



# The Interplay of Rural Regions, Migration and Legal Frameworks

MATILDE Policy Brief 3

POPULATION & POLICY

## BRIEF No. 3

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## INTRODUCTION

Ager and Strang (2008) define rights and citizenship as the **foundation** of the core domains of integration in their mid-level theory, which was extended and also further adapted within the MATILDE project (Weidinger et al., 2017; Gruber et al. 2020). “Definitions of integration adopted by a nation inevitably depend on that nation’s sense of identity [..]. This sense of identity as a nation incorporates certain values; and these are values that significantly shape the way that a concept such as integration is approached.” (Ager & Strang 2008, 173f.). Following, the MIPEX scores on access to nationality and permanent residence give an **impression on the “nation’s sense of identity”**, because every nation has the **right to self-determine the access to nationality** (Valchars & Bauböck 2021). Regarding to nationality, Sweden achieved the highest score (83 points, which means favourable for migrants; 2nd place in Europe) among the MATILDE countries, while Bulgaria and Austria bring up the rear (with 13 “unfavourable” points; just followed by United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia). As to permanent residence, overall Finland ranked first and Sweden second, whereas Turkey got the lowest rating among the MATILDE countries (Solano & Huddleston 2020).

MATILDE Country	Access to Nationality	Permanent Residence
Austria	13	50
Bulgaria	13	69
Finland	74	96
Germany	42	54
Italy	40	67
Norway	50	71
Spain	30	75
Sweden	83	90
United Kingdom	61	58
Turkey	50	42

Table 1 – MIPEX Points on Access to Nationality for MATILDE countries (Solano & Huddleston 2020).

Based on this wide range of MIPEX points, the hurdles and challenges vary from country to country in the MATILDE project. Nevertheless, in the third policy brief we present policy recommendations to facilitate legal frameworks aiming to increase the positive synergies of migration and rural development. We will discuss required framework conditions in order to benefit from immigration in rural areas. Therefore, elaborated measures and governance processes at all political levels in the MATILDE countries and at European level will focus on the possible changes of legal framework<sup>1</sup>.

## METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS

The main problems and policy recommendations of every MATILDE country are the outcomes of a **continuing analysis process with a multidimensional approach** basing on the results of the previous work packages and policy roundtables with stakeholders at different governmental levels<sup>2</sup>. A **qualitative content analysis after Mayring (2000)** of the MATILDE policy recommendation reports was conducted with dual control principle of the coding. At this stage of analysis, the focus was to identify the most important problems, based on the quantity of coding, in the MATILDE regions. Out of numerous challenges in the areas of integration, corresponding with the integration model after Ager and Strang (2008), the **four with the highest quantity of coding** were selected and refer to the integration areas of rural development, economy and employment, rights and citizenship as well as education. These four topics as well as the related policy recommendations and solutions were **further analysed and clustered in sub topics**. Hence, the four policy briefs base on the results of a qualitative content analysis. In the policy briefs, the arguments are linked to the mentioned MATILDE countries and regions, and good practices as well as possible solutions are presented. The third policy brief is dedicated to the legal frameworks of migration and integration, their impacts on rural areas and the dependency of policy determination and implementation from political majorities, social sentiments, perceptions and narratives.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORKS: CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Challenges and policy recommendations for the integration area of rights and citizenship (Ager & Strang 2008) are mainly discussed at national level, where the most laws are passed. However, they have a huge impact at regional and at local level, where the implementation is mainly done and where the effects become visible. In the MATILDE regions, different challenges such as restrictions and bureaucracy, a lack of standards and their implementation, structural discrimination or negative perception of migrants, as well as a lack of cooperation were identified and, based on that, corresponding policy recommendations were elaborated.



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### Restrictions and Bureaucracy vs. Lack of Standards and Implementation

The qualitative content analysis has shown that e.g. in Austria, Italy, Turkey and the United Kingdom, refugees and in particular asylum seekers are confronted with various **legal restrictions** or implementation hurdles of laws due to the complexity and numerous changes, which are especially pointed out e.g. in Austria and Sweden. In Austria, Italy and the United Kingdom, the migration laws have become **stricter** and more **complex** – in the United Kingdom especially due to the Brexit. In Austria, a centralisation process is noticeable, which not only brings standardisation of processes, but restricts the possibilities for integration in rural regions, as long-standing initiatives are often replaced by a few vendors responding precisely to centralized bidding criteria. Hence, the work of the organisations behind these initiatives is weakened, even though they are important players of integration processes in rural regions. Rural integration processes are hampered in Swedish municipalities when asylum seekers are transferred to other, designated municipalities after being granted asylum. In Turkey, beneficiaries of Temporary Protection Status have difficulties to secure formality. Generally, there is a **lack of quality standards in the asylum procedures, admission and accommodation in the EU Member States** and an ongoing discussion about the Dublin Regulations. Considering that migration and integration are expanding to multilevel policies and that the strong refugee migration since 2015 enabled a EU’s political crisis, multilevel governance is increasingly relevant for migration and integration policy setting - also to counteract de-coupling processes without fully cleared responsibilities and competences between different government levels (vertical setting) and among the departments on each government level (horizontal setting) (Gruber & Rauhut 2022).

