



Post-2014 migrants' access to housing,  
employment and other crucial resources  
in small- and medium-sized towns and rural  
areas

in Austria

Country Reports on integration



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

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



## Executive Summary

This report examines post-2014 migrants' access to housing, employment, and other relevant resources in different small and medium-sized towns and rural areas in Austria. The research in Austria focused on four localities in two provinces (Lower Austria and Tyrol), and in terms of categories of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers that had arrived since 2014. Primarily based on interviews conducted in each of the four selected municipalities, the report provides an overview of 1) the concrete barriers that post-2014 migrants are facing in relation to housing and employment; 2) the local actors who are involved in, and/or seen as responsible for, facilitating their access; 3) any concrete local measures or practices that help or hinder this access; and 4) the specific target groups of these measures, initiatives or practices.

The report finds that 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. While asylum seekers have been dispersed across the Austrian territory and a fairly elaborated national and provincial framework exists for this, beneficiaries of international protection are not addressed by any specific overarching housing policies. NGOs have thus been at the forefront of addressing issues, although municipalities do dispose of limited means (notably municipal housing) to address the challenges of housing transitions from the initial accommodation provided under the basic care regime to independent housing. Overall, however, beneficiaries of international protection have to rely on the private housing markets. High rents, limited supply of housing and lack of access to public housing are the main barriers, alongside discrimination and language barriers. In the two localities in the Tyrol, the short-term allocation of flats to tourists also increases competition in the housing market, where newly arrived migrants and refugees are disadvantaged from the outset. Overall, access to housing is often more difficult than access to the labour market. As a result of these challenges, newly arrived migrants tend to live in poorer neighborhoods and/or buildings. To facilitate successful housing transitions starter flats run by NGOs and initiatives with private landlords have been launched.

Regarding employment, the room for manouvre for local authorities is limited, as the overall framework is largely a federal competence. There are several challenges and obstacles to employment that have been mentioned by interviewees across the four studied localities. 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. Active actors in this field in all localities are the



Public Employment Service (AMS), companies themselves, NGOs and also volunteers. In order to facilitate access to the labour market for this target group, special fairs such as the Job Fair were offered, but also mentoring programmes were created. In general, the Public Employment Service is the direct point of contact regarding the labour market, but volunteers have also been able to use their personal networks to help newly arrived migrants and refugees find work.

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.

A similar pattern holds also in relation to provision of other services, notably language training. The report concludes that there is major urban / rural divide related to the density of 'arrival infrastructures', whereas the socio-economic conditions in the localities seem to be less relevant, given the organisation of key services at the provincial level. In addition, however, local mobilization around the issue of integration is of key relevance.



## Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1.1 Methodology .....	7
<b>2. Context &amp; cases</b> .....	<b>11</b>
2.1. General information on the relevant national and regional contexts .....	11
2.1.1. Employment .....	11
2.1.2 General policies on housing .....	14
2.1.3. Specific policy programmes addressing employment and housing of beneficiaries of international protection .....	16
2.2. Locality A (Innsbruck/Tyrol, Type A, Urban/Large) .....	17
2.3. Locality B (Tyrol, Type B, Rural) .....	17
2.4. Locality C (St. Pölten/Lower Austria, Type C, Urban/Medium) .....	18
2.5. Locality D (Lower Austria, Type D, Rural/Regional Centre) .....	19
<b>3. Access to housing</b> .....	<b>21</b>
3.1. Main challenges / obstacles .....	21
3.2. Actors involved (WHO) .....	25
3.3. Policies, initiatives, and practices that foster/hinder access (WHAT) .....	27
3.4. Specific target groups (FOR WHOM) .....	30
<b>4. Access to employment</b> .....	<b>33</b>
4.1. Main challenges / obstacles .....	33
4.1.1. Legal status of humanitarian migrants .....	33
4.1.2 Role of German language competences .....	35
4.1.3. Educational status and transferability of foreign qualifications .....	36
4.1.4. Transitions from welfare to work .....	37
4.1.5. Work cultures and cultural differences .....	39
4.1.6. Labour market situation and role/practices of employers .....	40



4.2. Actors involved (WHO) .....	42
4.3. Policies, initiatives, and practices that foster/hinder access (WHAT) .....	44
4.4. Specific target groups (FOR WHOM) .....	49
<b>5. Access to other resources and services .....</b>	<b>52</b>
5.1. Language.....	52
a) Main challenges/obstacles.....	52
b) Actors involved (who).....	56
c) Policies, initiatives, and practices (what) that foster/hinder access (what).....	57
d) Specific target groups (for whom) .....	58
5.2. Cross-cutting topics .....	60
5.2.1 Covid-19 Pandemic.....	60
5.2.2 Gender .....	61
<b>6. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>68</b>

## List of tables

Table 1: Whole-COMM variables for case selection .....	7
Table 2: Whole-COMM types of localities .....	7
Table 1: Case-by-case summary of results/findings regarding the area of Housing .....	32
Table 4: Case-by-case summary of results/findings regarding the area of Employment.....	51
Table 3: Case-by-case summary of results/findings regarding the area of Language .....	60
Table A1. List of interviewees .....	66

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# 1. Introduction

Whole-COMM focuses on small and medium sized municipalities and rural areas (SMsTRA) in eight European and two non-European countries that have experienced and dealt with the increased arrival and settlement of migrants after 2014. More particularly, the research project explores how these communities have responded to the presence of “post-2014 migrants”<sup>1</sup>, that is, which policies have been developed and implemented and how these policies shape and enable migrant integration. Taking an innovative Whole-of-Community research approach which conceives of migrant integration as a process of community-making, Whole-COMM pays particular attention to the interactions between multiple actors involved in local integration governance (for example, individuals, public and non-public organizations, institutions and/or corporate entities). Moreover, the project looks at the embeddedness of local actors in multilevel frameworks in which regional, national and EU policies and stakeholders may play a decisive role in shaping local integration policymaking, considering both potential collaborations as well as tensions between actors at different government levels.

**Work Package Four (WP4) focuses on local policies, initiatives, and practices addressing post-2014 immigrants’ access to housing, employment and other crucial resources or services.**

Following the Whole-comm approach, we assume that the multiple actors involved in integration and community-making processes may have different interests, strategies, resources, and power positions; and that mutual adjustment (between newcomers and long-term residents) and social cohesion do not necessarily represent the only/overall rationale guiding their various efforts; instead, the interplay between different actors (and their various interests and rationales) may also lead to exclusion and inequality. This interplay and the resulting measures can thus be analysed in terms of what Collyer, Hinger and Schweitzer call the ‘politics of’, or ‘negotiation around’, ‘(dis)integration’<sup>2</sup>. As these authors point out, integration/disintegration or cohesion/fragmentation should not be understood as simple binary categorisations but as processes that are intertwined and often coexist within and across policies and everyday practices.

By looking at how a wide range of actors (private actors, civil society actors and street level bureaucrats) foster but sometimes also hinder migrants’ access to adequate housing, work

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<sup>1</sup> The group of migrants that arrived in (Western) Europe after 2014 is very heterogeneous, “but mostly comprises migrants that left from areas of political and humanitarian crises” (Working Paper 1 2021, 1-2). The majority of ‘post-2014 migrants’ entered thus as asylum-seekers but may have obtained different legal statuses by now (see for more detail Working Paper 1 for the Whole-COMM project).

<sup>2</sup> Collyer M., Hinger S., Schweitzer R. (2020) Politics of (Dis)Integration – An Introduction. In: Hinger S., Schweitzer R. (eds) Politics of (Dis)Integration. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25089-8\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25089-8_1)



and other crucial resources or services, we hope to better understand (and be able to compare) these local politics of (dis)integration across different local and national contexts.

The choice of focusing on housing and employment follows two main rationales. First, they are key resources for granting fundamental rights and sustainable integration. Second, they are not exclusively dependent on local administrations but involve a diverse range of actors, thus allowing us to fully apply the whole-of-community approach. Housing is (partly or, in some cases, almost completely) in the hands of private actors, from big owners (including banks and international investment funds) to small ones. Work depends on employers, which again are very diverse ranging from big to small (including family) employers, from private to public employers and across different economic sectors. In both cases, between migrants and these private actors, we find a broad range of intermediaries (CSOs, trade unions, real estate agencies, civil society organisations, social networks, etc) and a diverse (and sometimes even contradictory) set of policies and programmes (at the national, regional, and local levels). Apart from housing and employment, WP4 is also interested in local policies, initiatives or practices that affect post-2014 migrants' access to other relevant resources and services, which might be specific to each national context.

To assess the role (and understand the interplay) of the different actors in relation to migrants' access to housing, work, and other services and resources, WP4 identifies and analyses:

- major **obstacles/challenges** that are reported to exist in each locality for post-2014 migrants, particularly focusing on those that are perceived as being particular to each locality;
- the **actors** (public, private, and civil society) involved, and their concrete role (e.g., as initiator, promoter, implementer, critic, etc. of a concrete policy, initiative, or practice).
- concrete **local policies, initiatives, and practices** that intend/help to overcome these obstacles. There might also be certain policies, initiatives and practices that have exclusionary effects (whether intended or unintended) and thus aggravate existing obstacles and inequalities in terms of access to adequate housing and employment.
- the **target groups of local policies, initiatives, or practices**: who is entitled to particular services and how is this entitlement justified<sup>3</sup>. This question will allow us to delve into the main deservingness frames regarding migrants' access to housing, employment and other key resources and services.

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<sup>3</sup> When explaining who is the target of a specific policy or practice, also those who are excluded (e.g., because they are covered by other policies or because they are simply left out or perceived as less vulnerable) are automatically identified (whether implicit or explicitly).

## 1.1 Methodology

The cases for the research project were selected based on a set of variables, namely:

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	For example: East / West or North / South, choosing localities from different regions
Local politics	Parties in government and local political tradition, choosing localities with different political traditions (conservative / progressive)

*Table 1: Whole-COMM variables for case selection*

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

Type A	Characterized by a recovering local economy and an improving demographic profile and migrants’ settlement before 2014
Type B	Characterized by an improving economic and demographic situation and no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014
Type C	Characterized by demographic and economic decline and migrants’ settlement before 2014
Type D	Characterized by economic and demographic decline and no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014

*Table 2: Whole-COMM types of localities*

### Specific aspects

In Austria, a total of 4 localities were investigated, two of which are in the province of Tyrol and two in Lower Austria.





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 and statutory towns.<sup>4</sup>

Empirical data for this report was collected in the period October 2021 until April 2022. Data collection comprised document analysis and semi-structured qualitative interviews with respondents at the local, regional/provincial, and national level. Potential respondents were sampled based on their (professional) positions, e.g., as local official working on integration in a municipality or employee in an NGO offering non-profit services to refugees. Most respondents were contacted through email first (in German), occasionally followed by a reminder and a call. After establishing first contacts in a municipality, other respondents were identified using the method of 'snowball sampling' (Bryman 2016). In total, 72 interviews with 74 respondents were conducted. All interviews were conducted in German, except one in Turkish, and recorded. On the basis of the interviews, summary protocols in English were prepared. These were coded and analyzed using MAXQDA text analysis software. A list of the interviewees can be found in the appendix, "Table A1").

As outlined, the focus of the Whole-Comm project is on the integration of migrants that arrived after 2014. In line with the definition of "post-2014 migrants", the majority that came

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<sup>4</sup> A statutory town in Austria also is responsible for providing the functions of district authorities.



to Austria in 2015 and 2016 comprised migrants “that left from areas of political and humanitarian crises”. Austria recorded a sharp increase in asylum applications, amounting to 88,300 in 2015 and 42,300 in 2016. Preceding and until 2021, when the number of asylum applications sharply rose again, numbers were significantly lower and the majority of annual net immigration concerned citizens from other EU member states. The humanitarian inflows around 2015 brought new groups of migrants to Austria in terms of countries of origin, in particular from Syria as well as increasing the number of Afghans and to a lesser extent of Iraqis in Austria. Austria recorded less than 1,000 Syrian residents in its population statistics in 2005. Their number increased to more than 55,000 in 2021. In case of Afghans, numbers were already higher in 2005 (3,300) and in 2014 (14,000), and have increased to 44,000 in 2021. The number of Iraqis amounted to 1,400 in 2005 and to 13,400 in 2021. 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). During the fieldwork, it was also observed that the term "post-2014 migrants" was interpreted as unclear by the interviewees and that they basically understood it to mean "refugees". The recruitment process proved to be challenging on occasion. In particular, accessing "employers," "trade unions," "members of local government" and "real estate companies" was particularly time-consuming.

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 be easily be identified given the far higher number of individuals involved we opted to disclose the name of the localities. By contrast, we keep the names of rural municipalities studied confidential, as individual stakeholders are much more vulnerable to be identified. The **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. Furthermore, the reception and accommodation of asylum seekers is organised across municipal and at times also district boundaries, involving stakeholders from the entire “region”. 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.

## 2. Context & cases

### 2.1. General information on the relevant national and regional contexts

#### 2.1.1. Employment

**Labour market policy is a national domain in Austria and the Arbeitsmarktservice – AMS (public employment service) is responsible for its implementation.** The AMS administers the provision of income support for the unemployed (unemployment benefits, unemployment assistance), and designs and provides active labour market policy measures, comprising orientation and guidance, placement support, employment related training programmes, and job subsidies.

