

Snapshots from the borders
Participatory investigation
Austria

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Introduction

This report focuses on migration and integration issues in Austria, depicted on the two cases: the municipality of Strass (at the Austria-Slovenian border) and Traiskirchen (30 km to the south from Vienna). After a short summary on the history of migration in Austria we focus on immigration policy and the institutional framework in Austria. The situation at the border respectively in Traiskirchen is described and the role of the „refugee crisis“ 2015/2016 is analysed. To grant better insights on how integration is going on in the municipalities four good practice examples are selected and depicted. This also serves as raw material to answer crosscutting questions like:

- How is integration catalysed and what are the successes and challenges?
- What is the role of the civil society and how does it interact with politics and administration?
- What does public opinion say about migrants, refugees and integration?

Conclusion are derived regarding integration policy at national level (#?), actions in the municipality and suggestions for further research activities.

Context

The present study is part of the project “Snapshots From The Borders”, a 3-year project co-funded by the European Union (EuropeAid DEAR budget line), run by 31 partners (civil society organisations and Local Authorities). It’s aim is to improve the critical understanding of European, national and local decision makers and of public opinion about global interdependencies determining migration flows towards European borders. This report throws a spotlight on the current development in Austria - and especially the participating municipalities – after approximately one year and will help to shape future project activities and strategies.

We want to express our gratitude to all of those, who helped during this research and all the dedicated people in Strass and Traiskirchen, who keep being active with much empathy and solidarity for their fellow human beings. This is nothing that’s taken for granted.

Approach

Sources for the research comprised literature research, analysis of websites, media reports and press releases. In total 29 semi-structured interviews were conducted with quite different persons¹, often leading to the next step in the investigation. Participant observations was carried out at festivals, meetings, in shops, at workshops and at certain projects, like the „garden of encounters“ in Traiskirchen. All collected data was analysed regarding our research questions, discussed in the research team and interim results checked by a international mentor.

The context of immigration in Austria after World War II

After the second world war, Austria was four times an important destination country for refugees: After the crushing of the **Hungarian uprising**, after the violent end of the "**Prague Spring**" in the summer of 1968, after the imposition of martial law in Poland and the suppression of the **Solidarnosc movement** in 1981 and 1982. Between 1968 and 1986 about 300,000 **Jews from the Soviet Union** and Eastern Europe emigrated to Israel and the United States through Austria. To summarize, **transit was the essential feature** of the refugees in the second republic (Bauböck 1996:11). The basic pattern of **labor migration** in the following years, on the other hand, was a **push through**: Austrian workers emigrated to Germany and Switzerland, foreign laborers were recruited.

Austria's guest worker policy and its consequences

In 1961, the **Raab-Olah Agreement** between entrepreneurs and unions laid the foundation for the systematic recruitment of foreign workers. In specially set up local offices, the recruitment of workers and their arrival was organized to Austria. Recruitment agreement were concluded with Spain (1962), Turkey (1963) and Yugoslavia (1966). The principle of the "**guest worker**" **system** consisted of the rotation of temporary, mostly male, workers. They should soon return to their homes and be replaced by new workers if necessary. Consequently, app. 265.000 people migrated to Austria between 1961 and 1974. However, the

¹ Activists and volunteers, religious authorities and believers, politicians and civil servants, employees of the city or community and CSOs employees

guest worker system did not work as planned: Many workers settled permanently in Austria already in the 1970s.

In 1975, after increased competition in the labor market, the **Aliens Employment Act** was passed, which grants Austrian citizens priority in the labor market. The side effect of the recruitment stop was, however, that many guest workers extended their stay and brought their families to Austria too. The share of employed migrants in Austria decreased about 40 % between 1974 and 1984 but the percentage of foreign residents remained almost the same, because the number of returning immigrants was compensated by family reunions.

Between 1987 and 1994, the **foreign resident population in Austria doubled** from 326.000 to 713.000. The increase in immigration had various causes: from the economic upswing to the war in former Yugoslavia. Under the impression of strongly emotionalized domestic debates, **the asylum law was dismantled step by step**. Accelerated asylum procedures were introduced, visa obligations were imposed on the main countries of origin of asylum seekers and deportations were facilitated. A core principle of the new asylum law is the so-called **third-country security**. Consequently, asylum application must be rejected if the refugee were already safe from persecution in another state. Since all neighbouring states of Austria are considered safe third countries because they have signed the Geneva Refugee Convention, this offers the possibility to reject refugees who come by land because they could already have applied for asylum elsewhere on the way.

However, all of these aggravations had little effect on the total number of refugees. The collapse of the Yugoslav state and the ensuing military conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo led to the **largest refugee movement within Europe after the Second World War**. The war in Kosovo caused a further increase in asylum applications in Austria. Since 1999 the refugee population is increasingly made up of non-European asylum seekers.

Austria's accession to the EU and EU enlargements to East and South-East Europe, as well as the freedom of establishment within the European Union, resulted in increased immigration from the EU area, especially when transitional provisions that Austria had claimed disappeared.

Austria and the “refugee crisis”? (Traiskirchen and the immigration after the “refugee crisis”....)

- **Ablauf** der Krise: Ultsch, Prior, Nowak: Flucht. Wie der Staat die Kontrolle verlor. Molden Verlag, Wien 2017
- Das Management der Flüchtlingskrise. Never let a good crisis go to waste. Gratz, Wolfgang 2016 NWV, Wien - **Vorgeschichte** der Krise und **Vorhersehbarkeit**
- -> **War die Krise vorhersehbar? Ja das war sie, und zwar ab dem Zeitpunkt des Entstehens der Balkanroute.** “Spätestens ab Juni, also der Öffnung der Grenze zwischen Griechenland und Mazedonien für Flüchtlinge, hätten die Alarmglocken schrillen müssen.” (Gratz 2016: 21)

Wie kam es zur raschen Zuspitzung der Situation in Traiskirchen? -> Artikel der Washington Post mit 8 Gründen für die rasche Zuspitzung der europäischen Flüchtlingskrise²

1. The war in Syria.
2. The route to Europe got a lot easier.
3. The price dropped.
4. The weather.
5. Germany’s extension of welcome to refugees.
6. The Syrian government’s conscription drive.
7. The Syrian government has made it easier for Syrians to travel.
8. The shortcomings of the underfunded international aid effort.

Die Zuspitzung des Krieges in Syrien führte zur Verdopplung der Anzahl syrischer Flüchtlinge

Die Reise nach Europa wurde mit Entstehung der Balkanroute einfacher,

Fluchtkosten halbierten sich und mehr Menschen konnten sich die Flucht leisten.

² The information is available at:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/18/8-reasons-why-europes-refugee-crisis-is-happening-now/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a78b07b72c00

Viele wollten vor dem schlechten Herbstwetter noch rasch nach Europa.

Die deutsche Kanzlerin sagte die Aufnahme von Flüchtlingen zu - die weltweit transportierte Aussage verstärkte v.a. Fluchtbewegungen aus dem Irak und das Aufbrechen von Flüchtlingen die unter prekären Bedingungen in der Türkei lebten.

Die vermehrte Einberufung syrischer Reservisten in die Armee führte zur vermehrten Flucht von Männern unter 30.

Die syrische Regierung erleichterte gleichzeitig die Ausstellung von Reisepässen als Teil einer Strategie das Land von Regierungsgegnern zu entleeren - das Ergebnis einer Überlebensstrategie von Assad lt. Londoner Institut für strategische Studien.

