Assessing the Social Impact of Immigration in Europe
Assessing the Social Impact of Immigration in Europe
Renegotiating Remoteness

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Edward Elgar
Cheltenham, UK • Northampton, MA, USA
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Acknowledgements

What follows in this volume is essentially the development of collaborative research stemming from the project ‘Migration Impact Assessment to Enhance Integration and Local Development in European Rural and Mountain Areas’ (MATILDE), which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 870831. Coordinated by the Karelian Institute of the University of Eastern Finland, this international research consortium of 25 partner institutions has sought to improve knowledge on the social and economic impacts of migration processes towards European rural and mountain areas. All the chapters in this volume derive from the research conducted within the MATILDE project.

When we embarked on the path of writing and editing this volume, many great people supported us along the way. We are grateful to colleagues, whose comments, expertise, time and efforts were crucial for finishing this work. We wish to thank Senior Commissioning Editor Katy Crossan from Edward Elgar Publishing for her attention, encouragement and exceptionally smooth collaboration throughout the book production process and the three anonymous reviewers for their feedback and constructive comments on our original book proposal. Our language editor, Rupert Moreton, deserves particular praise for his untiring and diligent editing. All remaining omissions are our own. Finally, we wish to thank the MATILDE project’s managerial assistant, Alicja Fajfer, for her valuable all-around help.

The Editors

The MATILDE project leading to this publication has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 870831.
### Abbreviations

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<td>AF</td>
<td>Arbetsförmedlingen [Swedish Public Employment Service]</td>
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<td>AMIF</td>
<td>Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund</td>
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<td>AMPAS</td>
<td>Asociaciones de Madres y Padres de Alumnos [Association of Parents of Students]</td>
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<tr>
<td>BFA</td>
<td>Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum</td>
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<td>BGN</td>
<td>Bulgarian lev</td>
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<td>BMEL</td>
<td>Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Germany</td>
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<td>CC.OO.</td>
<td>Comisiones Obreras [de Aragón]</td>
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<td>CCAA</td>
<td>Comunidades Autonomas [Autonomous Communities], Spain</td>
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<td>CEAR</td>
<td>Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado [Spanish Commission for Refugees], Spain</td>
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<td>CESA</td>
<td>Consejo Económico y Social de Aragón [The Economic and Social Council of Aragon]</td>
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<td>CSN</td>
<td>The Swedish Board of Student Finance</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
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<td>EAPS</td>
<td>Economically active population survey</td>
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<td>EBPM</td>
<td>Evidence-based policy-making</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<td>ERG</td>
<td>Eğitim Reformu Girişimi [Turkish NGO]</td>
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<td>ESSN</td>
<td>Emergency Social Safety Net</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FEMP</td>
<td>Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias [Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces]</td>
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<td>FPO</td>
<td>Faith-based organizations</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross domestic product</td>
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<td>GHIS</td>
<td>General Health Insurance Scheme</td>
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<td>I-NGOs</td>
<td>International NGOs</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>WKO</td>
<td>Wirtschaftskammer Österreich [The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber]</td>
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<tr>
<td>YTSB</td>
<td>Yüksek Teknoloji Sanayi Bölgesi [Hi-Tech Industrial Site near Karacabey]</td>
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1. On the potential of immigration for the remote areas of Europe: an introduction

Jussi P. Laine, Daniel Rauhut and Marika Gruber

REFRAMING MIGRATION

Migration to Europe tends to be fundamentally misconstrued and misrepresented, both in numbers and in relation to its core dynamics and asserted implications for European economies and societies (Ardittis 2017; Laine 2020a; Laine, Moyo and Nshimbi 2020). European public opinion significantly overestimates the number of non-EU immigrants: most of the 19 European Union (EU) Member States’ citizens perceive the proportion of immigrants to be at least twice the actual figure (Eurobarometer 469). As the statistics clearly indicate, migration – both regular and irregular – is a global rather than a European phenomenon. While Europe has been and increasingly continues to be a popular migrant destination the numbers appear less momentous in a global assessment. This becomes especially evident when refugees are considered, 83 per cent of whom are hosted in low- and middle-income countries, and 72 per cent in their respective neighbouring countries (UNHCR 2021). Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees, at 3.8 million people, significantly outnumbering all the EU countries. Germany currently tops the EU ranking as the largest refugee-hosting country, with 1.3 million refugees. When considering refugees as a proportion of the total population, Sweden’s enduring and generous refugee policy tops the EU ranking at 2.6 per cent, far behind Lebanon (19.8 per cent) and Jordan (10.4 per cent). Russia’s unprovoked aggression against Ukraine has forced millions to flee their homes, leading to major displacement crises, but note this is beyond this book’s scope because the data collection was largely concluded before the war’s onset.

Overall global migration is grossly exaggerated. The international migrant total currently comprises 3.6 per cent of the global population (IOM 2022; UN DESA 2022). The vast majority of the global population – around 96.4
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per cent – therefore live in the country in which they were born. Compared to 2.4 per cent in 1960 and 2.8 per cent in 2000, the overall estimated number of international migrants has indisputably increased in recent decades, but only moderately (Laine, forthcoming). Indeed, by far the most striking increase has been in the number of those forcibly displaced by war, persecution, and other violence: more than 100 million people are forcibly displaced within or across borders (UNHCR 2021). The share of migrants in the EU climbed from 2.8 per cent in 1960 to 12.2 per cent in 2020, yet much of this can be explained by increased intraregional mobility, which has for decades constituted one of the key cornerstones of European integration. According to Eurostat and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) data, 5.1 per cent (23 million people) of the 447.3 million people living in the EU were non-EU citizens in 2020, and almost 8.3 per cent (37 million people) of all EU inhabitants were born outside the EU. However, there are considerable differences between the Member States, although all their shares are remarkably lower than in most high-income countries. The share of third-country nationals (TCNs) in the EU ten years ago was 4.6 per cent (20.2 million people). The growth here can be considered quite modest – perhaps even too modest – as the immigration rate is no longer enough to balance out the negative natural population demographic caused by low birth rates and ageing populations (Laine, forthcoming). The EU population’s natural change remained positive in 2011 but has since been negative. The subsequent total change remained positive due to net migration until 2020, when it also took a negative turn because of reduced immigration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Migration is an inevitable part of development and transition. Migrants can be agents of development, contribute to economic growth, sustain jobs, and improve rural livelihoods. Exploring local partnerships in rural areas, in turn, is a core element in the development and implementation of inclusion and integration policy. Given rural areas’ critical importance for the EU’s transition to an environmentally sustainable society and to food security, migrants in rural areas deserve special attention when designing policies, practices, and strategies to promote stronger, connected, resilient, and prosperous rural areas and communities amidst broad social and economic changes such as globalization and urbanization. The inclusion and integration of migrants and refugees in rural areas has gained strong political support through the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (European Commission 2020) and the EU’s Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (European Commission 2021). While the former focuses on enhancing migrant participation, ensuring inclusion for all, mainstreaming gender, and emphasizing the need for long-term integration, the latter has created new momentum for rural areas by considering their role beyond agriculture and giving rural citizens more agency in the green, digital, and demographic transitions. Orderly, safe, and regular migration of people
on the potential of immigration for the remote areas of Europe underpins the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015).

Rural areas represent 83 per cent of the total EU area. According to World Bank statistics the European Union’s rural population’s share has decreased consistently, even during the COVID-19 era, from 41 per cent in 1960 to 21 per cent in 2021. The only notable exception at the country level is Austria, where the share of the rural population increased from 35 per cent in 1981 to 43 per cent in 2012, before beginning to decrease slowly (to 41 per cent in 2021). The Eurostat statistics show that rural and remote areas have the lowest shares of the EU’s population in age groups below 50, the percentage of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion is higher in rural areas, and the average road distance to essential services is considerably longer than in urban areas. The EU employment rate is higher in rural areas than in cities, and the gender employment gap is wider. The education gap between rural areas and cities has only widened in recent years. The share of rural residents with at least basic digital skills is considerably lower than for city residents. The average GDP per capita in rural regions hovers around three quarters of the EU average (European Commission 2022; cf. Bock and Krzysztofowicz 2021).

While these numbers are telling and can clarify the scope, dynamics, and spatiality of migration, alone they say little of its various implications and impacts. Migration – and it associated commonplace fears – has effectively been politicized (Czaika and de Haas 2017, 894; Laine 2020a, 93). Especially since the 2015/2016 peak in refugee arrivals in Europe, immigration has gained momentum in both political and public debate and provoked both mounting interest in and concern about migration and its broader societal impacts. The failure to find an agreement on the distribution of asylum seekers (Mudde 2016) has given rise to an unprecedented and continuing political crisis at the EU level. The complexity of the situation itself has created a demand for simplistic explanations. Common misperceptions regarding the impact of immigration have led to political polarization in EU Member States and the rise of populist politics across Europe (Inglehart and Norris 2016; Betz 2018; Laine 2020b; Gozgor 2022).

Immigration has become an issue that sharply divides today’s European and national political arenas. Europe has not only become increasingly divided into various national agendas, but the ‘nations’ – to the extent they even exist – have also become increasingly torn (Laine 2020b). With significant variations across and within countries attention tends to focus on how to limit migration’s impact rather than on constructing governance to untap its development potential and consider immigrants as resources in destination countries and regions. It is easily forgotten in the current context that migration has been considered normal for most of history; people on the move have only recently been depicted as a major challenge (Laine 2022). It is time to reverse this perception.
and – as Shah (2020) writes – turn migration from a perceived crisis into the solution for manifold socioecological changes. As Mbembe (2019) puts it, human mobility is normal; its constructive governance is the challenge.

In the broad debate on migration, rational assessments have been overshadowed by emotional outbursts and narrow perspectives. Migration has increasingly been addressed as a challenge if not a threat to the very body of our national societies (Laine 2020b; 2021). This is fuelled by sensationalist media images and narratives, as well as alarmist and opportunistic right-wing politicians seeking to exploit the purported immigrant invasion, which is assumed to consist predominantly of those who are irregular looming at the gates of Europe and awaiting the first opportunity to cross. While we may be conditioned to think of the world as a mosaic of sovereign states, each possessing its own distinct and bordered portion of the Earth’s surface (Diener and Hagen 2023, 1), people do not live in containers (Zoomers 2022, 121). Considering people to be incontestably from certain territorially bound places and origins is far from unproblematic in today’s mobile world (Laine 2021).

WHAT IS SOCIAL IMPACT, AND WHY ASSESS IT?

In following the aims of the MATILDE project funded by the EU Horizon 2020 program and focusing on migration’s impact on the local development of rural and mountain regions, our aim is to explore these negative tendencies by examining the social impacts of migration on European rural and remote regions, many of which have witnessed a marked demographic decline and neglect of public services, with manifold consequences. In what follows we seek to introduce these regions’ perspectives to the EU migration debate and identify the key challenges and potential of innovation, redistribution, urban–rural linkages, and the promotion of socially inclusive and territorially balanced growth. This book provides an innovative assessment of the social impact of immigration to Europe, thus seeking to promote a change in the perception of migration and related policies and practices. Particular attention is paid to third-country nationals (TCNs) in Europe’s rural and remote regions.

The frame of the book considers the spaces in which TCNs settle as both the input and output of a process of collective production of places, viewing TCNs as an active element in generative processes conducive to the redefinition and renegotiation of the social space. The chapters that follow especially emphasize migrants’ agency by considering both their characteristics (legal status, education level, health, family situation, gender, and age) and the role and functions of migrant networks and organizations. Relations and networks are seen as potential pull factors towards non-urban areas with limited public services and scarce mobility opportunities, working in the sense of bypassing the urban as the first place of arrival. These networks carry and diffuse a wide
On the potential of immigration for the remote areas of Europe

array of information and assistance, such as information on employment prospects and labour force demands in various destination countries, linkages to specific employment opportunities and accommodation, as well as feedback mechanisms about the entire migration experience (Bahna 2013; Docquier, Peri and Ruyssen 2014). The existence of migrant networks has been found to significantly lower the direct, opportunity, and psychological cost of international migration for prospective migrants (Massey and García España 1987; Epstein 2008), yet they often remain constrained and limited by other factors such as economic power or policy restrictiveness in the desired destination country (Collyer 2005).

The book pays special attention to examining how the peculiar traits of the rural and remote context interact with TCNs’ integration paths and impact. The demographic trends and socioeconomic dynamics of a specific region and its migration patterns affect policy responses and societal attitudes to TCNs, their opportunities, and perceptions of them. These in turn depend largely on different spatial characteristics within the same country: while urban contexts tend in any case to receive migration flows of a different nature (internal, forced, economic), rural and mountain areas are in many cases affected by phenomena such as depopulation dynamics, labour force shrinkage, and exposure to the increasing natural hazards resulting from climate change. The interaction between these characteristics and the processes of TCNs’ integration and settlement in rural and mountain areas has been largely ignored thus far, and this book aims to contribute to plugging this gap. It formulates empirically grounded recommendations and constructs strategies and solutions to improve the local governance of migration in light of the peculiar needs and resources of rural and remote regions, while considering them as potential new international migration destinations with specific needs that must be better understood in order to be fulfilled.

Territorial diversity and the diverse arrays of the components (i.e. human, social, institutional, natural/physical, and economic) and various drivers/pressures affecting it often result in unbalanced development, which needs to be addressed to unlock growth potential and boost sustainable transformations. An analysis of new and emerging drivers of inequality, including those created by the new socioeconomic and spatial contexts associated with the impacts of COVID-19 and/or climate change, is becoming crucial. There is a substantial lack of knowledge in migration studies that focus mostly on urban regions regarding the impact and development potential international migration brings to rural and remote regions. While contemporary migration flows are largely the result of both economic opportunities in cities and push factors from rural areas (Adger et al. 2020), new forms of economic and cultural mobility are extending outside urban areas. Part of this phenomenon can also be seen as an effect of the dispersal policies targeting asylum seekers and refugees. In
addition to the established destinations, new migration destinations encompass marginal and rural communities, resulting in an entirely new set of opportunities and challenges for these areas (McAreavey 2017).

Around Europe, especially following the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015 and 2016, proportional schemes were adopted for relocating refugees, fuelled by researchers’ and policymakers’ growing interest in accommodating refugees in rural areas of Europe to tackle two problems simultaneously: the large influx of refugees into Europe, predominantly into cities already facing significant housing stock pressure; and the population decline in shrinking rural areas, accompanied by high vacancy rates and a loss of services and employment that poses several challenges for these thinning communities (Bloem 2014; Gloersen et al. 2016; Copus et al. 2020). While previous studies have rightly highlighted the development potential of immigration for rural and other remote areas in Europe and the aptitude of smaller municipalities to welcome, mobilize, and include newcomers in their communities (Lucas 2007; Kasimis 2010; Kordel et al. 2018; Galera et al. 2018), migration cannot be seen as a magic bullet for the multiplicity of challenges these areas face. The plain expectation that an immigrant will simply occupy regions where ‘national natives’ are unwilling or unable to live seems both naive and prejudiced. Indeed, as was seen in the aftermath of the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015 and 2016, remote areas often appear uninviting to newcomers (Laine and Rauhut 2018) – largely for the same reason as they do for the existing local inhabitants. In the end, the interests of both the locals and newcomers are largely the same: both want a good and safe place to live in.

Yet migration can play a key role in demographic processes in rural and remote regions experiencing demographic decline (Kasimis, Papadopoulos and Pappas 2010; Scoones 2015; Scoones et al. 2018), though this seldom ensues spontaneously. Migration can play an important role for these regions by contributing to the revitalization of the local social and economic milieu, reducing territorial inequalities (Rodriguez-Pose 2018; Barca 2019), fueling social innovation, and fostering urban–rural interconnections. Migration increases diversity (i.e. socioeconomic, linguistic, cultural, religious) in rural and remote areas, creating opportunities for social innovation stemming from social rarefaction rather than agglomeration (Viazzo and Zanini 2014). It can be a crucial element to attain balanced territorial but also social and economic sustainable development goals and inclusive agriculture transformation, thus addressing the adverse drivers of migration. In seeking to escape the common challenge of overly relying on analytical frames built on dichotomous concepts such as the urban–rural, we underline the need to comprehend their interlinkage as a continuum, the patterns of which are again denied by migration. Here, migration patterns have been found to be correlated with demographic and housing changes, depending on the location on the continuum (Golding and
Winkler 2020), yet as the chapters that follow illustrate, an attempt to reduce demographic and economic imbalances in rural areas must also focus on immaterial assets, including human and cultural capital.

Across the continuum, national development patterns and shared institutions link rural and urban areas and different sectors of the economy: rural development is affected by the linkages between urban and rural areas; the extent of these linkages depends on the proximity and connectivity of rural areas to urban centres, the levels of migration and remittances, and the distribution of resources; and these linkages foster the diversification of economic activities in rural areas, which in turn can slow out-migration from them (United Nations 2021, 12). While migrants’ employment in rural and remote areas is often marked by the seasonality, geographic concentration, and ethnic niches of employment (see Nori and Farinella 2020; Triandafyllidou and Bartolini 2020), demographic change and the development of non-agricultural activities can also open new opportunities by increasing demand for services related to tourism, construction, the food industry, and distribution, for example (Bianchi et al. 2021).

The positive aspects of rural migration are not without negative consequences (cf. Grau and Aide 2007). Population overcrowding, redundancies, social unrest, xenophobia, earning disparities, and resource depletion and environmental pollution among other issues are also at stake when the migration impact is considered. To avoid the risk that increased human settlement will exert a negative impact on environmentally but also socioeconomically fragile areas, place-based (Neumark and Simpson 2015; Barca 2019; Fioretti, Proietti and Tintori 2021) but also people-centred policies and adequate governance measures hold great potential but require careful planning. Understanding the local context is crucial, for rural and remote areas do not present a homogenous category regarding levels of development, specific challenges, or opportunities. Yet place-based policies alone risk being less effective for people in the most vulnerable conditions (e.g. transit and undocumented migrants), so a combination of the place-based approach with people-based policies must be considered to strengthen social resilience and ensure no one and nowhere will be left behind (Golding and Winkler 2020). However, such policies face many challenges in persistently lagging regions. In regions that have become economically obsolete, Schaeffer (2021) contends, place-based policies cannot be justified by appealing to economic efficiency, yet it may be possible to justify them on social or political grounds, as is the case with the EU’s cohesion policies. He has found migration as an economic adjustment mechanism to have an ambiguous effect on lagging regions because the young and skilled are most likely to find success elsewhere, causing demographic disequilibria that reduce prospects of recovery (ibid.).
As a response to growing migrant numbers, several European countries have introduced dispersal policies or relocation bans to prevent concentrations of immigrants – asylum seekers and refugees – in large cities (Brell, Dustmann and Preston 2020). On several occasions the adopted policies have resulted in their relocation to relatively disadvantaged areas where accommodation is cheaper and more available, but labour demand is weaker (Fasani, Frattini and Minale 2018). While the policies have reduced pressure on urban centres, in rural and remote areas they have not been seen in a positive light as a means of counterbalancing negative demographic trends. Rather, as the conducted MATILDE research shows, these policies have often brought an additional burden for already marginalized and economically weak territories and highlighted the challenges associated with the failure to recognize immigrants’ educational and professional qualifications despite the apparent need for such workers, forcing many into precarious positions in the job market and to be content with jobs which ‘natives’ no longer want.

Migration has the potential to trigger development in the medium and long term, especially in remote areas, where it can operate as a counter-process to depopulation and economic decline, but the trajectory is neither automated nor self-evident. The following chapters show that migration can trigger the revitalization of abandoned spaces and generate new demand and stimuli for services of general interest. To favour balanced territorial development, spatial specificities must be considered in integration and migration governance. Meanwhile, the arrival and settling of TCNs should be acknowledged in development strategies for rural areas at the European, national, and sub-national levels. Evidence-based knowledge of migration outside urban areas is needed if migration is to be included in policies to promote balanced development planning. A further impetus for the book is the realization that the enduring COVID-19 pandemic contributes to a re-thematization of remoteness, not only in terms of social distancing but of perceptions and uses of space – at physical, symbolic, and normative levels, as a consequence of which also the relationship between ‘central places’ and ‘marginalized’ localities has become re-evaluated (Membretti, Dax and Machold 2022, 20). The spatial dimension and local contexts frame societal reproduction and change (Goffman 1974), shaping a continuous sociocultural negotiation between a variety of social structures and groups in territories and involving different groups of inhabitants: established and new; temporary and permanent; nationals and foreigners (Laine 2020b).

Instead of seeking to measure the efficiency of migration, as attempted elsewhere by Golding and Winkler (2020), for example, who pit net migration gains amidst proportionate levels of mobility, our focus is on migration’s social impact. As Gleersen, Mader and Ruoss (2016) point out, the aspiration to implement evidence-based policymaking (EBPM) has led to an increased
focus on quantitative indicators and targets defined at European level as instruments for designing policy measures and assessing their impact. This, they argue, has only constrained the debate and hindered the elaboration of a proactive European strategy for sustainable development in lagging regions. Siding with the European Commission’s (2015) acknowledgement, we see that a great deal of other information besides quantifiable causal effect is needed to assess impacts and provide findings useful for policymakers. Instead of only seeking to determine what makes a difference, we need to consider why, how, for whom, and in what conditions a set of interventions or factors produces intended or unintended effects. Such an approach does not for the most part produce a quantified estimate of the impact; it produces a narrative (ibid., 7), a discourse on change and innovation. This narrative is stronger when it is based on an understanding of issues, opportunities, challenges, and processes that are embedded in territories, as opposed to one inspired by centrally defined targets and objectives (Gløersen, Mader and Ruoss 2016).

Assessing the social impact of immigration – understood here as the changes to the social structure (demographic trends, social polarization or inclusion, civic participation, service provision, etc.) and the transformation of the ‘lifeworld’ (Habermas 1981) – the everyday world that we share with others – is much more than a step-by-step process for identifying the outcomes and fulfilment of certain legal requirements. It can be a mechanism for promoting social sustainability, as well as a tool for positive social change (Momtaz and Kabir 2018). Our assessment of social impact builds on Vanclay’s (2003) elaboration on the topic by including the processes of analysing, monitoring, and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programmes, plans, projects), as well as any social change processes they prompt. Such an approach allows us to target not only migrant integration but the broader social impact on the contextualized social realm and everyday life – how migration actually changes the life of people in specific territories.

A positive social impact of immigration is not the same as successful integration; nor can we assume causality between these concepts. Impact does not automatically necessitate integration; integration does not automatically imply impact (Laine 2022). This is more than just integration; it concerns a society’s functioning. A positive social impact of immigration on the host society is when a plus-sum game is achieved – for example, when immigrants and their integration add extra value to society that would not have been created without them. A negative social impact of immigration on the host society is when the opposite occurs: when a zero-sum game occurs – for example, when immigrants take resources from natives and vice versa. In both cases society and the integration of immigrants are worse off with immigrants and the integration of immigrants than without them.
Formal institutions (e.g. laws, regulations, public agencies, and organizations) facilitate immigrants’ settlement and integration, and these institutions interact with the policy process in the host country (Penninx 2003; Rauhut 2020). Laws and policies explicitly and implicitly categorize immigrants as ‘wanted’ and ‘unwanted’ or as ‘in need of integration’ and those who are ‘already integrated’ or ‘beyond integration’. Hence, the explicit integration policies not only shape an immigrant’s integration but also how policies explicitly and implicitly perceive, problematize, and categorize them (Mügge and van der Haar 2016). Various indicators have been defined to measure the level of integration (e.g. OECD/European Union 2015), with the aid of which immigrants tend to be categorized in relation to their success in achieving the predefined integration benchmarks set against a normative framework and the presumably agreed, often nationally defined, standards.

A glance at the prevailing public and political rhetoric suggests, first, that integration – understood as a sort of an ideal end state – is indeed a desirable, if unfeasible, goal, and that success in this regard is still often considered to depend more on the immigrant’s characteristics and actions than on those of the receiving society. ‘Society’ here usually refers to the ‘country’ into which immigrants are expected to incorporate themselves socioeconomically and to adapt to its sociocultural norms, values, and customs (Laine 2022, 60). Used as a yardstick, integration thus continues to be assessed predominantly with quantitative measures of migrants’ socioeconomic performance, commonly in contrast with the ‘non-migrant’, ‘native’ population (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2011; Alba and Foner 2016). Informal ties among immigrants, such as those related to religion and culture, can also determine the success of integration, and immigrant groups may become either an accepted part of society at the same level as comparable native groups, or they may isolate themselves or remain unrecognized and excluded (Penninx 2003; Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016). However, as long as being ‘native’ is understood as being indigenous to a territorially bound national polity, becoming a native thus defined becomes impossible: no matter how well integrated, an immigrant will never become ‘native’ and is thus bound to remain out of place.

Among migration-related social policies, which cover most social policy related areas, formal institutions dominate – for example, laws, regulations, public agencies, and organizations – while informal institutions – culture, attitudes, norms, or values – are scarce. The neglect of informal institutions in migration-related social policies results in misunderstandings and cultural clashes, which can be assumed to reduce immigration’s positive social impacts (Soholt et al. 2012; Tronstad 2015). Successful migration-related social policies therefore need to target all the involved actors, both immigrants and natives, as well as formal institutions (laws, rules, rights) and informal institutions (values, norms, attitudes). Lopsided migration policies for formal
On the potential of immigration for the remote areas of Europe

Institutions and immigrants may cause social polarization with so-called natives if they perceive that immigrants enjoy privileges they are not themselves granted. While immigrants and ‘natives’ are two potential target groups for migration-related social policies, these policies often target ‘immigrants’ in general or focus on refugees in particular. However, immigrants are far from a homogeneous group, meaning general approaches tend to obscure more than they illuminate. The same often applies to the host population, referred to here as ‘natives’. In using the word, underlining what and who constitute the host population and society to which a migrant is expected to aspire is seldom as clearcut as its usual depiction (Laine 2022). Central to the idea of a host population as a ‘norm’ is that it consists of a homogeneous group into which immigrants should integrate (Saharso 2019); that is, a nation state may be compelling but also tremendously biased, only accentuating the unfeasibility of the goal of integration by distorting the reality. The world characterized by migration and its impact can be better understood through transculturality and acknowledging the hybridization of cultures (Welsch 2001, 68).

Our aim has been to move towards an evidence-based evaluation model and use our case studies as benchmarks of good practice. The chapters in this book, all from their own complementary perspectives, argue collectively that targeted policies and migration governance play a key role in determining migrant impact. They show that more and better policy measures, including administrative and financial resources, are needed to improve migrant integration. However, as successful integration depends as much on the host society as it does on the migrant, the situation is that this is clearly easier said than done. The acknowledgement of the process’s two-wayness, though popular in both academic and policy circles because of its value in terms of checks and balances, does little to blur the social boundaries and binaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, those who belong and those who are perceived as not to belong (Laine 2022). Klarenbeek (2019) argues that the concept of two-way integration remains underdefined, and its mere endorsement is insufficient to avoid or resolve the problems associated with one-wayness. Highlighting two-wayness thus only reconfirms the existential separation between those who are considered to constitute ‘society’ by default and those who do not, and who therefore need to ‘integrate’ further (Schinkel 2018).

A careful balancing act is needed, for many well-intentioned programmes and policies favouring migrants and refugees have also been seen as downplaying or even ignoring the needs of the local communities (cf. Islam, Rohde and Huerta 2019) in which immigrants are expected to integrate, thus nurturing the risk of complicating rather than facilitating inclusion. However, there are several illuminating differences between the various investigated regions that in turn support the book’s key premise: place matters. Rural and remote areas
have much in common, but they are not the same. That is, while the challenges these areas face may be similar, the solutions need to be tailored to meet specific needs. While significant differences can be observed between the various countries, regions, and localities, our findings support the argument that Europe’s rural and remote regions offer great potential not only for the immigrants themselves and their respective new host societies but – above all – for something new to be created together and shared with others in the very process of redefining ‘we’. It is here, the book collectively suggests, the impact lies. Immigration to rural areas provides an opportunity to revitalize them by alleviating the common challenges confronting many of these regions: the weakening demography and lack of labour in the troubled areas of the local labour market and multiple side effects such as diminishing services, the erosion of public transport options, and the general waning of social and cultural capital. Participation on behalf of migrants seems a key enabler of social inclusion, while greater awareness of migrants’ stories and experiences among the host population is crucial to change local perceptions, often reserved by default, of immigrants, especially refugees.

Integration remains a pivotal concept – and above all a purpose-built administrative tool used to describe how immigrants find their way in a new country and become part of it; that is, to ease both the socioeconomic incorporation of immigrants into the host society and their sociocultural adaptation to it. While the various approaches to integration have proven benefits, as an analytical concept intended as descriptive and progressive it is often used rather normatively. Acknowledging that the integration perspective can be illuminating but also obscuring, there is a need to question the very assumptions upon which the concept rests (cf. Schinkel 2018), rather than taking them a priori. The book’s premise is that integration serves an important purpose, but in any assessment of integration, it is important to be specific about the purpose that is being worked towards with its aid. The assessments and applicability of terms vary greatly, depending on whether we understand integration as a merely administrative or bureaucratic ladder a migrant must climb to gain a certain status and rights in their new host society, or whether we are discussing broader wellbeing and coherence. Successful integration depends not only on the characteristics and abilities of the immigrant but on those of the receiving society. There can also be a social impact without integration.

**REJUVENATING REMOTENESS**

Europe’s rural and remote areas have significant value and potential, the capitalization of which indeed requires place-sensitive sustainable approaches and innovative governance strategies. These areas offer true opportunities of effective migrant inclusion through, inter alia, the provision of affordable
housing, fostering positive perception of migration (migrants as a tool for revitalization) and by ensuring inclusive and accessible host communities; yet the progress therein is not automatic. Rather than trying to implement a one-size-fits-all solution, the chapters that follow will highlight the need to assume a comprehensive approach to the issue by acknowledging both the diversity of the migrant populations and the specificities of the European rural and remote areas. At the same time, any attempt to rejuvenate remoteness must also acknowledge the impediments that remain in play for the impact of immigration to be fully grasped. Reduced public infrastructure and services (especially if migrants have specific needs), labour market constrains, the lack of migrant networks, challenges to mobility, and the diversity of migrant profiles are among the issues many regions are grappling with.

Furthermore, projecting remote areas simply in opposition to urban areas and depicting their interactions as a classic zero-sum game not only enforces the already much-critiqued binary–linear relationship of the early centre–periphery models and downplays the internal heterogeneity of these broadly defined categories, it ignores the increasingly apparent fact that globalization’s various manifestations are increasingly penetrating the remote parts of the world and profoundly affecting their use in complex ways – some of which can be seen as negative, some positive – but all making them distinctly less remote. As Kaps and Komlosy (2013) observe, adhering to the views of several post-colonial authors, the relationship between centres and peripheries has become increasingly entangled, with their interaction taking place in a multi-layered and overlapping network of polycentric relations between different spatial entities. As Zoomers argues correctly (2022, 22), discussions about how to stimulate local development usually become calls for action within fixed and confined settings, but globalization connects even distant people and places (see also Zoomers and van Westen 2011).

Few areas, be they remote or not, rely on local resources in today’s world; their livelihood opportunities are increasingly shaped by positionality, and how people are attached to and participate in trans-local and transnational networks (Zoomers 2022, 122). Instead of seeking to boost the development and standing of remote areas through independent local development and depicting them both in contrast with and automatically normatively better than development in urban or other non-remote areas, we advocate a shift of attention to the blurring of the rural–urban interface (understood as a continuum, not as a dichotomy) and multilocal development trajectories that focus on sustainable, green, inclusive, and integrated growth and development. To achieve this, remoteness and connectivity should not be considered as two independent opposite features but as constituting and conditioning each other and resulting in shifting socio-spatial constellations (Saxter and Andersson 2019, 147), the understanding of which is essential for considering the potential of even the
most isolated places. Forms of remoteness can emerge because of the privileging of certain connections, or vice versa (ibid.).

In their attempt to reframe remote places and remoteness as ‘a collective resource and value for Europe’ Membretti, Dax and Machold (2022, 17) take a somewhat normative stance against neoliberal globalization, projecting it as the sole source of exploitation and socio-spatial subordination of remote places to those considered to form the connected core. They argue that within such an economic and political process physical space tends to be treated as a mere support, an infrastructural platform for the development of productive and service activities that temporarily exploit geographical positions, only soon to abandon them and move to other locations more profitable in terms of labour costs, producing in so doing unstable territorial hierarchies, global competition between territories, and shifting alliances between global cities, while fuelling the marginalization of large portions of the planet, impoverishing local economies and reducing the capacity for local communities’ self-determination (ibid.). While their perspective has its merits, and some evidence for it can be found, the depiction scarcely addresses the complexities of the situation fully or impartially. Much ambiguity surrounds the causal pathways and dynamics that mediate and determine the impact of remote places’ global connection, as there are limitations to our current knowledge and weaknesses in our methodological approaches and research practices as solutions to the perceived challenges.

Seeking to rejuvenate the remote areas and draw attention to their untapped potential by pitting them against an oppressive all-powerful centre is counterproductive in terms of regional inequality and only fuels the emerging Europewide political divide between cities and the countryside. Rural areas are indeed ‘the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy’, as Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, acknowledged in preparing the ground for the long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas, a European Commission (2021) initiative to develop a common European vision for 2040, yet neither the areas in question nor the vision designed for them work in isolation. Rather, their success will depend on the broader frames of which they are a crucial part (‘a new push for European Democracy’, the digital transition, the European Green Deal, the recovery plan for Europe). In appreciating the role of rural and remote regions in building Europe’s future, in particular as anticipated by the European Vision for Rural Areas, it must be acknowledged that several challenges also hinder their potential for sustainable cohesive development.

For example, a recent new study reveals that people in the more rural parts of Europe have the lowest levels of trust in their nation’s current political system, and the growth of political disenchantment in many non-metropolitan locations across Europe provides fertile soil for nationalist and populist parties and
In contrast with the classic class-based left–right cleavages scholars have recently explained – though inconsistently – the new divisions as stemming from education and cultural attitudes (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Piketty 2018; Kenny and Luca 2021). Whether the cleavage is seen as a result of pitting ‘materialism’ against ‘post-materialism’ (Inglehart 1997), tension between globalization’s ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ (Kriesi 2010, see also Membretti, Dax and Machold 2022), or the conflict of values between ‘liberals’ and ‘conservatives, authoritarians, and/or nationalists’ (De Vries 2018; Hooghe and Marks 2018), they all point to the increasing salience of geography in relation to this new attitudinal cleavage and growing political disagreements between cosmopolitan, highly educated, and socially progressive urbanites and nationalist and socially conservative residents of ‘hinterland’ areas (Kenny and Luca 2021, 567).

