



MATILDE

Migration Impact Assessment to Enhance
Integration and Local Development in
European Rural and Mountain Regions

Country Reports on Challenges, Policy Recommendations and Solutions

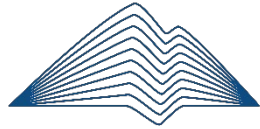
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Country Reports on Challenges, Policy Recommendations and Solutions –

Supplement to Deliverable 6.3 “Policy briefs for improved governance and policy arrangements”

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Summary

The reports on policy recommendations and solutions present the main policy problems in the MATILDE countries with regard to integration and inclusion in rural and mountainous regions on the basis of the conducted quantitative, qualitative and participatory action research in the MATILDE project. The starting point of analysis were the case study regions and the main objectives of the case studies in the MATILDE countries. With regards to the main policy problems and in consultation with diverse stakeholders, policy recommendations at all governance levels (local, regional, national and EU) were elaborated, further discussed and validated with researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders in a joint process of creation. In addition, links to existing solutions, which are presented as good practices, were made.

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Introduction

The reports on policy recommendations and solutions were developed in the frame of WP 6 of the MATILDE project focusing on the “development of policy recommendations at strategic and operational level to improve the governance of migration” (MATILDE Grant Agreement No. 870831, 2019, 119). The purpose of the reports on policy recommendations and solutions is to present the main policy problems with regard to integration and inclusion of third-country nationals (TCNs) in rural and mountainous regions as well as validated policy recommendations and solutions aiming to tackle these problems. Therefore, different areas of integration based on the mid-level theory by of Ager & Strang (2008; adapted by Weidinger et al. 2017; further extended by Gruber et. al. 2020), all governmental levels from local to EU level and different groups of TCNs were considered in the elaboration process. Nevertheless, the main objectives of the MATILDE case studies varied and focused e.g. on i.e. sustainable labour market integration of TCNs in rural and mountainous areas or on social integration at a local and regional level. With respect to the research focus, not all areas of integration, governance levels and groups of TCNs was given attention to by each MATILDE case study region. However, the challenges and policy recommendations presented in the reports below do not claim to be exhaustive. Still, they are the results of a participatory process including various stakeholders, policy makers and researchers following the MATILDE’s mixed-methods approach and stakeholder involvement.

For the elaboration of the policy recommendations, policy roundtables were organised, where the pre-validated policy recommendations were presented, discussed and finally validated in reconciliation with the participating stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, representatives of NGOs or public services) including their different perspectives on the topics. The results of these stakeholder discussions in the frame of the roundtables are going to be presented in the country reports below.

Austria

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1. Introduction and methodology

This Country Report for policy recommendations and solutions presents the development of the most relevant policy recommendations for Austria and its case study regions Carinthia and Vorarlberg. At the local and regional level, the report was divided according to the two case study regions, which can be seen in the headlines. Policy recommendations for the national (Austria) and EU level, are presented as common results from the point of view of the regions of Carinthia and Vorarlberg.

1.1. Carinthia

In the case study region Carinthia, the process of developing the policy recommendations were carried out in five phases:

Phase 1: Review of existing reports and SWOT-analysis

For the SWOT-analysis, each member of the policy research team separately reviewed the results and interviews from the deliverables D3.1, D4.1, D3.3, D4.3, D5.1, D5.2 and D6.2. In addition, previous results from the Carinthian integration program, adopted by the Carinthian government in 2017, were evaluated as well as studies from Austrian researchers on migration and integration included. Based on the report results, four SWOT-analyses – for the local, regional, national and EU level – were created.

Phase 2: Discussion and consolidation

In the next step, the individual SWOT-analyses were discussed together, reflected within the team, supplemented and finally aggregated. These results were also presented as an introduction at the MATILDE Roundtable.

Phase 3: Derivation of pre-validated policy recommendations

The results of the SWOT-analyses could be grouped into eight main themes (asylum, economy, education, health, housing, mobility, social connection, politics and public administration) and were in turn divided among the members of the research team. The topic of regional/rural development and the importance of migration and intercultural coexistence for it were taken into account as an integral part of the individual topics. The next step was to analyse the respective topics with regard to the different levels, to identify challenges, to derive policy recommendations as well as solutions and to present positive impacts that could occur when implementing the policy recommendations. Here, too, the final step was a joint discussion and additions were made.

Phase 4: Evaluation in the MATILE Roundtable process

The fourth step took place during the MATILDE Roundtable, where the pre-validated recommendations for action were validated by the participants. The MATILDE Roundtable was designed and implemented as a participatory process with a diverse mix of stakeholders and migrants. In the form of "fields of action posters", the above-mentioned eight main topics with the corresponding pre-validated policy recommendations were discussed with the 44 participants at a total of five tables:

- "Asylum"
- "Economy and Education"
- "Health and mobility"
- "Housing and social connection"
- "Politics & Administration"

In this context, the pre-validated policy recommendations, elaborated by the policy research team, were used as a basis for discussion and supplemented, expanded or omitted together with the participants.

Phase 5: Rating of pre-validated and elaborated policy recommendations

As the final step, the participants were asked to rate the discussion results according to societal relevance and urgency. Therefore, each participant was given three points and ranked the three most important policy recommendation of all discussed areas of action

according to their subjective assessment. Thus, the policy recommendations were validated and prioritised.

1.2. Vorarlberg

The development of policy recommendations and solutions of the Vorarlberg Case Study team was based on an interactive approach between the research and the local partner. It focused primarily on the development of policy recommendations and solutions for social integration at a local and regional level, the main topic of the case study Vorarlberg report (Del. 5.3). This approach included the development of a preliminary SWOT-analysis of local structures of social integration, their potential to enable and support social integration activities and the development of policy recommendations in this regard. The SWOT of local structures of social integration, such as communal offers, associations and voluntary work as well as related policy recommendations were discussed and complemented by participants of the first roundtable (see Country Report on Regional Roundtables, Vorarlberg).

In a second regional roundtable the essential arguments and policy recommendations were refined and discussed focusing particularly on the following aspects:

How to promote further encounter possibilities and meeting opportunities at a local level (between forced migrants and the local population)? How to strengthen volunteer activities? With the backdrop of many refugees leaving rural communities after recognition: What are the benefits for forced migrants and for the rural municipality if they stayed? What does a rural municipality have to offer that forced migrants want to stay or that they are able to stay?

This thematic focus was adapted to the needs and interests of the local partner okay.zusammen leben on the manifold aspects of social integration. As okay.zusammen leben has already documented and reflected on experiences made in different areas of integration of forced migrants from 2015 to 2020 in the past two years, including labour market integration, accommodation and housing as well as language acquisition (in a draft

version) they were particularly interested in structures of social integration at a local level¹. Hence, our approach fitted perfectly into the overall reflection on experiences in different domains of integration, focusing on the local structures of social integration activities. For a general SWOT-analysis on a broader collection of integration themes the research team reviewed results and interviews from reports 3.1-4.1, 3.3, 4.3, 5.3., in addition to a review of the results of the papers on “lessons learnt” by the local partner okay.zusammen leben, focusing on the regional level but also including aspects of the national and EU level. These “lessons learnt” provide an additional valuable basis for policy recommendations and solutions as they include several recent interviews with relevant stakeholders and reflections on the experiences of the past years.

2. Main Policy Problem(s)

2.1. Carinthia

Austria's MIPEX score has declined from 50 to 46 points from 2014 to 2019. Hence, “Austria's policies create slightly more obstacles to than opportunities for the full participation of non-EU immigrants in Austrian society” (Solano & Huddleston 2020). The obstacles are mainly in family reunion, access to nationality and political participation, while “non-EU citizens are left insecure in Austria”. They are seen as foreigners (Solano & Huddleston 2020). The MIPEX-result of “halfway favourable for integration” was also noticeable in the derived SWOT-analyses, which are the basis for the main policy problems located in the eight aforementioned main themes. Following are the identified challenges of the research team in the different themes:

¹ Documents of the project „lessons learnt” by okay.zusammen can be downloaded: <https://www.okay-line.at/okay-programme/lessons-learned-bei-der-integration-von-gefluechteten-in-vorarlbg/> (last accessed 27.05.2022) and comprise papers on the reflection of experiences with regard to the regional coordinator of asylum and refugee care, on the accommodation of asylum seekers in Vorarlberg, and on labour market integration of forced migrants in Vorarlberg; the papers on language acquisition and on voluntary work are in preparation.

- **Asylum:** at EU level, the lack of standards in the asylum procedures, the admission and accommodation in the EU Member States and ongoing critics of the Dublin Regulations and pushbacks at external EU-borders and at the national level, the tightened reforms of the Asylum Act as well as the location (in rural and inaccessible regions) and the organisation (quality of care, German language courses, entry ban) of asylum shelters, hinder the social integration of asylum seekers at the local and regional level. In addition, NGOs, who are working with asylum seekers at local and regional level, are weakened by the centralisation of the Federal Government as the Federal States do not have the power of co-decision in the distribution of subsidies.
- **Economy:** Even though (Austria and) Carinthia face a shortage on the labour market, the access to the labour market is restricted for TCNs [e.g., asylum seekers and Muslim women; (1²)] and the lack of recognition of migrants' qualifications (5) is problematic. So, the economic integration and independence of TCNs is impeded, while the economy is in the need of labour.
- **Education:** mainly, a lack of kindergarten places (9) exists, which is problematic for the social integration of children and the economic integration of their mothers. In addition, and in line with the labour shortage, there is a lack of coordination about migrant's potentials and existing knowledge gaps as well as a lack of support for migrants in school and education. So, (young) migrants might not receive the education, they need and which is missing at the labour market.
- **Health:** intensified by the negative impacts of COVID-19, a lack of mental health support exists in Austria. Psychological problems are not treated adequately, which is problematic for the social integration of TCNs and bears the risk of segregation.
- **Housing:** restrictions of public housing and legal unequal treatment in housing subsidies may lead to separation of TCNs and in consequence to ghettoization as migrant's wish to live in the municipalities centers and the local population has reservations towards migrants and convicts their lack of knowledge about customs.

2 Even though the participants of the MATILDE policy roundtable were asked to prioritise the most important policy recommendations, some of the challenges were rated too. The number of points is mentioned in the brackets.

- **Mobility:** lack of public transport, especially concerning the connections to rural regions, and the limited affordability of mobility leads to separation and hinders encounters of migrants and the local population.
- **Politics and public administration:** in Austria, negative narratives of migration, migrants and refugees exist that lead to an increase of restrictive integration policies (Dax et. al. 2021), a lack of integration efforts in refugee care and restrictions in access to the labour market. The centralisation efforts and the decisions at national level have a negative impact at regional and local level, e.g. the distribution of asylum seekers often without consultation of the Federal States. In Carinthia, the reservations of and the lack of sensitisation of employees in public administrations towards migrants as well as language barriers in public administrations and an insufficient coordination of integration are the main problems. In addition, ongoing conflicts about minority issues exist in Carinthia.
- **Social connection:** The persistence of reservations and the lack of knowledge in the local population provides fear and carry the risk of segregation and isolation for TCNs. In consequence, the tendency to withdraw, radicalisation and the risk of polarisation and hierarchies in the society can appear. In general, there is a tendency of an egocentric society. These problems prevent integration efforts and can lead to outmigration from rural areas, which are in the need of population due to the demographic change (Stainer-Hämmerle & Zametter 2021; Aigner-Walder & Luger 2018).

The aforementioned challenges were validated by the stakeholders during the MATILDE policy roundtable and some further challenges were added:

- **Asylum:** problems after the ending of the basic care in terms of housing (5), labour market access and structural hurdles
- **Education:** lack of afternoon child care, lack of full-day kindergarten places, lack of resources for kindergartens in rural areas, problematic access to schools, education and child care, lack of information for parents about language assessments and German support classes in schools, lack of information for parents about preparing

the children for school, lack of recognition of qualifications, lack of encounter of local population and migrants to support the language acquisition

- **Economy:** difficulties in finding qualified employees, differences in qualification levels of migrants, structural weakness of Carinthia, narrowness of the Carinthian labour market, low wage level in Carinthia (1), lack of child care
- **Housing:** lack of encounter, limited affordability in the private housing market (3), discrimination at the private housing market
- **Mobility:** migrants are in the need of public transport as they often do not have the driving license, mobility projects fail due to Carinthian mentality, lack of accessibility of (public) services
- **Social connection:** lack of encounter spaces (3), compulsive consumption in encounter spaces, encounter spaces are not low-threshold, pressure on voluntary work, prejudices and egoism (1), lack of possibilities to get in contact

In conclusion, the main policy problems occur in asylum, child care and kindergarten, social connection and social integration, mobility, policy network and knowledge transfer as well as the labour market and recognition of qualifications. The main challenges in context of the highest rated policy recommendations will be explained in detail below.

2.2. Vorarlberg

On the basis of the general SWOT-analysis, the main policy problems and challenges were as follows:

- **Labour market integration:** Labour shortage, de facto no apprenticeship and employment opportunities for asylum seekers due to legal restrictions, reduction of temporary working opportunities for asylum seekers (change of neighbourhood aid to integration activities in municipalities), abolition or phasing out of successful labour market interventions such as “integration year” or “longer-term integration accompaniment”, socio-economic projects are always temporary – need for longer term support, lack of recognition of qualifications.

- **Accommodation and housing:** expensive private housing market, access to social housing apartments – same conditions for all participants, however with different impact on locals and newcomers, settlement management, segregation in specific social quarters, conflicts arise due to waste management and noise development.
- **Education:** Distribution of hotspots schools – urban areas are more affected, hotspot schools need more resources, Covid-19 has brought disadvantages for people and particularly pupils with migrant background (digitization).
- **Social connection / social cohesion:** Three main approaches for social integration in a municipality (associations, voluntary work, communal offers), specific issues within this scope of action: lack of cooperation between standard systems and volunteers, danger of overstrain and disappointment by volunteers, potential of manifold associations in Vorarlberg not yet fully exploited by forced migrants (with the exception of soccer clubs), issues of integration should be a long-term task for municipalities.
- **Language and culture:** availability and accessibility of language courses in rural and peripheral municipalities, only small offers for technical language courses (e.g., construction industry or nursing), strong regional dialect, lacking digital competence for online language courses, long waiting time for follow-up courses lead to a forgetting of what already has been learned.

These challenges were validated by the participants of the two MATILDE roundtables and by two documents of the lessons learnt papers on labour market integration and accommodation and housing³ officially available on the website of okay.zusammen leben (Manahl & Häfele 2022; Manahl & Hörl 2021), considering the following themes: **Labour market and employment, accommodation and housing, social connections / social cohesion.**

³ Manahl, C. & Häfele, E. (2022): Die Arbeitsmarktintegration von Geflüchteten in Vorarlberg: Dokumentation und Lernerfahrungen der Jahre 2015 bis 2020. Manahl, C. & Hörl, M. (2021): Die Unterbringung von Asylsuchenden in Vorarlberg: Dokumentation und Lernerfahrungen der Jahre 2015 bis 2020.

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

Based on the aforementioned main policy problems, the corresponding most important policy recommendations at local, regional, national and EU level will be elaborated below.

3.1. Local Level: City of Villach (Carinthia)

3.1.1. Child care & kindergarten

The childcare in Austria is mainly organized at the regional and the local level. While the national level enacted a mandatory kindergarten attendance for five-year old children for at least 20 hours per week and free of charge in 2009 (BKA 2022), the **child care law**⁴ regulates among others the group size, the ratio of caregivers and children, the qualifications of the pedagogic staff and the costs in Carinthia. Accordingly, the group size is 25 children with one kindergarten pedagogue and one assistant per group as pedagogic staff. Nevertheless, the main responsibility for the **allocation of child care places** is at local level (Walenta 2021). Villach offers places in 13 public kindergartens for 1,141 children of the age of 3–6 years. 1,127 of them were taken in March 2022. The City of Villach does not show transparently, how many places are half-time and full-time organised. Prioritised are children, who are at the age of the mandatory kindergarten attendance or whose parents are working (Stadt Villach 2022a & 2022b). From 2016-2021, 2,121 children at the age of 3–6 years old lived in Villach on average (Statistik Austria 2022). Hence, there are obviously more children than kindergarten places in Villach. So, the occurred challenge is the lack of child care in Villach.

This **lack of kindergarten places** was mainly criticised in the case study by stakeholders, interviewees and at the policy roundtable. In addition, the lack of afternoon child care services and full-time places in kindergarten as well as a **shortage of personnel resources** and a **missing knowledge in the context of multilingualism, integration and inclusion** was negatively assessed for Villach at the policy roundtable.

4 LGBl. Nr. 13/2011

There, child care was discussed in the context of education, economy and employment as well as housing. In total, this topic achieved **23 priority points**, which means, that it is the highest priority at all levels. This thematic diversity and the priority can be explained by the wide range of policy problems and negative effects of the lack of child care in Villach. A lack of child care hinders the **social integration** of migrant children and their mothers and makes the **German language acquisition** more difficult for children, whose first language is not German. In consequence, the **access to the labour market** is problematic and the **economic dependence** of migrants and mainly migrant women continues. The linkage of kindergarten places to employment in Villach can become a vicious circle for women. In addition, many jobs, e.g. in the gastronomy or nursing, cannot be taken, as the working hours do not fit in the opening hours of the kindergarten. Finally, the risk of **social exclusion** increases and a prevented access to the labour market intensifies the labor shortage as well, which has a negative impact on the economy.

Consequently, the policy recommendation is

- the creation of sufficient kindergarten places,
- to be able to offer a guaranteed place for every child.
- In addition, the offers need to be expanded and adapted: **longer opening hours**, **flexible pick-up times** and **staggered prices**, in order to meet the labour market's requirements and to increase the comparability of job and family, especially for women.

In consequence, the social integration of children will be increased and the access to the labour market for mothers improved.

3.1.2. Labour market & recognition of qualifications

This topic achieved at the MATILDE Roundtable in total **14 priority points**. As mentioned above, the shortage of (skilled) labour is a problem that affects all levels. Some sectors run into troubles to offer their services in the traditional forms, such as the care sector or the tourism industry, or as in the case of international enterprises, e.g., *Infineon*. In addition, there are **vacancies of economic premises in the city center of Villach**, which gives a stagnant

economic image and let the city center appears as if it dies out. This aspect applies to different cities in Carinthia. In general, Villach's economy is dependent on a few companies, which are also mainly focused on (highly) qualified migrants. Therefore, the stakeholders recommended

- **faster recognition of qualifications** and **specific education and training offers** could also have a positive impact on migrants and labor market integration as well as the regional and local labor market.

3.1.3. Social connection & social integration

Former MATILDE report D3.3 has shown that key actors and institutions supporting the integration process in 2015/2016 experienced an indicated increasing enthusiasm for welcoming refugees in large parts of all regions and municipalities in Austria. Voluntary support from the local population spread during this period, indicating a shift towards rapid integration and acceptance of immigrants (of all kinds) by the majority of the population. This period exemplifies exaggerated expectations of "successful integration processes" that too often encounter significant difficulties in later stages. Throughout Austria, including our case study regions, the willingness to support diminished in the subsequent period. This was facilitated in particular by declining national support for migrants and the emergence of a political discourse that adopts a hostile attitude towards migrants and often neglects their positive social contributions to local and regional communities and their economic benefits to the national economy. This circumstance was also reflected in the MATILDE Roundtable, where the still **existing reservations and prejudices** of the locals towards the migrant population were discussed. Migrants are often socially and geographically separated from the locals (e.g., concentrations of migrants in certain districts). This circumstance is noted by migrants themselves, but also by employees of organizations that count migrants among their clientele and continues to make successful social integration considerably more difficult. Thus, several policy recommendations were developed for the local level, which achieved **10 priority points** in total.

- Creation of meeting areas and encounter zones or respectively space for the possibility of joint activities,

in order to reduce these reservations and to create a new awareness. It is important to note here that such "spaces" must be made available at the local level and that with affordable rents (or even free of charge) and without the need to consume but with a low-threshold approach to reach all population groups.

- Expansion of integration offices

Local institutions like the City of Villach could **expand their integration office** by the **positions of "migrant communicators" from the targeted communities** in order to build-up an authentic connection and at the same time to integrate migrants in the integration office institutionally in the sense of "for and with migrants". Furthermore, **campaigns for a positive coexistence** in Villach should be initiated.

The City of Villach started a Facebook campaign by January 2022, where they regularly post about results and events of the MATILDE project and related topics (e.g., positive effects of migration for Villach). A solution could be to expand campaigns like this one or to broadcast them through other channels.

3.2. Local Level: Municipalities of Frastanz, Innerbraz and Schruns (Vorarlberg)

3.2.1. Social connections / social cohesion

The analysis of local structures of social integration in the three different rural municipalities of Vorarlberg has led to a deeper understanding of the diversity of initiatives, offers and networks, but provided also insights into inter-municipal challenges, tasks and aspects as well as policy recommendations with regard to different local structures of social integration. Considering the three main approaches we looked into (voluntary work, associations and communal offers), voluntary work is the most informal one. **Voluntary work** is considered to play a major role in the local integration of refugees (e.g., Aumüller et al. 2015; Simsa et al. 2017). Voluntary engagement thereby strengthens social relationships and thus, generates

social capital, which is often referred to as the social cement of a society (e.g., More-Hollerweger & Bogorin 2019, p. 90). In 2015, with the increased influx of asylum seekers, **fast and unbureaucratic support** offers have been established by volunteers. These offers can be divided in group offers (reception of asylum seekers, German learning classes, etc.) and more bilateral accompaniment that provided support for all life-circumstances in many individual cases (such as asylum procedure, contact to authorities, training support for children, etc.; see WP 5.3 report). Addressing the needs and demands of forced migrants at local level, volunteers have developed activities according to their interests, their skills and their perception of problems. Conflicts arise when expectations of volunteers were not met by forced migrants or the continuous strain of voluntary work (beside other obligations) leads to overstrain and frustration and to a termination of voluntary work. Therefore, it is recommended that

- volunteers get support and appreciation to maintain and estimate their work in a positive way to cope with difficulties and unfulfilled expectations.
- A **contact person for integration issues** in each municipality should be established to support volunteers with organizational and coordinating issues, as well as with the most necessary infrastructures (like meeting rooms, possibilities to copy learning material, refund of private expenses, etc.).
- Furthermore, **forming a network** of actively engaged volunteers and the **general support by mayors**, and other influential local members or professionals in the field of asylum/integration are key issues for longer lasting voluntary activities at a local level.
- Therefore, awareness raising measures in and for relevant stakeholders and actors in a municipality about pressing immigration and integration issues are recommended including the necessity of support of volunteers at a municipal level (individual talks, networking, exchange of experience, supervision) (see also okay.zusammen leben, 2022).
- While these actors at the local level can mainly provide organisational and motivational support for volunteers, there should also be **professional support**

structures at regional level, that can provide specific knowledge on integrations structures and processes (advice, supervision, training) for volunteers.

Associations have great potential for building social contacts between forced migrants and the local population, besides the actual activity provides forced migrants with important networks and contacts to job possibilities or housing offers. However, this potential is not yet tapped by most adult forced migrants, with the exception of men in soccer clubs. In times when many associations complain about a lack of participants, particularly **low threshold measures** seem to be appropriate to reach out for new members.

- Newcomers (e.g., forced migrants) need “bridges” to overcome the first barriers of entry, e.g., a **personal invitation and accompaniment** by a volunteer who invites a newcomer personally to a meeting and serve as buddy for upcoming issues and questions.
- Additionally, it is helpful if there is also the possibility to participate with only little obligations (e.g., no fees or membership).

Some newcomers integrate very well, as the examples in interviews with forced migrants active in soccer clubs show, e.g. they take over responsibilities as trainer or kit manager.

Communal offers, such as open youth work activities, various local learning cafés or sewing workshops provide low threshold group offers and serve as meeting places for forced migrants and locals.

- Communal offers do not refer to solely full-time work but may be coordinated and supported by an employee of the municipality and carried out by volunteers.
- In general, communal offers need more time to establish and implement their offers compared to voluntary work, on the other hand, continuity, regularity and capacity to answer to changing needs is better manageable due to full-time support.
- Communal offers may also provide a link to other regular offers (official language courses, authorities, etc.).

The main challenge are the restricted resources at municipality level. However, such offers do not necessarily have to take place in each municipality, but the coordination of such offers at a regional level to ease the burden of small rural municipalities, are desirable, like the

regional coordinators of refugee care (see Bauchinger & Machold 2022). Simultaneously, constant **awareness building at municipality** level (see above) of the importance of social integration structures for local development, is needed.

The following **recommendations** emerge from the research:

- Support, accompaniment and networking of volunteers who work for refugees is important to ensure a longer-term commitment. Hereby, the support of a representative person from the community is particularly relevant. A contact person for integration issues in the municipalities can provide valuable services in this regard.
- Communities have the opportunity to create low-threshold meeting opportunities (third places) by providing infrastructure (rooms, copying facilities, learning utensils, etc.).
- Associations can offer low-threshold docking opportunities to invite people to join and make it easier for new members to participate. People who can "build bridges" for refugees in the associations should be approached as well as to offer less binding and free offers without membership.
- Continuity of the regional coordinator of refugee care as a contact and link for communities, volunteers and associations, to make sure that central tasks of this function (awareness raising, exchange, advice, etc.) can be provided sustainably.

3.3.Regional Level: Carinthia

3.3.1. Asylum

In parallel to the temporary provision of basic care for foreigners in need of assistance and protection⁵ at national level, the Federal State of Carinthia released the Basic Care Act⁶ (K-GrvG). The basic care includes the **"adequate accommodation considering gender and age specifics with the respect of the human dignity"** (LGBl. Nr. 43/2006, §3), meals, pocket money and money for clothing, medical check-ups, health care and insurance, information and consultation with interpreters for the orientation in Austria and voluntary return,

⁵ BGBl. I Nr. 80/2004.

⁶ LGBl. Nr. 43/2006

transport costs for (school) transfers and administrative procedures, as well as a structure of the day. Unaccompanied minors receive socio-pedagogical and psychological support, in addition. They are accommodated in “residential groups [...] with high care needs” (LGBI Nr 43/2006, §4). The maximum daily cost rate in an organised shelter is higher than agreed in the temporary provision of basic care (€ 21 per adult and € 95 per unaccompanied minor in a residential group). These extra costs are paid by the Federal State of Carinthia. In alignment with the temporary provision of basic care, the Basic Care Act of Carinthia **does not include information about the location and organisation of the asylum shelters**. Correspondently to the federal asylum shelters, the provincial asylum shelters are mainly **located in remote areas with a lack of care givers** (for the relevant policy recommendation, please refer to the national level).

Concerning the organisation, German language trainings are offered in the shelters. Nevertheless, the efforts are criticised as insufficient by MATILDE interviewees:

- The offers of low-threshold German language trainings free of charge need to be increased – especially their accessibility and reachability outside the shelters.
- **Literacy courses** in small groups are requested.
- Also, prompt follow-up (**advanced**) **training** courses need to be offered. Fostering the German language acquisition gained **9 priority points** in total.

The participants of the policy roundtable agreed that the **ending of the basic care is problematic for the persons newly granted asylum and the new beneficiaries of subsidiary protection**. They face time pressure, as the basic care ends, and they do not have enough information about housing and the labour market in Carinthia and how to organise that for themselves. In fact, they do not know, what will happen next. Consequently, the stakeholders recommended

- to elaborate an **information package about housing, social assistance, labour market and the public employment service (AMS), etc.** The persons granted asylum and subsidiary protection should receive this information before leaving the basic care and the asylum shelter. This recommendation was evaluated with **10 priority points**.

For Carinthia, an ongoing exchange of stakeholders involved in asylum issues should be implemented, e.g., in the format of a roundtable as recommended at national level. The aim is

- to improve the exchange and flow of information between the Federal State and the municipalities.

Then the responsibilities and contact persons would become more transparent and the quality of the coordination would increase.

3.3.2. Child care & kindergarten

Due to the responsibility of the child care, set by law at regional level⁷, the participants of the policy roundtable discussed the reform of this law. The policy recommendation was, that

- the **group sizes** should be smaller
- and the **ratio** of caregivers and children should be improved.
- In addition, the **increase of kindergarten places** should be supported in the (especially rural) municipalities.

The aim should be a structural change of the child care with

- sufficient **full-time places** in Carinthia, in order to increase the compatibility of job and family.
- In addition, the **education of the pedagogic staff** should focus more on diversity, interculturality and multilingualism.

3.3.3. Labour market & recognition of qualifications

The de-facto exclusion of asylum seekers from the labour market (for details, see labour market & recognition of qualifications at national level) also occurs at the regional level, which leads to a lack of encounter and opportunities for learning and improving the German language competencies. So, asylum seekers face restrictions to enter the labour market,

⁷ LGBl. Nr. 13/2011

while the regional labour market in turn is in the need of (skilled) employees. Hence, the policy recommendation at regional level is

- to tap the **full potential of labour market access possibilities**, e.g., including employment in the municipalities and in cooperation with NGOs and associations.

Above all, the **increased implementation of labour market integration projects, such as “A:Life”**, is recommended. The project aims to place refugees in apprenticeships. As a preparation for the apprenticeships, they participate in trainings in German, Mathematics and IT as well as societal topics at trainings institutions (Diakonie n.y.).

3.3.4. Mobility

Another policy recommendation that emerged at the MATILDE roundtable was on the topic of mobility, also in combination with the discussion of social integration. At the local level, but especially at the regional level, the **insufficient supply of public transport** was criticised and got in total **8 priority points**. This leads to limited mobility of people and, with regard to migrants, it encourages their **desire to live close to cities or city centers**, which in turn leads to a concentration in certain areas that should be avoided, as it promotes segregation and discourages social integration. In addition, it was emphasized that the transport connections to asylum shelters should be improved and therefore their residents would be less isolated. As policy recommendation,

- the expansion of public transport throughout Carinthia was concluded.

The roundtable participants often emphasized that people responsible for mobility should also

- **think in utopian terms** in order to explore different possibilities and
- to give room to **creative solutions and approaches** to increase mobility in urban as well as in rural areas in Carinthia.

In the context of possible solutions, special mention was made of projects such as the **“Mitfahrbank”** (ride-sharing bench). The ride-sharing bench is intended as a supplement to public transport and also creates a new platform of communication and is completely free for passengers since the car is going in the direction anyway. For this purpose, ride-sharing

benches are set up near bus stops, which are recognizable by a sign. At these places interested people have the possibility to be taken to the next village by friendly drivers (VCO - Mobilität mit Zukunft 2022).

- **Cycling paths** were also mentioned, as mobility should not only be focused on motorised devices.
- **Apps for using public transport** and routes should also be considered and thought of internationally, in the sense of being accessible in several languages. Public transport and routes should be accessible to all Carinthian residents, and
- **financial support for groups** at risk of poverty and exclusion was suggested.

3.3.5. Policy network & knowledge transfer

The competencies and jurisdiction in migration and integration affairs in Austria is mainly at national level. For example, the Integration Act (IntG 2017) including the conditions for integration was released by the Federal Government. In this sense, the laws became more complex and more restrictive over years and the **efforts of further centralisation of the integration issues** increased in the past years. However, the Federal States have the main **implementation competence** as well as legislative power to enable federal acts. In this context, Carinthia adopted the integration political program “Together in Carinthia” in 2017 with political guidelines and principles of coexistence (Dax et. al. 2021).

Nevertheless, the efforts of centralization and the decision for restrictive migration and integration laws at the national level have a **negative impact** at the regional level: **regional structures and initiatives** are limited, **project funding** are timely restricted and the Federal States cannot participate in determining. So, the actions taken not always meet the needs in Carinthia. In consequence, the **efforts for integration and coexistence** at regional level are hindered.

In this context, it was an important point at the SWOT-analysis for Carinthia, that the **coordination of integration is lacking** and **parallel structures** exist. Hence, the allocated resources from national to regional level are not used efficiently and effectively. This leads

to negative impacts, especially when the resources are limited due to the centralisation processes of the Federal Government.

In addition, the **knowledge about migration and integration** and the sensitivity for diversity, interculturality and intersectionality exist, but mainly partial in the departments in the public administration, which are responsible for migration and integration. That's why, **reservation, discrimination and mistrust** towards migrants in public administrations is reported by interviewees and stakeholders. In consequence, migrants are advised differently, depending on the knowledge and sensibility of the staff.

Based on these challenges, different policy recommendations were discussed during the policy roundtable:

- Above all, the networking between political representatives and stakeholders at all governance levels needs to be strengthened.
- **Exchange meetings** between representatives from the Federal State of Carinthia, representatives from the Federal Government and its institutions of migration and integration affairs in Carinthia, the municipalities, the NGOs, the civil society and the migrant communities are recommended to be organised and to take place regularly. This recommendation was highly prioritised with **six points**.
- In order to act as a role model, the representatives should be composed **diverse** with regard to their ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, etc.
- Their first task should be to identify and stop parallel structures and to **evaluate the existing processes and the resource allocation** (e.g., by applying the municipality profile of the MATILDE self-assessment toolbox for practitioners and policy makers), in order to improve the coordination and governance of integration in Carinthia.
- On this basis, a **coordinated integration management** of Federal State and the municipalities can be established.

As a concrete solution, **regional coordinators for refugee care** following the Vorarlberg model should be implemented.

In addition, it was recommended, that

- local politicians/mayors and employees in public administrations need an **intercultural education** and **trainings for a diversity-sensitive approach**. They need to be sensitised for diversity, intersectionality and different social target groups. For example, they could be educated in the Academy of Public Administration (“Verwaltungsakademie”). This policy recommendation was prioritised with **three points**.
- In addition, a process of knowledge transfer between the departments of the public administrations can be started.

Hence, reservations could be reduced and the **knowledge and understanding** for diverse target groups could be increased. Hence, the communication between the public administration and the migrants could be improved.

3.3.6. Social connection & social integration

Building on the presented background of main policy problems in chapter “Social connection & social integration” at local level (see chapter 3.1.2), the following policy recommendations were elaborated and prioritized with **20 priority points** at regional level.

- Projects which promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding were recommended.

As a concrete example, the project “Hera” was mentioned at the policy roundtable, which should be promoted permanently. “Hera” is a cooperation project of the organization EqualiZ (Centre of competence with a feminist stance in Carinthia) with the Diakonie de La Tour Kärnten (social organisation of the Protestant Church) and the WIFF Family and Women’s Counseling Center Völkermarkt. The project aims to actively and preventively combat violence against girls and women – especially in the context of migration - and at the same time to focus on the Austrian labour market (EqualiZ 2022).