- Falls es ähnliche Analysen auch in ö. Ministerien und Behörden gegeben hat, sind diese nicht auf die Ebene der Entscheidungen gelangt.
- **Hat Österreich an der Entstehung der Krise (Mit-)Schuld? Ja**, durch zu geringe Unterstützungen für internationale Hilfsorganisationen leistet auch Österreich einen begrenzten Beitrag zum Entstehen der Flüchtlingskrise. (Gratz 2016:21)

The situation today:

Compared to 2015, migration to Austria has returned to the level of previous years, with 60% of immigrants today coming from the EU, just under 40% from third countries. The asylum application figures in Austria have halved annually since 2015.³ Today, the state is no longer trying to cope with an exceptional situation as it did then, but again (more or less successfully) bringing skilled workers and well-trained people into the country. Konrad Pesendorfer, Director General of Statistics Austria, emphasized in a recent radio interview⁴: “It's about bringing good people into the country who are driving our economy forward.” Statistical Austria's employment forecast shows just how important migration is for the labor market: without immigration, the supply of employable people would decline by 17 percent by 2050, and by 2080 the labor supply would even shrink by 35 percent without immigration.⁵

The context in Traiskirchen

³ The asylum statistics of the Federal Ministry of the Interior document a steady decline of asylum applications since 2016: 2016 (-52.13%), 2017 (-41.50%), and 2018 (-46.31%). (Bundesministerium für Inneres: 2016 - 2018)

⁴ in the Ö1 lunch journal: <https://oe1.orf.at/player/20181122/533666>

⁵ The information is available at: derstandard.at/2000092006515/arbeitskraefteangebot-waechst-dank-Zuwanderung-bis-2050-um-fuenf-Prozent

The municipality of Traiskirchen is located about 20 km south of Vienna and has about 20,000 inhabitants. The city is known for its good wines and numerous wine taverns. One of two reception centers for asylum seekers in Austria is located in Traiskirchen, the Federal Care Office East⁶. Built as a cadet school covering an area of 190.302 square meters, the building was turned into a refugee camp overnight during the 1956 Hungarian uprising.⁷

Since then, the crises of the world have been reflected in its inhabitants: 1968 Czechoslovakia, 1973 Chile, 1982 Poland, 1989 Romania, in the 90s the Balkan wars, 1999 Afghanistan, later Iraq and Syria. A brief historical overview:⁸

1968 Czechoslovakia; Traiskirchen officially becomes a review center for asylum applications.

1970s: Austria takes refugees from Africa, South America and Asia for the first time.

1982: 120.000 - 150,000 Poles are fleeing, around 33,000 are applying for asylum in Austria, while at the same time Austria is moving from transit to destination country.

1988: the city archives records a "Polish invasion" - Men search for work on the roadside.

In 1990, the refugee camp reached a peak of 2,800 inhabitants. For the local population, overcrowding is obvious as in summer asylum seekers camp outdoors to escape the confinement of the rooms.

In 14 march 1990 in order to prevent more asylum seekers from coming to Traiskirchen, the population blocks all access roads - according to city archives "gapless". The then Minister of the Interior Löschnak (SPÖ) has to fly in by helicopter because the access roads are blocked with tractors and trucks. He announces that fewer refugees should come to Traiskirchen. The same day the population demonstrates in the main square. In 1991, the population demonstrated again. Mayor Knotzer writes in the foreword to the chronicle of the reception center: "I hope that a closure of the refugee camp will be possible in the next few years. I will continue to work to achieve this goal." (Puchinger, 1991:7, own translation) He never achieves this goal.

⁶ In German: Bundesbetreuungsstelle Ost. The complex seems *"like a city within the city Traiskirchen"* (Engelbert/Hausegger/Oberleitner/Weingrill 2010: 241), a "non-place" in the sense of Augé, that creates "loneliness and uniformity" (Augé 1994: 121), that transforms the city Traiskirchen itself into a transit point, where refugees are waiting for distribution to other federal states of Austria.

⁷ After the collapse of the monarchy, the building was used in various ways: first as a federal educational institution for boys, in the 1940s as a National Political Educational Institution by the National Socialists and as barracks for a regiment of 2,000 men by the Russians during the occupation. The information is available at: <https://www.dossier.at/dossiers/asyl/traiskirchen-eine-zeitreise/>

⁸ The information is available at: <https://www.dossier.at/dossiers/asyl/traiskirchen-eine-zeitreise/>

In 1999, Austria helped quickly and unbureaucratically during the Yugoslav war. 115,000 people flee to Austria, many remain. In the same year, the European Council decided to implement a common European asylum system.

In 2002, the admission of asylum seekers becomes more restrictive: In October, the Ministry of the Interior dismisses hundreds of asylum seekers from the primary care system. NGOs are building emergency shelters, pressure on federal states to accommodate asylum seekers increases.

2004: The agreement on primary care is decided. The duties of caring for asylum seekers are legally divided between federal and state governments.

2014: The refugee camp is still a local political issue. In January of this year, more than 700 people live in the facility, although the politically agreed limit is 480.

In 2015 the peak of more than 4.500 refugees is reached.

Under the title "We are only service providers" Schenk (2015) criticizes the privatization of state tasks and their consequences: ORS had "no capacity to mobilize volunteers, no interest to work together with civil society groups and also no willingness to enter into cooperation with professional NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders." (Schenk 2015: 77, own translation)

Atac (2015) beschreibt die unterschiedliche Positionierung der verschiedenen Aktivisten: Manche verstehen ihre Arbeit humanitär, andere politisch, als Kritik am Grenzregime. Diese Unterscheidung lässt sich bei AktivistInnen bis heute treffen.

The context of immigration in Strass in Steiermark (Austria) -History of a village at the border

Strass in Steiermark (short: Strass) is a village close to the border to Slovenia. In the course of time there were changes due to shifting of the exact border, especially after World War I and II. The World Wars also led to the arrival and in some cases permanent settlement of refugees – so there is a history of immigration in this small village, but mostly in the special context of the war between the Third Reich and Yugoslavia. An important aspect of this history in a cultural and political dimension is the image and the story of a „gatekeeper village“ at the southern border of the German speaking countries. The last bastion just before you enter the Slavic territories. This becomes clear, when you look at how the story of the shifting of the border is told: The occupation of the next train station and the village by “the Yugoslavian” in 1918 was combated by paramilitary forces. And the decision, that Strass and the neighbouring village Spielfeld is a part of Austria, is referred to as “liberation”⁹. There are barracks since

⁹ The information is available at: <http://www.strass-steiermark.gv.at/startseite/chronik/chronik-spielfeld>

1868 in Strass, which also play an important role, not just in a military-strategic sense, but of course also in the economic and cultural life of the region.

To wrap up the events related to refugees:

Refugees arrived in Strass (and also in the quite close village Spielfeld, where the train station is located) at the beginning of World War I. Most of them stayed in the region. After the unclear situation during the war the new border was defined in 1920, just 5 Kilometres to the south of the village.

After World War II a refugee camp, run by the British army was set up in the barracks. It was moved to a bigger village in the north in 1951. There was no big refugee arrival during the wars in the Balkans in the 1990's, although 115.000 people were forced to flee to Austria¹⁰. Reasons for this were: Refugees moved to bigger cities like Vienna, many refugees from Croatia or Kosovo returned rather soon and the biggest share of displaced persons stayed in other regions of Yugoslavia.

There was a massive refugee influx in the autumn of 2015, where thousands of people arrived at the border. In the beginning the Austrian army and police forces stopped the people at the border, but when the crowd reached a certain size there was no chance to prevent them from moving on. Thousands entered the Austrian territory (some reports speak about 4.000 to 7.300 per day¹¹, on their way further on, mostly to Germany. This event is sometimes described as a traumatic moment, which “must not happen any more” (Höflechner, Mayor of Strass, in his speech on World Refugee Day 20th June 2018). One could add: The bastion has to be restored and reinforced.

What happened since the “refugee crisis” in 2015?