The findings of Kenny and Luca (2021) point to a place-sensitive conception of political disenchantment, undermining in doing so the overly generalized characterizations of identity-driven ‘rural consciousness’ or ‘left-behind’ disillusion (Cramer 2016; Harris and Charlton 2016). They identify a rather clear gradient in political attitudes and social values, positing that their correlation with various spatial scales and kinds of community – from metropolitan centres to remoter rural areas – demands a more detailed and contextual understanding of not only the geography of discontent (Rodríguez-Pose 2018; Dijkstra, Poelman and Rodríguez-Pose 2020) but also of disillusion (Kenny and Luca 2021, 578). As disenchantment increases in Europe’s hinterlands, democratic politics risks being eroded from within (ibid.), and the European population is becoming increasingly divided (Laine 2020b). People living in places which are stagnating or facing comparative economic decline, such as peripheral towns and rural places, tend to generate a growing sense of disaffection, anxiety, and resentment, driving citizens to adopt a more protective, ‘zero-sum, “us or them” frame of mind’ (Wilkinson 2018, 5; cf. Cramer 2016).

In seeking to renegotiate remoteness, we have been inspired by Saxer and Andersson’s (2019) anthropological take on remote areas, which they depict neither simply as vestiges of a former, less connected era nor as the side effects of uneven globalization that could be taken care of by reinforcing development efforts. Rather, in building on Ardener’s (2012) observation that remoteness is less a function of ‘topographical’ than of ‘topological’ space – that is, a structural relationship of social distancing, in which those inhabiting remote areas may come to identify with their home’s peculiar ‘far-flung-ness’ and its vulnerability to external forces – they see remoteness above all as a relational category. Remoteness is thus not a static condition but something actively made and remade. Remoteness, Harms et al. (2014, 362) argue, ‘is not so
much a place as a way of being’, and only by detaching the remote ‘from its geographical moorings’ can we also understand it as a sociological rather than simply a spatial concept. While remoteness cannot be ‘fixed in place’, we agree with Saxer and Andersson (2019) that such detachment ought not to equate with emptying the notion of remote of all geographical content. The political return of remoteness with its manifold faces, its active production in the name of development, conservation, heritage, and security, is an aspect of the world’s reorganization, in which local, national, regional, and global scales interact, with unpredictable consequences. As we traverse scales and sites to explore these interactions, we not only come to terms with the local realities ensuing from partial ‘removal’; we learn how centres of power may be rethought if we analytically situate the remote as somehow central to our ‘new world disorder’ (Saxer and Andersson 2019, 152) – that is, how remoteness (as a concept and as a material reality) is, if anything, becoming increasingly relevant and more prevalent in this globalized world (see Green and Laviolette 2019).

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The book’s content has been structured into two separate yet interconnected parts. Part I features concrete empirical evidence from the research conducted and seeks to illuminate migration’s social impact in the analysed case studies. The fieldwork in peripheral, remote, and mountainous regions on which this volume’s contributions rely elucidates challenges and problems experienced in these regions. The challenges and problems highlighted in the contributions cover issues such as housing, the labour market, and long-term social inclusion strategies, as well as aspects related to transnationalism and re/de/bordering. The contributions discuss the specificities of the regions but also usefully highlight more broadly relevant lessons learned, thus bringing added value through their contribution to the book’s collective argument. Housing is recurrently discussed in terms of social inclusion and immigrants’ integration but is also a prerequisite for staying. While the challenges in urban contexts are mostly related to shortages and segregation, peripheral, remote, and mountainous areas struggle with the scarce availability of rental apartments and overpriced accommodation during the preference for profitable second homes or high tourism intensity. The discussion in Chapter 2 on the housing policies for immigrants in Germany and Austria by Stefan Kordel, Tobias Weidinger, Ingrid Machold, and Marika Gruber concludes that housing policies differ considerably between regions, labour immigrants, and refugees regarding adequate housing, and that NGOs and private actors must ultimately support labour immigrants and refugees to obtain adequate housing in the analysed areas.
No less than housing, employment is a basic prerequisite for active participation in economic and social life. Chapter 3 discusses the demand and supply of different types of immigrant labour (labour immigrants/refugees, high- and low-skilled, etc.) in Austria and Spain. Marika Gruber, Kathrin Zupan, Nuria del Olmo-Vicén, and Raúl Lardiés-Bosque note that both countries struggle with a labour shortage in peripheral, remote, and mountainous areas. However, Austria lacks high-skilled labour; Spain lacks low-skilled labour. Despite these challenges, there are many irrationalities on the labour markets and in the legislation leading to the labour market exclusion of many immigrants. Temporary employment, mostly offered in low-paid unqualified jobs, and the tedious recognition paths of immigrants’ qualifications and job competition between natives and immigrants generate tension. A long-term, multi-stakeholder integration strategy is required. This is explicitly discussed in Chapter 4 by Ingrid Machold, Thomas Dax, and Lisa Bauchinger. Their premise is that integration processes are often blurred by the short-term orientation of local action and policy strategies. However, achieving immigrants’ successful integration in local community life requires sustained commitment from the local authorities and actors and the creation of meaningful perspectives for newcomers. Local actors usually highlight the assessment that inclusion and social mobility may be expected only for second-generation (or later) migrants. Such perspectives argue for priorities in practical efforts that lay the foundations for long-term integration. However, enhancing language acquisition and labour market integration will lead not only to social inclusion but also to the development of a sort of place attachment to the local community by immigrants, who strengthen their social ties to a specific community. However, long-term social inclusion strategies are required if this is to be achieved.

Many peripheral, remote, and mountainous areas have received unprecedented numbers of TCNs over the last ten years. This has resulted in a de-bordering process in many of these regions, leading to transnationalism and new influences. The border region in North Karelia between Finland and Russia has been transnational for the last three decades. The conclusion of Chapter 5 by Pirjo Pöllänen, Lauri Havukainen, and Olga Davydova-Minguet is that the everyday life of immigrants living in the border area is explicitly transnational through family and care relations, for example, when the everyday takes place on both sides of the border. In the case of the Russian-speaking immigrants in North Karelia border crossing becomes a crucial part of everyday life.

In Chapter 6 Anna Krasteva examines the dynamic processes of de/re/bordering of a mountain region on the borders of Bulgaria with Turkey and Greece. The findings suggest a validation and application of a new type of migration crisis and a reinvention of remoteness, borders, and bordering during three crises – post-communism, migration, and COVID-19. The aspects
of remoteness and its effect on integration is further discussed in Chapter 7, where Maria Luisa Caputo, Michele Bianchi, and Simone Baglioni contend that remoteness is a spatial concept implying ‘otherness’. This relationship between spatial and social dynamics has been widely explored in the urban space (e.g. ghettoization and segregation) but not in a ‘non-urban’ context. Remoteness is largely a physical and symbolic dimension, which is embodied in space and time and is experienced by the actors. Remoteness does affect the self-perceived identity of ‘islanders’ and ‘otherness’; in a situation in which immigrants only partly identify themselves as locals or not at all, their emotional attachment as ‘islanders’ to the remote landscapes of their everyday lives allows little anchorage of their identity to the islands.

The second part of the volume focuses on formal institutions such as laws and regulations, administrative structures, governance processes, policies, and actors involved in rural development and immigrants’ integration in peripheral, rural, and mountainous regions. The chapters here highlight that while the respective policies are often centrally planned, their implementation relies heavily on the local and regional level actors. Moreover, tangible challenges and policy problems of rural and mountainous regions, such as depopulation processes, labour shortages, social welfare services, and their (restricted) accessibility to immigrants, especially TCNs, are discussed. While most EU Member States have registered population growth in recent years, the opposite can be observed in many rural, mountainous, and peripheral regions facing an overall decline in population, especially among the young, and resulting low fertility rates (Aigner-Walder, Luger and Schomaker 2021).

Raúl Lardiés-Bosque and Nuria del Olmo-Vicén examine this phenomenon in Chapter 8, discussing the impact foreign immigration may have on the revitalization of Spain’s rural areas. They highlight various positive impacts immigrants have, including their contribution to the reduction of population decline, the expansion of education and other services, and their economic activities. However, the authors do not conceal the problems associated with immigration to these regions. Many of these problems can be found in the labour market.

Despite the anticipated positive effects of TCNs migrating to rural regions, many challenges remain. This does not only concern labour market integration issues: the challenges extend to various social policy fields. In their analysis of the rural regions in two Mediterranean countries, Turkey and Spain, Pınar Uyan Semerci, Fatma Yılmaz Elmas, Raúl Lardiés-Bosque, and Nuria del Olmo-Vicén (Chapter 9) focus on immigrants’ ability to access central social welfare services amidst centralized governance structures. They underline the importance of social welfare policies for immigrants’ integration but also point to the limitations of central governance structures and a labour market-based integration model. Competition between immigrants and the local population for social services can therefore be observed in the rural regions under scrutiny.
Although Turkey adheres to a centralized governance system, a local turn in integration activities is noticeable. In Chapter 10 Ayhan Kaya discusses the integration policies and practices targeted at Syrian migrants based on the Turkish example of the province of Bursa. He stresses the role of municipalities and local NGOs in the support of migrants, while emphasizing the challenges they face – for example, in limited budgets, uncertainties about what they are legally allowed to do, and a lack of central coordination. A shift of responsibilities for integration services from national to local governance levels and actors is also noted for Austria and Sweden. Based on the governance structures of immigrant integration in both countries, in Chapter 11 Marika Gruber and Daniel Rauhut identify an increased marketization of integration services and intertwined but simultaneously fragmented responsibilities. They point out that the New Public Management orientation of integration service provision has resulted in a complex multilevel governance which ultimately makes immigrant integration processes even more difficult. They conclude that the competition generated among private providers often ends in funding uncertainties for urgently required integration services.

People living in rural, mountainous, or peripheral regions often face special challenges associated with greater distances or reduced service provision. Special challenges arise when immigrants move to such areas and demand (welfare) services, but these are not (or no longer) available, because the state has withdrawn from these regions. In Chapter 12 Susanne Stenbacka and Tina Mathisen discuss, based on the example of the rural region of Dalarna in Sweden, the governance dilemma of state withdrawal, the aims of equal accessibility to social welfare services, and rural justice in the settlement and integration of refugees. They underline the role of rural regions as integration actors and analyse how the state withdrawal and lack of essential services, for example, the reduced Swedish Public Employment Service agencies in rural regions, affect social cohesion and immigrant integration, especially in participation in the labour market and education. In Chapter 13 Ulf Hansson, Deniz Akin, Zuzana Macuchova, and Per Olav Lund focus on labour market integration in rural regions of Sweden and Norway. Like the Spanish labour market-based integration model, both Nordic countries seek fast labour market integration of immigrants to facilitate their (financial) independence. However, migrants’ labour market integration in rural regions is not only complicated by their insufficient language skills and structural deficiencies in the recognition of formal and informal skills but by the structural features of rural and peripheral areas, such as dispersed settlement, that influence migrants’ integration into the labour market. In Chapter 14, the conclusion, the editors summarize the major findings and suggest ways forward to a better acknowledgement and use of the impact of immigration in Europe’s renegotiation of remoteness.
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NOTES

1. Rural population (% of total population), available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS.
2. The MATILDE project resulting in this publication received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 870831.

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PART I

Recognition, renegotiation, revitalisation
2. Appropriate housing in rural and mountain areas? Current structures and practices of access for immigrants – the case of Alpine regions in Austria and Germany

Stefan Kordel, Tobias Weidinger, Ingrid Machold and Marika Gruber

INTRODUCTION

For immigrants, and especially for both labour migrants and refugees, a physical dwelling signifies much more than four walls with a roof. Appropriate housing provides shelter, meets psychological needs such as safety and security, and is of vital importance for the settlement of every newcomer group. Access to housing and housing conditions are therefore commonly addressed as a key dimension of integration and inclusion (Ager and Strang 2008). Besides, housing is closely interlinked with other dimensions of integration and represents a prerequisite for access to employment, education and healthcare (Teixeira 2008; UNHCR 2013).

While a plethora of studies of asylum seeker and refugee housing has focused on forced immobilization and placement in camps (e.g. Darling 2009; Kreichauf 2018), immigrants’ participation in the local housing market has not thus far been at the core of scientific debate. This is despite the fact that they must cope with regional and local housing market structures, associate this with their needs and preferences, as well as their ability to access housing. Moreover, many case studies have focused on housing in urban areas in Europe, for example, in Austria (e.g. Aigner 2019), Germany (e.g. Adam et al. 2019), or Italy (e.g. Belloni 2016). However, most recently, rural areas have become destinations for asylum seekers – first, following dispersal policies (Proietti and Veneri 2021; Machold and Dax 2017) or residence rules that bind refugees to certain localities (e.g. Weidinger and Kordel 2020). Second, rural areas, especially small towns equipped with a minimum of basic infrastruc-
ture, have become destinations for onward mobilities (Weidinger and Kordel 2020). Third, labour migrants from EU member states and third countries, or third-country nationals (TCNs), arrive, especially in sectors suffering labour shortages (Kordel, Weidinger and Spenger 2022). Meanwhile, however, rural housing markets have increasingly become tense for broader groups in the population, and migrants and refugees in particular. This is especially the case in the rural Alps, where the housing question tends to be more complex due to the coexistence of temporary and permanent mobilities, for example, (second home) tourism and out-migration, as well as external investment and the subsequent exclusion of certain population groups. Besides, a lack of investment and abandoned housing and vacancies are obstacles to accessing rural housing.

This chapter aims to sketch immigrants’ housing situation in the Alpine regions of Vorarlberg and Carinthia in Austria and Bavaria in Germany, characterized by the housing market’s diverse structures. We start with an overview of the state of research on housing in rural and mountain areas with a focus on the role various forms of temporary and permanent mobilities play. We then present current developments for the Alps regarding structures and spatial patterns resulting from both the out-migration and in-migration and immigration of selected groups. We also focus on housing policies. We then present the dataset and methods applied and discuss the practices of newcomers’ access to housing and the role of (public) housing policies, using three case studies.

STATE OF RESEARCH: HOUSING IN RURAL AND MOUNTAIN AREAS AND THE ROLE OF VARIOUS FORMS OF TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT MOBILITIES

Rural housing is characterized by a variety of peculiarities such as property ownership, certain cultural attributes of rural living, and an underdeveloped or even completely absent social housing sector (Milbourne 2012). Following Gkartzios and Ziebarth (2016) – who identified key issues with regard to rural housing – counter-urban and international mobilities, amenity-driven development, economic restructuring, and greater racial and ethnic diversity are at the core. In recent decades relocations, termed residential mobilities, increased first, due to changing aspirations and needs that were also related to globalization, and second, in light of changing availabilities of transport and mobility and communication infrastructures. Milbourne and Kitchen (2014) pointed to a huge diversity of residential mobilities in rural areas, termed rural mobilities, encompassing ‘movements into, out of, within and through rural places; (...) linear flows between particular locations and more complex spatial patterns of movement’ (ibid., 385–386). The demand for housing has
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therefore further diversified to date, mostly due to the arrival of a variety
of immigrant groups and people who move through rural areas and are thus
temporarily fixed to rural places. Seasonal migrants with complex patterns of
presence and absence include second homeowners, retirement migrants, and
commuters. For the first two groups migration is not primarily economically
driven but consumption-led (amenity migration, Perlik 2006) or motivated by
an individual quest for a better life (lifestyle migration, Benson and O’Reilly
2016; Kordel and Weidinger 2019).

A second home in the countryside is deeply rooted in cultural traditions in
Scandinavian countries, for example (Müller 2011; Müller and Hoogendoorn
2013), but has also proliferated because of neoliberal developments – for
example, in the middle class in Spain. Accordingly, second homes have been
made accessible to wider populations (‘democratization of second homes’,
Díaz Orueta 2012) and ‘must be understood in the context of multi-residential
practices by families’ (ibid., 237). Thus, multilocal living arrangements
(Weichhart 2015) are not only practised for leisure purposes, but also result
from working-living arrangements spanning huge distances. While daily and
weekly commuting is commonly addressed as an established practice (Mehl
et al. 2023), seasonal and cyclical commuting over large distances and inter-
national borders – for example, by seasonal workers in agriculture – is part
of the kaleidoscope of rural housing. In terms of more permanent forms of
immigration and in-migration, employment, or family purposes, as well as the
provision of humanitarian protection, are most relevant in rural areas. Housing
demand is as diverse as the groups: while homeownership may be considered
for skilled workers, forced migrants request small rental apartments for single
people or large homes for big families (Weidinger and Kordel 2020).

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS WITH REGARD TO THE
HOUSING (MARKET) SITUATION IN THE ALPS

Different processes characterize current developments with regard to the
housing (market) situation in the Alps: (i) out-migration and the resulting
housing vacancies, mostly in peripheral areas; (ii) the immigration and
in-migration of various population groups; and (iii) processes of spatial
concentration as a result of housing preferences and the availability of
infrastructures.

The first process with considerable implications for housing markets is
out-migration and its related intergenerational consequences. It includes emi-
grant heirs who are not interested in rural properties. Commonly addressed as
age-selective, young people especially tend to leave rural and mountainous
areas for education or employment purposes in metropolitan regions providing
such infrastructures (Bender and Kanitscheider 2013). While out-migration
Assessing the social impact of immigration in Europe may result in (temporary) housing vacancies at first sight (e.g. discussions about ‘ghost towns’ in Italy, Steinicke, Cirasuolo and Čede 2007), vacancies are often unavailable because of bad quality and a non-marketable state of repair, which is the case in one in five vacancies in the state of Vorarlberg in Austria (IIBW 2018). In the rural district of Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany, for example, most apartments were built between the 1950s and 1970s and therefore now need renovation, while another challenge is change of ownership in single-family houses due to owners moving to care homes or dying (Zugspitz Region 2020). The lack of modernization is also observable in the scant availability in the social housing sector. In the rural district of Berchtesgadener Land in Germany social housing was constructed for refugees and expellees because of the lack of housing after World War II. These apartments, owned by the rural district and ten municipalities, are currently being modernized for the second time. Moreover, abandoned housing prevails in peripheral and badly accessible areas and varies greatly between and within rural districts. In Vorarlberg about 8,500 abandoned apartments are acknowledged, many in peripheral and mountainous locations. Further reasons for abandonment are associated with negative experiences of renting, unresolved inheritance issues, or sporadic use for renters’ own purposes (IIBW 2018).

The second process refers to immigration and in-migration in Alpine localities with high tourism intensity. Labour migration is first stimulated alongside tourist development, while poorly paid and seasonal jobs prevail (Zugspitz Region 2020). The foreign workforce plays a major role, and foreigners’ concentration processes can be observed in municipalities with high tourism intensity – for example, in the southern part of Oberallgäu in Germany (Landkreis Oberallgäu 2017). Second, retirement migration and second-home tourism ‘grow alongside tourism’ as a more permanent form (Brown et al. 2011), because tourist stays are repeated over time, and protagonists, especially from the middle and upper classes, establish and maintain bi- or multilocal dwellings (Bender and Kanitscheider 2013).

An important challenge for destinations is the seasonal or sporadic use of second and holiday homes for a few weeks per year, resulting in criticism of closed shutters and a lack of floral decoration, as witnessed in a case study at the Tegernsee lake in Germany (Dirksmeier 2010). Sonderegger and Bätzing (2013) showed that more than 25 per cent of the total building stock across the Alpine Arc were second homes, with a regional focus in France and Italy. At a local scale second-home tourism is often well established and has a long history, dating back to the end of the nineteenth century (Wabra 1978, for Germany). Housing policies to counteract these developments and minimize the implications for the (local) population encompass the real estate market’s strong government regulations. These include (zonal) construction bans for second homes, the limitation of the share of holiday homes of a munici-
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ipality’s total housing and authorization requirements for second homes, restrictive provisions for the purchase of second homes by foreign nationals, or second-home taxes (e.g. Borsdorf 2013, for Austria; Kors et al. 2022, for Germany; Koderman and Pavlič 2019, for Slovenia; Schuler and Dessemontet 2013, for Switzerland).

Demand for housing in rural Alpine areas must be regarded as differentiated. During a general population increase, resulting especially from the immigration and in-migration of families with children and retirement migrants, demand increased (Allgäu GmbH 2019; Tekles 2020; Zugspitz Region 2020), while especially in municipalities with good commuting options to neighbouring rural districts or cities such as Innsbruck, Munich, Salzburg, or Vienna it is widespread. While many large-scale single-family houses prevail in most rural areas, small rental apartments are lacking or are only available through social housing. The current housing construction activities only partly reflect the demand. While the construction of luxury apartments and second homes continues, a low rate of newly constructed real estate is also observable (Tekles 2020) – for example, due to a lack of building ground. Simultaneously, multifamily houses and smaller apartments in the bigger towns are being built (Zugspitz Region 2020). Tourist accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees was and is transformed into state accommodation (e.g. Brunner, Jost and Lueger 1994, for Austria; Cretton 2020, for Switzerland), resulting in potential conflicts with locals and tourists (e.g. Pehm 2007 and Rosenberger and Haselbacher 2016, for Austria). Access to housing for recognized refugees remains a challenge (e.g. Scheibelhofer and Luimpöck 2016, for Austria).

CASE STUDY REGIONS, METHODS, AND DATASET

To address the housing of immigrants in rural and mountain areas, we chose three different case study regions, Vorarlberg and Carinthia in Austria, and Bavaria in Germany. Vorarlberg is the westernmost and second smallest of the nine Austrian federal states, bordering Germany, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland. The research focus was the municipality of Frastanz near the district capital Feldkirch (6,500 inhabitants), the small mountain village Innerbraz (< 1,000 inhabitants), and Schruns, representing a small market municipality in the ‘centre’ of a mountain valley (3,900 inhabitants). For the fieldwork in Bavaria, Germany’s southeasternmost federal state, which borders Austria and the Czech Republic, various municipalities and small towns ranging from 1,500 to 27,500 inhabitants in the rural districts of Berchtesgadener Land, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and Oberallgäu were selected. Carinthia is Austria’s southernmost federal state, bordering Italy and Slovenia. It has 132 municipalities, among them the town of Villach (63,236 inhabitants as of 1 January 2021: Statistik Austria 2022), where the empirical work was conducted.
The methods applied encompassed problem-centred interviews and focus group discussions. Background interviews were also conducted. The Vorarlberg dataset consists of 22 interviews with 23 individuals, five focus groups with 15 participants, and two background interviews, compiled between February 2021 and January 2022 during the MATILDE project and held with housing stakeholders and members of the regional coordinators of refugee care in particular. The Carinthia case study comprises 32 interviews with 35 individuals, four focus groups with 20 participants, and eight background interviews with immigrants, experts from social enterprises active in the care and counselling of migrants, as well as responsible persons from the municipal housing office, the regional management and development organization, and the chamber of commerce (10/2020–01/2022, MATILDE). In the Bavarian case study 32 interviews with 37 individuals, four focus groups with 14 individuals, and three background interviews were conducted with immigrants and regional stakeholders (08/2021–02/2022, MATILDE). An additional four interviews with five individuals were conducted during another research project dealing with civic engagement for migrants (03/2022, EMILIE).

RESULTS OF THE CASE STUDIES

Access to (Affordable) Housing in Vorarlberg, Austria: Decentralized Accommodation of Asylum Seekers and Housing for Recognized Refugees

Access to affordable housing in the province of Vorarlberg is not a matter of course. A growing population, rising real estate prices, and a below average social housing sector characterize the housing market, making it increasingly difficult especially for low-income young families and people, many with a migrant background and recognized refugees. This is the case not only in the urbanized Rhine Valley but in the more rural parts of Vorarlberg, though for different reasons. In the urbanized Rhine Valley building land is becoming scarce, and the price increase is particularly high (the average increase amounts to 57 per cent between 2017 and 2021: Gasser 2022). Moreover, while social housing availability in Vorarlberg is generally limited, such housing in rural areas is even scarcer, and according to the housing expert sometimes still controversially discussed by the local population. In addition, abandoned housing is an important issue in the more peripheral mountainous villages and reaches particularly high numbers in winter tourism destinations (IIBW 2018).

In the frame of the already tight housing market, the increased influx of asylum seekers, particularly in 2015 and 2016, posed considerable challenges in clearing accommodation for Vorarlberg’s state government, an issue all regional governments then faced. Not only did the number of asylum seekers...
increase from 1,200 to 3,900 between 2014 and 2016; their sociodemographic composition changed from primarily families to mainly young males, who needed other living arrangements. The specificities of asylum seeker accommodation in Vorarlberg and their impact on the increasing general awareness of affordable housing needs were reported in interviews and in an analysis carried out by Manahl and Hörl (2021).

As early as 2004, when asylum seeker accommodation and basic care changed from being a national responsibility to one shared with the federal states, Vorarlberg focused on the accommodation of individual asylum-seeking families in micro quarters, mostly rented apartments, provided by Caritas. This well-established system reached its limits in 2015, and a new strategy, involving new actors, forms of cooperation, and new tasks, was adopted (Manahl and Hörl 2021). It was supported by all parties in the state parliament and the association of municipalities. It was based on the agreement (in extracts) that asylum seeker accommodation in tents, containers, or large-scale quarters should be avoided, while accommodation in small-scale quarters should be pursued in as many municipalities as possible (ibid.). By the end of 2015 almost all Vorarlberg’s municipalities (93 of 96) accommodated asylum seekers in 28 larger quarters with more than 25 asylum seekers each, and in more than 600 private and small-scale quarters organized by Caritas and the Institute of Social Services, IFS (ibid.).

The recognition of asylum status and the right to stay mean refugees drop out from basic care provision and need to find housing. Additionally, family reunification changes housing needs and preferences. Some initiatives were therefore launched at various levels to provide additional housing in the already tight housing market. An example is the ‘Wohnen 500’ housing form, developed by the non-profit housing developers of Vorarlberg (VOGEWOSI), which focused on a comparatively favourable price per square metre. A first housing estate had already been completed before 2015. However, the increased influx of asylum seekers in the state of Vorarlberg propelled ‘Wohnen 500’ as part of a special housing programme. The state subsidy was linked to the condition that a third of the apartments were given to recognized refugees. Moreover, it was and is possible for recognized refugees to apply for a regular social housing apartment independently of the ‘Wohnen 500’ programme. Although a high proportion of people with foreign citizenship are represented in social housing apartments (for example, in the municipality of Frastanz, 57 per cent of social housing tenants are TCNs, most of Turkish background), obtaining such a flat is largely associated with long waiting times and cannot meet acute housing needs. Nevertheless, access to social housing since 2015 has become more transparent, when a housing allocation guideline of the federal state was implemented to regulate access to social housing with a mandatory points system. Previously, municipalities often decided on different access barriers
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as social housing is allocated through municipalities), making it particularly difficult for newcomers.

Another approach of the state of Vorarlberg is the ‘rent out safely’ [Sicher vermieten] initiative to mobilize private vacancies. As numerous private apartments have been reported for the use of asylum seekers via the previous ‘hand in hand with refugees in Vorarlberg’ official website, it was also intended to make these apartments accessible to recognized refugees (Amt der Vorarlberger Landesregierung 2022). By the spring of 2022 about 141 apartments and 19 residential houses had been rented (ibid.). Although this initiative initially focused on recognized refugees, the main beneficiaries were ‘non-refugees’. A reason was that from 2017 recognized refugees in Vorarlberg were allowed to continue to stay in basic care accommodation and private apartments after their recognition. These and other support measures by NGOs (e.g. Caritas Vorarlberg 2022) and refugee relief groups facilitate the residential integration of refugees and simultaneously labour market integration in regions with high labour demand and rental costs (Dellinger 2021).

Regarding the latter group – that is, volunteers – housing opportunities are often arranged and facilitated through their network (Machold et al. 2022). Recently, the increase of incomers due to the Ukraine war has led to a dramatic increase in accommodation needs. As existing quarters are already full, the state of Vorarlberg is again counting on the provision of private accommodation. Additionally, it has already decided on an exception in the building law so that it can build large quarters for refugees if necessary.

Private Housing of Labour Migrants and Recognized Refugees in Rural Districts in Bavaria, Germany

Since the 2010s labour migrants from eastern and south-eastern Europe (both EU and non-EU countries) and recognized refugees from third countries are the two most important immigrant groups in rural districts in the Bavarian Alps (except for nationals from bordering countries such as Austria). The first group is attracted to the region to work in sectors characterized by a lack of (skilled) workers – for example, the hospitality industry, the (health)care sector, construction, handicrafts, or industry. What they have in common is their desire to live close to the workplace – or at least in a place with good transport connections. The provision of a work and rental contract is a precondition for receiving a visa for those from third countries. However, the seasonality of certain jobs and resulting circular mobilities mean demand for rental apartments is subject to seasonal fluctuations. Those who do an apprenticeship and receive only a small training allowance need cheap housing, while those in permanent positions often aim to improve their housing situation over time and reunite with their spouse and children after months or years, leading to
changing housing demands. Eventually, some consider their stay in mountain areas only a temporary life project or a springboard for entering Germany and are eager to return to their countries of origin or move on to metropolises after finishing their apprenticeship.

The second group, recognized refugees, is distributed to the area based on a mandatory dispersal mechanism during the asylum procedure. For at least the first few months they are required to live in asylum accommodation, which is mainly provided in former hotels and guesthouses that have dropped out of the market because of investment bottlenecks and changed consumer preferences. Once they have been granted asylum and are allowed to leave state accommodation, they can usually apply for family reunification. While some aim to continue to live in mountain areas, especially in the better-connected small and medium-sized towns, others plan to move on to bigger cities. However, if they are still relying on social welfare, their freedom of movement may be restricted to the rural district where they lived during the asylum procedure.

When we examine the (private) housing market in which immigrants find themselves more closely, we find a high rate of homeownership. Moreover, social housing is scarce and is only available in some municipalities. It is also characterized by high demand and long waiting times. The criteria for the allocation of apartments are often also not communicated transparently, while a fear of certain nationalities’ spatial concentration is considered critical among the associations’ employees, because this would prevent immigrants learning German. On the private housing market, immigrants must not only compete with locals but with domestic labour in-migrants and relatively affluent amenity/lifestyle migrants aiming to rent or purchase second, holiday, or retirement homes, as well as with middle-class families wanting to exploit both the lower housing prices compared to cities and the spatial proximity to them for commuting. This demand results in high rental costs compared to the loan and training allowances paid to immigrants. In addition, apartment sizes frequently do not match immigrants’ household sizes: there is a lack of small apartments for single people and of big apartments for families with children.

The quest for housing is further aggravated because information about vacant apartments is regularly not shared publicly on real estate websites or in local newspapers but is passed on within social networks, which immigrants may lack when they arrive. Ultimately, real estate agents, landlords, and neighbours are found to be potential gatekeepers hampering immigrants’ access to housing. Reservations about and negative attitudes towards newcomers are common, while a hierarchization is taking place in which families, workers, EU migrants, and immigrants from the Balkan countries are preferred to single men, unemployed people, and people with ‘othered’ visual appearances – individuals who wear headscarves or people of colour. White privilege, xenophobia, islamophobia, and racism are paired with a lack of experience...
of foreigners (except paying tourists), prejudice and rumour, and negative experiences regarding immigrants’ lack of knowledge of waste separation and ventilation, payment ethics, cooking practices, and noise disturbances. Even if landlords are open to renting to immigrants, they may exploit their situation and seek overpriced rents.

Concerning practices and measures for fostering labour migrants’ and forced migrants’ access to the housing market, both local actors and immigrants themselves seek the prevention or postponement of the quest for housing, as well as improved access. For example, regarding further strategy, some local authorities allow recognized refugees to continue to live in state accommodation to take relief from the private housing market or provide emergency accommodation for those who may face homelessness. Moreover, employers may temporarily provide rooms in their hotels or invest heavily in constructing company housing or rental apartments and (sub)let them to their employees – sometimes even below local rates. To spare expense, immigrants may also (illegally) share flats or cohabit with family members and friends or chain use apartments to overcome entry barriers. The latter strategy, improving immigrants’ access to housing, is manifested in the construction of social housing, especially large apartments, or the local implementation of the ‘tenant qualification’ project, which includes various training courses for immigrants on the rights and obligations of tenants or communication with landlords. Mediators like entrepreneurs, colleagues, integration counsellors, and volunteers may also search for appropriate housing and accompany immigrants to viewing appointments or liaise with landlords. However, immigrants acquire more knowledge about accessing the housing market and German language skills over time and can contact property owners through their own social networks.

Social Housing Access for Recognized Refugees in a Rural Carinthian Town between Ethnic Socializing and Micro-segregation

In 2021 almost the entire province of Carinthia was classified as rural (93.9 per cent of Carinthian municipalities) (Europäische Kommission and Statistik Austria 2021), and towns such as Villach remain quite rural in structure. In one interview a representative of Villach described how it had essentially grown through the incorporation of the surrounding municipalities, as ‘a town with a small city centre and a number of villages around it’ (see also Gruber, Lobnig and Zupan 2021). Villach has even developed its own concept to preserve village structures (Moritsch 1997) and to protect villages’ ‘rural sense of home’ (Manzenreiter 1997, 7).

Villach, one of the fastest growing Austrian towns in this size category, has relatively cheap rental prices (social housing: €3.96/m², private housing:...
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€5.80/m²; Stadt Villach 2022), and the average total housing costs in Carinthia (€6.50/m²) are significantly lower than the national average (€8.30/m²). Fifty-six per cent of residential construction projects, with 2,741 housing units, were approved between 2019 and 2021, 16 per cent of it as social housing units. However, residential construction projects do not fully meet the future housing demand. A recent housing study that surveyed the population, employers, and real estate experts revealed that most of the supply in Villach’s housing market is considered (too) low, and free apartments scarcely need to be advertised (Stainer-Hämmerle and Schwarz-Musch 2022).

At the beginning of 2021 the top five TCN origins in Villach, ranked by the number of inhabitants, were Bosnia and Herzegovina, Syria, Serbia, Afghanistan, and the Russian Federation (mainly from Chechnya) (Statistik Austria 2022; Gruber, Lobnig and Zupan 2021). Most came to Villach because of various armed conflicts. However, highly skilled labour migrants and their families from all over the world are also especially attracted to Villach by the presence of high-tech companies. On arrival they already have a work contract and can afford (more expensive) private housing. Refugees from former Yugoslavia have also established themselves well in employment terms. Many have become entrepreneurs, and some have also been able to become homeowners. In contrast many of the recently arrived refugees have yet to achieve financial independence and rely on low-cost housing. Interviews with the municipal housing office and NGOs consulting immigrants made it clear newcomers were strongly concentrated in the inner centre of Villach, while locals preferred housing in the green surroundings outside the centre.