In addition,

- a **central Carinthian contact point**, to which contact seekers could turn, was recommended. It was pointed out that it is also necessary to strive for a

- **thought-out distribution of the immigrant population to the city's districts and the surrounding communities** and to link this with
- **inter-communal cooperation.** This should foster a more evenly distribution and cultural mixing, which would lead to **more opportunities for encounters between locals and migrants.**

The challenge of encounters between locals and immigrants is also strongly related to the challenge of (in)mobility in Carinthia (see also “Mobility”).

3.4.Regional Level: Vorarlberg

3.4.1. Labour market integration

Based on the analysis of Manahl and Häfele (2022) as well as interviews conducted in the course of the MATILDE project, the following sections highlight the policy recommendations and solutions with regard to labour market integration of forced migrants at a regional level in Vorarlberg.

Refugee migration to Vorarlberg and thus, integration of recognised refugees into the labour market did not represent a novelty for Vorarlberg in 2015. Especially in the years after 2005, various labour market projects with refugees from Chechnya were established and provided sound experience to be built upon in 2015 and the years ahead. Additionally, the wide range of services offered by the employment service of Vorarlberg was and still is fundamentally designed to meet the needs of very different people and groups.

Particularly in the course of 2016 and 2017 different strategies emerged to accompany the path of young and adult refugees towards employment. Since a large number of actors were involved in the implementation of these strategies, new structures of coordination and control were developed, which were reviewed as very useful (ibid, p. 23).

To support the coordination and cooperation of the heterogeneous landscape of actors, particularly between district authorities/minimum benefit and the employment service, and between the various implementers of labour market projects, the position of a regional **”Refugee Coordinator for the labour market integration of recognized refugees”** was **created in 2016** by the Federal State of Vorarlberg, which was explicitly dedicated to support

labour market integration as of mid-2017 until end of 2019. As a basis for joint development and planning, the **"Management Summary Refugee"** has been established, which shows monthly key figures about the areas of basic care, acquisition of Austrian citizenships, minimum benefit and the labour market. To provide a better orientation for full-time actors of labour market integration, the employment service Vorarlberg published the so-called **"integration paths"** for adult and young refugees in 2018 (actualized in 2021). The integration path for young refugees (under 25-years) shows primarily paths to a vocational training and available support measures. The integration path for adult refugees is more strongly oriented towards the uptake of employment and highlights offers such as improvement of German language skills, recognition of certificates, or work trainings.

Many labour market projects, set up in the context of refugee migration since 2015, have now come to an end, partly because the changing support needs particularly of young refugees, partly because of decreasing financial resources. However, singular projects have also been expanded and transferred to the regular employment service offer.

The "competency check" named **"CHECK IN"** has become a fixed component of the employment service and is now open to all immigrant clients and the modular workshop series **"labour market orientation for women with refugee experience"** has opened up to female migrants in general.

The specific measure to enhance labour market participation of recognised refugees with multiple learning difficulties **"Work 1st"** is still financed, while there is a strong trend to include recognised refugees in the regular employment services.

The review mentioned policy recommendations with regard to labour market integration as follows:

- There is a **need for orientation and a continuous support structure** for forced migrants (e.g., **integration coach**), who accompanies, particularly in transition phases between different courses and offers, but also between different institutions. The project "integration assistance" (carried out by the employment service Vorarlberg between March 2018 and June 2019) was very helpful in this regard.

- **Qualifications acquired abroad are rarely of use to get an appropriate employment.** It is recommended that **the recognition of educational qualifications** is promoted.
- **Labour market integration of female refugees is still little pronounced.** Participation in labour market projects is also far below average. Stakeholders name the following reasons: child care obligations, living in a remote area, traditional role models. It is recommended to **introduce female refugees as early as possible and with a long-term perspective to the regional labour market** with measures including child care options, language courses, vocational orientation, provision of internships and job placements.
- As asylum seekers have very limited options to get a job or a vocational education, it is recommended **to open up labour market options for (young) asylum seekers**, e.g. by easing the rigorous labour market review, currently necessary.

3.4.2. Accommodation and housing

The years 2015 and 2016 were characterized by an increased influx of asylum seekers, which posed considerable accommodation challenges to the Federal State government of Vorarlberg (however, similar to all regional governments at this time). Not only the number of asylum seekers increased from 1,200 in 2014 to 3,900 in 2016, but also their socio-demographic composition changed from primarily families to mainly young males who needed other living arrangements than families. Based on the analysis of Manahl and Hörl (2021) and interviews conducted in the course of the MATILDE project, the following sections highlight policy recommendations and solutions with regard to accommodation and housing of forced migrants at a regional level in Vorarlberg.

Already in 2004, when asylum seekers accommodations and basic care changed from a national responsibility to a shared responsibility of national and federal states, Vorarlberg focused on a **decentralised accommodation in micro quarters** (mostly rented apartments) for individual asylum seeker families provided by the NGO Caritas.

This well-established system reached its limits in 2015 and **a new strategy, involving new actors, forms of cooperation and new tasks came into place.** This new strategy was supported by all parties of the state parliament and the association of municipalities. This **multi-actor governance approach** was reviewed as a very successful solution to the overall difficulties of accommodation.

Nevertheless, coordination and collaboration of NGOs (e.g., Caritas was responsible of basic care management) with municipalities proved to be a challenge, particularly with regard to the organization and supervision of voluntary work. Since the establishment of **regional coordinators of refugee care** in 2016, this conflict could be defused.

The strategy, that accommodation in small-scale quarters should be pursued in as many municipalities as possible, held and by the end of 2015 almost all municipalities of Vorarlberg (93 of 96) accommodated asylum seekers in 28 larger-scale quarters with more than 25 asylum seekers, and in more than 600 private and small-scale quarters. However, the before mentioned review also showed, that **larger quarters are not necessarily a disadvantage** when accommodating forced migrants. Larger quarters simplify the professional care and accompaniment, while asylum seekers could still be integrated into the life of the community. Albeit it was seen as a **disadvantage for the integration of asylum seekers in the communities when quarters - regardless of their size - were set up in peripheral locations** or were **poorly connected to public transportation.**

- Hence, it is strongly recommended that quarters should be established in **central locations of a municipality.**

With the recognition of the asylum status and the granted right to abode, refugees drop out from basic care provision and the need for housing presents itself again. Additionally, family reunification changes housing needs. Thus, some initiatives were launched at various levels to provide additional housing in the already tight housing market.

One example is the housing program **‘Wohnen 500’** developed by non-profit housing developers of Vorarlberg (VOGEWOSI) that **focused on a comparatively favourable price per square meter** by using a modular construction method and by building without elevators and underground parking. A first housing estate has already been completed before 2015,

however, in the course of the increased influx of asylum seekers the Federal State of Vorarlberg pushed ‘Wohnen 500’ as part of a **special housing program**. The state subsidy was linked to the condition that one-third of the apartments are available for recognised refugees.

Moreover, it is possible for recognised refugees to apply for a regular social housing apartment independently of the ‘Wohnen 500’ program. In recent years, **access to social housing has become more transparent**, since 2015 a **housing allocation guideline of the Federal State** regulates access to social housing in a mandatory system of points. Before, municipalities often decided on different access barriers (as social housing is allocated through municipalities) making it particularly difficult for newcomers.

Another approach of the state of Vorarlberg is the initiative ‘**rent out safely**’ (‘Sicher vermieten’) to activate vacancies in the private housing market. As numerous private apartments have been reported for the use for asylum seekers via the former official website ‘hand in hand with refugees in Vorarlberg’, it was the aim to make these apartments accessible for recognised refugees as well as for all apartment seekers in general. The state of Vorarlberg offers landlords coverage for rent and operating arrears as well as for additional refurbishment costs. Additionally, the rent is capped corresponding to the size of the municipality.

Because of the lack of affordable housing and decreasing numbers of asylum seekers in Vorarlberg, from 2017 until recently, in Vorarlberg (and Tyrol) it was possible for recognised refugees to remain in the basic care facilities even after their entitlement to basic care had expired. Besides the importance of housing assistance by NGOs and volunteers, the opportunity to stay in basic care facilities had a positive impact on their labour market integration and readiness to stay in Vorarlberg. (Dellinger 2021).

3.5.National Level: Austria

3.5.1. Asylum

The competencies in asylum affairs in Austria is, as explained, primarily at national level. The main policy is the Asylum Act (AsylG)⁸. Due to the increased number of asylum seekers in 2015, the legal regulations were **tightened and frequently reformed** over the last years. Hence, the asylum system is complex and difficult to understand – also for experts working in this area for years. As a consequence, the decisions in the asylum procedures are not always comprehensible – especially for volunteers accompanying asylum seekers.

- A **sustainable reform of the Asylum Act** is recommended, so that also constant legal changes which complicates the work of the public officials is avoided.
- In this context, the stakeholders at the policy roundtable requested the **acceleration** of the asylum procedure and especially the **appeal procedures**, too.

For the basic care, the Federal Government and the Federal States agreed on a temporary provision of basic care for foreigners in need of assistance and protection (asylum seekers, refugees, displaced persons and other persons who cannot be deported for legal or factual reasons)⁹. Accordingly, the national level is responsible for the distribution and the transport of the target groups, the administration and the statistics, the coordination and execution of return programs as well as for the creation of places for accommodation in case of accommodation shortages. The Federal Government also covers 60% of the maximum daily cost rate in organised shelters per adult (€ 17) and per unaccompanied minor in a residential group (€ 75) of the basic care in the Federal States. Every person also receives pocket money of € 40 per month. As mentioned in the frame of the regional level, the temporary provision of basic care **does not regulate the location and just give general information about the organisation** of the asylum shelters, e.g. “respect of human dignity” (BGBl. I Nr. 80/2004, Art. 5). However, many asylum **shelters are difficult to reach and located in remote areas**, which is criticised in the case study by stakeholders and interviewees. The **lack of public transport** (see also 3.3.4. Mobility at regional level) from the asylum shelters to the municipal centers prevents social encounters of asylum seekers and the local population. The location

8 BGBl. I Nr. 100/2005

9 BGBl. I Nr. 80/2004.

of the shelters has a **negative impact at the local level**, mainly. Following, it is recommended to try

- to select the shelters according to the **public transport connections** or the **walking distance** to playgrounds, doctors, public administrations, etc.

In this context, the report of the commissioner of the human rights of the council of Europe (CommDH(2022)107, 15) “is concerned about the **unsatisfactory living conditions prevailing in several reception facilities**. Mijatović calls on the Austrian authorities to effectively protect the right to adequate housing of applicants for international protection”. Besides the location of the asylum shelters, the organisation of the accommodation and care needs to be **standardized**. The differences between the federal and the provincial reception centres should be overcome to **improve the living conditions for all asylum seekers in the reception facilities** (Mijatović 2022). These issues are in line with the MATILDE findings, according to which more staff would be needed with **adequate qualifications**, to avoid a high **turnover** and an **overload** as consequence. These challenges and staff shortages were compounded due to COVID-19 illnesses. The recommendations are

- to increase the ratio of caregivers and asylum seekers and
- to implement a stand-by contingent (e.g., students, civilian servants, volunteers, etc.), in order to meet peaks.
- In addition, the working conditions for the staff and the quality management need to be improved by **offering (more) supervision** and **implementing minimum standards of qualifications** and regular **trainings**. Following, the quality of support would meet the recommendations of the council of Europe.
- During the policy roundtable, the stakeholders added to increase the **availability of medical staff** in the shelters, i.e. specialised physicians, especially during the admission procedure of the asylum procedure, when the asylum seekers are not allowed to leave the district of their shelters.
- For an ongoing monitoring and exchange, **roundtables with stakeholders of asylum issues** are recommended. Furthermore, the **entry ban** should be discussed and evaluated, too.

For example, if (evaluated) volunteers would be allowed to enter the asylum shelters, they get in contact with the asylum seekers and may offer support in cooking, grocery shopping, leisure activities, German language acquisition, etc. Hence, the encounter of the new arrivals and the local population would be possible. Such a change of the entry ban would affect the efforts at local level.

3.5.2. Child care & kindergarten

As the mandatory kindergarten attendance for five-year old children was released at national level, the policy recommendation

- targets the **expansion of the mandatory kindergarten attendance from one to two years** for specific target groups (e.g., for newly arrived immigrant children, children at the risk of poverty, etc.), in order to prepare them adequately for the school, to increase their social integration and to improve their language acquisition at an early age.

Instead, the Federal Government and the Federal States agreed on a temporary provision of child care in May 2022. The focus is on language support and development. Even though € 200 million per year for the next five years will be invested in kindergarten in Austria, the regulation is criticised by some Federal States, the opposition and the social partners, as the amount is too low, because one billion would be needed per year, the quality is not standardised and an increase of flexibility is missed (ORF 2022a).

3.5.3. Labour market & recognition of qualifications

A challenge is the Austrian-wide **labor shortage of skilled workers**, which is also negatively noticeable at the regional and local level. In the roundtable, it was discussed that the **focus of integration efforts is almost exclusively on (highly) qualified migrants**. For the majority of migrants, there is a **lack of recognition of qualifications** or these are too restrictive, time-consuming and bureaucratic. From the migrants' point of view, this leads to restricted access to the labour market and continued economic dependency, which in turn promotes a deeper lack of workforce on the labour market. Especially for Muslim women, access to the labor

market is particularly difficult and young migrants often lack knowledge about the administrative processes regarding work and education. In order to counteract this,

- a **quick recognition of the existing qualifications** is needed as well as to facilitate the acquisition of missing qualifications by
- fostering migrants' access to **education and training**. It was demanded, to
- **establish an institution that is responsible for the recognition** in order to save time and costs and to minimize the bureaucratic effort, as well as
- to develop and **offer specific educational offers for migrants** (such as the project A:Life, see "Asylum") and above all to benefit from the motivation, which especially young migrants have shown in job and education.

Special attention should be on asylum seekers, who are de-facto **excluded from the Austrian labour market**. Especially, "for the first three months of the asylum procedure, they are subject to a complete ban on employment (decree of the Ministry of Economy and Labour 2004, GZ: 435.006/6-II/7/04)" (Gruber et. al. 2022; see also AMS 2021). Instead, the aim should be the **actual implementation of the EU-Directive (2013/33/EU)**, which has been implemented so far in a restricted way – the so-called "substitute worker procedure" ("Ersatzkraftverfahren"). Before an asylum seeker can be employed, a labour market review should try and find an available person with Austrian citizenship or with foreign citizenship already integrated in the labour market (Deutsch 2021). For the actual implementation, **3 priority points** were allocated at the policy roundtable for this recommendation. The potential of asylum seekers should be evaluated and trainings offered, in order to increase the access to the labour market in Austria. In this context, the increase of the earnings limit for displaced persons from Ukraine is currently discussed in Austria. Carinthia suggests to increase this limit for asylum seekers independent of the country of origin. The result is outstanding (ORF 2022b). At the moment, the limit is 110 €. The participants of the policy roundtable Carinthia recommended to use the limits of marginally employed people, which is 485,85 € per month in 2022 (USP 2021). Asylum seekers and locals need to have more information about the service cheque (Dienstleistungsscheck), because a work permit is not needed then (AMS 2021). It serves as a payment for the provision of services that are typical

in private households (e.g., cleaning or gardening etc.). An accident insurance is included and the employment is legal (AK 2022).

3.6. European Level

3.6.1. Asylum

Based on the SWOT-analysis and discussed during the roundtable, some challenges directed at EU level became obvious. The main aim should be to harmonize the asylum issues in the European Union and the Member States.

It became clear that the **arrival of TCNs in the European Union is mainly prevented**, especially with the Schengen Border Codes I and the Dublin III Regulation 2 (Guercio 2019). Following, legal ways for (unqualified/low-qualified) TCNs to enter the EU, are lacking. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum (COM(2020)609 final) announces to replace the Dublin Regulation, which is still outstanding (Zupan 2021). Consequently, TCNs try to enter the EU via dangerous ways – with smugglers, on the sea with dubious boats, etc. Hence, there is a **need for secure flights and the security of fleeing people**. Alternatively, TCNs are **offered legal ways to enter the EU**, e.g. via resettlement initiatives (Knaus 2020), in order to ensure a safe migration. But the current visa policies are restrictive, too (Hofmann 2017). Citizens from more than 100 countries need to apply for visa. Main EU programs (e.g., Hague and Stockholm) focus control or the choice of relocation or return, like the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (COM(2020)609 final).

After entering the EU, the **Dublin Regulation applies**. That means, some Member States at the external borders face a high number of asylum seekers in comparison to other Member States without bordering third countries (Guercio 2019). So, the refugees have to apply for asylum in the so-called “safe country”, they enter first. This leads to an **overburdening and inequality** of Member States at the external borders. Generally, Austria would not have many asylum applications as it borders on countries of the Dublin Regulation. However, this does not correspond to reality. In addition, there are countries which are currently excluded from the Dublin Regulations, because they do not fulfil all conditions of fair asylum procedures. Hence, it is recommended

- to relieve those Member States by **introducing a quota regulation**. For example, all Member States have to take up to 1.5% of the total population, mandatorily. In case of non-compliance, they have to pay penalties.
- In addition, the distribution of asylum seekers within the EU should become transparent, e.g. with a **transparency barometer**.

Consequently, the Member States at the external borders would be relieved and the distribution would be fair with an equal use of financial resources.

Some countries infringe EU rights, regulations and recommendations. Common asylum policies are not (fully) implemented by all Member States (Zupan 2021). Nevertheless, it is recommended

- to **standardize and harmonize the asylum procedures and the standards of admission and accommodation**.
- In order to increase the quality, a **monitoring system** should be elaborated to evaluate the asylum procedures as well as the quality of asylum shelters and care.
- If Member States further infringe EU regulations, they should pay penalties.

So, the aim is to increase and standardize the quality of handling refugees in the EU. In this context, the pressure on Austria would be higher, to implement the recommendations of the Council of Europe by Dunja Mijatović.

While the EU has responsibility in terms of asylum, the **influence on the Member States' integration policies is limited**. Even though the EU defines integration as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU Member States” and declares “the promotion of fundamental rights, non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all are key integration issues” (COM(2005)0389), the integration policies of the Member States increasingly seem to **focus on a one-way-process**, which is why it remains a topic of conflict and discussion (Zupan 2021). Austria is an example of tightened integration policies in the past years. Thus, the Member States face different migration pressures due to different ways of dealing with migration and integration issues. In this context, it might be fruitful too,

- to elaborate a **monitoring system** and to increase the **transparency** of integration policies.

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Bulgaria

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1. Introduction and methodology

The formulation of policy recommendations requires an integrated view with respect to the various opinions and considerations of different groups of stakeholders and TCNs who have been involved in the MATILDE research in the last years. Taking into account a large amount of gathered information during field visits, interviews and focus groups the Bulgarian MATILDE team opted for the adoption of **an innovative and holistic approach in a four-stage process of clarifying policy recommendations**. With the aim to formulate policy recommendations so they are as concrete and realistic as possible the team at first proceeded to **outline policy recommendations based predominantly on an overview and analysis of data shared by stakeholders and TCNs concerns, interests and motivation to change or to improve something at a local, regional, national or European level**.

After this first phase, all proposals of policy recommendations were discussed with crucial stakeholders and TCNs during a thematic round table “Local Development and Innovative Practices of Migration, Mobility, Integration and Inclusion”. Innovative and good practices of inclusion and integration were analyzed by the Regional Governor of the Haskovo Region, representatives of state institutions, four mayors of villages, representatives of the business, civic sector and international organizations, the schools and academia, as well as the migrant community. As a next step, **all participants were invited to individually rank the final 10 selected recommendations by their level of importance from 1 to 10 (1 being most important and 10 - least important)**. The valuation of policy recommendations referred to the (relative) importance given to the outcomes and thus **allowed to prioritize the recommendations and measure their level of social acceptability**. 37 participants in total including village mayors, social and health workers, school directors and teachers, lawyers,

migrants, etc. ranked the policy recommendations. Based on the results obtained and the scores collected for each policy recommendation, we were able to rank them in order of importance attributed by the responders.

Finally, key national stakeholders and policymakers in the sphere of European union's programs and funds, education, agriculture and rural regions were asked to rank and share their feedback on policy recommendations and solutions and their future application. This phase of validation turned out to be very valuable as it added the important perspective of actors with long experience in developing and implementing policies at European, national and local levels.

2. Main policy problem(s)

In the 2020 edition of the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX 2020), the most reliable and cited index for measuring and comparing integration policies towards migrants, for the year 2019 Bulgaria is placed 43rd out of 52 countries being part of the group of countries that are characterized as providing migrants 'equality only on paper'. The qualification of Bulgaria as a country which is providing migrants 'equality only on paper' is related to the obstacles encouraged in areas such as Social connection/cohesion, education, economy & employment, mobility, language, etc.

Following are described some of the identified main policy problems of the research team at the local and regional levels:

Social connection/cohesion: Although there are a few examples of intercultural engaged mayors of villages in the region in general, the connection and the communication between TCNs and the host community is not encouraged and supported by the authorities as no effective integration strategy in this direction exist.

Mobility: Also, the provision of **regular inter-village transport in the region is a problematic** area regarding the well-being of both TCNs and local people as having access to transport is crucial for the motivation of people from the two groups to want to contribute to the local development of the region by living and working in it.

Language & culture: Administrative paperwork is being qualified by migrants as a burden due to the fact that in most of the cases documents related to permit residents are **provided only in Bulgarian** which is putting the TCNs in an uncomfortable situation and makes it difficult to them.

Another particular problem that hinders TCNs integration in the region is their **inability to speak Bulgarian**. There are **not enough Bulgarian language classes for foreigners** in the region who don't live in the refugee center. Lack of Bulgarian language skills is a major obstacle to their integration into the labor market.

Participatory culture practices have proved to be a successful method of integration of TCNs in the case region. However, all initiatives promoting intercultural dialogue need to be planned in advance, and further systematized by publishing them on the site of the municipality in English so TCNs could keep themselves informed about them and express their willingness to contribute if they wish to do so.

Education: When it comes to the area of education which is pointed out as a slightly unfavorable area in the MIPEx findings, an existing policy problem is the **insufficient classes of Bulgarian language programs and of systematic courses for TCNs children in schools**. At the same time willingness and motivation to learn Bulgarian is expressed by migrant children as well as adults.

Economy & Employment: While the business sector is willing to be socially responsible, as well as social enterprises, have demonstrated an interest in working with TCNs in the Harmanli region as analyzed in previous MATILDE reports, they lack support from the state. They need additional expertise and experience, training, and exchange of experience with other countries with well-developed social entrepreneurship. The lack of sustainability in the business model of social enterprises is a significant obstacle to their future development. In addition, the monitored social enterprises working with migrants and refugees are not able to provide professional advancement to the migrants who are included in their activities. According to the SWOT analyses conducted by the MATILDE research team, a possible threat at a local level to the application of migrants' favorable policies is the existing local office of a far-right party in Harmanli which often uses **anti-migrant rhetoric as an instrument to**

gain political influence. There is one member of the far-right party in the municipal council of Harmanli. Also, TCNs face a **language barrier** due to the lack of English versions of the websites of the main local and regional institutions as well as administrative documents and the lack of accessibility to additional Bulgarian language lessons. Another weak point is that the current **transport network is not reliable** and migrants find it difficult to commute in the region.

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

3.1. Local Level and Regional Level: Municipality of Harmanli and District of Haskovo

For the purpose of drafting the Bulgarian Policy Recommendations and Solutions Report in accordance with the specifics of the Bulgarian Case study in terms of territorial division, **the notions ‘local level’ and ‘regional level’ will be presented together.** This is due to the fact that in Bulgaria locally and regionally coincide because the Bulgarian institutions at the municipal level under the Regional Development Act are municipal (local level) and at the same time part of the Haskovo district (regional level). Taking this into consideration the findings from the District of Haskovo and the Municipality of Harmanli in terms of Policy recommendations and solutions were presented as applicable at both regional and local levels.

Following are presented **ten policy recommendations that have been consulted with senior experts from the managing authority of the Operational Program financed by the European Social Fund in Bulgaria as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry in Bulgaria.** The undertaken consultations contributed to the formulation of some further recommendations at local and regional, national and European levels, including considerations of actions needed for the future implementations of proposed measures. The following policy recommendations and solutions for the local and regional levels were identified as the most significant on the basis of the multi-layered study on the issue.

3.1.1. Social cohesion: Policy recommendations 1 & 2

- **To support foreign nationals living in the region willing to engage in volunteering and social action (for example provision of English lessons)**

Evaluation: 324/ 370

Ranked at 2nd place out of 10

There is a big potential in this policy recommendation as a considerable number of interviewed **TCNs, especially from Great Britain, living in the region are socially-engaged**. Most of them have experience in volunteering and have shown interest in developing and maintaining **social causes oriented into helping refugees and into contributing to the local development** including the opportunity of exchange of new knowledge and skills between the local people and the foreign newcomers.

The policy recommendation was inspired and therefore supported by two English migrants who have very recently managed to start a school for teaching and coaching in English oriented towards adults, children and teams in the town of Harmanli.

Another successful example is the innovative form of **school 'Playschool' created by two British women** - mother and daughter, who **teach children refugees through play work**. They have created a space, where children and young people are helped in their studies and in overcoming post-traumatic symptoms through acceptance and care. The school was founded in 2014 and is still ongoing in the Registration and reception Center (RRC) Harmanli. Both mother and daughter are popular and appreciated by both the refugees at the center and the local residents. The school is the only one of its kind and has a profound positive effect on the children residing in the refugee camp.

There is a case of a Finnish family that is in charge of providing food for cats and dogs. Packages of dog and cat food arrive from Finland, which, for example, because they have been slightly opened, cannot be sold in Finland and are sent to the animals in Bulgaria.

For all of the described initiatives, the founders have **relied on their own means or crowdfunding**. In order to encourage more TCNs to engage in volunteering and social action, the municipality should support them to conduct their initiatives with logistical and financial support as well as providing them opportunities for networking.

- **To be published regularly on the website of Haskovo District in Bulgarian and English a schedule of intercultural events related to art, music, sport and ecology in the villages in the region.**

Evaluation: 315/ 370

Ranked at 4th place out of 10

In order to create and maintain long term, social cohesion between the local people and the newly arrived TCNs in the region common **intercultural events related to art, music, sport and ecology shall not only be organized but also actively disseminated and communicated at local and regional level**. Participatory practices, such as through culture, art, music, sports and eco-events, have already proven successful in building bridges between people, communities and cultures (Krasteva, Deliverable 3.3 – Social Impact. Bulgarian Report, 2021). However, their **planning does not seem to be very systematic**. Often there is a **lack of information about upcoming events on the websites of the local and regional institutions or it's available only in Bulgarian and not in English**. Therefore, representatives of the municipality and the NGO sector or volunteers from the local communities have:

- to prepare **a schedule of municipal intercultural events** that will be held or have the perspective to be conducted in the villages in the region.
- The schedule should be **published on the website of the municipality in Bulgarian and English**, so that all who wish to attend the events can be informed about the upcoming events.
- In addition, it should be noted how foreigners can volunteer or participate and who they need to contact in order to show interest.

The importance of this policy recommendation comes from the fact that the region has on one side already a very positive experience with intercultural artistic or green events and on the other side there are members of the migrant community, who are willing to organize events such as international art festivals. The encouragement of the organization and the participation in more cultural, art, sports and environmental events involving local people and TCNs is very important as representatives of both groups can participate in the process

of preparation and implementation of the activities. The organization of events can include different groups of TCNs - refugees and asylum seekers, newly settled young and old migrants from villages in the region, and migrants living in Bulgaria for many years, as each group can contribute differently to the intercultural appearance of events. On the part of the local community, it is crucial to involve people not only from the NGO sector but also from other areas such as business.

3.1.2. Mobility: policy recommendation 3

- **To improve the transport network - more and more regularly inter-village bus lines in Haskovo District**

Evaluation: 317/ 370

Ranked at 3rd place out of 10

The lack of regular means of transportation appeared as a problem during the conduction of the tool ‘Mobility mapping’ with two TCNs living in a village in the region of Haskovo who outlined the difficulties, when it comes to commuting in the region with public transport and **especially reaching the town of Haskovo, where most important buildings are located such as schools, hospitals, markets, etc.** This gap can be the reason for discouraging people to live in the rural and mountainous regions because of the difficulties they will face and the waste of the most precious resource - time. This is why **the Ministry of Transport together with the municipality shall make efforts:**

- to improve the transport network - more and more regular inter-village bus lines, as the connectivity of the Haskovo region is a key factor for local development and makes the region more attractive to migrants and Bulgarians wanting to live in a village.

3.1.3. Language & culture: Policy recommendations 4 & 5

- **All basic administrative documents to be accessible in English in order to facilitate the understanding of foreign citizens living in the Haskovo District.**

Evaluation: 273/ 370

Ranked at 8th place out of 10

With the growing number of TCNs wanting to settle down in the region of Haskovo grows the need for publishing and providing to the foreign citizens all basic administrative documents in English in order to facilitate their understanding of the important documentation they need to have in order to stay and live in the country. This is especially relevant in the case of renewal of citizenships. In the case when there is only a Bulgarian version of the documents, migrants have to either translate the text with Google translator or if they know Bulgarian try to write in it. Therefore, the municipality should prepare an English version of all major administrative documents so as to facilitate the understanding of the TCNs who want to stay in the region. Following several complaints in relation to this issue made by TCNs, who have faced the problem, there have been recent developments and subsequent improvements regarding this policy recommendation as the paperwork for residency that is filled in the relevant institution in Haskovo is already available also in English. But this practice should apply to all the administrative documents relevant to the foreign citizens staying in Bulgaria and should not exist as isolated cases but as a long-term well-functioning practice.

- **To provide additional Bulgarian language programs for TCNs and TCNs children in schools in the Haskovo and Harmanli region**

Evaluation: 345 / 370

Ranked at 1st place out of 10

Conducted research in the region of Haskovo and Harmanli regarding the integration of TCNs in the labor market points to their **motivation and wish to learn the Bulgarian language as well as to the lack of access to Bulgarian language programs**. The majority of interviewed TCNs, who decided to settle permanently in the region, expressed clearly their

willingness to learn Bulgarian. Since **there are no systematic courses for foreigners, they all learn the language on their own**, through internet applications. As a solution to this issue, **several institutions such as the State Agency for Employment together with the municipality and the business sector shall join forces to systematically meet the need of TCNs to acquire language skills that would allow them to move along the immigration process.**

In terms of school education, teachers and school directors have expressed concerns that it is quite difficult for migrant children to catch up with their classmates due to language barriers. For that reason, the Ministry of Education and the Regional Directorate of Education shall plan additional funding to meet the need for additional Bulgarian language classes for TCN children in school. The current program provides for additional Bulgarian language classes for 1 year only. The education sector representatives interviewed considered it necessary that additional support in learning Bulgarian should continue beyond the first year in which the child is enrolled in school. In fact, this measure is extremely important as it furthers the role of children as mediators, who act as interpreters for their parents when interacting with teachers, social workers, doctors.

It should be noted that stakeholders and migrants considered that this policy recommendation is of primary importance. A possible explanation is that as demonstrated in previous MATILDE reports in the field of integration of TCNs in **Bulgaria representatives of the education sector are the most involved in enrolling and keeping migrant children in schools.** Therefore, stakeholders proved to be sensitive, when it comes to the demand for more Bulgarian language courses.

3.1.4. Rural/regional development: Policy recommendation 6

- **To establish institutional cooperation between active migrants, who in their role as ‘Ambassadors of Tourism in Haskovo Region’ help to promote the region as a tourist destination but also as a place for long-term migration.**

Evaluation: 299/ 370

Ranked at 5th place out of 10

In the region of Haskovo and Harmanli, there are numerous passionate **TCNs who are already successfully promoting the region through their network with the different opportunities** it provides, as for example for the alternative way of life in nature that is possible there. These migrants with an active lifestyle and business or with ideas and projects for the promotion of the region have to be proposed to become "Ambassadors of Tourism in Haskovo". **The Haskovo District Administration as well as the Municipality of Harmanli where many of the foreigners are concentrated should use the potential of the TCNs to promote the region as a tourist destination, but also as a place for migration for development by creating heritage a positive marketing campaign, presenting the region as a multicultural place with wonderful nature, rich cultural and delicious food.** For example, given the variety of different cuisines and restaurants, the region can be promoted as a dining destination for all travelers coming from Turkey or Greece. The most active representatives of the TCNs should be included in working groups to discuss strategies for attracting tourists (holiday packages) and long-term migrants. For long-term migrants, the local administration has to be ready to provide free consulting services regarding the purchase of property in the region and other administrative services.

There are two prominent examples of existing potential among TCNs in the region to promote it. A British family that has been living in the region for years, which has **launched a successful website in an effort to attract more foreigners and to develop a real estate business, highlighting all advantages of the region as well as its cultural and tourist potential**, but especially the idea of an alternative lifestyle. The website itself is called 'Alternative Living Bulgaria'.

Finnish migrants maintain a website that promotes the village in the region they live in as a touristic destination. The site even provides a guide to migrating to the village. It is stressed that this place offers all conditions for working remotely and having a wonderful life.

Further aspects of the policy recommendations at the local and regional level were outlined during the validation of the formulated policy recommendation by experts from relevant to the project national institutions. **It is important to address the need for specific measures**

to support capacity building of administrations in the regional (in the case of Bulgaria regional administration level) and local authorities (municipal administration level) - training programs for administrations to identify migrant problems; training to establish links between regional and local businesses with representatives of migrant communities; training to provide business start-up services, including training in foreign languages, English or other languages, in the case of compact communities of migrants from a language group.

3.2.National Level: Bulgaria

3.2.1. Economy & Employment and Rural/regional development: Policy recommendation 7

- **To develop a strategy to attract foreign workers and retrain them according to the needs of the economy of specific regions and sectors**

Evaluation: 267 / 370

Ranked at 9th place out of 10

Gathered information from interviews shows that the **shortage of seasonal workers in agriculture has a direct negative impact on the balanced development of agriculture**. In order to address the key obstacle of refugee migration, namely its transit character the **State Agency of Employment together with the municipality and representatives of regional businesses shall create a mechanism to integrate TCNs such as refugees in the labor market in short-term positions**. Companies need legal and administrative flexibility and support of social workers in the centers of the State Agency for Refugees to be able to hire for a short period low-skilled migrants in agricultural production. For instance, in the case study at hand wine producers are in great need of workers every year and this lack of workforce tends to become more considerable in the future years.