After the peak in 2015 and early 2016 the arrivals of refugees declined very quickly due to attempts to prevent migrant flows from Turkey into the EU. A clear decision on this matter followed in March 2016 with the EU-Turkey-Agreement. This came soon after all the infrastructure for first aid and a care system for refugees was set up at the border. So there was (and partly still is) the bizarre situation that huge tents, fences, info desks etc. were ready and waiting while the number of new arrivals dropped to almost zero. Parts of this infrastructure is still there in 2018 – close to the open border checkpoint – and like a monument saying: „we have to be prepared for the next crisis!“. Or: „Even if it's calm at the moment, we are ready this time“. This attitude, expressed also by local and national politicians, also comes to the light, when a massive manoeuvre with the army and police forces took place at the border in June 2018¹². It was called “Pro Borders” by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and provoked discussions in the press and social media.

¹⁰ The information is available at:

http://medienservicestelle.at/migration_bewegt/2011/06/21/kriege-in-ex-jugoslawien-fuhrten-zu-drei-grosen-fluchtlingswellen

¹¹ The information is available at:

https://regiowiki.at/wiki/Liste_der_Grenz%C3%BCbertritte_w%C3%A4hrend_der_Fl%C3%BCchtlingskrise_in_S%C3%BCd%C3%B6sterreich_2015

¹² The information is available at: <https://steiermark.orf.at/news/stories/2920900/>

Since 2015/2016 asylum seekers are housed in Strass, like in many other villages in Styria¹³. If it is possible for them, they move to bigger cities like Graz or Vienna. This led to a substantial decline in numbers since 2017. Usually they live in privately owned accommodations; there is no refugee camp or a similar institution in the area.

The role of Strass in the debate on refugees and migration policy

At the moment the fact, that Strass is a village at the Austrian/Slovenian border is more important for its role in nationwide debate and propaganda, than for bare numbers of border crossings, housed refugees, integration projects, civil society activities or other aspects related to the presence of migrants – these matters can be observed all over the federal state of Styria. Of course there is still the topic of the relationship to Slovenia, neighbouring villages and this kind of intercultural exchange or transborder projects (like hiking trails and common cultural events). And of course there is migration between the two countries – since it has been for years, at least since Slovenia joined the EU in 2004. We will focus also on the situation and the developments on the ground in Strass in the following section, but what is central for the specific role of Strass for the bigger picture of the discourse on refugees and migration policy is its savour as (this) one spot where the “refugee crisis” in 2015 became tangible. Like, in the public opinion in Austria, the name “Traiskirchen” is connected to the topic of refugees and integration because of the reception centre there, the name “Spielfeld” (a part of the municipality Strass) is connected to the massive influx of refugees to Austria (and the EU) which was perceived by some as an invasion. This can be shown e.g. by events like demonstrations at the border by right wing groups (e.g. the „Identitäre Bewegung“ which can be seen as Austrian branch of the „Génération Identitaire“ / „Bloc Identitaire“ in France) and respective counter demonstration¹⁴ or artistic references: Also cultural events in Graz (the next bigger city) used the pun „ein Spielfeld für Flüchtlingspolitik“ - which is the name of the village at the border, but also means „court“ or „playing field“¹⁵. Furthermore this connotation becomes visible (and reinforced) by manoeuvres like „pro borders“ which was already mentioned above and is also transferred in the strong discourse on security and (border) protection in Austrian politics and visible boldly in the motto of Austrias EU presidency „a Europe that protects“¹⁶, where also the „fight against illegal migration“ is a number one priority. Connections between the occurrences in Spielfeld (and therefore Strass) and these priorities are evident, also for international media¹⁷

- **Rezente Entwicklungen in Niederösterreich und Traiskirchen**

¹³ Styria is a federal state in the southern part of Austria.

¹⁴ The information is available

at:www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20151105_OTS0123/spielfeld-demonstration-gegen-naziaufmarsch-am-15-november or <http://no-racism.net/article/4983>

¹⁵ The information is available at:

www.meinbezirk.at/graz/c-lokales/der-lend-wird-jetzt-zum-grossen-spielfeld_a1721340

¹⁶ The information is available at: <https://www.eu2018.at/agenda-priorities/priorities.html>

¹⁷ The information is available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45558510>

- Waldhäusl-Petition
<https://www.openpetition.eu/at/petition/online/ruecktritt-waldhaeusls-und-ruecknahme-seiner-asylanordnungen>
- NSA/Waldhäusl: FPÖ-Landesrat beauftragte private Securityfirma mit Beratung abgelehnter Asylwerber.
<https://kurier.at/chronik/niederoesterreich/landesrat-gottfried-waldhaeusl-und-die-nsa/400052978>
- Situation in Asylwerberheimen in Niederösterreich: In immer mehr niederösterreichischen Asylquartieren bekommen Flüchtlinge fertige Mahlzeiten vorgesetzt. In einem Gasthof herrscht – auch deshalb – Mangel
https://mobil.derstandard.at/2000091363517/Zu-wenig-zu-Essen-im-Asylwerber-Gasthof?fbclid=IwAR3W_hwTz2VXsR45MoFwwW-_tE5O0QL5xqMPiT_HkFsDHBVWIEpMHrSutc40
- Niederösterreich schafft Sammelquartiere für "Illegale"
https://derstandard.at/2000078860049/Niederoesterreich-schafft-Sammelquartiere-fuer-Illegale?fbclid=IwAR3_OyyvN1Un4TgnF6NgRmC372Fg524AEPOtSDyz9KSKpIYeNJZY79jLW2E
-
-
- **Ö tritt dem UN-Migrationspakt nicht bei**
<https://diepresse.com/home/ausland/aussenpolitik/5521946/Oesterreich-steigt-aus-Migrationspakt-der-UNO-aus>
- <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/10/31/austria-rejects-un-migration-pact-defends-national-sovereignty/>
- Kickl-Pläne: Geplantes **Ende unabhängiger Rechtsberatung durch NGOs**, Gründung einer Bundesagentur
<https://derstandard.at/2000090022808/Rechtsberatung-fuer-Asylwerber-Was-kaputt-gemacht-wird>
- Umstrittene Abschiebung in Vorarlberg: Kurz betonte mehrfach, dass Vorarlberger dafür verantwortlich seien, dass eine schwangere Mutter von Vater und Kind getrennt worden sei - derstandard.at/2000091499553/Asyl-Kurz-attackiert-Vorarlberg
<https://derstandard.at/2000091499553/Asyl-Kurz-attackiert-Vorarlberg>

Austria's integration policy and responsible bodies for the integration process

Integration was a long-neglected area of Austrian politics. For a long time, the idea of a temporary immigration of "migrant workers" was established, according to which foreigners would not stay in Austria for long. The need to develop policies on the social integration of the labour force was not seen. At the federal level integration policy efforts began only 40 years after the beginning of "guest worker immigration" with the so-called "integration agreement" in the Settlement and Residence Act in 2002. New immigrants from third countries are thus obliged to participate in German and integration courses.

In 2010, the National Action Plan for Integration (NAP.I), which outlined the guidelines for an integration policy, was adopted. It contains a detailed catalog of general integration policy guidelines, challenges and goals and its implementation is supported by an expert panel on integration. Also in 2010, a continuous integration monitoring at federal level was established, which uses 25 indicators to trace the course of integration processes.

In 2014, responsibility for integration policy was transferred from the Federal Ministry of the Interior to the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (BMEIA). The BMI is responsible for all agendas related to migration, asylum, flight and residence, the BMEIA for all issues related to integration.

In recent years, Austria has caught up with integration policy, given content and ideas to integration policy, and also framed it institutionally. The Foreign Minister is also the Minister of Integration, the different local authorities cooperate in an integration advisory board and the Austrian Integration Fund has become an important player in the implementation of the Integration Agreement.