There are two main reasons for the concentration of refugees in the inner town: first, many want to live close to members of their ethnic community; second, it is especially important for these TCNs to have pedestrian access to basic infrastructure, schools, and doctors: they usually lack a car, and public transport services, especially in the surrounding ‘villages’ belonging to Villach, are not always considered sufficient. The concentration not only affects some residential buildings but entire streets. For example, Afghans tend to live in one alley, Syrians in another. An immigrant interviewee, who has already moved with his family to a rural neighbouring municipality, is worried about the perceived emergence of ‘small ghettos’ in Villach. This concentration, which is also recognized by the municipal housing representative, has an impact on residential neighbourhoods: the remaining local tenants often move away, and in certain kindergartens and especially schools up to 80 per cent of children do not have German as their mother tongue (Gruber, Lobnig and Zupan 2021). Partly diverging lifestyles (for example, staying up late at night), more noise because of larger families, or insufficient awareness of proper waste separation and keeping housing complexes clean repeatedly lead
to conflict with the local population. Property managers must therefore play an important mediation role.

Villach has only had Social Democratic leadership and mayors since the end of World War II. This is apparent in its social orientation, diverse social support systems, and established social housing market (see also Gruber, Lobnig and Zupan 2021). According to the officer of the municipal housing department Villach has 1,300 municipal apartments managed by Villach itself, as well as the right to allocate 4,500 apartments from housing cooperatives. Social housing is allocated according to an ‘urgency’-based points system, with people/families with a low household income, large family, poor existing housing quality, and the elderly and young families receiving more points. In addition to Austrian citizens, recognized refugees and individuals with an EU permanent residence status, for which the person must have been continuously resident in Austria for the last five years, are also eligible. As mentioned above, to avoid conflicts between TCNs and the local population, Villach has made it compulsory to provide proof of German language skills (at least to A2 level) and has required recognized refugees to complete the ‘Harmonious Coexistence in Villach’ module (as part of the integration pass offered by Villach’s Integration Office, Stadt Villach 2017). The result is that the socially less favoured local population competes with refugees. The former apply for the same social housing and are disadvantaged simply because their families are usually smaller. However, Villach also assists lower-income individuals/families with rent deferrals and rental deposit assistance. When allocating housing, the city tries to consider the applicants’ wishes, which leads to spatial concentrations, especially of refugees of similar origin (in the past 60 per cent of tenants were sometimes of foreign origin), and conflicts with the local population result. As previously mentioned, the municipal housing department is aware of this and faces the tension between a balanced distribution across the town, enabling spatial and social proximity to one’s own ethnic community and accessibility within walking distance (Machold et al. 2021). Moreover, various NGOs and social enterprises help migrants find an apartment, providing financial support if necessary. A lack of German language skills can already make the application for social housing a major hurdle.

CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

This chapter aimed to reveal immigrants’ housing situation in rural areas of the Austrian and German Alps. As persistent or even reinforcing developments such as a tight housing market, scarce social housing offers, or second-home tourism continue strongly to influence rural Alpine housing, the immigration of labour migrants and refugees has made competition for affordable housing more visible and reveals the migrants’ active role in rural place-making.
Another impact is that various stakeholders’ awareness of the importance of housing provision is increasing but still needs further attention to enhance local development. More broadly, other people with difficult access to housing can benefit from measures implemented for immigrants. In access to housing both structural conditions of regional or local housing markets and discrimination by landlords result in further difficulties for newcomers in finding appropriate accommodation. Especially in rural municipalities the availability of apartments and houses (to rent or to buy) is strongly based on private stakeholders and networks. Accordingly, access to networks that are locally relevant for private housing – landlords, entrepreneurs, and social housing – are crucial. Further support is related to NGOs, which assist people in need in searching for an apartment, or a support mechanism like the opportunity for recognized refugees to stay in basic care provision even after the end of the asylum procedure.

In all the case studies social housing is key to accessing affordable housing but is often simultaneously characterized by high demand, special requirements, and long waiting times, especially in rural areas. The Austrian case studies also reveal competition between refugees, migrants, and other socially less-favoured locals, for example, which may lead to conflict and social tension. To improve acceptance of social housing in small municipalities, regional approaches differ considerably. Information campaigns and housing assistance projects have been established in Vorarlberg, while in Carinthia special training and proof of German language skills aim to improve neighbourhood and cohabitation in social housing. However, this risks ignoring the target group’s urgent need to access housing. Finally, the Bavarian case study reveals the agency of migrants themselves, which increases with time spent in rural localities.

Regarding the stakeholder landscape, employers may be important actors, while labour migrants and recognized refugees, who are aware of the hampered access to housing, prefer to take – and retain – jobs in companies that also provide housing. More awareness is needed of situations that may coincide with life events such as the completion of the asylum procedure or the start of employment, when the quest for an apartment becomes most relevant in migrants’ biographies. Vice versa, rental contracts may end during the termination of work contracts (in the case of company housing), when migrants lose their jobs, must return to their countries of origin, or when financial obstacles arise. Moreover, the personal use of an apartment by landlords for profitable tourist business, for example, may result in the termination of rental contracts. With the agreement of a private landlord or public/social housing to rent to immigrants, the rental contract and a sustainable housing is not guaranteed. Some immigrants may need support to cover additional housing costs like the deposit of rent deferrals, while for others further mediation processes may
warrant a good relationship with landlords and neighbours. As both life goals and household composition, as well as aspirations concerning where and how to live, change, migrants’ aspirations to keep an apartment and improve their living conditions must be accompanied by NGOs or private actors.

NOTE

1. The research which led to this publication received funds from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 870831) and from the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) (grant No. 2821FE010), based on a decision of the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany via the German Aerospace Centre (DLR-PT) under the rural development programme.

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Appropriate housing in rural and mountain areas?


3. Labour market shortages and exclusion practices: the irrationalities of the labour markets and the legislation

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INTRODUCTION

Employment is a basic prerequisite for active participation in economic and social life. Successful work integration, emphasized by the ‘right to work’ (Article 23(1) Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 15 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012/C 326/02)), has the potential for social recognition, integration, dignity, and a self-determined life, as is also confirmed by a UNCHR study (UNHCR 2013). In the context of the economic peculiarities of two rural regions restricted by the labour markets national legislation, this comparative chapter aims to analyse the differences in labour market demands and access with respect to different types of foreign workers in Austria and Spain, as well as the tension between (1) the right to work within each legal national framework; (2) the regional demands of skilled workers in Carinthia (Austria) and unskilled workers in Aragón (Spain); and (3) labour market inclusion problems and practices. Before this the general importance of labour market inclusion for third-country nationals (TCNs) and the challenges faced are discussed. The chapter concludes with a comparison of both countries and regions, focusing on the similarities and differences of labour market needs, access, and in-/exclusion problems.

We analyse Austria and Spain, two countries with different migration models from central and southern Europe with differences in flows and their composition, selected under the purview of the Horizon 2020 MATILDE project (see Laine, Rauhut and Gruber 2023). We selected Carinthia as a MATILDE case study region because of its mainly rural topographic (in 2021 93.9% of Carinthian municipalities were classified as rural; Europäische
We selected the Spanish region of Aragón because the Autonomous Communities in Spain are good laboratories for the development of decentralized policies.

Methodologically, the chapter draws on literature and legislation review, as well as qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with local stakeholders and immigrants within the frame of the MATILDE project. The information for Carinthia (Austria) is based on 49 interviews with TCNs and representatives of NGOs, public administrations, politics, and the economy, as well as five focus groups. Twenty-eight interviews aimed to identify the economic impacts of migration at individual, business, and regional levels. An additional 587 participants were involved in the action research activities in the case study region of Villach and its rural surroundings. Sixty-two interviews were conducted in Spain, 25 for economic and labour reasons (with trade union and employer representatives). Additionally, 12 focus groups were conducted, some also for labour purposes. In total, 136 participants were involved in the fieldwork activities all over Aragón and specifically in the two comarcas1 chosen as case studies (Alto Gállego and Los Monegros).

IMPORANCE OF LABOUR MARKET INCLUSION FOR TCNS AND CHALLENGES FACED

Ager and Strang’s (2008, 169) conceptual framework identifies employment as one of the key areas ‘which are widely suggested as indicative of successful integration’. However, the labour market integration of TCNs, refugees, and especially asylum seekers is very complex. On the one hand their opportunities on the labour market depend on their residence status; on the other the legal opportunities for gainful employment are handled differently – and are sometimes very restrictive between the different European countries. While TCNs arriving as labour migrants generally have a job, even before they immigrate, asylum seekers are often completely banned from labour market access during their recognition procedure, and refugees face particular challenges on the labour market.

In 2013 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) published a study of the integration of refugees in Europe. The interviews with refugees made it clear that finding work and accommodation were refugees’ two main concerns. When asked when they would feel integrated, the first response they gave in the interviews was when they ‘have a job’ (UNHCR 2013, 76). The UNHCR also conducted a study for Switzerland on the labour market integration refugee perspective, which revealed refugees’ high aspirations of entering the labour market (UNHCR 2014, 24).

According to the UNHCR (2013, 76) at ‘EU level, employment is central to migrants’ long-term position as contributing members of European society
Assessing the social impact of immigration in Europe and to countering negative demographic trends’. However, immigrants’ employment situation varies by country because of national jurisdiction over labour market access and regulations for the permanence and residence of immigrants. Refugees are the TCN group whom labour market barriers especially confront – for example, a lack of knowledge of local norms or the job application process, or a lack of social networks (Ortlieb et al. 2020, 2). Further difficulties are related to the complicated proof of (formal) qualifications, a lack of acknowledgement by EU member states and/or employers, and the resulting non-recognition of qualifications and practical work experience. What follows is underemployment, which means working in a job below the level of one’s qualifications (Ager and Strang 2008, 170). These jobs are often in the care, cleaning, catering, and construction sectors, which have arduous working conditions. Trauma, family separation due to flight, long asylum procedures, related periods of inactivity, and the non-application of qualifications are also challenges that especially apply to refugees (UNHCR 2013, 76–77).

Housing and employment influence each other. After refugee status is granted, refugees need to relocate quite urgently. Many refugees placed in rural or smaller urban areas during the asylum procedure decide after their recognition to move to larger cities – either because of limited employment opportunities in the countryside and/or because of the lack of ethnic networks in rural areas. The quest for housing and work can therefore take place simultaneously. An insecure housing situation can negatively affect the refugee’s ability to focus on job seeking, or their job if they have already managed to find one. The urgency of finding accommodation or otherwise being confronted with homelessness often forces refugees to accept jobs below their qualification level. Furthermore, various forms of discrimination – for example, due to visible differences such as skin colour or wearing a headscarf – often exclude refugees from labour market access (UNHCR 2013, 86–87).

Finally, if they have managed to get a job, TCNs and refugees are often exploited and affected by poor working conditions. A recent study examining the working and living situations of migrant workers employed by two Austrian temporary work agencies revealed shocking results. The interviewees, who were employed in a mail distribution centre and in a mask production company during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, reported ‘slave-like conditions’ (Neuhauser, El-Roumy and Wexenberger 2021, 2). The study stated that the exposed cases isolated negative examples but were ‘systematic for the working conditions of migrant workers’ (ibid., 4), who are often affected by ‘hyper-’ or ‘multiple precarity’ (ibid., 5).

Something similar occurs in Spain, where the labour market is significantly fed by the arrival of immigrants, and their contribution to the labour force is considered essential (Ombudsman 2020). Foreigners tend to be concentrated in sectors and occupations in which there is a scarce supply of Spanish workers.
Foreign workers are also exposed to labour market niches and more irregular, precarious, unstable, poorly paid, and vulnerable jobs.

LABOUR MARKET IRRATIONALITIES

Legal Framework for Accessing Labour Markets in Austria and Spain

Austria has established a criteria-based labour immigration system for TCNs, which supports the immigration of highly qualified TCNs, skilled workers in occupations with shortages, graduates of an Austrian university, self-employed key workers, and start-up founders. The ‘Red-White-Red Card’ is usually issued for 24 months. Family members of a Red-White-Red Card holder can apply for a ‘Red-White-Red Card plus’ for family reunification (Bundesministerium für Arbeit and Bundesministerium für Inneres 2022). Depending on the group of highly skilled people willing to immigrate, different criteria are considered and scored – for example, qualifications, applicant’s age, German and English language skills, or years of work experience. Only if the minimum number of points, which varies according to the qualified group of persons, is fulfilled is there a prospect of receiving a Red-White-Red Card (Bundesministerium für Finanzen 2022). This criteria-based system is intended to facilitate labour market immigration to Austria, as the country is strongly affected by labour shortages.

In Austria the Aliens Employment Act (AuslBG; BGBI. Nr. 218/1975) regulates foreigners’ employment. To take up employment, TCNs in Austria need an employment permit [Beschäftigungsbewilligung], for which foreign-ers’ (potential) employers must apply at the regional labour market service (Arbeitsmarktservice (AMS)). TCNs who want to immigrate, but who are neither highly qualified nor skilled workers in an occupation with labour shortages, must go through the ‘substitute worker procedure’ [Ersatzkraftverfahren], except for recognized refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, employees in education and scientific institutions, diplomatic staff, and staff of recognized churches, for example. Based on this procedure, the employment permit is only issued after a labour market examination has been carried out by the regional labour market service and may only be granted if neither an Austrian nor a foreigner is already on the labour market who is available and appropriate for the vacant position. The employment permit is issued to the employer and entitles them to employ the specifically requested foreign worker in a precisely designated workplace. The employment permit is valid for one year or the duration of an apprenticeship. To legally immigrate to Austria as a worker without a high level of skills, the migrant must first prove that they already have a job (WKO 2022).
Many countries – including Austria – restrict the right to work with national laws. This restriction primarily affects TCNs, especially asylum seekers. Asylum seekers who are still in the asylum procedure are denied these rights, to which refugees recognized according to the Geneva Convention are entitled. For the first three months of the asylum procedure they are subject to a complete employment ban (decree of the Ministry of Economy and Labour, 2004, GZ: 435.006/6-II/7/04). Until June 2021, asylum seekers could only take up gainful employment in a very limited way within the framework of national restrictive provisions (see Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour, 2004, GZ: 435.006/6-II/7/04) – for example, as seasonal workers in the hotel and restaurant industry or in agriculture for a maximum of six months per year. However, this provision was repealed by the Constitutional Court in its decision of June 2021 (V 95-96/2021-12) based on a private complaint.

Access to employment for TCNs in Spain is included in the Organic Law 4/2000 on Rights and Freedoms of Foreigners and their Social Integration. Access to employment requires a work and residence permit. For the initial concession the national employment situation is considered, which is included in the ‘Catalogue of Occupations with Difficult Coverage’ (CODC, published quarterly); its reduction during the economic crisis between 2008 and 2014 has been denounced by the non-profit entities that serve the foreign population. Hiring in occupations that are not included in the catalogue is also possible when no suitable jobseekers are available, and when there are international agreements for hiring TCNs (e.g. with Chile and Peru) (Ministerio de Trabajo y Economía Social 2022). In any case it must be demonstrated that the training is possessed in addition to the professional qualification legally required for the exercise of the profession. The national employment situation is also considered in granting a residence and work authorization documented with an EU blue card. This is the case for hiring highly qualified personnel – those with accredited higher education qualifications or a minimum of five years’ professional experience; however, only those who remain or reside in Spain have access.

Finally, it is also possible to produce collective contracts at origin only for those who are not in Spain or resident there. In this case, considering the national employment situation, the Ministry of Labour and Immigration can approve an annual forecast of occupations and where appropriate of the expected figures for jobs that can be covered through collective bargaining. Such hiring favours countries with which Spain has signed agreements on the regulation of migration flows.

Asylum seekers and those with international protection status can obtain temporary residence and work permits. However, the Spanish government modified the situation regarding immigrants’ access to the labour market in July 2022 to incorporate more foreigners into the labour market (El País...
Labour market shortages and exclusion practices

The reform of the Organic Law has been carried out in three key areas to advance the change in immigration policy.

First, the reform of the Immigration Law will seek to expand and improve the hiring of foreigners (especially collective hiring), which has until now been limited to temporary workers. After this change foreign workers will obtain a four-year work authorization that will allow them to be employed for nine months each year. If the workers return to their home countries at the end of each season, they will be rewarded with an extendable residence and work authorization for two years, with which they will be able to live and work independently in Spain as an employee. This reform seeks to modify the model for hiring foreign professionals, made until now with the CODC, about which we have already commented. The current problem with this catalogue is that it does not respond to real needs. The new regulation will imply a change to how the catalogue is prepared, updating it every three months, reducing deadlines, and making contracting more flexible in certain sectors. Employers will thus be able to hire foreigners in their countries of origin so that immigrants who already live in Spain can be regularized and work.

The second aspect of the Immigration Law reform is that students from countries outside the EU will be able to work in Spain. After this change students will be able to work up to 30 hours a week, and it will be easier for them to stay and work in Spain after graduation. The third novelty consists of creating a legal figure so that immigrants who have been in an irregular situation in Spain for at least two years can obtain their residence and work permits. This is rooting ‘by training’: a residence permit will be offered to train in occupations in which labour is needed, and immigrants will later be allowed to work if they obtain an employment contract. In short, the ultimate reason for these changes is the lack of labour in key economic sectors such as transport, construction, hospitality, and digitization, and for the large irregular economy to flourish. The aim is to improve the Spanish migration model, which encourages the underground economy and maintains rigid and underused hiring and regularization models.

Labour Market Shortages and Demands in the Regions of Carinthia and Aragón

The province of Carinthia faces (among others) three major demographic challenges: population shrinkage; population ageing and the simultaneous decline in the number of working age people; and migration. Sixty-one per cent of Carinthian municipalities lost population between 2002 and 2017. By 2050 the total population will decrease by four per cent due to internal migration losses and death surpluses. The population in some rural and peripheral municipalities will decrease by up to 38.5 per cent. The increase in international
immigration will not compensate this development (Stainer-Hämmerle and Zametter 2021, 52–53).

Alongside the population decrease the ageing of society is already visible in Carinthia. The share of children (−18.64%), young people (−16.88%), and the working population (−4.07%) decreased between 2002 and 2020, while the older population (75+) increased by 43.77 per cent in the same period. It is forecasted that these trends will continue. The decline of young people leads to a lack of skilled workers on the labour market, which negatively affects the business location and competitiveness (Stainer-Hämmerle and Zametter 2021, 57–58). The decline of young people can be explained by low birth rate cohorts and outmigration (Aigner-Walder and Klinglmair 2015, 17–18), with regional differences: ‘Those regions with a declining population are also facing an even faster ageing process and a disproportionate decrease in the population of potential working age’ (Aigner-Walder and Luger 2018, 4; translated by the authors).

While the share of younger people and the population of working age is decreasing, the foreign-born population in Carinthia will increase from 12.5 per cent in 2018 to 15.8 per cent in 2040. In Carinthia’s two biggest cities, Klagenfurt and Villach, foreign-born people will constitute almost a quarter of the population (ÖROK 2019). These demographic changes have already affected and will affect the Carinthian labour market. By 2030 a shortage of 43,000 workers is predicted. Primarily, a lack of university, higher secondary school, and apprenticeship graduates is expected, especially in technical professions. Rural and peripheral regions will be especially affected due to urbanization. Potential workers deciding to emigrate (internally) pose a risk for business locations in rural and peripheral regions (Aigner-Walder and Luger 2018, 7–8).

However, population shrinkage, population ageing, and outmigration negatively affect the labour market and the available workforce. An example is the restaurant and hotel industry, which has been affected by a shortage of skilled workers for years. In June 2019 Carinthia reported a shortage of 700 cooks and waiters (ORF Kärnten 2019a). A third of Carinthian businesses complained in November 2019 that they were unable to fill a third of their vacancies (ORF Kärnten 2019b). The COVID-19 pandemic increased this need still further, as many employees who were either initially placed on short-time work or dismissed did not return to tourism jobs (Salzburger Nachrichten 2021). While Carinthia faces a (skilled) labour shortage, and the number of unemployed decreased in the 2016–2019 period, unemployment affected foreigners 36.8 per cent more than Austrian citizens at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Arbeitsmarktdaten Online 2022a; 2022b). ‘Migrants are often affected by structural job losses because they are especially employed in cyclical sectors’ (Gruber and Zupan 2022, 92; translated by the authors).
In Spain it is also possible to highlight the demographic situations of ageing and the gap in certain manpower areas. Spain is currently the most depopulated country in the south of the EU, with a large older population and the lowest birth and fertility rates in Europe (Pérez Díaz et al. 2020). According to population projections for 2014 to 2064 Spain will lose one million inhabitants between 2014 and 2030, with a forecast decrease between 2020 and 2040 of almost 400,000 15–64-year-olds (Ombudsman 2020). Low birth and fertility rates mean the labour force will be reduced. The workforce forecasts are not entirely catastrophic, but this will be because of the immigrant population’s disproportionate contribution.

The Autonomous Community of Aragón in the northeast of the peninsula represents 9.4 per cent of the Spanish surface area but has only 2.1 per cent of the country’s population (1.3 million people). As in the whole of Spain, territorial imbalances in Aragón are a striking feature of the extreme concentration of the population and economic activities in the metropolitan area of Zaragoza, the regional capital. Almost 59 per cent of the region’s population live in just four of the 731 municipalities (INE 2020). Territory classified as ‘rural’ accounts for 95.2 per cent of the region (Government of Spain 2012) and is characterized by low population densities, ageing, and population loss.

In the early 2000s TCNs arrived and settled in the main municipalities of Aragon, and they have since spread to other smaller municipalities that are attractive for immigrants. In 2020 12.2 per cent of the population were nationals of another country (3.6% in 2002), and almost 14.7 per cent were born in another country. Among the latter, 58.9 per cent belonged to third countries, representing 7.2 per cent of the region’s resident population (INE 2020).

The distribution of immigrant workers by economic sector does not substantially differ from that of native workers. In 2020 78.7 per cent of affiliated foreigners worked in the service sector, 11 per cent in industry, 9 per cent in construction, and 1.3 per cent in the primary sector (Ministerio de Trabajo y Economía Social 2021). However, in 2020 62.5 per cent held unskilled jobs, followed in importance by catering, personal, security, and vendor services (14.6%). The main characteristic of the foreign workers is that they occupy niches and jobs left free by the native population, so they do not compete with them. This generates segmentation in the labour market (Domingo, Gil Alonso and Maisongrande 2008).

This segmentation, or polarization, is related to the maximization of labour exploitation – large global corporations versus small farmers. This industrialization of the countryside and the maintenance of the traditional agricultural sector have created high demand for labour, which is met by hiring immigrant workers. This phenomenon has been called the ‘southern model of agricultural exploitation’ (Checa, Corrado and Caruso 2018). The slaughterhouse and meat processing sector is an example where foreign immigrant workers predomi-
nate. In rural and mountain areas the agro-pastoral sector is also an activity with difficult cover, despite the fact that it continues to be essential. Finally, the care sector is in high demand, especially in rural areas, where depopulation makes the generation of resources to serve an increasingly ageing population impossible (Lardiés-Bosque and del Olmo-Vicén 2021). Foreign labour therefore plays an important role in maintaining the economy in rural areas.

**Labour Market Inclusion Problems and Practices at the Regional Scale**

The interviewees from the Carinthian economy and enterprises are aware of the labour market shortage. For example, the head of an NGO supporting young people in employment and vocational training states: ‘No matter which countries the young people come from, the economy needs workers so badly that you can’t make any distinctions’ (WP4ATK014). The head of a network and service hub for migrants suggests: ‘Let’s ask people what they can do and let them do it’ (WP4ATK021).

Independently of migrants’ resources and potentials, their legal access to the labour market and the recognition of qualifications is limited. While labour market access is described as too restrictive, the recognition of qualifications is the main barrier for labour market integration (Stadler and Wiedenhofer-Galik 2011; Gruber et al. 2021a). Hence, migrants work in jobs for which they are overqualified. According to Biffl (2019, 130) ‘education and training obtained in Austria is key to employment which is commensurate with the educational attainment level acquired. The duration of stay and employment is another important factor ensuring adequate employment.’ Migrants who have not graduated from an Austrian university therefore risk being overqualified for their jobs (Biffl 2019, 131). Recognition processes in Austria are highly regulated by chambers of commerce. An example is an interviewee who graduated in translation and interpreting at a German university and worked in jobs for which he was overqualified until he became an authorized interpreter (Gruber et al. 2021a).

Another hurdle for labour market integration is a lack of proficiency in German. Learning German is experienced as a challenge, and administrative procedures or job applications are therefore problematic, which is why two interviewees from large international companies accompany their clients, especially to the public authorities, to avoid misunderstanding and prejudice. Problems with racism and reservations about migrants exist even if migrants are highly qualified. In this context new supporting services for migrants have been created. It is sometimes only a question of support and information, which is also the key for the successful placement of (young) migrants (Gruber et al. 2021a).
Nevertheless, migrants experience discrimination and injustice in the Carinthian labour market. In this context institutionalized discrimination is embedded in the authorities, rights, practices, and structures (Gomolla and Radtke 2009, 49). Women with headscarves face multiple levels of discrimination in Carinthian society. For example, an interviewee with a university degree was not invited to job interviews when she applied for jobs with a picture of herself in a headscarf. However, when she sent applications with pictures without headscarves, she received invitations to job interviews and the employer expected her not to wear a headscarf. She finally found an adequate position in Carinthia where her right to wear a headscarf was respected. Yet she experienced racism from a doctor, who called her employer and complained about the decision to employ her. To prevent discriminatory behaviour at work, employers’ positive attitude towards migrants is above all required. Many employers also lack knowledge about migrants (Machold et al. 2021), and many migrants feel they need to overachieve to be accepted (Gruber et al. 2021a).

Young refugees especially depend on projects such as ‘A:Life’ and the engagement of individuals. ‘A:Life’ aims to place refugees in formal apprenticeships, while young refugees are educated in various training courses and complete internships. When they are taken on by companies, ‘A:Life’ supports them in social and integration pedagogical issues and acts as an intermediary for refugees and companies (Diakonie, no date). Two interviewed company representatives (from a hotel and an international company) recruit their apprentices via this project, which benefits employers because of the mitigation of the labour shortage, as well as the pre-educated workforce and the work effort of young refugees (Gruber, Lobnig and Zupan 2021b).

Foreign workers in Aragón have a positive impact on economic activity, employment, and occupations, because they occupy jobs the native population does not demand (CC.OO. 2021). However, various aspects of the labour market and employment need to be improved. For example, the employment rate for TCNs in Aragón was noticeably lower in 2019 (56.7%), compared with 78.1 per cent among nationals (CESA 2020). The comparatively high unemployment rate is another characteristic among foreign workers; the unemployment rate of TCNs in Aragón tripled during the economic and structural crisis (2008–2014), and in 2021 it was still higher than before the COVID-19 crisis (23.3% in 2018) (CC.OO. 2021).

Foreign workers endure worse working conditions and lower wages and have suffered most from the COVID-19 crisis. Temporality, part-time work, and less renewal characterize the hiring of foreigners. Moreover, their temporary employment rate is 39.5 per cent, compared to an average of 24.1 per cent in Aragón, so the temporality gap is 15.4 percentage points among foreigners, possibly because of their lower social mobility labour (CESA 2020).
Immigrants generally do low-skilled work. In some groups their lack of knowledge of Spanish and poor training limits job placement: ‘… in slaughterhouses the profile is 100 per cent immigrant, especially in the early stages [slaughter and meat processing]’ (former General Secretary of a Trade Union and mayor of a rural town; WP3ES008).

Thirty per cent of foreign workers worked in unskilled jobs in 2018, and 29.3 per cent worked in catering, personal, security, and sales services (which need few qualifications) (INE 2018). The main obstacle in the labour market is the lack of qualified personnel who want to join sectors with harsh conditions and low wages (the farm and agricultural sector) or little social recognition (the cleaning and personal care industry).

Another problem on the labour market is related to the agriculture sector because the contracts are mostly temporary. Foreign workers are hired more in times of economic growth, even in irregular positions. These seasonal workers’ main strategy is to travel throughout the national territory to cover the different agricultural campaigns, repeating each season with their employers. Africans account for the largest number of seasonal workers. Initially, many arrived and were hired irregularly, with little training offered (Ródenas 2016). The recognition of the important role these workers played during the pandemic (Rye and O'Reilly 2021, 4) has led to quicker hiring.

Another problem for the labour market integration of immigrants in rural areas is the lack of available housing because of racist attitudes to renting housing to foreigners. The problem is more serious among seasonal workers engaged in fruit picking. Difficulty with language is a major barrier to accessing other activities in the labour market, especially in the tertiary sector. This mainly affects African immigrants, especially women, which is why they are forced to work in low-skilled jobs in sectors like fruit picking and warehousing. A lack of language skills also limits access to continuous training and thus promotion and improvement of working conditions.

Those interviewed during the fieldwork highlight another obstacle to foreign immigrants entering the labour market in the care sector, which needs a significant number of contracts due to the ageing of the population. However, a large percentage of the work is irregular. For cultural reasons African and Moroccan women suffer greater rejection by employers than women from Latin America or non-EU European countries.

As was also shown for Austria, another difficulty in entering the labour market is the recognition of professional qualifications. This is especially a problem for immigrants from European and Latin American countries, especially Venezuela, with overqualification among groups like nurses or teachers, who can only access jobs in the cleaning and care sectors. For many irregular immigrants or those who have been unable to renew permits the main problem is to obtain a work permit. Those in an irregular situation can access the basic
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rights of the welfare system (education, health, and social services), but they are forced to work within the irregular economy for at least three years before they can access regularization through social roots. Foreign asylum seekers also find themselves in this situation when their application has been denied, even though as applicants they have previously enjoyed work and residence permits.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE LABOUR MARKETS OF CARINTHIA AND ARAGÓN

The case studies have shown differences in accessing labour markets because the legal frameworks of Austria and Spain focus on different skills. While Austria aims to attract both highly qualified TCNs and skilled workers for occupations suffering shortages, highly skilled workers in Spain only gain access to the labour market via the EU blue card. Meanwhile, Spain publishes a quarterly ‘Catalogue of Occupations with Difficult Coverage’, which is quite like the list of occupations suffering shortages in Austria. However, in Spain it is possible to recruit workers for occupations that cannot be found on the list when there are no suitable or available jobseekers. In Austria TCNs must undergo the ‘substitute worker procedure’. Before they are allowed to immigrate they need to prove they already have a job. Access to the labour market in Austria is therefore overregulated, while the Spanish labour market must deal with irregular work.

Although access to the labour market works differently in Austria and Spain, both countries and regions face a similar demographic situation: they suffer from population decline, a growing elderly cohort, and a decline in the working population. Both rural regions, Carinthia and Aragón, are especially affected by urbanization. However, TCNs in Austria and TCNs from Latin America in Spain are often hindered by the restrictive recognition of qualifications. To summarize, while Carinthia mainly has a demand for (highly) skilled workers, of whom there is already a dearth in the local population, TCNs in Aragón are hired for low-skilled jobs the local population is unwilling to do.

Moreover, the fieldwork in both regions has revealed discrimination against Muslim women: in Aragón this applies especially to North Africans from rural areas; in Carinthia highly skilled workers with an Austrian university degree also face problems if they wear headscarves. However, local administrations can favour their progressive labour integration, first, through local campaigns that facilitate and promote knowledge of German, second, through professional job placement training or professional recognition with prior training, and finally, through employment. This results in the use of the headscarf or other clothing being seen not as a barrier but as a cultural symbol like those
other social groups wear. However, a certain openness is required of employers when there is no lack of language skills or qualifications, as the example of Carinthia shows, to accept cultural and religious diversity if it does not affect the work itself.

Finally, the structural changes in the labour market caused by demographic change require long-term labour migration and integration strategies, as well as a general reform of working conditions in certain sectors that no longer interest locals. The improvement of working conditions in low-skilled jobs would allow an improvement in migrants’ socioeconomic conditions, favouring faster integration. Such jobs would also be accepted by more local workers, which would result in the homogenization of the profiles of both local and foreign workers. In turn this would function as a form of pressure for a general improvement in working conditions and would also help eliminate the label of ‘employment niches’ for low-skilled but essential jobs.

The results of the case studies show that regional labour market demands require consideration. The Spanish government’s recent reform of immigrants’ access to the labour market (2022), especially in allowing local employers to hire foreigners in their countries of origin, goes in this direction and prevents the formation of pools of workers in an irregular situation who can be subject to labour exploitation.

NOTE

1. In Spain some Autonomous Communities like Aragón have recognized the administrative level of ‘comarcas’, which are groupings of municipalities (the 33 counties of the region group 731 municipalities). They are local entities with various social, economic, etc. competences in different issues. Many are responsible for the residence and integration of foreign immigrants.

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INTRODUCTION

Immigration to remote rural regions must cope with several challenges, not only because of the complex process of integration and inclusion but also precisely because of the geographical character of remoteness. To shape meaningful strategies that provide a basis for long-term life opportunities, employment, and settlement options within such regions for migrants, we need to consider a series of aspects of long-term needs to achieve social inclusionary pathways.

In this chapter we will analyse these aspects by addressing the narratives concerning migrants’ role and place in the case study region of Vorarlberg in Austria, an area that has been characterized by diverse immigration experiences in the last century. The increase in migrant arrivals from a diverse range of geographical and cultural origins has accentuated the challenges felt by the local population and policy. An enhanced recognition of the increasing numbers of migrants, an acknowledgment of the diversity of incomers, and the political aspiration to cope with the complexity of challenges to community life have led to a more intense consideration of immigration as a priority issue for regional decision makers. This mindset has found its expression in institutional changes that have included different levels, approaches to, and contesting views of integration strategies.

The discourse of migration issues is heavily determined by mainstream narratives, and at least in the European context by a utilitarian perspective in which the causes, representation, and acceptance of immigration is tightly bound with the economic benefits of migration. As De Haas (2021) outlines in his reflective paper on migration theory, ‘(m)uch thinking on migration remain [sic] implicitly or explicitly based on simplistic push–pull models or neo-classical individual income (or “utility”) maximising assumptions, despite their manifest inability to explain real-world patterns and processes of migration’ (ibid., 1). This restricted explanatory framework can be detected...
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in most expressions of migratory studies and practice in recent decades (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016) which crucially shapes how we understand, denominate, and explain our observations of aspects of migration. The specific and restricted view of migration issues is consolidated and exacerbated in the public discourse and media reporting (Laine 2019). This can be seen in the vital role mainstream media plays in contributing to a common understanding of migration as a crisis and immigrants primarily as a threat to the dominant culture of receiving societies. The widespread expectation these discourses express is that migrants should ‘integrate’ into the sociocultural contexts of their ‘host’ countries, with increasing simultaneous concerns about ‘integration capacity’. These doubts are nurtured by seeing migrants as ‘others’, thereby impeding manifold pathways to social inclusion.