In order to make the region more attractive for foreign workers, the Employment Agency in cooperation with the State Agency for Refugees shall provide vocational training for TCNs depending on the regional economy's needs. This would require more research on the economic needs of specific regions and the provision and allocation of funds.

3.2.2. Education: Policy recommendation 8

- **To create and maintain sustainable cooperation between state authorities and the NGO sector to regularly train educators and psychologists involved in school and non-formal education.**

Evaluation: 293 / 370

Ranked at 6th place out of 10

Teachers and social mediators in the Haskovo and Harmanli region have shared that the role of educators and psychologists should be enhanced to meet the needs of TCNs children, especially refugees kids, who have experienced traumas, which require additional professional efforts to support their welfare and thus improve their quality of life and future development. State institutions responsible for the integration of migrants together with representatives of the NGO sector, who have experience in the field, shall provide a mechanism to address the isolation of refugee kids and other migrant children, who remain in Bulgaria by building a capacity at a regional level, which consists of adoption of possible effective practices in education, mental health and psychosocial support for this particularly vulnerable group. This policy recommendation requires a strategy of training school staff to implement practices that proved to be effective in other European countries for the inclusion of migrant children such as for example:

- “Interactive groups” - good educational practice in which children learn in groups through dynamic communication with each other
- “Expressive Therapy” - (psychosocial) activities organized for migrant and refugee children like theater, art, and music workshops. In this regard, more integration activities including sports, recreational games, and culinary exhibitions shall take place both within regular school lessons and as extra-curricular activities.

In addition, the initiative Intercultural Gardens as Green Bridges organized by the Bulgarian MATILDE team in schools in Harmanli and Haskovo region proved to be a successful good practice that connects children from different countries and cultures in an innovative way.

3.2.3. Language & culture: Policy recommendation 9

- **To improve the infrastructure of the refugee camp by adding a functioning space for art activities such as cinema and theater performances.**

Evaluation: 231 / 370

Ranked at 10th place out of 10

According to data collected in the frame of the MATILDE study, **the existing playground in the refugee reception center currently needs renovation as it is in very poor condition.** The repair of the playground is extremely needed so that children in the camp can't play outside safely. **It is important for kids to have a space to “live” their childhood. The State Agency for Refugees could allocate funds for the improvement of the infrastructure of the refugee camp by adding a functioning space for art activities such as cinema and theater, which is of great importance for the successful integration of the accommodated refugees and especially the children.** This measure is of high importance for the well-being of refugee kids because the playground represents for them a space of liberty outside the camp where children can express themselves and develop social skills through different games.

A further policy recommendation at the national level formulated in the framework of the process of consulting the already drafted policy recommendations with relevant stakeholders was concretized. It is very important to apply **specific measures to support the adaptation of foreign citizens living in the regions to local conditions (official language, cultural features of local communities, characteristics of regional and local business) - creating conditions for learning the official language of the state; training on local peculiarities (culture, way of life, communication); training for the presentation of regional and local business, available needs for business ventures, state of the labor market.**

3.3. European Level

3.3.1. Economy & Employment and Social cohesion: Policy recommendation 10:

- **TCNs with successful businesses initiatives as well as TCNs demonstrating strong entrepreneur potential to be identified and invited to national and European coaching seminars, business forums, job fairs, and intercultural workshops to share their best practices**

Evaluation: 291 / 370

Ranked at 7th place out of 10

Results from conducted study and field visits showed that TCNs tend to develop small businesses such as restaurants and beauty salons, barbershops etc. They decide to run the risk to see their business closed. This is so because **TCNs often do not have access to public funds or do not have sufficient information or expertise to prepare their application for it.**

In this regard, national authorities shall provide the necessary support to this group of the society so TCNs could be supported in setting up a business plan that would allow sustainability over the years of their specific project. Identified TCNs shall have the opportunity to join coaching seminars organized at the European level that would help to develop and improve start-up ideas. In addition, successful businesses need to be demonstrated at the larger European level, because they send a strong message that TCNs shall be empowered, because of their role as drivers of local development in each European country.

After the conduction of consultations with stakeholders regarding the drafted policy recommendation at the European level the following statements were formulated:

Policies at EU level must be differentiated towards the different stakeholders (target groups) involved in the processes. Policies can be implemented through the inclusion of recommendations in official documents of the EC and the Council, as well as through special centrally funded (by the European Commission) instruments or through European shared management funds (European investment funds).

Specific measures in the field of education - for additional training in Bulgarian (this may apply to any official language of the Member States) for migrant children in school to set at the level of official EC documents (ex. Commission communications, strategies in the field of

migration processes, Council resolutions and conclusions, etc.) specific requirements and criteria, for example for more hours for such training; to provide a sufficient number of teachers according to the needs; to develop special methodologies for this type of pedagogical activities (teaching children with a language other than the official mother tongue); training of teachers to teach specific methodologies and work with children of different backgrounds and languages from the main group of students in the community.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the enumerated ten policy recommendations, if taken into consideration by the relevant stakeholders and regional and local authorities, **have the potential to be applied in practice and impact positively the current situation with TCNs in the region of Harmanli and Haskovo**. On one side, there are already **existing examples of active migrants willing to engage in the tackling of some of the main policy problems** pointed out in the report by volunteering or managing their own campaigns and businesses and therefore the process of application of the proposed policy recommendations can be conducted in a two-sided way with the participation of the local community and the TCNs. On the other side, **there are concrete individuals such as the Regional Governor of the Haskovo Region, mayors of several villages, representatives of the business, civic sector, and international organizations as well as of the schools and academia who have shown and proved their engagement in the process of integration of TCNs and their inclusion into the local community**. A promising sign in this direction is the participation, the active discussion, and the strong interest in the implementation of policy recommendations during the round table organized in the region of Harmanli. This **demonstrated interest and willingness to bring a positive change is very important when it comes to the application of the identified policy recommendations in practice**. In addition, in order to achieve a sustainable impact of the implementation of the policy recommendations and their transformation into good practices, the further policy recommendations formulated during the consultations of the research team with relevant stakeholders have to be as well taken

seriously into consideration by the relevant institutions and authorities at local, regional, national and European level.

Finland

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1. Introduction and methodology

The policy recommendations from the Finnish MATILDE team are based on data collected in regions of **Ostrobothnia** and **North Karelia** in all phases of the research project. Outside of our interviews, observations, focus groups and other meetings we have also done desk research on the past and future developments of Finnish immigration, education, and social policy. Thus, we have a good picture of the main issues and problems in the current policy making and also what to expect in the near future. For example, **the new integration education curriculum** is coming into effect in August 2022 and **the preparation of the new act on integration** is going forward in the fall and is planned to come to effect in 2024. From what we know about these changes that are already in process is that they are at least trying to answer many of the issues raised in our own research. Therefore, we are mostly discussing policy recommendations on a more regional and local level as many of the national level or legislative issues and their future is currently difficult to assess.

As stated previously, our **recommendations are based both on the qualitative and desk research**. The recommendations are both based on the researcher's analysis and our participants opinions and views, particularly in the case study-phase conducted in winter of 2021 and 2022 and the subsequent roundtables in spring 2022. As there are no separate regional or municipal legislative actors in Finland and as the regional and local governing bodies in most of the country are the similar it is reasonable to include recommendations from both Ostrobothnia and North Karelia in the same report.

In our case studies in **two municipalities in North Karelia, Kitee and Lieksa**, the participants were from the folk high schools, representatives of local multicultural associations, the Lutheran church, municipalities, and immigrants of diverse backgrounds. While we were

happy with the range of participants, we would have liked to have more participation from the municipality administrations. **In Ostrobothnia** the participants were public officials, employers, local and national politicians, immigrants, and immigrant activists.

2. Main policy problems

The main challenges in Finnish immigrant and integration policy based on our research has to do with language attainment, socio-economic issues like housing and labour market integration, and co-operation between different actors. Language issue was raised in both North Karelia and Ostrobothnia with slight regional particularities. Housing and labour market issues were mainly raised in the discussions in Ostrobothnia but affect North Karelia as well. The difficulties and lack of co-operation and communication between different actors working with immigrants was North Karelia specific in our studies. Here are some of the challenges described in a more in detail.

- **Language learning in general is a major issue** as it effects, for example, the labour market integration of the migrants. While even immigrants with lacking skills in the local language find employment in labour intensive and low paying jobs (especially during labour shortage), **the Finnish labour market still emphasizes the knowledge of the official languages** to a large extent. Therefore, effective language acquisition is needed both in the official integration courses and everyday life. Here we come to problems with our current integration legislation¹⁰ which mainly directs integration education towards refugees and asylum seekers. It is seen in our research that, for example, **labour migrants and the elderly are often neglected in the integration services**. There is a new act in the works, but the draft will not enter parliamentary discussion until autumn of 2022. While based on our research we can assume that the new legislation will take the short comings of the older act into consideration, we cannot yet say for certain how it will end up after it is passed into law.

¹⁰ Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010)

- **The new curriculum for the integration education program¹¹** is coming into effect in the august of 2022 and it has more work-based learning integrated into it. The issue of work life integrated language education was discussed in multiple interviews and focus groups we have held. The problem with the new curriculum for small and rural municipalities is that they often lack both the on-the-job learning positions and the resources to help the immigrants find those opportunities. Nationwide guidance and recommendations are only designed in a general level when the everyday practical solutions need to be solved in the local level. **While more on-the-job learning is the right way to go forward, especially with those who are not already labour migrants, the practical challenges the change generates cannot be overlooked.**
- **There is also a problem with the co-ordination and co-operation between different actors** who are working in immigrant integration, both in public and third sectors. In regional and local levels, it is not often clear where and how different actors operate and sometimes all the actors do not even know of each other¹². Sometimes there are overlapping activities and interests due to the lack of communication and coordination. **One challenge is also that the co-operation between public sector and third sector is not working as effectively as it could.** In integration work the role of the public sector is clear and there are legislative norms which guide it. However, while mostly being informal, in the grassroot level the role of NGOs is crucial in improving the integration of immigrants. Some larger organizations like the Red Cross¹³ do have a formal role in immigrant integration but many of the smaller and local ones do indispensable work as well. The problems in funding and co-operation are limiting the functionality of third sector activities as many NGOs are dependent on short term project funding.

11 Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022.

12 E. g. In the case of North Karelia the multicultural associations in Kitee and Lieksa were not familiar with each other even though the regional “field” in the subject is small.

13 Runs most of the Reception centres in Finland.

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

3.1. Local Level: Kitee and Lieksa

3.1.1. Efficient organisation and cooperation in integration work

More coherent coordination of integration activities among different actors. In local level the roles of municipalities and third sector actors are sometimes unclear. The co-ordination among different organizations who work for immigrant integration is in many cases insufficient. If the co-ordination of integration work would be part of municipal work, it could create continuity for integration work. The municipal workers have more permanent contracts than those who are working in third sector project-based jobs. Even with personnel changes in municipalities, the posts have permanence and continuity is guaranteed. **The municipal actors should take the main responsibility of integration work**, but it should happen by establishing working groups consisting of all relevant actors. In our opinion this question should be addressed in the new integration legislation.

3.1.2. The use of the local language in multicultural associations should be promoted

The language used as lingua franca in multicultural associations can exclude or marginalize some immigrants, especially when one language group forms most of non-native speakers in the area. If the language of migrants or, for example English, is used it can hinder the immigrants' learning of the local language and the participation into activities can suffer for those who do not speak the used language. To create good population relations and mutual understanding the importance of common language is crucial. While impractical in the beginning, **using the local language helps migrants** from different language backgrounds to communicate better in the long term, but it will also improve establishment of relations with the local actors as well as attract locals to get involved. As the level of Finnish or Swedish varies greatly between individuals, and as associations have different priorities, advancing this recommendation might be difficult in some cases. **It will require more investment and care** placed on educating both the associations and the local community.

3.1.3. Promotion of the local language as the language of integration

The second recommendation concerning language is **the language of integration chosen** by the immigrant and its effect on integrating into the local community. As many refugees are also settled in the Swedish speaking areas of the country, the language of integration should also be Swedish. This does not always happen as The Finnish Migration Service (MIGRI) often pushes for Finnish as the language of integration due its majority status in the country. This can hinder immigrants' possibilities in integrating into the local community. While we acknowledge this is a sensitive political topic, **we think Swedish should be given equal status** as a language of integration as the language holds in the Finnish constitution¹⁴. As stated before, this question is especially relevant for the Swedish speaking parts in Ostrobothnia and the southern coast.

3.1.4. The role of leisure time activities should be developed

More action should be taken to encourage local sport clubs and other leisure time activity organizers to integrate migrants, especially migrant children to take part in their activities. **While some hobbies such as football and music already play a significant role** in integration of immigrant children, more emphasis should still be placed on them, particularly in rural surroundings where the number of possible activities is often limited. From the point of view of language learning and integration the role of leisure time activities, such as sports, cannot be overemphasized. Hobbies are everyday activities which integrate immigrants into Finnish society and local community effectively and increase the good population relations in natural surroundings. To promote this, action from both public institutions and the sports clubs themselves is needed.

¹⁴ "The national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. The right of everyone to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before courts of law and other authorities, and to receive official documents in that language, shall be guaranteed by an Act. The public authorities shall provide for the cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations of the country on an equal basis." The Finnish Constitution, Section 17.

3.2 Regional Level: North Karelia and Ostrobothnia

3.2.1. More coherent coordination and co-operation between actors on the regional level

The local multicultural associations should have more organized regional collaboration where they could circulate information, good practices, and for example apply for funding together. There should also be other NGOs, that work with immigrants in any form, to be invited in these working groups. The co-operation is important in many ways but especially applying for funding would become more effective when **these local actors could set up larger consortiums in the regional level**. This kind of co-operation would need guidance from the larger associations and public institutions in the region to get going.

3.2.2. Refugee settlement should take housing situation and distances into consideration

Many rural areas suffer from lack of proper housing, and this can cause issues when trying to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into more remote areas. As refugees are settled in the municipalities, they are often placed in areas that are far from services and thus cause car dependency. This is not a good match with refugees, who do not have a car and may even lack a license to drive one. As also the public transit is deficient in these places and large investments into new housing is not sustainable in the long term, more care should be put on the settlement of refugees. **They, especially families with children, simply should not be placed into areas where you need a car to operate your life properly.**

3.2.3. Diversification of economic structure on rural regions

In rural areas in both regions, but especially Ostrobothnia, the labour market is mostly low-productive and labour intensive. Heavy reliance on low-productive, labour intensive and often low paid work will slow down the structural change of the economy in the region and lead to underdevelopment. While the TCNs contribute to make the case study areas stuck in the vicious circle of underdevelopment, they also contribute to increase the relative competitive advantages for the region towards other regions hosting traditional labour-

intensive production. This creates a policy challenge: the companies need cheap immigrant labour on a short-term basis, but in the longer term the local economy becomes stagnant. The companies' need for labour must be weighed against the macroeconomic benefits. To use cheap immigrated labour will postpone the structural economic change, but not terminate it. Unless these companies become more cost-efficient, they will price themselves out of the market. **A diversification of the economic structure is needed**, and in such diversification, immigrants can play a vital role. Also, more **flexibility in the work-based residence permits** is needed to give more permanence for seasonal labour migrants who would like to stay in Finland. **More resources should be given to improve immigrants language and education attainment** to give them possibilities to improve their socioeconomic status.

3.2.4. Marketing of regions strengths, possibilities and needs should be improved

North Karelia and Ostrobothnia are not well known internationally, and this causes challenges when trying to attract labour migrants. Both regions have much to offer for immigrants. Unfortunately, few immigrants and foreigners know about this. The regions need to tell the world about the good thing they do by place marketing, place branding and public diplomacy. While it is already done to a certain extent by the regional councils and different institutions of education¹⁵, **the regions need to do more and better place marketing and place branding.**

3.3. National Level: Finland

3.3.1. The role of the public sector in setting up on-the-job learning for immigrants

The new curriculum for the integration education is directing language learning and language teaching towards on-the-job learning. However, as noted earlier, this is a demanding task for rural areas as there often are not enough on-the-job training position in

¹⁵ Such as the Riveria vocational school and the universities in North Karelia and Centria university of Applied sciences in Ostrobothnia.

the private job market. There should be nationwide instructions for municipalities for offering and organizing these on-the-job learning positions for immigrants. In public sector there are several jobs, which could offer these kinds of places for migrants. **The public libraries, sporting, and cultural sites as well as public schools and day care could offer training places for immigrants.** While immigrants could learn labour markets skills, they could also learn language and this kind of training periods would also help them to integrate better into Finnish labour markets. This should be instructed from the national level, and it should be an obligation for municipalities. If it is left voluntary, there is a high risk that municipalities will avoid this task. **We therefore propose that there should be quotas for immigrants in public sector organisations for their on-the-job learning positions.** This will require investment both from the municipality and the national government and its institutions.

3.3.2. National policy and support for groups that are left out of integration programs

There should be national guidelines and economic support for local actors on **how to substitute the language learning of those migrants who are not involved in the integration courses.** In our fieldwork it was noticed that, for example, the elderly and labour immigrants often fall out from language learning courses. The official language courses are focused for unemployed immigrants and refugees as they are time consuming and often organized during working hours. Language learning is one of the main issues in integration process into a new society and especially, in rural locations the knowledge of local language is important to be able to fully participate into the local community. **This issue is most likely being addressed in the new integration legislation** according to our earlier interviews with ministry employees.

3.3.3. The integration course organizers should be guaranteed more stability in their work.

Currently the law requires that integration education program framework contracts must be placed under competitive tendering every four years¹⁶ but in practice it is mostly done every two years¹⁷. If the suppliers need to compete with the price of language courses too often it also diminishes their possibilities to develop their methods and teaching. The institutions (folk high schools, schools, universities etc.) that traditionally have been organizing the courses are struggling to compete with private businesses that have multitude of ways of cutting costs, often to the detriment of quality of the course¹⁸. The organisations offering the integration courses are in ambivalent situation. They are expected to develop their language teaching, but at the same time the public institution¹⁹ responsible for financing these courses is mainly interested in the price of the integration courses and suppliers are under the pressures to organize the courses cheaply. From the point of view of organizations who offer language courses it is difficult to develop teaching because continuity is not guaranteed. The period before the next tendering should be lengthened and more weight put on qualitative factors like experience in the competitive tendering process. To our knowledge, a lot can already be done under the current legal framework and thus is more up to the will of the officials and politicians handling these matters.

3.3.4. More clarity to the responsibilities, rights, and expectations in the integration process

The line demarking between what responsibilities society has for its new residents and what obligations the new residents have in the integration process is often vague and blurry.

¹⁶ Act on Public Procurement and Concession Contracts, Section 42.

¹⁷ Example of a current competitive tendering process: Maahanmuuttajien kotoutumiskoulutus Kotkan-Haminan seudulle puitejärjestely vuosille 2023 ja 2024, 5.6.2022.

¹⁸ YLE MOT, 21.1.2019.

¹⁹ Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environments (CEDTE). Regional institutions financed by the government.

Generally, both politicians and practitioners as well as immigrants have an incomplete perception on rights, obligations, responsibilities, and duties. This is often true in practice even though the current legislation²⁰ is quite clear about the issue. **It would be beneficial for all actors involved if it could be clarified what kind of help, how much and for how long society will give. Parallel to this, what the new residents are expected to do should also be clarified.** If all actors involved are aware of what is expected from them, the outcome, output, and impact of the process would improve. If implemented, this is a process will, however, take some time. Here the new act on integration could and should bring more clarity.

3.4. European Level

3.4.1. Better clarity and accessibility on the EU-based funding possibilities

The EU funding instruments for local and regional actors, NGOs, should be more easily accessible and there should be better continuity for project-based activities. In local level the NGOs are not familiar enough with different possibilities to make effective use of EU funding. In many NGOs, project-based funding is causing problems setting up activities in the long term. In project funding the idea is often to set up innovative activities for the limited time of project and this is not the most effective way of improving and developing the integration work on a permanent basis as the activities created by the project do not last without new funding or political will. In European level it should be considered how small but efficiently operating NGOs could create activities that have opportunity for more stable and permanent funding. **This will require work not just on the EU level also on all levels of national governance to make different funding tools better known and accessible.**

²⁰ Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010).

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Germany

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1. Introduction and methodology

The policy recommendations deriving from the German case study focus on the sustainable labour market integration of third-country nationals (TCNs) in rural and mountainous areas, but also take into consideration intersecting dimensions of integration (cf. integration model of Ager & Strang 2008). They were developed by the authors based on the results of the desk research in WP2, WP3 and WP4 and the empirical research in WP3, WP4 and WP5. The latter was conducted in the Bavarian rural districts Berchtesgadener Land (BGL), Garmisch-Partenkirchen (GAP), Neustadt a.d.Aisch-Bad Windsheim (NEA) and Oberallgäu (OA). Methodologically, the authors checked existing policy briefs published by research institutions, NGOs and foundations to identify recommendations that were not yet implemented, but could be transferred to the specific context and matched the results found. Where necessary and suitable, in addition, policy recommendations were also formulated from scratch drawing from the suggestions made and needs for actions communicated during the qualitative interviews, focus group discussions and the action research activities. The draft of policy recommendations was presented and discussed in the course of the two regional roundtables (16.03.2022, Scheinfeld, NEA; 18.05.2022, online) and the national workshop (21.03.2022, online). All three events were attended by a total number of 27 stakeholders of the following categories: private businesses, NGOs, education and training institutions, public welfare service providers, research facilities and individual researchers as well as the MATILDE local partner.

2. Main policy problems

Overarching, until recently, Germany had to be considered a 'reluctant' immigration country as it was hesitant to acknowledge the realities of immigration (cf. Chemin & Nagel 2020). This is aggravated by the fact that the political structure of Germany and the distribution of competencies between the federal (NUTS0) and the Länder level (NUTS1) foster **disharmonized and inconsistent policies and outcomes**, i.e. differing administrative practices between the Federal States (cf. Bendel & Borkowski 2016, Přivara & Rievajová 2019). Mandatory tasks regarding integration, which are bound by instructions of superior levels (*weisungsgebundene Pflichtaufgaben*), e.g. the enforcement of the right of residence, the accommodation of asylum seekers or the provision of asylum seekers' benefits, are interpreted differently in legal terms by the Federal States and their rural districts and municipalities (NUTS3 and LAU), revealing a scope of action (cf. Schammann 2015, Schammann & Kühn 2016, Ritgen 2018, Schammann et al. 2020). The same is true for mandatory self-governance tasks (*pflichtige Selbstverwaltungsaufgaben*), e.g. the implementation of compulsory schooling or the realization of the legal entitlement to a kindergarten place. Besides, for voluntary self-governance tasks (*freiwillige Selbstverwaltungsaufgaben*) such as the provision of German language courses or migration counselling for those with a low prospective of staying, rural districts and municipalities can decide on their own, whether and how they want to act. As they generally have to fund it on their own, the implementation of such tasks, firstly, depends on the financial situation, while, secondly, a high pressure of local actors to justify their commitment is common (cf. Schammann et al. 2020). It was found that the implementation of integration policies depends on the efforts of local elites, local narratives and frames including (non)decisions and (non)actions that have been made in the past (cf. Engel et al. 2019; Schammann et al. 2020).

Further aspects include the **lacking sustainability of integration programmes** (cf. Apfelbaum et al. 2020), which result in temporally limited working contracts and insecurities for those who (should) support TCNs such as refugee and integration counsellors (Kordel & Weidinger 2021a, 2021b), and the **narrow focus of integration programmes on predefined**

target groups. Regarding the latter aspect, funding regulations as well as insurance-legal issues exclude certain groups of immigrants from services which are established and thus foster animosities (cf. Patuzzi et al. 2020). They fail to acknowledge the diversity of TCNs nor follow a ‘whole-of-society’ or ‘whole-of-community’ approach (cf. Papademetriou & Benton 2016).

In the following, specific recommendations are sketched with reference to the dimensions of integration proposed by Ager and Strang (2008).

2.1. Economy and employment

Regarding the integration dimension ‘economy and employment’, one of the main policy problems are **lacking knowledge and insufficient communication** as well as **bureaucracy**. Employers, for instance, often do not know about (legal consequences of) staying and work permits of TCNs as well as potential support mechanisms in case they hire or employ TCNs (Kordel & Weidinger 2021c, cf. Apfelbaum et al. 2020). The employment of those with insecure staying permits is also associated with a high level of bureaucracy (cf. Apfelbaum et al. 2020). TCNs, in turn, face knowledge gaps in terms of rights and responsibilities with regard to employment, the functioning of the German labour market and opportunities for the recognition of foreign credentials (cf. Apfelbaum et al. 2020, IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021a). The self-employment of TCNs is hampered by bureaucracy and high legal requirements (Kordel & Weidinger 2021c).

Another aspect is related to the **mismatch between skills of forced migrants and the availability of work places** in rural and mountainous areas (cf. Apfelbaum et al. 2020, Patuzzi et al. 2020), which is reinforced by the three-year residence rule for recognized refugees reliant on social welfare. The residence rule limits the residential location choice at least to the federal state where the asylum procedure was carried out (NUTS1), but the state may also prescribe a place of residence in a certain rural district or municipality (NUTS 3 or LAU). Brücker et al. (2020) and Der Paritätische Gesamtverband (2022) recently showed that this rule results in a reduced probability for them to be employed.

Apart from that, **negative attitudes to hire TCNs** as well as **exploitation, racism and discrimination at the workplace** can be witnessed (Kordel & Weidinger 2021a, 2021c, cf. IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021a). Due to the obligation enshrined in the Temporary Employment Act to pay loan workers the same salary than regular employees after nine months, contracts with TCNs are often terminated. They have to register themselves at the Jobcenter, but may get hired again soon after, revealing a ‘revolving-door-effect’ (Kordel & Weidinger 2021a). TCNs and PoCs (People of Colour), in addition, are required to work ‘behind the scene’, i.e. without customer contact, because of (feared) negative attitude of clients (Kordel & Weidinger 2021c).

2.2. Housing

In terms of the integration dimension ‘housing’, **lacking internet infrastructure in asylum accommodation** prevents asylum seekers to partake in home schooling and distance learning. Due to questions of liability, in many cases, the responsibility to provide such infrastructure is also shifted from the state to volunteers (Kordel & Weidinger 2021a, cf. Kommunaler Qualitätszirkel zur Integrationspolitik 2021). Furthermore, the access of recognised refugees and other TCNs (as well as other low income households) to private housing is complicated by a high rate of home ownership and second homes, a **lack of affordable and sizable housing, scarce social housing with long waiting times, negative attitudes of and discrimination by landlords and neighbours** (Weidinger & Kordel 2020, Kordel & Weidinger 2021a, 2021b) as well as the above mentioned three-year residence rule for recognized refugees (Brücker et al. 2020, Der Paritätische Gesamtverband 2022). **Concentration processes of TCNs** are criticized by local actors, but are facilitated by the above mentioned lack of housing, the group accommodation of TCNs, the residence rule for recognized refugees and the passing on of apartments within one’s networks (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b).

2.3. Education

With regard to the integration dimension ‘education’, the **lacking availability of places in nurseries and kindergartens** as well as closure of nurseries and home schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic must be mentioned as they result in child care obligations especially for mothers and prevent women’s access to employment and participation in language courses (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b, cf. Goßner & Kosyakova, SVR 2021). Further issues are the **lacking time resources of teachers to deal with specific needs of TCNs** (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b) and a **lacking adequate technical equipment of forced migrants** (and other low income households) to pursue distance learning (Kordel & Weidinger 2021a).

2.4. Health

In the realm of health, psychic and physical health limitations (e.g. sleeping or post-traumatic stress disorders, PTSD), depressions and substance dependences can be detected among TCNs. These result from war-related experiences, domestic violence, worries about family members living elsewhere, homesickness or lack of support by family members due to their non-presence on-site (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b). They may have negative interactions with other realms of integration, but may not be treated due to a **lack of legal access to health-related services or long waiting times, a lack of services in rural areas as well as bad accessibility and language barriers**. In the case of asylum seekers and refugees, empirical studies show that the lack of government coverage of treatment costs, the lack of doctors who are able to satisfy the needs of refugees or who are willing to provide treatment at all, and the lack of language support during consultation hours are perceived negatively (Schröder et al. 2018). In addition, information about the health system, e.g. regarding prescribing medicines, are often sparsely provided; health services are also used in an inappropriate way, e.g. dropping emergency calls for minor routine medical tasks (Kordel et al. 2022).

2.5.Social connection/cohesion

Policy problems in terms of ‘social connection/cohesion’ stem from a lacking awareness of the presence of certain immigrant groups, lacking experience with and cultural barriers to interact with immigrants, lacking interest in interaction with immigrants, negative attitudes towards TCNs as well as prejudices, rumours, bar-room clichés and racism (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b). This is aggravated by lacking places of and time for interaction due to concentration/segregation processes of local residents and TCNs as well as their family duties, long working hours, exhausting work, shift work or time spent commuting (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b). The participation of TCNs may also be hampered, because of traumatization or worries about family members, a different cultural understanding of volunteering or lacking financial resources. A high level of bureaucracy can keep TCNs from starting or maintaining own associations or clubs (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b).

2.6.Language & culture

When it comes to the integration dimension ‘language and culture’ in general and language and integration courses in particular, **high standards in terms of minimum number of potential participants and child care offers** are considered detrimental to offer services in rural and mountain areas for advanced learners, mothers or employed people (cf. Ritgen 2018, Scheible & Schneider 2020). In addition, it is difficult to recruit teachers for language courses there (cf. Scheible & Schneider 2020). Professional staff in administration or in the educational, health or justice system often **lack intercultural and language competencies to adequately deal with TCNs**, e.g. they practice (cultural) racism, talk to them in dialect and even use children of TCNs as interpreters (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b, cf. Gluns et al. 2021).

2.7.Safety & stability

The most urgent policy problems in the integration dimension ‘safety and stability’ are **negative attitudes towards TCNs** (Kordel & Weidinger 2021a) and a **situational hierarchization of TCNs** by the resident population. Regarding the latter aspect, skin colour

and appearance, name, family situation, country of origin, religion, level of education, employment status, expected economic impact of TCN on the region and the years spent on site represent important intersecting factors that determine the social position of TCNs (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b, 2021c). On-site, however, a heterogeneous spatial pattern with both ‘welcoming’ and ‘unwelcoming’ local communities can be observed, whereby local elites and key stakeholders such as mayors, priests or entrepreneurs are decisive to influence the local climate of opinion in one direction or the other (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b).

2.8. Mobility

With regard to the integration dimension ‘mobility’, a need for action results from the **lack of or irregularly operating public transport connections** between the place of residence and specific places such as language courses or the workplace, which is aggravated by **long travel times despite short distances, high costs and complex ticket systems** (Kordel & Weidinger 2021a, 2021b, cf. Apfelbaum et al. 2020). In cases where TCNs cannot afford (re)gaining their driving license and an own car, they may face a constrained everyday mobility with negative impact on their access to services (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b). The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed the **insufficiency to bet on volunteers and their provision of lifts to forced migrants**, as they could not be provided anymore due to social distancing and the protection of at-risk groups (Kordel & Weidinger 2021b).

2.9. Rights & Citizenship

The policy problems, which were addressed most frequently in terms of ‘rights and citizenship’ are long waiting times for appointments in embassies as well as long decision-making processes for the issuing of visas and the recognition of foreign credentials (cf. Bither & Ziebarth 2018, SVR 2018).

2.10. Rural/regional development

In terms of ‘rural/regional development’, a **lack of sensitivity of policies and funding programmes towards rural and mountainous specificities** is criticised, e.g. with regard to the population potential, the mobility or the spatial distances. In addition, **high bureaucratic burden and lacking time and personnel resources to apply and administer funding** (cf. Günther et al. 2021).

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

For the future, **transparent and clear responsibilities** between the federal (NUTS0), the regional (NUTS1) and the local level (NUTS3, LAU) are the most important prerequisite for sound migration and integration policies (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021, Schammann et al. 2021). In addition, a legal underpinning in terms of **defining ‘integration as a mandatory task’** would be helpful. In this way, continuous funding can be provided for fulfilling tasks at the local level. Simultaneously, it could foster the extension of offers for an indefinite period of time and could contribute to a professionalization of staff (Kordel & Weidinger 2020, cf. IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021a, Banulescu-Bogdan 2022). The third aspect that should be addressed is the **opening up of offers for all immigrants and forced migrants**, i.e. following a mainstreaming approach (cf. Scheible & Schneider 2020, Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021, Günther et al. 2021, Günther 2022), and the **replacement of a target group orientation in offers with a goal orientation**, i.e. following a ‘de-migrantization’ approach (Dahinden 2016, Kordel & Weidinger 2020, cf. Günther et al. 2021). Apart from these overarching policy recommendations and solutions, the following chapters present options for action for the specific levels of operation, i.e. the local one (chapter 3.1), the regional one (chapter 3.2), the national one (chapter 3.3) and the EU one (chapter 3.4).

3.1. Local Level: rural districts and municipalities in Bavaria

3.1.1. Economy and employment

The highest priority is **addressing employers as important actors of integration** and integrating them in networks and associations related to integration work on-site (cf. Schammann et al. 2021, Günther 2022). Inside the companies in general and the small and medium-sized ones in particular, **intercultural opening** should be fostered, e.g. by means of developing a diversity-sensitive corporate mission statement (cf. KOFA 2020), by means of complaints managements or anonymized application procedures as well as by respective staff trainings (cf. IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021a; DIW Econ & TENT 2022).

With regard to recruiting,

- **networks of existing staff and of migration and integration counsellors to potential employees** (abroad and on-site) and **target-group specific communication** (TCNs living abroad vs. TCNs on-site) have to be considered vital (Kordel & Weidinger 2020, cf. Ohliger & Schweiger 2019).
- To counteract homesickness, it can be reasonable to **recruit multiple persons from the same country** (cf. Ohliger & Schweiger 2019). An external, but regionally organised welcome centre or an in-house **relocation management** could support new employees and their families – prior or upon arrival – with access to housing, e.g. provision of company-owned housing, access to education, e.g. language courses or places for children in nurseries, kindergartens or schools, and bureaucracy (cf. KOFA 2020, IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021b, KOFA 2020).