According to experts (Fassmann 2015), the objectively measurable integration as well as the subjective perceived quality of living together in Austria has improved significantly. Nevertheless, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) 2015, which sees Austria in the European midfield (ranked 20 out of 38 in 2015), attests great development potential in the area of anti-discrimination policy and insufficient opportunities for political participation.

Immigration governance in Austria – the institutional framework

Ministries and Associated Bodies

The **Federal Ministry of the Interior** holds the responsibility for asylum and migration policies. It has established the so-called **Migration Council for Austria**, which consists of experts from academia and public life and assists with the development of a comprehensive migration strategy. The first instance authority in asylum procedures is the **Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum**. It is under the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. **Police officers** and the **police administrations of the provinces** are also under the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and play an important role in the implementation and execution of tasks in the field of asylum and migration.

The **Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs** is specifically responsible for integration issues. The **Austrian Integration Fund** supports recognized refugees and migrants in their integration process. The **Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection** is inter alia responsible for labour market policies and, therefore, also for policies linked to employment of foreigners. The **Public Employment Service Austria** is the leading provider of labour market related services and therefore in charge of the issuance and administration of work permits.

The **provinces** hold joint competencies with the Federal State in the area of temporarily granted basic welfare support for aliens in need of assistance and protection.

Following **courts** have jurisdiction in the field of asylum and migration: The **Federal and provincial Administrative Courts**, the **Administrative High Court** and the **Constitutional Court**.

Other Important Actors

In addition to the state actors a wide range of other actors also play an important role by influencing and implementing migration and asylum policies in Austria. These include the **Social Partners**¹⁸,

¹⁸ They are involved in the area of labour market policies and have contributed to the introduction of the current criteria-based system of immigration for qualified migrants

international organizations¹⁹, non-governmental organizations (NGOs)²⁰, **immigrant community associations and organizations conducting research**²¹ in the field of asylum and migration.

Immigration and Civil Society

Public opinion on immigration issues at the national level

According to polls the public opinion on issues like integration, migration and asylum seekers changed a lot in Austria in the recent years. Numbers can be found in the “statistical yearbook on migration and integration”, published by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF, Österreichischer Integrationsfonds). For their survey Austrians without migrant background were asked what they think how integration in Austria is working out in general. There is a positive trend over the years 2010 (31 % responding it’s working in general), 2015 (41 %) and 2018 (45 %), but if one examines the numbers a little closer, a different picture becomes clear: 2017 there were 36,5 % positive answers, 2016 48,1 %. Experts²² state that this variations over time can be explained by policy changes like the National Action Plan on Integration.

There is no sufficient data published in this surveys to evaluate the impact of the “refugee crisis” on public opinion. What can be observed is, that right wing parties are getting more popular²³ and that the atmosphere in political discussions worsened since 2015. Even though the share of Austrians with a hostile attitude against migrants did not rise, opinions of this kind are strengthened²⁴. Here a general trend in the EU can be observed in Austria too. But there are also differences to other countries: On the one hand Austrians seem to be open for

¹⁹ These include UNHCR, IOM, which was nominated as National Contact Point Austria in the European Migration Network by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and ICMPD.

²⁰ Examples are Asyl in Not, Asylkoordination, Caritas, Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst, Flüchtlingsprojekt Ute Bock, helping hands, Integrationshaus, Austrian Red Cross, Verein menschen.leben, Verein Menschenrechte Österreich, Volkshilfe Österreich and many more.

²¹ Some examples are the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, the Austrian Human Rights Institute, the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and various universities.

²² Dr. Anna Faustmann at the Department for Migration and Globalisation, Danube University Krems said so in an interview with Forbes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/freylindsay/2018/09/17/austrian-immigration-activists-energized-but-opinion-all-over-the-place/#12b303cd21a1>

²³ In 2017, the FPÖ reached values of up to 27 percent.

<https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-10/wahlkampf-oesterreich-migration-rechtspopulismus>

²⁴ The information is available at:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/freylindsay/2018/09/17/austrian-immigration-activists-energized-but-opinion-all-over-the-place/#12b303cd21a1>

far right positions, partly caused by bad reappraisal of the Nazi regime during World War II²⁵ – on the other hand right wing populism spread quite successfully into the average population (this process was enhanced by the fact that the major parties tried to copy the frames and claims of the political right).

Austrians have high expectations regarding the EU: 72 % would like to see more measures in the field of migration on EU-level²⁶, whereas there is a massive mistrust²⁷ against the own government according to a recent poll: 630 persons were surveyed, who started to support migrants during the big influx of refugees in 2015 / 2016. They have various backgrounds from all fields of society and they reported “disappointed expectations” as Günter Ogris (social research institute SORA, which conducted the research in Summer 2018) summarized the results. In 2015 volunteers followed the appeals to help arriving asylum seekers at the borders and on their way through Austria. Now they realized “that their commitment in solidarity is questioned”. When asked how they see the refugee relief in their respective municipality, 26 % responded, that it made them “proud” and 39 % saw it “confidently”. With “concern” or “anger” responded just 22% respectively eight percent. But there is a completely different picture when we look at the national level: “proud” are seven percent here and “confidently” 19 %, whereas 53 % answered with “concern” and 18% with “anger”. The “biggest difficulties respectively concerns” regarding refugees stem from the atmosphere and general discourse according to those polled: the “continued media coverage” (57 %), the “sentiment among the population” (49 %). Respondents see their state's involvement in aid to refugees very differently: on a scale of one to five, they rated the situation in Vienna 59 percent with a grade of one to three, 39 percent with a four or five. In Lower Austria, where Gottfried Waldhäusl of the FPÖ is responsible for asylum, only 36 percent gave grades one, two or three - 62 percent grades four or five. Two percent each did not answer²⁸. A international research project²⁹ on migration and public opinion, carried out in seven EU

²⁵ The information is available in an Interview with Kenan Güngör in the German newspaper: “Die Zeit”: <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-10/wahlkampf-oesterreich-migration-rechtspopulismus>

²⁶ The information is available in a Press release: https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20180918_OTS0112/ein-ergebnisorientiertes-europa-won-sich-oesterreicherinnen-mehr-massnahmen-auf-eu-ebene-erwarten

²⁷ The information is available at: derstandard.at/2000087680116/Stimmung-in-Bevoelkerung-fuer-Fluechtlingshelfer-grosses-Problem

²⁸ The information is available at: derstandard.at/2000087680116/Stimmung-in-Bevoelkerung-fuer-Fluechtlingshelfer-grosses-Problem

²⁹ The information is available at: <https://derstandard.at/2000078332643/Migration-und-oeffentliche-Meinung-Die-vergessene-Mitte-der-Bevoelkerung>

countries, shows that media is not able to approach a big share of the population, which is concerned regarding the issue. They are left alone with their questions and worries. Journalists and independent media have to approach these masses, instead of leaving the field to populist media and parties. The question, which is still open and worth another research, is: how is this possible?

Public opinion on immigration issues at the local level in Traiskirchen and Strass

People in Traiskirchen are neither hostile nor afraid of refugees. In contrast to many other people in Austria who did not experience this until 2015, the concrete visibility of the refugees' reality is not new to them. The reception center has been around for years in the city and some of the interviewees were always involved with refugees, especially when the situation in the "camp" got out of hand, it was overloaded. Still, they all confirmed, that it never had been as bad as in 2015. There are no apparent visible movements against refugees directly in Traiskirchen. But what does exist are hostile actions in social media against projects like the "Garden of Encounter" or "connect.traiskirchen."