The focus in migration research and policy is hence overwhelmingly on short-term ‘solutions’ which aim to ‘overcome’ the challenges encountered. As these aspects are those most often seen in the first place and assumed as the key objectives of the legal acceptance of asylum seekers, economic integration, language acquisition and skills improvement (and approval), and other aspects of socioeconomic integration are the primary topics. There is no doubt that these are fundamental issues for migrants. Given the persisting problems with achieving successful personal outcomes for migrants, even after many years of living in their new home countries, it seems a more comprehensive analysis of social inclusion aspects is crucial.

This chapter therefore suggests a broadening of our view that includes a multitude of factors, institutions, and strategic choices for enhancing migrants’ arrival and long-term inclusion in the local community and region. Migrants and especially refugees experience displacement from their original home as the main cause of their personal spatial changes. In seeking new places to settle, they aim to escape these extraordinary situations and feelings and wish to find and reconnect to places of ‘belonging’ (Marlowe 2018). In reporting on the findings of a case study analysis of an Austrian mountain area, we aim to identify migrants’ experiences over a longer period and indicate the manifold aspects contributing to beneficial outcomes. The focus is on learning from good practices within some communities that summarize practical lessons on the path to supporting local communities in embracing integrative views of newcomers and locals. The considerations include a discussion of the importance of an enhanced understanding of exchange and combined activities between various social actors and groups. At the same time, we show that municipal cooperation and regional coordination are pivotal to linking and responding to socioeconomic challenges to the community life of migrants and the local population.
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND REGARDING INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION

Issues of origin, place attachment, personal movement, and acceptance of newcomers in a local community are pivotal to ‘identity’ creation and the establishment of boundaries between societies. At first sight boundaries are thus especially related to spatial differentiation, but a more detailed analysis would of course reveal the existence and relevance of social groups, class, and diverse groups of ‘belonging’. This has specific implications for understanding aspects of integration or the inclusion of migrants.

In contrast with the general discussion of media and politics, which presents migration, and particularly the contributions of third-country nationals (TCNs), to economy, society, and culture, either as beneficial or as a threat to local societies, theoretical conceptualizations must respond to the issue’s dynamic and perceptual vagueness. Integration theory requires an assessment of a process that implicitly presupposes that migrants must ‘integrate into’ a particular society (Korkut et al. 2013). However, such a perception, widely shared by mainstream views, is remarkably superficial and does not address the core aspects, functions, and effects of migration movements. Above all, it does not refer to the difference of actors, the underlying and divergent objectives, the orientation of social processes, and the divergent valuations of effects. As de Haas (2021) argues, ‘(t)he field of migration studies has remained a surprisingly under-theorized field of social inquiry’ (ibid., 1). Despite the lack of systematic theorizing, an increasing amount of research provides micro-studies on migrants’ experiences while focusing on assessing the quantitative ‘effects’ of migration following the concept of ‘push–pull’ models as explanatory frameworks.

The orientation of the conceptual view is primarily on achieving ‘the process of becoming an accepted part of society’ (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016, 14), which might be seen as advocating a swift and unilateral adaptation of features of the ‘receiving’ society. However, it has been argued that we need to look at ‘integration as a two-way process’ (Klarenbeek 2019, 1) or even engage in a ‘Three-Way Process’ (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016, 1). An important shortcoming of both integration research and the related policy framework is their inclination to conceive publics as homogenous, including both newcomers and the host society, thus ignoring the differences articulated and practised due to ethnicity, class, and gender (Schinkel 2018). Beyond viewing both sides of the ‘integration process’ in host countries, as advocated in the two-way process approach, it is essential to include the effects on ‘sending’ countries to capture the real effects of a large share of global move-
ments. Such large-scale movements affect European regions, including remote locations like mountains and peripheral areas.

Observations of the specific integration processes of migrants, be they voluntary or forced, predominantly examine the stage of arrival: it takes a short- to medium-term perspective. Discourses are built around the ‘displacement’ of migrants who aim or are forced to ‘enter’ new destinations and societies, evoking images of distinction between ‘others’ (migrants) and ‘us’ (host societies). As a mirror of the common socio-political debate, research concepts use very similar argumentation, reinforcing a superficial, biased, and even misleading analysis framework. As Schinkel (2018) reveals, this can be seen as the outcome of a ‘neocolonial knowledge production’ (ibid., 1) which opposes ‘society’ to ‘immigrants’, thus contributing to the problematizing of the arising relationships. He continues that research focuses on the main ‘problematic groups’ of new arrivals, and by diffusing the rhetoric that migrants are still in the process of arriving, ‘integration’ challenges are sustained, and the acceptance of migrants’ children even protracted. It is quite common that the next generation(s) is (are) subsumed ‘in the sense of somehow still being under way, on their way to “society”’ (ibid., 5).

Theoretical considerations expand on various explanations of the main categories of sociocultural and socioeconomic integration and highlight the various psychological developments observed in this process. As has been referred to above migration theory starts with reasoning about migrants’ beneficial contributions to the host economy, society, and culture, but this emphasis has shifted in policy practice and public discourse to a focus on the ‘threats’, ‘competition’, and ‘displacement’ they allegedly trigger. Various theoretical concepts of coexistence reveal psychological features as crucial for exploring the underlying aspects of migrants’ strategies to cope with their new contexts and find access to and acceptance by the host society. The following theoretical approaches are particularly impactful, both on addressing migrants’ short-term demands and the long-term features of processes that aim beyond ‘integration’ and include inclusionary pathways:

- **Multicultural concepts**: Migrants’ rising numbers and diversity were also reinterpreted as a broadening of host societies’ ‘cultural features’. Such concepts’ effectiveness is based on processes of mutual accommodation and the acceptance of important contributions of diverse origins and enriching encounters. However, many analysts point out that this assumption appears to have failed (Koopmans 2013) and is hardly any longer a guideline for policy and local strategy building.

- **Assimilation and acculturation**: In contrast, restrictive perceptions of mainstream policy and media discourse favour acculturation needs, primarily enhancing views of assimilation and one-sided integration demands
of migrants, and especially TCNs. Initially, Berry (1997) exposed assimilation, integration, separation/segregation, and marginalization as the diverse outcomes of acculturation processes, depending on effectiveness and the individual response to integration options. Instead of speaking of acculturation, the processes in which migrants must engage demand the maintenance and redefinition of identity in contexts of alternative cultural norms that contend with idealized views of conscious choice or mainstream and heritage culture strategy. This reveals that the enculturation of cultural elements is a particularly significant process for migrants in identity building (Weinreich 2009).

- **Aspirations and capabilities model:** Local and regional adaptation processes are also largely influenced by macro-structural change. These influence people’s migratory aspirations and capabilities, which are highly complex and often counterintuitive. This approach ‘reflects the need to (re) conceptualise migration as an intrinsic part of broader processes of economic, political, cultural, technological and demographic change [original italics] embodied in concepts such as social transformation, “development” and globalization’ (de Haas 2021, 12). Migration outcomes are therefore observed as a function of aspirations and capabilities with the set of geographical opportunities and structural conditions.

- **Border and identity shaping:** The interpretation of migrants’ integration and inclusion outcomes depends heavily on the definitions and delimitations of social groups, individual attachment to them, relationships and their cultural meanings, spatial and imaginary boundaries, and the dynamic evolution of these categories. The drive for stricter border management in recent years has both responded to mainstream discourse and shaped the debate and political options. While calls for freedom of movement have been exposed, these trends reveal a restrictive interpretation of people belonging to the host society and those outside. Advocating ‘unbounded inclusiveness’ (Laine 2021) challenges many divisions in European societies that are ‘taken for granted’ and thereby shape borders, physically and mentally. Projects of collective psychology recall the need to overcome ‘an atomized “I” and engage in a “Larger Us” movement that shifts borders and understanding for other perspectives’ (Evans 2019, 2).

- **Belonging:** In response to observations of migrants’ loneliness and isolation, psychological aspects feature prominently in explaining their long-term feelings. Following from the separating lines of ‘bordering’, the question of what determines a sense of belonging becomes crucial and is experienced particularly strongly in rural local communities (Herslund 2021). Analyses of social locations, social capital, and support by meso-level structure are relevant throughout Europe and are not restricted to less advanced contexts (Rottmann 2021). While this was also seen as relevant
Long-term needs to achieve social inclusionary pathways for migrants for other groups during the recent pandemic, particularities in shaping belonging expose their origin in small structures (Bock 2018). Community gatherings and transformation are therefore decisive for migrants’ psychological development and health, aspects that initially appear less prominent in migration studies.

However, theoretical concepts must prove their practical relevance for implementation. Newcomers face high expectations in coping with these processes. While integration theory focuses on rules for legal acceptance, employment, language learning, leisure, and the cultural issues of migrants, ‘social connection’ aspects that mediate adaptation processes in societies are regarded as secondary, supportive elements. This implies a certain idealization that assumes migrants are focused and ambitious individuals who strive to achieve host societies’ requirements and adopt their views. As host communities are presented as a ‘pure domain’ (Schinkel 2018), these processes tend to prolong the breakup of borders between opposing groups of migrants and society. As local partners in our case study claim, such effects tend to extend to the next generations and therefore imply the long-term commitment of every participant in the process. For application in remote and highly dispersed regional contexts, meso-institutions, in addition to supportive national frameworks, achieve a particular anchoring role and become pivotal in the long-term integration process (Galera, Giannetto and Noya 2018).

It is especially important to remember that inclusionary pathways have many aspects that can be explored from various angles and perspectives. When examining the long-term effects of migration, it is very relevant to understand migrations’ inclusion in a local society not as a one-directional process that affects only the migrants themselves, but that it applies to every regional social group, and to consider the strong dependence of research conceptualizations on dominant narratives. The conceptualization of ‘integration as a two-way process’ (Klarenbeek 2019) thus opens a renewed perspective on, and narrative concerning, inclusionary pathways. The need to engage in such research concepts to assess long-term effects will be explored, and the relevance for local development in rural areas will be explained as a crucial element of future developments.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF IMMIGRATION IN VORARLBERG – FOCUS ON ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Historically, Vorarlberg was one of the first regions in Austria to experience intensive industrial development. It particularly focused on the textile industry, which was very important until the 1970s (Melichar 2016). However, other
industries also prospered. This led to continuously high labour demand that domestic workers could only partly meet. There is therefore a long history of labour immigration to Vorarlberg, as in many similar rural regions. The important stages of immigration date to the early twentieth century, with an intensification of migration in the 1950s following World War II, when internal labour migrants from the economically weaker provinces of eastern Austria (Carinthia and Styria) were dominant. From the 1970s Vorarlberg especially attracted labour migrants from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia to work in the textile and construction industries. The population of Vorarlberg has since become more diverse, with migrants from old and new EU member states and more recently from third countries other than Turkey. Migrants not only settle in the urbanized Rhine Valley but in smaller mountainous valleys according to the location of industrial plants and the community’s tourist development (Barnay and Manahl 2003/2017). While this historical development reflects different immigration stages that may also occur in many other rural regions, it is important to highlight that the region’s employment needs mainly influenced these inflows and used the appropriate skills of targeted in-migrants.

Accordingly, an important research interest focuses on the structural factors of integration, such as immigrants’ participation in the labour market and especially second-generation migrants’ educational attainment (Burtscher-Mathis 2013; Grabherr and Burtscher-Mathis 2013; Gächter 2018). The results show that the second generation has caught up significantly in participation in education, while educational qualifications have only a moderate impact on vocational positioning. While there are scarcely any differences between the local and second-generation populations in educational attainment, second-generation employees remain concentrated in the lower segment of the labour market, and their formal qualifications are often unused. Other factors such as ‘ethnic penalties’ (Auer and Fossati 2019) seem to have an effect here. As the theoretical considerations above have already shown, a more comprehensive view of integration and inclusion issues is needed. This view underpins the increasing awareness that economic integration is not merely an issue of newcomers’ labour integration but depends greatly on communities’ many other, social, cultural, and wellbeing aspects. Beyond personal attributes and adaptation processes, the structural aspects of the host community play a pivotal role. The establishment of the okay.zusammen leben regional institution in Vorarlberg in 2001 has especially underlined the need for institutional support and a focus on the development and cooperation of municipalities. This perspective on institutional enhancement translates to an early discussion of the need to elaborate appropriate strategies for migrants’ local integration through ‘integration mission statements’, first for the town of Dornbirn (2002) and later for other municipalities and the region itself (2010).
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to address the local specificities of integration concepts and needs and the shift
to more inclusionary pathways.

‘BUILDING BLOCKS’ FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

Migrants’ inclusionary pathways are complex, non-linear, and multidimensional and involve multilevel and contested governance processes (e.g. Laine 2022; Omanović and Langley 2021). The social aspects and timing of inclusionary activities are still often underestimated, especially regarding their long-term impact on social cohesion. Based on selected results concerning the qualitative impacts of TCNs with a focus on forced migrants in the MATILDE region of Vorarlberg (Machold et al. 2021), this section presents some insights into the relevant ‘building blocks’ for social inclusion in the context of social cohesion.

The start of activities is important for the achievement of social inclusionary pathways for migrants. There is a widely shared view among stakeholders in Vorarlberg that building social cohesion starts as soon as migrants arrive in a community. For forced migrants this starts with the organization of basic care, which should optimally support self-reliance, including self-catering. Vorarlberg especially supported small-scale accommodation structures and the distribution of asylum seekers across almost all municipalities (93 of 96 municipalities) in 2015 (but also for Ukrainian refugees in 2022), leading to high levels of local involvement in refugee care (from communal representatives, NGOs, volunteers, etc.). Actors from various backgrounds were involved in a large variety of voluntary activities to support new arrivals (Machold et al. 2022), including language courses. As stakeholders mention a lack of knowledge of German as the prime obstacle to inclusionary pathways (and later to the understanding of dialect and expressions), it is crucial to start with language learning as soon as migrants arrive. However, the national provision and eligibility of language courses for asylum seekers through the official language course provider ÖIF only starts when the right of asylum is granted. Another factor that impedes asylum seekers’ inclusionary pathways is the restrictive working permits, despite a much more favourable decree by the Austrian Supreme Court in 2021. Moreover, regional projects such as the ‘Neighbourhood Aid’ project (1993–2016), which aimed to enhance employment options for asylum seekers (ibid., 30), had to be terminated or transformed into more bureaucratic schemes. The project aimed to ameliorate the social exchange between locals and asylum seekers and simultaneously provide modest renumeration. At the same time it increased the visibility of asylum seekers in the locality, contradicted the image of migrants’ ‘laziness’, and supported asylum seekers in finding a job after recognition. As the project organizer, the Caritas NGO argues it strives in its current form to meet some
of its initial intentions, ‘but cannot cope with the needs to the same extent as before’. A mayor of a small mountainous municipality adds that difficult administrative requirements hinder local inclusionary processes from both sides:

If the municipalities had been allowed to do it in an uncomplicated way, more could have been achieved. Trying to standardize everything, uniform paperwork, costs, and so on, creates high and complex costs. At the beginning [note: of the asylum process] families would have liked to do something, but then they were not allowed to.

The existence of a contact person, who can be understood as a ‘gatekeeper’, also strongly influences migrants’ inclusionary pathways. Familiar with both local and regional traditions and their relevant institutions, they offer a support structure that links with opportunities in the region, provides access to information, and thus expands the scope for action and opportunities for migrants. Contact people seem even more important in rural areas, where access to housing facilities, for example, is often untransparent and a major concern for migrants because of recently increased housing costs. Getting an apartment often needs explicit advocacy from a local key actor, especially where rare social housing apartments in high demand are concerned. Moreover, labour market integration benefits from local contact people who provide links and even care personally for job placements, as a (former) regional coordinator of refugee care in a rural region stated:

The rural area is characterized by short distances. People know each other. They know where to find a job. … If a volunteer calls an employer and thinks he could place someone [note: e.g. a forced migrant] he knows, that carries much more weight than a job application through the employment service. Personal mediation counts for more.

Besides the commitment of key actors interlinkages between local and regional actors of different backgrounds and an institutional anchoring of the topic of ‘integration’, indicative of the relevance of decision makers, are decisive (Manahl and Grabherr 2021). A new focal point was established in 2016 at the interface of the municipality, local actors, and forced migrants to support inclusionary efforts in Vorarlberg’s municipalities, the regional coordinators for refugee care. Remoter municipalities found the reception of asylum seekers in 2015 a huge effort, which led to a confusion of responsibilities and the over-burdening of actors. Regional coordinators’ professional support of refugee care has therefore been perceived as ‘indispensable’, as a mayor of a mountain village reflected. Tasks include counselling of forced migrants; recruitment, coordination, and support of local voluntary engagement; and cooperation
with municipalities and service facilities (e.g. educational institutions). This newly established coordination unit serves above all as an information hub for all the involved regional and local institutions. To enhance responsibility for social inclusionary processes and accountability, ‘such “relationship work” is very important for creating trust’, as one coordinator argued.

It is generally important to focus on potential and enhance opportunities for migrants when considering inclusionary pathways. This refers to voluntary work, which is considered to play a major role in local inclusionary processes (Machold et al. 2022), as well as to institutional offers. Two are highlighted here, because they explicitly target migrants to unfold their potential. (1) The ‘Competence Check’ project provides advice and support for people with a migration background in finding an adequate job that matches their vocational skills and educational qualifications. It was initiated in 2017 by the Centre of Migration Support to help recognized refugees and people with subsidiary protection to succeed in formal job requirements, training and skills development, verification of documents, and the matching of job experiences. In 2020 the project was extended to all people with a migration background to enhance their employability. (2) Supporting the strengths of young people is also a main aim of the activities of open youthwork, as the chairman of youth centres in Vorarlberg emphasizes. He sees himself as a ‘mediator and facilitator’ for young people (between policy representatives, administration, social initiatives, neighbours, etc.). He observes that the challenges young people with a migration background face are not specific to their origin but a consequence of their unfavourable socioeconomic situation, primarily determined by a low level of education, a family’s low social position, and – quite often – language deficiencies. More inclusionary pathways are sought by including migrants in cultural activities (e.g. concerts, excursions, performances, multi-ethnic parties, graffiti painting …) and establishing links with job placements, vocational training, and education.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL COMMITMENT

Social inclusion is not unaffected by territorial influences. As our analysis in the MATILDE case study region suggests, a rural and mountain region location decisively influences inclusionary processes. Migrants’ expectations are especially affected by the (lack of) support for local and regional actors and the underlying narratives of local strategies. However, this is not only a feature of the arrival phase, when commitment and empathy can be more easily increased because of dramatic situations like 2015’s high migration influx, the impact of refugees from the war in Ukraine in 2022, or short-term in-flow peaks. For local development the long-term commitment becomes crucial and can
be traced by different community approaches that are also in the case study region.

One of the core questions that arises is the issue of how to convince or enable migrants to stay in remote municipalities after the first ‘accepting’ periods. In principle, this is about how to ‘anchor’ newcomers in a rural setting and address the specificities of the mountain context. Inclusionary pathways do not happen automatically or by themselves: they need engagement, commitment, and creative action. How such processes are designed and implemented in the long run is also crucial. Other case studies focusing on the topic of integration and inclusion in rural and mountain areas confirm the importance of local framework conditions (e.g. Fick 2021; Galera, Giannetto and Noya 2018; Marcher, Kofler and Streifeneder 2017; Engel 2013). The main issues regarding the potential to encourage inclusionary pathways concern institutional aspects (e.g. how inclusionary activities are placed and supported by the local political system, despite limited administrative manpower, and cooperation between relevant actors), social aspects (the engagement and commitment of civil society and structures of social integration) and structural aspects (the availability and accessibility of adequate housing options, as well as a receptive local and regional labour market).

There are two main factors with an important influence on migrants’ integration in mountain areas. First, long geographical distances characterize the mobility and limit the accessibility of rural and mountainous areas (Bose 2014; Weidinger, Kordel and Pohle 2017; Machold and Dax 2017). Spatial mobility in rural areas is based on individual mobility (car mobility) for the largest part of the population. Consequently, long distances between small municipalities and regional centres limit public transport availability, and the lack of individual transport facilities for parts of the population leads to weak accessibility. Moreover, in rural and mountainous areas migrant communities can be very small, making it difficult for migrants to maintain bonds with people from the same ethnic community (Ager and Strang 2008).

Second, empirical evidence suggests that the manageable size and proximity of social spaces in a rural and mountainous environment may facilitate the building of social bridges between migrants and local inhabitants by offering the advantage of more direct links in daily life, neighbourhoods, and the active engagement of the municipality and other actors (Bürer et al. 2021; Glorius 2021). However, other studies highlight that social contact, particularly for women migrants, is less frequent in remote locations, underlining problems of isolation in this spatial context (Manahl 2022). This may be overcome by an orientation towards a welcoming culture with many local volunteers offering orientation, swift social contact opportunities, and support by individual volunteers and key people. It also links experiences of much easier school and work integration, based on local actors’ sustainable support (Machold et al.
However, rural areas are also associated with high degrees of social control and the general expectation that newcomers accord with and adapt to locals’ general attitude and behaviour (e.g. Glorius et al. 2020; Schneider, Bürer and Glorius 2021). In contrast, having better prerequisites for social inclusionary pathways due to social proximity (‘everyone knows everyone’) may lead to severe challenges for inclusionary pathways.

Box 4.1 summarizes refugee care activities realized in a small mountainous municipality to exemplify a local development good practice experience. This presentation communicates how the municipality benefited from a proactive approach, emphasizing the development process’s cornerstones.

**BOX 4.1 REFUGEE CARE IN A SMALL MOUNTAINOUS MUNICIPALITY (VORARLBERG)**

Refugee care in a mountainous municipality of about 1,000 inhabitants, started when the first refugee home (for 11 single men) was opened in November 2014. The mayor at the time reacted promptly to the challenge of the ‘integration’ of new arrivals into the community. He established and coordinated a local volunteer team who engaged in various activities with forced migrants in the following years. In regular meetings this ‘core group’ of volunteers (6–8 people) assessed the anticipated needs of the incoming forced migrants and possible activities. They communicated their activities in the municipal gazette to serve as contact people for both locals and forced migrants for any issues they might wish to address. The mayor, as head of this group, took full responsibility for the group’s actions. Yet he accepted that not everyone in the village was eager to offer support, and that attitudes towards forced migrants within the local population were diverse. He also acted as link to regional institutions and NGOs.

In the spring of 2015 a second refugee home was launched with room to accommodate about four families. During the peak period up to 40 forced migrants lived in the municipality, making a total of about 88 between 2014 and 2018.

Volunteers’ activities were wide-ranging and elaborated over time. They included the provision of language courses, regular sporting activities and meetings between locals and forced migrants, the organization of events and parties, the involvement of forced migrants in local activities like woodwork and snow shovelling, informal activities like cooking, baking, and knitting, numerous intensive personal contacts, and the accompaniment of individual people and families.

Since 2017 many forced migrants have left the village, either to join rel-
atives in towns and cities (Feldkirch, Dornbirn, Vienna, etc.) or to find an appropriate job or housing elsewhere. Some were not given asylum and had to leave the country. In 2021 one refugee home accommodating two asylum seeker families remained open, while another four families with asylum status were living in private and social housing facilities in the village. The present mayor, as well as schoolteachers and volunteers, still support forced migrants in need, now on a more individual basis.

CONCLUSIONS

Learning from a concrete example of territorial action in the small mountain municipality of Vorarlberg in Austria, the chapter underlines the need to retain local and regional actors’ commitment beyond the initial regulation of forced migrants’ asylum status. Taking this long-term perspective entails the advocacy of an encompassing view of the relevant sociocultural aspects for providing inclusionary pathways for migrants to remote areas. This implies the tackling of economic options specific to the local area and region, a wide array of factors contributing to drivers of wellbeing and the attractiveness of an area, and the institutional requirements to enable and support such a strategy. Migrants’ ‘integration’ is thus not a one-directional aspect but is embedded in highly diverse spatial and social contexts for which no simple solutions are available (Wessendorf and Phillimore 2019). It seems particularly important not to view this process as a ‘problem’ but as a long-term adaptation process for all the involved actors. This might be steered more satisfactorily if new-comers’ opportunities and potential are realized as additions to local assets.

The observation of relevant processes and support activities points to a need to cultivate inclusion from the beginning and to continue to subsequent generations, as complex social mechanisms engender enduring opposing perceptions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Such processes tend to be simplified to offer short-term solutions to the challenges of intense media exposure. Migration pathways in remote and mountain regions face further difficulties: beyond the general spatial aspects of coordinating local and regional development issues, long distances to economic centres (urban regions) must be addressed. Yet the proximity of social spaces in these areas is assumed, and that it favours social contact, participation, and inclusion. However, detailed analyses reveal specific problems of isolation and psychological stress in remote areas.

It is therefore crucial to thoroughly assess the local level, and that local actors understand their remit to nurture migrants’ inclusion. This requires long-term commitment, structured support, and an enhanced understanding of the relevance of ‘gatekeeper’ contact people and/or institutions that may act as
Long-term needs to achieve social inclusionary pathways for migrants

‘anchors’ for migrants in orienting to their new environment. The decisive role these actors play when migrants arrive is undisputed. The limited analyses and observations available so far over a long-term perspective suggest that later tasks are often overseen or neglected, yet this lack of concern may have detrimental consequences for migrants’ inclusion in local communities. Many of the early arrivals in remote locations relocate towards urban contexts or places more accessible to work and education. Others also relocate because they want to link to their peers’ specific social groups.

Although local and regional authorities cannot alter these forces of gravity, we observe a lack of focus on opportunities and limited awareness of specific development options. Regional coordination thus plays a key role in supporting and steering processes beyond the local level. In our case study we note regional coordinators’ specific role in refugee care. Regional authorities need to be more active in linking local and regional actors and views to increase migrants’ living and wellbeing options in remote places.

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Assessing the social impact of immigration in Europe


5. Russian-speaking immigrants’ vulnerable transnational family lives on the border: the case of North Karelia

Pirjo Pöllänen, Lauri Havukainen and Olga Davydova-Minguet

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the transnational everyday life of third-country nationals (TCNs) in the predominantly rural region of North Karelia in eastern Finland. It has a sparse, declining, and ageing population, with long distances to markets and in many cases to services. The region shares a 304-kilometre border with the Russian Federation, which was long considered a facilitator of the region’s economic development. It includes the relatively prominent checkpoint of Niirala-Värtsilä in the municipality of Tohmajärvi, with more than a million annual border crossings before the restrictions imposed due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced crossings remarkably. Of North Karelia’s approximately 160,000 inhabitants, 77,000 live in Joensuu, the regional centre. The region is a typical new immigration destination, with historically little experience of international migrants. Russians are currently the dominant group: at the end of 2021 3,949 people registered Russian as their first language (Statistics Finland 2022). Russian citizens constitute approximately 44 per cent of all foreign citizens living in the region (Joensuun kaupungin selvitys 2020). Estimates of the number of Russian speakers in Finland range from 80,000 to 100,000, depending on the calculation method. In 2021 87,552 Russian speakers were registered in the country (Statistics Finland 2022).

In this chapter we examine some traits of Russian-speaking immigrants’ integration into and impact on the Finnish border region of North Karelia. Like most Finnish (and European) rural regions, depopulation is a characteristic trait of North Karelia. Immigration can be seen as having potential to
alleviate this trend (Laine, Rauhut and Gruber 2023). Immigration to North Karelia from third countries has two main patterns: first, from Russia, mainly from areas adjacent to North Karelia, which has lasted for more than three decades; second, the appearance of asylum seekers as reception centres have been established in the region (Pöllänen 2020). Russian-speaking migrants’ presence cannot be dismissed when discussing immigration’s social and economic impact. Russian migrants typically remain in the region because of the border’s proximity and the ease of maintaining transnational family relations and everyday life (Sireni, Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2021). Meanwhile, asylum seekers typically move from North Karelia to more urban regions once they receive residence permits (Pöllänen 2020).

The changing geopolitical situation between the EU and Russia and the COVID-19 pandemic have greatly affected migrants’ transnational everyday lives. This chapter investigates the transnational familyhood of Russian-speaking immigrants in the Finnish border region. It considers how Russian speakers construct their transnational everyday lives in a rural border region that has faced the notable consequences of the changed geopolitical situation, both economically and socially. The data collected for this study are based on interviews conducted in the MATILDE project before Russia started the war in Ukraine, but they are complemented by ethnographic observations and unrecorded discussions with Russian speakers and experts after the war started. Even with the rupturing of border regimes and the extreme wartime geopolitical situation transnational families are building their familyhood in everyday life.

The transnational connections between Finland and Russia are rooted in the countries’ common history (Laine 2013). Nevertheless, during the Soviet period immigration from Russia to Finland was almost non-existent (cf. Leitzinger 2016). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 immigration from Russia and other former Soviet countries has been a noticeable phenomenon in Finland. At first this immigration consisted mostly of people of Finnish descent and their family members. These ‘re-migrants’ currently make up approximately a third of all post-Soviet immigrants in Finland (Davydova 2009). The second third roughly comprises those who moved because of family ties, and the final third consists of every other form of immigration (Leitzinger 2016). Marriage has always been a channel for Russian migration to Finland. It is highly gendered, involving predominantly women (Saarinen 2007; Pöllänen 2013; Tiaynen 2013). Since the 2010s immigration from Russia to Finland has occurred mostly because of family ties, study, entrepreneurship, and work.

The new layer of Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland in recent years is formed by those who have moved for political reasons. Although most Russian speakers arrive not as political refugees or asylum seekers but as students or labour migrants, in practice many seek residence in Finland because of
Russia’s political situation. The character of Russian-speaking immigration to Finland is changing. The arrival of these ‘new’ Russian speakers, who emigrated from Russia to escape the political reality, started before the current war in Ukraine, but the latest developments will only increase this trend. The war’s outbreak will bring and has already brought Russian-speaking refugees from Ukraine and Russia, as well as Ukrainian-speaking refugees.

**TRANSNATIONAL FAMILYHOOD AND TRANSNATIONAL CARE**

Studies of transnational families have become important in the globalization era, and they are tightly connected with migration. The definition of transnational families relies on the assumption that families divided by national borders live their lives transnationally, staying together and creating something that can be seen even across national borders as a sense of collective wellbeing, community, and familyhood (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). Transnational families’ creation and maintenance of familyhood, including ‘relativizing’ and ‘frontiering’, include transnational care and the maintenance of emotional and material bonds between family members. Their everyday life is framed by nation-states’ institutional practices, which are always intertwined with geopolitical regimes and developments (Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2020; Zechner 2010; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002).

The transnational family has previously been studied from various perspectives and geopolitical and geographical contexts. Transnational family studies often consider the requirements of care either from the parental perspective (e.g. Pöllänen 2013) or that of elderly care (Zechner 2010). Fisher and Tronto (1990, 35) argue that ‘human existence requires care from others and such caring is an important part of life’. They continue that women’s care is in the female sphere, which is seen as including private matters, family affairs, unpaid labour, and personal relationships (ibid., 36). This affects the nature of care, which in terms of duty and work is often invisible and poorly paid. How care is organized is culturally conditioned, and definitions of good care and care routines are culturally constructed.

From the socio-political perspective mainstream research has long concentrated on the study of care systems within the public sphere (Zechner 2010; Kröger 1997). Just as state socio-political systems differ, how care in private life is organized varies from one country or community to the next. In private life the concept of care inevitably refers to the family and family relations. In many cultures the family is the main unit of care. However, the organization of care within the family and the concept of family differ not only between but within societies. For example, in Finland the concept is based on the ideal of a nuclear family, whereas in Russia it follows either the extended family
or the extended motherhood models (see e.g. Pöllänen 2013; Rotkirch 2000; Yesilova 2009; Zdravomyslova 1996). Moreover, the model on which the construction of a particular family is based significantly influences its related caring processes and the organization of care.

Family care is often intergenerational and mostly reciprocal (Fisher and Tronto 1990, 37). It is at least assumed that family care entails reciprocity. In pinpointing the insubstantial nature of care, we assume a more collective viewpoint. Reciprocity can take place collectively between generations (e.g. the members of younger generations take care of those of older generations). Thus, reciprocity does not have to entail direct help from one another. The insubstantial nature of care refers to the emotions existing between family members and generations. Even if I am not physically caring for my parents, I have feelings and emotions which form part of the reciprocity with family care. This leads to a discussion of the emotions involved in care: the emotions and affects of care become important in a transnational context.

In studying transnational familyhood and transnational care, it is important to understand the geographical context of families’ distance from each other. In transnational family care it should be noted that the geographical location of both the country of emigration and the country of immigration is also meaningful. Geographical distance creates everyday transnationalism for migrants. When a migrant lives their everyday life far from their family members, care differs from when they are near their family members. It is difficult to sustain such everyday care practices as cleaning, cooking, or bathing from Finland for elderly relatives who live on other continents. In these cases care is framed more by financial and emotional support. Yet if the family member lives just on the other side of the state border, it is easier to maintain physical care for one’s family members. (Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2020; Pöllänen 2013; Zechner 2010.) Care for family members involving cleaning and cooking is possible in Russian Karelia from North Karelia. However, distance is not the only element that defines the functionality of transnational care, because border regimes also frame it in practice.

In our previous study (Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2017; 2020; 2021) we approached the border regime between Finland and Russia from the perspective of the border area as a precarious zone. We were inspired by the academic discussion of the precarization of everyday life and precarity, which we have developed as intertwined with transnational family relations. We understand precarization as the hollowing out of the welfare state, fragmentation of the labour market, and porosity across societal structures. The forms of work, education, family life, sociality and leisure, civil society and politics, and international relations are shifting from lifetime stable endeavours to temporary, unstable, and uncertain projects and phenomena. These processes mean many populations (especially women and migrants) must face uncertainty not only
from a financial perspective but from the emotional and functional frames shaping their lives. Moreover, the global geopolitical order has become even more unstable and militant and is now vulnerable to conflicts not only in the ‘traditional’ locations of the unstable Middle East but in post-Soviet regimes and even beyond. This instability creates feelings of precarity, especially among population groups with a personal connection to the territories where such conflicts arise. (Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2017, 177–178.)

We understand precarity as an affective stage caused by societal institutions, their functions, and transformations – for example, state borders, border regimes, and bordering processes that cause the unpredictability of everyday life in border regions. The fragility of transnational family relations in border regions has for decades been a lived everyday. However, since February 2022 the situation on the Finnish–Russian border has shifted from precarity to permanent vulnerability. The new situation demands quotidian resilience. This quotidian resilience, as Laine (2021a) notes, is more than an ability to recover as quickly as possible but to adapt and emerge more strongly. Laine (2021a) observes that such resilience seeks tools for solidarity and adaptation to the new everyday situations created by geopolitical threats.