During the onboarding phase,

- **regular meeting encounters**, e.g. joint lunches, joint sports or leisure opportunities as well as **tandem and mentoring programmes** may be able to ease the arrival of TCNs at a new place respectively a new work environment and improve their social connection. Mentors could either be other employees or volunteers from the civil society, from local associations, schools or universities, with whom companies could

cooperate for this matter. For small companies, it can also be reasonable to share a 'buddy' with other enterprises (cf. KOFA 2020, IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021b, DIW Econ & TENT 2022).

- **Work-accompanying language courses**, ideally organised at the workplace and during working hours, i.e. with temporary release from duties, may be able to improve German language competencies of TCN employees and simultaneously match their everyday lives (cf. KOFA 2020, IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021b, DIW Econ & TENT 2022, Günther 2022).

To foster retention of TCNs in companies,

- an overarching **appreciation for employees is crucial** – irrespective of their origin or qualification level.
- **Financial incentives, flexible work models and long holidays to visit family and friends, qualification measures and support for qualification** could also be beneficial for their intention to stay (cf. KOFA 2020, IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021b).

3.1.2. Housing

As mentioned above, employers, but also local administration, welfare organizations, NGOs, and refugee relief groups could

- **support TCNs' access to private housing of good quality**, e.g. by means of providing information, contacts and networks or by moderating conflicts between landlords, neighbours and immigrants (cf. Schammann et al. 2021). Municipalities and rural districts may also
- **found or nurture existing social housing associations and construct apartments** to increase the local supply of housing.

3.1.3. Education

Target-group specific educational offers for all TCNs are core (Ohliger & Schweiger 2019).

- For children, **the construction of nurseries and kindergartens and the safeguarding of places in all-day child care and schooling infrastructures** provides a means for them to establish social networks and is also a prerequisite for many mothers and single parents to participate in language and integration courses, if there are no childcare facilities adjacent to language and integration courses (cf. Goßner & Kosyakova 2021, DIW Econ & TENT 2022).

Other issues are

- **the better information of TCNs** about the surplus of pursuing an apprenticeship in Germany, e.g. in the course of school partnerships and exchange programmes (cf. Ohliger & Schweiger 2019, SVR 2022), and about existing child care offers at the German destination (cf. Goßner & Kosyakova 2021),
- **the fostering of training and qualification for nursery school teachers and school teachers** in intercultural opening and language education and promotion, and
- **lending services for technical equipment** that could improve distance learning.

3.1.4. Health

- The local administration could use their space of action to offer asylum seekers an **easier access to health-related services** (§4, 6 AsylbLG, cf. Schammann et al. 2021). This is particularly relevant in the area of dealing with mental impairments, as therapeutic counselling services are often not available in rural areas. Finally, municipalities are called upon to understand health holistically by incorporating both social and leisure aspects in municipal health concepts that should be communicated with intercultural sensitivity.

3.1.5. Social connection/cohesion

- By means of media relations, the **presence of TCNs at and the diverse history of immigration in places** in rural and mountainous areas **need to be made more visible** (Kordel & Weidinger 2020, cf. Schammann et al. 2021, Günther 2022).

- Besides, **interaction between TCNs and the local resident population should be fostered**: at nurseries, kindergartens, schools, workplaces, residential environments, events and festivities as well as clubs and associations. This requires **opportunities and places for interaction** that are accessible free of barriers on the one hand (Kordel & Weidinger 2020, cf. Ohliger & Schweiger 2019, Schammann et al. 2021, Günther 2022) and are accompanied by **mediators and bridge-builders** among both TCNs and local residents on the other hand (Kordel & Weidinger 2020, cf. Schammann et al. 2021, Günther 2022). The latter individuals may accompany TCNs to meetings of associations and clubs, for instance (cf. Mann et al. 2018), and may thus contribute to overcome ‘everyday otherness’ (Radford 2016).
- The **permanent provision and funding of positions for coordinators of volunteers** in rural districts and municipalities as well as within bigger associations and clubs can help to match interested volunteers and TCNs and contribute to intercultural sensitization and qualification of volunteers and clubs and associations by means of trainings (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021, Gluns et al. 2021, Schammann et al. 2021).
- To attract TCNs’ interests, **clubs and associations could promote themselves** in language and integration courses as well as in vocational schools, while loans and waivers for membership subscription could be provided to lower entry barriers.

3.1.6. Language & culture

- To interact with TCNs, **different forms of communication** (e.g. social media, multi-lingual, plain language) **and specific places to communicate** (e.g. asylum accommodation, language and integration course, vocational school, meeting of migrant organisation) may be helpful (cf. IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021a, Gluns et al. 2021). The latter aspect can be especially relevant to provide information about rights and responsibilities in Germany and existing counselling offers in the rural district or the

municipality (cf. IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021a, SVR 2022).

- **Intercultural opening of local administration, nurseries, kindergartens, schools, general practitioners, hospitals, public transport companies, police, customs authorities and the justice system** is another vital issue. In particular, they should be sensitized for their use of Bavarian dialect in contact with TCNs. Language competencies and multilingualism of existing staff should be valorised and the acquisition of new languages should be supported. Where it is necessary, additional lay cultural and language interpreters can be qualified. To represent a diverse local society, TCNs can be targeted in recruiting (cf. Schammann et al. 2021, IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung 2021a).
- The **TCNs' acquisition of German language needs to be prioritised**, i.e. access to language and integration courses should be available irrespective of their origin or prospect of staying (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021). It ideally begins prior to entering Germany and starting to work and is taught close to real life experiences.

3.1.7. Mobility

First, **everyday mobility of TCNs should be improved**, not least between the place of residence and the workplace. This could be achieved by means of

- providing bicycles, lifts or shuttle busses,
- fostering public transport offers,
- reducing language barriers for on-demand offers and
- reimbursing costs for volunteers who provide lifts.
- To allow TCNs to pursue driving schools and buy an own car, **loans or (partial) reimbursements** by the state or employers could be offered (cf. Ohliger & Schweiger 2019, Schammann et al. 2021, DIW Econ & TENT 2022).

Second, the prevention of everyday mobility of TCNs by means of

- **decentralised counselling and digitation of bureaucratic procedures** can contribute to overcome spatial distances in rural and mountainous areas and tackle the potential constrained mobility of TCNs (cf. Schammann et al. 2021).

3.1.8. Rights & Citizenship

- To appreciate rural newcomers, rural districts and municipalities should held **welcoming receptions for TCNs and parties for their naturalisation** (cf. SVR 2021).
- For those without cleared identification, **rural citizenship documents** may allow TCNs to access local services (cf. Schammann et al. 2021).
- Supported by local politics and administration, **low-threshold opportunities for participation** should be fostered and **integration advisory boards** could be established to represent those who are not yet allowed to vote (Kordel & Weidinger 2020, cf. Gluns et al. 2021, Schammann et al. 2021).

3.1.9. Rural/regional development

Rural districts and municipalities could market themselves as attractive places to live and work in a more active way, e.g. at fairs in the source or transit countries of TCNs, focussing on those countries with whom trade, migration or social connections exist. To address the specific needs of newcomers,

- **welcome hubs/centres** that act as first contact points at the local administration can be established (Kordel & Weidinger 2020).

Besides, an important aspect in terms of rural/regional development is the

- **strengthening of regional networks and cooperation** within administration but also between administration (e.g. foreigners' office, social welfare office, Federal Employment Agency and Jobcenter), employers, police, justice system and civil society (e.g. welfare organisations including migrant counselling, NGOs, migrant organisations and volunteers). They serve to exchange experiences, formulate demands for action and develop implementation possibilities with regard to improving the integration of TCNs (cf. Ohliger & Schweiger 2019, Schammann et al.

2021, Günther 2022). Therefore, **existing (parallel) structures in village and regional development, economic development and integration work should be merged** (Schammann et al. 2021). To implement relevant changes, it is always helpful to **gain support from local elites and key stakeholders** (cf. Günther 2022).

3.2. Regional Level: Federal State of Bavaria

3.2.1. Economy and employment

The respective ministries and the chambers of industry and commerce and the ones of handicraft should

- **support small and medium sized enterprises with regard to recruiting** (e.g. by means of bilateral cooperation) and **better communicate opportunities for the recognition of foreign credentials.**
- intensify the use of **loans, deferrals of payment and (partial) waivers for the recognition process** to reduce costs for TCNs.

3.2.2. Housing

- The Federal State could **apply algorithm-based matching processes to allocate asylum seekers and resettlement refugees to specific rural and mountainous areas**, taking into account factors such as the background of TCNs and structural aspects such as the labour market, housing market or existing educational and integration offers (cf. Schammann et al. 2021).
- In addition, **asylum accommodation should generally be equipped with internet and Wi-Fi.**

3.2.3. Education

- The Federal State should **hire additional staff for nurseries, kindergarten and schools** to deal with the diversity of children and pupils and assist all students to overcome disadvantages resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Furthermore, the **curriculum of prospective teachers could be extended** to encompass qualification measures with regard to language education and promotion in the context of migration-related multilingualism (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021).
- To support TCNs during exams, **programmes for exam companions** can be strengthened.
- Interrelated with employment is the **provision of education infrastructures for further qualification** to fill gaps and to provide the basis for social upward mobility.

3.2.4. Social connection/cohesion

- The Federal State should **maintain and consolidate institutions and prevention programmes addressing racism and intercultural opening of society**. This includes the Bavarian Information Centre against Extremism (BIGE), the Bavarian State Coordination Office against Right-Wing Extremism (LKS) or the Umbrella Association of the Municipal Integration Advisory Boards in Bavaria (AGABY) respectively the Children and Youth Program of the Bavarian State Government.

3.2.5. Language & culture

- The Federal State could **maintain and consolidate programmes for lay cultural and language interpreting** like the current project “cultural interpreter plus”. The qualification measure was developed by the Dachau Forum for Catholic adult education, the Domberg Academy Freising and the Bavarian Catholic working group for adult education (KEB) and is currently implemented jointly with the Association of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (AAEB) in more than 15 locations all over Bavaria.

3.2.6. Rights & Citizenship

- In the course of an Integration Act, for instance, the Federal States should define **integration as a mandatory task** for the local level, i.e. the rural districts and municipalities, and specify concrete fields of activity.
- With regard to the **recognition of foreign credentials**, procedures should be simplified and streamlined and authorities should be better equipped with resources and connected with each other (SVR 2022).

3.2.7. Rural/regional development

- The Federal States and the rural districts' and municipalities' associations, e.g. *Bayerischer Landkreistag* and *Bayerischer Gemeindetag*, should establish and strengthen **regular formats for exchange between local stakeholders about the topic of immigration and integration** (Kordel & Weidinger 2020, Schammann et al. 2020).
- In order to relieve the process of accessing and administering funding, the rural districts and municipalities could be assisted with **funding consultants**. The Federal States could also provide the local level with the opportunity to apply for a **'local integration package'** using only one application. The Federal States, then, compile the money from different lines of funding, e.g. from EU, federal and regional level (Günther et al. 2021).

3.3. National Level: Germany

3.3.1. Economy and employment

The Federal Government should

- maintain its efforts to **support the intercultural opening of the workforce** (diversity management) and the **counselling offers with regard to information about qualification and education of (TCN) newcomers as well as self-employment** (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021),

- provide a **better communication of opportunities for the recognition of foreign credentials** including a less expensive process (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021),
- check, if **work permits for forced migrants** can be provided even earlier after arrival than today (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021),
- **evaluate the Temporary Employment Act**, currently applied for forced migrants in particular to find out, if the constant replacement of contract workers after exhaustion of the maximum period of contract working leads to a ‘revolving door-effect’,
- control legally prescribed conditions for remuneration, working conditions and contractual relationships by means of an **expansion of capacities at the customs authorities** (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021), and
- consider the implementation of a **mandatory time recording in hospitality industry** to counteract unpaid overtime hours.

3.3.2. Housing

- The results of the 2022 evaluation of the three-year **residence rule for recognised refugees** reliant on social welfare need to lead to a comprehensive reconsideration of the rule.
- The efforts for the **construction of social housing** for both locals and (TCN) newcomers need to be intensified (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021, Banulescu-Bogdan 2022).

3.3.3. Education

- The **minimum requirements for the provision of language and integration courses (including child care offers)** could be evaluated to better match the situation in rural and mountainous areas, e.g. with regard to the minimum number of participants/children or the minimum requirements for rooms for the provision of child care offers (cf. Goßner & Kosyakova 2021).

According to welfare organisations, the new Federal Programme “Integration course with child: building blocks for the future” of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) and the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) that replaces the previous programme of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees is a step in the right direction (Der Paritätische Gesamtverband 2021).

3.3.4. Health

- The **provision of psychological and therapeutical offers** for TCNs in general and forced migrants in particular in rural and mountainous areas needs to be considered as a key for successful settlement and integration. Accordingly, more psychologists and therapists need to be trained and motivated to provide their services outside of the big cities.
- In addition, **support in terms of substance counselling** should be safeguarded (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021).

3.3.5. Social connection/cohesion

- **Federal programmes for the intercultural opening of society and fostering democracy** such as “Live Democracy!” should be maintained and be consolidated. The programme of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) that was established in 2015, for instance, consists of competence centres and networks in specific thematic fields, democracy centres in the Federal States that pool measures and partnerships for democracy, where cities, municipalities and rural districts can decide themselves on measures to strengthen democracy and diversity (BMFSFJ 2022).

3.3.6. Language & culture

The Federal Government should

- foster German language acquisition prior to arrival of TCNs in Germany. Therefore, **more opportunities to learn the language** abroad are necessary – in secondary schools, in the course of short- or long-term exchange programmes, or in work-preparatory language programmes (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021).
- include **everyday experiences of TCNs** in existing language courses and thus strengthen intercultural exchange, e.g. by means of the topic credit counselling. **Image campaigns** could highlight the advantages of TCNs' multilingualism for the contact with customers, clients or patients and lead to a change of mind-set among employers and society.

3.3.7. Mobility

The Federal Government could check,

- if the **recognition of foreign driving licenses** is possible without prior tests, and
- if **travel costs to language courses** can be re-funded in an easier way (cf. Scheible & Schneider 2020).

3.3.8. Rights & Citizenship

The German embassies should

- have **more staff for their visa departments** and digitalised processes to enable faster decision-making processes (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021).

The Federal Government should

- provide **more staff for authorities**, who are responsible for the recognition of foreign credentials (SVR 2022),
- **foster family reunification** (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021) by means of faster and digitalised visa processes (see above), and
- foster participation at least at the local level by means of providing TCNs with the **right to vote**. For identification purposes, the potential for **naturalisation of TCNs** should be exploited by means of marketing measures and the permission for double citizenship (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021, SVR 2021).

3.3.9. Rural/regional development

The Federal Government should

- provide **enough funding for the purpose of integration**, including emergency funds for acute needs (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021, Günther et al. 2021).

3.4. European Level

3.4.1. Economy and employment

The European Union should

- **facilitate the recognition of professional qualifications** to improve the recruitment of skilled workers from third countries, e.g. by means of a directive with defined prerequisites, and
- **maintain and consolidate funding for the intercultural opening of the workforce** (diversity management).

3.4.2. Housing

It is urgently indicated to

- define internet connection and Wi-Fi as minimum requirements for asylum accommodation in all Member States of the European Union.

3.4.3. Social connection/cohesion

The European Union should

- maintain and consolidate funding for the intercultural opening of society, and
- address the recognition of diversity in rural areas and resulting challenges in funding programmes.

3.4.4. Rural/regional development

The European Union should

- **dismantle bureaucratic hurdles for small cities and rural districts and municipalities in rural and mountainous areas with regard to applications for EU funding** (cf. Gauci 2020). European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) should increasingly consider migration as a means for economic development, especially in the field of foundational economies, and simultaneously pay attention to social cohesion, which especially becomes challenging in light of transformation processes in the society.

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Italy

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1. Introduction and methodology

Under the WP6 task “Policy recommendations based on stakeholders’ consultations”, the Italian MATILDE team²¹ proceeded by the following steps:

- Analysis and assessment of existing policies supporting migrants’ social and economic inclusion and the better inter-connection of urban and rural/mountainous areas at national, regional, local and European level;
- Elaboration of a SWOT-analysis starting from the previous step findings. The SWOT-analysis served to highlight strengths and weaknesses of Italy’s reception system and inclusion patterns at local, regional and national level;
- Multi-dimensional policy recommendations and solutions matrix elaboration. The MATRIX summarized the results collected from preliminary analysis and research. It served to elaborate possible policy recommendations and to propose actions and solutions to overcome challenges and constraints to TCNs inclusion from a multidimensional perspective.
- Organisation of three roundtables (RT), two local-regional roundtables and a national one to discuss and validate with relevant stakeholders the first “policy recommendations” draft with the support of the SWOT-analysis and the policy recommendations matrix;

A final review and analysis step to synthesize results from the analysis and stakeholder’s consultation stages

²¹ Researchers Andrea Membretti and Monica Gilli supported the collection and analysis of information.

2. Main policy problem(s)

The round tables confirmed, as the research did, that the issue of inclusion of the TCNs in local, regional and national contexts is a complex topic. A multidimensional approach to its analysis is needed. Likewise, multi-level and integrated governance is crucial for effective interventions.

Policies at all levels should be responsive to the context without losing sight of the more macro and microscopic dimensions. Different levels of governance should establish continuous forms of dialogue to ensure effective policy interventions.

The main policy problems emerged are:

- **Economy & Employment:** Italy's approach to migration appears as apparently utilitarian and poorly based on a mutual benefits strategy. The entrance and the permanence of workers migrants is based on a system of quota set up annually by the government according to the request of workforce (determined in the yearly plan "Decreto Flussi"). This system do not meet real labour market needs, generating irregular work exploitation (e.g. in the agricultural sector). The Decreto Flussi (DF) has been assessed to be an unrealistic, inefficient and inadequate system to tackle both labour demand and immigration needs (Gruber & Zupan, 2021). In practice, this system does not favour neither migrants nor the Italian economy because it misses capturing migration possible positive effects. At the same time due to the wrong esteem of the workforce needed it favours irregular work migration and exploitation. Going down to a lower level of analysis TCNs work inclusion at local levels is marked by high seasonality, part-time or temporary occupations and rarely self-employed positions. This turn in fixed-term contracts in seasonal sectors and can be considered one factor, which –among others – influences the in-work poverty phenomenon.
- **Asylum:** Low structured governance and a complex system of not unitary measures and actions characterize Italy's migration and integration policies system today.

- Moreover, in the last ten years, coexistence, relationships and perception of migration in Italy have been marked by political shifts. **Policies, laws and rules changed over time.** Migration topic has been exploited with particular reference to the so-called 2015 “migration crisis” from northern Africa.

Public debate has been dominated (until the Pandemic COVID-19 crisis) by the irregular migration topic giving **less space to understand the overall complexity of the migration phenomenon** portraying it as a problem for the community rather than an opportunity. The combination of these dynamics has created **uncertainty, insecurity and instability** at the expense of migrants and communities spreading fears and misinformation.

- **Education/Health and Mobility: TCNs and Italians living in rural and mountainous areas have little access to essential services, limiting their well-being and desire to settle in rural/inner/mountain areas.** Access to basic services is particularly relevant for mountain, rural and inland areas. In such territories, essential services (e.g. education, health and transport) are not sustainable due to dispersed housing and fewer inhabitants. Public services access matters in term of inclusion, safety, stability and wellbeing.

Specialised services like hospitals are mainly located in urban areas increasing the medium time need to reach it from municipalities located in mountainous or rural area reducing the local health services; Schools are only located in a few municipalities and the time to reach them may vary between municipalities, affecting families’ organization. This may also affect the participation in training and education. A deemed relevant aspect considering that research highlighted different NEET rates values for the total population and TCNs over the last ten years (**NEET rates** of the total population are far below the national average whilst the **ones of TCNs are higher**). Furthermore, the **share of the population with lower education, i.e., less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2), is higher among TCNs** in respect to Italians;

The degree of accessibility by roads and railways varies widely along the Italian territory (with significant differences between urban and rural areas). Research conducted at local level has shown that the **public transport service** is often **ineffective** and characterized by inefficient timetables and connections, high information costs and distance of public transport stops (Laine, 2021). This **hit particularly some categories of people as** elderly, **migrants**, students and women who less frequently have their own car.

- **Rights & Citizenship, Social inclusion:** The Italian slowness of administrative and bureaucratic procedures and the uncertainty of rules, which are often changed, influence the ability and willingness of foreigners to settle permanently on the territory. A regular migrant legal status, often hard to obtain, is also the basic conditions to access essential services and rights and to enhance active citizenship locally²².

An irregular or temporary - status, to be reconfirmed repeatedly does not facilitate any kind of participation or sense of belonging to any community. At the Italian level, these aspects are also exacerbated by the work permit quota system mentioned above and by European legislation.

- **Housing:** Migrants often find work but not a home, especially in rural areas, and are forced into poor housing conditions. Access to housing depends on the local context and on certain endogenous conditions (including community culture, willingness to rent to foreigners, actual availability of houses and flats, average rental costs).

²² Irregular migrant are excluded from some essential services and can account only on local NGO's and civil society initiatives

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

3.1 Local Level - South Tyrol (in the province of Bolzano/Bozen) & Metropolitan City of Turin (Piedmont)

3.1.1. Improve the access of TCNs to basic services

Housing policies

- **More accessible and equal housing policies** are needed to combine housing needs of e.g. young Italians or low-income families with those of foreign immigrants.
- The **rehabilitation of abandoned or underused buildings in inland/mountainous areas** may be an example of another possible solution to this problem, also promoting co-housing approach and hostels for temporary inhabitants.
- **A map/list of abandoned or unused property should be promoted**, especially in small municipalities affected by depopulation and abandonment trends incentivizing the renewal of real estate in rural/mountain regions.

Good practice example/ solution: *1 euro for 1 house projects.* Some small Italian municipalities have started an initiative called 'houses for 1 euro'. There are several reasons for this: the desire to encourage the repopulation of small towns where demographic contraction and abandonment are particularly high; the recovery of public architectural heritage in order to ensure its preservation and renovation; the need for private individuals to get free of their second homes on which property taxes are imposed.

Good practice example/ solution: *Domus Sportello.* The Domus Sportello project aims to support people housing and job opportunities access, and to raise citizens and local institution awareness of vulnerability and poverty conditions in their community. The project works to foster a co-responsibility path by all with respect to people suffering such problems. . An individual inclusion path is settled for each recipients, which can also include targeted training sessions. The project aims to go beyond implementing actions to support people involved by activating resources and building a network around them.

Other actions may be specifically implemented, when specific context-related needs arise. Mistrust of local owners, high rental and buying costs are among the main barriers to migrants' access to house in South Tyrol context.

- A **public support in the form of payment guarantees** may represent a solution to the low housing access due to mistrust and fears of local owners renting to TCNs.

Mobility services:

Even if LPT in South Tyrol and CMT0 local mobility are mainly considered efficient, the rural and mountainous context along with the low population density reduce its effectiveness. This problem matter particularly for the elderlies, minors, migrants and women, who less frequently have a private car (this is particularly true for migrant seasonal workers and for who recently arrived due to license permission time needs).

- **Improve flexible transports and community-managed services such as carpooling or social taxi** may represent a recommendation to solve this problem guaranteeing benefits for all.

Training and educational services:

The share of the population with lower education and the NEET rates are higher across TCNs in respect to local ones both in ST and CMT0. Nevertheless, the NEET phenomenon is present among the local population as well. School services access seems guaranteed.

- A **community's strategy** needs to be put in place **to contrast NEET phenomenon through flexible and integrative trainings, formative activities and psychological support**. Some example may be represented by afternoon didactic activities and workshops, activities connected with local traditions and vocations, psychological supports for scholars and families;

Family support services:

- **Welfare actions to support families and parents should be implemented for all (whether Italians or foreign)**. Possible example to be implemented are: family

allowances and financial support, support access to medical services such as pediatric ones, psychological and educative support, school services, psychological flexible training.

This matters also in terms of gender inclusion policies as TCNs women are often the highest share in neither education, employment and training. This is partially explicated by women dedicated to childcare (Kordel & Membretti, 2021).

Health services access:

Specialised services like hospitals are mainly located in urban areas increasing the medium time needed to reach it from municipalities located in mountainous or rural areas. Access to specialized health services is a challenge both for local and migrants.

- **Proximity services and communities' managed services** may represent a solution to this problem (e.g. communities' nurse and midwife; telemedicine).

Good practice example/ solution: *La Strada - Der Weg.* *La Strada* is a non-profit organization offering innovative inclusion services (e.g. ethno-clinical" training, language training services and childcare nursery service for 0-3 years old babies). *La Strada - Der Weg Onlus* offers a wide range of services to migrants and people in difficult situations. Among these, an ethno-clinical training service is offered to improve migrants' access to health care. This service is provided in collaboration with the GriS (immigration and health group) promoted locally by The Italian Society of Medicine of Migration. The service aims to overcome and reduce possible constraints suffered by migrants in access to medical treatments (e.g. difficulties in receiving blood transfusion due to religious or cultural beliefs). Another service to be mentioned is called "Giovani Madri" and is dedicated to improve women's inclusion and empowerment. Projects are developed with mothers and, experimentally, with family units, to foster women's parental responsibility, autonomy, self-determination and self-management capacity in everyday life, reconciling childcare with home management, work and any other commitments. Additionally, the project aims to help women escape from loneliness and isolation and to strengthen their social and family networks.

3.1.2. Promote a bottom-up and mutual benefits approach to territorial inclusion respecting the carrying capacity of local communities.

The main aspects to be tackled are:

Within mobility flows there are many different people and needs.

- **Assessing the characteristics of these people and understanding how they can relate to the local contexts**, guiding them towards adequate and specific training and support, is an essential aspect.
- Improving **local stakeholders' involvement in the reception and integration process** is deemed essential.

It serves to increase integration and mutual possible positive effects of migration, both for foreigners and communities, e.g. through:

- **Fostering public consultation** and action-research initiatives.
- **Enhancing local initiatives that bring together** local administrations and associations/groups of citizens while focusing on the effective agency of migrants as actors of local development.
- **Reception projects of asylum-seekers and refugees** must be tailored according to the size and needs of local communities, supporting widespread micro-hospitality and territorial development projects, in particular in rural and remote regions.

Implementing good practices with concrete and specific goals:

Projects that promote concretely a mutual benefits approach (e.g. offering training to migrants and asking them to give something back to the community as the maintenance of territories, forests, and banks) seem to enhance a favorable attitude through communities and foreigners;

- Support to mutual exchange and **cooperation between locals and newcomers**, aiming at fostering a shared care of the territory in which they all live (common goods approach) and avoiding focusing on initiatives targeted only at some social categories such as the foreigners.

- **Fears and mistrusts should be relocated in an open local debate that may address challenges related to migration and breaking out negative dynamics** (e.g. by applying the village talks of the MATILDE self-assessment toolbox for practitioners and policy makers; addressing specific problems through information and targeted actions). Reciprocity and a win-win strategy are the means to overturn the way the migration issue is negatively perceived.

3.1.3. Enhance a positive socio-economic impact of migration on rural/mountain territories.

A positive social impact of immigration is not the same as successful integration. It is not possible to assume causality between these concepts. A positive social impact of immigration is more than just integration; it is about the well-functioning of society. A positive social impact of immigration on the host society is when a plus-sum game is achieved, i.e. immigrants and the integration of immigrants adds extra value to the society and this extra value would not have been created without immigrants. A negative social impact of immigration on the host society is when the opposite occurs (MATILDE, 2021). In Italy, the dynamics of social integration in mountain and rural areas appear in many respects less complex than in urban and metropolitan contexts: the relatively small numbers of people, the possibility of face-to-face interactions, the persisting communitarian dimension, are all factors that to a certain extent seem to limit the possible social tensions between old and new inhabitants. Yet, as the most critical cases of the reception system for refugees and asylum seekers show, social integration is only possible where civic and collective participation dynamics are activated. In the absence of this, the risk is as much that of the creation of separate communities living in the same territory as the possible manifestation of conflicts, often provoked also by xenophobic political forces, coming from outside the contexts considered. Main innovative policies should therefore refer to:

- Supporting **associationism and civic participation** at local level, with specific attention to the processes of space-building and territorial identity definition (e.g.,

joint redefinition of local public spaces for civic purposes and activities; organization of performative workshops based on self-construction, etc.)

- Investing on **cultural mediators**, to be intended as agents of local development, supporting connections between different social worlds (e.g., work dimension, ethnic groups and community) and strengthening the system of mutual trust at local level.

Cultural mediators may respond as well to the need of migrants of “prolonged accompaniment” as emerged from MATILDE field research. The cultural mediator professional has a double value, it is useful both for TCNs and for host communities to promote effective communication between different cultures;

- Promote an easiest and stable recognition of the legal status of the migrants.

Research highlights that this aspect is the basic premise for TCN’s participation or sense of belonging to any community. For migrants in Italy, changing their socioeconomic status is difficult due to continuous changes in migration policies and admission rules.

- **TCNs may be supported locally in the bureaucracy path to ask for regular permission visa.**

Good practice example/solution: Morus Onlus. Moro Onlus is an association that supports migrants in their inclusion path through projects and activities that foster social cohesion, exchange activities and work inclusion. The Onlus promotes inclusivity, antiracism and welcoming values. The activity and projects promoted by the Moro Onlus started to support the relationship and exchange among migrants, asylum seekers and the local community of Val di Lanzo in Piedmont. To do so, several projects have been implemented to bring together locals and newcomers through leisure and free time activities (this is the case of the experience of Coro Moro (a choral activity), and Moro Team (a football team) or through work support activities as Moro Style tailoring activities that enhance the fabrics and creativity of the migrants involved. So the method adopted is based on a bottom – up approach that aims to support migrants in their inclusion path through employability and social inclusion. Among its initiatives, it is worth mentioning the Coro Moro, a successful activity that brought together migrants and locals in a choral activity to facilitate the learning

and practice of the Italian language and through this, the inclusion of migrants into the local community (FIERI 2017).

3.1.4. Support and valorise workers migrants as an essential resource for local economy and labour system

TCNs presence in ST and CMTO labour market is marked by high seasonality jobs (especially in the agricultural and tourism sector), part-time or temporary occupations and rare self-employed positions. Competitions among local and migrants do not arise as migrants seem employed in less desired jobs. Elderly care is another relevant employment sector. ST, CMTO and the Italian population in general is ageing. The local population seems not interested in working in the position, where usually TCN (especially non-EU citizens) are employed. For this reason, migrants appear as an essential working resource that sustains basic essential activities at the core of local and regional economy. Indeed, foreign immigrants help key economic sectors of rural/mountain areas to remain alive. Moreover, with their presence mitigate the de-population process, contributing to keep public services open and sustainable.

- **Specific tools, training and educational paths capable to highlights TCNs competencies should be implemented to continue attracting external workforce in a mutual benefits approach where migrants can have benefits as well (e.g. professional training, accredited training, check of competences, life-long learning, peer-to-peer training are some *example of practical intervention to support this approach*).**

Good practice example/ solution: Markas is a private service company with multi-ethnic staff. In Italy the company has 6903 employees, 29% of whom are foreigners coming from 91 different countries. Markas pursues an equity management policy without making difference of age, race, ethnicity, gender or provenience. The Company has a high rate of foreign employees and through its activities (as for example its involvement in the MATILDE project and the application of the “check of competences”) fosters an inclusive policy among its staff. The Company promotes other initiatives/activities to support an inclusive work

environment such as: - engagement in workspace atmosphere surveys to understand how employees perceived their work environment and how it can be improved; - staff training services to support talent development; workers psychological support (during the COVID 19 pandemic, Markas established this type of support for its employees; adoption of visual communication tools to enable not native speaker (often migrants) in their daily working activities. A system of coloured dots is used to enable cleaning and sanitation foreign staff to better understand products use and toxicity

- **Foreigners should be also supported (when possible) in their formative achievement validation process to access qualified works.** Such to promote migrants inclusion through professional paths consistent with their potential and aspirations.
- **Active listening to the needs and personal projects of the migrants arriving in mountain and rural territories is advocated in particular to help some of the "highlanders by force" to become "highlanders by choice",** rooting in local communities and developing their own ideas bringing positive impact to local context.
- **Trainings should be also in line with local economic traditions and economic attitudes.**

In last years, ST local work market has also been characterized by the out of quota phenomenon. To contrast, migrants' rights impoverishment and support integration in this case, a more flexible system to access and require work permissions is advocated. Irregular presence may indeed also matter in terms of social security, inclusion and local community's willingness to host newcomers.

- **TCNs and Italian entrepreneurs may be supported in the bureaucratic paths to ask for work permission visa.**

3.2. Regional Level - (the province of Bolzano/Bozen & Piedmont)

3.2.1. Access to basic services for all (foreigners and not) through well-balanced services plans

- **Effective public service planning has to be supported and a network of exchange between those responsible for planning and the municipalities who are concerned by the planned services should be institutionalised.** Territories can develop and become more attractive to new and old inhabitants (foreign and non-foreign); Basic essential services distribution within territories are planned at the regional level (including public transport plans, educational planning, off-school training, training focuses, and healthcare service delivery locations). Since the provision of these services impacts on various dimensions of the individual's life, for both Italians and foreigners, the **programming institutions should be aware of local needs ensuring equal access to these services to all.** Meetings opportunities between regional actors and local representatives are necessary.

Good practice example/ solution: The National Strategy for Inner Areas is an Italian investment policy to support inner (mainly rural and mountain) territories to improve local access and provision of essential public services (in particular mobility, education and health services). This policy supports the co-design of services through meetings, discussions and projects involving national institutions, regional bodies in charge of service planning and representatives of local communities.

Good practice example/ solution: CoNSENSo is an INTERREG project implemented in Piedmont. COmmunity Nurse Supporting Elderly iN a changing Society –is a project to support elderly in Alpin spaces by providing them better health and social care. The project activates formed nurses who visit the patients and not the opposite, providing health assistance also in remote and low accessible municipalities

3.2.2. Institutionalisation of experiences and best practices to standard working practices for all stakeholders in a network approach

Regional institutions should play a coordinating role by fostering interaction between the different projects activated on each territory.