The situation in Strass is different. In discussions at public events (which were also part of the project "Snapshots From The Borders") a refusing attitude towards refugees clashed with the views of people who welcomed the new fellow citizens. In interviews activists (mostly from the ARGE Flüchtlingspartnerschaften) also told about incidents in the local school, including racial discrimination. Sometimes the villagers make a distinction between migrants, that arrived in the 1990ies and the refugees, who arrived since 2015 – even though the respective people may in both cases come from non-european countries and struggle in speaking German. **It seems like integration takes a long time and is very sensitive to the number of new migrants.** The mayor of Strass does not argue for a complete stop of refugee- or migrant reception, but he advocates the position that we have to avoid migrant flows towards the EU like the one in 2015 at any rate. This reflects the "never again"-attitude described above. On the other hand there are people active in helping refugees for more than three years now, driven by contrary views.

Representation of immigration in society

An EU-wide study³⁰ (ter Wal 2002) shows that people with migrant background are represented in the media in a negative way and are associated with violence and crime in all EU member states. Austria is no exception in this regard. The EUMC study states that there is a discourse on economic refugees coming from Bulgaria since 1989 (fall of the Iron Curtain). During the war in Bosnia in 1993 refugees were always represented as criminals by the popular press (especially the “Neue Kronen Zeitung”³¹), like black migrants as drug dealer since the 1990ies. But it can be observed that using stereotypes and racist attributions is not limited to the popular press, but prevalent in almost all the media in Austria.

A study by the Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds) on „media and the refugee issue“ (“Medienanalyse zur Flüchtlingsthematik”)³² examined different media between August 2015 and Juli 2016. Conclusions are:

- dominant topics associated to refugees changed from people smuggling and the lack of accomodation to crime, sex assault and terror
- the accent changed drastically to the worse: there were „friendly“ reports and stories of compassion in the beginning, but with the terrorist attacks in Paris and the increase of arrivals in Austria in 2015 the accents changed to negative, even more after the events in Cologne on new years eve.
- positive reports were mainly on the welcome culture, examples of successful integration, flight and the search for refugee camps.
- a separation in distinction of „victims“ and „offenders“ was observed: Women and children were represented as victims quite often, men as offenders.

³⁰ Done on behalf of The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) who commissioned it, as negative stereotyping of migrants in the media can lead to an increase in racist attitudes in the population.

³¹ According to the Austrian edition control, the "Neue Kronen Zeitung" is Austria's highest-circulation daily newspaper and also the national leader in ePaper sales. The information is available in the following press release:

https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20180222_OT50082/oeak-2017-die-krone-ist-erneut-die-nr1-tageszeitung-in-allen-kennzahlen

³² The information is available at:

https://www.integrationsfonds.at/fileadmin/content/AT/Downloads/Publikationen/2016_OEIF_Medienanalyse_Hayek.pdf

- The origin of refugees involved a certain picture too: Syrian refugees were seen as (more legitimate) war refugees, while there were more negative reports, often associated with criminal acts, on people from Afghanistan,.

In the period of this study the topic of refugees was the most important issue in Austrian politics, even more important than elections and their outcome. This shows how difficult it was (and still is) for political parties to bring other topics on the agenda.

Actors and Actions of the Civil Society

Partnership between Civil Society (CS), local authorities and citizens focus on civil society actors. How many associations are involved in the territory? How they work together? What are the main activities on immigration issues? How local authorities and CS work together? The decision-making system? The role of actors and stakeholders? What they do together (meetings, debates, events, welcome structures)?

Essential players in 2015³³ according to a study done NPO Competence Center at the Vienna University of Economics were:

- large relief and relief organizations³⁴ and associations that deal with the supply and integration of refugees³⁵
- newly founded grassroots initiatives
- state actors³⁶
- dedicated individuals³⁷
- private companies³⁸

³³ according to. Simsa (2016: 15)

³⁴ These were, for example, the Red Cross and the Workers Samaritan Federation, which mainly took the role of emergency care.

³⁵ Like People's Aid (Volkshilfe), Caritas, Diakonie, Hilfswerk, children's friends (Kinderfreunde).

³⁶ Above all, facilities at federal and state level, such as the Austrian Federal Railways, the police, the interior ministry, the army and various communities that were particularly affected by the crisis.

³⁷ This refers to the large number of self-organized volunteers, without affiliation to NPOs and civil society initiatives.

³⁸ This offered support primarily through donations and corporate volunteering.

Who was active in Spielfeld? ³⁹	Who was active in Traiskirchen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Border Crossing Spielfeld⁴⁰ ● Gib mir deine Hand⁴¹ ● ARGE Flüchtlingspatenschaften⁴² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Welcoming Organization ● connect.traiskirchen ● Newbornbaskets⁴³ ● Deutschkurs für Traiskirchen⁴⁴

Who is the civil society that committed itself in 2015 and beyond?

An empirical study⁴⁵ among 1,500 participants in Austria provides answers to the question of **who the people are** who support refugees since the summer of 2015. The majority of them are **female (72.4%)**, they are **above average educated, are social climbers**, but have an average income⁴⁶. From the data, it can be concluded that they were sensitized by a high proportion of primary and secondary experiences with escape. Many of them were already active in civil society. They emphasize their social and societal responsibility. From the **feeling of having to do something**, they used their experiences and networking for active help. Although not in the same intensity, they remained an active part of civil society initiatives. Independent and self-organized activities were a focal point. There was also a tendency of **skepticism towards large organizations** and (state) institutions in the data. **Social media**⁴⁷ support the potential of self-directed action and open up new civil society ways of participation. This was true for all ages.

What did they do?

³⁹ Since the groups in Strass and Traiskirchen fluctuated strongly, we can only name the most visible.
⁴⁰ More information is available at: <https://www.spendeninfo.at/border-crossing-spielfeld+2500+1117523>
⁴¹ More information is available at: <https://www.spendeninfo.at/gib-mir-deine-hand+2500+1117524>
⁴² More information is available at: <https://www.spendeninfo.at/fluechtlingspatenschaft-strass-spielfeld+2500+1117527>
⁴³ <https://www.spendeninfo.at/newbornbaskets+2500+1115958>
⁴⁴ <https://deutschkursfuertraiskirchen.wordpress.com/>
⁴⁵ The study was conducted 2016 and 2017 by the research institute of civil society. It is available at: https://zivilgesellschaft.wien/application/files/5715/1264/6719/Zivilgesellschaft_Studie_Folder_Zsgf_122017_komp.pdf
⁴⁶ One-third only had a monthly income of less than 1,500 euros net.
⁴⁷ For Train of Hope (45.440 Likes on Facebook), social media were particularly important in the organization, and the project connect.traiskirchen (7.504 Likes on Facebook) quickly had more coverage on Facebook than the parent organization Kinderfreunde. The site of "Happy Thank You More Please", another initiative that has existed since 2015, has 8.678 Likes on Facebook

They organized (non-cash) donations such as food, medicines, hygiene items, clothing, infrastructure such as PCs or rooms, as well as monetary donations. In addition, they did translation work, mediated housing in shared apartments or private apartments, taught German and offered other educational measures⁴⁸ and encouraged meetings between refugees and local people by offering recreational activities. In addition, they were still active in the field of health and mental health and legal advice. (Simsa 2016: 17-18)

Good practices at local level

Good practice 1: connect.traiskirchen

connect.traiskirchen was a project realized by an association called „Kinderfreunde“ (which would mean friends of children) in Traiskirchen and offered an opportunity for leisure time and studying for young refugees. It was a necessary measure in a situation, where an estimated number of nearly 1.600 unaccompanied minor refugees⁴⁹, aged from 14 to 17, stayed in the reception center. Many of them experienced horrible situations before they arrived in Austria and had to wait for decisions on their placement and accommodation in Austria. In this period of time there was no school, no leisure opportunities, no work, no familiar social environment – and thus a burdening situation for them.⁵⁰ The main activity of connect.traiskirchen was to offer child care once a week – first in the ice rink, then in a old factory building. The number of youngsters gathering for playing football, learning German, eating together or playing chess⁵¹ reached 800 to 900 at maximum. All child care, support and coaching was done by volunteers, there was just one employed person for the general organization of the project. After 1,5 years – finally – negotiations with states and municipalities all over Austria led to a redistribution of refugees and the need for offers like connect.traiskirchen declined. This was a relief also because the resources of the volunteers

⁴⁸ In addition to language courses, a quantitative survey also included computer courses, various workshops (asylum, job market, health, gender, ...), cultural offers, support for formal school leaving certificates and learning support for children and adults.