Since 2017, a specific law addresses the labour market integration of humanitarian migrants. The **Integration Year Act** (Integrationsjahrgesetz) addresses labour market integration of humanitarian migrants and prescribes **modular labour market policy measures for beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection, who are unemployed after they obtained their status and who do not find a job.** German language proficiency at A1 level is the required for accessing these measures. Asylum seekers with a high probability of recognition can be included, subject to available funding and provided they have been resident in Austria for at least three months.<sup>5</sup> In cases of non-compliance, financial sanctions (cuts of welfare benefits) are possible. These measures are basically intended for one year and include a range of active labour market policy instruments (competence clearing, guidance and preparation for job interviews, measures preparing for employment, community-based work that contributes to employability), new instruments specifically adopted for humanitarian migrants (value and orientation courses) as well as support instruments for migrants (information and support with the recognition of foreign qualifications, German language courses). Institutionally, the majority of these measures is in the responsibility of AMS except for the value and orientation courses and German language courses. Their provision is in the responsibility of the ÖIF. From A1 onwards, they can register with the AMS (PES) as job-seekers and must complete German courses within requirements. These are the requirements for receiving social assistance. (AH10)

Two further laws have implications for the transition of humanitarian migrants into employment. This is on the one hand the Integration Act and welfare legislation (Federal Framework Act of 2019 and provincial legislation) on the one hand. The **Integration Act** (also

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<sup>5</sup> §68 (1) of the Asylum Act stipulates that the Ministry of the Interior has to inform the AMS (PES) and the Integrationsfonds which categories of asylum seekers may benefit from measures under the Integration Year Act. The law leaves the definition of categories of asylum seekers with a high probability of recognition to the discretion of the Ministry of the Interior.



adopted in 2017) prescribes integration obligations for humanitarian migrants as well as the provision of integration measures. Providing integration measures and demanding active participation in the integration process (§1 IntG) should support their integration in Austria, in particular for participation in social, economic and cultural life. Thereby the law lists **employment**, education, gender equality and **speedy economic self-sufficiency** as major aspects of participation (§2 Abs 2 IntG). In terms of integration measures, the Integration Act regulates language training and some form of civic integration (§3 IntG). **German language courses** have to be provided to beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection, ranging from literacy courses to German language competences at B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Courses need to include values and “orientation knowledge”. The minister for integration has to ensure the provision, while the **Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF)** is responsible for implementation. ÖIF can contract **educational providers** for the German courses. (§4 IntG) Refugees who have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection have to **sign a so-called “integration declaration”** at the ÖIF (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds – Austrian Integration Fund), declaring that they will adhere to fundamental Austrian values and complete German as well as values and orientation courses as specified in the Integration Act. Non-compliance with the course requirements can result in **cuts of welfare benefits**. (cf. BMEIA/ÖIF Integrationserklärung 2019). As in the case of the Integration Year Act, the Integration Act foresees financial sanctions in the form of cuts of welfare benefits in case of non-compliance.

Welfare benefits in the form of social assistance (Lower Austria, localities C and D) and minimum-income benefits (Tyrol, localities A and B) represent a last-resort benefit for those who have not sufficient own means and no entitlements to other benefits, such as allowances under the basic care arrangements (see on differences between Tyrol and Lower Austria below, and Skrivanek et al., 2022).<sup>6</sup> Support mainly regards cash benefits to maintain one’s living and complementary benefits for housing. Benefit recipients, who are fit for work (arbeitsfähig), should be (re-)included into employment. This involves on the one hand the obligation to participate measures that support employability and placement and the provision of respective support measures on the other hand. Despite these mainstream provisions, some provinces have added specific provisions for beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection since 2016. Federal level provision followed with the adoption of the Integration Act and Integration Year Act in 2017 and Basic Social Assistance Act in 2019.

**Beneficiaries of asylum have equal status with citizens in terms of access to mainstream welfare benefits in case of need** (social assistance/minimum income benefits). Prior to 2015, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection were among the entitled groups. (IOM Vienna, 2014, 31) Since then, several provinces excluded beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, including Lower

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<sup>6</sup> Apart from asylum seekers and holders of an international protection status within the first few months after the grant of the status also rejected asylum seekers have access to basic care, in case they have lodged an appeal with suspensive effect or granted a period until voluntary departure (Gahleitner-Gertz 2022: 89f).

Austria (affecting localities C and D). In practical terms, **policies on needs based welfare benefits have remained largely in the competence of the provinces** in Austria,, after repeated attempts to formulate a framework act on social assistance at the national level failed and were finally abandoned in the late 1960s (Melinz 2016).<sup>7</sup> Responding to an increasing unease concerning the incoherence of provincial social assistance policies between each other and in respect to other national welfare policies shared across the political spectrum and building on longer-standing debates on a basic income for all promoted by an NGO platform on poverty (“Armutskonferenz”) that was taken up by the Greens and the Liberal Forum<sup>8</sup> in the 1990s, a major reform in 2010 introduced a basic income scheme in the form of an agreement between the federal level and provinces<sup>9</sup> defining common standards for a minimum income scheme (Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung) and in place between 2010 and 2016 (Fink and Leibetseder 2019).<sup>10</sup> It reformed the existing social assistance framework that left social assistance policies to the provinces by establishing a common national framework. It aimed to reduce the strict separation between employment policy and social assistance, harmonise schemes across provinces, and promote activation. The agreement was not continued after that period. In **2019**, the Federal Government adopted a so-called **“Basic Social Assistance Act”** (Sozialhilfe-Grundsatzgesetz)<sup>11</sup>, which brought a return to the general orientations prior to 2010/11, although maintaining the national level’s prerogative to set the basic conditions for social assistance. Provinces thus had to adopt corresponding implementing acts. Furthermore, the federal reform included explicit provisions aiming to reduce and prevent migrants from receiving benefits. **The Austrian Constitutional Court repealed these provisions in December 2020**, but the integration requirements of the Integration Act (adopted in 2017) have remained in place. Beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection status need to sign an integration declaration, complete a value and orientation course and are required to pass a “B1 integration exam” (B1-Integrationsprüfung). Non-compliance can involve benefit cuts of at least 25% for at least three months.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the act reduced the benefit level for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, limiting it to core social assistance benefits that do not exceed the level of basic welfare support benefits.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Yet the establishment of social assistance acts in the 1970s involved consultations amongst relevant policy-makers in different provinces as well as experts, so were loosely coordinated (Melinz 2016).

<sup>8</sup> The Liberal Forum was established as a split-off of the Freedom Party in 1993. It was voted out of Parliament in 1999. In 2013 it formed a (successful) electoral coalition with the liberal NEOS party, with which it subsequently merged. Neos have stayed in Parliament ever since.

<sup>9</sup> 15a agreement, named after the relevant constitutional provision regulating areas of shared competence between the national level and the provinces.

<sup>10</sup>BGBl. I Nr. 96/2010 Vereinbarung zwischen dem Bund und den Ländern gemäß Art. 15a B-VG über eine bundesweite Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung

<sup>11</sup>[BGBl. I Nr. 41/2019](#)

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Sozialhilfe-Grundsatz Gesetz i.d.F. BGBl. I Nr. 41/2019

<sup>13</sup> Art 4 para 1 Sozialhilfe-Grundsatzgesetz i.d.F. [BGBl. I Nr. 108/2019](#) (VfGH)



**Lower Austria was among the first provinces implementing these provisions** into provincial legislation (adopted in July 2019, in force since January 2020). The province had already excluded beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from minimum income benefits by April 2016 and they are excluded from social assistance now, receiving only core benefits of the basic welfare support system. Already prior to the Federal Integration Act, Lower Austria introduced an “integration agreement” for recipients of minimum income benefits in January 2017 (renamed to “integration declaration” by August 2017). This applied to recipients who resided in Austria for less than five years within the last six years.<sup>14</sup> They had to attend measures that improve their integration, i.e. a “value and orientation course” and A2 German language competences. In case of non-compliance, financial sanctions applied. Since January 2020, the provisions of the Integration Act apply (implemented in provincial social assistance regulations for beneficiaries of asylum and in state basic welfare support regulations for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and beneficiaries of asylum in the first four months after they obtained their status). **Tyrol has not adopted a corresponding implementation act yet and maintained its minimum income benefits scheme.** Consequently, there is no distinction in benefit levels between beneficiaries of asylum and of subsidiary protection. Both receive minimum income benefits. Furthermore, the integration requirements are lower in regard to German language competences, requiring the acquisition of A2 German competences.

### 2.1.2 General policies on housing

**Housing policies** in Austria are **decentralised** and largely fall in the **competence of the provinces [Bundesländer]** (housing benefits and subsidised housing) **and municipalities** (social housing, usually referred to as municipal housing). Tenancy law is regulated on the federal level, regulating, amongst others the ceilings for tenancy of older buildings and thus functioning as an important ‘damper’ of overall costs of housing. The **reception system for asylum seekers** (“basic care” [Grundversorgung]) **is regulated as a joint responsibility of the provinces and the federal level** through an agreement on the basis of Article 15a of the constitution. The agreement implements the Reception Conditions Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU) and provides the overall framework for the reception of asylum seekers, recognised refugees until four months after the granting of a status and certain other categories eligible for basic care (Gahleitner-Gertz, 2022, UNHCR, 2015, see also Skrivanek et al., 2022). In general terms, housing provided under the basic care arrangements has to be vacated four months after subsidiary protection or asylum has been granted, although this also varies in practice (see below). The agreement is implemented by provincial legislation, which vary in the way they implement the national framework, go beyond it or impose additional restrictions (See in more detail Gahleitner-Gertz 2022, 89 and Skrivanek et al. 2022).

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<sup>14</sup>§ 7c Integrationsvereinbarung, Niederösterreichisches Mindestsicherungsgesetz (NÖ MSG) i.d.F. [LGBL. Nr. 103/2016](#), §7c Integrationserklärung i.d.F. LGBL. Nr. 63/2017



**Social housing** lies in the responsibility of **municipalities (municipal housing)**. Access to housing subsidies and subsidised housing is regulated on the provincial level (UNHCR, 2021).

**Access to municipal housing** usually relies on income as well as residence criteria, including legal status and a certain minimum duration of residence in a municipality. In relation to legal status, only long-term third country nationals have equal access to municipal housing. Yet other third-country nationals may have access on a discretionary basis.

Residence requirements vary from municipality to municipality and usually lie between 2 to 5 years<sup>15</sup>, although in some cases this may be substantially longer (UNHCR, 2015). These varying waiting times for a municipal housing may well be seen as an obstacle to accessing affordable housing. Other criteria include income, family size and special needs.

Allocation of municipal housing generally follows provincial legislation on housing support and the criteria laid down there. However, criteria for allocation of municipal housing are not very transparent and allocation of housing is largely up to the discretion of relevant officials, especially in smaller communities.<sup>16</sup> Amongst the four localities studied, only locality A provides details on the criteria for allocation of municipal housing and the points system used on its websites, whereas other localities only provide a form suggesting a range of criteria but not detailing how they will inform allocation decisions. Importantly, selection criteria only apply to the initial selection of tenants and tenants are generally allowed to remain in municipal housing, even if their social conditions improves.

Similarly and partly due to general tenancy law, children of tenants living in the premises have a right to claim tenancy in case of decease. As a result, municipal housing involves a mixed population, which to some degree is also an intended outcome (namely to avoid segregation). Another effect, however, is that the number of vacant housing units to be allocated is limited. In international comparison, the share of municipal housing in the total number of dwellings rented out (roughly 19 per cent in 2012) and non-profit, semi-public housing (roughly 41 per cent) is relatively high and significantly lowers average costs of housing. Importantly, in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas the share of home-ownership is significantly higher and the number of social or subsidising housing units smaller compared to Vienna (Oberhuber/Denk, 2014). Those parts of the population who are not eligible for municipal housing may have to face significantly higher costs, as they have to rely on the private market. A major barrier to in regard to access to subsidised housing provided by non-profit housing cooperatives (“Genossenschaftswohnungen”) are the relatively high financial contributions

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/bauen\\_wohnen\\_und\\_umwelt/wohnen/Seite.210240.html](https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/bauen_wohnen_und_umwelt/wohnen/Seite.210240.html)

<sup>16</sup> This assessment is based on research on publicly available information material as well as selected informal phone consultations with officials responsible for municipal housing.



demanded from prospective tenants, averaging EUR 15,000-30,000 for average apartments.<sup>17</sup> While the lump sum payment paid as financial contribution to the construction costs of the housing cooperative helps to lower the monthly rent substantially, it functions as an exclusion mechanism for poorer persons unable to afford this payment.

### 2.1.3. Specific policy programmes addressing employment and housing of beneficiaries of international protection

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

In regard to **housing**, the policy plan observed a great need for affordable housing, in particular in Austria's agglomerations, having high relevance for refugees with status as well as for the host society. Suggested measures included early access to municipal and non-profit housing upon proof of progress in integration (such as knowledge of German and understanding of the values and social order), an even regional distribution of refugees across Austria to reduce high demand in urban areas and use integration opportunities in smaller communities (assuming easier encounters between locals and migrants compared to more anonymous neighbourhoods in urban areas), as well as providing support to refugees seeking accommodation on the private housing market (permissible rents, avoidance of overcrowding). (BMEIA 2015, 22f.)

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<sup>17</sup> See the relevant sections on the online guide on tenancy law at the Lower Austrian Chamber of Labour at [https://noe.arbeiterkammer.at/beratung/konsumentenschutz/Wohnen/Finanzierungsbeitrag\\_Genossenschaft\\_swohnung.html](https://noe.arbeiterkammer.at/beratung/konsumentenschutz/Wohnen/Finanzierungsbeitrag_Genossenschaft_swohnung.html).

## 2.2. Locality A (Innsbruck/Tyrol, Type A, Urban/Large)

Locality A is located in Tyrol and is the most populated study area in our sample. According to the statistical data used for the case selection, the **size of the population in 2014 was 125.000 and the share of foreign residents was 20%**. The resident population has been steadily growing in recent years. In 2021, the locality recorded **131.000 inhabitants**. The **share of foreign residents** also significantly increased in recent years to **28.1%**, and is **significantly above the national average of 17.1%**. Also in 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 biggest problem, he said, is the **high cost of rent and housing**, which many newly arrived migrants can hardly afford. In addition, the high prices would push also the middle class into the surrounding smaller municipalities, where the purchase prices of real estate is cheaper.

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).

## 2.3. Locality B (Tyrol, Type B, Rural)

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 Statistics Austria of **2019, 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 17,7% in 2022. 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 the locality B *"You can notice immigration, no matter whether it is a German citizens or someone who came as a migrant [sic]. As long as the more skilled workers and care workers are scarce, we need controlled immigration (AB3)."* A representative of a pro-migrant group provided a similar observation, saying that demographic changes have been underway for 20 years. Land/property would become more and more expensive. Locals would have to move away because of this and wealthy people would have moved in (AB2). Another representative of a

pro-migrant group points out, that the inflow of fleeing people did not have an impact on demography and there are more inflows of Germans than of refugees (AB1).

The **unemployment rate in 2014 was 3,1% and therefore significantly below the national average of 7,3%. In 2021, the unemployment rate in the locality stood at 3,7%.** 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 no businesses and it is rather a sleeping municipality, whose residents work in other places** (AB2). In addition, it is emphasized that large pharmaceutical companies invest in the region, however, there is not enough qualified personnel due to the shortage of skilled workers (AB1).