- **Results from different projects should be shared and synergies created between the different stakeholders** involved in the inclusion processes.
- Regions should also **encourage the establishment of broad and inclusive partnerships that actively involve all local stakeholders including migrants;**

3.2.3. Ensure mediation and representation of local demands in national arenas by regional administrations

Regional institutions should

- **Foster linkages between local realities and national decision makers**, for example, by advocating and promoting proper estimation of work visa quotas needed in local labor markets.
- **Municipalities must be recognized as active players** in local public service planning and development processes. Small municipalities must be seen as key players in a balanced growth process. Each of them must be part of a broader vision of development and inclusion. National policies must accompany local processes in this direction, and **regions must link these two dimensions.**

3.3. National Level

3.3.1. Reframing migration policies to overcome the emergency approach.

Nowadays, migration can be considered, in both its irregular and regular forms, a constant phenomenon. Moreover, international migration has to be considered as one expression among diverse mobilities. Today, it is possible to recognize several types of mobility that in Italy matter with particular reference to rural – urban relationships. People move for a wider range of reasons: such mobilities include depopulation/repopulation trends, “new highlanders” movement, leisure and amenity migration, multilocalism, part-time living,

asylum seekers and refugee's resettlement outside urban centres; it also relates to labour-induced and circular migrations, particularly seasonal work in the agricultural and tourism sectors (Membretti & Bosque, 2022). An emergency approach reduces the opportunities to highlight and sustain migration related positive effects (MATILDE 2021): **A structural approach is then strongly advocated through a wider rethinking of public policies that may affect/influence - directly or indirectly - a fruitful inclusion of immigrants at territorial level, enhancing mutual benefits for foreigners and Italians.** Considering migration within an integrated approach to local development and social cohesion, this process should regard several policies fields:

- **Labour market access for foreigners should be supported and migrant's irregular work exploitation contrasted.** Specific tools, training and educational paths capable to highlights TCNs competencies should be implemented (e.g. *professional training, check of competences, life-long learning, peer-to-peer training*). **Work visa permission related procedures and available quota should be better targeted to the real potential of the country market in a bilateral and mutual approach,** especially for seasonal workers. In relation to the "Decreto Flussi", a better understanding of workforce needs has to be put in place considering in particular seasonal worker's needs (with particular reference to the agricultural sector and the *Caporalato* issue). **A more flexible, accessible and clear visa system has to be promoted** (avoiding continuous rules changes/ promoting easily system for workers that return in Italy seasonally to work).
- **The access to micro-credit opportunities needs to be widened improving correlated non-financial services for beneficiaries.** Support the beneficiaries from the pre-grant to the post-grant stage paying special attention to the validity and sustainability of the business project.
- **Self-employment through guidance and mentorship should be supported** enabling foreigners to approach and deals with bureaucracy and language barriers.

Although migrants represent an indisputable resource for rural and mountain economies and societies, policies for the re-launch of these territories usually do not focus on the role

of foreigners to fight depopulation and population ageing, to maintain essential services in remote areas, to foster social and cultural innovation processes.

- In Italy, there is a general lack of policies to revitalize internal areas, just as **it would be necessary to invest in active demographic policies to counter the decline that is affecting many mountainous and rural regions of the country.**
- **The demographic theme and the issue of territorial inequalities must therefore be put in relation with migration policies** (and new peopling, more in general), within a vision of development of the country centred in a mutual relationship between the centre and the peripheries, and between the different populations living in these territories.
- Demographic policies should be based on welfare actions to support families and parents whether Italian or foreign (e.g. through family allowances and financial support, access to medical services as paediatric ones, psychological and educative support, school services, etc).

3.3.2. Improve public opinion and political actors' knowledge of the contribution of foreign immigrants to the Italian economy and society.

Generally, results from research show migrants' relevance for local economy and communities: nevertheless, these aspects appear as underestimated and unacknowledged by both migrants and local actors (Gruber & Zupan, 2021). Foreign immigrants help key economic sectors of rural/mountain areas to remain alive: they open new businesses that contribute to local development, and they can mitigate the de-population process, contributing to keep public services open and sustainable. Currently, data collected by European national statistical agencies are often inadequate to capture the dimensions of the immigration phenomenon, especially with respect to its socio-economic impact and the geographical dimension (place-sensitive information, referring to small-scale territories). Policies are needed to favour the creation and use of appropriate indicators and make important resources available for this type of assessment. Main interventions should refer to:

- Developing and enforcing a **conceptual framework** and a strong transdisciplinary methodology for contextualizing the phenomenon of immigration within rural/mountain areas, focusing on its main place-based drivers/impacts;
- Promoting a **National Data policy** to foster the collection of useful data about migration impact at different territorial levels, identifying indicators and data that may be used/implemented/imagined to capture migration value for the recipient territory country/community.
- Enhancing **migration impact assessment** as a fundamental and scientific-based contribution for understanding the role of new inhabitants within local societies and economies, fostering their role with respect to local resilience and revitalization.

3.4. European Level

No recommendations for the European level emerged in the roundtables. Reflections from the research group are given below:

- **A rethink of European reception policy** is desirable, reviewing the hotspot system and the dynamics of relocation of migrants within the European countries.

Hotspot functions are not standardized by the European Agenda on Migration (EU 2015) where a clear definition of hotspots is missing. This approach left to national legislation and local management wide space for shaping what hotspots should be giving roots to inefficiencies and abuses (D'Andrea, 2017). Moreover, this system does not promote an equal treatment among different hotspots. With respect to migrants by force, since 2015 the redistribution system has worked mostly on a voluntary basis, the mechanic implies that the asylum application must be received by the first state where the migrant arrives. If a person arrives in Italy must proceed with the asylum application in the same territory even if it was an intermediate step. This implies that the person can be stationary even for a long time in a territory where he or she does not want to be. A redistribution mechanism would allow this process. This regulation encourages clandestine situations and does not foster effective inclusion processes.

In general, the migrants' role in the European development is underestimated.

- An approach which values **migratory flows including them in development processes and perspectives** should be promoted.

Europe lost focus on its regions, and policies appear detached from regional contexts.

Remote places seem increasingly left at the margins. Disaffected policies left places behind. The example of the management of asylum seekers is particularly negative. If regions are not listened and engaged these become distant missing the opportunity to manage migration even at the decentralized level.

- A **European regional immigration policy** is needed.

Europe should look to the future in its approach to migration and international migration flows. People are increasingly moving and for different reasons. It is likely that over the years the migrant profile will change several times and new mobility needs will arise and strengthen (e.g. mobility related to climate emergencies; or mobility needs due to conflicts).

- **Europe should have a structural plan with respect to current and future migration flows.**

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Norway

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1. Introduction and methodology

This report presents a series of policy recommendations concerning the integration of migrants in rural and remote areas. The presented policy recommendations are based on data collected by the Norwegian partners in the MATILDE project. The data has been collected through various work packages with different overarching aims, and includes assessment of official statistics, document studies and collection of qualitative data such as individual interviews, focus groups, and participatory action research organized around world cafés. While the focus of the project has been on two case regions in Innlandet County in Norway, the participants and informants represent a wide range of stakeholders at the local, regional and national level, including local citizens, migrants (with and without TCN background), public service employees, public sector managers, politicians, third sector representatives, employers, and private business representatives. For a complete overview of informants, see the attached Norway data collection plan.

When developing the policy recommendations, we draw on insights from the different forms of data collected for MATILDE. First, the assessment of existing integration policies, conducted as part of WP6, forms an important contextual backdrop for our recommendations (see Røhnebæk et al. 2021). Second, we draw on insights from qualitative and quantitative studies assessing the impact of migration in rural areas in terms of social (Samuelsen & Røhnebæk, 2021.) and economic dimensions (Blumenthal & Lund, 2021). Third, we place emphasis on insights from the local and regional case studies of WP5 which were based in participatory action research. The participatory action research was organized as participatory workshops (World Cafés) where migrants and diverse local stakeholders were invited to share knowledge, ideas and experiences and to work co-creatively on solutions

than can improve social inclusion and integration locally (the processes and proposed solutions are summarized in a separate report, see Røhnebæk et al., 2022).

Key insights from the different data collection activities are in this report formulated as policy recommendations with diverse implications for the local, regional and national level. Drafts of the recommendations were presented and discussed in **three roundtables**. First, **two regional roundtables** were organized with key decision makers from the **local government in the case regions**. These roundtables focused on dialogues around how the inputs and ideas from the workshops were assessed and how they were followed-up by relevant decision makers. Secondly, **one roundtable** was organized with representatives from agencies and organizations involved in migration and integration at the **national and regional level**. The participants were mainly from the public sector, but third sector representatives were also invited to the roundtable (see attached data collection plan for more detailed information about the participants). This roundtable focused more on the overall recommendations extracted from the MATILDE research, and the roundtable participants were invited to comment on the relevance, feasibility and timeliness of these recommendations. The recommendations were subsequently edited and refined based on inputs from these roundtables. The refined versions of these policy recommendations are presented in the subsequent sections.

It should be noted that the recommendations to be presented are largely based on the participatory action research part of the Norwegian MATILDE research. In which migrants residing in small rural communities were invited to share their experiences and develop ideas for solutions in collaboration with a diversity of local actors from the public, private and third sector. The recommendations are largely based on the perceptions and ideas conveyed through these processes, which give insights to what migrants and representatives from the host communities themselves find important for strengthening local integration. Thus, the recommendations are not based on studies of effects of concrete integration measures or interventions. The latter would require a different kind of methodological approach and a different epistemological basis. In this sense, the recommendations are research-based (based on a triangulation of research methods), but they are not as such, evidence-based.

2. Main policy problems

2.1. Geographical mobility

Being mountainous and remote, the case regions lack a viable public transportation system which makes geographical mobility difficult for many. Because the major social and health facilities in the regions are dispersed, having a car is almost a necessity to be able to participate in both the social and the working life in these regions. Everyday activities such as, buying groceries, taking children to school or kindergarten, visiting a doctor, or going to a bus stop/train station are all dependent on one's ability to drive. To obtain a driving license, however, is quite expensive in Norway. Although one can take the theory test in various languages (though not in every language), the courses and books are mainly in Norwegian, and many struggle to find someone to practice driving with.

2.2. Lack of access to arenas for social interactions

Social interaction and networking play a critical role for the integration process as they facilitate immigrants' orientation into the local community and society at large. Although there are particular schemes, arenas, and events to foster social interaction and networking for different groups (families with children, women etc.), information about these are inadequately disseminated. That is, many of the immigrants in these regions are not aware of these facilities because they lack information about them. Additionally, geographical limitations can prevent some from participating in these events and gatherings as they can be difficult to access unless one has access to a car.

2.3. High thresholds for labour market participation

Many individuals find labour market participation challenging. That is mainly because their eligibility is judged against formal qualifications. It was highlighted in the data collected for MATILDE that many immigrants have undocumented skills and competences that can be of high value for particular labour market services. Furthermore, municipalities often have

problems offering individuals who receive social security benefits meaningful activities that allow them to gain experience and develop competencies that will enhance their qualifications and employment opportunities.

2.4. Impediments and scarce support for (aspiring) entrepreneurs

Supporting entrepreneurs and their businesses in the region is of great importance for the regional economic growth. To start a business requires solid information on issues such as accounting, taxes, laws and permits. However, interviews revealed that immigrants with entrepreneurial ambitions lacked access to information and entrepreneurial courses specifically adapted to immigrants with limited insight into the Norwegian bureaucratic system. This hindered their ability to put their entrepreneurial ambitions to life and caused significant delays in their business ventures.

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

This report lists policy recommendations pertaining to the local, regional, and national level in line with the shared MATILDE guidelines. Policy recommendations pertaining to the EU level is not addressed in this report, as the conducted participatory research, namely the World Cafe workshops but also the subsequent roundtables, had a local and regional focus. The policy recommendations that could be developed on this basis therefore mainly centered on the local, regional, and to some extent also the national level.

It should be noted that the positioning of the recommendations in relation to the different levels is not clear cut because issues or problems raised and experienced at the local level may require action at regional or national level. Likewise, challenges highlighted at the national level, may require action at local levels. We try to include reflections on this when presenting the recommendations.

3.1. Local Level: Tynset & Sør-Fron

3.1.1. Social inclusion

The policy recommendations pertaining to the local (municipal and inter-municipal) level centres mainly on measures for strengthening opportunities for social inclusion or participation in social arenas. To be socially active in inclusive and safe surroundings are key to immigrant integration at the local level. It is through social arenas that newcomers socialize and acquire skills and knowhow that may contribute to employment and language acquisition, both important components of their integration to the society at large. Furthermore, having access to social networks provide many health benefits as it provides support, connection and interaction for the immigrants which can be extremely important during their resettlement process. The barriers to building a social network can, however, be high for immigrants as they might lack the necessary language skills, resources to participate in certain types of activities, and lack door openers into the local community. In the following, we present some concrete policy recommendations that can be used to strengthen opportunities for social inclusion and social participation and the local community.

- **Making information on events and activities more accessible: local information sharing platformS**

Social inclusion is an important part of successful integration and lack of access to information about local opportunities for networking and socialization, such as events, activities, cultural happenings, and meetings can be a hindrance to social inclusion. Several of our migrant background informants expressed that they felt that there were existing opportunities for activation and socializing that they were simply not aware of and did not know where to find information about.

To improve access to such information, and consequently expand opportunities for social inclusion, World Café participants proposed the establishment of municipality/local level platforms for collecting and sharing information about local events and opportunities. Including information about organized sports, cultural activities & events, language training opportunities, educational possibilities, etc. The platform should function as a one-stop

information hub for updated information about local activities and opportunities. Such a platform can not only contribute to providing local inhabitants with up-to-date information but can also be used as a strategy to make the region more attractive, by showcasing the different opportunities and activities that are on offer in the region.

While many municipalities have information available on their website, this information can be difficult to find and has a tendency to be outdated. Key to this platform, whether it is hosted on a website, app, social media, or through other channels, is that it needs to be kept up to date. This can be ensured by for example allowing uploading access to multiple actors and turning it into a community platform. To make the information on the platform more accessible to immigrants, the information on the portal could be made available in different languages.

- **Activity passes and subsidized leisure activities for migrants and underprivileged youth**

Offering activity passes or subsidized leisure activities for children and youth from underprivileged families is a policy that has already been tested and implemented in multiple municipalities in Norway. Maintaining this kind of support for families with immigrant backgrounds is a vital measure for integration. When children are provided with opportunities to take part in organized activities this has implications for immigrant families' access to networks and sense of belonging (see also Solheim & Rønnebak, 2019).

Such initiatives should be developed in relation to the aforementioned information platform to ensure that families are provided with information about both the activity passes themselves and about the different activities that are available locally.

In Nord Østerdal, a pilot project titled **“Right activity for all”** was initiated in 2018 after a study had shown that the two of the main reasons why local children were not participating in leisure activities, were lack of information and lack of finances. Tynset sports association, the Regional council for Nord Østerdal and International Board in Tynset municipality, therefore, initiated a pilot project where they, among others, would cover membership/training fees for leisure activities for children in low-income families. The project has resulted

in sharp increase in youth participation in leisure and sports activities and has succeeded in recruiting more girls to various sports activities. The project has also had a positive effect on families as such, as it has provided language training and (for some) work opportunities. This initiative has been a success and we recommend furthering such initiatives as they can play an important role for integration for immigrant families.

- **Inclusion policies and initiatives directed at single household immigrants**

Today, many of the integration activities and initiatives for newly resettled refugees are directed toward families and children/youth. The need for initiatives directed toward single household immigrants was an issue that was raised by multiple informants (both during in-depth interviews and during the idea workshops) who felt that current initiatives did not meet their needs and that they lacked arenas where they could meet and socialize with other people around their own age who are at a similar stage in life. Although this was an issue that was raised in multiple groups during the two idea workshops, none of the groups went on to present solutions related to this issue. There might be multiple reasons for this, overrepresentation of participants with families for example, but it could also be an indication that the needs and interests of this group of immigrants might be overlooked in favor of the needs of other immigrant groups. However, this is an important point, given the fact that we know that single households often feel lonely, as was particularly reported also during the pandemic. The lack of measures aimed to social inclusion of settled refugees in single households have also been highlighted in previous studies (i.e. Solheim & Røhnebæk, 2019)

Concrete suggestions related to this policy recommendation is the inclusion of immigrants in activity-pass schemes, the establishment of informal meeting places aimed at young single household adults, and buddy systems where people are paired up with someone around the same age with similar interests.

- **Mentors: Door openers to language and social inclusion**

Social inclusion and integration into the local community were identified as one of the key challenges facing migrants in the two rural case regions that were examined. This was related to barriers to workforce participation, language barriers, and to difficulties in establishing a network within the wider community locally. One proposed policy recommendation, which was brought up as a potential solution was the implementation of different types of mentor/ buddy schemes. Different examples of these kinds of schemes have been successfully introduced in both case regions, as well as in other regions in Norway. The core tenet of these schemes is that new arrivals get matched up with a buddy that can aid them in various ways, from practical language training and cultural understanding to networking and practice driving. These mentors or buddies are meant to function as door openers to Norwegian society and the local community. Different kinds of solutions relating to such mentor systems include:

- *“Language buddies”*: Developing systems that connect local people (buddies) with migrants, giving migrants the opportunity to practice their Norwegian language skills in an informal, social setting, while simultaneously developing contacts within the local community.
- *Local guides*: Mentors that can provide guidance in navigating daily life and the social life in the community. These mentors can also offer insight into how the Norwegian welfare system works, explain rights and obligations as a Norwegian citizen, and provide guidance into the more informal and tacit rules and cultural codes of conduct. For such a system to work successfully, continuous follow-up and training of mentors is recommended. It was also highlighted that it would be beneficial to recruit individuals with migrant backgrounds as mentors.
- *Welcome coordinators*: This mentor should provide guidance to the local community, help newcomers get settled in the community, and gain access to networks. This is a scheme that can be directed toward immigrants but also towards newly arrived migrants moving into the community from other parts of Norway. The idea is to bridge

connections between newcomers and locals, and both groups can act as mentors to newcomers.’

- **Enhance engagement of the volunteer sector as a supplement to the public refugee services.**

During the idea workshops held in the two case regions, one of the topics that were brought up was the lack of availability of help and assistance after working hours and on weekends. This was described as a challenge, particularly for those who lack a network in the local community, since many of the issues and problems refugees experience arise after formal working hours, i.e. interpreting letters from school/kindergarten, health related issues, etc . A potential solution to this problem could be to activate the volunteer sector and recruit volunteers willing to assist refugees in afternoons and on weekends functioning as a more flexible supplement to the governmental refugee services. During the roundtable dialogues following the idea workshops, it was however pointed out that there can be a downside in offering too much help and support. Given that it can lead to situations where refugees are not provided with opportunities to become independent and find ways to manoeuvre and get familiar with the workings of Norwegian society. Thus, an important element of this measure would be to train volunteers in how to support refugees to handle things themselves. That is, providing support and doing things with them, rather than for them. A strategy for facilitating the development of such cooperation between the volunteer sector and the municipal refugee services, which was brought up during the idea workshops was to physically co-locate the municipal refugee service with the local volunteer central. In an effort to encourage dialog and cooperation between the two actors.

3.2.Regional Level: Nord-Østerdal & Midt-Gudbrandsdal

The interviews showed that there is a strong need for new initiatives that will enable geographic mobility in the case regions. As mentioned before, geographical mobility is critical for social and labour market participation of the residents, and that it is often immigrants who lack a driving license and experience hardship on that matter. At the

regional level, there is also a need for policies that will strengthen opportunities for immigrants' labour market participation, which may also benefit the regions' economic growth. The policy recommendations pertaining to the regional level target these two areas.

3.2.1. Improve migrant's opportunities for geographic mobility

Mobility plays a crucial role in participation and integration in rural and remote municipalities characterized by dispersed settlements, as having access to a car can be pertinent to both labour market participation and participation in social arenas. Having access to a car in such areas is hence connected to opportunities for equal participation, but also a feeling of independence and self-worth, as several informants expressed that they felt uncomfortable having to depend on others for transport and always having to be the one asking for help. In the case regions, there have previously been initiatives providing immigrants with financial support to obtain a driver's license, but our findings pointed to other forms of support that might be valuable. In Norway, it is currently possible to take the written theory test needed to obtain a driver's license in different languages, but the theory classes aimed at helping students pass the test are currently only offered in Norwegian. We thus recommend offering such classes in different languages, to help lower the barrier to driver's license obtainment for immigrants with limited proficiency in the Norwegian language. To make this policy recommendation viable in rural areas where there might be few potential students, classes could be offered as online classes, gathering students with a shared language from a larger geographical area. This would, however, require national level coordination.

A second recommendation relating to driver's license obtainment is a measure that can help migrants practice driving outside of formal driving lessons. Driving lessons are costly, and the number of driving lessons needed to pass the test can be reduced significantly if those under training are given the opportunity to practice driving with skilled drivers. Establishing a system, for example in cooperation with local volunteer organizations, that can connect migrants with volunteers who can assist with practice driving can thus contribute to lowering the financial burdens associated with obtaining a driver's license.

Other initiatives that can contribute to improving mobility are to improve the local public transport service or establish ride-sharing schemes where local teams, organizations, and private citizens can come together to organize carpooling in connection to sporting events, cultural events, and other leisure activities.

3.2.2. Lowering the barriers for labour market participation

- **Establishing a “job central”**

Labour market inclusion and participation was a clear challenge in the case regions examined in this project and policies that can contribute to reducing the barriers to labour market participation are central. One potential solution is to establish “job centrals” functioning as supplements to the regional and local Labour and Welfare Services.

These job centrals would work closely with the regional and local Labour and Welfare Services as well as local businesses and would function as a hub and a meeting place that can assist with assessing and identifying job seekers’ competencies (formal and informal), as well as conveying small, ad-hoc jobs related to for example different forms of repairs and maintenance, simple types of production or summer jobs. The purpose is to enable immigrants to “get their foot in the door” of the Norwegian labour market, which is particularly useful for immigrants without formal qualification, by facilitating access to low-barrier, short-term employment opportunities and “on the job” language training. Hence the target group of this initiative is job seekers with migrant backgrounds in need of work experience and language training, as well as social welfare recipients with “aktivitetsplikt” (duty to be active).

Job centrals can be especially useful to immigrant youth in rural areas who have limited networks locally, as short-term jobs for youth such as summer jobs are, according to local informants, mostly obtained through relatives, acquaintances, and social networks. Establishing a job center as a pool for short-term vacancies for youth can help mitigate the effects of a limited network for migrant youth, giving them access to valuable work experience. Job centrals have already been successfully implemented in other regions and

municipalities in Norway and there are also similar initiatives in Sweden, so there are best practices to be learned from existing examples of this initiative.

- **Improve access to vocational education opportunities for migrants in rural areas**

Formal qualifications have increasingly become a prerequisite for entering and staying in the Norwegian labour market, as there are few jobs for unskilled workers. Integration policies have thus shifted from a focus on rapid employment towards increasing focus on formal education as investments for secure, long-term employment. Module-based vocational training is an important element in this shift, and entails development, piloting and testing of more flexible and effective educational programs leading to trade certificates. The flexibility allows participants to combine prior experience and skills more easily with elements (modules) of the formal educational programs. This is important for immigrants because it enables development of formal qualifications sequentially over time in combination with work and language training.

Moreover, currently, Norwegian counties are not required to provide vocational education programs that are adapted to students who lack Norwegian language skills. For many immigrants, this results in significant delays in their educational progression, as they are forced to put their education on hold until they have gained sufficient language skills to be able to follow classes in Norwegian. Norwegian is, however, not the only language that hinders migrants from partaking in upper secondary education in Norway. Lack of proficiency in English represents a second barrier, as potential students are required to pass all classes at the lower secondary level before being admitted to upper secondary school. Consequently, many immigrants have to learn and master two new languages before they can begin their upper secondary education.

In Norway, it is the municipalities that are responsible for providing lower secondary education, while the county is charged with upper secondary education, and these issues have caused contention between these two levels of government as they have not been able to solve how these challenges should be dealt with.

In 2017, however, in an attempt to address these issues, a pilot (titled “Modulforsøket” [The module pilot] was launched, involving several counties in Norway, including Innlandet County, where the two Norwegian MATILDE-case regions are located. In the pilot, which is scheduled to run until 2023, local adult education centres work together with participants with limited Norwegian proficiency to develop a tailor-made qualification scheme based on the competencies, qualifications, and needs of the individual participant. The pilot tests three approaches to vocational education obtainment:

- Preparatory adult education: piloting a module-based curriculum where participants can learn both theory and language simultaneously, preparing participants for upper secondary school.
- Module-based vocational education: piloting a flexible, module-based curriculum that leads to a (vocational) certificate.
- Combination pilot: Combining preparatory adult education and module-based vocational education. The participants are offered tutoring in the primary/lower secondary school subjects they are lacking, while simultaneously participating in “on the job” vocational training.

These flexible solutions require close cooperation between the municipalities involved, the local adult education centres, local enterprises, refugee services, and the local labour and welfare administration.

So far, the experience from the pilots has been positive and it is expected that this will become the new “norm” in adult education in Norway, which will be accelerated by a governmental reform focusing on the importance of completing upper secondary school. Several municipalities and adult education centres in Innlandet participate in this pilot and have reported positive experiences and results, and it is expected that these initiatives can be successfully replicated in other regions, thus contributing to improving access to education opportunities for migrants in rural areas. We recommend policy makers to continue these experimentations with module-based vocational training, and to continue systematic evaluations of the experiments as a basis for implementation and scaling beyond the pilots.

Module based education for adults. The Norwegian parliament decided in 2021 that module-based education will be the future model for adult education. This model is being piloted and tested in the period 2017-2023.

The essence of these pilots is that the training is divided into smaller training units (modules) which can be more flexibly combined with work experience which in the end can lead to a formal certificate of competence (trade certificate). Experiences from the pilots are important for developing the new future module-based model. Reports from the interrelated pilots are available in Norwegian here: <https://ideas2evidence.com/news/nye-rapporter-om-fremtidens-voksenopplaering>

- **Entrepreneurial courses specifically adapted to immigrants**

Interviews conducted among entrepreneurs with migrant backgrounds in the two case regions revealed that lack of information about requirements, rules, regulations, and bureaucratic processes had been a key hurdle on their path to realizing their entrepreneurial ambitions. They described support from the government in the form of information and entrepreneurial courses to be considerably more important than financial support from the government, as they were able to secure the necessary financial backing for their enterprise through a combination of personal funds and bank loans. This need has also previously been identified in an evaluation of the entrepreneurial support offered in Innlandet county (Andersen et al, 2019) which showed that immigrants are very interested in entrepreneurial courses specifically adapted to them and that financial support was considered of secondary importance compared to support in the form of information and counselling related to establishing a business. A solution to facilitate entrepreneurship among immigrants can thus be to provide make relevant information more easily accessible and to offer entrepreneurial courses specifically adapted to the informational needs of would-be immigrant entrepreneurs. As well as offering other types of support, for example through personalized counselling. Adaption to the target audience is key, both in terms of the type of information that is needed, how it is provided, and the language the information is provided in, as the

informational needs of an entrepreneur with a migrant background can differ from the needs of native entrepreneurs.

3.3.National Level: Norway

The policy recommendations pertaining to the national level focus on two main themes. First, we highlight the need for strengthening opportunities for labour market inclusion by lowering the thresholds for acquiring and documenting formal qualifications and second, we point to the need for enhancing predictability and communication for local settlement and integration work.

3.3.1. Documentation and recognition of skills, competencies and education

National policies and practices that will facilitate recognition of immigrants' skills, competences and formal education would have been beneficial for lowering the threshold for labour market inclusion. In its current state, mapping of both formal and informal skills of immigrants is a lengthy process which imposes certain limitations for TCNs employment opportunities.

To address this, there is need for more structured support and recognition procedures for non-formal qualifications. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) contributes, among others to recognize foreign education. NOKUT assesses whether vocational education and training obtained abroad can be comparable to Norwegian craft and journeyman's certificates (fagbrev). Migrants without formal qualifications and certificates, however, face entirely different challenges, as their lack of formalized qualification become a barrier to work force participation, even in professions in which they have several years of prior work experience from, but lack the formalized skills to execute in Norway. An important barrier to workforce participation, as reported by our informants, was thus the lack of formalized qualifications. Structured support and recognition procedures to assist immigrants in formalizing non-formal skills and competencies can thus be an important solution to facilitate a quicker transition into the workforce. The target group of such a policy would be immigrants who possess skills and competencies but lack the

formalized qualifications required to practice their craft or to partake in further education in their new country of residence.

The piloted module-based qualification scheme, described in section 2.2 above, is an opportunity for migrants to formalize their competencies. The “supported employment”-methodology has also been piloted for immigrants by the Norwegian Directorate for Integration and Diversity, which can also be further adapted by municipalities, to assist migrants without formalized qualifications. According to the Norwegian Education Act, anyone who applies for upper secondary education under the “adults’ right” has the legal right to have their formal, informal, and non-formal competence assessed and evaluated, but this is a tool, that according to our informants, is not used often enough. Although the law opens for this assessment to be done in a different language than Norwegian, for those who are not proficient in Norwegian. Again, this clause is seldom used, but should be used more widely as it can reduce the effects of language barriers and contribute to a quicker transition into the work force.

3.3.2. Enhance predictability and communication for local settlement and integration work

Another important issue that needs to be addressed at the national level is improving the quality of cooperation and communication between the central government and the municipalities concerning the resettlement of refugees.

In Norway, a national committee annually determines the refugee settlement requirements, which may vary greatly from year to year. During the years 2015-2016, the resettlement needs were at a record high, but during the last few years, the number of refugees arriving in Norway has decreased dramatically. That the number of refugees vary is inevitable, as the number of refugees around the world fluctuate constantly. Although this means that predictability is difficult to ensure, the situation makes it challenging for municipalities in Norway to maintain the competencies and capacity for resettling and integrating refugees. In our research, we have encountered several examples where municipalities have been willing to resettle more refugees than they have been assigned by the national committee.

This is because the resettlement of refugees has by many rural municipalities been regarded as important for curbing population decline and for maintaining municipal services such as local schools. Hence, refugees are seen as a resource and a resource that has become increasingly scarce. As a consequence, there are several municipalities who are both willing to and have the capacity to receive far more refugees than they currently do. This has given the national committee the opportunity to prioritize which municipalities are assigned refugees for resettlement, prioritizing the municipalities that are most successful in their resettlement, qualification and integration efforts. Which, consequently, has helped make the assignment of refugees more predictable for municipalities, as they know succeeding with their integration efforts can lead to more refugees being assigned to them in the future. During the years since the refugee peak in 2015/2016, many regions have established inter-municipal cooperation for refugee and integration services. In this way, they have succeeded to maintain necessary competencies even though the number of resettlements has been low. When prioritizing the municipalities that are assigned refugees for resettlement it is thus recommended that the national government should emphasize inter-municipal/ regional cooperation when assigning refugees to municipalities and not just the individual municipalities. Similarly, there should be more emphasis on the region, when evaluating suitability for resettlement, in terms of job opportunities, mobility, etc. Since this would paint a more realistic picture of the opportunities that are available to those being resettled in smaller, rural municipalities.

4. Conclusions

These policy recommendations are largely in line with existing integration policies in Norway. The recommendations mainly advice authorities on different government levels to continue, scale up or strengthen existing measures. As such, they do not present radically new or innovative recommendations and solutions, instead they largely elaborate, add details to, and highlight the value of previously tested or existing policies and initiatives.

This report presents recommendations aimed at both strengthening conditions for labour market inclusion and measures that focuses on strengthening mechanisms for social

inclusion, particularly social bridging (i.e., access to networks and social relations beyond the family and close networks) (see for instance Ager & Strang, 2008). We find that social and labour market inclusion are deeply interconnected, especially in rural contexts where employment opportunities tend to be linked to personal networks (Samuelsen & Rønnebak, 2021). Furthermore, Norway is marked by high labour force participation and low unemployment rates, which implies that socializing and social inclusion is largely centred around the workplace. Labour market exclusion and mechanisms of social isolation thus tend to be closely interlinked. Measures focusing on social inclusion is also indirectly about labour market participation because opportunities to participate in social arenas is vital for language training; learning cultural codes; developing skills; getting access to networks and for learning about local employment and qualification opportunities. These are all elements providing a crucial 'scaffolding' for labour market inclusion. Consequently, we highlight the need for holistic approaches that combine measures aimed a social inclusion with measures aimed at enabling labour market participation. We believe such holistic approaches to be particularly important in remote and rural areas where recruitment to jobs often take place through informal networks and where formal and informal roles and relations tend to be more entangled than in urban settings.

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Spain

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1. Introduction and methodology

The information has been obtained from the fieldwork carried out for WP3 (social impact), WP4 (economic impact) and WP5 (case study in two comarcas/counties; there are 33 in Aragón).

With the material conducted, a SWOT-analysis has been prepared for the different governmental levels (EU/national/regional/local). This SWOT-analysis, clarified the problems and deficiencies as well as the corresponding policy recommendations identified at these four territorial levels, for the different dimensions considered (1: administrative and bureaucratic issues; 2: social sphere, cohesion and inclusion; 3: economic and labor-professional; 4: housing; 5: territorial aspects, transport and communications). These findings were explained, dimension by dimension, to all the participants in the roundtables. Some participants shared them in their areas of work and responsibility.

With this SWOT-analysis, we worked in the different roundtables with stakeholders from different responsibilities in the social, educational, economic, legislative and territorial-demographic fields. Due to their positions, all the participants had the capacity to make decisions on aspects conditioned by migration. Using this material, the participants expressed their opinion and debated the diagnosis made, its problems or deficiencies, and whether the policy recommendations were possible, which ones, and at what level of responsibility or of the Administration they should be taken. They also exposed and explored the possible and feasible measures, from each level of the administration.

Two roundtables have been held at the national level and other two at the regional level. Among all the recommendations debated in the different dimensions, those related to the main problems faced by immigrants residing in rural areas have been selected for this report.

There are other recommendations, also interesting, but they have been ruled out due to: 1) the need to involve various levels of public administration (need for a great deal of coordination), or 2) because they require a substantial legislative amendment or an extraordinary financial contribution. Thus, the collected measures here are aimed at solving problems that affect and/or benefit both the foreign population and the native population. Also, their development could have a positive impact on the economic activity of the area and for the social cohesion.