EVERYDAY ETHNOGRAPHY AS A METHODOLOGICAL TOOL

This chapter’s methodology is based on the tradition of the ethnography of everyday life (see Vila 2003; Jokinen 2005). The chapter focuses on transnational everyday family relations and care practices in the border region in a changing geopolitical situation. The everyday is seen as a tool for understanding human behaviour, daily routines and practices, interactions, and communication. The significant markers of everyday life are routines, habits, and repetition, which often remain unrecognized by the actors themselves. The everyday becomes visible and acknowledged when it is contradicted by something perceived as extraordinary. When one faces something extraordinary (such as disease, falling in love, death, birth, migration, or war), everyday routines are ruptured until new practices replace the old and become familiar, and some routines become one’s new everyday. We see ethnography as an important data collection and analysis tool. Ethnography is a long-term, empirical, simultaneous, diachronic, and localized social research practice (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994). Everyday ethnography refers to a holistic way of doing research and an interest in knowledge. We attempt a holistic approach by using multifarious data and maintaining the flexibility and innovativeness of the data analysis.

The chapter’s analysis is based on data collected in the MATILDE project. It consists largely of 18 semi-structured interviews with local residents in the
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border region of North Karelia, experts working with immigration issues, and migrants of various origins. We also conducted two group interviews, six focus groups, and two roundtables. We undertook field trips in the border municipalities of Lieksa and Kitee to familiarize ourselves with the surroundings and the various actors working with immigrants. Beyond the data collected in the MATILDE project this chapter is built on the authors’ long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the border area between Finland and Russia. We also use ourselves as instruments of research in our border ethnography, following the ideas of autoethnography (Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2017; Uotinen 2010).

The data collection for MATILDE took place mainly in three phases between September 2020 and February 2022. In the first phase, in the autumn of 2020, expert interviews were conducted locally, regionally, and nationally. In the spring of 2021, we interviewed immigrants and those working with them in North Karelia. We also organized two focus groups. In the last phase we conducted field trips, attended events, and conducted four focus groups in the municipalities of Kitee and Lieksa. We familiarized ourselves with various NGOs and other actors organizing activities for and with immigrants in these two border towns. Although all these data were useful to obtain a broader view of the phenomenon, we will largely use the data from the two most recent phases, which focus more on the border region’s Russian-speaking immigrants. Even if the data were mostly collected before the invasion of Ukraine, they were complemented by ethnographic observations and unrecorded discussions after the war started.

In the following we analyse the data from the perspective of transnational family practices, everyday familyhood, and transnational care. The content analysis method is used in the interview analysis (see Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2002). The method is classically applied: it represents ‘a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from the text’ (Weber 1990), in our case to make valid inferences from interviews and ethnographic observations. Weber (1990) points out that this method can be used for many purposes; in our study the relevant purposes are to ‘reflect cultural patterns of groups, institutions, or societies’ and ‘reveal the focus of individual, group, institutional, or societal attention’ in the context of transnational everyday familyhood. We create the analytical themes by detecting key themes based on our theoretical understanding of the research topic and on conclusions emerging from our previous studies. Content analysis was chosen as a methodological tool to identify any thematic structures running throughout the interview data because it ‘brings meaning to a recurrent topic or experiences and its various manifestations’ (Graneheim, Lindgren and Lundman 2017, 32).
THE VULNERABILITIES OF THE TRANSNATIONAL EVERYDAY AMONG RUSSIAN SPEAKERS IN THE BORDER REGION IN NORTH KARELIA

Since the Soviet Union collapsed Russian speakers’ numbers in Finland have grown steadily. Finland and its eastern border regions have been a desirable destination for Russian speakers, especially for those from areas close to the Russian–Finnish border, because it allows them to keep in close touch with families in Russia. The everyday life of Russian speakers is often transnational as they maintain family and friendship networks over the border. Moreover, as previous research suggests (e.g. Pöllänen 2013; Pöllänen and Davydova-Minguet 2017; Tiaynen 2013), Russian speakers, especially women, often have care obligations in Russia. Transnationality is also becoming part of the everyday because some Russian speakers also have properties on the Russian side of the border. Some also receive social benefits (e.g. a pension or their mother’s capital) from Russia. Before 2014 this transnationality was more practical, and although the border crossing of individuals, capital, or belongings has never been easy, Russian speakers are used to coping with it. Our analysis of Russian speakers’ transnational family life focuses on three chronologically appearing layers: the post-Crimean period (from 2014); the COVID-19 period; and the post-February 2022 era. We examine the insecurities and vulnerabilities Russian speakers have faced since the post-Crimean period in their transnational everyday family life.

The Effects of the Post-Crimean Period on Transnational Family Relations

After the Russian annexation of Crimea and western countries’ resulting sanctions in 2014, the reality in the Finnish–Russian border area drastically changed (Laine 2018; Laine 2021b). The open atmosphere in the border region surrounding migration and transnational connections rapidly deteriorated. Bolstered by the arrival of asylum seekers in considerable numbers in 2015, the security discourse in Finland significantly changed. These shifts influenced the proliferation of the security and danger discourse. New fears emerged about the Russian Federation, embodied in the figure of Putin, as well as immigrants more broadly. The annexation of Crimea had a direct influence on Russian speakers’ everyday life in Finland. Russian speakers were conceptualized as a potential danger through their inevitable transnational connections to Russia and possible dual citizenship. Russian speakers’ transnational connections at different levels were securitized in the overall framework of confrontation.
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Because of Russia’s shrinking democracy and ever tighter atmosphere, a new wave of Russian speakers began to migrate to Finland after the beginning of the 2010s. According to data collected during the MATILDE project in North Karelia young and even underage Russian citizens began moving to Finland, especially to the border region, to study. Russians with the financial means to educate their children abroad appear to find this migration channel desirable. Many young students said they had been preparing to emigrate to Finland by studying Finnish via online courses.

I studied Finnish for a year with a private tutor in Russia before I left for Finland, and remotely with a computer. (FIK37, December 2021)

In recent years student migration from Russia, even to Finnish rural areas like North Karelia, has increased dramatically. This is at least partly because study is one of the easiest routes to residence in Finland. As students from outside the EU/ETA countries have had to pay for tuition since 2016, most come from middle-class families, often from major Russian cities. This has coincided with active recruitment efforts by Finnish educational institutions like the Riveria vocational school in North Karelia. In the last decade the number of new foreign-language students at Riveria has rapidly increased (Education Statistics Finland 2022), from 152 new students in 2012 to 342 in 2020. This concerns both young people and adults. Riveria and folk high schools offering vocational education programmes are also a gateway for those who already have established careers and lives in Russia. While it is reasonable to think people migrate to study for many reasons, our data make it clear that in recent years many have done so because they want to leave Russia due to the political situation. For older migrants, for whom studying the language beforehand may be impossible, and whose life is more established in Russia, the situation is thus much more precarious than for younger students who have been preparing for the change. The language barrier can be high, and the recognition of education and skills is uncertain.

When we’re discussing immigration in general it’s language, language, and again language. If you have the language, everything else comes with it. Many, many who come from Russia and Ukraine are immigrants who’ve left everything behind. Most of us were unprepared for emigration, and in this sense, we lose to those who have consciously prepared for it. For the most part this situation I’ve just told you about affects those who are over 40 or 30 years old. You can be a good professional but without the language … [interrupted]. (FIK56, through a translator, February 2022)
Despite the dramatic reasons for emigration from Russia, people need to maintain their family relationships over the border: young students’ nuclear family may be in Russia, whereas adult emigrants who emigrate with their nuclear families have intergenerational care obligations. Tense international relations frame these everyday family relationships. Previous research (Oivo and Davydova-Minguet 2019) indicates that the deterioration of Russian–EU relations in 2014 directly affected everyday lives and transnational relationships in border regions. The influence of the crisis was multidimensional. In Russia the state authorities issued several laws, instructions, and restrictions targeting Russian citizens with residence permits abroad and those with dual citizenship. Yet in Finland Russian dual citizens were conceptualized as a potential threat to national security. Dual citizens’ opportunities to study and work in security-related sectors were restricted. Previous research (Oivo and Davydova-Minguet 2019; Oivo 2021) maintained this created an atmosphere in which Russian speakers felt they were ‘between the devil and the deep blue sea’. Russian speakers’ affiliations and levels of state trust were polarized and even traumatized (see Oivo and Davydova-Minguet 2019; Oivo 2021).

Russian speakers living in the border region also faced a new labour market situation. The political crisis resulted in economic sanctions from both sides, and it affected international trade and tourism following the crash of the rouble’s value. Many Russian speakers faced fewer job opportunities. Furthermore, our ethnographic fieldwork reveals that since 2014 those with Ukrainian passports and transnational families experienced considerable difficulties in crossing the border at Finnish–Russian checkpoints. As a legacy of the Soviet Union families with members in various post-Soviet countries often have sisters, brothers, uncles, and other relatives in both Russia and Ukraine or elsewhere in territory of the former Soviet Union.

Since 2014 it has become clear opinions about the geopolitical situation are diverse, depending on the side of the border people find themselves. Such opinions are largely conditioned by media involvement. The media plays an important role in Russian speakers’ everyday lives. They follow different media sources originating in both Finland and Russia but also beyond. The media is used transnationally in Russian speakers’ everyday lives. Previous research (Davydova-Minguet et al. 2016) notes that the Russian state-sponsored media discourse has divided Russian speakers into different pools and created new divisions and collectives that are tightly bound to different types of transnational media involvement. Media involvement can both unite transnational families and divide them.
The COVID-19 Pandemic Changed Transnational Everyday Life

The COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting restrictions greatly affected the everyday lives of Russian-speaking immigrants and immigrants in general. In our data experts working with migrants were concerned about migrants’ integration into Finnish society because the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions interrupted in-person contacts. Many social activities important for the integration process were replaced with online meetings or cancelled entirely, and this disrupted the everyday security and interactions between other migrants and Finnish speakers.

Russian speakers’ transnational everyday was also ruptured because the pandemic dramatically complicated crossing the border. In March 2020 the Finnish–Russian border was closed for private and business crossers, something that had not occurred since the fall of the Iron Curtain. The problems for people with trans-local contacts, transnational families, those working with Russian tourism, and businesses connected with the border became insurmountable.

Many Russian speakers with care duties and obligations on both sides of the border worried about how their relatives were coping after physical contact was severed. The border was all but closed for months. Those with family members on the other side of the border could cross the border for urgent matters a limited number of times a year. For example, it became more difficult to go to Russia to care for elderly relatives. This understandably had dramatic effects on affected families. However, this was not the case for every Russian speaker: our interviews reveal some wished to avoid travel to Russia because of the unpredictable pandemic situation there.

And when it comes to travel, I haven’t been to Russia in over a year and have no urge to. I don’t want to take the risk. At some point in the Republic of Karelia the situation was very bad. I think it was third after Moscow and St Petersburg in those … sad numbers. It’s like this. Many, many have now passed up on travel, at least to Russia. I know this at least from my immediate circles. (FIK19, March 2021)

The pandemic was psychologically demanding for all immigrants, especially those with relatives and close family members in parts of the world where the pandemic has been much worse than in Finland. According to our interviews it was clear the lockdown created anxiety among Russian speakers as it did among other immigrants. A teacher who was teaching migrant children said this anxiety among migrants and their concerns about their family members could be seen in children’s behaviour and concentration at school. Migrants worried about their family members and their health, and this created considerable extra stress. The teacher reported that during the distance schooling period
in the spring of 2020 some migrant pupils just disappeared. Families also faced substantial pressures in supporting their children’s coping with distance learning. In some families this was demanding.

How it showed on the school side was that I had students from multilingual families that just disappeared. Unfortunately, there were incidents in families where parents divorced, for example, or another parent was left on the other side of the border for work-related and other reasons. This changed the family dynamic. And depending a little on the cultural background, the coronavirus could be seen as so frightening that the parents were unaware of where it would be safe for their child, in the school or in distance learning. Then if the parents couldn’t support them with the difficulties of distance learning, they might just leave the tasks undone or not attend meetings with the teacher. (FIK12, February 2021)

Later, when the total lockdown ended, but the restrictions on border crossing remained in force, some peculiarities also began to be seen in social behaviour. The informants reported that people in schools and workplaces wondered how those who crossed the border were following the quarantine restrictions, and if not, if it was a risk to others. Russian speakers’ transnational everyday caused confusion in local communities. This was especially the case in municipalities close to the border with a significant Russian-speaking population. The interviews revealed that Finnish speakers in local communities worried that Russian speakers, often those with dual citizenship, who were regularly crossing the border were spreading COVID-19.

According to the interviews there was also an everyday challenge with holiday trips to Russia. If Russian speakers travelled to Russia for holidays, they needed longer periods to comply with quarantine rules. This was emphasized in an interview in which the participants were working in a municipal day-care centre:

… It also has an impact if some Russian speakers, for example, travel somewhere – they’re quarantined for two weeks, so the child is away for that time … (FIK22, March 2021)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when family members and friends were unable to cross the border as often, networks of Russian speakers in Finland developed and strengthened in North Karelia: in the absence of the possibility to visit relatives, the maintenance of familyhood happened by sending presents and goods to families through acquaintances crossing the border. Strong and lively networks of acquaintances living in the same situation are very important in meeting this task. Social media platforms and local Russian speakers’ social media groups play a key role in establishing such networks.
The New Layer of Increasing Vulnerability: The War in Ukraine

In early 2022 the situation’s precarity deteriorated further. When Russia started the war in Ukraine, transnational family life changed dramatically. In a focus group conducted in Kitee a week before Russia launched the invasion in February, the tension among Russian speakers was already tangible. It became evident that there was considerable variation in the opinions of Russian speakers living in North Karelia concerning the current political situation in Russia. As previously stated, many Russian speakers who have emigrated in recent years are motivated by Russia’s democratic deficit. There is therefore a generational gap between Russian-speaking immigrants who moved to North Karelia in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union and those who have moved more recently. It is noteworthy that ‘generational gap’ does not necessarily refer to immigrants’ age but to the timing of and reason for migration.

Russian speakers who immigrated during the 1990s or early 2000s arrived mostly as re-migrants on the grounds of their or their spouse’s Finnish descent, to study or work, or as migrant spouses. Their reasons for migration differed from those who have moved to Finland in recent years. This also influences the perspective on how Russian speakers see Russia’s everyday democratic reality. After the Soviet Union’s collapse the reason for many Russian speakers’ migration was more financial than in recent years, when people have moved in many cases for political reasons. Recent Russian-speaking migrants have in some form been seeking political asylum, even though they often use student residence permits to gain residence in Finland.

The tensions caused by different ways of seeing the political situation in Russia affect Russian speakers’ social relationships in the post-February 2022 era. Our data show that friendships and family networks are being redefined, and the situation is causing significant worries for those with family members in Russia. These worries range from security-related issues to social and financial problems. In a later roundtable discussion one informant said she was worried her relatives might have to participate in the war in Ukraine if Russia declared a mobilization. This worry is quite common among those with young male family members in Russia, and it was raised in many conversations. The other common concern is elderly relatives, and how they are coping with pensions with the constantly rising prices resulting from the sanctions against Russia.

There are also people with family members or close friends in Ukraine. Their worries are even more intense. In everyday conversations Russian speakers speak of relatives trying to escape warzones, or of how and when they last heard from their relatives. There are doubts that their family members are still alive. This situation is complicated because Russian speakers may have...
relatives who live in Ukrainian regions occupied by Russia such as Donbas, where in addition to the hostilities the danger of being mobilized is quite high.

The affectional condition of Russian speakers seems contradictory in many ways (Tolkki 2022). Some support the Russian action and feel somehow empowered by knowledge about Russia’s activities garnered from the Russian mass media. Some oppose the war but are unaffected by it through personal contacts and family relationships. Russian speakers are also commonly distrustful and lack any clear opinion about the information they receive about the war, and many seek to distance themselves from the news flow. The affectional condition of some is heavily affected by the war. Pre-war vulnerability has become stifled pain.

Both the importance and vulnerability of transnational family relations since the war in Ukraine started have become visible. According to the data it is obvious that people seek to maintain their transnational familyhood in every possible way, but it seems transnational family relations are in a frozen state for many Russian speakers. While the split is not completely clear cut, those family members who live in Russia and mostly follow the Russian media often see the war in Ukraine as justified, whereas many Finnish Russian speakers condemn the war (see also Cultura Foundation 2022). However, people still wish to maintain their transnational familyhood, and this is possible if people completely avoid discussions of political issues. Family relations are maintained, but an informant said it was impossible to discuss almost anything today. The war touches every aspect of everyday life.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter we have discussed the vulnerabilities that have become the lived everyday in the Finnish–Russian border region of North Karelia since 2014, and which affect Russian speakers’ transnational familyhood. The region has become increasingly transnational in the last three decades, but since the outbreak of the war in eastern Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, the pandemic, and now Russia’s invasion of Ukraine this transnationality has become not only precarious but very vulnerable. This vulnerability has a significant bearing on society in general but especially on individuals’ lives.

North Karelia has long been a desirable immigration destination from nearby Russian areas, but since 2014 this desirability has been evaporating, and in 2022 the region’s image has changed. The border’s proximity has shifted from an advantage to a factor that creates insecurity. The decline in Russian trade and tourism has reduced business and job opportunities for Russian speakers. The war in Ukraine affects both the local and immigrant residents of this Finnish border region, regardless of their attitudes towards the war. At the same time the arrival of new immigrants and growing migration...
pressures from Russia benefit local educational institutions that previously established their contact and educational programmes with Russian-speaking immigrants. Immigration through education now seems the main channel to North Karelia for Russian speakers. However, this poses further challenges for the accepting communities. How can they help those who have completed their education find jobs and thus keep them in the region? How can they help families immigrate and integrate?

The integration and settlement of Russian speakers in the rural border region of North Karelia have been possible for three decades, and Russian speakers have become habitual everyday neighbours. Attitudes towards them have become smoother during these years. The new geopolitical order is changing population relations in border regions such as North Karelia, not only between Finnish speakers and Russian speakers but also among Russian speakers. We have described these effects in this chapter. From the perspective of good governance and good population relations immigration policy regulations for gaining a residence permit, family reunification, or entering Finland as an asylum seeker or refugee should be clear, transparent, and fair. In rural surroundings like North Karelia the prerequisites for entering Finland as TCNs are perceived as unfair and arbitrary among the various Russian-speaking communities. This needs to be fixed to develop good population relations in Finnish society.

NOTES

1. This was the case before 30 September 2022 when Finland implemented restrictions to the border crossings of Russian citizens to Finland.
2. According to the data collected in MATILDE most are Russian speakers.

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6. De/re/bordering remoteness in times of crisis: migration for reterritorialization and revitalization of a remote region

Anna Krasteva

Harmanli does not need to travel, for the world passes through Harmanli. (Gencho Stoev, Bulgarian poet)

I begin with this quotation from Harmanli-born poet Gencho Stoev, because it is a poetic mix of the local identity, globalization, mobility, connectivity, images and imaginaries, and relationships between spaces of places and spaces of flows that lie at the heart of this study. This chapter has three objectives. First, it analyses how bordering, migration, and remoteness are theorized in a crisis by comparing alternative conceptions and proposing new ones. Second, it examines the dynamic processes of the de/re/bordering of a remote region during three different yet interlinked crises: post-communism; refugees/migration; and the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, it studies the reinvention of remoteness at the intersection of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. This contribution addresses re-thematization of remoteness not only as social distancing but as perceptions and uses of space at physical, symbolic, and normative levels – space-making versus sense-making (cf. Laine, Rauhut and Gruber 2023, Chapter 1 in this volume). Building on experiences gained from a depopulated region, the chapter discusses the impact of migration on the revitalization, dynamization, and reterritorialization with a special emphasis on the agency of migrants as actors of migration and integration strategies, as well as on social innovation.

The study is based on the MATILDE region of Harmanli and Haskovo, a border region on Bulgaria’s triple border with Greece and Turkey. The region has discovered immigration in three different temporalities and at three different levels: local; national; and European. Locals experience the national specificities of immigration as citizens of Bulgaria through the media, political discourse, and migration policies, and the regional ones through their everyday
lives as residents of Harmanli and Haskovo. The refugee/migration crisis and the pandemic have thrust them into the European and global temporality of crisis (mis)management.

The national migration context has set the framework for the regional case study’s analysis. The former can be summarized in one general characteristic and two paradoxes. The general characteristic is that Bulgaria has an asymmetrical tripolar migration profile – heavy emigration, considerably lighter immigration, and a very small number of settled refugees (Krasteva 2019a, 17). The positive paradox is that in post-communist Bulgaria, a country with little experience of migration and democratic integration policy, there are high levels of immigrant integration in labour market participation and linguistic, cultural, and social integration. The second paradox is that in Bulgaria, which did not experience a significant increase in migrant stocks during and after the refugee/migration crisis of 2015–16, there is an increase in securitarian and restrictive discourses and policies that create negative attitudes towards refugees (Krasteva 2019a, 7).

This study is based on a multi-method approach that combines various complementary methods: desk research; narrative interviews; focus groups; critical political discourse analysis; and participatory practices. During the research around 120 interviews were conducted (89 individual interviews and approximately 30 participants in focus groups). The selection of the respondents was made with the aim, first, of hearing migrants’ voices. The goal was to include various cases in terms of nationality, status, length of residence, impact on the social, economic, and cultural life in Harmanli and the region, and forms of labour, educational, cultural, and other integration. Second, the selection aimed to identify the largest possible number of perspectives concerning regional development – for example, representatives of the local administration, business actors and NGOs, and representatives of national and international organizations providing both humanitarian and legal assistance and social services.

The ethically important moments of ‘island migrant communities’ (Stachowski 2020) have been given serious consideration. Studying a small migrant community in a small urban centre highlights the ethical concerns of confidentiality and the privacy of the research subjects, as well as the management of trust (Stachowski 2020). An English-language teacher in a refugee camp exemplifies this. Ethical issues (Birman 2005) are addressed with methodological vigilance.

This chapter is structured in four parts. The first reflects on the theoretical background of the conducted analysis by re/conceptualizing its three pillars – bordering, crisis, and remoteness. The second introduces the migration profile of Harmanli and the Haskovo region as an amalgam of local, national, and European dynamics and policies. The third analyses how the three crises – of
post-communism, refugees/migration, and the COVID-19 pandemic – have affected the region’s re/de/bordering. As different as these crises are, they share three characteristics: an intensive temporality; a threshold that produces change; and alternative visions of their impact and management. The crisis of communism (post-1989) catalysed debordering by the double process of the (relative) opening of state borders and the rise of emigration. The refugee/migration crisis (2015–16) pushed the pendulum in the opposite direction – reordering by the triple process of building a fenced wall, the rise of populist discourses of Othering, and the construction of a refugee centre in Harmanli. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the revalorization of remoteness through return and mobility. The fourth part of this chapter studies the reinvention of remoteness through reterritorialization and local citizenship.

CRISES: A CATALYST FOR RECONCEPTUALIZING BORDERING, REMOTENESS, AND CRISIS ITSELF

The conceptual cluster of this study is structured around three poles: re/de/bordering from the perspective of two types of territory (organic and political) and the insightful triad of bordering/ordering/othering (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002); crisis as what Reinhart Koselleck calls the ‘symbolic signature of modernity’ (Schulz 2017, 10); and remoteness as a geographical condition, political narrative, and metaphor.

Bordering: Liberating Pathos of Borderscapes vs ‘Revenge’ of the State

Border studies has undergone a fundamental epistemological turn from linearity and territorial fixity to practices, regimes, narratives, from state-centred to citizen-centred bordering (Laine 2017, Scott 2020, Laine and Casaglia 2017), its main argument being that ‘borders are in a constant process of confirmation, contestation, transformation and re-confirmation’ (Scott 2020, 4). The processual ontology of borders requires ‘a shift from a fixed border knowledge to a knowledge capable of throwing light on a space of negotiating actors, experiences and representations’ (Brambilla et al. 2015, 4). The more fluid the ontology, the more multi-sited the epistemology that strives to encompass a maximum range of bordering agency, practices, and imaginations (Krasteva 2020). The key concept on which a multi-sited epistemology stakes the highest theoretical expectations of innovative reflection is that of borderscapes (Laine and Scott 2018) – borders as mobile, relational, and contested sites (Brambilla 2015, 17).

The merit of the borderscapes approach lies in its strong normativity (Laine 2018), its theoretical effort to open the conceptual space to accommodate multiple non-authoritative actors of bordering, and its fundamental assumption of
the alternativeness of non-state bordering discourses and practices. The refugee crisis of 2015–16 catalysed the divergence between border theory and border reality in different directions: the more the state produces borders, strengthens its monopoly on bordering, and mobilizes its ‘legitimate violence’, the more deconstructive, creative, and alternative borderscapes theorizations become. While scholars have sought to ‘overcome Euclidean geometry, moving towards a new “multidimensional choreography” of borders’ (van Houtum 2009) and expound the border imagination ‘beyond the line’ (Brambilla 2015, 17), I argue for the alternative idea of the ‘revenge of the state’ (Krasteva 2020). The state has seized the refugee crisis of 2015–16 as the perfect pretext for fixing the border at the line. The fence as a policy narrative and imaginary visualizes and designates the fundamental triad: state–territory–sovereignty. The post-Westphalian order, which weakened the state through transnationalism and identitarianism, is transformed into a neo-post-Westphalian order, in which reordering at the line rehabilitates the state (Krasteva 2020). The borderscapes approach is relevant when analysing debordering by a multiplicity of actors and practices. The ‘revenge of the state’ approach works well when analysing the rebordering catalysed by the (mis)management of migration crises and mainstreamed anti-immigration populism.

**If Crises Did Not Exist, Populist Leaders Would Have Invented Them**

Crisis has been assigned a central place in the conceptual arsenal that conceives the contemporary world. ‘An epoch is often characterized by the domination of a self-interpretation of its relation to historical change’ (Schulz 2017, 9). The twentieth century ended with a radical non-crisis discourse: Francis Fukuyama’s (1992) ‘end of history’ expressed the triumph of democracy and globalization. The twenty-first century has replaced Fukuyama’s triumphant optimism with Zygmunt Bauman’s ‘state of crisis’ as the *differentia specifica* of contemporary society: ‘We must learn to live with the crisis, just as we are resigned to living with … pollution, noise, corruption and, above all, fear’ (Bauman and Bordoni 2004, 7). Bauman and Bordoni’s conception makes the transition from ad hoc to permanent crisis, from crisis as a pathology to crisis as the new normality (Laine 2018).

The refugee/migration crisis is interpreted in various ways. Several scholars consider the diagnosis of ‘refugee crisis’ misleading (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak 2018). I propose a more complex conception of two types of refugee/migration crisis: classic and populist (Figure 6.1). The first borrows two elements of the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) definition of refugee/migration crisis, involving large-scale migration flows and migration management challenges – namely, an unprecedented increase of refugee flows and institutional incapacities in managing them
efficiently. The second is of a different character and is constructed through politicization, mediatization, and securitization. The populist migration crisis is more independent of the ontological reality of the size and dynamic of migration flows: refugee flows become a ‘crisis’ when their ‘mediatization and politicization’ in public and political discourse turn them into a crisis (Triandafyllidou 2018). I conceptualize the systemic affinity between crisis and leadership in the paradox ‘If crises did not exist, populist leaders would have invented them’. This paraphrases Sartre, emphasizing that populist leaders need crises as deeply and intimately as Sartre’s anti-Semites needed the Jews. Migration/refugee crises are their favourite asset (Krasteva 2019b).

Both classic and populist migration crises are at work in this study. The classic crisis describes the institutional unpreparedness and inefficiency in crisis management in the face of the unprecedented surge in refugee flows in 2015–16. The concept of populist migration crisis is relevant for situations
where, with reduced migration flows and functioning institutions, far-right politicians electrify public opinion by inciting fear, hatred, and hostility.

**REMTENESS: MARGINALIZATION VS TRANS-LOCAL SOLIDARITY AND RESTORATION OF PLACES AND SPACES TO PEOPLE**

To paraphrase a well-known saying, ‘There’s a place for everything, and everything is in their place’. Remote and rural regions have been taught to know their place (Ching and Creed 1997). The notion of political remoteness is dominated by the image of a powerful centre that defines places outside and distant as peripheral and marginalized, the spatial fringe interfering with the political deficits. This imaginary constructs remoteness as downgraded and deprived of self-government. Remote places can be reconceptualized as people’s vital and multifaceted worlds of experience, grounding their future in the diversity of their cultural and positional resources, values, and potential, as well as the basis for place-sensitive and place-based policies. The restoration of places and spaces to people affords an opportunity for territorial equity and trans-local solidarity.

**Harmanli and the Haskovo Region: From ‘Zero’ Invisible Immigration to Diversified and Visiblized Migrations**

The Haskovo region’s migration profile is shaped by the socioeconomic context in which the settlement and inclusion of immigrants in local development occurs. The region is among the least developed economic regions in Southern Bulgaria, with the lowest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita after Sliven – 8,500 Bulgarian lev (BGN) (2018). The average gross annual wage is the fifth lowest in the country – just BGN 9,600 (IME 2020). The region’s socioeconomic profile is a key factor in explaining the specificity of the local migration profile. The latter cannot be understood within the explanatory scheme of wage differentials, more opportunities for employment, and other classic migration theory arguments. Different pull factors are relevant in explaining migrations to an underdeveloped region – cheap real estate, a good climate, and government refugee reception policy.

The Haskovo region’s migration profile is characterized by small but diverse migration groups. Three arrival and settlement periods can be identified: the first arrived before the post-1989 democratic changes in Bulgaria, mostly for family reasons; the second arrived after the start of the democratic transition, when Bulgaria opened up; the last wave was caused by the refugee/migration crisis of 2015–16. Here we can see the first key characteristic of the region’s migration profile – it is linked to the democratic changes. There were very few
family migrants during communism, and they were so well integrated that they were almost ‘invisible’ – both the population and the authorities perceived the situation as ‘zero migration’. The three post-communist decades have radically altered the picture, increasing the still small number of migrants, diversifying their profile across the broad spectrum from refugees to British amenity migrants, and amplifying the visibility of refugees with a new ethno-national profile for the region. In length of residence three distinct groups can be identified: permanently settled and transit, the former being migrants for family reasons, the latter refugees. Britons, Finns, and so on are in-between, with a pulsating character between temporary and permanent migration.

Considering the type of migration, three different types can be identified: family migration; amenity migration; and refugee migration. The first type is family migration. Its most characteristic representatives are the members of the Russian community. Indeed, this group is nationally diverse, including women from Russia and other post-Soviet republics, as well as women from the Bulgarian diaspora such as ethnic Bulgarian women from Moldova and other post-Soviet countries. A key characteristic of this group is gender specificity. At both the national and regional levels, Russian family migrants are mostly women (Krasteva 2018). The labour integration of Russian women is diverse and successful – during our fieldwork we met Russian women teachers, hairdressers, and family business owners. The Slavic language, Cyrillic script, and Eastern Orthodox religion are cultural factors facilitating and catalysing inclusion. Also noteworthy is a new phenomenon of mixed families, the product of the diversification of migration flows in the last decade – intermarriage of members of different migrant groups; for example, of TCNs and refugees (BG09). There are also mixed marriages between EU citizens and locals who are also EU citizens (BG25). It is noteworthy that labour migration is absent: foreigners do not come to the Haskovo region in search of higher wages or more job opportunities. This is the region’s major distinctive feature.

Amenity migration involves people moving to regions perceived as desirable, usually for non-economic reasons such as a physical or cultural environment that is seen as more beautiful, tranquil, or inspirational than their current one (Borsdorf, Hidalgo and Zunino 2012). In Bulgaria and in the Haskovo region the most typical representatives of amenity migration are British. They are the most visible part of a heterogeneous community: ‘We have a Japanese lady who lives with a black man from London, two Polish families, people from the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Austria, everywhere’ (BG06). The major specific feature of this group is its rural character. All other types of migrants in Bulgaria are concentrated mostly in cities. Unlike them, amenity migrants prefer to stay/live in the countryside. The set of pull factors attracting
amenity migration to the Bulgarian countryside is a rich mix of the environmental, cultural, social-psychological, and political:

We are all moving here for the same reason – to live in the countryside, have a quiet and peaceful life, the weather is good, the people are nice, the culture is nice, the wine is also really good, and we can grow our own food. … There’s a lot more freedom than there is in England, less control. … It’s much less stressful. (BG06)

Refugees are the latest immigration phenomenon in the region. Their profile differs from that of all other groups in several respects. Unlike the other immigrants, they have not chosen Harmanli – they have been placed by the host country in the Registration and Reception Centre (known informally as the ‘refugee centre’) in the town. A second difference is that refugees are the most mobile migrant group – Bulgaria is a transit country for the overwhelming majority of refugees.

THREE CRISES: MULTIPLE TYPES OF DE/RE/BORDERING

From Communist Over-production of Bordering and Under-production of Migration to Post-communist Over-production of Migration and Debordering

The communist border regime affords a perfect illustration of the conceptual ‘bordering/ordering/othering’ triad. It was characterized by hyper-bordering, based on and intensified by geopolitical and ideological factors. National borders were defined, militarized, and guarded as the Cold War borders and as a symbol of the closed communist society. The state was the major militaristic border and migration actor, jealously excluding alternative citizens’ agency. Citizens were excluded from both access to borders and authorship of their migration projects. Communist borderscapes were guarded and off-limits to free movement, let alone unauthorized crossing. ‘Paper borders’ (van Houtum 2021) – that is, visas – reinforced the state’s monopolistic surveillance power. The few Bulgarians who managed to escape surveillance were not called ‘emigrants’ – the communist authorities branded them ‘non-returnees’. Othering was applied not only to foreigners but to the state’s own citizens. Ordering was the major aim of the communist over-production of bordering and under-production of migration: there was a place for everyone if everyone stayed in their place, which was defined, regulated, and controlled by repressive power.

Post-communism saw a radical debordering through a variety of policies, practices, and social innovations that will be analysed in the chapter, such
as the emergence of the empowered citizen designing their migration and bordering practices; mass emigration and slowly increasing immigration; the construction of borderscapes as a lived and practised space inhabited by local citizens and migrants in border regions with transborder activities; the transformation of the border from a barrier to a resource, and so on.