## 2.4. Locality C (St. Pölten/Lower Austria, Type C, Urban/Medium)

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 fact that migrants are a part of the cityscape is also made clear by a member of the local government:

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

The **unemployment rate in 2014 was with 9,8%** above the national average of 7,3%. However, the unemployment rate has declined markedly in the last 2 two years, **falling to 7,5% in 2021 (on district level).** The **mayor also sees a positive development** and a high growth potential and says that more jobs than job seekers would be available (AC16). The influx of migrants is viewed cautiously positively by the representative of the Employers' organization:

*“Economically, one can say that there is more purchasing power and labor force, with more population there is more turnover, more customers. That can be seen as a positive development due to the influx, but whether that is sustainable is a second question. I would see it as value neutral, cautiously positive. Given the current*

*demand for labor, more potentially available employees are definitely good. Whether the skills of newly arrived migrants fit is another question (AC15)."*

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)."*

## 2.5. Locality D (Lower Austria, Type D, Rural/Regional Centre)

Locality D (a rural area in Lower Austria) is the **second smallest locality** in our sample. According to the statistical data used for the case selection, the size of the population in **2014 was approximately 6.000 to 7.000** and the share of **foreign residents was around 7%**. The **number of inhabitants has hardly changed** in recent years and has remained also in 2022 in the same range as in 2014. However, the **share of foreign residents/foreigners in the municipality** has increased in recent years, but is still considerably lower than the national average of 17.7% at **about 8% in 2022**. In the 2005 survey period, by comparison, the number of foreign residents was around 5% and thus considerably below the national average of 9.4%. **Locality D is also district capital**. The locality has hosted asylum seekers after 2014 and **had a reception center with about 110 places. At the time of the research<sup>18</sup>, there were 3 smaller accommodations with 12 places each, which were rather decentralized.**

The **unemployment rate was at 6% in 2014** and below the national average of 7,3%. The unemployment rate has declined markedly in the last 2 two years, falling to **3,9% in 2021 (on district level)**. According to the respondents, **immigration has had little to no impact on economic and demographic development** since 2014 (AD11, AD1, AD9). **Many refugees who received a positive decision would have left the locality**. According to one employer, families with children in particular have stayed in order to provide the children with a good education (AD12). Economically, a few businesses have been established as one-person businesses. Therefore, from the point of view of a local official: *"... it was very positive and important that refugees stayed (AD1)."*

All interviewees made it clear that there was **great concern and fear in society when the first asylum seekers arrived in 2014**. False information, such as that the foreigners will overflow the country and culture, was spread. In addition, the accommodation of dozens of young single men in the locality have caused more worries, regarding to an interviewee. Also, at the beginning, the local population was insufficiently informed and left alone. **Only when the refugee shelter closed in 2017, the situation calmed down** (AD6, AD9, AD11, AD14, AH16).

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<sup>18</sup> Late 2021 and early 2022 and thus before the Ukrainian refugee crisis.



## 3. Access to housing

### 3.1. Main challenges / obstacles

#### Locality A (Innsbruck)

The housing market in locality A is predominantly privatized. Of the approximately 75,000 thousand housing units, approximately 16,000 are community housing apartments. Moreover, housing prices, both for buying and renting, have risen sharply in recent years. The average price for purchase is currently about €8,000 per/m<sup>2</sup> and average rent is €20/m<sup>2</sup>. This circumstance does not only pose a major challenge to newly arrived migrants and refugees in terms of housing access, but also affects locals who are increasingly moving to surrounding municipalities and suburbs.

One of the biggest hurdles and challenges faced by post-2014 migrants, according to the interviewees, is the fact that living space in the locality is limited (AA3, AA4). In addition, the locality is a university town, which means that competition in the housing market makes access even more difficult for newly arrived migrants and refugees, who has been granted asylum. Due to the fact that living space is limited, the locality is one of the most expensive cities in Austria in terms of rents. This raises also the question of affordable housing and avoiding segregation. As described above, beneficiaries of international protection usually have to leave the accommodation four months after recognition at the latest. However, finding affordable housing on the private housing market proves to be very difficult, making the transition more difficult (Reeger, Nagel, and Josipovic 2021).

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 street-level bureaucrat of a leading organization in refugee coordination “The everyday racism in (the locality) is trumped by the fact that the demand for workers in certain sectors is very high. In sectors such as gastronomy, tourism, people are very urgently needed, so that the origin usually does not matter. [...] Often, work is found before housing. Some of our clients live in the shelters for months and years, even though the asylum procedure has already been completed, but they do not get an apartment (AA4). The prejudices that prevail in the private housing market also mean that refugees from certain regions of origin (Kohlbacher 2020) (Afghanistan, Africa) have an even more challenging experience in finding housing. According to the interviewees, highly educated refugees usually have a certain advantage over others (AA7).

According to a member of the local government, one result of these prejudices is that there is a certain **segregation** in the municipal housing, in that some locals do not want to live in certain apartment buildings where migrants/refugees also live (AA11). Another obstacle seems to be the **size of newly built apartments** in the city area, which do not provide enough space for larger families. Furthermore, the interviewees also mentioned that the information provided on household-specific issues (operating costs, heating costs, electricity costs, waste



separation) is not sufficient for recognized refugees when they move into a private apartment. This sometimes leads to additional payments or conflicts with neighbors (AA4, AA7).

### Locality B

The **high rent prices and shortage of space** is also a frequently raised issue for Locality B and the whole region, which makes access to affordable housing more difficult for post-2014 migrants. This said, locals are also strongly affected by this situation. Access is further complicated by the fact that the entire region is a (winter) tourist area, where vacant apartments are sometimes only temporarily rented to tourists. The leader of a pro-migrant group said that apartment owners rent out their apartments for €500 per week and that there is no motivation to rent out the apartments on a long-term basis (AB1).

Another obstacle is that recognized refugees have to stay in the asylum shelters for several months because they cannot get adequate and affordable housing. A dilemma that arises in this context is that asylum seekers from Syria, for example, are granted status more quickly than asylum seekers from other countries of origin and have to leave the shelters sooner in comparison. However, most of them do not have sufficient German language skills to find a job, which would enable them to afford an apartment. According to the interviewees, this leads many to move to the nearest municipalities and cities where the refugee shelter is located (see for more details on Austria's dispersal policies Skrivanek et al. 2022) Others, however, who have friends and relatives in other parts of Austria, hope to find housing support through their network (AB1, AB7, AB14).

**Prejudices** against refugees and post-2014 migrants also seem to be a major obstacle. In particular, recognized refugees who do not yet have a job and are welfare recipients are not wanted by landlords. "This is a criterion for exclusion," says a representative of a non-profit service provider. Prejudices associated with welfare recipients are, for example, many children, too noisy, problems with neighbors, difficulties with the language (AB7). It was also often emphasized that **high rents** are also problematic in terms of social assistance schemes and housing benefits. If recognized refugees are promised an apartment and the rent exceeds the predetermined amount of the social welfare authority, it might not be paid (AB1).

A clear criticism regarding the accommodation of asylum seekers in shelters and the associated costs came from the representative of the opposition party. Regarding asylum seekers, he said that the distribution was ordered by the state and the municipalities were basically against it. Furthermore, he stressed the high cost of €3,600 for the active accommodation in the locality, where 14-16 asylum seekers live. In his opinion, forced migrants should be supported locally in the countries of origin, which would also reduce the costs. Furthermore, he refers to the current war in Ukraine and that there is a great willingness on the part of private individuals to provide housing for Ukrainian refugees. He means "In 2015 there was no such willingness to help, the atmosphere was quite different (AB15)."

### Locality C (St. Pölten)

**The increased rent prices** are also in locality C one of the big obstacles for post-2014 migrants, although according to the interviewees there is a **large supply of housing**, mostly provided by private individuals. Although the locality is also a university town, it has no impact on the housing supply, as many students come from Vienna and can commute relatively quickly by train every day. A senior non-profit service provider representative also highlights that in 2015/16 many apartments were made available by private individuals to accommodate asylum seekers and in some cases refugees with a positive asylum decision for the first period after the decision. However, this was a temporary phenomenon and no longer exists today (AC4).

Certain **prejudices and discrimination** against post-2014 migrants can also be identified in locality C. Paradoxically, the large supply of housing does not seem to lead to easier access to housing. Interviewees emphasized that landlords specifically select tenants. Private apartment owners and housing cooperatives are sometimes prejudiced against certain groups of origin and usually reject them on the grounds that the applicants cannot prove a secure income and that this is a prerequisite. **Language barriers** can also lead to landlords preferring to rent to someone who understands German. Also, the amount of the deposit, real estate agent's fee and sometimes the fee for furniture or other items in the apartment, can be a big obstacle according to an other non-profit service provider representative (AC3). As a recipient of social benefits, it can also be very difficult to get an appointment with a landlord, although there are some exceptions. According to the statements, these circumstances also lead to certain actors on the housing market offering precarious and sometimes shabby and unhealthy apartments (Aigner 2019; Kohlbacher 2020).

According to two representatives of a real estate company, all these circumstances lead to a certain **segregation** within the city. 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 (AC10). Also, a representative of the trade union points to this issue:

“It would require to mix the population in [the locality], I would settle one refugee/migrant family in each street and several families in larger streets and do the same for surrounding villages. It also requires affordable housing and not that a few make a lot of money with it. The social housing works so halfway in [the locality] over the cooperatives. As soon as there is contact between locals and migrants, it is easier. If you do not know each other, there is mistrust (AC14).”

But the fact is that certain apartments where Turkish guest workers lived until the early 2000s have been replaced by Chechens. Then the refugees from Syria and Afghanistan have come. These are, in a sense, "transit apartments," where one generation moves on and the next moves in. The differences can also be seen clearly in the available infrastructure and the educational opportunities. “These neighborhoods have been poor neighborhoods since I was a child”, said one interviewee (AC4).





## Locality D

In 2014/15, vacant military barracks in locality D were to be converted into accommodation at the insistence of the federal state government. There was resistance from the population, but also from the local government. Finally, another accommodation for about 110 asylum seekers was provided. Currently, about 50 asylum seekers live in smaller accommodations. According to a street level bureaucrat representative, the initial concerns have also been reduced by the mayor's commitment and information events (AD3).

Also in this locality, affordability **and shortage of housing** are addressed. Some refugees have therefore moved to Vienna or western cities after recognition, where the expectation to find housing would be easier and cheaper and where they have friends and family. However, some have also returned to the local area because personal support from volunteers is not available in the big cities (AD10).

Another issue associated with high rents is that the share of housing costs for welfare recipients is limited and without employment housing is not affordable for larger families in particular. However, it is also emphasized that this circumstance also affects Austrian welfare recipients and is a fundamental problem, so that families often have to live in small apartments. Another financial obstacle is the real estate agent's fees, deposits, and fees for certain items (built-in kitchen, etc.) in the apartment that are not part of the basic furnishings (AD6).

A much larger problem faced by post-2014 migrants is **landlord's reservations**. Some landlords would not rent their apartments to "foreigners" as a matter of principle. Furthermore, social welfare recipients are also rather undesirable among landlords. However, according to a representative of a non-profit service provider (AD11), these reservations have decreased because the social welfare office guarantees payment of the rent. Refugees also face discrimination in housing. Gender and age are not decisive, but origin is. "Skin color is unfortunately a big issue. Also, for the police (AD11)."

The representative of the opposition party, who is himself a real estate agent and has also rented apartments to refugees, also addresses the reservations of the landlords. There is a fear that it will be too noisy, and the rent will not be paid. He believes that rents are moderate and that there is a sufficient supply of housing (AD9). The average rent per m<sup>2</sup> is lowest in locality D with about 8€.

## Summary

The comparison of the four localities shows that the challenges are overall very similar. In all localities, high rents and limited living space are mentioned. Especially in the localities in Tyrol housing in general is in short, whereas in the localities in Lower Austria other factors – especially discrimination is relatively more important. This said, refugees face discrimination and prejudice in the private housing market in all localities and landlords are more reserved towards refugees compared to other categories of migrants or non-migrants. Municipal



housing does not play a role for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (see below).

In the localities in Tyrol (localities A and B), recognized refugees had to continue to stay in the accommodations for several months, as access to housing usually fails due to financial resources, since finding a job also proves to be difficult.

## 3.2. Actors involved (WHO)

### Locality A (Innsbruck)

In Tyrol, the [Tyrolean Social Services \(TSD\)](#) is responsible for ensuring basic services (accommodation and care) for all asylum seekers. Furthermore, the TSD also tries to support recognized refugees by calling potential landlords or accompanying refugees when they visit the apartment, which makes landlords more willing to rent the apartment because they recognize a local contact person (AA4).

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. The interviewees also mentioned 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.

The red cross in the locality runs a shelter for 20 unaccompanied underage male refugees.

### Locality B

Also in locality B, TSD is primarily mentioned when it comes to housing asylum seekers. It was also reported that some locals offered their apartments to TSD, while also the provincial government itself had been looking accommodation for asylum seekers in the region in 2015 (AB2).

A voluntary organization that is active in the region was also mentioned as an actor that is one of the first points of contact for refugees regarding housing. Diakonie is also active in the region where the locality is located with its counseling centers. A street-level bureaucrat from the social welfare office noted that they try to inform landlords about the process and payment. They pay the deposit for welfare recipients. In some cases, they also inform refugees

about the possibilities of getting municipal housing or about cooperative projects, although these tend to be less available in rural areas (AB14).

The services of IBZ, which takes active responsibility, are housing consultations. They also have 15 "starter apartments" in different municipalities in the region.

### **Locality C (St. Pölten)**

According to a member of the local government (AC16), *"The rental of apartments is usually organized through organizations such as Caritas or Diakonie"*. Also a representative of a pro-migrant group mentioned that they are planning a project with [Caritas](#) (a social aid and service organization of the Roman Catholic Church). A day-care center for people for mental health problems should be established in 2023. Until then, asylum seekers who are awaiting the outcome of their asylum procedure will be accommodated there (AC1).

Also the local official of the locality clarifies:

*"[The locality] has the advantage that there are no refugee centers, but there are individual living areas run by the housing association, Diakonie or Caritas, which are supported by the state. From the registration data, we then get to know how many people there are in [the locality]. We can then only react and are not able to plan in advance (AC2)"*.

The IBZ is also actively involved in housing provision. In the first 1-1.5 years 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. (AC4) The housing supply is large and is provided by private individuals (AC2).

### **Locality D**

In 2015, the question of responsibility arose in locality D. The representative of the employers organization stated in this regard:

*„In the first phase, the problem was, if a private person wanted to make housing available, how it would work with federal supervision and so on. It was not certain whether this would be a rental or an accommodation or commercial rental. There were interested parties who wanted to make houses available, under what conditions and who would finance it (AD16)"*.