⁴⁹ The situation in the first reception center in the summer of 2015 was inhumane. A board of the Ombudsman inspecting the camp on 15/07/2015 found 3,828 people in the camp, half of whom had no bed, 1,588 were unaccompanied minor refugees. There were deficiencies in hygiene and medical care. The information is available at: <https://volksanwaltschaft.gv.at/artikel/versorgung-von-umf-situation-in-traiskirchen-unertraeglich>

⁵⁰ The information is available in a press release at:

https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20150723_OTS0031/connecttraiskirchen-bildungs-und-fr-eizeitangebote-fuer-jugendliche-fluechtlinge

⁵¹ A wide range of activities were offered: painting, crafting, playing cards, doing woodwork, playing table football, laying mosaics, carving, climbing, making music, jumping trampoline.

and the association were exhausted.

Preconditions

The project would not have been possible without the really strong dedication of many, many volunteers, committing themselves to the issue for a longer time. Helpful was also the mixture of people who supported connect.traiskirchen: youngsters from the town, boy scouts, people from the parish and retired ones. It can be estimated that this would be much harder now, since the atmosphere and the public opinion changed a lot in regard to migration (see Simsa 2016: 347). Another precondition was the good collaboration between the municipality and the association Kinderfreunde. This made it possible for the Kinderfreunde to have access to room or transport possibilities.

What went very well?

Communication: It started with rather informal requests in the private sphere of members of the Kinderfreunde for child care or contributions. But then the idea spread quickly by word of mouth. So the communication on the project and specific appeals had to be done in a more structured way: other associations and companies were asked for donations and contributions, a facebook-page was set up and a clear telephone and e-mail contact was made available.

Broaden the effect: The organizing people were successful in addressing the average citizens of Traiskirchen, even those who were sceptical towards refugees. Those were invited to come and watch or contribute with their particular skills or ideas. Also volunteers (or interested people) sometimes come without bringing along a certain offer like a play or coaching – connect.traiskirchen became a space for meeting people, getting to know each other, talking or just killing time - providing a “safe space” where people of different backgrounds could meet and have fun together for an afternoon.

Limits

One challenging aspect of the project was the infrastructure (sanitary facility, water supply, power supply, heating). Another one was team building and volunteer turnover – on the one hand it was necessary to have a stable offer (e.g. for German classes), on the other hand variety and diversity was appreciated. A very important and also challenging factor were (missing) soft skills. In an environment of a bulk of pubescent men, with lacking supervision for volunteers, conflicts were not avoidable too.

Conclusion

connect.traiskirchen inspired many other similar projects all over Austria. Still active are: connect.ottakring, connect.leopoldstadt, connect.steinbrunn, connect.graz-wetzelsdorf, connect.donaustadt, connect.hietzing, connect.mariahilf, connect.döbriach. And a very important fact (regarding sustainability of the project) is, that some other projects – and good practices – that are still present in Traiskirchen, like the Garden of Encounters or the „Vogelspielplatz“ (playground in the shape of a bird) were invented at connect.traiskirchen. This was possible because the target group was accessible there, one could meet on "neutral ground" - in contrast to the initial reception centre, which one was not allowed to enter.

Good practice 2: Garten der Begegnung/Garden of Encounters (Traiskirchen)⁵²

The idea for the “The Garden of Encounters” was born in the summer of 2015, at the peak of the refugee crisis, when thousands of refugees camped in the streets of Traiskirchen, waiting to apply for asylum. A plot of cultivated land was dedicated to the project by the municipality and farming and gardening was started in the spring of 2016.

⁵² <https://www.gartenderbegegnung.com/>

Type of engagement

The urban gardening project brings together the local community with young refugees from the nearby refugee camp. Asylum seekers and residents of Traiskirchen work together: they dig seedlings into the ground, weed, harvest fruits, herbs and vegetables and get to know each other. In addition to the volunteers from the city, there are also three school classes and a retirement home in Traiskirchen gardening there. The core team consists of 10-15 refugees who garden every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. New refugees come again and again from the nearby camp.

Type of activities

Everyone is welcome: Volunteers, refugees and locals come together three times a week to grow, cultivate and harvest fruits, vegetables and herbs. The agricultural products are sold for donations every Saturday. What isn't sold goes to the local cooperative market "the good store", where disadvantaged citizens are entitled to get stock that would otherwise go to waste. The highlight of this week is when all the helpers enjoy a meal together on Fridays. Harvested fruits and vegetables are prepared in the field kitchen outside the little camping hut, and the self-made pal-ette furniture provides a cozy setting on the field.

There are regular festivals: the Newroz Kurdish New Year, once in the summer, once in the fall and every time someone receives a positive asylum.

In consultation with the community, the refugees from the Garden of Encounter throughout Traiskirchen plant fruit trees of old, endangered varieties. So the refugees can give something back to the city.

An additional place was established with the "Sewing Factory", where the young refugees first started to alter sleeves and pants from donated clothes. Since then, it has become a busy spot with seven sewing machine stations and many fabric ideas. Made-to-measure button-down shirts are created here, as well as bags, tool belts and many other unique items.

Methods

"The Garden of Encounters" aims to integrate refugees with Austrian people and culture through the shared work in the field and provides a safe environment for newcomers. Furthermore, the refugees spend their time on something positive and productive while waiting for their asylum process to proceed. It helps them to learn German, get to know the

Austrian culture and make new friends.

Good practice 3: Mommy's Coffee Time (Traiskirchen)

For now more than three years week by week families of refugees with their children meet with a Austrian supporter in a tavern, owned by the mayor of Traiskirchen.

How did it start?

The project was founded by a pedagogue who read in newspaper articles that mother have to sleep unsheltered with their babies in Traiskirchen in June 2015. She started to build small beds for babies out of laundry baskets and collected blankets from her friends and family. At the same time she started to look for midwives, physiotherapists,

psychologists and interpreters in order to support and advise mothers and pregnant women.

The project started with a “mobile station” in Traiskirchen – because there was no permission to set up any structure in public space overnight. Two months later the mayor opened his “Heurigen” (a tavern wine cellar typical for the region) for pregnant women and babies, which was an important improvement, because it created a space for intercommunication and also as protection against the low temperatures of the approaching autumn. Supporters of the project started to bring tea, coffee or toys and multilingual leaflets were produced, explaining the idea and basic rules.

What is happening now?

In the course of time a community grew out of the project. There is a stable group of approximately 20 families, who meet once a week in Traiskirchen. Commodity contributions keep playing an important role for many of them, but Mommy's Coffee Time also functions as social meeting point. What started as a safe space for mothers and their babies became a meeting place and hub for families, including the fathers, and friends. They can get support in bureaucratic affairs and consulting in various questions there and become a member of a community which offers mutual support. Mommys Coffee Time offers a space to talk about needs and meet like-minded people. What is central for the project and the success so far, is the approach of the founder – she puts self-determination and dignity of the refugees first. This definitely also qualifies the project as a good practice, where many success factors can be evaluated. A charity-style approach of helping “the poor mothers” in the beginning transformed to a now vivid and confident group of people, coming together, sharing homemade cake and doing the dishes together. The founder is still present and always anxious to convey the rules of society in Austria. Her dedication (20 hours per week of unpaid work) are crucial for the project, besides her contacts and her organizational skills.

