

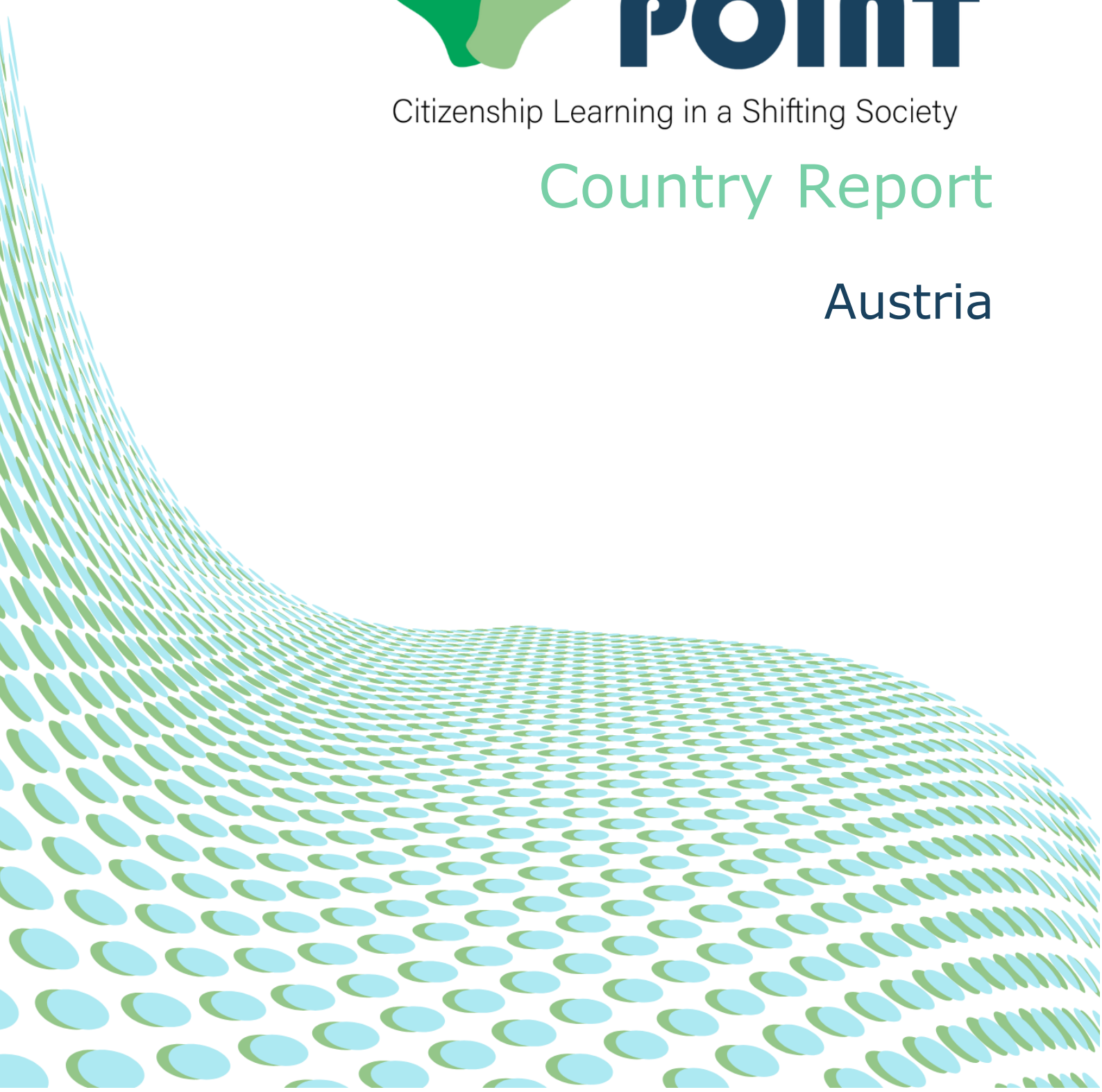


START POINT

Citizenship Learning in a Shifting Society

Country Report

Austria



Introduction

Nowadays the people are moving freely inside the European Union which brings a frequent exchange of population and a high degree of diversity especially in countries as Austria. Even though Austria is not a traditional immigration country, it has its history of immigration, emigration and transit migration that takes place since the Habsburg Empire until today. In this report we will mainly focus on the situation of immigration nowadays and the challenges that the people coming to Austria are facing and the differences between the EU migrants and non-European.