2. Main policy problems

- **Administrative and bureaucratic area.** In rural areas, TCNs' have special difficulty accessing administrative procedures, including procedures that can be carried out online due to the digital gap, both in terms of knowledge and devices. In addition, there are connectivity problems that especially affect rural areas .
- **Economy.** The main economic problems, related to the national policy, have to do with the difficulty of TCNs' access to qualified and long-term jobs. In addition, TCNs generally work in certain low-skilled economic branches (tourism sector, hotels and restaurants, cleaning and care jobs, and manual jobs, which are generally the most demanding and lowest paid). In part, this problem is related to the problems and difficulties for standardizing qualifications and training that immigrants bring from their countries.
- **Social cohesion and inclusion.** There are also social problems such as the lack of coexistence and acceptance by the local population, especially in some groups such as North Africans. There are many stereotypes and stigmas about the foreign population, lack of knowledge and communication, being necessary to know "to the different"; visibility policies are needed and to know the real contribution of immigrants (fighting against the stigma that they come to undermine our welfare state and use our social resources). Although it is a problem whose responsibility falls on all levels (national, regional and local), direct intervention is necessary, so regional and local governments have greater responsibility in this area

- **Housing.** From a regional and local territorial perspective, the TCNs highlight the lack of housing in rural areas: little and not available, because the owners do not put it up for sale or for rent. This problem is aggravated in tourist areas, where prices increase a lot and are not accessible to the native population and immigrants. In addition, there are many prejudices against renting housing to foreigners (they do not trust them, they believe they are dirty and that they will not pay...).
- **Transport and communications.** TCNs living in rural areas, highlight the difficulties of accessibility and the lack of transport and public services such as education and health. This problem is especially serious in rural areas of Spain, where there is low population density and lack of social profitability of services. Therefore, the majority of TCNs reside in intermediate cities and not in the smallest towns (not with less than 2,000-4,000 inhabitants, in general). In rural areas, many immigrants (especially women) do not have a car and must travel many kilometres to work, or to access these services (children's schools, take courses, health, etc.). The problems regarding the offer of training to get jobs, is also a problem in rural areas, due to the lack of population and services. For this reason, those who want to train and get courses and better qualifications must travel many kilometres to the county or provincial capitals.

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

3.1. Local Level: Comarcas de Alto Gallego and Los Monegros

3.1.1. Reform of the public administration

The areas of intervention and decision that affect the migratory phenomenon are distributed among different levels of the administration. However, the local scale is very important, because it is at this level where the population interacts and lives together. As it was referred during the roundtables, the City Councils can develop and implement many policies and measures. In Aragón, also, the comarcas have many powers (competencies) to intervene in matters of social integration, employment, training, health, housing, etc. However, the aid and

calls (for funding) come from the regional government, the comarcas have to apply for them, but the procedures are slow. For all these reasons,

- **the reform of the local regime and the administrative simplification** that facilitate the leadership and decision-making of local governments are demanded.
- In addition, it should be incorporate the rural perspective and the demographic impact.

All this will give more freedom of action to the municipalities and comarcas, and will contribute to increasing social cohesion, without forgetting to reinforce the territorial structure and the cohesion. This differential treatment should be introduced to correct the spatial differences and reduce the gaps between urban and rural areas.

3.1.2. Social housing

There is a problem of poor access to housing (local level), both rented and owned, because there is little, there is reluctance to rent it to immigrants, and it is very expensive in some (tourist) areas: consequently, it is out of reach for the population with low income. It has been recognized that it is a very serious structural problem, which requires multilevel attention.

- A housing plan must be addressed in the rural world that contemplates the access of foreigners, the habitability of the houses and their maintenance.

Some of these measures are already implemented, such as the Huesca Provincial Council Housing Plan, (Diputación Provincial de Huesca, 2022); Through this plan, interest-free loans are granted to municipalities in the province of Huesca with less than 1,000 inhabitants; These loans are destined to investments for the acquisition, rehabilitation or construction of houses for new settlers in their municipality . But investment must be increased to create more housing supply.

Local Action Groups (LEADER) are also developing measures for the same purpose, for example, carrying out housing censuses to collect all the existing ones according to the state in which they are found; in this way, these Groups are able to offer dwellings, checking the

needs for rehabilitation and conditioning, in order to finance their adaptation to offer them for rent.

The City Councils should

- **allocate more investment and resources to the creation of housing.**

One of the measures that has been highlighted here is to

- **improve municipal governance** and **give more freedom of action to municipalities.**
- Precisely, that would allow them to be able to build or rehabilitate more houses in the municipalities, since there are many immigrants who must move their place of residence to other nearby with lower prices.

3.1.3. Information about procedures in municipalities

One of the difficulties mentioned by immigrants in their daily lives, and especially when they arrive to the -local- territory, is knowing what steps to take and how to carry them out: from requesting residence and work permits, to procedures for renting a home, signing up for children to school, accessing to health care or how get a driver's license.

In some municipalities there is already a good practice of publishing small books/guides/tutorials with information on the main places and telephone numbers of interest, and with information on basic services (medical, educational, administrative procedures on registration, shopping, etc.) (Participant, Roundtable 1 National level)

Here, we propose that

- all comarcas could **offer guidelines**, both in paper and in digital formats.
- This measure would be complementary to others such as personal attention to immigrants at specific points for the resolution of doubts about these procedures.

3.1.4. Adult Education Centers (CPEPA)

Almost all the comarcas (33 in Aragón), but getting funding from the Aragón government, have developed a network of Adult Education Centers (CPEPA) (<https://epa.educa.aragon.es/educapermanente/>), which we have identified as a good

practice, established in the 1980s. It is a public service to train people over 18 years of age and for minors with an employment contract.. Participants can obtain an official degree, increase their basic training and promote job inclusion, not only among foreign immigrants but for the entire population. There are courses about Spanish language, but "Certificates of Professionalism" are also offered for training in socio-health care for dependent people, to be facilitator of children's and youth educational free time activities, to be community mediation, etc. (Participant, Roundtable 2 Regional level)

Considering the trajectory of these centers,

- **the autonomy of these Centers could be increased to expand their training offer to other subjects** related to labour demands at the local level.
- The financing could come from the counties in coordination with the municipalities.

3.1.5. Racism and xenophobia

At a local level, there are problems of racism and xenophobia, not only between natives towards foreigners, but also between different groups of foreigners. Immigrants report refusal to be hired and get certain jobs, or to be able to rent a house (especially those of Moroccan origin), to socialize with the native population, or even for children of foreign origin to participate in school activities. There are still many prejudices, false beliefs and taboos about immigrants. To defeat them, **it would be convenient to increase the channels of communication**, which can be done in several ways.

Here, we propose

- that the municipalities could intervene more in **organizing activities and meeting points** for the promotion of a more intercultural coexistence.
- An example would be the **creation of (local) radio programs** where experiences and initiatives are shown, also giving information about the daily life of immigrants, making their problems visible, but also their achievements. This could help break stereotypes and promote "bridges" of coexistence.

3.1.6. Intercultural mediators

The figure of intercultural mediators has existed in the comarcas of Aragón since 1992. The comarcas are part of the local administration, and there have been this type of agents in some comarcas, although they are not generalized.

Intercultural mediators are usually agents/technicians hired by the Social Action sections of the comarcas. They are also called "coexistence agents", they are normally of foreign origin, and they work for the reception, orientation and intercultural mediation with foreign seasonal workers for agricultural campaigns (Heraldo 2021). They offer help, guidance and explain the services that exist in the area, especially housing and health, to improve integration.

In the region of Los Monegros there was an intercultural mediator in 2007, but timely-limited (Radio Huesca 2007). She was a woman of Arab origin, hired with funding from the Departments of Education and Labor and Immigration of the Government of Aragón, in order to support the integration, especially of Arab women. However, workers of this type currently exist in very few comarcas.

In fact, the government of Aragón already contemplated this type of agent in 2014 in its III Inclusion Plan (Government of Aragón 2014). This Plan promoted the presence of intercultural mediators in all services and areas of all administrations, although only for temporary workers in the agricultural season.

With these precedents, here, the recommendation is

- **to generalize and give continuity to these workers**, not only during temporary work campaigns to help seasonal workers, but to support the integration process of all foreign immigrants throughout the year.
- There could be at least one in each of the 33 comarcas.

This is not a very expensive measure, which could surely receive financing from European Funds, and which would have a very positive impact on the inclusion of immigrants in the territory. This measure was discussed in the roundtables and seemed to be well accepted.

3.1.7. Political participation in municipalities

It has been verified in the fieldwork carried out for the MATILDE project that the possibility of voting in local elections reinforces the feeling of belonging of foreign immigrants and towards the community.

In Spain, all residents without having Spanish nationality, who come from an EU country, enjoy the right to active suffrage in municipal elections (to elect their representatives). In addition, there are immigrants from around 15 countries (including Colombia, Ecuador, etc.) who also have the right to vote because their country has signed an agreement with Spain. However, the rest of the people arriving from other countries need to have Spanish nationality.

Modifying this requirement, the recommendations is that

- people who have a residence permit and who have been registered (in the *Municipal Register of Inhabitants*) **could be allowed to vote at the municipal level**, following the general electoral regulations established for all citizens.

That would be, regardless of the agreements signed between the different countries with Spain.

3.2. Regional Level: Aragón

In Spain, the policies of access to the benefits of the welfare systems for the population, under the principle of normalization, depend fundamentally on the regional governments. The review of the existing problems and the policies and good practices developed has made it possible to observe difficulties for the population as a whole, and how these are intensified among the most vulnerable population, in particular foreigners (TCNs). The main recommendations to overcome the main problems are listed below.

3.2.1. Social Housing

Previously, the problem of homelessness in rural areas has been highlighted: it is scarce, expensive in some tourist areas, and often in poor condition. It must be remembered that, in Spain, housing competencies (its creation) belong to the autonomous communities,

although supply plans can also be developed at other territorial levels such as provinces and town councils.

The central government, from the General Secretariat for the Demographic Challenge, has developed measures applicable to the management of housing in rural areas, which will be implemented in collaboration with the governments of the autonomous communities. At the regional level, the government of Aragón and the provincial governments (Provincial Councils) are developing **housing plans in rural municipalities**. Basically, these plans consist of giving subsidies to the municipalities so that they can rehabilitate and offer low-priced housing in rural areas. The rehabilitation of homes that do not have the adequate conditions is promoted, and aids of up to 45,000€ are offered to have a social rental of a municipally owned home.

Other measures that are proposed are

- **the management of social housing** by the social services (of the Government of Aragón and the comarcas) and the development of mobile offices for its management.

A different problem is the lack of housing for **foreign workers with temporary contracts** during agricultural campaigns. There are business agreements that recommend that employers/entrepreneurs should offer housing to these temporary workers, but many do not meet the requirement. For this reason, it is proposed to

- **reinforce the responsibility of employers in terms of accommodation**
- and to **intensify inspection protocols since it is a responsibility of employers.**
- Finally, it is proposed **to carry out training campaigns on the use and social responsibility of housing.**
- In addition, it is also proposed to carry out awareness **campaigns to encourage renting** without distinction of origin or ethnicity.

This is due to the fact that there are problems of racism and xenophobia and many foreigners are unable to rent homes.

These are measures that reinforce existing ones and that can benefit the entire population - not just immigrants/TCNs-, and can benefit investment and economic progress in rural areas.

3.2.2. Access to services (via public transport and online)

As of 06/2022, eight law projects are being processed by the Regional Government of Aragón; one of them is the Law for the Dynamization of the Rural Environment to combat depopulation. This law possibly addresses some of the issues outlined here.(Aragón Digital, 2022)

The few public transport lines, and in general the lack of public? transport in rural areas, makes it difficult to access basic services in these areas.

To this end, the Government of Aragón is also working on a Plan for a New Road Transport Concession Map, in order **to densify the transport network**. Accordingly, all towns with more than 10 inhabitants will have a transport line, at least one once a week, to access the population centers of the comarcas where the main services are concentrated (education-training, leisure, sports, health, etc.).(Participant, Roundtable 1 National level)

In the roundtables it has been proposed

- **to organize integrated routes (school buses that can be used by the population too);**

however, it is not always possible, because the contracts of the school lines depend on the Education Service (government of Aragón), and this measure cannot be carried out due to reasons of safety and protection of minors.

- The development of intercity transport is also aimed at structuring the territory and promoting inclusion and social cohesion for all the inhabitants of the different areas of Aragón. They can be implemented in a reasonable time, since they are already contemplated in the new plan.
- As an alternative to face-to-face services, the access to online services needs to be improved.

Regarding connectivity and internet access in rural areas, there is a demand to speed up the already started process. In the roundtables, the responsible person of the Department of Regional Planning in Aragón highlighted that the state internet coverage data does not

reflect the reality in the case of Aragón, since it can be said that 80% of the population has access, but the other 20% occupies more than 50% of the territory.

The Department of Science, University and Knowledge from the Aragón Government is already working to bring broadband to the municipalities, in collaboration with the Provincial Councils. In particular, the DPH (Huesca Provincial Council), has chosen to bring fast internet connection to many municipalities, and has reached many. (Heraldo (2021)

With the same aim, the agreements signed with the main telephone company in the country (Telefónica) are trying to improve the **broadband to reach the public services (administration) in the towns**. The idea is to extend the internet connection with the administration and for the population living in rural areas. Progress is being made, although not enough to cover the main rural areas of Aragón. (Participant, Roundtable 1 National level)

However, there is also the problem of the use and training in digital technologies, not only among immigrants, but among the older native population. This lack in the management and use of technologies is currently covered by the workers of the municipalities and the social services of the comarcas, who selflessly help and carry out procedures for citizens who have difficulties. The Government of Aragón is asked

- **to recognize this activity for these professionals in their contract and in their economic remuneration.**

The measure could also include

- **more technology training for these groups**, in order to be able to carry out many transactions online.
- Improving this training could favor digital communications among the population.

It is a necessary measure for the population as a whole and would be well received, since in rural areas there is a deficit both in communications and in the formation of technologies.

3.2.3. Network and knowledge transfer

From the Department of Regional Planning of the Government of Aragón it is recognized that many actions are planned, but they are the responsibility and competence of different

Departments of the Regional Government. For this reason, there is **a coordination problem between sections and parts of the Administration**, and

- channels should be created for its improvement.

Despite the fact that the 'Forum of Immigration in Aragón' - which brings together the main agents in this matter - is functional in terms of migration,

- the **creation of intersectoral roundtables** is proposed for the debate of many problems that concern rural areas and it can be managed from the comarcas.

3.2.4. Adult Education Centers (CPEPA)

A need is detected to adapt vocational training to the needs of the sectors with the greatest economic activity in rural areas. To this end, it is proposed, on the one hand,

- to continue training in the Spanish language.
- In addition, also improve vocational training in the main towns of the comarcas, even accompanied by other complementary occupational training (employment workshops).
- The proposal is **to offer these trainings on a rotating basis in the different population centers/towns**.

However, and after discussion, it does not seem very viable.

As indicated, the first integration tool is the improvement of the language: it benefits not only labor integration but also social integration. In this sense, the training carried out from the Adult Education Centers is recognized as good practice, with satisfactory results. These centers offer Spanish courses for foreigners, in addition to the 'Certificates of Professionalism' that allow employment.

But in addition, the measures related to training adapted to the demand of the sectors of activity in rural areas are widely accepted both by foreign workers and by employers in the area. Its implementation, however, presents numerous obstacles since bringing these resources closer to rural areas has a high economic cost. Therefore, the recommendation should

- focus on the **development of occupational training courses at the proposal of employers** in the area.

This would be more feasible given that the decision can be made by the Government of Aragón in collaboration with the demands raised by the economic agents in the area. Another alternative would be to improve and favor the public transport from rural areas to the places where vocational training is offered (see 3.2.2. Access to services), but it would also be necessary to adapt vocational training to the needs of rural areas.

3.3.National Level: Spain

Spain is a state with high political-administrative decentralization, and the main competence of the national level is to manage the entry, settlement, family reunification and nationalization of foreign immigrants. For this reason, these policies currently depend on the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior (General Directorate of International Relations and Immigration). All this is included in Organic Law 4/2000, of January 11, on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social integration (*Immigration Law*). But despite the modifications of this Law, mainly to adapt the migratory reality to the variations of the economic cycle, some situations remain to be solved.

3.3.1. Adaption of Immigration Law

The difficulty of access to renew work and residence permits leads to situations of supervening irregularity. In the roundtables, the proposal was presented

- **to streamline and make administrative procedures more flexible.**

In particular for situations, when asylum is denied and the person has not accumulated the minimum 3 years of residence in the country to be able to request the renewal of permits by social rootedness. In this situation, the person cannot present an offer of a work contract with a duration of more than one year.

The recently approved labour reform (Approved on December 28, 2021, by the Council of Ministers), starting on December 31, 2021, requires that employment contracts have a minimum duration of one year. It is believed that this will allow the renewal of contracts when an immigrant presents a job offer.

Here, **it is proposed**

- **to increase the information so that both foreigners and employers can apply this measure and make job offers with a minimum duration of one year.**

In addition, we make the proposal

- **to adapt the Immigration Law to the current Labour Reform**
- and to eliminate those articles that position the foreign person in second place.

In this sense, the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration has launched a regulatory reform to give work permits to immigrants who occupy jobs that are not covered and who remain free. This will be done in three ways: 1) expanding hiring at origin (not only with temporary workers); 2) allowing foreign students to work; 3) allowing irregular immigrants to train in jobs where personnel are needed (Participant, Roundtable 1 National level)

It is easy to implement, in a short space of time, which can also be attractive to both employers and foreigners. It is a measure that promotes a win-win management model, in which both parts of society benefit.

3.3.2. Access to services

It is proposed to increase the channels of information and documentation processing. A first proposal focuses on

- **increasing and bringing the immigration offices closer to the citizen in rural areas.**

However, this measure is not seen as very feasible by the participants in the roundtables, since it is expensive.

In addition to the above problem, there is another related to the fact that the Police Stations -where permits are renewed- are overwhelmed and have fewer workers than necessary. This

problem has been aggravated by the Covid-19 crisis, but in the roundtables it has been commented that the government should

- **increase the allocations so that assistance is faster and more agile** (reducing waiting lists).

A second proposal focuses on

- **improving online access to permit and documentation procedures through the Ministry's portals.**

However, for this to be efficient, both the procedures and the form and language used should be greatly simplified. It must not be forgotten that the foreign population comes from different administrative cultures and often lacks knowledge of the language, and also of the administrative language.

This solution is more realistic and requires less implementation time.

- In addition, its effectiveness can be measured in a reasonable time through **indicators** such as the number of entries to the portal and the number of procedures initiated and completed.
- An indicator of user satisfaction could also be used, through a brief survey, at the end of the processing process.

On the other hand, online access must be reinforced by actions at the regional levels of the administration, and **facilitate both training in digitization and connectivity in rural areas** and areas far from urban centers (see Access to Services at regional level).

To this end, the General Directorate for the Demographic Challenge (Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge) has carried out a plan of 130 measures aimed at rural areas in Spain (MITECO, 2021), where it is contemplated to extend the network with a speed of 100 megabytes for the entire territory.

3.3.3. Effectiveness of recruitment of foreign workers

Access to employment for TCNs is included in the Organic Law 4/2000, of January 11, on the Rights and Freedoms of Foreigners in Spain and their Social Integration (articles 36, 38 and 40; developed in the Regulations of the Law Organic 4/2000, approved by Royal Decree

557/2011) (*Immigration Law*). Therefore, foreigners must have a work and residence permit, and also be hired in one of the occupations included in the 'Catalogue of Occupations with Difficult Coverage' (CODC, published quarterly). This catalog considers the national labour situation and limits the access of immigrants, who can only access those jobs that are not covered by Spanish people. The efforts made by the SEPE (State Public Employment Service) have been recognized in the roundtables, but an

- **update and adaption of this national catalog to the labour market is needed by improving hiring** because it is insufficient at the local level. That is why adaptation to the local level is included as a proposal.

Therefore, we accept the **idea**

- **to develop local catalogs of occupations that are difficult to cover.**

This initiative is already being developed in a municipality on the urban outskirts of Madrid, where a local catalog is published, which is updated according to the demand of the labor market in the area. This decentralization process is a complementary solution adapted to the environment, which, although it requires the management of the local levels of the administration, allows opening contracting opportunities, as well as being sustainable over time due to its flexibility and adaptation. In addition, it is a measure that would benefit the economic development of many areas, since it speeds up the coverage of jobs in less time (Participant, Roundtable 1, National L.)

Favouring the hiring of immigrant workers at origin for unskilled jobs would allow safe labour migration, with a regular employment contract and social benefits. In addition, it would contribute to the reduction of the irregular economy, which currently represents around 20% of GDP in Spain.

Hiring at source has been applied preferably to qualified workers (senior management personnel), athletes, artists and for professional practices. The main objective has been the attraction and/or retention of talent. However, little has been contemplated for other profiles

of unskilled workers, except for circular migration and temporary migration contracts²³. Currently, contracting at origin is being applied in some Andalusian provinces with a high demand for workers to collect summer fruits, contributing to circular migration, especially of women from Morocco and Eastern EU-countries such as Romania and Poland. This routine is an advantage for entrepreneurs who can plan campaigns.

Based on this recent experience, **it is proposed**

- **to promote this type of recruiting foreign workers at their origin.**

However, this model is not exempt from criticism, given that the treatment of foreign workers as mere labour is questioned, when they are "necessary", without considering other emotional and social needs.

Another problem with the current Immigration Law is that it does not manage well, nor does it provide incentives to solve the problems of job vacancies that remain unfilled. According to the government, there are 109,000 unfilled vacant jobs in Spain, which represent 0.7% of the total employed: they are jobs as telemarketers, commercials, shop assistants, sales distributors, waiters, laborers, and construction workers, among others (EL PAÍS 2002a). The Immigration Law (2000) is not very agile to allow foreigners to enter the labour market, so they end up doing it irregularly. Thus, migratory pressure, the difficult coverage of some jobs and the need for more workers and contributors to maintain pensions, make reconsider some changes in the Law.

3.3.4. Spanish citizenship

Access to Spanish nationality is determined by the country of origin, being easier for TCNs from Latin American countries (due to cultural and linguistic similarities). To obtain it, applicants must pass a test that demonstrates sociocultural and constitutional knowledge of the Spanish nation. This represents a significant barrier for people with little knowledge

²³ In Spain, in the process of ordering migratory flows, the legislation establishes that the job offers processed through the collective management of hiring at origin are preferably oriented to the countries with which Spain has signed agreements on regulation and ordering of migratory flows (Royal Decree 2393/2004 and reform of LO 4/2000 by LO 2/2009) (EMN -Red Europea de Migraciones-, 2011).

of the language and, sometimes, with low levels of training, including functional illiterates in their mother tongue. In these cases, it is possible to resort to a 'Request for waiver', on an exceptional basis, but it is reported that the resolution of said request is slow.

- **The immediate application of this waiver (or reduction of the difficulty of the exam) is proposed** to applicants for Spanish nationality for those who carry out their activity as **essential workers in sectors of difficult coverage**.

The justification is due to the characteristics of the Spanish labor market, which presents a high demand for the coverage of low-skilled jobs in the agricultural sector and in the cleaning and care sector, among others.

3.3.5. Network and knowledge transfer

The cross-cutting nature of migration requires the participation of the entire organic structure of the state and all levels of public administration. Given the nature of the decentralized model, it is considered a priority to increase coordination in multilevel management and multilevel governance. To this end,

- **greater coordination** is proposed between the General Secretaries of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Inclusion and the Ministry of Labour.
- Coordination should also increase with the Secretariat for the Demographic Challenge (Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge), since it is responsible for measures to attract and retain population.

This emphasis on multilevel management has repercussions in the territories with the future creation of Territorial Innovation Centers²⁴.

²⁴ These centers respond to a new policy to deal with territorial cohesion that allows acting taking advantage of the different elements and strengths that exist in each territory, always counting on the private and public sectors. It is also committed to promoting elements such as housing, connectivity and others of a social nature. There are several selected in Spain, but there is an Agreement signed between the Provincial Councils of Huesca, Lleida and the Municipality of Valle de Arán (Lleida).

3.4. European Level

3.4.1. Asylum procedures

The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) establishes common minimum criteria for the treatment of all asylum seekers and all asylum applications in the EU. Nevertheless, the migration crisis has highlighted the need to reform EU asylum rules. In addition, currently, most requests are concentrated in a few countries.

Already in September 2020, the European Commission proposed a **New Deal on Migration and Asylum**. The proposal establishes a comprehensive common European framework for the management of asylum and migration, which includes several proposals. Asylum and migration management should have a more global approach, be more efficient and more resistant to migratory pressure, so that the distribution of applicants by country could be more equitable.

- Thus, application procedures in the EU should also be harmonised.
- The acceptance should also be proportional to the level of development of the countries, assuming that responsibility.

3.4.2. Frontex

The EU established in 2016 the European Center for Combating Smuggling of Migrants to help member states dismantle migrant smuggling networks. From then, Frontex has carried out three operations in the Mediterranean:

- Operation Indalo, which covers the Western Mediterranean and monitors all activities on the Western Mediterranean route between Morocco and Spain. The agents, ships and surveillance assist the national authorities in border surveillance tasks, and in the search and rescue of immigrants.
- Frontex controls the migratory flows of the Alboran Strait and Sea in collaboration with Spanish agents. This operation was joined on 11/2021 by a small deployment in the Canary Islands, where 26 agents help identify migrants and conduct interviews. This operation (Crossing the Strait) is carried out every year.

- In March 2020, the EU launched the IRINI military operation, which collects information and patrols with aerial means. This measure contributes to fighting against the business of illegal trafficking networks and human trafficking. Previously, between 2015 and 2020, the military operation Sophia had focused on migrant smugglers in the Mediterranean.

The continuous famines, food and global crises affect a large population in Africa, so the borders of southern Europe, and the Spanish ones in particular, are exposed to the continuous arrival of irregular immigrant population. The coasts of the Canary Islands are especially exposed to the continuous arrival of boats with immigrants. In addition, human trafficking between Morocco and Europe is one of the great problems that both Spain and the EU borders have. In this context, the recommendation is

- to intensify and extend the presence of Frontex operations not only in the Canary archipelago and other EU borders.

4. Conclusions

Migration is a very transversal theme and its management responds to the intervention of different territorial levels of the administration. However, horizontal coordination between different sections/areas/dimensions at each of the territorial levels is also necessary. The administrative division in Spain is complex and, at the national level, we must add the existing decentralization with the Autonomous Communities, which have many powers and the capacity to act in many matters. In addition, Aragón has recognized the division into comarcas (there are 33), which also have many competencies delegated from the regional government. And finally, the municipalities, which also have some autonomy. This “mosaic” of agents and actors complicates decision-making and management implementation.

For this reason, some of the policy recommendations relate to the coordination of these agents, and also with the greater capacity for action that the City Councils can assume. However, it is the Autonomous Communities with the main competencies to achieve improvements in the social and economic inclusion and integration of immigrants.

Therefore, changing these trends is difficult, but the roundtables made possible to discuss these points of views. The reality is that many actions are being carried out to solve the problems and difficulties encountered in the elaborated SWOT-analysis. Many actions and plans are being carried out at the national level focused on rural areas, and specifically from the recently created General Secretariat for the Demographic Challenge, dependent on the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge. In Aragón, many instruments of territorial incidence are trying to improve the situation of rural areas. Specifically, the law project for the Dynamization of the Rural Environment is in process in 06/2022, and it is a law understood to be of great need. In addition, and in specifically related to migration, the government of Aragón is active in the defense of the rights, and for the inclusion and equality of foreign people, who reside in the region (around 12% of the total). For this reason, numerous initiatives have been launched to improve housing, services, training and access to employment or as a means of subsistence, for their inclusion, or to fight against some signs of racism that still exist.

In short, all the participants in the round tables have recognized the problems, although the solution does not depend on them directly, many times, due to the tangle of competencies and departments/sections involved. However, we believe that these proposals and initiatives will help to improve the life conditions of this important group of the population.

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Sweden

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1. Introduction and methodology

This report presents the final policy recommendations from the Swedish case study. The process to create policy recommendations builds on a thorough examining of the empirical results from the previous MATILDE-reports. This was used as the basis for a SWOT-analysis, where we identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats at the local, regional and national level. After the SWOT-analysis we identified the most important areas of action and possible policy recommendations and solutions that revolved around our **focus areas; education and labor market integration**. The research team together with the local partner – Region Dalarna – created a presentation of the preliminary points of action and recommendations to present during **four policy roundtables**. The presentation included statistics and concrete result from the research to underpin the suggested recommendations. We decided to arrange four separate roundtables in order to make it easy for the different groups of representatives to speak their mind and share their thoughts. Two roundtables were arranged with **regional and local stakeholders** with representatives from the department of integration in the County Administration, representatives from the regional public service program and the department of culture and health at Region Dalarna, representatives from civil society, and representatives from the division of education at the municipal level. Representatives from the national level, such as the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) and Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) were invited but were unfortunately prevented from coming. The other two round tables were held with **local SFI teachers/administrators and SFI students** (TCNs). The presentation and focus of discussion were adjusted to the different groups to be able to reflect over the results with the

stakeholders, practitioners and students according to their interests and area of expertise. Even though our focus has been on education and labor market integration, the recommendations that we discussed during the round tables touched upon many related topics. In this presentation we have therefore had to make some choices and prioritize the most important issues, issues that were also confirmed as highly important during the round tables. Policies that affect migrants' socio-economic position is mainly developed on a national level even though they are operationalized and implemented on local and regional level.

2. Main policy problems

Sweden is known for its comprehensive welfare system, and **immigrants have access to the Swedish welfare system to the same degree as the majority population**. Migrants are given the same rights as the majority population and are invested in as future citizens. Sweden has developed a comprehensive policy framework for migrant integration, and the country is ranked among the top three countries on the MIPEx-index, scoring 86 points on the 100-point scale (Solano and Huddleston 2020). Since the 2015 large-scale refugee migration to Europe, the Swedish integration measures have not changed to a large degree, however, the focus on labour market integration and migrants' self-sufficiency has been further strengthened. There has for example been restrictions regarding family reunification, demanding economic self-sufficiency in order to claim family reunification.

Even **though measures to integrate migrants in education and on the labour market is comprehensive** and include free access to pre-primary, compulsory and vocational education as well as unpaid job-training and subsidized employment (Solano and Huddleston 2020, Hernes, Bolvig and Liljeberg 2022), **the employment gap between migrants and natives is among the highest in OECD-countries** (OECD 2022). Migrants with a refugee background are more likely to be unemployed and generally have lower income than the majority population (Åslund et al. 2014). In addition, there exists **a gender gap between men and women in terms of employment and earnings**, particularly during the first years of residency (Hernes et al. 2022).

According to a report from the Gender Equality Authority (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten 2022), barriers to establishment are both structural, systemic and individual, and includes sexual and ethnic discrimination, exposure to violence as well as the design of parental insurance, level of education and health status. In our empirical studies, key actors mention that it might be a barrier to return to SFI, for example after parental leave. According to Statskontoret (2018), responsibilities for children and families are one reason why women have a lower participation in the labor force than men born outside Europe.

Another factor involves authorities' response; the same study from Statskontoret (2018) finds indications that the administrators are creating obstacles through their treatment of women born outside Europe. They argue that the administrators' knowledge of the target group should be improved in order to acknowledge culture, traditions and possible experiences of traumatic experiences. A study by Cheung (2018) shows that men are allowed to take part in work-related initiatives such as labor market training, vocational training, entry-level jobs and start-up jobs to a higher degree compared to women, who are more often directed towards preparatory education and extra services.

The problem of authorities' response thus has at least two sides. Municipalities and authorities risk falling into the traditions of non-European countries where the man is the head of the family, which can strengthen women's difficulties in entering the labor market. There is also a risk of underestimating women's opportunities for participation and thereby reinforcing an already low self-esteem. There is a need for an increased focus on identifying and further developing the talents and skills that the non-European-born women have. (Statskontoret 2018)

We are particularly interested in policies related to education and work; policies that aim to influence participation in the labor market. The Swedish field-study is conducted in **Dalarna County**, and with **special focus on three municipalities**. We write about 'Dalarna' as a case since our observations at municipality level and our discussion are relevant to the region, as well as to other rural areas in Sweden. Important information with regard to education and labour market is that unemployment among foreign-born in the Dalarna County is significantly higher compared with foreign-born in the country. **In 2020, unemployment**

among foreign-born in Sweden was 26%, the corresponding figure for foreign-born in Dalarna is 32%. The figure for the domestic-born population is 9,9%. In addition, it is more common for foreign-born people to lack primary or lower secondary education. With regard to the growing challenge of attracting labor to the region, it may be beneficial that the foreign-born population in the county is younger compared to the domestic-born, and has a larger proportion of people of working age. (SCB statistics)

Migrants' opportunities for work depend on their language skills. The proportion of individuals who obtain a passing grade in SFI is slightly higher among men compared with women, and it varies throughout the period 2010-2020. The proportion is relatively even in the first 5 years, when about 40% of women and 50% of men are approved. From 2018, more women than men pass the exams and in 2018 the proportion of approved is 30 and 35 percent (men/women), respectively. If we compare with the country, Dalarna is above the national average. The study results in SFI can also be investigated in terms of median value of the length of stay for persons who have achieved a passing grade. There is great variation in the length of stay, which is shortened in the middle of the observed period, between the years 2014 - 2017. It takes longer for women than for men to pass. Between the years 2010 and 2020, the length of stay for men has doubled, from about 600 to almost 1200 days, and for women from about 750 to 1300 days. One explanation is probably that later in the investigated period, there are fewer individuals included in the statistics and that individuals who do not succeed remain in the material and constitute an increasing proportion.

With regard to the local level, we want to emphasize strengths such as established collaboration among educational actors and public employers, such as the municipal care sector. Also, in several municipalities there is a varied local labour market and several employers are active in projects aiming for integration of newcomers. Another aspect concerns unaccompanied. The policies round unaccompanied is formulated on the national level, and on the local level that means that the municipalities are responsible for their establishment. This makes it easier to meet their needs and facilitates integration, local networks and local knowledge are used.

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

3.1. Local Level: Vansbro, Älvdalen and Hedemora

3.1.1. Language training and labour market measures

The weaknesses identified at the local level relates to the quality of SFI, that varies among the municipalities in the region and among regions in Sweden. There is also recurrent lack of teacher competence, for example vocational teachers or language teachers. When we have elaborated on gender relations in our field studies, what is put forward is the relatively lower grade of participation in introductory programs, SFI and labour market measures, among women. It may seem contradictory that women, on the one hand, seem to go through SFI more quickly, while on the other hand they have a lower degree of participation in other parts of introductory programs. As mentioned above, explanations evolve around structural, systemic and individual barriers, including authorities' responses.