Good practice 4: ARGE Flüchtlingspatenschaften/Working group refugee sponsorships (Strass)

In 2015 a group of people got together with the aim of helping refugees in their often desperate situation, when they arrived at the border or crossed the border. This group is still active, although the situation changed in the mean time. It's a very informal group, now active in a wider area around Strass and Leibnitz, but it's the most important player in the civil society when it comes to the topic of migration. Many important insights on the situation of refugees and challenges in the process of integration of new inhabitants can be acquired through their experience (see #also following section).

What makes them a good practice example?

First of all, they are very effective in helping refugees e.g. with legal support or language courses. Secondly, they managed to adapt to the changed situation and are still active, after more than 3 years. Their activities changed from frontline assistance to general support and consulting. And finally their activities and engagement are proof that supporting integration processes does not need to cost vast sums of money and can be done in an unbureaucratic way (a fact also claimed by Maier/Ortner 2017).

The group is called „ARGE Flüchtlingspatenschaften Südsteiermark“ (which could be translated as „working group for refugee mentoring“) and what they do can be described as: helping refugees in the area in every possible way. This means: support in bureaucratic affairs, medical care (there is also a doctor in the group), organizing german classes or language exchange, help with searching for jobs, legal advice and awareness-raising among the austrian citizens and promoting cultural exchange. All of this work is possible because it's built on the personal network of the members of the group – as it was described: „in the countryside you know each other“ – and because they started their work in 2015, gained much experience and – first and foremost – came to know a lot of refugees. So they can call a „mentor“ if they need help or an advice. Basically the whole initiative is based on a network of personal contacts, trust and solidarity. What members of the ARGE Flüchtlingspatenschaften described as the most important aim (and solution) is: to build

„bridges between our hearts“ - we should get aware of our commonalities and relieve fears. (# Interview mit Gitta Rupp on September 22nd 2018)

Exploring new possibilities/projects and problems to implement good practices/projects

Strass

There are two specific ideas that received positive feedback in various conversations. The first one arose from project activity of „Snapshots From The Borders“: A movie screening took place as a part of the campaign „No More Brick in the Wall“ and the audience got enthusiastic about the idea of organizing such events on a regular basis. Since the campaign will focus more and more on national and EU- level, this kind of low-threshold public events in the border towns should not be neglected at the same time.

The second idea was to arrange workshops on migration and intercultural competence for pupils in the local school in Strass – here many of the project activities focus on exchange between experts and decision makers, but not so much on addressing the needs of the average citizens. Even teachers don't ask for more trainings lead by experts, but for experts working with the pupils directly. (Interview with Ingrid Ullly on 1st of October)

A third suggestion was made by a member of the ARGE Flüchtlingspartnerschaften by expressing the need for more background information on the countries of origin of the refugees. This is expected to create more understanding among the residents of the villages in the area. Delivering the background information could (and should) be accomplished by different means, may it be exhibitions, lectures, movies, other cultural events or collaboration with media, associations or companies.

Traiskirchen

Since 2015, the political mood in the country has changed (Simsa 2016: 347). In November 2014, today's Federal Chancellor, as then Secretary of State for Integration, called for more welcoming culture⁵³. Nearly a year later, he argued for an "end to the invitation policy".

A recent survey shows that the many activists who were involved at the time and that are still doing so intensively today, perceive the "continuing media coverage" (57%) and the "mood in the population" (49%) as more burdensome than the lack of psychological support.

⁵³ The information is available at:

https://diepresse.com/home/politik/innenpolitik/4592895/Kurz_Wir-haben-zu-wenig-Willkommenskultur

Closer cooperation and networking of various initiatives and associations would therefore be important, so that these people also feel **recognition** for their social commitment. At the national level, human dignity Austria⁵⁴ is trying to make a positive contribution towards networking here. In Traiskirchen itself, it is planned that in cooperation between the garden of the meeting and the municipality a workshop for closer networking and knowledge exchange on the local level should take place.

The implementation of further (integration) projects in Traiskirchen seems difficult at present - this has several factors: The city is a transit point, most of the refugees who are in the city do not arrive here, but are "in transit" - they are waiting in the reception center for distribution to the federal states.

Since the acute overcrowding of the institution is now over again and the commitment of activists now on a different level (namely the longer-term accompaniment of the arrived in the integration process) is in demand, it would be especially exciting to **create a space** for this, where activists and refugees in a relaxed atmosphere - regardless of the weather.⁵⁵

Limits of action and challenges for implementation of projects and practices in Strass and Traiskirchen

Neither in Strass nor in Traiskirchen do refugees stay for a long time. In Traiskirchen they wait for their distribution to the federal states of Austria, which usually only takes a few months. This means there are always a large number of refugees on the ground, but this fluctuates greatly when analyzing inflows and outflows per week. (Interview with mayor Andreas Babler, 12.10.2018)

In Strass, refugees do not settle permanently, because there are not enough options for them in terms of German language courses, work opportunities or community from their own country. Both places are therefore not the ideal place to implement long-term integration projects. Nevertheless, this was especially addressed in Traiskirchen.

In Traiskirchen, access to the first reception center is also severely restricted, which limits the possibilities of intervention for the township and for activists. Communication with the initial

⁵⁴ In German: "Menschenwürde Österreich": <https://www.mwoe.at/>

⁵⁵ Years ago there was a book project on Traiskirchen (Engelbert, Hausegger, Oberleitner, Weingrill 2010) by three artists. In cooperation with the city library Traiskirchen, they wanted to stimulate the creation of an integrative library in the Federal Care Office. 10% of every book sold went into the project. But eight years later, the funding still seems to be unfinished or the project has fallen asleep.

reception center has been very difficult in the past, responsibilities in the initial reception center are complex. Inquiries (such as for interviews to the present study), in reference to the Ministry of the Interior as a competent body, come to nothing.

- **Proposals:**

- Rooms where one can meet refugees on neutral ground would facilitate the important work of many activists.

- A strategic approach with intensive networking of all local players

- A regularly meeting platform in which the different interests of all involved can be discussed

Integration and citizenship

Social protection of asylum seekers

Primary care: Asylum seekers are allowed to work only to a very limited extent during the current asylum procedure in Austria. If they have neither money nor other assets, they are granted "primary care"⁵⁶, which ensures a decent living, but is significantly lower than social benefits for Austrians. It amounts to 320 EUR per month for accommodation, meals, electricity and all other costs for a person of full age⁵⁷. To get this, you have to prove that you pay rent. Asylum seekers living in organized full-board accommodation receive EUR 40 per person per month for personal expenses. The owner of the accommodation gets directly from the state 21 EUR per person. In self-catering quarters between 3.50 EUR and 6.50 per day are paid directly to the refugees for their own meals.

Access to minimum income: Only recognized refugees are entitled to minimum income in Austria. The height of the amount and the award is regulated differently from state to state.⁵⁸

Access to education: All children under the age of 15 are required to attend school in Austria, regardless of their residence status (granted asylum, subsidiary protection or ongoing asylum procedure). Children who do not speak German well can - for max. 2 years - be classified as "extraordinary students" meaning that they do not have to take exams, but still attend classes and can even progress to the next grade. Schools receive funding from the state to support such students, for example through German language courses. Young people from the age of

⁵⁶ Called "Grundversorgung" in German.

⁵⁷ This is, if asylum seekers do not live in organized accommodation.