Aims/Objectives of Report

The main aim of this report is to show the needs, differences and challenges that the migrants arriving/moving to Austria face. What are the facilities and systems put in place by the local and national authorities to ensure the integration of these people. At the same time what is the influence of the NGO sector and civic society in the facilitation of the integration process at different levels.

Another important objective of this report is identifying the main categories that are playing an important role in the integration of the migrants in Austria such as language learning, social integration, education and integration on the labour market.

Method

The two methods that are at the base of this report are desk research and field research, each one complementing the other.

A bit of immigration history

Before discussing about nowadays situation of integration policies in Austria, it is important to look first at its history and the key moments that are influencing even nowadays the gap between the immigrants and local population. Even though Austria is not a traditional migration country, it has a long history of immigration,

emigration and transit migration, starting with the Habsburg Empire and continuing with the two World Wars. An important immigration wave that had lasting effects on the composition of the foreign population was the guest workers from Turkey and Yugoslavia. The agreements with the aforementioned countries were done between 1964 and 1966 and brought into the country over 76,500 people.¹ This migration was supposed to be temporary and directed toward job market integration only, without any other type of support. There were no policies designed for integrating these groups in the Austrian society, lacking any kind of language courses or further education. Moreover, the children were offered classes in their mother tongues – Turkish or serbo-croatian, so the integration and acquisition of local language was impossible. (Perchinig 2009, 233)². After years of high numbers of incoming migrants due to family reunifications and then the collapse of the Yugoslavia, the party in power Freedom Party (FPÖ) called for a “zero immigration legislative measures” in 1990 which covered all areas related to immigration, including entry, residence, employment, and asylum. Since then, the immigration processes got harder and only relaxed with the entrance of Austria in the European Union and the Schengen zone. Since the early 2000s the immigration of 3rd country nationals was limited to highly skilled migrants (differentiated by skill level and period of residence) which included a strict procedure for family reunification and allowed a higher freedom to 3rd country nationals students. In 2011 it was introduced the Red-White-Card for highly skilled workers.³

Regarding integration policies of the Ministry of Interior, there were almost inexistent until 2003 except for integration policies directed towards refugees with a recognized status who would get

¹ Michael Jandl, Albert Kraler. 2003. Austria: A Country of Immigration?
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/austria-country-immigration>

² Perchinig, B. 2006. “Einwanderungs- und Integrationspolitik.” In Schwarz-Blau: Eine Bilanz des “Neu-Regierens,” ed. E. Talós and M. Fink, 295-342. Wien: Lit Verlag.

³ Caritas Austria. Common Home. Migration and development in Austria. p.34,
https://www.caritas.at/fileadmin/storage/global/caritas-at/Hilfe-Angebote/Migration-Flucht/MIND_Common_Home_Studie_Austria.pdf

organizational support, financial and psychological in the first five years. The responsible institution for this matter was Austrian Integration Fund which was responsible for offering psychological counselling, helping refugees to find housing, organizing German language training and so on (see Nationaler Kontaktpunkt Österreich 2005, 49-57).

In 2002, an important amendment of the immigration legislation, that was further changed in 2005 and 2011, brought major changes in the integration policy of the ministry. Starting with this amendment, all 3rd country national migrants that wanted to settle into Austria had to sign an "integration paper" that was stating that the migrant must achieve a basic level of German language within a given period of time, at that point A1, with the change in 2005 it got increased to A2 and with the changes in 2011, the time limit got set to 5 years, after which the migrant could get deported if he/she didn't fulfilled the language requirements. Another change that came in 2011, it was the requirement of at least A1 level of German knowledge for family reunifications, that had to be acquired prior to the arrival into the country. ⁴

Even though these policies with a focus on language learning can have an empowering role for the migrants, they were introduced under the discourse of a very anti-immigrant far-right party – FPÖ with the main scope of enhancing, the already strict, immigration policy.

The integration process in Austria is mostly unilateral directed towards the immigrants and not a two ways process involving also the local population. As we will present more further in the report, these policies and anti-immigrant discourses had a heavy influence on the way the local population perceives foreigners and migrants.