The local official also stated that he was able to organize some apartments in cooperation with the municipality and the social welfare office and that the mayor was concerned to resolve the situation without major conflicts (AD1).

After the shelter in the locality was closed in 2017, the responsibility regarding housing was mainly taken over by a voluntary organization that was active in the region. The representative

of this organization stated that "Caritas is responsible for housing and Diakonie did legal counseling, but they were here only every two weeks, which makes good counseling difficult. That's where we provided support" (AD3). As a result, a cooperation with Caritas was started, resulting in eight basic care flats (AD11).

### Summary

Actors differ across the localities. The Diakonie was mentioned by the interviewees as one of the largest non-profit social organizations in all localities. In Tyrol (localities A and B) TSD, a publicly owned company, was specifically established for to cater for the accommodation of asylum seekers and thus is one of the most important actors also frequently mentioned by respondents, - localities in Tyrol thus differ from the two localities in Lower Austria. In addition, Caritas - another non-profit social organization - has been identified as a key actor in localities C and D. The IBZ - a programme run by Diakonie - was also identified by respondents in three out of the four localities studied.

## 3.3. Policies, initiatives, and practices that foster/hinder access (WHAT)

### Locality A (Innsbruck)

Based on the interviews, no formal policies could be identified to increase access to housing for post-2014 migrants. Yet there are routinised practices adopted by key stakeholders and in that sense, policies do exist. Thus, as mentioned in the previous chapters, organizations such as Diakonie, Caritas and TSD are very active and take initiative. They support refugees by providing starter apartments, giving information about access to subsidized housing, and acting as intermediaries with landlords. Private individuals are also taking action to facilitate access to housing for refugees. One apartment building owner interviewed has rented five out of six of her apartments to post-2014 migrants and one to a migrant family that has been living in the location for some years (AA19).

However, according to a member of the local government, there are ways to facilitate access to municipal housing (which will be described in more detail in the chapter 3.4 Specific Target Groups):

*"We try to help with accommodation. We have apartments that are rejected several times by the locals. Either the size does not fit etc. From the 1960s there are even larger apartments available, which cost between €1.000-1.200. They are about 120m<sup>2</sup> in size. These apartments are usually not preferred because people do not need such large apartments, or the rent is too high. If an apartment is often rejected, we have the opportunity to allocate these apartments freely. We give these apartments to the refugees because they can afford the rent through the state social benefits. In this way, we can create living space for the refugees in this way without breaking the rules (AA11)."*

## Locality B

In locality B, which is a small municipality, the willingness to accept asylum seekers was not high. A representative of a pro-migrant group commented in this regard:

*„Municipalities were not forced by the state to host asylum seekers but there were incentives. Initially, there were owners of property who just made contracts with TSD. Then, it was tried to include local policymakers and the local population. After some time, there was some pressure by the state level to municipalities to host asylum seekers” (AB1).*

According to the interviewees, statements by politicians also play an important role. The politically responsible person of the locality mentioned that in 2015 the head of the federal government publicly suggested to help the refugees, which was spread by the media and after that the willingness to accommodate refugees was much higher. "Money didn't play such a big role, because it was all about the people" (AB19).

The mayor of one city in the region also took the initiative, according to one interviewed employer, and talked about the possibility of providing access to municipal housing for refugees. This, however, caused concern in the community, as locals also had a need for it. The extent to which politicians take initiative also depends heavily on the elections, he stated (AB17).

## Locality C (St. Pölten)

The initial policy of the locality was not to have larger accommodations, but to accommodate asylum seekers in smaller units. The member of the local government emphasizes that recognized refugees are also distributed throughout the city and that there is no concentration in certain parts of the city (AC16). However, some interviewees contradict this statement and emphasize that the employment situation and low in-come lead refugees to settle in certain areas of the city where there is cheaper access to housing (AC10, AC11).

In a longer statement, a street-level bureaucrat of a counselling center for migrants describes the situation in the locality as follows:

*“There is no such thing as a municipal building here as there is in Vienna ... so the hurdles are extremely high. Four months after a positive asylum decision, people have to move out of their accommodation. Before that, the Diakonie is responsible. And finding a flat after four months is simply not feasible for these people. Everyone is aware of this difficulty, including the social welfare office. The social welfare office then determines whether the flats found are acceptable or not, because the social welfare office pays the deposit. What is needed here is a social offer for these people and generally for all those who fall into the category of "working poor". I would say this is racism to the core. If we call, we get a viewing appointment. When refugees themselves call, the flats are always occupied. We have a few landlords with whom*

*we interact well. Unfortunately, there are many landlords who take advantage of people's situation (AC8)".*

### **Locality D**

As indicated in the previous chapters, there are no noticeable policies in Locality D to foster access to housing for post-2014 refugees. The planned adaptation of a military barracks into a refugee shelter for about 400 people, which was planned by the federal government in 2015, did not materialise due to widespread opposition in the locality. The mayor then took the initiative and offered an alternative shelter for 100 asylum seekers. It was closed in 2017 because the number of recognized refugees also increased and only a few new ones arrived. The mayor clarifies this discrepancy with the federal government as follows:

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

The local official also took the initiative to arrange housing in cooperation with the social welfare office. The actual initiative came from a volunteer organization that supported recognized refugees in their search for housing.

### **Summary**

Municipalities do not have a formal role regarding the reception of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers' distribution within a province (the distribution across the 9 provinces is following a quota system) is usually a result of availability of housing and negotiated directly between the provincial government department (Lower Austria) or TSD as the responsible department in Tyrol on the one hand, and landlords, on the other, without consultation of municipalities concerned. In case of facilities owned by the federal government, the latter may also be involved. While municipalities do not have a formal role, they can shape reception policy as the conflict over the eventually aborted plan to accommodate 400 asylum seekers in military barracks in locality D shows (a different facility with 100 places was offered by the municipality instead).

The capacities to develop housing policies for beneficiaries of international protection, i.e. for the time after the initial reception period vary between localities, with the two larger municipalities (locality A and C) having more capacity to respond to challenges. Yet concrete policies to support recognized refugees in particular to gain access to housing are rather non-existent and NGOs initiatives such as "starter apartments" (offered by Diakonie and Caritas in locality A) or counselling and mediation services (offered in other localities) partly fill this gap, even if these falls short of the demand.



By and large, municipal housing is not used as a policy instrument, partly because the number of vacant apartments that could be provided to refugees are limited, partly because of fear of political repercussions of being seen as prioritising refugees over others. Only in locality A has the allocation of public housing units to refugees been explicitly mentioned as an instrument (see in more detail the summary of section 3.4.)

### 3.4. Specific target groups (FOR WHOM)

#### **Locality A (Innsbruck)**

There are no specific regulations in the locality for newly arrived migrants and refugees regarding access to municipal housing. In order to be registered for a municipal apartment, all applicants must have a continuous residence record of five years in the locality. The time spent in asylum accommodation is taken into account (AA13).

For the representative of a non-profit service provider, a shorter asylum procedure can have a negative impact in this context (AA3). Recognized refugees who have to leave the accommodation and do not have the necessary income for a private apartment sometimes move to another federal state, and the prospect of a municipal apartment is thus not given. Asylum seekers whose procedures take longer sometimes have a better chance of getting a municipal housing unit as a result.

#### **Locality B**

In locality B, no special services were mentioned, apart from legal counseling and help in finding housing from Diakonie and volunteers. A street-level bureaucrat reflected that non-profit housing cooperatives, such as “Neue Heimat”, tend to build in the surrounding larger cities and not in rural areas (AB14).

A representative of a non-profit service provider said that the persistent prejudice against refugees makes it difficult to find housing and that no PR work is being done against this. She also stated that in Innsbruck there is a special shelter run by an association that provides accommodation especially for single women. She also mentioned that in one of the larger cities (Individuals who have had their primary residence in the locality for at least three continuous years or have had it for more than five years during the past ten years) in the region, refugees have access to municipal housing 3 years after recognition. In another municipality (no special requirements according to information from the municipality) in the region, however, access to municipal housing is not possible (AB7).

#### **Locality C (St. Pölten)**

Based on the analysis of the interviews, no specific policies for migrant housing were identified in St. Pölten. However, the interviewees of locality C confirmed that there are basically too few municipal housing units and that relatively little new construction is taking place. According to official information, the locality manages about 1,200 apartments. In addition,

newly built municipal housing would be built outside the city area, making access to services and facilities that are in the city difficult for recognized refugees with limited mobility (AC10).

A real estate agent also pointed out that land prices in the locality have increased a lot due to lack of space. As a result, it is more likely that large construction companies and cooperatives would have the financial means to build new apartment buildings, which in turn are too expensive for post-2014 migrants (AC11).

A street-level bureaucrat also noted "*It is easier for families and women with children than for single men. They sometimes end up in precarious housing conditions (e.g., 20 people on one floor with only one bathroom)* (AC3)."

### **Locality D**

Based on the analysis of the interviews, no specific policies for migrant housing were identified in locality D. Efforts were made on the part of community representatives to provide housing primarily for asylum seekers. For recognized refugees, organizations such as Diakonie and a local civil society initiative offered counseling on finding housing.

### **Summary**

There are no explicit municipal policies for specific (vulnerable) target groups, although a variety of programmes such as emergency housing for victims of domestic violence, mothers with kids in other emergency situations, homeless persons or unaccompanied minors exist in the two small and medium sized towns (locality A and C), but not in the two rural localities (locality B and H). Such special facilities also receive financial support from municipalities. They are usually run by NGOs. In the interviews, specific target groups were hardly mentioned, and differences made mainly in terms of nationality. For most purposes, asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection were thus seen as the main target group.

While there are no explicit policies for specific vulnerable groups, municipal housing is generally also used as an instrument for vulnerable groups, and access to it has been an important issue in all four localities.

Apart from this, there are no known regulations in the municipal building sector that specifically address recognized refugees or migrants. This means that the right to housing is linked to certain criteria that are the same for all people.





CASE	WholeCOMM typology	Major obstacle(s)	Actor(s) involved	Measure(s)	Target group(s)
Locality A	A	Limited living space, competition in the private housing market, high rental prices	Tyrolean Social Services (TSD), Diakonie, Integration and Education Centers (IBZ), Red Cross	Starter apartments, legal counseling, initiative by private landlords, access to social housing after 5 years of residency	General
Locality B	B	Access to affordable and adequate housing, prejudices against migrants/refugees	Voluntary Organisation, Diakonie, TSD, IBZ	Collaboration between landlords and TSD	legal counseling and help for recognised refugees in finding housing from Diakonie and volunteers
Locality C	C	Increasing rental prices, prejudices and discrimination, segregation	Caritas, Diakonie, IBZ, Civil society actors	No large refugee accommodations, smaller units, access to social housing after 5 years of residence	General
Locality D	D	Hight rental prices and shortage of housing, reservations of landlords	Social Welfare agency, Caritas, Voluntary Organisation	Initiatives by local government	no specific policies for migrant housing, Diakonie and civil society organizations offered counseling on finding housing

Table 3: Case-by-case summary of results/findings regarding the area of Housing

## 4. Access to employment

### 4.1. Main challenges / obstacles

There are **several challenges and obstacles to employment** that have been mentioned by interviewees **across the four studied localities**. This regards the legal framework, in particular the status of asylum seekers, the role of German language competences, the transferability of foreign qualifications, the transition from welfare to work, gender-specific aspects, the general labour market situation, the role/practices of employers, and observations related to work cultures, cultural differences, prejudices and discrimination.

#### 4.1.1. Legal status of humanitarian migrants

In regard to **access to employment**, the legal status can be a formal barrier to employment as **asylum seekers** have only access to seasonal and self-employed work (not covered by trade law) in Austria. Since 2012, asylum seekers (initially under the age of 18, since 2014 under the age of 25) could do an **apprenticeship** in sectors with a general shortage of apprentices. The federal government (at that time a coalition government between Peoples' Party, ÖVP, and Freedom Party, FPÖ) stopped this option in 2018. Already since 2015, apprenticeships could be stopped in case of a negative asylum decision. (Rosenberger and Gruber 2020, 104). Besides employment, asylum seekers can do **auxiliary tasks directly related to the refugee shelter** (e.g., cleaning, maintenance, in the canteen) **or community-based work (gemeinnützige Tätigkeiten)**, which involves a minor remuneration (Anerkennungsbeitrag) for performing such activities.<sup>19</sup>

Interviewees related the following problems and obstacles to this situation. In case of **long asylum procedures**, individuals are kept inactive for a long time (AI17, AK19), which may create difficulties to 'activate' them when they obtained asylum/subsidiary protection status (AK19) and contribute to tensions at local level (AH9).

*"The 'fault' is not with the asylum seekers, but with us as a society in Austria. We have young men who have been in the asylum procedure for one or two years, sometimes five years, and are not allowed to work. I have tried to bring this up in committees, i.e., that we are wrong in our integration policy, i.e., not being allowed to work during the asylum procedure, the language courses have sometimes worked better, sometimes worse. (...) The current situation is that we have fewer job seekers than before the pandemic and that will continue. Now the voices are getting louder that something has to be done, because we have a certain pool of people there and I don't think it will take that much longer (AB19, member of local government)."*

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<sup>19</sup> Art. 7 para 3, 3a, 5 Grundversorgungsgesetz (Federal Care Act)

*“With regard to the labour market, it is exciting to see that the refugees from Ukraine are the good refugees and have immediate access to the labour market. It cannot be that the refugees of 2015 are the bad refugees. They were not allowed to work. We need more flexible and humane solutions (AC16, member of local government).”*

*“The people [i.e., asylum seekers hosted in the locality] were unemployed, they were not allowed to work, but they did not have any hobbies either. They then went through the [locality], which appears very strange. You have to understand that the locals become suspicious.” (AD9, member of opposition)*

**Employers would be willing to employ asylum seekers**, also due to general labour shortages, but could not do so due to the legal framework (AB19, AB16, AA17). **Access to seasonal jobs** would be formally given, but in practice quotas for seasonal jobs would be low and require an approval procedure with the employment office that takes time. (AB19) In regard to **community-based work**, two interviewees described the framework as bureaucratic (“so many guidelines”, AD2, “so many restrictions and hurdles” AC2), a further interviewee observed that the framework (remuneration) would in some instances not match with actually performed tasks.

*“Voluntary work [i.e., community-based work] for three euros an hour, where some have worked hard, that doesn’t work (AB19, member of local government).”*

All interviewees of the business chamber referred to the **stopped access to apprenticeship training** for asylum seekers and/or cases of actual deportation of asylum seekers who had received a negative asylum decision. This would have been a big issue for employers and for the business chamber.