To overcome these obstacles that hamper the further integration of migrants in rural regions, different recommendations were elaborated during the MATILDE roundtables. Due to depopulation processes in many rural regions, **rural municipalities are increasingly aware of the need of immigration**. In case of Karacabey (TR), which might apply for other MATILDE regions as well, place-based approaches at national level are missing. That’s why, it is hard to initialise sustainable concepts of co-existence of locals and migrants, working in the agricultural industries (Kaya 2022). Hence, local needs and possibilities should be considered in the reception process of asylum seekers and refugees. Still, subsidies from regional and national levels are required. In terms of the location and management of asylum shelters, it is recommended for Austria to consider the easy access to public transport when selecting the location of shelters and to introduce minimum standards for the management of the shelters and care of asylum seekers. The increase of the number of caring and medical staff may bring improvements.

Above all, it is recommended **to reform the EU's legal framework of migration and asylum**. For example, application procedures should be standardised and harmonised. To increase their quality, a **monitoring system** should be elaborated, which would increase the pressure on the Member States to implement recommendations from the European Union. Safe migration would be fostered and the pressure on public administration staff responsible for asylum procedures could decrease, if **quota regulations** for and transparent distribution mechanisms between the Member States were to be implemented. In June 2022, a first step was taken when the majority of EU Member States agreed on a **voluntary distribution system of refugees** (Die Presse 2022). It remains to be seen how this decision will be implemented exactly.

Besides, different MATILDE countries (AT, DE, ES, IT, TR, UK) **face challenges with the bureaucratic procedures combined with slowness, inconsistency and complexity regarding various laws**. A high bureaucracy increases the complexity of the implementation, which is an obstacle at local and regional level with a small number of employees in public administrations. For example, the approval of visa and the recognition of foreign qualifications are the results of long decision-making processes in Germany or in Austria, and Turkey, the access to nationality is linked to several complex requirements, but e.g. the political participation depends on the citizenship. Without an efficient access to permanent residence permits, the migrant's residency in a country remains unstable and insecure, which in turn hampers their social and economic integration and thus, consequently, their willingness to stay in the (rural) region for the longer term (place-based attachment).

Stakeholders in the roundtable discussions and previous MATILDE research activities recommended to **evaluate existing bureaucratic procedures and the allocation of resources** (AT, DE, ES, IT). This could be done e.g. by applying different tools, such as the municipality profile of the MATILDE self-assessment toolbox for practitioners and policy makers. To foster the implementation of integration laws, responsibilities and funding issues must be clearly defined, as voluntariness won't work for such issues (Gruber & Rauhut 2022). For example, it might be useful to implement a **coordinated integration management** at regional level, like Vorarlberg (AT) has already done with the **regional coordinators for refugee care**. To reduce the complexity of the implementation of migration and integration laws, the departments in public administrations should start **knowledge transfer processes** which would also increase efficiency. Hence, the number of employees in public administrations should be increased, also to **enable faster and more flexible processes** of residence permits, visa, permissions, or recognition of qualifications. In order to standardise migration and integration related procedures in municipalities, it might be helpful to **publish guidelines with information** about basic services, employment and housing or contact persons and important telephone numbers. The rural region of Hermagor (AT) provides a welcome guide with important information on Austria, Carinthia and the district of Hermagor, about residence permits, language, education, labour market, housing, environment and sustainability, health, family, gender and social affairs, transport and mobility, activities, religion including most important telephone numbers and links (ÖIF et al. n.y.).

Aside from general restrictions and bureaucracy, the **pathway to residence permits and citizenship is described as complex** in the policy analysis of several MATILDE countries (AT, DE, ES, IT). Without citizenship, the **political participation is often limited**, as examples for Austria, Germany or Spain show. In Spain, nevertheless, third-country nationals from around 15 countries with a signed agreement have a right to vote in **municipal elections**. This might be transferable to other countries where immigration of third-country nationals plays a major role, and expandable to third-country nationals residing in the municipality generally, like it is recommended in Germany. At least, **integration advisory boards** can be implemented to increase migrants' participation at local and regional level.