Further on we will focus more on language acquisition, as well cultural, social and economic integration and other good practices that facilitated the integration of migrants and refugees, mostly organized at regional or local level.

German language acquisition

The acquisition of German language in Austria is very important for all the migrants, as most of the jobs require at least a minimum level – A2/B1. At the same time, the local language is very important for social and economical participation, as well as for further education. For the refugees with recognized status and persons granted subsidiary protection is especially important, as it is mentioned in the "Integration Declaration" that they must sign when receiving the status. They must

⁴ Mourão Permoser, Julia & Rosenberger, Sieglinde. (2012). Integration Policy in Austria. p. 47

acquire at least A2 language level and non-compliance can lead to social support cuts and sanctions.⁵ Though language differences and level of education are not taking in consideration, which are two important factors when trying to acquire a new language in a foreign country.

The language plays an important role in the integration process, especially in Austria, where the locals are very proud of their language and their different dialects and finding a better job without speaking it, is close to impossible.

Depending on the country of origin and education level, migrants are starting to learn the language by themselves or search for local organizations and institutions offering the courses. The Austrian Integration Fund and AMS (Employment office) offer different integration courses and language courses for migrants and refugees or direct them towards language schools, organizations or special programs.

The Austrian Integration Fund is also the institution that organizes the official German tests.

In the Vienna, the local state is offering vouchers for German courses for migrants under specific circumstances like family reunification members.

Though going for German courses and passing the tests, doesn't totally help with the social participation and integration as Austria has different dialects that people use daily and can be quite different than the official language. Many migrants are learning the dialect language from work or spending time with the local communities, but it is double work when it comes to passing a test in the official language.

At the same time, very few institutions are offering language courses in the dialect languages and only focusing on the local one.

Many local organizations and volunteers are offering language courses where migrants can go for free and also meet new people with whom they can practice the language.

Another important aspect on language acquisition is feeling confident and practicing the language in the daily life. For this, many migrants are joining local associations, neighborhood community centers for their weekly activities such as boardgames nights, conversation hours etc, as well as volunteering in different events and festivals where they have the chance to use and improve their German, as well as making friends.

⁵ Caritas Austria. Common Home. Migration and development in Austria. p.34,
https://www.caritas.at/fileadmin/storage/global/caritas-at/Hilfe-Angebote/Migration-Flucht/MIND_Common_Home_Studie_Austria.pdf

Integration strategy of migrant women in Austria

According to the report⁶ from 2020 realized by Austrian Integration Fund, around 902,100 women born abroad were living in Austria at the beginning of 2020, making up a fifth (19.9%) of the total female population. 48.7% of women born abroad came from EU/EFTA countries, 51.3% were born in third countries. Most of the women were born in Germany, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Serbia and Romania.

Although migrant women bring a range of skills, they are often mainly confined to service jobs in less regulated sectors such as cleaning, catering, hospitality, home and social care. All of these jobs are unregistered, or if they are, they offer migrant women worse working conditions than to native-born women: short-term contracts without the possibility of extension, low wages, long hours, and physically demanding jobs. Unemployment and underemployment are more widespread among migrant women than among native women.

For several years, the integration of migrant women was a priority for the Austrian integration policy as women are seen as “driving forces of integration”. This is reflected in the current Government Programme, which provides a number of specific measures for migrant women. “In the programme, migrant women are understood to be “multipliers” of integration (Federal Chancellery, 2020a:146) and driving forces in education for the entire family. They are also seen as playing an important intermediary role in passing on values and thus as heavily influencing how their children’s integration unfolds.”⁷

One special integration policy is focusing on achieving gender equality and equal rights for women and men. For a proper integration of women, there should be a focus on empowering and encouraging migrant women to participate into the social and economical life of the hosting country. These measures are important also for preventing traditional family practices to make the integration more difficult.

At the same time, it is mentioned in the integration policy papers that the topics of self-determination, gender mainstreaming and equal treatment of women should be tackled in school and in intercultural dialogue. Another focus is the language training, the policy aims for more language courses specifically addressed to women and including childcare options either in house courses with childcare or parent-child courses. This aspect is very important as many times the

⁶ Österreichischer Integrationsfonds (2020). *Frauen & Integration ZAHLEN, DATEN UND FAKTEN 2020*, 8-9, https://www.integrationsfonds.at/fileadmin/user_upload/OEIF_StatBro_Frauen_2020_WEB.pdf

⁷ Saskia Heilemann. Integration of Migrant Women in Austria. Policies and Measures p. 20, <https://www.emn.at/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/emn-study-2022-integration-of-migrant-women-in-austria.pdf>

migrant women can not take part in the German language courses or other type of courses because of the lack of childcare options.