*“The deportation of apprentices was not welcomed by employers. The employer has the training costs, then the apprentice is almost finished and then he’s gone (AC15, business chamber representative).”*

Observations on the legal status of humanitarian migrants in Austria almost exclusively referred to the situation of asylum seekers. However, **one legislative change is observed to have implications for status holders and their actual employment opportunities**. Since 2016, initial asylum status is granted for three years (prior to that it was granted for an unlimited duration). This caused uncertainties among employers, acting as potential barrier to employment:

*“With the limited asylum stay of 3 years, if there are no reasons for terminating the stay, the status is automatically extended. Many companies don’t know this and ask for documents that people can’t have. However, they have to ask the AMS for the documents, although it is unnecessary because*

*they would basically have access to the labour market (AC8, non-profit service provider)."*

#### 4.1.2 Role of German language competences

Interviewees across localities have attributed a **high relevance to (basic) German language competences** for employment. Some interviewees named it as general prerequisite without giving further reason, while others mentioned specific functions and justifications: This includes the requirement to understand **safety regulations** (AS14, AK12, AK9, AS15, AS5), and observations that many jobs nowadays involve the ability to read certain instructions and information (AB9).

*"I would not let anyone work on the assembly line who did not know German either. That is how the labour market works, I do not learn Turkish or Arabic (AC14, trade union representative)."*

*"In some industrial companies the problem arises with safety instructions, which are sometimes written in three languages. As an employer, I have a duty to provide information, and I then address the concrete situation, although German is actually the official language (AC15, business chamber representative)."*

*"If someone operates a machine, for example, but does not follow the safety rules and then something happens, then the plant manager has a problem because he ensures that the employee understands the safety regulations. The plant manager has then violated his supervisory duty (AC5, street-level bureaucrat)."*

Furthermore, German language competences would be a prerequisite for basic encounters and **interactions with local co-workers** (AD16, AD2, AB19).

*"The biggest obstacle is language, but on both sides. Some refugees can speak English, but the local population doesn't. For the jobs, they need German, because the co-workers who introduce them into their jobs don't speak English. Moreover, dialect can be a further obstacle (AB19, member of local government)."*

The interviewee refers to the German courses in which high German is taught, but the everyday language (Tyrolean dialect) can differ significantly in pronunciation.

German language competences could also help prevent exploitation of foreign workers:

*"The fact that one person in a batch knows German and gives instructions to the others is not the way to go; some people take advantage of that. In terms of pay, they get more, because they are foremen, for example, and who knows in what other ways they benefit if they bring newcomers into such*

*jobs. This has been the case in industry for a long time, but I hear less of it now (AC14, trade union representative)."*

Some observations on German language acquisition/competences relate to **different groups**, e.g., **Syrians** would have had rather little time to learn German due to fast asylum procedures. Therefore, they needed to learn German before seeking employment/receiving placement support (AB1). It would be easier for **younger people** to learn German (AD10, AC8), while it would be more difficult "**older**" **people** (referring to 40/50 year old) and for **those with little education** (AD10, AC8).

#### 4.1.3. Educational status and transferability of foreign qualifications

While interviewees across localities referred to the **role of (formal) qualifications**, views are mixed on the **transferability** of foreign qualifications/professional competences and reasons for that. Observations include views that the **higher the educational status** of refugees, the easier was their linguistic and professional integration (AA17, AC14) on the one hand, and reporting difficulties on the other hand, stressing the role of formal recognition (AC4). Individuals with **low (formal) qualifications** would have most difficulties in finding employment (AA17), they would have the longest spells of unemployment (AC5). Others observe that transitions would work best for those with **vocational/craft professions** (AC4, AB12), while some also mention questions of comparability and transferability of vocational qualifications, e.g., tinsmiths in Afghanistan and in Austria (AC5).

*"Our impression is that those with craft qualifications find their way into the job market best, e.g., as painters or locksmiths. The qualifications are not quite comparable, but the transition succeeds. In the case of higher qualifications, there are problems with recognition; a master's degree is usually recognized as a bachelor's degree at the most. Often the level of German is not sufficient, C1 is required, which is actually almost a mother tongue level. Our clients work, for example, in waste disposal, construction, cleaning companies, industry and shift work; many are factory workers. Personnel leasing companies are also relevant (AC4, non-profit service provider)."*

*„When looking at the biographies, the occupation in the country of origin is an indicator, most of them come from a craft occupation. If someone has worked in a trade in Syria or Afghanistan, for example, he or she will almost certainly find a job in a trade or production facility here (AB12, non-profit service provider)."*

In regard to **formal recognition**, interviewees see difficulties to transfer qualifications (AD10, AA17, AC13, AC14, AC4, AC16), having skilled migrants working below their qualification (AI6, AI4). Interviewees relate problems of **deskilling** to problems with recognition, such as long procedures to go through formal recognition (AA6, AA4), recognition procedures that were not completed (AC5) or qualifications that were not recognised (AC8), as well as formal



requirements to proof competences (AC15) and reluctance of employers to employ applicants with foreign degree (AC3).

*“Working below one’s skills may also arise if people do not manage to complete a recognition process, not all of them manage that. Overall, those who do not have any/low (formal) skills have the longest spells of unemployment/job-seeking (AC5, street-level bureaucrat).”*

*“The recognition of qualifications is another issue. In 2015-2016 we also had a lot of academics from Syria, and they had to wait a very long time for recognition. At that time, there were great opportunities for the labour market that were not used (AC16, member of local government).”*

*“Cleaning jobs are always as the Amen at the end of a prayer - many qualifications brought with them are also not recognised. That's why many people end up in cleaning companies (AC8, non-profit service provider).”*

*“Education and training are not the same and comparable everywhere; professional training is needed here. Well educated people, they are not a large group, are in jobs that have nothing to do with their qualifications, such as cleaning, driving cabs and unskilled jobs (AC14, trade union representative, St. Pölten).”*

*“In the case of training, there are questions of equivalence and assessment, which can lead to reservations on the part of employers (AC3, street-level bureaucrat).”*

#### 4.1.4. Transitions from welfare to work

Further observations, including mixed views, refer to the transition from welfare to work.

*„There are refugees who have jobs. Others say I want to work when I know German very well. A man and father I know is doing the B1 course. I wonder when he will start working, now he is still on welfare and the B1 exam is difficult (AB19, member of local government).”*

This includes observations that there was **not enough pressure** and jobs for 1500/1600 Euros would not be taken up anymore (AS13), as well as observations of **tensions between migrants** on welfare and migrants having a work income similar to welfare recipients:

*„There are also those who say, ‘I can live on social welfare’. There are also tensions within the groups – ‘he only gets social welfare’ or ‘I work and earn only a little more than the person who only lives on social welfare’. You can live on social assistance and family allowance as long as the AMS (PES) leaves you alone (AC1, pro-migrant group).”*

Others see such observations on a lacking willingness to work rather as **prejudices** (AC14, AC5).

*“I would rather not see a lack of willingness to work. These are prejudices, who likes to live on welfare? You have to queue for every penny (AC14, trade union representative).”*

*“There is always a certain base, e.g., a woman with four children is difficult to place, the AMS (PES) also reaches its limits. (...) A 58-year-old who wants a job and I say I don't have one, to say that's a social parasite, that's a bit far. Society has to put up with a certain number of people who cannot be integrated in this way (AC5, street-level bureaucrat).”*

Furthermore, transitions from welfare to work can be harsh in terms of **income**, if e.g., rents must be covered from work income instead of payment by welfare authority before (AB19), and every (also small) income from work is deducted from welfare benefits (AC4).

*“Personnel leasing companies are also relevant, although some of them provide only very short-term jobs, which makes it complicated for our clients because any income is deducted from social welfare benefits (AC4, non-profit service provider).”*

*“I have the feeling that our welfare state is taking care of these families, and maybe they don't even want to work, because if you have a certain income, you will drop out of the welfare scheme. Then the district authority will no longer pay for your flat. In the case of a family with five children [known to the IP], the husband earns so much too much that they don't get any welfare benefits. It has to be said that there are also Austrian families who have very little money. They first get into our social system in such a way that they believe it's paradise here. Paradise remains as long as you have no income of your own. I can only say in regard to cases I know. If my flat is paid for by 1000 euros and that goes away, I have to earn that first (AB19, member of local government).”*

A non-profit service provider observes **gender specific effects** related to welfare regulations, delaying participation of mothers in courses and training measures as only one parent has to seek work/participate in activating training measures in households with children under the age of three. Actually, it could also be the father being the parent that the welfare authority registers with such childcare obligations, but in practice it would be commonly mothers. (AB7)

**Regulations of welfare system can affect career choice**, as the described case shows:

*“There was a case of a girl aged 18 who wanted to take the “Matura” (A level exams). She was told by the BH [the district authority] to look for an apprenticeship and to drop out from school. She did not do that and the cut*

*in welfare benefits followed. In such situations we accompany the clients, we try to file a complaint. The Minimum Income Act stipulates that you have to register as a jobseeker when you reach a certain age. We appealed and the judge was understanding, but the law did not allow a decision in favour of the young woman. Despite the best grades and the arguing that a good school education (with planned university education) offers prospects of a good secure job, it was not enough to convince the authorities, or the law does not provide for an exception. In this specific case, the young woman nevertheless managed to do so without receiving minimum benefits. This situation is linked to the subsidiary protection status of this young woman and her family, no family allowance was granted either. She is not entitled to it if her parents are not in employment. This is different for refugees with Convention status, they receive family allowance if they receive welfare benefits and are not in paid employment (AB7, non-profit service provider)."*

#### 4.1.5. Work cultures and cultural differences

A further obstacle concerns (perceived) **differences in work cultures and routines** (AD2, AD6, AD16, AB19). Some interviewees link it with or generally observe **cultural differences, which in turn might show incompatibilities with the Austrian world of work**. This regards the beginning of working time, being on time, working eight hours a day as well as compatibilities between work, gender norms and/or religious practices (referring to Ramadan, see quotes below), cultural practices and safety standards (AC13, AD16).

*"The second topic is other lifestyles - the structured work organisation we are used to (starting work at 7.00 am) does not fit with their mentality (AD16, business chamber representative)."*

*"The way of working refers to showing up on time, working overtime and accuracy, aspects that fall under the term flexibility (AD6, street-level bureaucrat)."*

*"There is enough work, it is more about getting used to the labour market. Working in Austria is maybe something different than in their countries, e.g., being used to working 8-hour days and religious festivals. When it comes to Ramadan, I take the Imams up on it, because I don't think it's even in the Koran that it has to be at that time if you're prevented from working or otherwise (AB19, member of local government)."*

*"It's a matter of sticking to the rules altogether. I was a warehouse manager for ten years and there were many Turks. They benefited from the public holidays in Austria. However, they claimed not being able to work full time during Ramadan. They went on sick leave. Many do not accept that this is not possible, no matter if it is Ramadan (AC13, employer)."*



*“Their upbringing/education (Erziehung) and attitudes do not permit what is normal in Austria. I had a young woman who speaks German well, so I was sure it could work in the warehouse. (...) In this case, she came [on the first day] with her husband wearing a headscarf. That is not possible at the workplace, there are conveyor belts, it is dangerous and forbidden. If you [the interviewer] were to start working for company X, for example, I would tell you that you have to remove your earrings because that is forbidden at work. In the described case, I did not expect that she would come with her husband and a headscarf the next day (AC13, employer).”*

*“Another topic: women. In gastronomy there were a few cases where women would have liked to help in the kitchen, etc. But they were not allowed to because their husbands did not allow them (AD16, business chamber representative).”*

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

#### 4.1.6. Labour market situation and role/practices of employers

Across localities, interviewees refer to **current general labour shortages, which makes it easier for refugees (with asylum/subsidiary protection status) to find a job**. Employers are observed to be more open and flexible in their requirements, giving people a chance that they would not have considered before. Actual labour demand requires migrants (AA1, AA4, AC13, AC14, AC15, AB9, AB19, AD11).

Some interviewees just generally observe **not much resentment among employers**, referring to companies that hired refugees (AD14), and declining reluctance and prejudice among employers (AC16), respectively. Attitudes of employers would also depend on their experience with refugees, including good and bad experiences (AB9).

*“Employees with specialist skills are in great demand, in the iron, metal, construction and carpentry sectors. The residence title does not matter (refugee or other migrant group) (AC15, business chamber representative).”*

*“For those entitled to asylum, those who want to work will also get work (AD16, business chamber representative).”*

*“It might regard the headscarf, but that is also because the topic is emphasised. Due to current labour shortages, employers are more open, everyone is looking for staff (AC14, trade union representative).”*



*“We need people, without foreigners the economic upswing in Austria would not be possible (AC13, employer).”*

*“Due to labour shortages, employers are more flexible in their requirements and give people a chance they would not have considered before (AC14, trade union representative).”*

*“Employers may have certain concerns, such as: ‘we have enough people of this nationality at the moment, maybe from another nationality’. However, in the current situation need outweighs demand. No one says ‘please no Syrians, Afghans or Somalis’, but ‘a certain mixture of nationalities’ is welcomed (AB17, employer).”*

*“The everyday racism in [the locality] is trumped by the fact that the demand for workers in certain sectors is very high. In sectors such as gastronomy, tourism, people are very urgently needed, so that the origin usually does not matter. Our experience is that our clients quickly find a job as soon as they are allowed to work. (...) Many used the first job they find as a springboard and try to find something over time that corresponds to their qualifications (AA4, street-level bureaucrat).”*

Observations also link to a **mix of obstacles** (individual, organisational, and structural) that contribute to non-take up despite availability of jobs:

*“It is getting worse, with the first refugees it was easier than now. Currently we have about two applications per day that meet our requirements/needs. There are only a few refugees who come and want a job. Difficulties also relate to the transferability of qualifications (e.g. a carpenter in Syria and in Austria). Some are not resilient or do not want to (“I do not like that”, “I do not like that”). This is getting worse. It has to do with the labour market situation. Overall numbers are lower than in 2019. There are still about 5500 unemployed in the district, there should be people. There are jobs from 7am-4pm, which you can reach by public transport and they do not involve shift work or work at weekends, but we have difficulties to fill the vacancies (AC13, employer).”*

*“It is also the responsibility of employers. If companies have cut back heavily, I do not want to send my child there for an apprenticeship or if there is no chance of being taken on. Unskilled jobs are becoming fewer overall (AC14, trade union representative).”*

Despite observations on realised transitions into employment, openness of employers, general labour shortages and the need for workers, some interviewees describe **discriminatory attitudes**, e.g., employers that do not recruit applicants of certain origins, as

well as **cases of discrimination, exploitation of migrant workers and difficulties to enforce their rights** (AD11, AA3, AC3, AC8, AB12).