⁵⁸ The information is available at:

http://www.unhcr.org/dach/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2018/01/AT_UNHCR_Fragen-und-Antworten_2017.pdf

15 have a harder time, especially if they do not speak German well: secondary schools are not obliged to accept them, other educational offers (such as literacy or basic education courses, compulsory schooling and transitional classes) are available, but they vary according to state. Often there are not enough places or the access depends on the residence status.⁵⁹

Language learning Since 2015, many Austrians are volunteering in teaching German. Access to state-funded German courses is very restrictive: Until recently asylum seekers had no claim to a German course - since 1.9.2018⁶⁰ they are entitled to a (state-funded) German course, but only if they have a "high probability of recognition" for their application for asylum.

Access to the health care system Asylum seekers are covered by health insurance in Austria and are exempt from prescription fees. They are entitled to the same benefits of the health insurance as Austrians. Barriers in the health system exist for refugees, especially in the area of information, communication and language: Patients do not know where to go with which problems, video interpreting services are charged and they are only offered to physicians in private practice, but not for hospitals. There are also waiting periods of up to one year for psychotherapeutic therapy places for traumatized refugees.⁶¹

Access to the labor market Recognized refugees and those with subsidiary protection have full access to the labor market. For asylum seekers it is hardly possible to get a work permit.

How long is the asylum process? The asylum process was 16,5 months on average according to the last Integration report of the Ministry of Interior⁶². If, however, only those asylum procedures applied for and decided after 1.7.2016 are considered, the average length of proceedings is 6.6 months in the first instance. Legally, the Federal Office for Aliens and Asylum must decide as soon as possible, at the latest 6 months from the date of asylum application. After this period has expired, the asylum seeker can bring in a complaint of default. Around 40 % of all first instance asylum decisions are revoked⁶³. 41,401 asylum decisions of the second instance between 2014 and 2018 were recently systematically analyzed by an IT consultant. The result raises questions about the independence of judges and the high error rate. For example, more and more asylum applications have been rejected

⁵⁹ The information is available at:

http://www.unhcr.org/dach/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2018/01/AT_UNHCR_Fragen-und-Antworten_2017.pdf, p. 20

⁶⁰ This happened when the Aliens Act Amendment 2018 (FrÄG 2018) BGBl. I No. 56/2018 of 01.09.2018) entered into force.

⁶¹ The information is available at:

http://medienservicestelle.at/migration_bewegt/2016/04/07/medizinische-versorgung-von-fluechtlingen-in-oesterreich/

⁶² The report is available at:

https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Integration/Integrationsbericht_2018/Integrationsbericht_2018.pdf the same number is also mentioned in answer to a parliamentary inquiry:

https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/BR/AB-BR/AB-BR_03228/imfname_706081.pdf

⁶³ The information is available at:

<https://kurier.at/politik/inland/asyl-weniger-fluechtlinge-aber-verfahren-dauern-immer-laenger/400024405>

The error rate varies, of course, over time and also in relation to the country of origin, for example, at the beginning of 2016, 78% of all decisions against Afghans were lifted. The information is available at:

<https://www.profil.at/shortlist/oesterreich/fehlerquote-asylbescheide-asyl-afghanistan-10098509>

by Afghans, although international reports and local observers have found no evidence of a security situation in the country. An influence of the political situation in Austria can also be derived theoretically.⁶⁴

How many refugees receive a positive asylum notice? 2017⁶⁵ about half of all decisions about international protection were positive, 2016⁶⁶ one third of asylum procedures ended positive and 2015⁶⁷ it was 40,5 %.

Which actors are working on “integration” issues today?

Lower Austria:

Housing: Diakonie Refugee Service⁶⁸ and Caritas are responsible for care and accommodation in Lower Austria. They divide the area among themselves (Caritas Lower Austria East, Diakonie Nö West).⁶⁹ Apart from these, smaller, local initiatives⁷⁰ to provide housing for refugees exist as well.

Legal Advice: Native-language, independent, free legal advice in asylum and immigration law proceedings for asylum seekers and migrants is offered throughout Austria by the working group legal advice⁷¹, consisting of the two NGOs “Volkshilfe” and “Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst”. However, this is to be abolished and replaced by a newly established "federal agency for care and support." In the future, therefore, the same ministry, which makes decisions in the asylum procedure in the first instance, should also be responsible for the complaints against these decisions.⁷² This represents a frontal attack on the rule of law in the asylum procedure.

⁶⁴ The information is available at:

<https://www.profil.at/shortlist/oesterreich/fehlerquote-asylbescheide-asyl-afghanistan-10098509> and at: <http://www.fairness-asyl.at/ris-datenanalyse/>

⁶⁵ According to the integration report 2018: 27: available online at:

https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Integration/Integrationsbericht_2018/Integrationsbericht_2018.pdf

⁶⁶ According to the integration report 2017:26: available online at:

https://www.lsr-stmk.gv.at/de/Documents/Schulpsychologie/Integrationsbericht_2017.pdf

⁶⁷ According to the integration report 2016: 22: available online at:

https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Integration/Integrationsbericht_2016/Integrationsbericht_2016_WEB.pdf

⁶⁸ In German: “Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst” <https://fluechtlingsdienst.diakonie.at/>

⁶⁹ In information brochure on “primary care” in Lower Austria available at:

<http://www.noel.gv.at/noel/SozialeDienste-Beratung/Grundversorgungsbroschuere.pdf>

⁷⁰ These are for example: Tralalobe <http://www.tralalobe.at/>, Verein menschen.leben.

<http://www.menschen-leben.at/>

⁷¹ In German: Arbeitsgemeinschaft (ARGE) Rechtsberatung

⁷² The information is available at: <https://fluechtlingsdienst.diakonie.at/zur-recht-unabhaengig>

Daneben gibt es noch den Association Human Rights Austria⁷³ (v.a. Rechtsberatung in Richtung Abschiebung, sehr umstritten)

Beschreibung der Situation in den NÖ-Flüchtlingsquartieren? Standard-Artikel⁷⁴ von Irene Brickner? Sachverhaltsdarstellung gegenüber Staatsanwalt? Recherche des Volksanwalts (Ombudsman Board)? [und nur die Spitze des Eisbergs - siehe Dossier.at-Recherche von vor einigen Jahren!]

Styria

Unterbringung in der Steiermark:

Land Steiermark - Referat Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten - Quartiermanagement kümmert sich um Unterkünfte in der **gesamten Steiermark**.

Eine Vielzahl an Flüchtlingsquartieren wird von der **Caritas** in der Steiermark betrieben.

Diakoniewerk Steiermark ist seit über zehn Jahren in der Flüchtlingsbetreuung tätig. Seit 2009 beherbergt und betreut das Diakoniewerk Steiermark auch bis zu 35 unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge in ihrer Jugendeinrichtung in Deutschfeistritz. Im separaten Familienquartier in der nördlich von Graz gelegenen Marktgemeinde kommen bis zu 37 AsylwerberInnen unter.

How is the contact with the local population (are they excluded of the society)?

- In STrass wohl nur die ARGE, oder? - aber auch wenig Bedarf, weil Binnenmigration: Zur Binnenmigration von Flüchtlingen in Österreich siehe profil-ARTikel.⁷⁵
- Welche NGOs gibts in der Steiermark, was machen sie?

Conclusion and recommendations

⁷³ In German: "Verein Menschenrechte Österreich", <http://www.verein-menschenrechte.at/>, mainly active in the areas of legal advice, detention care, return counseling

⁷⁴ The information is available at:

https://mobil.derstandard.at/2000091363517/Zu-wenig-zu-Essen-im-Asylwerber-Gasthof?fbclid=IwAR09-m5Sw04OscHV3qaZBG6JE2b6wdkd8QipB_L6bHR0MQrT3xeTKAJBze8

⁷⁵ The information is available at:

<https://www.profil.at/shortlist/oesterreich/warum-es-fluechtlinge-nach-wien-zieht-8326022>

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