The health literacy is also mentioned, and the focus is on improving the information and advice being offered on psychosocial and sexual health in particular, and to strengthen diversity skills in the health-care system and achieve better access for migrant women.

Another sensitive topic that is being address in the integration policy documents is domestic violence and the protection of women from violence shaped by familial, social, ideological, cultural or religious factors by implementing and developing different initiatives and measures and including this subject in the educational curriculum.

Table 1: Mentions of “migrant women” as target group in central documents for nationwide integration policy according to specific areas

Area	Government Programme 2020–2024	National Action Plan on Integration	50 Action Points: A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria	Action Plan for Women's Health	Mentions of “migrant women”
Labour market	X				Strengthen labour market participation by women with a migrant background by providing them with better individual support as they enter the labour market and support in the scope of mentoring programmes (Federal Chancellery, 2020a:146).
Entrepreneurship					–
Education and vocational training	X	X			Family-friendly initial and continuing training opportunities (Federal Chancellery, 2020a:146). Educational and career guidance for girls and women in order to open up educational and occupational prospects. And support to help girls and women attain occupational qualifications (Federal Chancellery, n.d.b:23).

Language training	X	X	X		<p>Increased range of German and literacy courses with childcare options (Federal Chancellery, 2020a:146).</p> <p>Further develop the range of language courses for women in order to increase their opportunities for education and participation. Support women with a higher educational attainment level in accordance with their potential. Range of programmes for parents, including expansion of parent-child courses (Federal Chancellery, n.d.b:14–15).</p> <p>Better coordination between available language courses for parents, especially mothers, and the mandatory year of kindergarten, e.g. by offering German courses in the proximity of kindergartens (Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, 2015:9)</p>
Housing					–
Health	X	X		X	<p>Strengthen the diversity skills in the health system and the health literacy of women, in particular raise awareness around women's health, including psychological health, flight traumas or sexualized violence (Federal Chancellery, 2020a:146).</p> <p>Improve the information and counselling being offered, especially psychosocial counselling, sex education, the health of children and women, and family planning – particularly for women with a migrant background (Federal Chancellery, n.d.b:32)</p> <p>Increase equal health opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged women with a migrant background. And design accessible institutions and services in the health and social sector (Federal Ministry of Labour; Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection, 2018:37–38).</p>
Civic integration	X	X			<p>Initiatives to empower women in the scope of basic welfare support in the asylum process (Federal Chancellery, 2020a:142).</p> <p>Empower girls and women and support their self-realization, for example by enacting a headscarf ban for schoolgirls up to age 14 (Federal Chancellery, 2020a:148).</p> <p>Anchor gender mainstreaming and gender equality of women and men more firmly in the curricula (Federal Chancellery, n.d.b:27).</p> <p>Make the status of women a topic in intercultural dialogue (Federal Chancellery, n.d.b:35).</p>

General integration policies

The current integration plan that is followed in the Austria was adopted in 2010 by the Federal Government. The National Action Plan for integration is divided in the following key action fields.

1. Language and Education
2. Work and Employment
3. Rule of Law and Values
4. Health and Social Issues
5. Intercultural Dialogue
6. Sports and Recreation
7. Living and the regional Dimension of Integration

The field "Language and Education" is considered one of the most important as the German language skills are seen as the basis for a successful integration into the Austrian society. The language is not only necessary for managing the everyday life, but also for work purposes, as most of the jobs in Austria require at least a minimum level of German. At the same time, the language is necessary for a better education and better perspective on the labour market.

A migrant is successfully integrated in Austria when:

- He/she has a good command of German and could use it for work life, training, further education, as well as communicating with the public institutions
- Is economically self-sufficient
- Understands and follows the Austrian and European legal order and value systems⁸

Good practices

Migrants contribute to the community life in different ways such as neighbours, club members or volunteers. "The most recent report on voluntary commitment in Austria reveals that people with migratory background are represented in every sector within formalised voluntary work, starting from sports to environment protection and animal welfare; however, they are less often engaged in formalised settings than Austrians."⁹ However they often engage in formalized refugee aid, voluntary educational work within the social and health sector, as well as in the religious sector.