## Structural Discrimination and Negative Perception of Migrants

At regional and local level, the implementation of migration and integration policies often **depend on the efforts of local political decision makers and public administrations** as well as of local narratives and perceptions (AT, BG, DE, ES, SE). In Harmanli (BG), the far-right parties using **anti-migrant rhetoric** is identified as a threat for rural needs that can profit from migration. In Austria, **negative narratives** of migration, asylum seekers and refugees also exist that encourage the development of restrictive integration policies (Dax et al. 2021). Additionally, the example of Germany shows that **reservations of civil servants**, coupled with their lack of intercultural and language competencies, are barriers for the consistent implementation of migration and integration laws and for an efficient use of resources at local and regional level. For example, employees talk to migrants in dialect or use their children as interpreters. On the other hand, it is reported for Sweden that third-country women are treated differently than men in public authorities. Swedish studies (Statskontoret 2018; Cheung 2018) have shown that women generally are more likely to be registered for preparatory courses, while men are registered for work-related initiatives.

In Spain, it is recommended to reform laws on immigration and to **eliminate structural discriminatory articles**, which would be transferable also to other countries. Additionally, the European Union can set standards in this regard. Besides, it is important to overcome reservations, discrimination and mistrust towards migrants in public administrations and political discussions. Therefore, the **knowledge of politicians about migration and integration and its benefits for rural regions, as well as the sensitivity for diversity, interculturality and intersectionality among public administration staff** should be increased. For example, it is recommended to offer mandatory **trainings on interculturality and diversity** for the on-the-job training in public administrations. In Austria, this could be implemented by the Academy of Public Administration. Moreover, the knowledge transfer needs to be increased, especially when the knowledge is available in the respective municipality. The cooperation of civil servants and NGOs dealing with integration issues and related policies can foster exchange in the regions and improve the bureaucratic procedures. This would also contribute to transfer good practices and solutions.



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## Lacking Cooperation

NGOs, associations and other interest groups in the third sector were identified as important stakeholders in the MATILDE project (Gruber et al. 2020). Pursuing the **cooperation between public and third sector organisations is of high importance for the integration processes** of migrants in social and economic contexts, especially in rural regions. However, the round-table discussion results in Austria, Finland, Italy, Norway and Sweden have shown that the cooperation of the third sector and the public sector is often lacking, also at local and regional level in rural and mountainous areas. Additionally, NGOs often **struggle with financing and funding processes**.

For example, in the Region Dalarna (SE) a **regional agreement called “The road to inclusion”** was active until 2020, that was signed by different stakeholders from public administrations, public services, universities, business partners and municipalities. By 2020, no sustainable structure of support and cooperation efforts could be developed, which was criticised during the roundtable discussions. Hence, it is recommended to **re-introduce such a cooperation project with the aim to create sustainable structures and common goals**, which is also transferable to other MATILDE regions. Additionally, existing structures should be used as networks to share good practices for a joint learning process. To get access to good practices, it is recommended for Italy to foster **public consultations** and enhance **joint local projects** of public administrations, associations and/or NGOs. As an example of good practice in exchange, the integration department in the City of Villach (AT) regularly invites different stakeholders in the field of migration and integration to **discuss current topics**.

Besides, the **constant communication and exchange of municipalities, federal and state governments** are recognised as important factors in Austria, Finland and Norway, for example to tackle the asylum seekers' distribution and the lack of predictability. Some MATILDE regions, such as in Norway, have established **inter-municipal cooperation** for refugee and integration services. In this sense, it is highly recommended by the participants of the Carinthian (AT) policy roundtable to **improve the exchange and network** between political representatives and stakeholders at all governance levels and to increase the information flow between municipalities, federal states and federal government.

In addition to the transfer of knowledge and information and a more efficient integration management, cooperation among municipalities, public service providers, NGOs and associations can further be used for **joint application for funding**, which is recommended not only for Finland. The larger associations and public institutions could guide other institutions through the funding processes, but will be also part of a larger regional consortium, which might be a win-win-situation for all participating stakeholders and can be implemented in different MATILDE regions. This would benefit rural regions in particular, which are already affected by a tighter financial situation and a depletion of infrastructure due to depopulation processes.

## CONCLUSION

Even though **restrictions of national migration and integration laws** directly influence the implementation at regional and local level and the possibilities for rural regions to intervene in national policy processes are limited, some actions can be set in order to **use the existing framework conditions most efficiently**. To overcome the complexity and bureaucracy as well as unclear items of responsibility for the implementation of migration and integration laws and to leave (structural) discriminatory actions behind, **resources** should be bundled, **knowledge and good practices** transferred. Therefore, trainings on diversity and interculturality should be increased and **cooperation** between the multilevel governance actors improved. Independently, national laws are framed by **standards of the European Union**, which should be further developed and consider the benefits of migration for rural regions.



Migration ImpAct assessment To Enhance Integration and Local Development in European rural and mountain regions

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Deliverable 6.3 - Policy briefs for improved governance and policy arrangements

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