Policy recommendations

- **Language training in combination with work** is described as successful. This initiative is called 'SFI combination', where for example language in combination with welding training or chef training is offered. Even if SFI is regulated in national policy, the content can be formulated locally. Taking advantage of existing good examples and continue to develop forms of language training in connection with work / practice. Increase the possibilities for and knowledge among employers to offer work in combination with language training.
- **Inventory of local labour market opportunities.** An important part of the local preparedness is to consolidate current knowledge about the local labor market, about the companies' needs, about which meeting places there are and how they can constitute important pillars in the integration work. Specifically, this means making an inventory of each municipality and updating information with regard to employers and their needs. Information should be shared among municipalities (see recommendations with regard to the regional level below), to make it easier for local entrepreneurs to network with each other and with educational actors.

- **Work to reduce the differences between women's and men's participation and performance.**

Consider the reasons behind differences between women's and men's performance in SFI and labour market participation, illuminated in earlier studies. Develop measures that can make it easier for women to take part in the introductory program's activities, such as SFI and work-related education, even if they have small children. Strengthen work that focuses on public health since this is fundamental to cohesion and a sustainable working life – while also offering arenas for networking and integration.

Recommendations aimed at expanding the contact areas between jobseekers and employers and strengthening the health among municipality residents benefit the entire population and should thus be attractive for the rural population in general.

3.2. Regional Level: Dalarna

3.2.1. Coordination and united action

The management of integration and establishment of migrants on the labor market on regional level is divided between Region Dalarna, which is organized in the same way as a municipality with elected representatives as well as politically independent officials, and the County Administration (Länsstyrelsen) which is a local representation of the state (state agency). The county administration's role is to plan and coordinate integration efforts based on letters of regulation from the state (regleringsbrev) with an overview of the whole region and in collaboration with state agencies, municipalities, civil society and corporations. They also grant money to municipalities for specified integration efforts. Region Dalarna is generally responsible for public health, public transportation and regional development projects, including a specific focus on skills supply to better match the populations' skills with the local labor market. It is within the skills supply section that the focus on establishment of newly arrived on the labor market is now placed. However, according to our findings in the SWOT-analysis which was also confirmed during the policy round tables, the skills supply

section does not have a holistic focus on integration on an overarching level, and does not see this work as their mandate.

Region Dalarna used to have a more outspoken focus on the establishment of newly arrived migrants, particularly through the regional agreement called “Vägen in” (The road to inclusion) that was active from 2015–2020²⁵. The agreement was a declaration of intent to work together to make Dalarna an attractive region for new arrivals and secure that migrants would be included in society and the labor market and that their competences would be acknowledged and valued. The declaration was signed by Region Dalarna, the County Administration, the Swedish employment service, Dalarna University College, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Swedish Migration Agency, Almi företagspartner (Almi business partner), Företagarna (organization working for self-employed and startups) and all the regions’ municipalities.

After 2020 the goal was that a focus on establishment of migrants should be mainstreamed into all levels of the Region Dalarna organization, however, according to our informants, this has created confusion about who are responsible for these kinds of questions, and the focus on integration and establishment might “slip through the fingers”.

According to an external evaluation²⁶ of the work with Vägen in, it has been difficult for the partners to achieve a holistic approach and a long-term sustainable structure to support and coordinate collaborative efforts (Sjöblom 2021). At the end of the project period, there were no established structures to secure future collaboration between the partners (ibid.). The external reviewer writes that one explanation for this may be that the decision to sign the agreement in most cases was made by individuals; the heads of the signing authorities. There were therefore no formal commitments on the part of the signatory parties to implement the agreement (ibid. p, 5).

25 <https://www.regiondalarna.se/verksamhet/regional-utveckling/sarskilda-satsningar/integration-och-mangfald/sa-har-jobbar-vagen-in/#:~:text=V%C3%A4gen%20in%20I%C3%B6per%20ut%20vid,nya%20utmaningar%20och%20m%C3%B6jligheter%20tillkommit.>

26 Utkast till utvärdering Vägen in 20200507_med nästa steg (regiondalarna.se)

During our policy round tables the weakness regarding coordination and division of responsibility among the regional actors was actively commented upon and representatives from the civil society requested action from Region Dalarna to take larger responsibility for the coordination of the regional integration work.

Policy recommendation:

- **Scrutinize and consolidate the coordination of integration measures on a regional level.** A decision should be made on a regional level on what organ is going to be the responsible part in coordinating and establishing a platform for communication between all involved parts in the integration work in Dalarna. Whether this should be in the form of a similar agreement as “Vägen in” or take another form must be discussed by all parties, but since these channels have already been established once, it should be recognizable for all stakeholders involved and thus feasible to implement. Given that Region Dalarna has held this role before, it should be possible to learn from previous activities in the “Vägen in” agreement and work towards establishing more lasting structures and platforms for communication. To be able to create such long lasting structures, it is important that all parties agree on common goals and that these are thoroughly implemented in each signing partner’s organizations. If Region Dalarna is to take on this coordinating role, they need to be given a particular mandate to set of time and resources to work with integration more targeted and holistically, not only in relation to skills supply.
- **Use existing structures and networks to spread knowledge of good practices.** In relation to the recommendation above and provided that structures of communication and cooperation are in place, a further recommendation is to use existing structures and networks to spread knowledge of good practices between municipalities and local companies, and encourage continuous learning even if the municipalities and local companies should have different prerequisites. Spread information among migrants about the possibilities of work within the local as well as regional labour market and the possibility to commute within the region. This leads

us to the next issue revolving migrants' possibilities to be mobile, related to public transport in rural areas.

3.2.2. Rural development and public transport

Many rural regions in Sweden, including Dalarna, see the arrival of TNC's as an opportunity for population growth, community development, and labor market supply (Stenbacka 2013, Syssner 2014, Arora-Jonsson & Larsson 2021). However, the welcoming of new arrivals to rural areas and their interest and possibilities of staying might be hindered if basic services, such as public transport is scarce. Through the work with the SWOT-analysis and policy roundtables, one weakness that we have detected that seems to be an obstacle for TNC's to establish themselves and stay in rural areas in Dalarna is the lack of mobility and possibility to access jobs, SFI and other public and private services. During the migration crisis in 2015 many asylum centers opened in rural and remote areas because of the relatively easy access to housing. However, it quickly became evident that the lack of transportation created a sense of isolation and difficulties to integrate in the local community (Arora-Jonsson & Larsson 2021, Beskow 2022). Migrants that we have talked to, speak of difficulties to access and communicate with the Swedish migration authorities and the Swedish employment service because these services are placed in the region's larger cities and towns. In addition, many integration initiatives arranged by civil society, such as language cafés are centralized in towns rendering them highly unavailable to residents in more remote places. While it is seldom that recently arrived migrants such as asylum seekers or refugees have access to a car or indeed hold a valid driver's license, rural residents in general use the car as their primary means of transportation (Lindgren and Berg 2017). Public transportation is not only scarce in the countryside, but also expensive seen in relation to the social benefits allowance of a job-seeker, student or asylum seeker (See also Beskow 2022).

One solution that has emerged has been that the employer arranges transports. To facilitate the transport of employees with TCN background residing 120 km away, special shuttle buses were organized on the peak days and the employers also provided accommodation.

Policy recommendation

- **Build on already existing examples from the region to develop solutions for more efficient public transport in rural areas.**

A goal should be to foster stronger connections between rural and urban areas and to increase the mobility possibilities of the rural population in general and those without access to a car more specifically.

Possible solutions:

In Sweden, as in many other European rural areas, new transportations services are being tested in order to increase rural residents' mobility options (Hartz & Sommer 2021). In 2017 the Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute (VTI) did a study on effective public transportation in rural areas in Sweden. The study underscores that providing public transport in rural areas is all about providing access when demand is low and that the regions scarce resources lead to a prioritization of urban areas, but also that it is difficult to continue financing projects for testing innovative ideas for transport in rural areas (Lindgren and Berg 2017, p. 11). The authors conclude that if one wants the rural population to use public transport, public transport needs to be provided, and this is resource demanding.

In a literature review undertaken by Berg and Thoresson (2017) they detected three factors that are particularly important in order to develop a well-functioning public transportation system in rural areas; 1) Coordination of transport services, public transport and school transport, 2) target groups must be identified and their needs and conditions must be mapped, and 3) marketing of new projects and transport lines incredibly important for the residents to know about their possibilities and have the opportunity to test new solutions (Berg and Thoresson 2017, p. 26).

According to German researchers Hartz & Sommer (2021) the most common transportation idea in rural regions in Europe is “ridesharing” where people who own a car announce when they are travelling and are matched with people who need a ride. This has been tested in an integration project lead by the interest organization “The whole of Sweden shall live” (Hela Sverige ska leva!) in our case municipalities Hedemora and Älvdalen. According to the project coordinator Carl Wiking, important learning points from the project was that the technical

solutions of how to match drivers and riders must be very simple and intuitive. Regions might also need to focus on attracting and motivating potential drivers in why ridesharing is important and what they can gain from sharing their car (Hela Sverige ska leva 2017). Studies show that ridesharing can function as a compliment to and be a part of an integrated public transport system and thus can increase mobility options in rural areas (Hartz & Sommer 2021). However, as the study by Lindgren and Berg (2017) showed, this demands strong efforts to cooperate and coordinate on several levels simultaneously.

To increase accessibility for migrants living in rural areas, public transportation is *one* area that needs to be improved and measured in relation to the provision of and access to other public services, which we will turn to discuss in the next paragraph.

3.3. National Level: Sweden

As stated earlier, policies that affect migrants' socio-economic position is mainly developed on a national level even though they are operationalized and implemented on local and regional level. Thus, in this section we will discuss national level policy departing from institutions performing on the local level.

3.3.1. Continuity or disruption

In order to improve the establishment of new arrivals in the municipalities, with regard to the labour market and in society, a new law was adopted in 2016. This law obliges all municipalities to accept new arrivals for residence (the Settlement Act). When distributing new arrivals among municipalities, account shall be taken of the municipality's labour market conditions, population size, total reception of newly arrived and unaccompanied children and the extent of asylum seekers staying in the municipality. Responsibilities should be shared and the situation for new arrivals should improve concerning their establishment in the labour market and in society. (SFS 2016:38)

Policy recommendations

While these contextual factors are highly relevant, we would like to add two aspects important from the perspective of rural municipalities. One aspect concerns the number of

new arrivals in relation to population size. Although it is reasonable to adapt the reception to the size of the municipality as well as other mentioned variables, an organization and provision of specific service is still required, regardless of how many people arrive. **A rural municipality may be equipped to receive a higher number than what might seem reasonable in relation to its size, provided that state subsidies are paid.**

Another aspect concerns opportunity for and utilization of establishment with regard to length of stay in a municipality. A migrant might arrive to one place and be granted asylum, stay there for several months and start establishing. Then they will be informed about their designated municipality, and be transferred there. This can mean that you get rooted in a municipality that you then have to leave, a disadvantage both for the migrant and for the municipality. Rapid changes complicate planning and preparedness; resources cannot be used in an efficient way. In addition, it can affect individuals' views on their commitment, it might not seem logical to act as a welcoming municipality, in the public and the civil sector, in order to at a later stage be prepared to dismantle existing services and engagement.

- The Swedish Migration Agency's **communication with the municipalities** (via the county administrative boards) with regard to receiving capacity, service provision and continuity, can be improved in this matter.

3.3.2. The Swedish Public Employment Service

Two important institutions with regard to establishment are The Public Employment Service and Swedish For Immigrants. In the following we will focus upon illuminating the strengths and weaknesses that have been made visible in relation to their performance.

Before 2009 the municipalities were responsible for the new arrivals, but the new law, Act on Establishment Initiatives For Certain Newly Arrived Immigrants (2010:197), moved the responsibility to the Swedish Employment service and most of the resources were also transferred. (Governmental organization, interview 4) In the performed interviews, this shift is described as bit "messy" and unfavorable for the municipalities. The organization got a broader mission and competence was lost.

The change described above thus concerned a transfer of responsibility from the municipalities to the Swedish Public Employment Service. Another organizational change concerns a reduction in the number of local offices. **The re-organisation of the Swedish Employment Service means that by the end of 2020 there were supposed to be 112 physical offices in 106 of Sweden's 290 municipalities.** This can be compared to 238 offices in 218 municipalities in the beginning of 2019. Among these 112 offices, 88 will be staffed and 24 will be "offices" that staff will travel to. (Swedish Public Employment Service 2020, p. 24) A disadvantage with decreased local presence is that: "...knowledge about the local labour market, the local business life and the local employers risk to get lost." (Governmental organization, Interview 4) This knowledge is described as crucial for being able to implement smart and individual solutions and lack of such knowledge risks to delay labour market participation. Such close contacts with different actors are described as important, in addition to the character of the local labour market.

In a debate article published in March 2022 (Svenska Dagbladet, 20220331), 15 politicians from the local level in Dalarna conclude that shutting down AF offices at the local level has meant that local knowledge about both jobseekers and the business community disappeared; that common work that earlier was organized at the individual level ended, and that **people who are furthest away from the labour market are the ones who are affected the most.** The politicians call for a clearer control of AF regarding the role of and opportunities for the municipalities on how to collaborate with regard to jobseekers who are furthest from the labor market. It is also emphasized that there is a risk that increased digitalization will make contact more difficult for certain groups. (Governmental organization, interview 4; Svenska Dagbladet 2022-03-31; Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner (SKR) 2021.) The Swedish Employment Service has large digital resources, but it is not a given that such knowledge is available to employers and jobseekers. Physical meetings and contacts are important when you do not know each other, while digital solutions work in routine matters and in cases where participants are familiar.

The identified shortcomings of the new organization that were highlighted during our interviews and in the debate-article referred to above, are also confirmed in a survey

conducted by Sweden's Municipalities and Regions (SKR, 2021) targeting the heads of the municipalities labour market units. These units have insight into the local needs of the unemployed, of local conditions and needs and of the local industrial life. The survey focuses upon the Swedish Public Employment Service's assignments and show an overall negative image; 72 percent of the municipalities state that the authority's physical presence is not appropriate for providing jobseekers with support in their municipality. The survey also mediates that 95 percent of the municipalities provide one or more forms of support to jobseekers that are part of the Swedish Public Employment Service's assignment; that municipal employees in practice may step in and provide support to the unemployed (for example enrollment at the Swedish Public Employment Service, activity reporting, interpreting decisions and coordination of establishment initiatives for new arrivals). At the same time, the agency's activities and cooperation seem to work well in some places. (p. 6-7)

The results raise questions about how the authority can continue to work to ensure quality and equivalence and respond to the needs of jobseekers and employers across the country, since 42 percent of the municipalities state that they lack a constructive dialogue with the employment service about how to ensure the local presence. (SKR 2021, p. 6)

Policy recommendations

- **Municipal labour market integration and The Swedish Employment Service** need to **consolidate their competences** with knowledge of individuals and of industries and based on this, work with local matching. Existing knowledge states that networks are important for getting access to jobs. Networks arise in local contexts and environments where many people meet.
- **Secure that physical meetings with the Swedish Employment Service are offered.** Physical meetings encourage interaction, use of the public environment and increases knowledge and experiences. In quantitative terms, **the number of physical offices and physical meetings** with job seekers need to be considered.

Solution

SKR (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions 2021, p. 5) has worked out five dimensions that are considered important to ensure the Swedish Employment Services local presence:

- Easier service and support for the unemployed who cannot solve it digitally
- In-depth support for the unemployed
- Operational cooperation with municipalities and regions for individuals in need of collective support
- Strategic cooperation at management level between municipalities and the Swedish Public Employment Service
- Local and regional support for employers' skills supply

To consider these dimensions is one step in a direction that could lead to enhanced possibilities to use the existing and entitled services, and thereby facilitate social and economic integration.

3.3.3. Swedish for Immigrants, SFI – a right of varying quality

A person who has a residence permit, and has registered in a Swedish municipality and who does not speak Swedish is entitled to Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) according to the Education Act.

In Sweden, the responsibility for SFI is placed at the municipal level. This can be a challenge for municipalities that have to provide the service for a small number of migrants or for a group with large differences in language skills. The municipalities that see no possibilities to do their own arrangements can buy training places from private companies or from other municipalities. In best cases, cooperation functions well and individuals succeed in learning Swedish. Another situation might be that a municipality procure a company that provides the participant with an account on a digital platform; there is no personal meeting with a teacher. In addition, you can 'buy' test results from other people who send it to you and you get a certificate without gaining the skills (Round table 20220426).

When it comes to practices related to education, language training in combination with work is described as particularly successful, a combination that increases the chances of getting a job (Roundtable Hedemora; Roundtable Vansbro). The number of municipalities offering SFI in combination with vocational training is increasing, but there are still regional differences. In Dalarna, SFI for academics is only offered in Borlänge and Falun. (Sveriges Radio P4, April 21st 2015) This is likely to lead to migrants with an academic background trying to settle there, rather than in the smaller municipalities. The geographical differences suggests that it is important to allow participation in SFI in municipalities other than where one lives and to inform about commuting opportunities.

Dalavux is an organization that aims to facilitate cooperation and learning among municipalities in Dalarna. DalaWux is the collaborative body for municipal adult education in Dalarna, which includes all 15 municipalities and all kinds of education. This is described as a well-functioning organization.²⁷ There are networks where teachers in adult education exchange experiences, and it is requested that also teachers in SFI should have networks.

In a report on community trust (Wallman-Lundåsen 2021), it is stated that the degree of income inequality in the municipality affects the correlation between the reception of migrants and community trust of the residents. Individuals living in a municipality characterized by high income inequality and a large reception of newly arrived migrants would, on average, have a lower level of community trust than individuals living in municipalities characterized by low income inequality. Education and work are a way to a better economy and therefore increased labor market participation could, in addition to improving the situation of the individual, affect community trust in a positive direction.

Policy recommendations

27 Educational opportunities include: SFI (Swedish for immigrants), Lärvox (adult education for individuals with learning difficulties due to disabilities or acquired brain damage), Grundvox (for individuals with a shorter education than 9 years, or with needs to repeat subjects at the undergraduate level for further studies), Upper secondary education for adults (shall provide adults with the corresponding education provided in the national programs for upper secondary school. You can study for a high school diploma or individual courses), "Yrkesvox and lärling" (Vocational courses at upper secondary level in municipal adult education; individual courses or entire training packages. Part of the training takes place at the workplace).

- **Strengthen initiatives where work experience and language learning are integrated and increase the possibilities for employers to offer work in combination with language training.** Language training in combination with work is described as successful. Since these educations are offered on a municipal level, possibilities to join may be made more difficult by the fact that you live in one municipality but would like to participate in an education offered in another municipality. The opportunities for cooperation among municipalities need to be improved, which may require a change in the law. In short, an improvement would mean that individuals would be able to gain more knowledge about the opportunities that exist in other municipalities and that the municipalities would be able to offer each other educational places to a greater extent. In this way, access to more specialized education would increase. However, this proposal is dependent on access to and extent of public transport.
- **A further recommendation is to strengthen the local supply of education which is adapted to local labour market needs.** This includes Komvux as well as Folkhögskolor. The form of education that is offered by Folkhögskolor (adult education) is primarily financed by public funds from the state, and to some extent by grants from regions. These recommendations should be attractive for the rural population in general, since everyone would gain from increased access to education and public services.

3.4. European Level

In our empirical investigations, the relation to the EU-policy has not been given attention; stakeholders have not commented upon European structures or prioritized international relations. This is due to our focus upon integration and the social and economic impact of international migration in rural areas in Sweden. Our informants have not been directly asked to comment on Sweden's position in the EU or how EU policy affects integration work in Sweden. This might be due to Sweden's position within the EU being taken for granted, and

that focus is placed on what is happening within the country and what the conditions are for creating a sustainable situation for individuals, groups and societies here and now.

4. Conclusions

The future focus of country-specific policies in Sweden need to consider rural areas as important places and regions, which contribute to creating cohesion in the country. Rural areas are sites for production of food, raw material for construction and energy, and areas for recovery and well-being. Such activities need an engaged population and therefore policy need to acknowledge the needs of rural areas.

Through our analysis of the material collected within the MATILDE-project and working with the policy recommendations, it is our understanding that in order for immigration to have a positive social and economic effect on rural areas in Dalarna and in Sweden more broadly, it is important to intersect migrant integration and general rural development strategies. This includes for example access to public communications and presence of public services. Such policies, that enhance the socio-economic integration of TCNs, will also benefit the majority population.

According to participants in our round tables working with rural development issues in Dalarna, the region has not formulated a specific strategy for regional/rural development (Policy roundtable 29/4 2022). If the goal is that newly arrived migrants should stay in the municipalities they are placed, there needs to be a focus on the services provided for the residents in rural areas, including public transport.

Different levels have different roles to play in the development of rural areas. However, there is a risk that unclear structures and an unclear distribution of responsibilities will arise. The Dalarna case study shows this at the regional level, where the County Administrative Board is responsible for integration but where Region Dalarna is responsible for crucial activities (health care, transports, culture) that are keys to successful integration. This is also evident at the local level, where national policy regarding the reduced presence of the Swedish Public Employment Agency means that the responsibility is inadvertently shifted to the municipalities, regardless of whether any resources follow.

When we discussed policy proposals with some key players at local and regional level, health aspects were also brought into the discussion. Good health facilitates participation in both education and the labor market, and in addition, the arenas where health promotion measures take place form a basis for establishing networks. Health-promoting measures can be implemented by strengthening the meeting places that already exist, such as facilities for sports and outdoor life. The work that began in 2015, to increase integration in sports, should continue. This is work that should be continuous and not take the form of temporary project efforts. This also includes participation in other associations; for example, culture, outdoor life and folk music.

Integration through education and work is related to where you live. Large housing facilities located at a distance from municipalities with lacking communications, are hardly sustainable living environments. Accommodation in small-scale facilities located in or near smaller towns would mean a better starting point for integration, through access to private and public services and through participation in everyday life; association life and other social activities.

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Turkey

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1. Introduction and methodology

This report compiles the main policy problems, policy recommendations and solutions revealed by the participatory action research activities held in Turkey and the local MATILDE region, Karacabey, Bursa. With an aim to examine how migration impacts local development and territorial cohesion in rural areas, a mixed-methods approach was exploited for data collection, impact assessment and formulation of policy recommendations. With an intention to adopt an insider perspective and an aim to include all relevant actors in research and development processes, different set of activities were conducted during the research activities related to all the elaborated WPs so far. In summary:

Field visits to the Matilde region and tent areas in rural Karacabey made it possible for the research team to communicate with the locals and immigrants, mostly seasonal agricultural workers, and to find out more about their living conditions as well as to identify their vulnerable and precarious conditions. **Qualitative interviews** conducted in rural Karacabey and Bursa helped us elaborate on the coexistence of migrant and native communities and contributed to depict the role of central state actors, local municipal actors, civil society actors and migrants themselves. The accumulated knowledge collected through in-depth interviews conducted with different stakeholders within the WP3, WP4 and WP5 between October 2020 and September 2021 were also exploited to generate a comprehensive analysis of the problems, recommendations and solutions. **Quantitative data collection** provided by the relevant interlocutors during the field research and direct correspondence with local stakeholders helped us address a preliminary analysis and discussion of the main dimensions of the case study. **Focus group meetings** with immigrants in rural Karacabey

were exploited to gain an in-depth understanding of working conditions, social and economic challenges they faced in everyday life and the level of interaction with the locals. Directly to frame the policy recommendations, **two roundtable meetings** at both local/regional and national levels were organized with the collaboration of the local partner Support to Life (STL). The first thematic roundtable was carried out on 27 November 2021 in rural Karacabey, with a specific aim to involve the representatives of the wider local community and immigrants who would not get together otherwise. Fifteen people including representatives from NGOs, trade unions, municipality, migration policy experts and non-organized migrants participated in the roundtable meeting. With different interactive sections focusing on problems and opportunities of agricultural production, having access to labour market, and social cohesion and integration, the outcomes of the roundtable helped to generate policy recommendations and innovative proposals raised by the locals and immigrants. Lately, the second thematic roundtable meeting was organized in İstanbul on 12 May 2022. A group of 28 people consisting of scholars, NGOs, UNHCR, health experts, agricultural production experts and municipal actors from İstanbul, Bursa and the other cities participated in the meeting. The roundtable mainly focused on the legal, political and socio-economic barriers before agricultural production in Turkey and the inclusion of migrant labour force. On the basis of main discussion themes, a number of policy recommendations were generated by the participants at regional and national levels.

After all, based upon the outcomes of the whole action research activities and the roundtable meetings with a range of stakeholders, the research team synthesized the following policy problems and policy recommendations.

2. Main policy problem(s)

According to the latest available figures²⁸, there are more than 5.2 million foreign nationals present in Turkey, 3.7 million of whom are Syrians under temporary protection status (TPS).

28 For the latest figures, see Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), <https://en.goc.gov.tr/> (latest access 18 May 2022).

Only 50 thousands of Syrians live in seven shelters in five border cities. The vast remaining majority live outside the camps. Bursa province, the MATILDE region, with its 184,371 registered Syrians under TPS ranks 7th among the provinces hosting Syrians within their borders (as of 5 May 2022). Syrians represent a specific subgroup whose population corresponds to almost 6% of Bursa's current population (3.1 million in 2021). In addition, it is among the provinces, which are closed to the applications of all foreigners of any status due to the high foreign population figures. On the other hand, Karacabey, the local MATILDE region, one of Bursa's 17 municipalities, with a population of 84,666 as of 2021, hosts around 3,000 foreign nationals including Syrians under TPS (2,828 in numbers) as of July 2021. Besides, its vast agricultural lands also attract thousands of seasonal workers, including Syrians, between April and September.

Having considerable foreign population both in Turkey in general and in Bursa including rural Karacabey specifically has resulted in some major challenges, needs and policy problems. Based on the reports elaborated so far and the roundtable meetings conducted, this section revisits main policy problems put forward by the actors involved during the action research with their critical, reflexive and objective agencies.

2.1. Economy and employment:

- **High informality:** High informality is one of the ongoing chronic structural problems of the labour market in Turkey (Caro, 2020). The immigrants' situation in local labour market in Karacabey is an outcome of these structural problems of the national labour market. There is high informality among foreigners working in Karacabey. The informal sector generally comprises of jobs that are not much attractive to the local population, including the seasonal agricultural jobs. Neither Turkish citizens nor other international migrants are registered workers in the case of seasonal agricultural work. Regarding their nationality, Syrian workers mostly work informally as **cheap labour force**. Their majority find themselves working in dirty, dangerous and demeaning jobs in highly **precarious and unsafe work environments**. Our interviews and observations also reveal the informality for the immigrants working in Karacabey,

mostly seasonal agricultural workers. Further, the agriculture-based industry in the district has noticeably employed foreign workers. However, during our research, we could neither get response from leading industrial producers and factory owners for our interview requests with their foreign workers, nor get the data on their foreign worker population.

- ***Lack of regulations in the Labour Law regarding rural jobs:*** A labour law specific to agriculture has not been prepared for many years due to reasons such as the **disorganization of the agricultural sector**, the difficulties in determining who is the worker and who is the employer, and the **economic weakness** of the farmers in agriculture. **Social security** in agriculture is another problematic issue. Securing the social rights of those working in temporary jobs is already an important problem in Turkey. The situation of migrant workers has been added on this problem.
- ***Lack of jurisprudence:*** In terms of Turkish Labour Law, it is not possible to talk about a settled immigration jurisprudence in terms of labour standards of migrant workers. There is no case brought before the court regarding the unregistered employment of migrant workers.
- ***Temporary Protection Status as a challenge:*** Considering the access to the labour market, it is very difficult to secure formality for Syrians under Temporary Protection Status (TPS) as well. The Regulation on Work Permit for Foreigners under Temporary Protection, adopted on 15 January 2016, regulates the procedures for granting work permits to persons under temporary protection. Accordingly, in order to access the labour market, temporary protection status beneficiaries need to obtain either a work permit or a work permit exemption. The work permit stipulates **a multilayer restriction mechanism**: (1) **spatial restrictions**: the requirement of registration in the province of residence and (2) **quota system**: the number of temporary status beneficiaries cannot exceed ten percent of the number of Turkish citizens working at the workplace. These restrictions have a direct effect on the scope and extensity of informal migrant labour, although immigrants are crucial to close this existing gap in the labour market, e.g. Afghan shepherds and Syrian agricultural workers in

Karacabey. The difficulties to get work permit seem to remain the same for those even making a considerable amount of investments in production in Karacabey. The difficulties encountered in naturalization and having work permit are two common impediments expressed by our interlocutors.

- ***Instrumentalization of migrant labour force:*** Considering seasonal agricultural migrants, our research specifically reveals that the system of *dayıbasılık* (intermediary person between landlords and seasonal workers) is **wide open to abuse** and it is an example of instrumentalization of international labour force. "Dayıbası" organizes large group of migrant workers. Groups could have more than 100 workers. In the summer of 2021, each seasonal worker would be paid 100 TL/per day, and Dayıbası was taking his commission, which was worth of 20 TL out of 100 TL (In August 2021, 100 TL was approximately worth of 10 Euro).
- ***Gender dimension in labour market:*** The situation of Syrian refugees in the Turkish labour market has a strong gender dimension. Syrian women work as **flexible labourers** at the workplace and at the same time, look after their families. They struggle on both ends, i.e. the production and re-production sides of life. At the workplace, they are the most affected and vulnerable agents of the labour market because they are employed with **lower wages** in comparison with males from other nations (Dedeoğlu, 2018). It is very difficult to engage migrant women in having access to the labour market, because they are also taken responsible for domestic household issues.
- ***Other structural problems:*** Child labour, exploitation of men and women in the labour market, low salaries, lack of social security, difficult working conditions, lack of formal channels to help migrants find jobs, lack of official controls in the labour market, low skill sets of the labour force, and low labour force participation rates of women have been repeatedly expressed by the interlocutors involved in the research. Formal jobs are more difficult to secure for the low skilled workers such as the young, women and Syrian refugees. Policies to protect the lower skilled workers such as

increasing the minimum wage, provokes shifts from formal to informal employment, making the working conditions of the workers even worse.

- ***Rural peculiarities and shortage of local labour force:*** From the communication with the locals, and through further analysis, the following policy problems in regard to Karacabey's rural peculiarities could be specified: The fertile lands, agricultural products with Karacabey brand, and its logistical location close to the main consumer markets make the district advantageous in terms of local development. There is also an opportunity for ecological agriculture, eco-tourism and rural tourism as there is a growing demand for remote/rural activities especially following the Covid-19 pandemic. Considering the **insufficiency of the local labour supply**, particularly during the summer period, there is a great **need for international labour force**. The **idle lands** waiting to be cultivated makes the need for foreign labour force more obvious for a sustainable local development. The labour shortage is not a case just for the agricultural and unskilled labour but also for the skilled ones. Our research reveals that there is intermediate and technical staff shortage.

2.2. Housing

Housing conditions of the seasonal agricultural workers with Syrians under temporary protection remain to be a major problem to be resolved. Our participatory observation and semi-structure interviews with migrant-origin health personnel working for mobile health services and migrants in the field reveals that **precarious housing conditions in the removable tents** also create hygiene problems for the families.

2.3. Education

- ***Language barrier and school dropouts:*** The main problem in terms of education of migrant children is the attendance issue rather than their enrolment. The decrease in schooling rate as well as the increasing school dropouts among migrant children are major problems resulting from the language barrier, articulated by different

stakeholders affiliated with research facilities and provincial directorate of Ministry of Education.

- ***Challenges in front of schooling:*** Schools are crucial for current and future social cohesion. However, hard conditions such as income and education levels of migrant families, employment status of parents play a role in immigrant children's school participation. The schooling rate decreases considerably in the upper levels, mainly because the migrant children have to contribute to the household income. Particularly, schooling becomes a more challenging issue for the immigrant children of agricultural seasonal workers.

2.4. Health

- ***Residence location:*** Residence location is an important determinant to access healthcare services for Syrian migrants. Those under TPS and living outside the camps can go to healthcare institutions in the city of residence where they are registered. This obligation prevents refugees living outside the city where they are registered for any reason such as job opportunities, family visits and education, from accessing health. Although there are some initiatives, such as mobile health services in summer periods, **sustainable treatment for chronic diseases is a big challenge** for the immigrant population **in remote places**, particularly for the seasonal migrant workers. Any initiative by civil society remains limited. The relevant local stakeholders state that this problem can be overcome only if public institutions take the initiative through common means.
- ***Lack of special education and rehabilitation facilities*** There is a certain deficiency in having right to access to social services with regard to the special education and rehabilitation facilities. Foreigners cannot benefit from the social assistance provided for those in need of special education and rehabilitation.
- ***Rural conditions:*** For the rural and remote places, especially regarding the places where seasonal agriculture activities are carried out, there are several factors affecting migrants' health such as electricity problem, environmental pollution, and

special conditions like having a stream very close to the living area that can cause malaria. Our research observations also reveal that they all wait for solutions at the administrative levels.

2.5.Social Cohesion

- **Temporariness** The prolonged temporary protection status of Syrians is key to understand the main cause of the difficulties one faces with respect to social cohesion. The state of temporariness **leads to the lack of interaction** between locals and migrant communities. This negative correlation makes it difficult for migrants to contribute better to the local setting that they are in.
- **Ghettoization** A growing stream of ghettoization for our Matilde region, Bursa, is concerned in spite of its strong tradition of incoming migration over the past centuries. Both in the city centre of Bursa and rural Karacabey, the locals and immigrants do not interact to a great extent and **live as two separate groups**. The temporariness in seasonal jobs also plays a crucial role in the lack of interaction between the locals and migrant communities in Karacabey. The field research reveals this temporariness is a reason of the inertia of local authorities in handling social cohesion issue, and makes no local solution generated.
- **Negative language** The language of media about the Syrian refugees seems to be effective on the perception of locals towards the newcomers during the past ten years (Sunata and Yildiz, 2018). Recently, the **discourse of “cheap labour source”** as well as the Turkish mainstream media coverage of irregular Afghan migrants entering the country from the Iranian border has resulted in hostility towards the Syrians and Afghans who often faced with the slogans such as “refugees out”, “Syrians out”, “Afghans out”. The existing **anti-immigrant attitude** is mostly framed as a threat to the economic wellbeing of the Turkish citizens and a threat to lifestyle.
- **Competition among vulnerable groups** Competition among the most vulnerable groups with respect to social assistance, access to rights and job opportunities in the informal labour market **create tensions**. Furthermore, misinformation on the

available services and rights and misinformation on the budget spent for the social assistance for migrants' needs contributes to negative attitudes and prejudices, and therefore increase social tension at the local level.