⁸ Federal Ministry Republic of Austria. Living and working in Austria. - <https://www.migration.gv.at/en/living-and-working-in-austria/language/language-learning/> (accessed at 12.07.2022)

⁹ Caritas Austria. Common Home. Migration and development in Austria. p.34, https://www.caritas.at/fileadmin/storage/global/caritas-at/Hilfe-Angebote/Migration-Flucht/MIND_Common_Home_Studie_Austria.pdf

1. NACHBARINNEN in Wien

Systematic initiative started in 2012 aiming to improve civic integration. The project aims toward self-empowerment and offers different services including support for families, home visits, advice in mother-tongue, accompaniment on official visits, educational breakfasts, parent roundtable discussions and learning assistance for children.

The main focus of the project is integrating socially isolated migrant families into society and enabling them to have a better access to welfare, health care and education systems. In 2013, the first training course took place and prepared women as social assistants(neighbours). In order to reach migrant women as effectively as possible, women who speak the same language and have the same cultural background are trained as social assistants. They will go to visit other women at home and inform them about different activities and services, as well as motivate them to participate in existing integration programmes. At the same time, they will approach women in the parks, outside kindergartens or in other public spaces, but also communities, schools and other institutions refer people to the project.

The NACHBARINNEN in Wien association implements the project. One third of the funding currently comes from public funds from the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, the City of Vienna Municipal Department for Integration and Diversity (MA 17) and from the Public Employment Service. Two thirds of the total budget comes from donations, private sponsors and income from the Sewing Workshop. In addition, funding is provided by the City of Vienna Child and Youth Welfare Service (MA 11).

The impact of the project was measured by Vienna University of Economics and Business and they found the project as successful and extremely effective. "In addition to supporting women with a migrant background on their path to empowerment, there was also evidence of impacts on the entire family and other stakeholders, including staff, learning assistants, donors, lecturers and public bodies" (Sprajcer et al., 2014:54). During the evaluation was also pointed out the that knowledge of the cultural context, living environments and everyday problems enables the "neighbours" to build trust and create a closer relationship that is beneficial on the long term.

2. KAMA¹⁰ – courses offered by asylum seekers, migrants and refugees

Since 2007, Kama facilitated in Vienna courses and events led by asylum seekers, migrants and refugees with the main purpose of sharing their knowledge and skills with the locals and whomever interested. The courses and events are donation based and the money gathered are going to the person that is leading the workshops.

The courses differ from languages to creative and music workshops to culinary. They happen weekly or only on a specific date. All the information is posted on a online calendar and the people interested are asked to subscribe before attending a workshop in order to keep the group small and easy to work with.

The spaces used for the workshops are coffee places or seminar rooms, spaces where they could organize dance classes or sports. They are always searching for a partnership so they could get the space for free.

The project works on a voluntary basis supported by donations and sponsorships and extended to other cities around Austria like Graz, Innsbruck and Linz.

3. Civil Society Network (Netzwerk Zivilgesellschaft)¹¹

The civil society network was created to support visibility, networking opportunities, learning from each other and collaboration.

The active society is an important and growing area for individual participation in society. A diverse civil society promotes democracy and solidarity.

Vision: To develop the positive forces that promote community, working together, get to know each other and become more visible. To encourages more and more people to participate in the community.

Goal: The Civil Society Network aims to provide a framework for all initiatives active in Vienna that contribute to good to live together, a framework that makes it possible to get to know each other and work together to and to work together in order to achieve a stronger common impact.

¹⁰ <https://www.kama.or.at/>

¹¹ <https://zivilgesellschaft.wien/netzwerk>

How it works: The Civil Society Network organizes meetings in which people with initiatives get to know each other and thus gain an overview of the variety of civil society engagement in Vienna. If there is a need or interest, people can cooperate and share experiences, information or resources. At the same time, the initiatives are posted online, so people that find it interesting and want to cooperate can join the initiative and they are easier to find by the target groups, as well.