The Refugee Crisis as Multiple Rebordering

The refugee crisis of 2015–16 swung the pendulum in the opposite direction and produced multiple rebordering. In Harmanli and the Haskovo region especially it triggered three forms of rebordering. The first is related to the refugee centre in Harmanli as an abrupt transition from small-scale and well-integrated immigration to migration ‘imported’ by the national authorities and unwanted by either the refugees themselves or the locals. The second is the newly erected wall – both as a real fortification of Bulgaria’s border with Turkey and as an image of and metaphor for Bulgaria’s new post-communist closure. The third form is b/ordering from above and below – by mainstreamed populism and everyday bordering.

The refugee centre: abrupt transition from zero migration to large migration flows

The residents of Harmanli experienced the refugee crisis in a dynamic mix of three different temporalities: the emergency temporality of the Balkan migration route as a state of exception; and the more gradual national temporality connected with the gradual increase in immigration into Bulgaria, from 1,236 in 2008 to 39,461 in 2021.1 Of key importance to local residents was the third temporality, a sharp discontinuity associated with the establishment of the Registration and Reception Centre in Harmanli, which opened on 12 October 2013.

The refugee centre brought about four important changes in Harmanli. The first was a radical increase in the number of foreigners and a change in the ratio of locals to refugees, with the number of refugees growing to several thousand in a town with a population of fewer than ten thousand. The second was a substantial change in their national, ethnic, language, and religious profile – the asylum seekers came from the Near and Middle East, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. The third concerns visibility. Whereas Russian women migrants are more invisible in public because they are well integrated, as are the British migrants because they are scattered across the countryside, with no more than several British families living in one village, the refugees are concentrated in the town. The initial unpreparedness of public institutions to manage the refugee crisis and reception of asylum seekers efficiently, as well as the local population’s lack of intercultural experience of coexisting with large groups of
migrants, consolidated the ‘migration–securitization–ontological insecurity’ cluster (Laine 2020). Locals experienced the top-down asylum policy, the opening of the Registration and Reception Centre without sufficient consultation with and preparation of the population, and the sharp increase in the number of refugees as a culture shock. An informant said that she had been out of town for a week, and when she came back, ‘The cultural shock was enormous. … The whole town was swarming with foreigners. … The locals were worried about what would happen’ (BG03).

Refugees: the favourite target of politics of hate and b/ordering
Towns with refugee centres are preferred places for far-right parties. Their leaders ‘start their campaign from Harmanli’ (BG11). Several informants stressed the role of nationalist parties as organizers of anti-immigrant actions (BG30, BG14) such as rallies against the refugees, ‘at which people from elsewhere outnumber those from Harmanli’. The electoral cycle, not refugee waves, determines the temporality of the activity of political brokers of hatred. Locals find themselves in a vortex of both crises – the refugee wave and its political instrumentalization by extremist actors, even in periods of significant reduction in migration flows.

Everyday re/de/bordering: elasticity of the us/them boundary
The concept of everyday bordering refers to the practices of building boundaries and increasing social distance in the everyday life performance of the meetings between ‘me’/‘us’ and ‘them’ (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2017). An informant in Harmanli shared her observations of a Syrian refugee: ‘He experiences racism everywhere he goes’ (BG09). Social distance between Bulgarians and refugees is increased by several apprehensions – fear of disease and crime, foreign culture, and Islam. The locals are familiar with Islam – there is a large ethnic Turkish community in the region – but the Islam of refugees seems more radical to some (BG11). The anxiety and multiplication of fears suggest a sense of ontological insecurity – challenges to the collective identity that are exacerbated during a migration crisis (Laine 2020).

The concept of everyday bordering tends to reify and reinforce boundaries, while the study has provided insights into their elasticity. I will illustrate them with two different cases: the diversification of refugee images; and the relatively easy transition from rebordering to debordering in interpersonal relations.

Refugees: one group, two images. The diverse representations of refugees can be structured around two opposing poles. The first is positive and applies mainly to Syrians: ‘they are very polite, intelligent, some of them have good professions and financial resources’ (BG03, similar information in BG05). The second focuses on fear and is personified above all in young Afghans: ‘All
De/re/bordering remoteness in times of crisis

Problems come from the Afghans, they are young men, behave arrogantly, have no manners. They don’t stay long, but while they are here, they create tension’ (BG05). The two images correspond to two narratives of asylum – a humanitarian and a securitarian one. The Syrian refugees are viewed mostly as a humanitarian issue, the young Afghan men as a challenge to national and individual security. They are shaped by two discourses – media and political. At the beginning of the refugee crisis the media reported both the causes (war and violence in Syria) and the civic mobilization for solidarity. At the opposite pole, the far right is very vocal in its securitarian and extremist narrative. Between 2017 and 2021 the far-right United Patriots nationalist coalition was part of the ruling coalition and influenced both the political and media discourses with its anti-migrant securitarian rhetoric.

From rebordering to debordering – herein lies the crucial importance of interpersonal communication. An informant reported a characteristic case in a public transport vehicle. The bus driver, who wanted to make the other passengers laugh, said something disrespectful about a refugee on his bus – without malice, but out of a misguided sense of humour. The first time the refugee remained silent. When the same thing happened again in a modified form, he spoke out – in Bulgarian – much to the surprise of the bus driver and the other passengers. The atmosphere immediately became friendlier. ‘And guess what happened then?’ the informant, a TCN, asked me. Yes, I was already guessing – today the refugee and the bus driver are friends and communicate cordially with each other (BG09). This individual case is characteristic in several respects. Everyday bordering can emerge with no reason, without being provoked by a foreigner in any way. In its milder forms it is a dimension of a contradictory attitude towards otherness – you do not like it, but you do not take it seriously and joke about it. What is important is the reversibility of everyday bordering, the possibility of decreasing the social distance and building a shared space of communication. The most powerful means is language. Locals are particularly impressed when foreigners speak to them in their native language. The latter is also the strongest catalyst for building trust.

Pandemic, or the New Attractiveness of Remoteness in (Post-)Covid Times

Place matters. Place was defined and managed in different ways during the three crises. Communism and post-communism thought of it in terms of borders, of the policy dynamics of their closing and opening. It was the policy of decentralizing refugee reception, rather than a local development policy, which was the reason for the construction of the refugee centre in Harmanli. Policies during the first two crises remained blind to the advantages of a remote region. Paradoxically, it was the pandemic crisis that revealed this positive per-
spective. COVID-19 became an incentive for change in the symbolic battle for attractiveness between remote and urban places.

‘A combination of Brexit and the virus’ (BG06) – this is how a British resident summarized the key push factors. The recent British immigration to the villages in the Haskovo region illustrates a more general trend. Villages have become an attractive centre in Covid times not just for foreigners but also for Bulgarians. A British immigrant noted that ‘a lot more Bulgarians are moving back to the villages’ (BG06). The same observation was also made by Bulgarian informants (BG03). A crisis highlights what remains invisible in normal times – the pandemic and the climate and economy are major triggers of the reterritorialization, reconceptualization, and revalorization of remote areas, which the next section analyses.

RETERRITORIALIZATION AND REVITALIZATION OF REMOTENESS

Migration as a Resource for Local Development

One of the most significant changes for the labour market and local development is the establishment of the refugee centre as one of the biggest employers in Harmanli, providing a variety of high-skilled jobs. It plays an important role in preventing a brain drain by offering interesting employment opportunities to educated foreign-language-speaking experts from the town and the region. Refugees themselves also have a positive impact on the local economy because they boost local business – grocery shops, restaurants, banking services, real estate: ‘A Turkish-speaking owner of five or six flats in Harmanli rents them to refugees’ (BG01).

‘The Spiral of Development’ or Revitalization of Remoteness through Migration and Mobility

The deterritorialization of remote regions means a loss of the youngest and the best, of demographic and social capital, a brain drain: ‘Many gifted young people are leaving Harmanli to go either to the bigger cities or abroad’ (BG03). This remains a major trend. However, new reterritorialization actors – migrants and mobile nationals – have begun to counter the dissatisfaction of places ‘left behind’ by revitalizing remote places, promoting the attractiveness of small settings, and revalorizing remoteness.

Based on a concrete example, I will illustrate this phenomenon, which I define as ‘spiral of development’ – each positive change stimulates and brings about another positive change. The village is small, with only about 100 inhabitants. After a Finn settled there, he was followed by others, and
they formed a small community that is now 10 per cent of the local population. They introduce the typical changes that expats make in all villages – renovating houses, improving the look of the village, boosting the local economy through consumption – from building materials to food. They have also dynamized village life by getting involved in a range of activities – from painting the church dome to planting trees in the village hall courtyard. The second change has to do with the impact of the village’s new attractiveness on de/re/population. In the first stage the locals who had moved to the big cities were glad to have someone to sell their houses to in the village. The more attractive the village became to foreigners, the more Bulgarians began to rediscover its charm and wish to restore their links with it. In this new stage of the spiral, some sellers pulled their houses off the market. The village is now enjoying a third wave of change – house owners, although they are not returning to the village, are increasingly involved in development initiatives, multiplying and empowering local agency. At the time of writing an inspiring recent example is the restoration of a beautiful but abandoned fountain, thanks to the visionary mayor, donations, and volunteer labour of all active fellow villagers – Bulgarians, foreigners, and recent returnees alike.

This individual but characteristic example shows that four types of actors are key to the reinvention and revalorization of remote regions. The first is expatriates – from the United Kingdom as well as from other European countries, who revitalize villages, change their image from depopulated to repopulated, and appreciate and increase their attractiveness. The second is mayors and local representatives with the vision and political will to multiply resources for local development, including through migration and mobility. The third is mobile Bulgarian citizens. ‘Chicago, Sofia, Plovdiv’ (BG30) – this is how a local businessman described the starting points of the return mobility of locals who have worked or studied abroad or in other Bulgarian cities and are now returning to their places of birth. Some become commuters, working in a big city and living in a small town or in the countryside; others restore their closer links with their village, as in the beautiful example of the restoration of the fountain. The livelier the villages, the more they attract new migrants. A migrant owner of a real estate agency said he preferred to sell houses in villages that already had mobile residents – settlers from Plovdiv, Sofia, Haskovo, or people renovating their parents’ houses (BG06). The fourth is the non-mobile locals who, even if they do not communicate directly with and have no vested interest in the foreigners, enjoy the revitalization of the local community: ‘The most interesting thing is that even the grandmother in the village, who does not depend on the British in any way at all, is delighted with their presence because she wants there to be people in the village’ (BG04).
Migrant Entrepreneurship and Empowerment of Migrant Agency

Migrant entrepreneurship in a small town with transit migration is a positive paradoxical phenomenon – it is neither widespread nor even typical, but that is precisely why it is more visible and more highly appreciated: ‘The Syrian guy with a fast-food restaurant here is a very successful example of integration because he has a job. Most of his customers are Bulgarians, and they accept him as part of their society; he is still living in Harmanli and hasn’t moved to Sofia or abroad’ (BG02). The best-liked migrant entrepreneurs become local and national celebrities – the media speak highly of them, and the locals like them.

The restaurant business and services are the main areas of self-employment and small-scale entrepreneurship, but original forms are also found in quite different areas like education. The best-known innovation is the playschool at the refugee centre in Harmanli introduced by a young British woman. Play methods help children overcome trauma, giving childhood back to children who have been robbed of their childhood by wars, conflicts, and exile. The playschool’s purpose is to form behaviour for learning and emotional skills (BG09). All the migrant parents we interviewed praised it. The playschool is a dual educational innovation in both methodology and financing. Having started as a volunteer project, it now relies on ‘Fund a teacher’ crowdfunding (BG09). Migrant entrepreneurship therefore has a threefold positive impact on the empowerment and successful integration of migrants, on economic and social development, and on the intercultural atmosphere.

Greening Intersectionality and Local Citizenship

‘[C]itizenship remains a significant site through which to develop a critique of the pessimism about political possibilities’ (Isin and Nyers 2014: 9). The inclusive and activist understanding of citizenship covers all actors who contribute to ‘constructing the place’, including newcomers and international migrants considered members of a local community regardless of their legal status. I will note here two innovative practices, both inspired by the creative mix of green and intercultural values and practices.

**Intercultural greening of villages.** Migrants are among the innovators and active promoters of village clean-ups. This takes the form of cleaning the streets around the house to cleaning the main streets in various villages. Migrants often initiate these green practices, involving neighbours, pupils, and fellow migrants.

**‘Intercultural Gardens as Green Bridges’** is a participatory activity launched by MATILDE partners (CERMES and Caritas) and implemented with the enthusiastic involvement of all the schools in Harmanli and a neighbouring
village with refugee pupils. Children from Bulgaria, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan planted flowers and saplings in the schools where they studied, played, and grew up together. Every culture poeticizes nature. The rose is emblematic of Bulgarian identity, but the red rose is also the national flower of Iran and Iraq. After flowers and saplings had been planted and watered there was a short intercultural programme in each school with recitals, dances, and songs prepared by the pupils and their teachers especially for the event. Intercultural gardens are green bridges that connect pupils from different countries and cultures, children and adults, and all of us – children, teachers, parents, scholars, stakeholders, citizens – with nature.

**Welcoming Culture as an Asset to Address New Migration Crises**

It was kind of a big surprise. We are friendly with everybody, and we expected to be treated similarly in return, but we could never have dreamt how welcoming the Bulgarian villages would be to us. It was amazing. (BG06)

The quotations from the interviews about the warm welcome, openness, and cordiality of the local people are so numerous that a separate chapter could be written about them. What is important for the present study of the de/bordering and revalorization of remote places is the significant implications of a welcoming culture not only for the festive and everyday interactions of locals and foreigners but also their readiness for positive, rapid, and adequate responses to new refugee crises. A typical example is a village mayor who welcomes migrants into local community life. This intercultural capital was mobilized in the new crisis – at the beginning of the Ukrainian refugee crisis the small village was already hosting two families, one in the mayor’s own home.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This study’s conceptual cluster comprises the triad of re/de/bordering, migration, and crises. It is mobilized at two levels: the theoretical by offering new conceptualizations; and the empirical in the analysis of the fieldwork in Harmanli/Haskovo region. Crises catalyse and intensify the re/de/bordering dynamics and reshape the leading agency. The article analysed three crises that differ in nature, duration, and impact: communism; refugee/migration; and COVID-19. The crisis of communism marked the transition from an over-bordered closed society to de/bordering through political openness and mass emigration and from the monopoly of the state to empowered citizens as actors in their migration projects. The refugee/migration crisis introduced a radical discontinuity to the migration profile of the Harmanli/Haskovo region with the construction of a refugee centre. The case study demonstrated
the applicability of my concept of two types of migration crisis: classic and populist. Political instrumentalization of refugees illustrates the paradox: ‘If the refugee/migration crisis did not exist, it would have been invented by populist leaders’, introducing temporality to a crisis even in calm periods. The COVID-19 crisis has reversed the picture, increasing the attractiveness of a remote region.

Immigration in the region is not numerous but has a positive impact in several respects. The first is on local citizens – the new Registration and Reception Centre is among the biggest employers in Harmani, attracting a qualified labour force. The second is symbolic – expats from the UK, Finland, the Netherlands, and even Japan create a positive image of the region, attracting amenity and lifestyle migrants from developed countries. A long-term effect of this new positive capital is the decrease in negative local attitudes towards emigration: as an informant noted astutely, educated young Bulgarians are more inclined to stay in a region where the community of educated and English-speaking people is growing (BG 04). While the emigration of locals deterritorializes the region, depriving it of life projects, expats reterritorialize and revitalize depopulated villages, enhancing the region’s dynamism and attractiveness.

NOTE


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7. Migrating to Scottish insular communities: how remoteness affects integration by shaping borders and identities

Maria Luisa Caputo, Michele Bianchi and Simone Baglioni

INTRODUCTION

The remote areas of Europe hold significant value and potential, the capitalization of which needs place-sensitive sustainable approaches and innovative governance strategies. However, they are no magic bullet for the multiple challenges our societies face (Laine, Rauhut and Gruber, Chapter 1 in this volume). In this chapter we discuss how remoteness, a largely spatial concept that implies ‘otherness’ (Harms et al. 2014), influences the definition of borders and participates in the ongoing construction and enactment of individual and collective identities in the Scottish Western Isles, with a resulting impact on the integration processes between migrants and local communities. This relationship between spatial and social dynamics has been widely explored in the urban space – see, for example, the discussion of the ‘ghetto’ (Wacquant 2005; Peach 1996) or the literature concerning the impacts of the characteristics of arrival areas on integration outcomes (Hanhörster and Wessendorf 2020). Yet the literature, notably the geographic and anthropological – whose development is strictly linked to this dimension – has not directly discussed how remote spaces contribute to local and migrant actors’ performance and negotiation of their identities and the social borders between them.

This chapter discusses how remoteness participates in the integration process not as a mere context in which actions occur but as a dimension the actors experience, appropriate, and mobilize. We explore how the emphasis on ‘local’ homogenous identity in remote communities can present an obstacle to integration, especially where this is understood as assimilation. We also investigate how the awareness of the important role incoming migrants play
in revitalizing these ageing and shrinking communities and their contribution to the local economy can be a key enabler of integration between locals and migrants. Finally, we explore the role of the remote landscape in the performance of migrant identity, and how the resulting symbolic appropriation of space is fundamental for the construction of a sense of belonging.

METHODOLOGY

Our analysis builds on data collected in fieldwork between October 2020 and May 2022 in Scotland’s Western Isles. For this chapter’s purposes we use 47 relevant qualitative in-depth interviews from 74 interviews, both with migrants and local or British actors, collected either remotely (between October 2020 and September 2021) or in person (since October 2021). We asked 16 of these migrant interviewees to produce mental maps representing the space of their everyday lives. These mental maps helped evoke their experience, elaborate their representation, and explore their relationship with the remote place in both visual and oral forms. The maps thus afforded a subjective and individualized perception of how remote spaces could affect integration processes. Five of these 16 migrants, all women, also participated in a photovoice workshop: a research technique facilitating migrant expression through photography. Participants were provided with a workshop on photographing techniques and a discussion was facilitated with them on the topic of the workshop: ‘My place’, understood as the Western Isles as ‘my place’ and as ‘my place in the Western Isles’. We then asked them to take photos of ‘their place’ and comment on them. The corpus of 20 pictures and the texts these migrant women produced over a two-month period within this workshop’s framework is a further – more reflexive and developed – elaboration of their relationship with the remote space and community. It is therefore important for this chapter’s analysis.

‘MAKING REMOTENESS’ IN THE WESTERN ISLES

In this first section we discuss remoteness as a multidimensional notion – embodied in space and time, with physical, symbolic, relative, and relational dimensions. We also discuss remoteness not as a static quality of the space but as the process of ‘making remoteness’. We then introduce the Western Isles, or Na h-Eileanan an Iar in Scots Gaelic, as a remote space and place.

Discussing Remoteness

Remoteness and remote islands have always been a source for imagination, crucial for the geographic enterprise. Similarly, remote communities
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– unchanging and cohesive ‘communities’ which existed in the past and still survive in distant lands, an important myth in industrial societies – were key for the development of the anthropological field (Macfarlane 1977). ‘Going remote’ and ‘being there’ therefore became essential to the discipline, as a well-known passage of Malinowski states: ‘The anthropologist … must go out into the villages, and see the natives at work in gardens, on the beach, in the jungle; he must sail with them to distant sandbanks and to foreign tribes, and observe them in fishing, trading, and ceremonial overseas expeditions’ (Malinowski 1926, 147).

While remoteness has been a key element in the formation of these disciplines, what ‘remoteness’ is remains debated. ‘Remoteness is a tricky concept in multiple ways: politically, historically, conceptually and, perhaps as importantly, in the imagination’ (Green and Laviolette 2019, 138). Notably, this seems to occur because remoteness eludes any static description, as Harms expresses in his reference to its ‘edginess’:

> Remoteness is never fixed; it is not a predetermined and enduring place, but a process situated in dynamic fields of power. The condition is always infused with the edgy feeling experienced by people living in a world where the relations of inside and outside, near and far, proximate and remote are always contested. Calling remoteness edgy means thinking of remoteness as an active process. … If the remote is a largely spatial concept that implies otherness, edginess inserts a sense of the ways human beings negotiate and wield remoteness as a strategy for living in the here and now. (Harms et al. 2014, 364)

Thinking of remoteness as an active process entails both the deconstruction of the idea that remoteness is an absolute or permanent characteristic of some spaces and an emphasis on the power dynamics that define and redefine it:

> Unsurprisingly, remoteness is created; it is not some kind of inherent characteristic of a place, let alone a people. And, by definition, remoteness is a relative term: it is dependent on the relation and separation between two points. And while places can be defined as being remote according to some criteria (e.g. bad infrastructural connections), they might not be remote at all according to other criteria (e.g. effects of transnational trade). It depends on what you are comparing to what. (Green and Laviolette 2019, 137)

Remoteness’s relativity emerges not only across different spaces and scales but different actors. As an experienced dimension remoteness varies greatly across different actors: class, age, and gender can greatly affect one’s experience (for example, in one’s ability to access aerial transport or rely on terrestrial and/or maritime mobility) and therefore require understanding from an intersectional perspective. Furthermore, these power dynamics affecting space and actors combine when we consider the individual need to move across spaces, as
migrants who have settled in a remote place need to travel from the remote place to their primary network in their home country (e.g. migrants’ potential rural–rural circular mobility with their family in their home countries), or all those who need frequently to access infrastructures primarily located in ‘central’ spaces (e.g. elderly people who need specialized healthcare).

Finally, Saxer and Andersson (2019) observe a return of remoteness’s dimensions to the centre of the anthropological and geographic fields. This new interest in the remote space seems to be related to the current redefinition of space accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a context in which ‘remote’ is ‘virtual’ and the ongoing global pandemic persists, remoteness seemed to become increasingly appealing – see, for example, the rapid increase in housing prices in such regions and the growing digital nomad phenomena. We thus need to rethink space power dynamics by situating ‘the remote as in some ways central to our “new world disorder”’ (Saxer and Andersson 2019, 152).

The Western Isles as a Remote Space and Place

The Western Isles are remote spaces. As an absolute dimension remoteness refers to remote spaces or inhabited regions at extreme latitudes, above a given altitude threshold, inland far from coasts, and harbour islands, especially those far offshore (Bocco 2016). This typology needs to be understood as not exclusive but to have potentially overlapping categories, as in the case of the Western Isles, the space this chapter studies. This island group sits to the west of Scotland, constituting the country’s last inhabited region before the Atlantic Ocean. Their insular remoteness is strengthened by their northern latitude and challenging weather and sea conditions.

‘Rather than simply being disconnected, seemingly remote areas are usually shot through with uneven forms of connectivity, wiring them to the world economy and into global politics and mediascapes’ (Saxer and Andersson 2019, 143). These uneven connections can be seen in how the Western Isles’ geographical insularity mixes with their worldwide economic, cultural, and social ties (e.g. the economic bonds derived from the large-scale export of fish and shellfish to Europe, their cultural and social ties with descendants of emigrants to the United States and Canada, or their relationships with the home towns of Romanian and Latvian incoming migrants, etc.).

The Western Isles are remote places. We stress here their relationship with the actors who inhabit or experience them. As experienced places, the same geographical peripherality of such remote places needs to be questioned and oriented according to the observer’s perspective: ‘Remote from where?’. Furthermore, these ‘peripheral’ remote, places are centres of meaning for individuals and communities (Bocco 2016). They are central to local communities, and they contribute to their construction. This ongoing relationship between
The Western Isles are remote in time. The duration of journeys from other more central spaces in the case of distant, badly connected, or unconnected places is central to the experience of remoteness. The journey from the islands’ harbours to the main cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow takes at least nine hours, and people are frequently unable to travel because of the old fleet or bad weather. Regular daily flights connect the islands with the mainland, but their cost is higher than most national and regional flights, and they are therefore accessible to only a minority of islanders and visitors.

The Western Isles are also remote in time because their social time is asynchronous with that of more central societies. On our islands this is notably represented by the hebdomadal rhythm centred on Sunday as the Christian sabbath, a time of community consecration when all economic activities and travel cease. This religious time also contributes to the perception of the islands as remote places. Until twenty years ago the Western Isles were isolated every Sunday, as there were no flights or ferries. The first plane departed on a Sunday in 2002, and the first ferry in 2006.

Finally, remoteness needs to be discussed in relational terms as an active process situated in the field of power. Power dynamics related to remoteness and insularity can be discussed in terms of insulation and isolation (Vannini 2011). Following Vannini’s analysis, we can refer here both to insulation as the opportunity in a remote space to resist the practises and rules of the more central and hegemonic spaces and to isolation as the dynamic resulting from peripherality.

In the Western Isles the maintenance of Scots Gaelic, the religious observance of the Sabbath, and the large community buyout of land can be seen as forms of resistance embodied in the remote space. This is evidenced by the fact that three quarters of community-owned land in Scotland is in the Western Isles. It constitutes about 75 per cent of all land in the Western Isles, 85 per cent of whose population live on community-owned land. This community landownership seems to be the result of the collective process of healing from the trauma of the Clearances (Rennie 2020).

This discussion of remoteness as a process in the field of power must consider how scale changes the organization of space at centres and peripheries. This is very evident in the Western Isles, as they are not a cohesive space but a group of islands – 15 of which are inhabited – stretching 200 kilometres from north to south. Travelling this relatively short distance is challenging, requiring two ferries and from eight or nine hours to a full day by private car, pleasant weather, and no ferry disruptions. Accordingly, centre/periphery dynamics emerge at the scale of the different islands, structured around Stornoway – the main town – as the centre of local power. This organization of space and gov-
Governance is contested by the local actors of ‘remoter’ islands, notably in terms of the asymmetry of services (see social housing, health, childcare).

‘ISLANDERS’ AND ‘MIGRANTS’: HOW REMOTENESS AFFECTS THE SOCIAL BORDERS ON THE ISLANDS

In this section we examine how national and social borders are represented in a remote place like the Western Isles, and how remoteness affects them. We argue that while the fading of national borders can facilitate the integration process, an emphasis on local borders and identities can be a barrier in the integration process. Our reflection on social borders is rooted in the interviewees’ frequent questioning and contesting of the category of ‘migrant’. ‘It depends how we define migrants – are we saying migrants from across Europe or other parts of the world or migrants from the south of England? Is a migrant someone who has another cultural experience?’ (Local expert, 1 April 2021).

In his discussion of how ethnic identities are constructed through interaction between different groups and the creation of borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’, Barth (1998) describes how the specific traits of cultural identities have become signifiers of ‘us’ and therefore emblems of difference: "Although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of ‘objective’ differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant. … [S]ome cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied. (Barth 1998, 14)"

Following Barth’s stress on the active process of creating borders, we discuss how the actors interviewed in the Western Isles (de)constructed the notion of ‘other’. While the researcher used the notion of migrant as a ‘non-UK national’, the representation of the border between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘locals’ and ‘migrants’ was never defined by British borders. The categories of ‘other’ and ‘migrants’ were extended to both national and international incomers as opposed to being an islander. Two notable features constructed islander identity – a link with the terrain (being born on the island or a descendant of someone born there) and an ability to speak Scots Gaelic – as participating in local culture. Non-islanders thus included a wide range of the incoming migrant population – British and non-British. This wide notion of otherness prevailed in other categories, based on nationality, race, and religion. This was commonly highlighted by interviewees through the example of the Gaelic-speaking descendants of Pakistani migrants – a visible minority who
arrived in the islands after WWII – who were described as fully part of the local community.³

In the general framework of a family-oriented society ‘the main route to integration is through family’ (Local expert, 15 March 2021). School – and notably Gaelic schools – and playgroups were thus shown to play a key role in the Western Isles. As Stachowski remarks concerning the case of Polish families in rural Norway (2020, 390):

For families with children, family life played a significant role in creating different conditions for participation in various social areas, other than one’s own ethnic group. … The introduction of children into local educational and extracurricular institutions allowed the children to function as gate-openers for the adult migrants, granting them access into previously inaccessible social environments of the local community.

Children’s enrolment in Gaelic education especially seems to be perceived by locals as an indicator of migrants’ participation and inclusion in the local community.

Speaking Gaelic is a key constituent of the local identity and a powerful tool to perform it, as the local council clearly states. It describes it as ‘an inalienable aspect of Islanders’ identity’ or ‘an inalienable part of the lives, identity and cultural heritage of the people of the Western Isles’ (CnES 2017). In 2011 more than 61 per cent of the population of the Western Isle could speak Gaelic (NRS 2011 Census) – an exception among all Scottish Local Authorities, where speaking Gaelic in everyday life is rare.⁴ This unique widespread use of Gaelic seems a direct consequence of the islands’ remoteness. ‘The remoteness and relative inaccessibility of those islands have meant that they have resisted Anglicisation more successfully than the rest of Scotland’ (Cummins and Corson 1997, 127).

According to McEwan-Fujita (2010) Gaelic is the most recognizable pillar of the social border between locals and migrants:

Uist residents categorize people who settle in Uist as adults as ‘incomers’, a category opposed to ‘locals’. In theory, these terms describe, respectively, people who have settled in the area as adults (or whose parents have), and people who were born in the area of at least one parent who was also born in the area. … people assign sets of opposing values to these two categories: ‘Locals’ are believed to belong to the area, to have roots and a history there, while ‘incomers’ are believed not to belong to the area, to lack roots there, and to be ‘recent and fugitive’. … [T]he general equation of Gaelic with ‘local’ and English with ‘incomer’ is still prevalent among Gaelic speakers, and newcomers are socialized into it. (Ibid., 46)
According to Ardener (2012) Gaelic skills also allow a hierarchization of ‘incomers’, and he includes the islanders of Pakistani ethnicity mentioned above:

The Lewis Pakistanis may not all speak the fluent Gaelic that legend says, but the legend marks their assimilation to the averageness of strangeness that characterizes incomers. No amount of Gaelic would turn them into Gaels, but their existence is used to contrast with those incomers who have learnt no Gaelic at all. (Ardener 2012, 529)

The local authorities make many efforts to give continuity and valorization to the language. Since 2020, Gaelic has been the default language for all new pupils in Western Isles schools unless their parents request otherwise. Yet none of the migrants interviewed had enrolled their children in Gaelic education. Non-English speaking households are concerned that children will learn English, while the limited education in Gaelic – a few years as a second language – seems sufficient. Our migrant interviewees thus seem not to perceive Gaelic education as a way to integrate with communities or access opportunities.

Among the interviewees amenity/cultural migrants fascinated by the local culture and history generally speak Gaelic to some extent and contribute to the local culture’s continuation by participating in it, collecting oral history and writing about it, and participating in its dissemination. However, although they are well integrated in local communities, their identity remains that of outsiders. A migrant woman, who speaks some Gaelic and actively contributes to the conservation of the local culture, explained that she remained an ‘outsider’ when we asked why she did not participate in the collective management of the community-owned land on which she lived: ‘I honour the tradition here, but I don’t want to interfere’ (migrant woman, 18 February 2022), referring to the fact that the management of common goods for the local community needs to remain in natives’ hands. Another woman describes this positively as a way not to become ‘uniform’: ‘Being an immigrant doesn’t go away. Even if you get involved in local projects and live in a place for many years, you’ll still be different. But that isn’t necessarily negative’ (migrant woman, 19 February 2022).

None of the migrant workers could speak Gaelic. Very few had some grasp of it because they had been schooled, came from a mixed household, or had lived for more than 15 years on the islands. We do not know how their assessment corresponded to their actual skills: certainly, most interviewees had no skills. An interviewee described migrant workers’ disinterest in Gaelic culture in discriminatory terms: ‘They’re “gypsies”. They’re here for the money – they have no interest in it’ (employer, 13 October 2021). Yet both local and migrant...
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Interviewees described open prejudice and xenophobic incidents against migrants – including British nationals – as very rare. They also said that during the Brexit referendum (2016) xenophobia against EU migrants had been rare in the Western Isles. ‘Brexit put a sense of fear in them [the EU migrants]. It took a lot of work to convince them they were welcome’ (religious leader, 15 April 2021).

In conclusion, the wide notion of otherness implied by a narrow understanding of the ‘native islander’ mitigates national, racial, and religious differences but simultaneously seems to define the presence of a nonporous border between local and non-local. As one interviewee stated: ‘There is a clear line between the people of the island and the others’ (migrant woman, 19 February 2022). Does this emphasis on the islander identity’s borders build on birth/descendance and the cultural feature of Gaelic represent an obstacle to integration?

While the interviewed local community seems to value integration if it is understood as assimilation to the prevailing culture, we understand local integration processes as much more complex and strongly affected by other social, demographic, and economic factors. Newcomers’ inclusion in these remote communities seems to be facilitated by their small numbers, which creates a sense of belonging and engagement and the development of social connections (Dahl and Tufte 1973). The acknowledged need of newcomers to sustain ageing and declining local communities appears to be the main driver of integration. This awareness always emerged during our interaction with local actors (interviews, focus groups, informal meetings) and is not limited to an economic outcome: ‘Trying to solve the issue of how to hire a fisherman or a factory worker only has the effect of making me richer – what we need is to resettle families’ (employer, 11 February 2022). A commitment to remaining on the islands long-term and contributing to local communities thus seems capable of blurring the social borders between migrants and such communities.

Furthermore, the tendency to solidarity and self-organization in addressing the everyday challenges of living in a remote place – for example, challenging mobility, harsh weather conditions and isolation, and a lack of essential goods or electricity – seems to trigger social cohesion. Awareness of the need for incomers and ‘remote solidarity’ affect integration. This can be appreciated in the changes introduced in local business to adapt to the much-needed migrant workforce, the informal support offered by local actors to migrants to access services and opportunities (e.g. help with driving lessons, administrative tasks, informal childcare), and in the many volunteering initiatives (befriending groups, childcare for ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) class participants, etc.).

While the interviewees appear to clearly distinguish the borders between ‘islanders’ and ‘migrants’, awareness of migrants’ contribution to local
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communities and their engagement in them – facilitated by local gatekeepers – seems to highly mitigate their effects. This leads us to approach integration between migrant and local communities in the Western Isles not as the creation of an integrated community in which social and cultural borders are simply absent but – building on Klarenbeek’s (2019a) reflection – in terms of ‘relational integration as the process of boundary change towards more relational equality’ (ibid., 4).

Relational integration does not primarily concern the decrease of objective difference, but rather the meaning of perceived difference. The two are not unrelated: they mutually affect each other. Yet, objective differences are not necessarily a problem for relational integration; they only become so if they are perceived as a reason to ascribe people lower or higher social standing. Processes of relational integration revolve around whatever social boundary maintains relational inequality. (Klarenbeek 2019a)

In our case cultural and social borders between migrants and islanders seem not to affect migrants’ access to social and economic opportunities or their social mobility. Yet to our knowledge they are absent from the management of common goods – and notably from organizations managing community-owned land, revealing that these borders maintain a certain level of inequality in this highly symbolic sphere.