*“It may be that employers prefer an Austrian ‘they can rely on’ (AC3, street-level bureaucrat).”*

*“When employers or teachers immediately label someone on the basis of their origin when applying for a job, without paying attention to the person's achievements and abilities. This is very problematic. For example, there were some refugees who changed their religion and were able to add their baptismal names to their applications. This has made many things easier, made the hurdles 50% smaller. This is very problematic, but when you are desperate for jobs, people do a lot of things (AD11, non-profit service provider).”*

*“Racism and discrimination exist in particular on the housing and labour market (AA3, non-profit service provider).”*

*“Especially for women, the headscarf is a huge problem also for the companies, it is getting better, change is very slow (AB12, non-profit service provider).”*

*“There are many incidents of discrimination: are people paid adequately, does the contract state what people actually work for, do people know what they have signed - we are very happy to send people to the AK [Arbeiterkammer/The Chamber of labour] and have already reported many employers ourselves. Then people are registered at the last minute but immediately terminated. In many people's eyes, migrants are cheap labour and are good for as long as they don't demand their rights (AC8, non-profit service provider).”*

## 4.2. Actors involved (WHO)

**As outlined, labour market policy is a national domain in Austria and the Arbeitsmarktservice – AMS (public employment service) is responsible for its implementation.** The AMS has a federal structure with nine provincial offices and regional branches, which are mainly located in district capitals. There are no local level AMS offices. To register at AMS, **job seekers and unemployed need to go to the corresponding regional office.** AMS funded labour market programmes and services may be provided more decentralised, e.g., in the district capital and other main towns/areas of a district or might be available only outside the district, e.g., in the provincial capital. In terms of employment, the AMS represents the main actor in the four localities for the provision of measures supporting access employment.

Thereby, the AMS commissions **third-sector providers for service provision** (see for programmes and measures in section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**). For the recognition of foreign qualification, counselling desks at provincial level are available, which are funded by the Federal Ministry for Labour and implemented by **migrant counselling organisations** (ZEMIT for Tyrol and Beratungszentrum für Migranten und Migrantinnen for Lower Austria, see section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**) Furthermore, there has been a Mentoring Programme in place (initiated by the Austrian Integration Fund, AMS and Business Chamber at federal level and rolled in the provinces by their corresponding provincial branches.), which has been only accessible for refugees.

**Welfare authorities** are the second mainstream actor of the institutional integration framework, administering the provision of **social assistance (Sozialhilfe)/minimum income benefits (Mindestsicherung)**. As outlined, these represent a last-resort benefit for those who have not sufficient own means and no entitlements to other benefits. Most refugees registered for minimum income benefits/social assistance benefits when they obtained asylum and subsidiary protection status due to insufficient own means and not having a job already with status acquisition in many cases. While the provision of language courses, which have been identified across localities as important means for access to employment (seeing German language as prerequisite), is in the responsibility of the **Austrian Integration Fund**, and labour market policy measures (according to the Integration Year Act) with AMS, welfare authorities have to monitor “integration progress” and apply financial sanctions in case of non-compliance by cutting welfare benefits. Data on completed courses and training measures are exchanged between the organisations. Welfare authorities are located at district level (within the Bezirkshauptmannschaften), except for some towns that have their own department within their municipal administration. The latter applies to locality A and C.

Across localities, interviewees referred to **employers**, mentioning on the one hand companies that recruited refugees and generally observing more openness to refugees due to current general labour shortages. However, attitudes of employers would also depend on their experience with refugees, including good and bad experiences (AK9). The interviewed representatives of the business chamber reported interest of employers to hire asylum seekers beyond the current limited options as well as using the opportunity (in place until 2018) to recruit asylum seekers under the age of 25 as apprentice. In locality A, a job fair has been organised for several years now (attracting employers and job seeking refugees beyond the locality), being a cooperation between provincial AMS, provincial Business Chamber and the Integration Office of Locality A.

In regard to organised interest groups, the regional branches of **business chambers** took a role in advising members on the employment of refugees (legal framework) and based on needs. The **Chamber of Labour** was mentioned by interviewees in locality C, helping migrants in counselling and enforcing their rights.

In the two rural cases (B and D), **locals from civil society/members of associations** were also mentioned as actors involved in supporting access to employment, whereby their activities were based on needs, including general orientation on labour market opportunities in Austria, accompanying migrants to job interviews and using their own networks to place migrants into jobs.

### 4.3. Policies, initiatives, and practices that foster/hinder access (WHAT)

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

Furthermore, some measures were developed at higher level (federal, provincial) and available to refugees in the four localities. However, actual service desks may be located in the provincial capitals and larger towns of the provinces:

The **AMS Tyrol has established a specific counselling and support desk for refugees (Jobservice Tyrol)** with status and their main residence in Tyrol, providing counselling and support and aiming at job placement. It is co-funded by the EU and the province of Tyrol. **Jobservice Tyrol** targets adults entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection with their main place of residence in Tyrol and who are assigned by the AMS to Jobservice Tyrol. The programme comprises individual counselling by a case manager, group coaching on various topics, support in finding a job and in the application process, use of company network, placement into regular labour market, 3-month follow-up support when starting work, locations in Innsbruck, Schwaz and Wörgl. Jobservice Tyrol is funded the European Social Fund, the AMS Tyrol and the province of Tyrol.<sup>20</sup> Services have been available to refugees residing in locality A and B.

The NGO Diakonie runs so-called **“Integration and Training Centre (Integrations- und Bildungszentrum)” in Tyrol and Lower Austria**. It offers holistic integration counseling on health issues, housing, work, education, language cafés, workshops on different topics, e.g.,

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.itworks.co.at/bbe/> (last accessed: 22/06/2022)



housing (heating, airing, saving energy), women and health, digitalisation. IBZ is an optional service desk for refugees (not prescribed by law) and represents a first point of contact after obtaining protection status. In Tyrol, its services focus on helping with accommodation after status acquisition due to the overall difficult housing market in Tyrol. Open counselling includes counselling related to the minimum income scheme (welfare benefits), including housing counselling, family allowance and referral to other social organisations.

**Guidance and counselling desks on the recognition of foreign qualifications (AST)** have been established and funded by federal level in 2013. Since January 2013, four contact points (AST) exist in Vienna, Linz, Graz and Innsbruck and have provided counselling on the recognition and assessment of qualifications acquired abroad throughout Austria. In the other provinces, weekly counselling days are held. The ASTs offer free, multilingual information, counselling and guidance throughout the entire recognition or assessment procedure to facilitate transitions into job that correspond to migrants' qualifications. The target group are persons with formal qualifications acquired abroad who have questions about the recognition or professional utilisation of their competences and reside in Austria. Guidance and counselling includes clarification of whether formal recognition is necessary or possible, helping with certified translations of diplomas and certificates, support in assessment/recognition procedures and information on further education and counselling opportunities. ZeMiT – Zentrum für MigrantInnen in Tirol runs the AST in Tyrol, in Lower Austria the Vienna-based „Beratungszentrum für Migranten und Migrantinnen“ provides counselling hours in St. Pölten and Wiener Neustadt.<sup>21</sup>

**Mentoring for Migrants** is a joint initiative of the Austrian Integration Fund, AMS and the Business Chamber that started in 2008. It brings together experienced individuals from the business world as mentors and skilled migrants (apprenticeship, high school diploma, higher educational degree) as mentees helping them finding a job in their field. (WKO 2013, WKO/ÖIF/AMS 2021) Refugees can access this programme as well.

**The Tyrolean Social Services (responsible for basic welfare support of asylum seekers) introduced a so-called “Tyrolean integration compass”.** It targets asylum seekers from the age of 16 and persons with a positive asylum decision or subsidiary protection. It provides interpreter-supported, voluntary, free of charge, counselling and coaching, collecting information on education, work and integration steps, identifying competences and related opportunities in Austria. Results are recorded in the “TIK Compass” and should help refugees with their further integration, including transitions into employment.<sup>22</sup>

### Locality A (Innsbruck)

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.anlaufstelle-erkennung.at/anlaufstellen> (last accessed 22/06/2022)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.tsd.gv.at/tiroler-integrationskompass.html> (last accessed 22/06/2022)



The AMS provides **general training measures for jobseekers in the locality** (to entitled Austrian and foreign citizens alike), which are provided according to needs, including refugees. This includes trainings e.g., for jobs in tourism, in the metalwork sector, and other sectors (AA17). Furthermore, Jobservice Tyrol is available to refugees registered at AMS Innsbruck. This comprises individual counselling by a case manager, group coaching on various topics, support in finding a job and in the application process, use of company network, placement into regular labour market, and 3-month follow-up support when starting work.<sup>23</sup> There were high success rates in job placement, but often short-term, which was also due to seasonality (AA2).

**Adopted employment measures rather aimed at fast transitions into the labour market, which might cause problems in the longer run** due to low qualifications and lacking transferability of foreign qualifications. (AA2) There was too little time for regular support and counselling of migrants (about one hour every three weeks). Most job-seeking refugees were interested in for a job instead of training and doing e.g., an apprenticeship (*„an apprenticeship and earning 300 euros net less was the less preferred alternative (AA2).“*) The interviewed street-level bureaucrat would have aimed for longer-term programmes, combining training, work and German language acquisition, bringing 50-60% into apprenticeship training. Success rates of job placement would have been high, but often short-term, also due to seasonality (AA2).

In regard to employment, the integration office has **collaborated with the AMS and Business Chamber, organising a job fair since 2017** (attracting employers and refugees from across Tyrol) where job-seeking refugees can meet potential employers. From 2016-18, the focus was on apprenticeship, since then the focus has been broadened (AA1, AA17). The outcomes of the job fair range from internships, apprenticeships, unskilled and skilled jobs (AA17).

The **‘Mentoring for Migrants’ programme is a joint project of the AMS, the Business Chamber and the Austrian Integration Fund** that had been initiated by the federal representations of the three organisations in 2010 and implemented across the provinces. It targets migrants with vocational qualifications and high and good German skills and is also available to migrants of the locality. It aims to support finding employment appropriate to their qualification through a mentoring/buddy system. The programme was also provided to refugees and thereby transitions into apprenticeship were observed as valuable means (AA17).

### Locality B

In locality B (a rural area in Tyrol), **measures centred on addressing needs related to the refugee shelter and their residents. A member of the local government coordinated measures and had the role of being a main point of contact** for any issues related to the

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.itworks.co.at/bbe/> (last accessed: 22/06/2022)



refugee shelter. **Support by volunteers has been very relevant** for providing language courses, finding employment using own networks, and e.g., accompanying refugees to job interviews (AB3, AB19). The municipality also **offered work in the framework of “community work” to asylum seekers**, and there were similar initiatives elsewhere in the district (AB19, AB1).

Mainstream services and specific integration support measures were not in place in the locality, but in the district capital and in one of the larger towns of the district. As mentioned, the AMS has no local offices but representations (usually) in the district capitals. This is also the case of the locality. The AMS has not arranged any specific courses for this group. Refugees can access the general range of measures of PES. This ranges from job application training to metalworking apprenticeship courses. However, labour market support measures have been also established in more decentralised manner. As in locality A, Jobservice Tyrol has also been available to refugees residing in the locality, focusing on job placement. The range of measures of the AMS include training, as well as subsidies to companies (Eingliederungsbeihilfe) and short-term work placements (Praktika) (e.g., one week in a company, the PES pays an allowance to the client, insurance and, if applicable, travel costs) (AB9).

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

### Locality C (St. Pölten)

The **AMS** is a mainstream provider of **active labour market policies (ALMPs)** and the basic approach of AMS is (as stated by our interviewees) to provide measures to their clients according to needs. Thus, this general repertoire of ALMPs was also available to post-2014 migrants in St. Pölten, including programmes to get a Lower Secondary School Diploma, to obtain a VET qualification (apprenticeship), counselling and placement support (e.g., how to write a CV in Austria) (AC5, AC13). In terms of specific measures for migrants, the AMS has offered a **specialised language course for the care professions** in this locality. (AC8) Furthermore, the AMS adopted specific measures for post-2014 migrants that came to Austria for humanitarian reasons. The AMS cooperated with the Chamber of Agriculture placing refugees in the agricultural sector (AC5). A further programme includes a nine-week **course to support integration into the labor market**. It includes information about the Austrian labor market, the job application process, job specific German competences, as well as excursions with clients to different institutions and companies. The project started two years ago and our contacts have grown well. The participants are booked by the AMS. At the organisational level, the AMS office designated front-line workers that worked exclusively with humanitarian migrants. This step was implemented in the period of high numbers between 2015 and 2018, aiming to provide more counselling time per client (about 1 hour instead of 15-20 minutes on average) (AC8). Furthermore, the AMS has cooperated with a non-profit service provider/counselling centre, which is present with staff members at AMS twice a week, providing **mother-tongue support to clients in their AMS** (PES) appointment (AC8, 64, AC5).



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

Additionally, there are **mainstream programmes and services** that can be relevant for humanitarian migrants, such as, **youth coaching, measures for young adult women, the youth education centre** (AC4).

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

#### Locality D

**In regard to employment** (and as the interviewed AMS representatives stated also in the other localities), the programmes and services of AMS are available to entitled Austrian citizens and foreign citizens alike. **Specific measures that were available to humanitarian migrants of the locality included mainly German courses and training for the gastronomy sector** (kitchen staff, bar staff). The regional AMS did not implement the „competence check“ (AD6), a skills assessment and training programme specifically developed in the context of the refugee crisis (Pfeffer, 2017). The interviewee of AMS stressed AMS' essential role in job placement, but also highlighted the role of informal networks of volunteers that help to establish contacts and find jobs. (AH6:30) Furthermore, there have been specific labour market-related courses in the provincial capital that were also available to humanitarian migrants of the locality, such as for the catering industry, and there have been job fairs where employers from Western Austria could look for workers (AD6).

**German courses** were provided by the AMS (AD16) and the ÖIF (AD10).

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

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

**Locals from civil society founded an association to support refugees.** The local association of volunteers has provided support where needed, being a first point of contact, providing general information on how the authorities and the labour market work in Austria and helping with job search. The association of **volunteers has helped with applications and** has used their **contacts with employers** and e.g., organised trial days. If possible, these trial days are organised in the framework of AMS (PES) work trials (Arbeitserprobung) or work training (Arbeitstraining) measures, which also provides insurance coverage (AD3). The regional business network invited the association of volunteers to their **job fairs** (AD3).