The Civil Society Network supports initiatives that:

- do something concrete for other people in Vienna
- are active on a voluntary basis
- promote the good coexistence of all people in Vienna
- are sustainably committed to their cause

Field research findings

All the respondents of the survey agreed to participate and understood the scope of it. More than half of the respondents identified themselves with the target group. Almost 53% of them think they don't have access to social and civic participation and are not aware of any local initiatives. At the same time, most of them, 35%, think the local NGOs are responsible for such initiatives and 23% believe that the governmental organizations are responsible.

A small percentage is aware of local initiatives and mentioned a few examples as volunteering with the firefighters, red cross, Erasmus programs.

The main obstacles to promote good initiatives are lack of accessibility due to lack of language skills in the local language, as well as motivation and training programs. The same reasons appear also on the top list for the access to information.

The information about different initiatives is perceived to be spread mostly by word of mouth and social media, which also brings back the language barrier factor. The target group is not able to inform itself properly due to the lack of language skills or poor language skills, as well as low interaction with the local population.

When talking about the responsibility of raising awareness about the lack of participations, the highest number of respondents answered that they would promote the organizations funded programs, while just a small percentage mentioned funding new initiatives.

The respondents of the target group were mostly men, 64% between 18-25 years old, while the women respondents were in a very small number.

When taking in consideration the respondents that were not part of the target group, most of them represented NGOs 61% or volunteering organizations 15%. Most of them believe that the target

group has access to social and civic participation programs and opportunities, which shows a big difference in perception with the target group. At the same time, most of them agree that these initiatives they are not specially targeted towards the target group and. If they exist, they are not accessible because they are mostly in big cities and are just in German. At the same time, the respondents mentioned that there are different volunteering programs or workshops in the local NGOs and youth centers, but the target group is not aware of them. One cause can be the lack of direct contact between the youth workers and members of civil initiatives and target group, as well as poor promotion directly towards the target group.

Most of the promotion of the initiatives is done on social media and a small percentage by word of mouth, which would actually be the best way to reach the target group.

When asked about raising awareness about the lack of participation among the target group, most of the respondents answered that they would promote the organizations funded programs, around 38%, while 23% would change the existing programs to be more accessible to the target group, as well as push for stronger governmental actions.

This category of respondents was mostly represented by women between 26-45 years old actively participating in the democratic society.

From the respondents of our field research, we could see there is a gap between the people that work in NGOs and the target group and the way one group is perceiving the other which is also visible in the transfer of information and promotion of local initiatives.

Conclusions and Recommendations

According to MIPEX, Austria's policies create more obstacles than opportunities for the integration of non-EU migrant population into the Austrian society.¹²

Austria's approach is classified by MIPEX as "temporary integration" because non-European migrants benefit from basic rights and support for equal opportunities, but they do not receive support and security for permanent settling. This approach is also encouraging the Austrian population to see immigrants as foreigners and not as equals.

Austria's MIPEX score is lower than the European average, scoring 46 from 100 points and being the most insecure country from all 56 MIPEX countries alongside Switzerland and Denmark.

¹² Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020 , Austria. <https://www.mipex.eu/austria> , accessed at 24.06.2022

From the 8 points analyzed by MIPEX (Labour market mobility, Family reunification, Education, Health, Political participation, Permanent residence, Access to nationality, Anti-discrimination) the most favorable scored the Health sector, where immigrants have the same conditions as the natives as long as they have their status recognized and have the national health insurance. At the same time, the health information is presented in various migrant languages and on different formats, making it accessible across the big majority of migrant population, but intercultural mediators are too few. On the other side, the fields that scored the lowest are Political Participation and Access to nationality. Migrants are not allowed to vote, and immigrant associations have very low support. Immigrants' eligibility for Austrian citizenship is still very unfavorable because of very strict naturalisation requirements such as language, good character, income and costs, as well as Austria not allowing double citizenship.

Policy Recommendations from Beratungszentrum für Migranten und Migrantinnen

- Increase work placements, bridging courses and effective diversity strategies for both high- and low-educated
- Increase the family reunion rate based on impact evaluation of the high-income requirement, 21-year age limit and a review of the best ways to support learning German after reunification in AT
- Allow dual nationality for all citizens
- Guarantee AT citizenship for all 2nd generation at or after birth
- Increase uptake of naturalisation and permanent residence based on impact evaluation of the income and language requirements
- Open equal access to public sector jobs and business licenses for non-EU citizens