APPROPRIATION OF THE REMOTE LANDSCAPE AS A STEP TOWARDS A ‘NEW-ISLANDER’ IDENTITY

While in the previous section we discussed ‘islander identity’, and how the borders between native and migrant affect integration, in this section we discuss alternative ways to identify as ‘islanders’ mobilized by some of the interviewed migrants. We show how remoteness affects migration trajectories, and how the remote landscape intervenes in the redefinition of migrants’ identities.

How Remoteness Enters Migrants’ Narratives to Affect their Trajectories

Migrants themselves commonly introduced references to remoteness without any solicitation from the researcher, and often in relation to their experience of the challenges of arriving on the islands. Facing isolation, reinforced by challenging weather and rare or unavailable public transport, many of the labour interviewed migrants – and notably those who had arrived through recruitment agencies and lacked any pre-existing networks – perceived their migration as temporary. As one of our interviewees said: ‘The weather was a shock,
landing from the flight I thought I would stay only for a few months’ (Migrant, 21 October 2021) and ‘I was always thinking I would remain only two more months’ (Migrant, 21 October 2021).

Remoteness continued to affect migrant trajectories after they had settled or decided to remain. A recently retired amenity migrant, who chose to live in a beautiful and remote corner of the islands, had decided to give up driving. Another found their personal mobility increasingly challenging, as they struggled to get to their vehicle on the frequent windy days. These migrants saw themselves needing progressively more care and healthcare in the near future, and they considered that it would be too difficult to meet their needs, so they were considering leaving the islands soon. Finally, remoteness also contributed to the shaping of migration patterns as families in the home country did not wish to join migrants in the remote islands. One of our interviewees, whose relatives had not stayed with him, said ‘They didn’t like it here’. Migration thus assumes a circular pattern but also plans for more fluid long-term settlement. Remoteness was often highlighted as the reason for migration. This notably occurred among amenity migrants and generally in terms of access to ‘idyllic nature’ (de Lima 2012). Reference to remoteness also emerged in positive terms as contributing to the process of making migration permanent. This was commonly reflected in settled labour migrants’ appreciation of the sense of security and the landscapes that living in an isolated small community afforded (see also Flynn and Kay 2017). In one case an interviewee, describing remoteness in terms of low population density and isolation, said it constituted a bridge to the lifestyle in their home country and therefore allowed them to build a sense of continuity with their previous life experience.

The Remote Landscape as a Canvas through which Drawing an ‘Islander Identity’

It is generally challenging to build and perform a set of cultural identities that embraces both the place the migrants live and all the other places, across national boundaries, that are meaningful to them. In the case of the Western Isles a tension between ‘here’ and ‘there’ was expressed by many interviewees, most notably by circular migrants as exemplified by a fisherman’s painful remark: ‘I changed my home for a holiday’ (migrant fishermen, 7 October 2021).

In this section we explore how labour migrants can re-elaborate their experience of living in the Western Isles by building a sentimental attachment to their remote landscape. The relationship between the experience of migration and the landscape of the arriving regions is widely unexplored by the migration and integration literature. To our knowledge it is discussed in the rural setting only in relation to amenity (or lifestyle) migrants – see, for example, the work of
King et al. (2021) on retired migrants in the Italian region of Marche or Cooke and Lane (2015) on how amenity migrants become environmental stewards of rural landscapes. We are aware of very few works that have explored the role the landscape plays in migrants’ rebuilding of a sense of belonging in the arrival place and in redefining and performing their identity. Aure, Førde and Magnussen (2018) is pertinent, as it explores migration and integration processes in Norway with a sensitivity to the ‘complex connections – and disconnections – between place and belonging’ (ibid., 53). ‘Engagement with the landscape is an analytical lens that allows the investigation of interrelations between the social and the material as well as mobility and stability’ (ibid., 54).

Following the same approach, we explore how the sense of belonging and an ‘islander identity’ are built through the remote landscape. We therefore understand landscape as a sociocultural product. ‘Landscape is not merely the world we see; it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world’ (Cosgrove 1985, 47). This view is socially and culturally constructed: it is subjective yet informed by a shared culture. ‘The simplest and most banal of landscapes is both social and natural, subjective and objective, spatial and temporal, material and cultural production, real and symbolic, etc. The landscape is a system that straddles the natural and the social’ (Bertrand 1978, 249).

This section analyses the creation of a relationship with the remote landscape as a key step in the process of construction and enactment of a new identity, allowing us to see how the subjective trajectory and view of the migrant interact with the sociocultural construction of the remote landscape in the community in which they arrive. The maps of two migrant women who have lived a large part of their lives in the islands will be used for this purpose.

The first map (Figure 7.1) was drawn by a young migrant woman who arrived in the Western Isles as a child to join her mother, an economic migrant. She learned some Gaelic at school, yet she was educated primarily in English. She described herself as part of the local community and was employed in the administration of a local company. She had intended to enrol in a university degree on the mainland, but she changed her plans and decided to remain because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although she grew up on a small island in the Western Isles, she did not describe her identity as that of an ‘islander’ but as growing up as ‘other’ in a small community in both positive and negative terms. While not fully identifying with the community, she seemed to identify with the place she often praised in her narration. ‘We don’t have many commercial centres here, but we have beautiful beaches and many other great places’; ‘Some people don’t know the beautiful places that make the islands and make people want to stay here’ (migrant employee, 21 October 2021). When asked to draw a map of her everyday life, she started to draw her favourite local landscapes – a place
The map was created as a result of the researcher’s request to draw her daily space.

**Figure 7.1 Mental map representing the landscape the migrant appreciates in the island where she lives**

where the waves took the shape of a volcano, a group of rocks on which it was possible to spot seals and otters, the small island with a single circular road where she spent most of her life. These remote landscapes seemed to be centres of meaning which signified her experience of settling on the islands and made her want to remain. Through this sentimental attachment she built a sense of belonging to the islands and her ‘islander identity’, and by sharing these centres of meaning with other (local) people, she reinforced her integration in the local community.

The second map (see Figure 7.2) is that of an ageing migrant woman, who drew her everyday space as that of the living-room of the house she had bought for herself and her children, who were now adults and had left the islands. The migrant woman had a personal connection with the Scottish culture and landscape before she married a local and moved there. The private space she drew was fully integrated into the remote landscape. The house and notably the kitchen table were tools for her narration as gravitational spaces around which the main achievement of her life – the creation of an important charity – had occurred. The table was also a link to the local community and terrain.
Made by friends from local materials, it represented hospitality: ‘My house feels like a solid and permanent base. But it also gives me wide open views towards the sea beyond my immediate surroundings. On good days you can see the mainland hills on the horizon, a physical connection to the outside world. The kitchen table is the other focal point of my house. … In Lewis hospitality to family, friends, and strangers is still considered an essential way of being, which I wholeheartedly embrace’ (text produced by the migrant in the framework of the photovoice workshop, April 2022). The migrant is represented by an eye that looks outside from a warm stove, while the weather outside defines the landscape and the waves. The isolation is represented by the label ‘end of the road, no immediate neighbours’, and the knowledge of the landscape emerges in the Gaelic word ‘machair’, which describes the type of soil/vegetation behind the house. The remote landscape was part of the house, constructing a centre of meaning on which the migrant built her identity. 

In both maps the remote landscape is key to anchoring the migrant women’s sense of belonging to the islands. It shows that knowledge of and appreciation
for the local territory are meaningful not only to amenity migrants, for whom the landscape is a key pull factor. For these two migrants, who arrived mainly for marriage and financial reasons, the remote landscape is one of the ways they can (re)build their identity as ‘islanders’. Their integration in the local communities that preserve the knowledge of the place is anchored in the local terrain. Yet it is personal, interpreted individually and through the lens of their lives and migration experiences. Finally, it seems the remote landscape is a strong bridge linking these migrants to the local communities, with whom they sat around the kitchen table looking at the sea, and with whom they shared walks to the volcano rocks.

CONCLUSION

This chapter reflected on how remoteness affects local identities and borders’ representation, thereby actively contributing to shaping the integration process. Remoteness was understood not as an attribute of space but as a process located in the field of power and affecting individuals intersectionally. We particularly discussed how remoteness in the Western Isles was not isolation but an uneven form of connectivity, and how the process of the ‘making of remoteness’ took the form of resistance to central spaces’ cultures and practices. This resistance passed through community landownership, respect for Sabbatarian temporality, and the survival of the Gaelic language, and was key to local identity’s construction and performance, and thereby its borders.

We discussed how remoteness affected the definition of the identity of ‘islanders’ and ‘otherness’, stressing that nationality, race, and religion were less relevant in constructing the ‘other’. By discussing the impact of the social and cultural border between migrants and islanders in terms of integration, we could appreciate how an awareness of migrants’ contribution to remote communities’ long-term sustainability and the solidarity arising from facing the common challenges of living remotely, while enhancing inclusion, allowed the blurring of those borders. What seemed a successful process of integration did little ‘to blur the social boundaries and binaries between “us” and “them”, “insiders” and “outsiders”, those who belong and those who are perceived not to belong’ (Laine 2022, 61). However, instead of considering those not seen as ‘islanders’ as people who needed to ‘integrate’ further to achieve an ideal society ‘in which there are no social boundaries between “legitimate members”, or insiders, and “non-legitimate members”, or outsiders’ (Klarenbeek 2019b, 903), we emphasized that those borders did not limit migrants’ access to social, cultural, and financial opportunities and achievements, and we chose an approach to integration that did not stress borders but their mobilization in building inequality.
Finally, we used mental maps to explore how migrants related to the islands, and how migrants rebuilt and performed their identity in the migration experience from a specific perspective (which was in no way intended to be complete): even if they only partly identified or did not identify as locals – as ‘islanders’ – their emotional attachment to the remote landscapes of their everyday lives still allowed their identity to be anchored to the islands. This territorialized identity referred to the same remote place as that of the ‘islanders’, revealing the polysemic natures of spaces which different groups can invest in and mobilize. This process of actively making sense of the migration experience through the receiving space by appropriating the remote landscape allows the migrant to intertwine their experience with local history and culture. It therefore seems important for the literature to further explore the migrant-led integration path in this remote region.

NOTES

1. The Sabbath is notably respected on the northern islands of Lewis and Harris, where Presbyterians constitute the majority, while the southern islands of Ulst and Barra have a large Catholic population as result of Irish Catholic missionary activities in the eighteenth century.
2. The Highland Clearances were the forced eviction of the inhabitants of the Hebridean Islands, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century and continuing intermittently for a century.
3. This example needs to be weighted on the data that the first mosque in these largely Christian communities was built only in more recent years with the arrival of the Syrian refugee population more than 50 years after the Pakistani migrants who describe themselves as Muslims (National Records of Scotland – Census 2011).
4. The average for Scotland was only one person in every 100, and in the second local authority, the Highlands, only seven per cent of the population could speak Gaelic.
5. According to the manager of a school the only migrant household who enrolled their children (migrants or second-generation) in Gaelic lessons had a parent teaching in the same school.
6. Translated from the French text by the authors: ‘[Le plus simple et le plus banal des paysages est à la fois social et naturel, subjectif et objectif, spatial et temporel, production matérielle et culturelle, réel et symbolique, etc. (…) Le paysage est un système qui chevauche le naturel et le social].’
7. In Gaelic, fertile low-lying grassy plains between sand dunes and moorland.

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PART II

Challenges for policy and governance
8. The impact of foreign immigrants on the revitalization of rural areas in Spain

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INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the twentieth century, especially until the early 1980s, Spanish rural and mountain areas experienced a massive decline in population due to out-migration. The main factors were agricultural mechanization, work opportunities in rapidly industrializing areas boosted by the development plans launched at the end of the Franco period (1959–1975), and the establishment of the welfare state providing better access to health, social, and educational services in urban areas (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Gil-Alonso 2013; Lardiés-Bosque 2018a). While some commuted weekly or relocated permanently to big cities and their growing urban fringes, others emigrated to former colonies in South America and later to other European countries (Oliva 2010).

However, from the 1990s, in parallel with out-migration, the arrival of a foreign population in Spain has been increasingly relevant and has had a major impact on its social structure (Sampedro and Camarero 2018). Although most of the research about the immigration of foreigners in Spain has focused on metropolitan and large urban areas, studies have recently increasingly addressed the arrival and characteristics of foreign immigrants in rural areas (Morén-Alegret and Solana 2004).

A process of repopulation then started in some rural areas (Hoggart 1997; Soronellas-Masdeu, Bodoque-Puerta and Torrens-Bonet 2014), which was supported by EU accession, the related economic boom, and post-productivist economic alternatives: organic farming, tourism (second homes), construction, or jobs in public administration, and a better supply of infrastructure such as the internet, which enabled teleworking (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Gil-Alonso 2013; Oliveau et al. 2019). Apart from urban residents and re-migrants moving to the countryside for weekends, holidays, or permanently, foreigners
The accelerated arrival of immigrants in rural areas mainly from the 2000s characterized that decade as the ‘golden age of immigration’ (Lardiés-Bosque 2018b), a phenomenon associated with neoliberalization policies in the real estate sector. Many rural communities and their mayors wished to participate in urban development with the aid of urban developers. Thereafter, non-economic factors linked with a better lifestyle became important for immigrants’ arrival and choice of location in Spain (Alamá-Sabater, Alguacil and Serafí Bernat-Martí 2017).

However, the 2008 economic crisis interrupted this development, followed by a decrease after 2013 (Collantes et al. 2014; Lardiés-Bosque 2018b; Oliveau et al. 2019). During the crisis between 2008 and 2014 many immigrants stopped arriving and left rural areas. In contrast, unemployed young Spaniards began to commute to cities or left Spain for Northern Europe (Lardiés-Bosque 2018a). After the Lehman Brothers crisis immigrant numbers recovered from 2015 until the COVID-19 crisis, when they again declined.

The main consequence of rural emigration and the growth of urban areas has been the significant territorial imbalances generated in the country, with many areas having very low population densities (Gobierno de España 2020). Concern about depopulation and the lack of population has become a current issue in Spain that both academia and institutions have addressed. Immigration and actions to settle the new population began to be seen as a solution for reviving villages and towns and tackling sociodemographic and territorial imbalances between urban–metropolitan–coastal areas and rural–inland areas (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2012; Collantes et al. 2014). Numerous initiatives have since been launched to curb depopulation and attract immigrant populations to rejuvenate rural areas (Coto Sauras 2019; Lardiés-Bosque 2018a). Authors like González-Torres (2016) have also suggested the revival of villages and towns with refugees, drawing on three places in some provinces.

In this chapter we conduct a review of the main works on this subject. We also present some general statistical data on the evolution of the foreign population in rural areas in Spain, mainly between 2002 and 2020, its current distribution, and some of its sociodemographic and economic characteristics in relation to the labour market in which it is integrated. We use the National Statistics Institute’s (INE) continuous Population Register (Padrón Continuo de Población) and the Economically Active Population Survey (EPAS). This will enable a better understanding of immigrants’ contribution to rural areas.

The work has been conducted in the context of the H2020 MATILDE research project, which has analysed the Aragón region in more detail. Aragón is one of the 17 autonomous Spanish communities, with problems of depopulation and many demographically empty areas (European Union 2016); more-
over, the arrival of immigrants affords a good example of the demographic revitalization of its rural areas. We will therefore offer some information about this Spanish region to compare the problems at different territorial scales. The chapter ends with a discussion of the results and some conclusions.

DEPOPULATION AND THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE IN SPAIN

Spain has experienced significant demographic growth. Between 2002 and 2020 its population increased from 41.8 to 47.5 million (Table 8.1). However, rural areas have experienced depopulation in the last three or four decades, which combined with their demographic situation, has become a major challenge in which several problems are intertwined: the emigration of the young population, decline in the birth rate, ageing, and low demographic density (Bandrés and Azón 2021; FEMP 2017).

The exodus of the rural population between approximately 1950 and 1980 had serious consequences for the maintenance of the rural population. During the decade between 2000 and 2010 many rural areas, especially inland rural areas, saw a reversal of a depopulation that had lasted decades (Esparcia 2002; García Coll and Sánchez 2005; Collantes et al. 2014). Nine of the 17 Autonomous Communities experienced depopulation between 2010 and 2019.

However, depopulation is very evident at the municipal level: of the 8,131 municipalities in Spain, 62.7 per cent experienced depopulation between 2001 and 2011, and 76.6 per cent between 2011 and 2019 (INE). Of Spanish municipalities 83.1 per cent had fewer than 5,000 inhabitants in 2021, and 410,000 fewer inhabitants lived in them than a decade earlier. Only 2.9 per cent of the Spanish population lived in municipalities with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. Similarly, the populations of 29 of the 51 Spanish provincial capitals have declined in the last decade.

According to population density, 48.3 per cent of Spanish municipalities had a density of fewer than 12.5 inhabitants/km² in 2020. Almost 9 million inhabitants (19.2%) are more than 65 years old, and this is expected to be around 30 per cent in 2030 (INE). However, ageing is greater in rural municipalities: 33 per cent of the population are over 65 in municipalities with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants.

The rural exodus has emptied rural areas of the young, and this is combined with the lack of fertility and the general lack of births, leading to a deficit of
Table 8.1 *Volume of foreigners and distribution by size of municipalities in Spain, 2002 and 2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of municipality</th>
<th>Municipality size</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>Foreigners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volume</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>&lt; 2,000 inhabitants</td>
<td>2,975,840</td>
<td>68,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>2,000–10,000 inhab.</td>
<td>6,671,269</td>
<td>232,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>&gt; 10,000 inhab.</td>
<td>32,190,785</td>
<td>1,676,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>41,837,894</td>
<td>1,977,522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Percentages          |                    |                     |                     |         |                  |           |         |
|----------------------|                    |                     |                     |         |                  |           |         |
| Rural                | < 2,000 inhabitants| 7.1                 | 3.5                 | 3.2     | 5.6              | 3.4       | 2.3     |
| Intermediate         | 2,000–10,000 inhab.| 15.9                | 11.8                | 10.4    | 14.4             | 11.2      | 9.1     |
| Urban                | > 10,000 inhab.    | 76.9                | 84.8                | 86.4    | 79.9             | 85.4      | 88.6    |
| **Total**            |                    | 100.0               | 100.0               | 100.0   | 100.0            | 100.0     | 100.0   |

*Data source:* Municipal Register of Inhabitants, INE.
young people to maintain and/or revitalize these areas (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Gil-Alonso 2013; Camarero 2020). There are therefore scarcely any children in many areas of inland Spain, very few young people, and a large elderly population: more than 28 per cent of the population of many rural inland areas are more than 65 years of age (Camarero et al. 2009).

The low fertility and birth rate is therefore a problem throughout the country, and especially in rural areas. In most rural areas the population is ‘biologically dead’ due to the emigration of young people and the permanence of the elderly population (Lardiés-Bosque 2018b). In recent decades the country has had negative natural growth, and there are more deaths than births in 77.7 per cent of municipalities. Demographic projections point to a scenario in which the population decline can be sustained if the internal and external dynamic variables do not change (FEMP 2017).

The depopulation of rural areas (the ‘empty Spain’ [España vacía]) and the demographic problem are not only of academic concern but have generated a major official, political, and academic debate; for example, various proposals attempt to turn immigrants (and refugees) into settlers of these spaces. This issue has generated national interest with the creation of the current Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, and within it the General Secretariat for the Demographic Challenge, where the General Directorate of Policies against Depopulation is based. Currently, the issues of depopulation and the demographic challenge are fully present in the news and media and official and academic reports. Many municipalities and public institutions have developed and financed projects for the settlement of the population in rural areas and small municipalities, in which immigrants are of outstanding importance. In this context the arrival of foreign immigrants is usually considered an opportunity for the demographic revitalization of rural areas (Camarero and Sampedro 2019) as their representation has grown.

FOREIGN IMMIGRANTS IN RURAL SPAIN AND THE ROLE OF DEMOGRAPHIC REVITALIZATION

Aware of the worrying demographic and economic situation in most rural areas in Spain, in this section we analyse the role the increase in foreign immigrants may play in their revitalization. The immigration process in Spain has been fundamentally characterized by its speed and intensity and the impact this has had on Spanish society (Arango 2012) with all its implications – many still unexplored. Immigration has therefore become one of the main factors of the transformation of the Spanish social and population structure (Lacomba et al. 2021). There were 314,824 foreign immigrants in 1998, 0.79 per cent of the Spanish population, but this figure increased to 5.5 million in 2022, 11.6 per cent (INE). The greatest increase has occurred since 2002, when there
were already 1.9 million foreigners, 4.48 per cent of the population (Table 8.1). Having traditionally been a country of emigration, within a decade Spain became a significantly receiving country like France or Germany (Arango 2012).

The immigrant population is concentrated in the large cities and main metropolitan areas, but the phenomenon has significantly affected rural areas due to immigrants’ presence in economic sectors like agriculture, construction, and domestic services and care (Mendoza 2003). For example, 3.4 per cent of foreigners – and 2.3 per cent of TCNs – in Spain lived in rural municipalities (< 2,000 inhab.) in 2020, while 5.6 per cent of the total population lived in them. This means the concentration of foreigners in urban municipalities (> 10,000 inhab.) is percentagewisely higher (Table 8.1).

However, these figures vary by province and territory. Figure 8.1 shows the weight of the foreign population in the total population in the smallest municipalities (< 2,000 inhab.). For example, this figure was 12.1 per cent in Spain in 2011; it was higher in the Mediterranean coastal provinces, on the islands, and in the Community of Madrid. The example of the three provinces of Aragón also stands out. Here, the presence of the foreign population in rural areas in 2020 was much higher than the Spanish average, and 12.8 per cent of foreigners lived in the smallest municipalities (Table 8.1); the concentration of TCNs in rural municipalities is also very high in Aragón (15.8% of the total). Neither EU foreign citizens nor third-country nationals are equally distributed over the country (Oliveau et al. 2019), and the reduced presence of immigrants and foreigners characterizes small municipalities and rural areas, especially in the north and west of the country (Oliva 2010). In contrast, the provinces that offer more employment in agriculture and tourism, the main economic sectors for the integration of immigrants, are those that register the highest figures (Figure 8.1).

In the theoretical context of new post-productive rurality the arrival of foreign immigrants occurs in parallel with the phenomenon of counter-urbanization and diverse population flows away from productive motivations (lifestyle migrants in rural areas); in a globalized and transnationalized world all these new flows contribute to social diversity and the diversification of the traditional composition of rural areas, traditionally characterized as homogeneous (Halfacree 2008).

Immigrants arriving in rural Spanish areas differ greatly from the foreign residents who in previous decades settled in coastal Mediterranean areas, the autonomous island communities of the Balearic and Canary Islands, some mountain areas, or inland areas of the peninsula especially attractive to tourists (Camarero and Sampedro 2019). Those immigrants and residents who arrived during the 1970s and 1980s were generally retirees from central and northern Europe, who settled in areas where they had previously holidayed. Retirement
migrations of elderly people who live with a family and have a medium or high socioeconomic level in relation to the local population continue.

Meanwhile, the new immigrants who have arrived since the 1990s and 2000s have different profiles. They generally migrate for labour and come from Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, like those who have arrived in other southern European countries. The new labour immigration protagonists are younger. They generally travel without their family and have a lower economic position than the local population, thus best reflecting the status of those called ‘immigrants’ in Spain (Sampedro 2012). This immigration is differentiated by the migrants’ geographical and cultural diversity: they sometimes come from rural areas in their countries of origin. Their higher rate of unemployment than the native population’s is also noteworthy, as is the considerable level of informal employment (Mendoza 2003; Sampedro and Camarero 2016).

Arroyo et al. (2014) state that ‘it is obvious that the arrival of foreigners brings a change in the volume and structure of the total population residing in Spain’, but ‘they not only increase the volume, but also enter into the
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demographic dynamics, which they modify through their births, deaths, and migration’ (2014, 26). Not only is the population weight acquired by immigration itself important; no less important are its incidence in sociodemographic dynamics, presence in the territory, and insertion into family structures. Immigration has reversed the decline of Spain’s population, contributed to its rejuvenation, compensated for the loss of inhabitants in some areas, and brought greater diversity to families and households (Lacomba et al. 2021).

In addition to the strictly demographic problem the arrival of immigrants has affected the territory, modifying the local population’s dynamics. As early as the 1990s Buller and Hoggart (1994) pointed out that foreigners were beginning to play an increasingly important direct or indirect role in rural areas’ evolution. The general youthfulness of immigrants in Spain has therefore usually been seen as an opportunity to (re)populate many areas, especially rural areas and municipalities with a small population.

The population density of the region of Aragón was 28.2 inhabitants/km² in 2017, one of the lowest in the EU. It is the Spanish region with the fourth lowest population density – and the first if Zaragoza, the most populated city, is not considered. Zaragoza accounts for more than 56 per cent of the regional population. According to the Economic and Social Council of Aragón report (CESA 2019) some 86 municipalities (of a total of 731) with fewer than 100 inhabitants in Aragón have already entered what is called a ‘demographically terminal’ cycle. This situation not only affects the smaller municipalities; 184 (25.2%) with more than 1,000 inhabitants are also affected.

The region has been very attractive for foreign immigrants since the mid-1990s. Between 2002 and 2020 their number increased from 43,973 to 162,048 (Municipal Register of Inhabitants, INE). Although the region’s native population was 1.1 million in 2002, it was also 1.1 million in 2022; however, the total population increased from 1.1 to 1.3 million in the same period. The population increase is therefore the result of the arrival of foreigners; the region has had negative natural growth for years.

In 2020 12.2 per cent of the region’s population were nationals of, and almost 14.7 per cent were born in, another country. Of the total foreign population, 43.2 per cent came from Africa, and 41.3 per cent from America (mostly from Latin American countries); moreover, 58.9 per cent of foreigners came from countries outside the European Union, representing 7.2 per cent of the region’s population. Currently, this group consists mainly of people of the following nationalities: Morocco; Colombia; Ecuador; other non-EU European countries; and Venezuela.

In 2020 12.8 per cent of the region’s immigrants lived in small municipalities (< 2,000 inhab.), 16.7 per cent lived in intermediate municipalities (2,000–10,000 inhab.), and 70.5 per cent were concentrated in urban municipalities (> 10,000 inhab.). Their presence in rural areas is therefore important;
in many municipalities they can reach between 16 and 20 per cent of the total population, although the majority is concentrated in urban areas. In demographic terms the foreign population thus plays a fundamental role, because they are mainly concentrated in intermediate towns of between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants (Lardiés-Bosque and del Olmo-Vicén 2021a), where there are better labour opportunities and access to services (transport, education, health), more social life, and greater availability of housing. People prefer these intermediate towns to very small villages with fewer services and less accessibility.

Concerning demographic characteristics, 73.9 per cent of the foreign population in Aragón were under 45 years of age in 2020, and 81.0 per cent were of working age. Moreover, the average age of the native population was 46.5, while that of people of foreign origin was 33.9 (CC.OO. 2021). Testimonies obtained during the MATILDE project’s fieldwork and other official information give an idea of the foreign population’s contribution to the revitalization of rural areas from the demographic and economic perspectives. This is also noticeable in the region’s public schools, where foreign students represented 13.8 per cent of the total in 2019, although in some they represented up to 20 per cent (CESA 2020). The arrival of families from Latin America and to a lesser extent the sub-Saharan countries or as a result of the reunification of families from the Maghreb has therefore made it possible to increase the number of school places, conciliation services, and activities related to intercultural coexistence in many municipalities.

This example of foreigners’ contribution at the regional scale reinforces the importance of the demographic and economic role foreign immigrants play in rural areas. We next examine some of that role’s economic and labour characteristics.

**Living and Working in Rural Areas: From the Impact to the Difficulties**

Foreign workers held 12.6 per cent of jobs in Spain in 2019 according to the INE (Table 8.2). They were overrepresented in the primary sector (in agriculture they occupied 22.3% of these jobs) and in construction (17.2%). They were also important in services (12.3%).

But what is the main reason for the arrival and settlement of foreigners in rural areas? The answer may lie in the analysis of the jobs they hold. There are many studies of immigrants’ participation in industrialized agriculture in Spain (Pedreño Cánovas, de Castro Pericacho and Gadea Montesinos 2015). In Andalusia in the south of the country intensive agriculture employs many foreign workers, mainly Moroccans, and especially women, in the cultivation of strawberries, olives, and tomatoes, and on tobacco plantations or in Mediterranean orchards. In northern and inland agricultural areas there
Table 8.2 The employed by economic sector and nationality in Spain, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality of employed</th>
<th>Agriculture (%)</th>
<th>Industry (%)</th>
<th>Construction (%)</th>
<th>Services (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish (1)</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>16,705,500</td>
<td>87.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign (2)</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>2,400,100</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>944,300</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-EU (Europe)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>151,000</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>719,800</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the world</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>585,000</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCNs</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>1,455,800</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (1 + 2)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>19,105,600</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data source: Economically Active Population Survey, INE.
are high concentrations working with fruit or irrigated crops. Many of these workers are temporary (Morén-Alegret and Solana 2004).

Construction is another important sector for working migrants in rural areas, where about a third of all men are employed, often temporarily (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2012). Lower housing prices and following the established commuting patterns of Spaniards in the construction sector (Oliva 2010) meant Eastern Europeans and Moroccans settled in villages and small towns 150 kms from Madrid, outside Barcelona, or in the hinterland of the Costa Blanca or Mallorca (Morén-Alegret 2008). They commuted either to urban centres or rural areas where second homes were being built (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2012; Lardiés-Bosque 2018b). When the economic and construction boom ended in 2008, many continued to work in agriculture (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2013) or left rural areas (Lardiés-Bosque 2018b).

Catering and tourism, with their spatial focus on coasts and inland tourist areas, have offered workplaces for foreigners, especially Africans, Europeans, and Latin Americans. Latin Americans predominate in adventure tourism in Pyrenean villages (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Gil Alonso 2013; Soronellas-Masdeu, Bodoque-Puerta and Torrens-Bonet 2014). Wholesale (e.g. Chinese, Senegalese), courier and service delivery (Senegalese), and the sale of second-hand and electronic equipment, jewellery, and flowers (Pakistani) are other service sectors with a presence of foreigners and TCNs. Domestic work, including (live-in) caregiving, has become another sector that especially attracts foreign women (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2012; Díaz-Gorfinkel and Martínez-Buján 2018; for Peruvians see Escrivá 2003). Caribbean and Latin American women come mainly from the urban or metropolitan areas of their countries. Some even have higher education and often arrive without family and children, who are left behind at least for a few years (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2012; Soronellas-Masdeu, Bodoque-Puerta and Torrens-Bonet 2014). Finally, women from Moroccan or Algerian cities are drawn to Spain by family ties – for example, with the aid of a husband or brother. If workplaces are in very mountainous areas with poor communications, women workers do not live onsite, preferring to live in more accessible towns or villages. However, rural areas are considered to have certain advantages like a cheaper cost of living, making it easier to save or become known as a good worker in the village. Although domestic services provide a fixed and stable income, and only 34 per cent are on temporary contracts (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2012), a considerable number of immigrants use such work to obtain information and accumulate financial resources, skills, and contacts to move on to cities and better paid occupations (Collantes et al. 2014).

In the region of Aragón, as in other rural areas of Spain, foreign workers also endure poorer working conditions and lower wages, and they have suf-
ffered most during the COVID-19 crisis. Temporality, part-time work, and less renewal characterize the hiring of foreigners. The temporary employment rate among immigrants is 39.5 per cent, compared to an average of 24.1 per cent in Aragón. This gap of 15.4 percentage points (CC.OO. 2021) may be related to their working in jobs offering less social mobility.

Of the 145,562 new contracts in 2020 foreign workers accounted for 32.4 per cent of those affiliated with the agricultural sector, 44.7 per cent of domestic workers, 14.5 per cent of workers in the food industry, and 16.5 per cent of workers in land transport (CC.OO. 2021). By economic sector the services sector accounted for 41.9 per cent of the total, followed by agriculture (33.5%), industry (18.7%), and construction (5.8%). Two thirds of the contracts signed by foreigners were concentrated in the following seven economic activities:

1. Agriculture, livestock, hunting, and related services (35.1%).
2. Food and beverage services (10.2%).
3. Wholesale trade and trade intermediaries, except motor vehicles and motorcycles (5.1%).
4. Food industry (4.9%).
5. Building services and gardening (4.3%).
6. Land and pipeline transport (2.7%).
7. Storage and transport-related activities (2.5%).

Sub-Saharan Africans have settled in some comarcas to work as unskilled labour in the fields and in fruit harvesting. These immigrants from rural Africa have entered the secondary labour market in a segmented labour structure (Ródenas 2016). Others have subsequently worked in industry (animal slaughterhouses, cleaning) or in unskilled but relatively stable jobs in industries that previously lacked manpower. This has allowed them to survive the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Having worked as agricultural seasonal workers, they have become wage earners in industries that are relatively stable and have a certain legal balance. They have also settled in urban areas and brought in their wives and families. This demographic impact has resulted in women gaining employment opportunities through emigration.

Most foreign workers work as wage earners, although there are also entrepreneurs, generally in restaurants (where many Latin Americans work) or small businesses (Chinese). Many of these businesses are in the service sector and usually occupy market niches, so their impact on the region’s economic development is residual. Although many migrant entrepreneurial initiatives take place in the fields of micro-enterprises and commerce, others are becoming more common. According to the OPI (Permanent Immigration Observatory) home service, transport, cleaning, and other companies offer services traditionally unavailable in rural areas. The entrepreneurial spirit of
immigrants has thus contributed to the integration their lives with those of the inhabitants of cities and towns, affording them access to services that were not previously offered in these areas. This population therefore has a positive impact on economic activity, employment, and occupations, undertaking work the native population is reluctant to do and contributing to demographic revitalization.

An explanation of foreigners’ arrival and settlement in rural areas may be that they find jobs in economic sectors and branches the native population is frequently reluctant to enter (Lardiés-Bosque and del Olmo-Vicén 2021b). They are generally poorly paid temporary agricultural jobs that require constant spatial mobility and the displacement of men from their families. Other sectors in rural areas with large numbers of foreign workers are restaurants and tourism businesses, where they work as waiters, personal and domestic care assistants, cleaners, and manual workers in industry or transport (CESA 2020). The data from the INE show that 30 per cent of foreign workers in Spain were engaged in unskilled occupations in 2018, and 29.3 per cent worked in catering, personal, security, and sales services (which need few qualifications). In some groups the inability to speak Spanish and poor training limit job placement and lock workers in low-skilled jobs.

Such poorly paid, temporary, and arduous jobs mean the rooting and settlement of this population in rural areas are difficult and unstable, and these factors limit their stability and demographic impact. All this is associated with the high level of exclusion and marginalization foreign immigrants suffer in certain contexts (Lozano 2015).