#### 4.4. Specific target groups (FOR WHOM)

Specific target groups of measures are based

- on the **residence title**, i.e. humanitarian migrants (according to the Integration Year Act, Integration Act) with asylum and subsidiary protection status,
- on **benefit receipt**, i.e. activating refugees drawing on minimum income, social assistance benefits,
- **socio-economic characteristics** (young migrants, women), partly paired with legal provisions (option for asylum seekers under the age of 25 to access apprenticeship until 2018 in place)
- **on qualification**, i.e. counselling desks (AST) for AST: persons with formal qualifications acquired abroad with questions about the recognition or professional utilisation of their competences and residence in Austria; Mentoring for Migrants; bring refugees into apprenticeship training.

CASE	WholeCOMM typology	Major obstacle(s)	Actor(s) involved	Measure(s)	Target group(s)
Locality A	Medium town	Comparability and transferability of foreign qualifications (recognition)  Long asylum procedure, limited labour market access for asylum seekers  German language competences	AMS (regional branch)  Employers  Non-profit service provider  Integration Office	Access to AMS mainstream measures  Job fair  Access to Job Service Tyrol  Access to Diakonie Integrations- und Bildungszentrum	Asylum seekers for apprenticeships (until 2018)  Refugees with asylum/subsidiary protection status  Refugees with formal qualifications



		<p>Policy focus on fast transitions (worked), but longer-term consequences (highest unemployed among unskilled)</p> <p>Discrimination</p>		<p>Mentoring for Migrants</p> <p>Access to AST (recognition of qualifications)</p>	
Locality B	Rural	<p>Few employers in the locality itself</p> <p>Mobility to reach workplace, in particular shift work</p> <p>German language competences</p> <p>Transfer/comparability of qualifications</p> <p>Different work cultures, prejudice</p>	<p>AMS (regional branch)</p> <p>Employers</p> <p>Non-profit service provider</p> <p>Locals from civil society</p>	<p>Access to AMS mainstream measures</p> <p>Access to Job Service Tyrol</p> <p>Access to Diakonie Integrations- und Bildungszentrum</p> <p>Volunteers using to their networks to employers</p> <p>Community-based work</p> <p>Access to AST (recognition of qualifications)</p>	<p>Refugees with asylum/subsidiary protection status</p> <p>Asylum seekers for community based work</p> <p>Refugees with formal qualifications</p>
Locality C	Small town	<p>Transfer/comparability of qualifications</p>	<p>AMS (regional branch)</p> <p>Employers</p> <p>Non-profit service providers</p> <p>Locals from civil society</p>	<p>Access to AMS mainstream measures</p> <p>Specific service desk at AMS</p> <p>Access to Diakonie Integrations- und Bildungszentrum</p> <p>Access to AST (recognition of qualifications)</p>	<p>Asylum seekers for apprenticeships (until 2018)</p> <p>Refugees with asylum/subsidiary protection status</p> <p>Refugees with formal qualifications</p>
Locality D	rural	<p>German language competences</p> <p>Different work cultures, prejudice</p>	<p>AMS (regional branch)</p> <p>Employers</p>	<p>Access to AMS mainstream measures</p> <p>Community-based work</p>	<p>Refugees with asylum/subsidiary protection status</p> <p>Asylum seekers for community based work</p>



			Non-profit service providers Locals from civil society	Volunteers using to their networks to employers	
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*Table 4: Case-by-case summary of results/findings regarding the area of Employment*

## 5. Access to other resources and services

### 5.1. Language

In order to be able to deal with the individual sub-items in the area of second language acquisition, it should be briefly stated that German courses in Austria are obligatory for persons granted asylum and subsidiary protection (§ 4 IntG):

§ 4. (1) The Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs shall provide German courses for persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (§ 3 Z 1 and 2) from the age of 15 onwards, which - if required - enable literacy in Latin script and the attainment of a language level of at least B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The Integration Act further states that:

§ 4. (2) In the German courses pursuant to para 1, values and orientation knowledge shall be dealt with on a compulsory basis (§ 5 para 4). These measures are handled by the Austrian Integration Fund, which may use course providers for this purpose.

The aim of these integration measures is defined as the opportunity to participate in social, economic and cultural life in Austria. The law defines the essential aspects as participation in employment, education, gender equality and rapid economic self-sufficiency (§2 Abs 2 IntG). The German courses anchored in the law, which are also to include so-called value and orientation aspects, are to be provided by the Integration Minister and implemented by the Austrian Integration Fund. The Austrian Integration Fund is also responsible for the curricula. In light of this, the legal requirements for beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection are the same in all four localities.

#### a) Main challenges/obstacles

##### **Locality A (Innsbruck)**

In Innsbruck, a street-level bureaucrat pointed out that until the first legislative period Kurz I (The Federal Government Kurz I was in office from 18 December 2017 to 28 May 2019) German courses for asylum seekers and persons entitled to asylum were to a significant extent provided by the Public Employment Service. Yet, according to the government, the PES was not supposed to offer German courses for the target group and the PES budget was cut

(AA2).<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the street level bureaucrat mentioned that the cooperation between the ÖIF and the Public Employment Service Austria (PES) was difficult as far as data sharing was concerned. The ÖIF would commission education providers with the German courses, which turned out to be very time-consuming.

*"But the ÖIF commissions education providers for the German courses and that is extremely time-consuming. It is very tedious, much more tedious than if the PES would commission the education providers. That's not because of the ÖIF staff and the language trainers, it's because of the legal framework. It is very time-consuming and to everyone's dissatisfaction (AA14)."*

A member of the Business Chamber assessed the initial phase of integration support (i.e., after receiving a positive decision on an asylum application) as chaotic. A lot of information about qualifications and language skills of the asylum seekers would have been lost due to a lack of data collection. There were also differences in access to German language courses, which affected the accommodation of the refugees.

*"There was no strategy in place beforehand to ensure the same 'way', e.g., the availability/access to German courses was made very different between individual localities or regions". The member of the Chamber of Commerce pointed out that due to the regional distribution, it was often not possible to achieve the group sizes required for the German course to ensure a permanent offer (AA17)."*

Another street-level official considered integration in smaller communities to be more efficient in terms of language acquisition, as the refugees are forced to operate in the foreign language (German) due to the absence of their own "language community". In his view, this would accelerate language acquisition (cf. AA4).

Coordination of volunteers was also seen as another challenge:

*"Volunteers did not know who to turn to and who was responsible for them, including some who were over-ambitious. One of the volunteers took on the coordinating role and that helped. The Integration Office offered training for volunteers, and the scope changed. Initially, it was about German language support (with some volunteers aiming for 1:1 support as they assumed this was superior to all other formats), also about the role of volunteers and what*

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<sup>24</sup> See also Die Presse, 30.11.2018 „Arbeitsmarktservice streicht Großteil der Deutschkurse“ [PES cuts bulk of German classes], <https://www.diepresse.com/5538879/arbeitsmarktservice-streicht-grossteil-der-deutschkurse>.



*they can contribute, as well as reflection workshops (also in relation to situations of deportation or hiding). In the beginning, there were many registrations, but these declined. The integration office collected feedback from the volunteers on the trainings (what helped, what should be kept and what should be left out) (AA1)."*

## **Locality B**

A language institute was commissioned by the province to organise German courses for refugees in Tyrol, accessible for refugees of locality B. In the meantime, this institute runs specialised language courses tailored to the requirements of the labour market, such as "German on the Labour Market (AB3)."

Furthermore, private persons offered support in acquiring the German language (AB2). There was also a women's meeting place in a café once a week (AB7), where volunteers also offered German courses and, during the Corona pandemic, tutoring for children. A street-level bureaucrat also mentioned that it was particularly difficult for women to attend German courses regularly due to childcare responsibilities (AB7). The biggest hurdle that Locality B had to face is the fact that access to German courses is very difficult. Literacy courses, for example, would not be offered every year and there would be a very long waiting list. There are also particular difficulties associated with social assistance:

*"People have to register as unemployed, but first they do German courses and have to take a placement test. That is the first thing that is required for welfare benefits as well as the value course and registration at ÖIF for a German course. Practical difficulties are e.g., such: We had a client who would have had a place for a German course in another town in 3 months. They did not issue a confirmation of enrolment because this is not done for 3 months in advance. This in turn caused problems with the minimum income scheme because they require a confirmation of enrolment" (AB7).*

A staff member at the Public Employment Service also explained the difficulty that arose in relation to language courses. For example, people could only be registered as job seekers if they had already passed an A1 exam. Thus, persons entitled to asylum first had to be referred to another office to complete the integration package (German and values course) in order to be able to register with the PES. In this way, it was also possible to ensure, in cooperation with the district administration, that refugees with status receive the minimum income, even though they had not yet registered with the PES (AB9).

### Locality C (St. Pölten)

In St. Pölten, several providers offer German courses. A special feature in locality C is the Office for Diversity, which would also offer German courses alongside other actors such as Diakonie, AMS, Volkshilfe FAIR, but also the Women's Centre and Caritas. The cooperation with the ÖIF is rated as difficult by a street-level bureaucrat as far as bureaucracy is concerned (AC4). On the other hand, the ÖIF would also offer many language courses online. Another street-level bureaucrat noted the following hurdles in accessing language services:

*"Again and again we hear 'language, language and language' - here too we find many hurdles. Firstly, there are changes every year. Refugees used to have to take courses at the PES. Then refugees were only allowed to take courses from A2 and now they are only allowed to take courses from B1 and now only if they have access to the labour market. They are classified by the ÖIF and this classification is valid for four months. Sometimes, however, they don't even come to the German course because that document is already expired. Another hurdle is the dialect, which is not taught in the German courses. What is needed is buddy support in the companies (AC8)."*

An employee of the Social Welfare Office mentioned that access to German courses had also improved over the years. The situation is now as follows:

*"There are fewer waiting times for German courses. It works better now and the range of courses has also increased. For a while there were courses with only one hour per day. Now there are also full-day courses from Monday to Friday. There is more capacity (AC3)."*

### Locality D

In locality D, volunteers founded an association to support refugees in their integration. German courses were also offered through this association (AD1). The municipality itself supported the German courses with donations in kind. A member of the association explained that refugees in locality D did not have access to official German courses. The only option would have been to commute to another larger municipality, and this would have been considered unmanageable for some (for example, people with caring responsibilities). Likewise, the fact that the ÖIF only grants German courses to persons entitled to asylum, but not to asylum seekers, should not be overlooked, as this would have led to tensions and frustration between the refugees themselves. All German courses for asylum seekers were discontinued in this region after integration policy on the provincial level became the responsibility of the Freedom Party:



*“There are no ÖIF German courses offered in the [locality], in the [region] it is difficult to reach other course locations by public transport and only some people can travel to [Locality C]. For women with small children this is not feasible. Here we stepped in and a retired German teacher gave lessons. Furthermore, the ÖIF only offers German courses for refugees with a positive asylum decision and refugees with a high probability for recognition. This causes tensions among asylum seekers and those who have to access German courses and those who have not. This causes mental health problems (AD3).”*

A member of the district administration explained that also in Locality D refugees who have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection status have to report to the ÖIF according to the Integration Year Act and ask for an appointment to sign the Integration Declaration. This would be followed by the dates for the values and orientation courses. From A1 onwards they can register with the PES as jobseekers (AD10). The PES was very involved in financing German courses (AD16).

## b) Actors involved (who)

Since German language courses are compulsory for persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and are centrally administered by the Austrian Integration Fund, the same players are primarily involved in the implementation and provision of German language courses in all the localities studied. The Austrian Integration Fund certifies German institutes, which are then authorised to offer certified German courses within the framework of the ÖIF curriculum. This approach makes the ÖIF a central figure as far as German courses for beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection are concerned. Prior to 2019, the PES played a major role in this context, assigning the persons concerned to German institutes.

### **Locality A (Innsbruck)**

In Innsbruck, the main actors in the provision of German language courses for the target group of persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are the Austrian Integration Fund, the Public Employment Service and Tyrolean Social Services (TSD), a public agency that is responsible for the reception and support of asylum seekers. The compulsory German courses may only be offered by ÖIF-certified course institutes and ÖIF-certified course trainers, as already mentioned at the beginning.

### **Locality B**

In locality B, where access to official German courses was only possible by commuting to a neighbouring municipality, private individuals often also provide support with German

learning opportunities or tutoring. As in Innsbruck, persons entitled to asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection must first pass a German and integration test at level A1 in order to be able to register as job seekers with the Public Employment Service. The actors involved in this case are again the ÖIF and the PES, but also volunteers.

### **Locality C (St. Pölten)**

In St. Pölten, several actors were involved in the provision of German courses. For example, the Diakonie, the Public Employment Service, the Integration Fund and other education and training providers, e.g. (ZIB-Trainig) were mentioned. 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 Corona pandemic, also providing language learning measures in the framework of the Diversity Café.

### **Locality D**

Although in locality D, from the perspective of the interviewed actors, a newly founded association of volunteers played the central role, also with regard to the offer of German courses, the ÖIF and the PES were mentioned as key figures, as in the other locations (AD1).

## **c) Policies, initiatives, and practices (what) that foster/hinder access (what)**

### **Locality A (Innsbruck)**

Regarding integration policies, a member of the Social Services company commented that the most important factor was the legal framework in which they can work. It defines their mission and their basic services (AA4):

*"Take asylum procedures, for example: How quickly these procedures are handled has a huge impact. Syrian nationals are through the procedure very quickly and with a high probability of recognition. On the other hand, we have clients who have come since 2015-16 and are still waiting. The legal framework and the state structures are very important for us. It is also important that we are an affiliate of the province. The requirements of the province are crucial. The unpredictability in the asylum system is also an important factor."*



### Locality B

In Locality B, an interviewed non-profit service provider (AB7) observed that access to German courses was particularly poor. The fact that special offers, such as literacy courses, were only offered irregularly was identified as a hurdle. The lack of responsibilities or the lack of knowledge about who is responsible for what also often turned out to be problematic. On the other hand, what turned out to be helpful (AB9) is the fact that German courses had already been offered in this region before 2015 and that it was possible to build on existing structures.

### Locality C (St. Pölten)

In St. Pölten, several actors emphasised the good cooperation with the Office for Diversity (AC4). The cooperation with the ÖIF was seen (cf. AC4) as a bureaucratic hurdle and the compulsory language courses were also assessed as a deliberate institutional hurdle as far as access for refugees to the labour market was concerned.

