes of inclusion and exclusion were present. The findings in this regard were based on the comparison of four localities.

Generally, respondents have been fairly positive about their experiences, although this perception is very much linked to settlement histories, personal expectations and aspirations, which in turn may be different for larger or smaller localities. Thus, statements such as "I would have better chances of getting a job in the city" or "I would learn the language better in a small municipality" should therefore be considered in relation to the person and do not make either a large city or a small municipality good or bad in terms of integration per se.

Amongst the factor facilitating integration that can be identified based on the analysis of interviews are the following:

- Welcome culture; the first (positive) experiences with the local population can be decisive for the further integration process and willingness to integrate
- The existence of civil society structures, associations and volunteers
- A political orientation supportive of migrant integration, combined with institutional structures (politically responsible person for integration issues (such as in Innsbruck) or a body (Office for Diversity-St. Pölten)
- A good social infrastructure (schools, kindergartens, health care facilities) and public transportation
- Recreational facilities, such as parks and playgrounds



Amongst the factors identified as hindering integration of newly arrived migrants are the following:

- Long asylum processes
- Qualification mismatches regarding jobs, perception of inadequate support from the Public Employment Services
- Negative discourses in media and politics
- Lack of language courses and other services
- There is a paradoxical effect of fast asylum processes increasing the pressure to work without providing sufficient time to improve one's language

Hindering factors in particular relate to factors outside local communities – the broader political framework determined on the national level (e.g. long asylum procedures), politics (media discourses), or structural aspects (skills mismatches), whereas it is particularly the facilitating factors where the local level makes a difference.

These facilitating and hindering factors are not distributed equally amongst the different localities investigated. Thus, strategies and explicit initiatives to incorporate migrants are largely absent in the two smaller municipalities studied, as are positive narratives of welcoming migrants. This said, those who “made it” in smaller municipalities are fairly positive about their environment, while many migrants in the larger municipalities still report marginalization and othering, especially when it comes to housing or employment, despite any positive policy narratives.

Generally, the main differences in the case of Austrian municipalities studied relate to the size and position of municipalities (central vs. peripheral, larger vs. small), which shapes the opportunities available for migrants in various regards. These patterns have already been identified in earlier studies (Skrivanek et al., 2022a, 2022b) and are confirmed by the research undertaken for this report. The findings thus do not neatly inscribe themselves in the Whole-COMM typology (Caponio & Pettrachin, 2021), although this may be more of a function of certain types of municipalities identified in the theoretical framework (such as with poor economic performance and high migration) are simply not present in the Austrian context and other axes of differentiation are more important.

Another aspect of the research also addressed the arrival of Ukrainian refugees and how that has affected the experience of integration in the localities compared to post-2014 migrants. Generally, a clear preference for Ukrainians both in public policies and in local policy practices is visible from the perspective of post-2014 migrants. For this group, it is also clear that politics and society differentiates between countries of origin, skin colour, culture and religion and that they are seen as "second-class refugees". This perception leads to frustration and disappointment among many, which in turn can hinder their willingness to integrate in the medium and long term.



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