- ***Perspectives of policy implementers:*** Our communication with the interlocutors during the action research reveals that the **negative perspectives** and/or stance of some social policy implementers and social service providers such as the local governor/mukhtar of the neighbourhood towards the Syrians poses an obstacle in providing social cohesion.

2.6. Language & culture

- ***Language barrier:*** The language barrier is among serious challenges to prompt immigrants, particularly the Syrians, generate **a sense of territorial belonging** as well as to integrate them into education and work environments. It is also one of the factors linked to the increase in NEET rate among immigrants.
- ***Cultural intimacy discourse:*** In the early days of mass migration of Syrians, there was the prevalence of cultural and religious intimacy discourse promoted by the ruling government. This discourse made it easier for the members of the majority society to accommodate the Syrians for a few years. However, this discourse is no longer embraced by the majority society due to the increasing **economic crisis, political polarisation** and **electoral cycles**.

2.7. Mobility

- ***Residence restriction:*** The requirement of registration in the province of residence leads to unregistered residences in many provinces throughout Turkey, including Bursa (Erdogan, 2021). It has also **a direct effect on the scope and extensivity of informal migrant labour**. Since Bursa has a labour potential owing to its diversity of industrial, agricultural, and service sectors providing jobs, many migrants, although unregistered in the province, prefer to stay in Bursa. This does not only lead to the

employment of migrants in the informal labour markets, but also makes it also very difficult for them to enjoy their rights to reach public education and health services.

2.8.Rights and citizenship

- ***Political participation:*** Following the Law 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) of 2014 and follow-up regulations, although there are major improvements in the fields of basic access to education and healthcare services along with small procedural improvements to access labour market, there is no way for political participation for foreign citizens. Political participation of migrants without Turkish citizenship is only possible through the City Councils (Kent Konseyleri) running under the auspices of local municipalities.
- ***Access to nationality.*** Turkish citizenship is primarily based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* (by descent). A foreigner or stateless person can acquire Turkish citizenship after birth by the decision of competent authority based on several conditions. After five years, immigrants can apply for naturalization, by completing language, economic and other requirements. Although dual nationality has been allowed since 2017, it has still been criticized with **discretionary and complex requirements** (MIPEX 2020). All legally resident foreign nationals including Syrians under TPS are assigned Foreigners Identification Number (*Yabancı Kimlik Numarası*, YKN) which serve to facilitate their access to all government services. Also, the Temporary Protection Regulation of 2014 envisages the issuing of Temporary Protection Identification Documents (TPID) to beneficiaries upon registration. Still, the TPID cards does not serve as residence permit, and may not lead to long-term residence permit in Turkey. Temporary protection regulation blocks the path to Syrians to citizenship and access to individual international protection application. For this reason, the Turkish government grants citizenship to Syrians under temporary protection through the regulation of “exceptional citizenship”. Some Syrians are naturalized under the article of exceptional citizenship of the Turkish Citizenship Law (Art.12 of Law No. 5901) introduced in 2009. Turkey has so far issued citizenship to around 193 thousand

Syrians (Cumhuriyet, 2021). Syrians are also gradually becoming the targets of increasing hostility from the majority society in Turkey since socio-political polarization has become widespread after the failed military coup attempt in July 2016. Another essential source of growing hostility towards the Syrians in Turkey is the deepening of economic crisis, which turns the refugees into scapegoats who are blamed for high unemployment and rising prices.

2.9. Rural & regional development

- ***Uncontrolled industrialization and urbanization:*** Over-industrialization is one of the main challenges creating further impediments for agricultural production. The uncontrolled industrialization and urbanization process towards Karacabey creates concerns among the locals. The local interlocutors during our research specifically articulated their concerns and the already felt consequences of environmental overloading, particularly in terms of industrial pollution poisoning the farmlands, due to uncontrolled-concentration of industry in the region. Over- and uncontrolled industrialization result in the lack of perspective for the future and therefore make local youngsters be hesitant to stay in Karacabey. This paves for depopulation in rural areas and puts the immigrant workforce to the forefront of the agricultural and industrial production.
- ***Depopulation as a challenge:*** Depopulation in rural areas as a worldwide problem with its socio-economic and ecological consequences constitutes an important challenge for rural Karacabey as well. Young locals in Karacabey migrate either to the urban centre (Bursa), or to the big cities, especially neighbouring Istanbul. This demographic pressure coupled with the fragmentation of inheritances have made the agricultural lands idle for the last two decades. Our participatory action research also reveals that migration of young generation to the urban centres threatens agricultural sustainability in Karacabey.
- ***Need in agricultural workforce:*** Considering its vast agricultural lands, there is a pressing need in agricultural workforce in Karacabey, especially in the summer

periods. Both seasonal and permanent migrants and refugees meet an urgent need that is the continuation of harvesting fertile agricultural lands, an activity that seems to be neglected by the locals due to the reluctance of young people in agriculture, its concomitant growing emigration pattern and the fragmentation of inheritances.

- ***Temporariness of seasonal migrants*** Temporary arrivals and departures of seasonal agricultural migrants creates another kind of problem. The native population do not consider immigrants as an asset for a long-term local development. This is why, the local municipal and public administration actors do not implement any policies to handle seasonal migrants' problems in the long term. This also puts the social cohesion aside, out of local consideration.
- ***Lack of support by central and local actors*** The lack of support by the central state actors and the municipal actors does not help this process to revert. Especially the regulation changing the status of the villages and the boundaries of metropolitan municipalities has made the issue of allocating enough resources for rural development worse. Law No. 6360 of 2012 re-scaled the urban areas by absorbing rural areas. Towns and villages have been eliminated along with their legal personality within the boundaries of metropolitan areas and villages have been transformed to neighborhoods and common goods have been transferred to metropolitan municipalities. This regulation is criticized as it posed hindrance for the municipalities to support and develop rural areas.
- ***Lack of knowledge***: During the action research activities, malinvestments, or investments that are wrongly allocated by the local unconscious farmers, were also emphasized as an important impediment in front of the rural and agricultural sustainability. The lack of knowledge of the locals is valid in terms of both new production techniques and their knowledge of legal and administrative procedures.
- ***Law on the Protection of Agricultural Lands (Law No. 5403)***: The amendments made in 2005 and 2014 remain limited in terms of preventing the agricultural lands from being divided among the heirs, and making sure that agricultural production can be continued.

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

Turkey research team has compiled a set of policy recommendations at local and national level since the regional and European levels are not found that relevant for the Turkish case.

3.1. Local Level

3.1.1. Housing

- **Sustainable Accommodation.** Migrants often encounter difficulties when trying to find private accommodation. The local municipal actors and the local representatives of the central state actors should work together with local employers to make sure that migrants are granted the possibility to have a decent accommodation during their stay in the given locality. It is often the case that the same seasonal agricultural workers visit Karacabey every year. However, their living conditions and habitats are not sustainable in the tents.
- The local municipality should organise sustainable accommodation facilities for seasonal migrant workers with the support of local stakeholders and civil society organisations.

Ensuring better accommodation: In most instances, refugees are destitute. Many depend on the solidarity of friends or relatives who may host them temporarily. Even when they can afford rental or hotel accommodation, owing to language difficulties, hostility of landlords or racial prejudices, asylum-seekers often encounter difficulties while trying to find private accommodation. This proves even more difficult when refugees and migrants are not permitted to work or cannot find employment.

- The local municipality should develop programs of quality control to ensure that all seasonal migrant workers and other migrants' housing meets minimum quality and safety standards.

3.1.2. Rural Development

Agro-tourism, eco-tourism and organic agriculture: The fertile lands, agricultural products with Karacabey brand, and its logistical location close to the main consumer markets make the district advantageous in terms of local development. There is also an opportunity for ecological agriculture, ecotourism and rural tourism (Ak, 2017) as there is a growing demand for remote/rural activities especially following the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Locals should be given financial opportunities to develop and pursue new projects in agro-tourism and eco-tourism.
- Locals should be given the opportunity to learn the technics of organic agricultural production.

Cooperatives:

- Local business associations and local municipalities should work together with the agricultural producers to form cooperatives that can organise the sale and transportation of products to outside markets.

Smart Villages:

- Local municipalities in rural places could promote the establishment of smart villages where peasants can be trained to develop skills about the use of technology and efficient methods in agricultural production, marketing, sale, and communication.

The following village sample from the city of Aydın, an Aegean town, can be taken as a reference point (see <http://www.vodafoneakillikoy.com/>).

3.1.3. Economy & Employment

Rights-based approach:

- All local actors should embrace a rights-based approach in communicating with migrants.
- Ensuring their equal and fair access to labour market procedures and the facilitation of full access to legal aid should be among the major priorities.

3.1.4. Social Cohesion

- In order to achieve social cohesion of immigrants with the native populations, local municipalities can organise get-together meetings at the local level in different neighbourhoods where there is a critical mass of migrants.

3.2. National Level: Turkey

3.2.1. Economy & Employment

Preventing Child Labour:

- The Ministry of National Education should collaborate with the relevant local actors, land owners and producers should be informed and trained about the negative consequences of child labour.
- Local actors and international institutions should collaborate to offer educational and child-care services to the migrant communities.

Amendment of the Labour Law (Law No 4857):

- The Labour Law should be revised to better recognize the rights of migrant labour.

Labour Unions:

- Labour Unions should be more engaged in supporting and organising agricultural and seasonal workers.
- Workers abused by third parties and/or employed as cheap labour force may establish associations or unions to protect their rights. The presence of both Turkish and immigrant-origin workers in such unions would be purposeful.

Improving employment opportunities: It is widely accepted that dependence on the state is reduced when refugees are working.

- Migrants and refugees should, preferably, be granted permission to work so that they could generate an independent financial self-sufficiency to maintain an adequate standard of living.
- The state should simplify and standardise the process of ensuring recognition of qualifications and university degrees earned in the countries of origin.

Improving the image of agricultural workers and rural jobs: Farming is not a career goal, especially for the new generation. Farming is generally not performed as a primary occupation. Families engaged in agricultural production do not want their children to continue in the agricultural sector.

- The image of businesses related to farming and agricultural production should be strengthened.

3.2.2. Education

Access to education: Following the departure from the country of origin, migrant and refugee children suffer from the forced interruption of their education. In order to restore a semblance of normality, it is essential that children benefit from primary and secondary education of a satisfactory quality.

- The state should also increase childcare access and language course opportunities and incentives so that adults are better able to attend language courses.

Preventing drop-outs in schools: The main problem in terms of education of migrant children is the attendance rather than their enrolment mainly due to the language barrier and a burden for children to contribute household income.

- Measures to change the conditions that weaken migrant children's ties with school after their enrolment in the education system should be planned and implemented in order to prevent the school dropouts.
- These measures could be to train teachers to be informed about intercultural communication; to strengthen the Turkish language training for the Syrian students; to engage students' parents through their children to become more integrated to the schooling activities; to better inform the local students about the difficulties that the Syrians face in everyday life so that Syrian children will not be often exposed to peer pressure.

3.2.3. Health

Access to health services: Most refugees and migrants suffer from health problems, including emotional or mental disorders that require prompt professional treatment.

- Arabic interpreters should be available at all hospitals and government offices, and hospital staff should be trained regarding migrant needs.

3.2.4. Social Cohesion & Language and Culture

Engaging the media: The role of the media is clearly an integral part of public engagement in migration and integration related issues in the public space.

- The local branch of Directorate Migration Management should work on a communication strategy to appeal to the local media promoting solidarity and human protection values, with biographies and refugee testimonials, and an explanation of how they relate to all of the native population.

3.2.5. Rural & Regional Development

Revision of the Law 6360: According to the Law No. 6360, the legal entity of the special provincial administrations, town municipalities, and villages was removed in the provinces where a metropolitan municipality was come to an end, and additionally, the town municipalities and villages were converted into a neighbourhood of the district municipalities of which they had been under.

- The law needs to be revised in order to prompt the inhabitants of villages to invest in agricultural production.

Amendment of the Greater Municipality Law (Law No 5216): The Law has neither assigned a duty nor created a resource to the municipalities for the development of rural areas. The newly neighbourhoods (formerly villages) affiliated to the metropolitan and district municipalities have neither eligible source nor addressee institution to apply for agricultural purposes and economic investments (Arıcı and Kirmikil, 2017). Lack of resource brings along competition among vulnerable groups.

- The Law on Greater Municipalities should be revised in order to make the villages to regain their village status.

Amendment of the Law on Protection of Agricultural Lands (Law No 5403):

- The Law on Protection of Agricultural Lands should be revised to make sure that inheritance of agricultural lands can be peacefully resolved among the members of the family without having the time pressure.

Long-term perspective for rural sustainable development:

- Relevant state actors such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry should work in collaboration with the other state actors, local municipal actors, scientists, and civil society organisations to develop a more holistic and sustainable rural and agricultural development goals.

3.2.6. Other

Climate change and migration:

- Climate change with its different aspects should be a part of even short-term planning.
- Any national level sustainable development plan on migration should also include climate change, which causes rural migration and intensifies other socio-economic drivers of migration, such as rural poverty and food insecurity.

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1. Introduction and methodology

Our work for the **creation of two policy recommendations for the Scottish case study** has mostly relied on the results from the previous fieldwork aimed to analyse the existing migration and integration policies (WP3-WP4, Task 3.1 and 4.1); to assess the social impact of migration (WP3); to assess the economic impact (WP4); as well as the action-research built with the local actors (WP5).

Since February 2022, we have begun to work on the preparation of the policy recommendations that we wanted to present and discuss at the roundtables with decision-makers and stakeholders from local, regional, and national levels. To accomplish this task, we used the support of our Scottish partner COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities); the two staff members who have assisted us were Dr Lorraine Cook and Mrs Anna Tajsiaik; they are experts in policy on migration and coordinate projects and schemes for refugees and asylum seekers by Scottish Local Authorities.

The **first step** in this process was to **identify the potential participants for the roundtables**; at the local level, we planned to ask for support from local actors previously involved in the Case Study Working Group to involve their local networks. At the regional (Scottish) and national (British) levels, we required the assistance of COSLA to contact those teams potentially interested in the recommendations' topics.

Between March and April 2022, we elaborated with COSLA two policy recommendations **to address the depopulation of Scottish rural areas** and ensure dedicated and facilitated

ways to employ foreign workers by the fishing industry in the Outer Hebrides. Particularly for the latest one, our team found beneficial the help that Western Isles Fishermen Association (WIFA) provided to us; they could give an inside view into the most impellent issues that affect the economic sector. Not only they drafted the dramatic picture of local fishing companies, in crisis for the scarcity of workforce, but they functioned also as great "gatekeepers" to the local firms putting us in contact with valuable sources for first-hand information. Consequently, we considered constructive to organize a **focus group** with some of the fishermen who operate in the Outer Hebrides. On Thursday May 5th - which was a day of bad weather that constrained the fishermen to stay at home - we gathered online, in the evening, and discussed with them our draft, asking for feedback and suggestions for implementing it. Around ten entrepreneurs responded to the invitation sent by us through their local association and the meeting was joined also by representatives of the Orkney and Argyll Isles branches. They provided additional data about the challenges met in recruiting migrant fishermen through the Skilled Worker Visa.

In terms of sources and data used to support our proposals, we largely benefit from the work done in the last two years in the MATILDE framework; specifically, the reports produced for the deliverables 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3, 5.2, and 5.3. To elaborate the policy recommendation for the repopulation of rural areas we also used the demographic data from the National Record of Scotland and the 2011 Census, reports from the Home Office UK, and the policy pilot created by the Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population (EAGMP).

To conclude this process, we organized **two policy roundtables in May 2022** to favour the debate among economic agents, local authorities, regional and national officers and other stakeholders (e.g. sectorial associations). On May 16th, at the Caladh Inn hotel in Stornoway, the research team held the **first meeting "Finding a route for migrant fishermen to the Western Isles"**, organized with the support of CNES (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar - Western Isles Council). This saw the presence of WIFA, local officers from the Council, our partner COSLA, representatives of the local enterprises, the Highlands and Isles Enterprises agency, and members of governmental teams (Migration Strategy and Inshore Fisheries Management & Coastal Communities). On May 18th, we had an online (Teams platform) policy

roundtable to discuss the recommendation **“Migrants as actors of the Repopulation of Scottish Rural Areas”**. The meeting was attended by representatives of the local authority (CNES and Hebridean Housing Partnership), local economic sector representatives (Western Isles Fishermen Association, Skill Development Scotland, Outer Hebrides Tourism, Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance, Visit Scotland, and Highlands and Isles Enterprise, Codel), the Scottish Government (Free Movement and Citizens’ Right team, Population team, Connected Communities team, Migration Strategy team, Skills, Talent Attraction and Retention Department team, EAGMP), and the British Government (Migration Advisory Group).

2. Main policy problems

As explained in the introduction, our proposals challenge diverse problems, which are directly intertwined and correlated. On the one hand, there are the challenges faced by the fishing industry in the Outer Hebrides; according to representatives of this sector, the isles exemplify the conditions of all the Scottish West coast and part of Northern Ireland. The main difficulty is to recruit the workforce; since the early 2000s, the EU migrant workers had filled gaps in the local labour market but now, due to the new Brexit migration policy, recruitment has become more complex and difficult. On the other hand, there is the trend of depopulation of Scottish rural areas that has been causing the abandonment of many communities by young people, while the ageing of the residential population is progressively reinforced by the arrival of British in-migrants in their late 50s. These trends have generated the gaps filled by newcomers. The two main issues that our research team discussed with local partners and decision-makers are connected because of the survival of key economic sectors – particularly the fishing industry which composes a significant share of local GDP (Caputo et al., 2021b) – depends on the repopulation of these areas. Consequently, the theme of migration to these rural communities is of paramount importance and contributes to the wider strategy to save local economies and communities from decline. Nevertheless, aspects of the current British policy framework for migration and management of local services prevent the achievement of feasible solutions.

The main challenge for the fishing industry is to deal with the new post-Brexit migration system. This requires newcomers and companies - which function as a sponsor - to go through a long and complex procedure.

Generally, the conditions to obtain a working visa are difficult because there are strict requirements and the implication to pass through the British migration system. This aims to attract people, particularly investors and entrepreneurs (previously known as the Tier 1 Visa). It also regulates the arrival of skilled workers with job offers (now as Skilled Worker Visa, previously Tier 2); temporary workers in specific sectors (charities, creative industries, religious); seasonal workers in horticulture; students and people in Authorised Exchange schemes. The route for workers considered “low-skilled” (former Tier 3) to fill specific labour shortages has never been implemented because EU migrant workers filled the gaps in the job market. The Skilled Worker Visa allows a worker in a selected list of occupations, and their family, to live in the United Kingdom, but it is demanding in terms of administrative requests as migrants must be sponsored by a licenced employer through a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) to apply for a Visa. Moreover, migrants need to be able to speak, write and read in English before arriving in the UK. The level required is a B1 (intermediate) of the Common European Framework of Reference and this needs to be certified with a formal written and oral exam that is challenging for people who have not been in education for very long time or who achieved only primary education. Regional differences in wages are not considered and there is a minimum threshold of a salary of £25,600 per year²⁹.

Results from our fieldwork and focus groups show how the entrepreneurs with small firms have difficulties in dealing with the complex bureaucracy and sustaining the cost of these practices. The required salary threshold cannot be met by all the employers. Furthermore, all those who obtained a sponsor licence had their demands rejected as the migrant did not met the required English language proficiency skills, discouraging others to apply for the sponsor licence.

29 The minimum salary for the type of work is the highest out of the following 3 options: £25,600 per year, £10.10 per hour, the 'going rate' for the type of work (Home Office, Workers and Temporary Workers: guidance for sponsors part 2: sponsor a worker – general information, Version 04/22).

Another possible solution is the use of a Transit visa, which allows non-UK citizens to arrive in the UK with confirmed offers of work on a fishing vessel based in the UK but working outside UK territorial waters (12 maritime miles from the coast). In this case, the problem is the physical characteristics of the Scottish West coast; to respect the required distance from the coast, vessels must go further West in the Atlantic, while they are not necessarily fit to sail in those waters, increasing the safety risks for the crew. Furthermore, there is increasing evidence on how this Visa puts migrants at risk of exploitation in the UK fishing industries. In parallel to this complex issue, the context of rural areas presents structural difficulties particularly the possibility to find affordable accommodation. In this sense, the absence of a social housing strategy in partnership with local economic actors appears as the main political issue brought to our attention by our local partners. This emerged as an issue in local development policy during the fieldwork for WP5 and had been further investigated for the creation of the WP6 policy recommendations. The private rental and estate market are difficult to access as half of the local available accommodations are aimed at the tourists as temporary accommodations and often rented for a price that is about five times their long-term rental price. This situation was notably worsened by the platform *Airbnb*. The main share of social housing is in Stornoway (21%) (Caputo et al., 2021a), which is coherent with the share of the population. Nevertheless, many employers are located far away from the principal town; consequently, those local economic agents ask for a strategic plan that also considers their development planning so it can ensure an appropriate cover for housing demand in remote communities.

Generally, participants in our research agreed on the opportunity to develop a new policy that can design a new scheme to support newcomers' settlement in rural areas.

3. Policy recommendations and solutions

3.1. Local Level – The Outer Hebrides.

The principal player at the local level that can implement solutions for the issues presented earlier is the CNES, the local council. It has been our partner in the research project since the

beginning of the fieldwork and all the officers involved understand the benefit MATILDE wants to bring to rural and remote areas. Furthermore, this actor already acknowledges the issues illustrated and took part in the definition of them for our research purpose.

The highest priority for the local council is to reverse the depopulation trend and to support the local economy by helping the local firms in findings and recruiting new workforces. It is important to consider that newcomers' decision to settle in a place and begin a process of integration depends on the intersection between personal strategies and structural factors. Consequently, the policy recommendation must consider both the individuals' trajectory of migration and the features of local societies; the latter can present either barriers or opportunities. Migrants contribute to the local economy by providing the labour force necessary for filling those gaps in the local job market – although firms need even more workers – and to fill in the level of the local population; they contribute to about 7% of all births between 2011 and 2019 (Caputo et al., 2021b). Nevertheless, further efforts and interventions are required to slow the depopulation process and save the local economy.

To accomplish this task, there are various domains, which are necessary to enhance to attract and integrate newcomers. At the local level, the most considerable is the theme of housing. The accessibility to affordable accommodation on the private market is difficult due to owners' choice to use second houses or empty rooms for short-term renting for tourists (Caputo et al., 2021b). Furthermore, the social housing distribution does not support the requests by migrant workers to have accommodations close to the fishing industries; indeed, the 21% of social houses are in Stornoway (the largest concentration on the isles) leaving few options in those remote communities where the employers look for newcomers to fill in the vacant job positions (Caputo et al., 2021a).

Our recommendation is to develop an **open discussion among the public authorities, the organization in charge of the social housing management** (The Hebridean Housing Partnership), and the local entrepreneurs to intertwine the future investment plan of the HHP with the plan for the development of local companies to harmonize both strategies. In terms of qualitative changes, it is necessary to link the need for new social accommodation to current requests for a new workforce and future plans of investments and expansion by local

economic actors. In terms of quantitative change, it is important to increase the number of social houses outside the Stornoway area and locate them in those communities where the fishing industries require more workers.

A second aspect that the local authority can support is the English learning by **reactivating language courses and ESOL classes for foreign workers** and reinitiating its provision in the workplace. As well, this can be done by promoting local informal encounter opportunities like *Befriend*³⁰ that helped the local Syrian refugees in acquiring adequate language skills and to integrate with the local community. This is a key aspect of the process of integration; the acquisition of linguistic skills favours the process because it makes possible for the migrant to communicate with the locals, understand laws and legal requirements, and increase the possibilities for a career advancement (Ager and Strang, 2008). In terms of qualitative change, a local policy can guarantee more occasions for migrants to improve their English; while, in the quantitative sense, the goal can be to have more courses in the various communities.

Furthermore, the council can **ensure access to essential local services** by enhancing awareness among migrants of the existing services and assessing specific needs (e.g. flexible-time childcare for workers in the fish-processing sector). From our previous research (Caputo et al., 2021a), we know that the locals have a good appreciation of the quality of local services; therefore, it is important to make sure that they are accessible also for newcomers. This can be achieved with the translation of information material into diverse languages and addressing newcomers to the local services when they arrive in the fostering communities. These strategies can get inspiration from the good practices developed by both the public authorities and the private sector. The initiatives for settling asylum seekers and refugees have developed important know-how (Baglioni and Caputo, 2021) that can be useful to create a new scheme for favouring integration. As well, the local private sector has already put in place informal solutions for migrants' integration (support in translating working tasks, help to find accommodation, support in obtaining a driving license) that can be integrated into a more structured scheme (Caputo et al., 2021b). The local partnership between these two

30 <http://befriendinglewis.org.uk/>

sectors can generate networks of resources and opportunities to foster new initiatives. It is also relevant to consider a further involvement of the local third sector; generally, this can operate as a fundamental player in the facilitation of migrants' integration process (Bianchi et al., 2021).

The main outcome will be **a scheme to support migrants in their settlement and integration** with the community. This must ensure that each job opportunity in the Western Isles would be associated with an offer of accommodation and with integration opportunities (ESOL classes, encounter opportunities, driving classes). This strategy can be considered also for attracting migrants already present in the United Kingdom to the Western Isles and can be expanded to the entire Scotland as we explain in the next section. Considering the pressuring economic conditions of the local firms, it is important to implement new solutions as soon as possible to respond to these issues. According to the fishermen gathered for the focus groups, their companies are already in critical conditions and struggle to recover from the Covid-19 economic consequences.

Policy Recommendations:

- To make official a co-design of new investment plans for social housing involving also local economic actors along with the HHP and the local council.
- To promote occasions for foreign workers to access ESOL classes for English learning; these can be organized in accordance with employers to allow workers to optimize their daily schedules.
- Council can make services more accessible considering migrants' needs and working schedules.
- To design a local scheme that supports migrants' settlement and integration using know-how from the public sector and also resources from the private and third sectors. This will help migrants in dealing with daily difficulties that can be encountered living in rural areas facilitating their access to services and resources.

Solutions:

- HHP and the local council already have a periodical discussion about housing needs; they have to begin from this basis to expand the vision of the housing strategy.

- Befriend is an existing initiative to help Syrian refugees to acquire language skills and meet locals.
- In the Syrian refugees resettlement program, social workers accompany refugees to register at the GP.
- The Syrian Vulnerable People Resettlement Program has proven to be successful in generating know-how usable for designing a new scheme open to all migrants.

3.2.Regional Level – Scotland

Before the examination of possible policy recommendations at the regional level, it is important to recall that the migration policy is a reserved matter of the British Government, so the role of the Scottish government is to gather evidence and propose improvements. The Scottish government oversees integration that is a devolved matter. Currently, the Scottish and the Central British government have divergent views on migration, thus, it is challenging for the Scottish government to influence the general British migration policy. Therefore, these suggestions are addressed to decision-makers at this level but need to be further integrated with a review of the British migration policy illustrated in the next paragraph.

First, it is important to underline how depopulation is a common trend for the entire Scottish region. The 2018 projection tells that in 10 years the working population will decline by 6.4%. They estimate a decrease of 14% among the people aged 15-60 years³¹. Consequently, the theme of a scheme for attracting newcomers to rural areas is an important matter also at the regional level. Therefore, our recommendation is to consider future policy improvements to enhance the capacity of integration in rural areas by starting from the existing policy framework and from that propose viable settling solutions. This idea can also address migrants already present in the UK or British citizens who want to move outside the urban areas. Existing schemes and programs are a good base upon which to create new proposals for attracting newcomers and helping the repopulation of rural areas. Based on our findings from the fieldwork, the Syrian Vulnerable Peoples Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) has proven

³¹ All data refer to the Population Projections for Scottish Areas (2018-based)

successful in the Western Isles (Caputo et al., 2021b). Many families decided to remain there and created social connections and economic integration within the communities. Since 2015, Scottish Local Authorities in rural areas have accommodated and supported refugees (Baglioni and Caputo, 2021). Officers involved in this program took care of the Afghanistan refugees' resettlement since summer 2021 and are now working on the Ukraine crisis. At the local level, these officers have acquired consistent know-how in facilitating the integration process between refugees and local communities. They support families in their path to access social housing, language classes, health services, social benefits, and economic integration. This scheme allowed local authorities to recruit personnel and develop important competencies in terms of integration. Furthermore, The Scottish Government has implemented the "New Scots strategy", the main Scottish integration policy aimed at refugees and asylum seekers, providing an indispensable framework for integration policies at the local authority scale and for other migrants.

Our policy recommendation for the regional level is to design, with local government and COSLA, the abovementioned scheme that aims to create local partnerships among private, public and third sectors to coordinate them to offer **integrated solutions for newcomers to settle in remote areas** and to support them. This must encompass access to affordable accommodations at a viable distance from the job position the migrant is coming to fulfil; opportunities and facilitate language learning; access to essential services and social and economic opportunities.

Clearly, **this local-based system must find integration with a national migration policy** able to satisfy the needs of rural and remote areas; the proposal for an integrative review of the national policy system is illustrated in the next paragraph.

The implementation of this new scheme can be measured through three indicators. First, the number of offers the local authorities can generate in collaboration with the private and third sectors; second, the number of people that respond to these offers; third the number of individuals and/or families that settle in rural areas through this scheme after certain years of permanence. Clearly, the perspective on the assessment of this initiative is at least in the

medium-term because the main goal is to help people to settle in rural communities and not just to fill in vacant job positions temporarily.

Although the matter is urgent, the timing to realize this scheme is broad because this requires collecting information from the existing programs, mapping the potential partners, checking their availability and resources, and then designing the scheme and implementing it. All this takes, at least, a couple of years.

Policy Recommendations:

- To design a scheme to incentive the settlement in rural areas through the offer of job positions, accommodation, access to necessary local services and other job offers for partners to convince also families to move there.

3.3.National Level: United Kingdom

The main current barrier to the development of an adequate policy migration for Scottish rural areas is the distance between the local demands and the British decision-makers. This is not simply a physical distance between remote rural areas and the extended metropolitan areas, such as London, but it reflects a discrepancy between Scottish and Central governmental views on migration policy. The participants in our research criticise the idea by the British Government of “one fits for all” migration policy, this does not consider the physical and economic specificities of remote areas, such as the Outer Hebrides.

Current migration policies do not facilitate or even allow the arrival of the workforce that is most needed in regions where the ageing and depopulation trends have opened critical gaps in the labour market. In this sense, the Scottish Government has already pushed forward a pilot to propose a new approach to the migration policy; based on our findings, we agree that this can be a reasonable solution and – with few integrations – can fit the case study of the Outer Hebrides and many other Scottish rural areas. The Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population (EAGMP) – which works for the Scottish Government – has

elaborated a pilot ³² with a 'strategic mitigation' approach; this has a focus on recruiting migrants with the occupations, skills and demographic profiles that would best contribute to sustaining local businesses and communities. The proposal directly addresses the UK Home Office and asks for a revision of the migration system. According to our view, this must be the framework into which **designing the local-based system mentioned earlier**.

Among the three strategies proposed by the EAGMP pilot, there is the **review and expansion of the Shortage Occupation List** – the list of occupations that have a shortage of workers. For a company aiming to recruit international migrants for those jobs, the costs are lowered, and the requirement lessened. The EAGMP pilot requires the Home Office to consider labour shortages at the local scale. In this sense, a migrant will need to fill a job position that will be in a shortage occupation in a designated area (non-tradable). To **remove the barriers** that we identified in our research, we add to this proposal that not only the migrants' professional skills (job at appropriate skill level) and their job salary should be tradable but also their English level (Speaks English at the required level)³³.

Furthermore, in this framework, we consider that it is important to design a new policy to **recognize the fundamental role of the fishing industry** in the areas of the Scottish Western coast. This policy must embrace diverse aspects such as the urgency to recruit a workforce in a region structurally lacking an adequate working-age population. To recognize the fact that all the waters within the Western Isles and the West Coast of Scotland are territorial waters. To consider the local cultural heritage and notably Gaelic as an active and operational heritage that includes the knowledge of the marine territory and of the fishing practices.

Such a policy, moreover, must **secure a safe route for migrants** to avoid them becoming vulnerable to exploitation and address the issue of recruiting the workforce in time to limit

32 Boswel, C., Bell, D., Copus, A., Kay, R., Kulu, H., 2021. Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population: Designing a Pilot Remote and Rural Migration Scheme for Scotland: Analysis and Policy Options.

33 Please note that this proposal differs from the Remote and rural SOL scheme proposed by the EAGMP in one point, such as that we consider that English requirements are a barrier to migration. All the interviewed migrants learned English while in the United Kingdom and notably through their occupations or voluntary activities; therefore, we think that the English skills should be tradable.

the damages to this key sector of the local economy that already has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Compared to the other strategies proposed in the Rural pilot, the revision of the Shortage Occupation List can be implemented quickly enough to respond to the lack of workforce in the fishing industries and can address the barriers previously described (cost of the sponsorship licences, required salary threshold, English language proficiency skills), therefore we support it notably with reference to short term needs.

In terms of measurability, it will be fundamental to consider the future numbers of entrances and settlements in rural areas that will happen through this new scheme. The targeting of those areas more in need of workforce should be a strategic goal of the regional government through delegation by the Central government.

Policy recommendations:

- To design a local-based system for settlement and integration.
- To allow a regional-based Shortage Occupation List to facilitate newcomers' arrival to be employed in those sectors more in need in each area.
- A new policy to recognize the value of the fishing industry in remote areas of Scotland; this will facilitate the recruitment and arrival for workforce in these areas and avoid workers' exploitation.

Solutions:

- The Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population has designed a pilot to implement the migration to rural areas through a scheme to facilitate the migration bureaucracy for those who respond to necessary criteria to fill in the gaps in local job markets.

3.4. European Level

After Brexit in 2020, the United Kingdom is no more part of the European Union; therefore, it is not possible to provide policy recommendations at this scale. The proposals presented in the previous paragraph apply to European citizens who want to move to the UK. Those

European citizens who were in the territory before Brexit and decided to remain obtained a visa: EU Settlement or Pre-settlement Status; or Frontier Worker permit.

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