### Locality D

As already mentioned above, in locality D the association, which was founded at the beginning of 2015 by local volunteers, was seen by all interview partners as the most important actor and at the same time policy initiative promoting access to services.

## d) Specific target groups (for whom)

### Locality A (Innsbruck)

In Innsbruck, one expert stressed that the focus of the measures is more on recognised refugees and persons with subsidiary protection. Asylum seekers would receive less funding because they are supported by basic welfare services for asylum seekers ("Grundversorgung"). This differentiation according to the status is then also reflected in other support offers, for example in terms of access to German courses but also in access to the labour market. Migrants who have lived here longer but still have difficulties integrating would be ignored (AA6).

### Locality B

A member of an association that supports refugees pointed out that German courses have been offered to asylum seekers in Tyrol already since 2011 (AB1).

*"I started to work in the sector in 2011 and at least since then German courses were also provided to asylum seekers in Tyrol."*

In regard to concrete measures and target groups, a meeting place for women (women's café) was mentioned, which offered German courses for women as well as tutoring for children (AB7). People who need literacy training have to wait a long time for an appropriate course in the locality (AB7).

**Locality C (St. Pölten)**

In St. Pölten, it was mentioned that the Office for Diversity offered German courses that were not specifically addressed to refugees (AC8). Refugees had also travelled long distances to attend language courses in locality C (cf. AC2). It is also the case in location C that persons entitled to asylum and persons with subsidiary protection are obliged to attend German courses. In Locality C, specific "Mum learns German" course targeting women with children is also offered (AC16).

**Locality D**

In locality D, it was mentioned several times that it is difficult, especially for women with children, to participate in German courses due to care obligations. Also, for some women, participation in a German course or entry into the labour market would not be desired by their husbands (AD2):

*"There are many whose knowledge of German is still inadequate after so long. There, too, a very patriarchal image of values prevails, "the woman is not allowed to work", "she is not allowed to learn German". I fear that it will be similar with the Afghans and Syrians in twenty years."*

A member of the association of volunteers in locality D pointed out that the Austrian Integration Fund offers courses only to persons granted asylum and subsidiary protection. For this reason, the association offers its courses to all refugees, including asylum seekers(AD11).

CASE	WholeCOMM typology	Major obstacle(s)	Actor(s) involved	Measure(s)	Target group(s)
Locality A	A	Data sharing between institutions, lack of strategy, coordination of volunteers	ÖIF, PES, TSD, ÖIF-certified institutions and trainers	Legal framework and state structures are defining	Recognised refugees and subsidiary protection seekers
Locality B	B	Difficulties for women to attend language courses due to childcare,	Private individuals, PES, ÖIF	Existence of structures before 2015	Asylum seekers, language courses for women

		obstacles related to the status			
Locality C	C	Difficult relations with the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), dialects in different regions	Diakonie, PES, ÖIF, ZIB-Training	Good cooperation with the Office for Diversity	Recognised refugees and subsidiary protection seekers, language courses for women
Locality D	D	No access to official German courses	Volunteer association, ÖIF, PES		Recognised refugees and subsidiary protection seekers, asylum seekers

Table 5: Case-by-case summary of results/findings regarding the area of Language

## 5.2. Cross-cutting topics

### 5.2.1 Covid-19 Pandemic

The pandemic affected the **extent and formats of service provision to migrants**. In case of the AMS, the focus was on paying out unemployment benefits on time and supporting company with „short-term work“ (Kurzarbeit) options in the first lockdown. Appointments in persons at AMS were discontinued. Non-profit service providers had to change the format of their services, e.g., switching from “open counseling” (counseling without a prior appointment) to counseling by appointment, telephone and video counseling instead of meetings in person. At times, the whole staff was on telework and the counseling center was only available by phone. In group programmes, the number of participants had to be reduced and overall, events had to be canceled and reduced, respectively. Furthermore, they developed new, such as picnics or "walk the talk," i.e., counseling while walking. However, they maintained low-threshold services available to those who do not meet the general Corona access rules (Gs), ensuring emergency services (Notfallsdienstleistungen).

Clients faced **unemployment**, in particular those with jobs in tourism, the restaurant sector and with temporary employment agencies (AA3). Covid has also had an impact on apprentices, especially in the catering industry. They could no longer finish their apprenticeship (AA4).

Furthermore, interviewees observed that **clients lost part of their already acquired German language proficiency** as e.g., meetings with volunteers and language courses were interrupted. (AA3, AB19).

## 5.2.2 Gender

Interviewees named the following gender-specific challenges, thereby mainly referring to the situation of women. It is observed that it is **not so common for women to work**. Women with small children do not work (AD10, AC4). Furthermore, age matters. Older women would be rather at home and caring for the family (AD14). It would also depend on the **availability of jobs**. Men find jobs in the construction sector and do shift work (AD10). Not every job would be suitable for women because of the **manual work** involved. Furthermore, companies sometimes **lack appropriate staff rooms** (AC13).

Generally, interviewees report **difficulties to reconcile childcare with work or training as a barrier for women** (e.g., AC1, AC4). Women can have difficulties to **reconcile German courses with childcare** and commonly there are no German courses with childcare (AB7). Entitlement to childcare (kindergarten) is given for children at the age of 5 (year before starting school), otherwise availability is only given if a place is available or for a fee (AC3). Furthermore, logics of the welfare system may delay training and employment of mothers:

*“As regards gender, women join support measures later, partly because of care work, but also because of role gender norms. This regards patriarchal structures, e.g., if you do not share care responsibilities, it is difficult to draw on institutionalised integration measures and services. In this respect, it is good if women have to keep appointments. This can be a way to justify participation within the family (AC4).”*

*“With regard to the requirements of the Integration Act and the linking of the minimum income with German language requirements, women with children in need of care do not have to attend German language courses for the first three years. The women are “allowed” to stay at home. The man would also be allowed to stay at home if the woman worked full time, but this does not happen in practice (AB7).”*

Interviewees also observe differences in terms of **mobility**, referring to female clients not having a driving licence and/or availability of a car, **(AC3, AB12)**, while men would usually have a driving licence, and therefore being more mobile. (AB12) This is relevant for shift work and jobs outside the place of residence (AC3).

*“For women, childcare is a hurdle, because entitlement to a kindergarten place is only given from the age of 5 (year before starting school), otherwise only if a place is available or for a fee. Childcare is also a financial issue. Mobility can also be a hurdle (no driving licence or no car) for jobs outside the locality, especially in shift work it is difficult without a car. Without a job one is financially limited, e.g., to be able to buy a car.” (AC3)*



## 6. Conclusion

This report has focused on post-2014 migrants' and refugees' access to housing, employment, and language courses in four localities in Austria. The report examined these key areas in terms of barriers and challenges, actors involved, strategies and policies to improve access to these services, and specific target groups addressed by public policies. The conclusion summarizes the main findings and results.

### **Housing**

In international comparison, Austria's share of social (referred to as municipal housing,) and non-profit housing is high, with about 60% of rented housing falling under these two categories. Nevertheless, beneficiaries of international protection do not usually have access to these types of housing and thus largely have to rely on the private housing market. One issue that was raised specifically in this context in all localities concerns access to municipal housing. There are no specific regulations for migrants in this context, but residence requirements (municipalities usually require 2-5 years of prior residence in the municipality) work to the disadvantage of beneficiaries of international protection

On the private housing market, **high rents are an issue** in several of our localities, but not to same extent: Rents are highest in Tyrol, and in Tyrol in Innsbruck, but are much lower in Lower Austria and least in locality D. Cost barriers to housing are thus most relevant in Tyrol, whereas in Lower Austria other reasons are more important. High rents makes access to affordable housing difficult not only for post-2014 migrants, but also for locals. Rents have risen noticeably in recent years, so income and employment play an essential role. Rents in locality A are the highest, at around €16/m<sup>2</sup>. Localities B and C are on a par at around €11/m<sup>2</sup> and rents in locality D are around €8/m<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, the **amount of land available for construction** is estimated to be very low in all four localities, and land prices are very high. In Innsbruck and St. Pölten, new residential buildings are therefore being built mainly by private construction companies, which means that rents are again higher. This also makes it difficult for housing cooperatives and municipal buildings to build affordable housing in the urban area.

A major problem that was clearly addressed in all four localities is **discrimination and reservations on the part of private landlords**. Generally, recognized refugees have to leave the accommodation provided under the basic care system after they have been recognized, but they may not be able to do so because, on the one hand, they cannot afford to pay the deposit and the real estate agent. On the other hand, landlords would also select potential tenants according to certain criteria, so that post-2014 migrants often do not even get an appointment to view the apartments. Although many associations and civil society actors provide support in this context, it is difficult to find affordable housing. As a result, refugees sometimes have to leave the places where they have waited for years for their asylum decision and have achieved a certain degree of integration in order to get housing elsewhere.



Another aspect is that there are almost no policies for post-2014 migrants that could facilitate access to housing. Civil society organizations, such as Caritas, provide "starter apartments", but not in all localities and the offer also cannot meet the demand. Generally, however, associations and migrant networks play an essential role in terms of access to housing.

### **Employment**

Labour market policy is a national domain in Austria and the Arbeitsmarktservice – AMS (public employment service) is responsible for its implementation, including the design and provision of active labour market policy measures (including professional training and language training) and the administration of unemployment related benefits. There is a specific policy for beneficiaries of international protection, the so-called "integration year" (regulated by the Integration Year Act). It targets beneficiaries of international protection, who are unemployed after they obtained their status and who do not find a job. Participation is mandatory and non-participation can be sanctioned. Policies on needs-based welfare benefits, by contrast are largely in the competence of the provinces, and there are important differences between the provinces. Thus, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are excluded from mainstream social benefits in Lower Austria, while they do have access to comparable benefits in Tyrol.

There are several challenges and obstacles to employment that have been mentioned by interviewees across the four studied localities. 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. Active actors in this field in all localities are the AMS, companies themselves, NGOs and also volunteers. In order to facilitate access to the labour market for this target group, special fairs such as the Job Fair were offered, but also mentoring programmes were created. In general, the Public Employment Service is the direct point of contact regarding the labour market, but volunteers have also been able to use their personal networks to help newly arrived migrants and refugees finding work.

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.

### **Other services, notably language training**

A similar patterns holds also in relation to provision of language training. A relatively broad range of mainstream services are readily available in the two urban areas (courses offered by the Austrian Integration Fund – ÖIF and courses – beyond A2 – offered by the Public Employment Service (AMS). In Lower Austria German courses for asylum seekers, however, were discontinued after the responsibility for integration moved to the right-wing Freedom Party on the provincial level. In the two rural localities private actors were mentioned as important for asylum seekers. For beneficiaries of international protection access to language training was considered more problematic in these two communities compared to the two urban areas, partly because no programmes were offered in the localities themselves and clients had to travel, which in turn was not possible for all (such as women with child care obligations), partly because of the lack of specialized offers (notably literacy courses) and lack of clarity on responsibilities or knowledge thereof.

### **The impact of the pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on different aspects, as personal appointments or in-person-trainings were suspended and some services only were moved to an online format only relatively late into the pandemic, resulting, amongst others, in loss of language proficiency. This said, there were also a number of innovative responses to the limitations imposed by the Pandemic and associated lockdowns, such as “walk the talk” counselling sessions. The pandemic also spurred unemployment and affected vocational training, especially in those sectors where work was basically suspended during repeated lockdowns, notably the hospitality industry.

### **Explaining the outcomes**

In the Austrian case, the most obvious contrast is between rural and urban localities and is related to the density of the ‘arrival infrastructure’, including both formal and informal services as well as housing. By contrast, the socio-economic positioning of localities seems to have been less important, not least since many services are organized and provided for on the provincial level. The importance of the provincial level is also reflected by the difference in general conditions offered in Tyrol vs. Lower Austria, with the latter characterized by a far more hostile attitude towards refugees, after the right-wing Freedom party assumed the responsibility for issues related to integration, which is opposed to the more inclusive and cooperative approach taken in Tyrol. In the two rural communities the initiative of voluntary organisations – in one case involving members of the local government – proved crucial in response to the arrival of post-2014 migrants. While the role of voluntary organisations and volunteers more generally in the two urban localities studied should also not be underestimated, established professional organisations were far more important, suggesting that volunteers make up for the lack of capacity (both public and non-governmental) in rural areas.

## Appendix

Table A6. List of interviewees

Locality A, interviewee code	Interviewee Type	Locality B, interviewee code	Interviewee Type	Locality C, interviewee code	Interviewee Type	Locality D, interviewee code	Interviewee Type
AA1	Local Official from the municipality	AB1	Pro-migrant group	AC1	Pro-migrant group	AD1	Local Official from the municipality
AA2	Street-level Bureaucrats	AB2	Pro-migrant group	AC2	Local Official from the municipality	AD2	Member of local government
AA3	Non-profit service provider	AB3	Pro-migrant group	AC3	Street-level bureaucrats	AD3	Pro-migrant group
AA4	Street-level Bureaucrats	AB4	Local Official	AC4	Non-profit service provider	AD6	Street level bureaucrat
AA6	Pro-migrant group	AB5	Employer's Organisation	AC5	Street-level bureaucrat	AD8	Expert
AA7	Experts/Journalists	AB6	Street-level bureaucrats	AC6	Member of opposition	AD9	Member of Opposition
AA8	Pro-migrant group	AB7	Non-profit service provider	AC8	Non-profit service provider	AD10	Street level bureaucrat
AA9	Street-level bureaucrats	AB8	Real Estate Company (private)	AC9	Street-level bureaucrat	AD11	Non-profit service provider
AA10	Public Employer	AB9	Street-level	AC10	Experts	AD12	Employer



			bureaucrats				
AA11	Member of local government	AB10	Member of local government, neighbouring municipality	AC11	Real Estate Company	AD13	Street level bureaucrat
AA12	Members of Opposition in the local council	AB11	Public Employer	AC12	Employer	AD14	Trade union
AA13	Real Estate Company	AB12	Non-profit service provider	AC13	Employer	AD15	Employer
AA17	Employer's Organisation	AB13	Anti-migrant group	AC14	Trade union	AD16	Employer's Organisation
AA18	Trade Union	AB14	Street-level bureaucrats	AC15	Employer's organisation	AD17	Real Estate/Landlord
AA19	Real Estate/Landlord	AB15	Members of Opposition in the local council	AC16	Member of local government		
AA20	Real Estate/Landlord	AB17	Private Employer				
AA21	Non-profit service provider	AB19	Member of local government				
AA22	Street-level bureaucrat						
AA23	Trade Union						
AA24	Employer						

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