DISCUSSION

In this chapter we have attempted to analyse the presence and evolution of the foreign population in Spanish rural areas. We have investigated the population’s economic and territorial characteristics to evaluate its contribution to the revitalization of these areas. We have observed that some areas affected by depopulation in Spain welcome new foreign residents. From a demographic perspective the findings from the literature show that recent immigration to rural areas has significantly contributed to reducing depopulation (Collantes et al. 2014; Roquer and Blay 2008; Sampedro and Camarero 2018), helping generate a positive impact (Esparcia 2002). The population trend has even been reversed in some rural areas that have begun not only to retain but also gain residents after decades of steady decline (Collantes et al. 2014; Lozano 2015).

Our analysis shows immigrants are valued for the work they do, especially in rural areas where many positions would remain vacant because of the declining workforce (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2013). Besides, the positive impact the reception of immigrants has had on the rejuvenation and
growth of the population through the increase in the birth rate, especially in rural areas, is unquestionable (Collantes et al. 2014). The effects of immigration on the recovery of fertility rates were highlighted as very positive a decade ago (Cebrián et al. 2007), based on immigrant women’s very different reproductive patterns. However, time has shown that their fertility drops to the level of native women after a few years in the country, so this effect is largely limited to the arrival phase. Among the less positive effects it has also been observed that the arrival of immigrants has contributed to the masculinization of rural areas, as migration flows are mainly made up of men (Camarero et al. 2009). Family reunifications may attenuate this, presenting different patterns and logics in the different national groups (Sampedro 2012).

The ability to retain this population in the medium and long term and its full integration into local life is a basic issue for these rural areas’ social sustainability. However, the demographic impact of immigration is a complex phenomenon and has different dimensions. The research carried out thus far suggests this is associated with the characteristics of both rural villages and their new residents (Camarero 2020; Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2013). Only regions with certain characteristics offer the ideal conditions for the establishment of a foreign population. Tourist areas are a clear example. They have benefited significantly from this rural renaissance (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Gil-Alonso 2013). Moreover, the foreign population is concentrated in medium-sized municipalities – towns with more diversified economies, a greater supply of housing, good communications, and better public services, making the abandonment of smaller and isolated villages more evident (Goerlich, Maudos and Mollá 2021).

In the patterns of territorial settlement and models of labour insertion and family migration strategies, the role rural areas play in migration projects assumes special importance. Many studies underline that the immigrant population plays an important role not only in highly seasonal agricultural jobs but in many other jobs linked to agribusiness, commerce, or local services, so they are the protagonists of business initiatives that revitalize village life (Soronellas-Masdeu, Bodoque-Puerta and Torrens-Bonet 2014). However, the abandonment of agriculture and rural areas and the social progress of immigrants explains the desire for mobility and social progress that accompanies all migration projects (Pedreño and Riquelme 2006). In many cases the analysis of foreign immigrants’ residential and occupational mobility suggests that rural areas and agricultural work may only be a station on the path to better jobs in urban areas (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2013). Rural areas linked to sectors such as agriculture, which are unattractive for the local population and have a high level of informality, may only be the first stage in the migration trajectory.
Related to this, the balance between 2002 and 2020 suggests that the arrival and settlement of foreigners has grown in cycles of economic growth but decreases in phases of crisis. In the latter (between 2008 and 2014 and between 2020 and 2021 with the COVID-19 crisis) the decline in the rural population has also been evident among foreigners. Between 2008 and 2014 there was a drastic reduction in the foreign population’s migration flows, reaching negative values at the end of the period. The impact of the crisis was reflected in the decrease in arrivals of new immigrants and in the departure of those who could not retain or gain employment and ran out of the public aid or family support that allowed them to withstand financial challenges (Torres Perez 2014).

CONCLUSION

The presence of foreign workers in many rural Spanish municipalities has been considered the last chance to prevent the disappearance of many small towns. However, it is necessary to consider the extent to which and how this arrival of immigrants can maintain demographic rural areas, which ones, and if it can correct the profound demographic imbalances affecting many of them. The selection of areas requiring revitalization is important because not all rural areas will receive enough immigrants. Medium-sized towns are therefore perhaps the best option for any revitalization strategy.

In considering the characteristics of the chosen destinations, work-related initiatives should allow for the possibility that agriculture may not be the preferred sector for immigrants once they begin to integrate into the receiving society (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva 2012; Morén-Alegret and Solana 2004). Schemes should be designed, perhaps locally, to provide training and recognize professional skills to match demand from employers and promote self-employment in other sectors, with a particular focus on women (Collantes et al. 2014). Second, new or existing measures should deepen integration and facilitate the establishment of ties with host areas. These would include actions to promote family regrouping and settlement, ensure access to housing and healthcare, and channel the attitudes of locals (for example, in informal employment relationships; see also Camarero et al. 2009; Saéz, Ayuda and Pinilla 2016).

To improve rural living conditions, public administrations attempt to ensure full equality in the quality of public services and social services, with necessary adaptations based on their territorial characteristics. The lack of specific services, lower quality, and difficulty of access directly affect the perception of the rural population’s quality of life, constituting another reason for the abandonment of rural areas. The Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias (FEMP) has therefore recommended the planning of the reception and integration of the foreign population, with a programme of subsidies for the local
entities involved, in collaboration with NGOs and with the active participation of the public services of the different autonomous communities.

All the above should be developed in a context in which rural areas’ depopulation and demographic revitalization have become important topics in the political debate and for Spanish public administration. Many initiatives and actions address the issue at different administrative levels (national, regional, and municipal). Overlaps emerge, and there is little clarity about which territories should be prioritized for revitalization, how, and with which population. The differences in North–South development will continue to ensure the arrival of foreign populations, whose role in rural areas will continue to be necessary.

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The impact of foreign immigrants on the revitalization of rural areas in Spain


9. Access to welfare policies by immigrants: comparing centralized and decentralized governance in the examples of Turkey and Spain

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INTRODUCTION

Welfare policies are crucial for social cohesion. However, the realities of the world, and especially increased migration, challenge the existing citizenship framework in which they remain based (Geddes 2003; Laine 2021). The term ‘welfare chauvinism’ has been posited as a challenge to social cohesion in this respect. The term has been widely employed since its first use by Andersen and Bjørklund (1990), yet it remains a disputed concept (Careja and Harris 2022). Welfare chauvinism suggests that welfare benefits should be restricted to the ‘native’ population as opposed to immigrants (Keskinen, Norocel and Jørgensen 2016), reinforcing the stubborn notion that people are from a certain territorially demarcated place, and their rights, duties – and life opportunities – should remain based on this arbitrary fact (Laine 2021). Such positions are not only prevalent in radical right-wing parties but in mainstream party politics and public opinion (Cinpoes and Norocel 2020; Burgoon and Rooduijn 2021). In this rhetoric migrants are seen as undeserving ‘others’ who exploit the welfare system (Soroka et al. 2016; Mau and Burkhardt 2009). The pandemic and economic crises have created further uncertainties and reinforced anti-immigrant attitudes (Keskinen, Norocel and Jørgensen 2016); amidst multiple overlapping crises, migrants have been used as convenient scapegoats in a strategy to combat the anxieties and insecurities caused by other kinds of societal change in the quest for stability and continuity (Laine 2020a).

Our premise in this chapter is that targeted policies and migration governance play a key role in determining migration impact, showing that better
policies, focusing on the wellbeing of both migrants and host communities, improve social cohesion. Both countries under scrutiny, Spain and Turkey, can be regarded as Mediterranean welfare states. They have seldom been compared (see Ajzenstadt and Gal 2010), except in broader elaborations on migration in the Mediterranean (Ribas-Mateos 2017; Sciortino 2004). The settlement of immigrant-origin groups has posed a series of important challenges to both countries. The social protection policies included in the welfare state are among the main ones affected by the social, political, cultural, and demographic transformations arising from this phenomenon. They must define the mode of incorporation of new residents into their services and benefits, while addressing the need to articulate response mechanisms to the demands of a changing population (Moreno Fuentes 2007). The social protection system is also subject to a change in the social perception of its legitimacy as being derived from the increase in a society’s internal heterogeneity. Besides being a challenge, this phenomenon presents an opportunity to identify the system’s weak points to strengthen it and thus guarantee its future sustainability.

The centralized governance of Turkey and the decentralized governance of Spain form an interesting juxtaposition for a comparison of welfare policies aimed at social cohesion. By focusing on three important areas of social welfare crucial for the current and future wellbeing of society, namely social support, health, and education, we will elaborate on these cases’ existing rights and policies. Social support is necessary for livelihood. It is crucial to study health, both for the wellbeing of migrants and public health, and education, current and future wellbeing, and the social cohesion of the whole of society. Furthermore, differentiation between migrant categories should also be considered, because it leads to systems of stratified rights according to legal and residence status. The chapter’s main goal is to help develop better social policies for social cohesion to scrutinize access to social services for immigrants in both countries by comparing decentralized and centralized governance and focusing on rural areas.

This chapter utilizes fieldwork conducted in the two countries during the MATILDE project (see Chapter 1 in this book). Focusing on migration’s impact on the local development of rural and mountain regions, the fieldwork was conducted in the province of Bursa and rural Karacabey in Turkey and the autonomous community of Aragón in Spain between 2020 and 2022. Regarding the migration-related social policy analysis, the Turkish team conducted 17 in-depth interviews (of which four were group interviews) with 24 participants from different national, regional, and local stakeholders. To elaborate on healthcare services, especially in rural areas, one focus group was conducted with seven interviewees, comprising nurses and/or health mediators, providing mobile health services to seasonal agricultural workers in rural areas. The Spanish team conducted 17 in-depth interviews with regional
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and local stakeholders; two focus groups were developed with 29 third-sector, public social services, and regional and local political representatives. All the interviews focused on access to welfare system services by third-country nationals (TCNs). Participatory action research within the different work packages between October 2020 and May 2022 was also exploited to generate a comprehensive analysis of the related issues.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FOREIGN IMMIGRANTS

Turkey, traditionally known as a country of emigration, has been receiving diverse migrant in-flows since the early 1990s. According to the available figures as of March 2022 (PMM 2022; IOM 2022) there are more than five million foreign nationals, of which 3.7 million Syrians have been granted temporary protection status (TPS). Besides, there were close to 330,000 international protection status holders and asylum seekers by the end of 2021. There were 29,256 international protection applicants (mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran) in 2021. In March 2022 there were 1.4 million foreigners with a Turkish residence permit (PMM 2022).

With a total population of 3.7 million, Syrians in Turkey have had an impact on a notable change in legislation and public administration. Syrians escaping an internal war and seeking sanctuary were initially accepted as ‘guests’ with no legal status (Uyan Semerci and Erdoğan 2016). In contrast with the rights-based approach, humanitarian support for Syrians was first maintained by charities, mostly with religious connections, state agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, as the numbers increased (14,237 in 2012) (PMM 2022), and the duration of their stay extended, their status and rights, including access to basic rights, had to be reorganized, and Syrians were granted temporary protection status in 2014 by Law 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), adopted in 2013. The proportion of Syrians with TPS in the Turkish population is 4.27 per cent. By 2022 only 1.3 per cent of Syrians lived in camps. The average age of registered Syrians was 22.4. Seventy per cent consisted of women and children. There were 1.7 million (47%) children under the age of 18. Moreover, by the end of 2021, 193,293 Syrians had been granted Turkish citizenship (Refugees Association 2022).

In Spain the magnitude of the migration phenomenon since the end of the twentieth century has profoundly transformed society’s demographic profile. According to the Municipal Register of Inhabitants (INE 2022) in 2021 there was an increase in the number of foreigners (72,410; 1.3%) from mainly non-EU countries (59,010 TCNs). The foreign population represented 11.6 per cent of the total, excluding those who had already obtained Spanish...
citizenship. The foreign population had a slightly higher distribution of men (50.1%) and was mostly young (52.9% of foreigners were between 16 and 44); TCNs came mostly from Africa (22%, mainly Moroccans), South America (20.9%), non-EU Europe (10.5%, including 2% of Ukrainians), Asia (9.1%), and Central America and the Caribbean (6.7%) (INE 2022).

Spain has the third highest number of applicants for international protection in the EU. However, only five per cent of applications are resolved favourably (compared to the EU average of 33%). About 60 per cent therefore remained in an irregular situation, and 45 per cent (99% from Venezuela) obtained a residence permit for humanitarian reasons (CEAR 2021).

CENTRALIZED AND DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE OF FOREIGN IMMIGRATION

Turkey’s public administration has a unitary structure. Local administrations have been established to provide services by governors and other senior public officials appointed by the central government, and by elected mayors, who govern the municipalities. Formal social policy includes state-provided free education at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels and a combined public health and pension system associated with employment status (Buğra and Keyder 2006). Turkey’s post-2011 experience of hosting the largest internationally displaced population is associated with multiple puzzles (Özçürümez and İçduygu 2020). Policies began to evolve from the prolonged stay of Syrians towards the inclusion of forcibly displaced migrants in mainstream policies. Nevertheless, the uncertainty between temporariness and permanence remains an issue, and both informality and irregularity prevail. The current and most comprehensive legal regulation concerning all foreigners is the LFIP of 2013, which established the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) under the Ministry of Interior, which is responsible for overall administrative, legislative, and operational migration policy.

In contrast, Spain is a highly decentralized state, both politically and administratively, with a clear orientation towards the development of a welfare state. Regional governments are responsible for implementing national legislation frameworks and managing all sector-specific welfare policies. However, it is the local authorities’ responsibility to develop services with third-sector institutions. The Spanish case has been described as a patchwork integration model (Martínez de Lizarrondo 2009) in which there are variations of the same system, depending on the regional policies developed for the integration of immigrants. The principle of standardization governs access to welfare systems: everyone who is legally resident has the same right to access basic welfare systems. This integration model is mainly oriented towards regularized immigrants, but since 2003 especially, the law has granted all irregular
migrants access to the basic benefits of the national health, education, and social service systems, as long as they are officially registered at a town hall, which only requires proof of a fixed address.

SELECTED POLICIES FOR THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Support

Social support activities for migrant groups in Turkey are carried out by various ministries and municipalities. Since the early days of the crisis in Syria, social assistance has also been one of the largest domains of NGO emergency field activity, while their social assistance programmes differ in their perspective and scope. The launch of the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) aid programme, EU-funded cash assistance to the most vulnerable refugee families in Turkey, is also considered a shift in the centre of gravity from NGOs to domestic public actors (Yılmaz 2019).

Humanitarian assistance programmes are still provided in emergency support for Syrians, although the current situation in Turkey can no longer be treated simply as an emergency (Yılmaz 2019). The fragmented structure of social services in Turkey means a holistic approach remains lacking. The Ministry of Family and Social Policies has attempted to resolve this problem through the Social Assistance Information System (SOYBİS). However, the absence of municipalities in this system continues the risk of duplicates in social aid (Temel and Tüfekçi 2018), as municipalities have been at the forefront of providing public services and support for Syrians and have developed various responses (Bettis et al. 2020; Coşkun and Uçar 2018; Kaya and Kıraç 2016). To overcome financial constraints, actively engaged municipalities establish partnerships with NGOs and international actors to seek external funding.

The services cover a wide range of activities, already provided by many municipalities through the poverty aid for Turkish citizens living in their district; these services have been extended to Syrians (Kale and Erdoğan 2019). Nevertheless, since the allocation from the national budget is indexed to the Turkish population, the presence of refugees does not lead to an increased allocation. Another handicap is that refugees, as non-citizens, do not contribute to the municipalities’ budgets because they do not pay local taxes (Coşkun and Uçar 2018). The existing research points to municipalities’ concerns about criticisms from locals uncomfortable with the use of municipal resources for non-citizens (Kale and Erdoğan 2019). Similarly, our field research reveals that although the policy implementers appear to do their best to meet the needs of the migrants in the locations for which they are responsible, resource scar-
city is an issue, especially at the municipality level. The problem is not only limited financial resources (WP3TRB001) but the scarcity of human resources delivering services (WP3TR002; WP3TRB004).

In Spain, each regional Social Services Law includes the basic integration principles of the Aliens Law (Basic Law No. 4/2000) and grants regularized immigrants access to benefits under the previously mentioned standardization and mainstreaming principle. Accordingly, irregular immigrants who have registered with their local authority are entitled to some basic emergency financial benefits, but other regular benefits (i.e. Minimum Insertion Income, MII) are more restricted. MII, another measure the government approved in July 2020, is intended to alleviate cases of extreme poverty in households and seeks to protect families, whether of native or foreign origin, who suddenly lose their source of income. Previously, this benefit was decentralized, depending on the social or guaranteed minimum income (CCAA), and it is still too early to assess the consequences of this decentralization of social support policies. Regarding immigration, social services have extensively worked to welcome the foreign population (covering basic needs, housing, legal advice, teaching Spanish, etc.), either directly or by delegating to third-sector entities.

The National Strategy for Preventing and Fighting Poverty and Social Exclusion 2019–2023 (Ministry of Social Rights and 2030 Agenda 22/03/2019) refers especially to the provision of comprehensive care for unaccompanied foreign minors (Spanish acronym: MENAs) to meet their accommodation, education, food, and guardianship needs and ensure they are properly integrated into Spanish society. It also calls for the promotion of active employment policies to make it easier for vulnerable people, including immigrants, to find jobs. Such measures are greatly criticized, and the mass media reports the discontent of neighbours arguing about citizen insecurity because of the presence of unaccompanied foreign minors.

**Healthcare**

In Turkey, the Ministry of Health (MoH) administers healthcare services through its provincial health directorates. The General Health Insurance Scheme (GHIS), which has unified health insurance since 2008, covers most of the population, including foreign residents without social security cover in their home countries and, through a 2013 amendment, those under the protection of the LFIP. Given the broad change in immigration outlook with the arrival of Syrians in the last decade, there have been major improvements in basic healthcare access by the LFIP and follow-up regulations in pursuit of the initial approach in terms of an ‘emergency’ (Uyan Semerci and Erdoğan 2016; Özçürümez and İçduygu 2020). The Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR, Regulation No. 29153) applies to migrants arriving from Syria and specifies...
the health services provided to them under TPS. Accordingly, all Syrians have free access to medical treatment, but they must be registered by the PMM (Özkul 2020; Yıldırım, Komsuoglu and Özekmekçi 2019, Assi, Özger-İlhan and İlhan 2019).

The Turkish health system guarantees primary healthcare for all foreign residents, including undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and people under international protection. Moreover, since 2017 Migrant Health Centres (MHC), staffed by immigrant-background health workers and support personnel, have supplemented public health centres. Within the scope of the EU-funded SIHHAT Project the MoH has thus far opened 177 MHCs in 29 provinces. It is envisaged that each MHC will serve 4,000–7,000 Syrians where they are collectively living under TPS (SIHHAT 2022).

Residence location is an important determinant for Syrian migrants’ access to healthcare. Those with TPS can go to healthcare institutions in their city of residence. This obligation prevents access to healthcare by refugees living outside the registered city because of job opportunities, family visits, and education (Özkul 2020). The effectiveness of healthcare services for refugees is limited by language barriers (Mardin 2017; Özcürümez and İçduygu 2020), a lack of information (Özkul 2020), limited mobility, and some legal restrictions (Assi, Özger-İlhan and İlhan 2019). It is also observed (Sevinin 2020) that the current healthcare system systematically excludes migrant communities except those with TPS. In parallel with this observation, immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic a bill (Law No. 7196) amended the related article of the LFIP. Accordingly, those without medical insurance and financial means are subject to the provisions of the GHIS for a limit of a year after registering for international protection. This is critical because it limits the right to healthcare of thousands of individuals who cannot obtain work permits, have no regular income, and are subject to physical and psychological problems because of forced migration (MÜLTECİ-DER 2019). Fieldwork also shows that irregular migrants avoid health institutions because they are afraid of being deported, fired, or dispossessed (MUDEM 2020; Özkul 2020).

Our fieldwork reveals that healthcare is also a realm in which the most serious antagonism towards immigrants occurs (focus group WP3TRB003). Their right to healthcare results in tension or anti-immigrant attitudes. Considering the population categories in health insurance coverage – peasants, seasonal workers, and workers who are not in the formal economy (Buğra and Keyder 2006) – tensions are more likely to arise in rural areas.

To overcome legal and practical barriers, several studies emphasize the role of service providers in gatekeeping access to different types of services for irregular migrants to overcome restrictive policies leading to exclusion from the welfare state (Price and Spencer 2015; van der Leun 2006). Local service providers’ approaches also play an important role in healthcare. Our focus
group meetings with health workers reveal healthcare providers tend to act according to their professional ethics and help every immigrant, including the unregistered and those away from their place of residence. Our observations confirm that healthcare services are among the most important fields for social engagement with immigrants in districts where locals and immigrants usually interact little. Immigrants rely on MHCs and mobile health services (especially in the seasonal agriculture sector) to meet their primary healthcare needs. Healthcare personnel and other actors willing to reach out to immigrants facilitate the building of confidence.


Regular immigrants’ healthcare benefits are governed by the principle of normalization and transversality. Basic Law No. 14/2003 extends the right to healthcare to all foreigners, regardless of their legal status. Previously, undocumented immigrants had limited access to emergency services and treatment for infectious diseases. They therefore had to resort to informal health circuits (NGOs, municipal charity services, and volunteer professionals). Although the legislation has extended health cover to undocumented immigrants, some obstacles remain in practice, especially to obtaining a health card or in relation to co-payment for medicines (Moreno Fuentes and Bruquetas Calleja 2012).

However, following the 2008 crisis healthcare was limited to regular immigrants between 2012 and 2018 (Royal Decree–Law No. 16/2012). Yet not all the autonomous communities applied the reduction of benefits to immigrants in an irregular situation (Godenau et al. 2014). In 2018 the authorities restored the right to healthcare with limitations for foreigners in Spain who were not legal residents (Royal Decree–Law No. 7/2018).

A study conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic showed that 68 per cent of the communities had developed specific health programmes for immigrants (e.g. vaccinations and pregnancy monitoring). Some communities also implemented programmes in collaboration with NGOs and health or ethnic associations. Most communities have therefore taken measures related to healthcare for irregular immigrants, those without economic resources, and refugees. Other measures included linguistic interpreting services and intercultural training for health professionals (Aguilar Gil, Bleda García and Centelles García 2019). Despite the improvements in accessing healthcare for irregular migrants, certain groups of irregular seasonal workers were not covered by health assistance until the outbreak of COVID-19.
Education

The Turkish education system points to strong state authority. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is responsible for planning, implementing, monitoring, and inspecting education and training services at all levels. The research findings reveal that highly centralized governance allows little rapid response to external change, and the lack of local-to-national policy alignment hinders refugee education development (McCarthy 2018; Sunata and Abdulla 2020). Nevertheless, the forced migration flow from Syria resulted in increasing numbers and changing governance requirements. The legal and institutional structure has evolved extensively in the last decade. A brief overview of education legislation, activities, and practices points to a process evolving from an initial emergency and protection approach to a perspective reflecting a commitment to social cohesion (Unutulmaz 2018; Özçürümez and İğduygü 2020).

The most recent and comprehensive legal regulation concerning the education of all foreigners is Article 34 of the LFIP. The law entitles the children under 18 of all legal residents in Turkey to primary and secondary education. Moreover, Article 28 of the TPR, based on the LFIP, addresses education services for Syrians with TPS by giving them a right to access to education from preschool to language, vocational, and skills training. Several projects and social support programmes concern immigrants’ – mainly Syrians’ – formal education, such as those with a direct EU grant (PIKTES) and/or through a conditional cash transfer called the CCTE. Both the MoNE and municipalities, as well as civil society organizations, have provided several channels alongside education.

The main issue concerns how existing rights and facilities become actual capabilities. Our field research reveals the importance of schools not only for academic purposes but the socialization role they play. Schools play a dominant role in children’s lives from many perspectives (WP3TR003). Given refugee families’ financial vulnerability, the material conditions in which children live define their propensity to fail to start, continue, and complete their education. Conditions such as migrant families’ income and education levels, parents’ employment status, and language ability even play a role in immigrant children’s school participation. This also leads to child labour, especially in the agricultural sector.

In such an environment not only the policies determined in a centralized system, but the roles and perspectives of local social policy implementers, make a difference. In our research, the enrolment issue, especially in rural areas, was addressed in the interviews with local stakeholders. Individual efforts to find the residence of unenrolled children with local governors’ aid and in contact with local associations have been an important factor in
the attempt to overcome this challenge. Nevertheless, this only works for registered migrants. It is impossible to determine the residence of the unregistered (WP3TRB002). In December 2020 more than 768,000 children were integrated into the Turkish schooling system. However, more than 400,000 school-age refugee children (approximately 36% of school-age Syrian children) remained out of school because of family difficulties (UNICEF 2020). Poverty, which also leads to child labour, is the main cause of a lack of access to education opportunities. The rate of school enrolment and dropouts also dramatically decreases at higher levels.

The language barrier is among the obstacles to integrating Syrians into education. Although the MoNE, municipalities, and civil society organizations (CSOs) provide channels targeting different groups more broadly, several factors limit access to language courses – for example, limited capacity, time inflexibility, course duration, and the requirement of central approval for all educational activities by internationally funded CSOs (UNICEF 2019). Besides, dependence on international funding raises serious concerns about the insufficiency of the state’s centralization efforts to ensure long-term sustainability once the funding stops (Özçürümez and İçduygu 2020). As the language barrier affects educational success, tension in education policy implementation is likely to occur in schools. Our field research reveals teachers’ reluctance to work in schools where half the students are Syrian (WP3TRB002).

As mentioned above, foreign students’ right to education in Spain is included in Organic Law 4/2000, but it is also included in the successively approved organic education laws. These laws guarantee foreign students a school place during the compulsory stages (6–16 years), regardless of their administrative situation (Grau Rubio and Hawrilak 2016). Indeed, non-compulsory early schooling (3–6-year-old children) is also standardized. Schooling does not even present problems for children from families involved in seasonal agriculture (Pérez Yruela and Rinken 2005). It is important to highlight minors’ and especially newcomers’ high level of integration into the education system and the reception of children of irregular immigrants (WP3ES008). This has been possible because the 2nd Strategic Citizenship and Integration Plan features four types of educational measures: reception measures; attention to linguistic and cultural diversity; attention to families; and teacher training.

The measures developed to improve the integration of foreign students depend mainly on the CCAA. Some regions have developed additional measures – for example, scholarships and grants for school supplies, canteens, school transport, and the tools for parental involvement in schools through AMPAS (associations of fathers and mothers). Other measures aim to promote foreign students’ school success, including the intercultural mediation service in educational centres to prevent conflict arising from cultural factors or the migration process.
Foreigners’ schooling has increased significantly since 2000. Nationally, the majority of TCNs (80.9%) choose public centres. However, unlike urban centres, there has been no segregation of students in educational centres according to origin in rural areas. Immigrant students from families with lower socioeconomic status and educational attainment are especially vulnerable: they suffer from two causes of school segregation (Murillo and Belavi 2018).

**DISCUSSION**

Social support is necessary to provide immigrants’ basic needs, which are crucial for their wellbeing. With its pre-existing inequalities and regional development gaps limiting the capabilities of its own citizens, Turkey faces many problems: poverty; the informal economy; child labour; and access to qualified education for all. Competition between the most vulnerable groups for social assistance and access to rights and job opportunities in the informal labour market therefore created tension even before COVID-19. Almost all the informants during our field research underlined this. In the absence of a clearly defined understanding of social cohesion there was an emphasis on the promotion of solidarity among fellow citizens or the avoidance of tension (Kale and Erdoğan 2019). Meanwhile, in Spain the foreign population’s high level of social integration characterized the important immigration processes experienced between the 1990s and the beginning of the 2008 economic crisis. Nationally, the welfare state adapted reasonably well, providing a high degree of protection to Spain’s immigrant-origin population (Moreno Fuentes and De Figueiredo Ferreira 2013). However, the situation changed with the 2008 crisis. The increase in unemployment (especially long-term) and the labour market’s precarity raise doubts about their sociocultural integration, and it exposes the weaknesses of the Spanish integration model. Changes have been observed in natives’ attitudes towards immigrants in Spain (Moreno-Colom and De Alós 2016).

Concerning the foreign population’s use of health resources, numerous studies have shown that there is no greater use than that made by the native population in both countries (Blanco Moreno and Hernández Pascual 2009; Moreno Fuentes and De Figueiredo Ferreira 2013; Yıldırım, Komsuoglu and Özekmekçi 2019; Yilmaz 2019). That the increase in foreign population causes congestion in primary healthcare services is a perception. Immigrants’ access to healthcare, even when rights are defined, is always limited by obstacles in both countries. The complex bureaucratic systems and lack of multilingual and multicultural rights-based approaches complicate the system’s navigation for those unfamiliar with it. During the economic crisis in Spain, the central government’s policy was to limit healthcare services to those who contributed or could contribute to the system. The state’s administrative decentralization
meant that not all the autonomous communities accepted the ‘welfare chauvinism’ model. As noted in the Turkish case, healthcare is an area that causes high levels of anti-immigrant attitudes.

Furthermore, healthcare, especially preventive healthcare, is crucial for society’s overall wellbeing. Access to vaccination is always important. However, it was even more so during the pandemic. Registered immigrants in Turkey have the same rights as Turkish citizens. Regional governments in Spain temporarily included these people in the health system. Public institutions and NGOs acted to disseminate information in both countries.

Finally, education is crucial for immigrants’ current and future wellbeing, particularly for children and young people. Thus, inclusive education is an ongoing project not only for immigrants but for locals in both countries. The content of education at every level is a political issue, and this is even more the case for immigrants. Whether the medium of instruction provides a space for multilingualism and whether it is monolingual are important questions. However, education in Turkey is a policy realm in which inequalities based on socioeconomic status continue to exist, especially regarding preschool education and regional disparities in the schooling rate (ERG 2017). A sudden and massive influx of migrant children has been included in this environment since 2011. This creates tension in the field, but our fieldwork findings demonstrate that the attitudes of local social policy implementers, including school administrations and teachers, play a crucial role. Our Spanish fieldwork’s findings show there is a general acceptance of the need to provide opportunities to the immigrant population through access to education. All these measures for the integration of minors also demonstrate the recognition of the positive social impact of immigration in municipalities greatly affected by ageing and depopulation (WP3ES008; WP3ES006). However, there is also a widespread perception that immigrants receive more school aid than Spanish people, even if they have a similar income level (WP3ES005).

CONCLUSION

Welfare policies are crucial for social cohesion, and the existing overlapping crises of the economy, pandemics, war, and more existentially, the environment mean welfare chauvinist positions are and probably will be increasingly seen. Thus, the wellbeing of any society and indeed global wellbeing cannot be maintained in isolation but in social cohesion. In examining three selected crucial social policy areas in both countries, we have reflected on how central and decentralized governance work is based on the literature and the findings of our field research.

The public attitude towards immigration is one of the key determinants of the implementation of existing policies. In the Turkish context, the welcoming
of ‘Syrian guests’ as part of Turkish hospitality and religious values has diminished with the emergence of an increasingly anti-immigrant attitude. With economic crises and the election year to come things will be even more difficult. Broadly speaking, the Spanish have maintained more positive attitudes towards immigration. However, there is currently a slight increase in negative attitudes, although the extent to which this is due to the institutional presence of the far right remains unclear, as does the extent to which it should be attributed to the economic crisis caused by COVID-19 or the massive arrival of irregular immigrants (González Enríquez and Rinken 2021).

Economic insecurity is systematically correlated with welfare chauvinist attitudes (Careja and Harris 2022). Both Turkey and Spain testify to this. Restrictions to the accessibility of social services for foreigners increase in times of crisis, and the ‘native’ population tends to become more reluctant to grant social rights to immigrants, considering them rivals or competitors for access to benefits or public services (Cea D’Ancona 2015; cf. Laine 2020b). Immigration is thus often seen as having negative effects on welfare state services and their redistribution (Moreno Fuentes and Bruquetas 2012). This was also observed in our research, though in the Spanish case a general perception of the positive effect of immigration on the economy was also identified.

Local practices in rural areas also play a role in determining the extent to which existing policies are implemented successfully in each case; differences can be observed even from one village to another, based on the attitude of social service providers. In Turkey centralized rules and regulations are implemented in every locality, yet the agency of the social service providers may make a difference. In Spain’s decentralized system the municipalities constitute the gateway to welfare services, which is why they may face greater pressure from citizens to direct the system’s benefits away from foreigners; however, the recognition of the positive impact on the local economy tends to maintain a less reductionist attitude towards the concept of citizen. Most of the criticisms of the negative effects of immigration focus on the greater ease of access for foreigners to social benefits to the detriment of vulnerable populations.

To conclude, the implementation of any social policy or project supporting immigrants should consider inclusive coverage for all members of society, especially the most vulnerable. Support for social cohesion to overcome anti-immigrant attitudes must be a priority, as it determines the implementation of and access to existing rights. The host population needs to learn about migrant’s stories and experiences if local perceptions are to change. Hopefully, this will lead to an understanding of human beings’ common needs and the framework of universal rights. Successful social cohesion and broader well-being depend not only on immigrants’ adaptation but on change in the local population.
NOTE

1. MATILDE has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 870831.

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INTRODUCTION

Turkey has been exposed to the entry of thousands of Syrian refugees since April 2011. On 3 March 2022 there were 3,747,734 Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey. Syrians lack permanent legal residence status and political or citizenship rights, and most have only insecure irregular employment. Temporary protection regulation blocks Syrians’ path to citizenship and access to individual international protection. The Turkish government therefore grants citizenship to Syrians under temporary protection through ‘exceptional citizenship’. Some Syrians are naturalized under the article of exceptional citizenship of the Turkish Citizenship Law introduced in 2009. According to Article 12 (exceptions in acquiring Turkish citizenship) of this Law (Law No. 5901) ‘those persons who bring into Turkey industrial facilities or have rendered or are believed to render an outstanding service in the social or economic arena or in the fields of science, technology, sports, culture or arts’ can acquire citizenship. Since 31 January 2021 Turkey has issued citizenship to around 193,000 Syrians. Syrians are also gradually becoming the targets of increasing hostility from the majority society in Turkey, because socio-political polarization has become widespread since the failed military coup in July 2016. Another essential source of growing hostility to Syrians in Turkey is the deepening of the economic crisis, which makes scapegoats of refugees, who are blamed for high unemployment and rising prices. Yet Turkey is not just a stop on the way to Europe for many Syrian refugees but is instead a place where many wish to stay if conditions allow (Kaya and Kiraç 2016; Rottmann and Kaya 2020).

Despite its shortcomings in the economic and political integration of migrants and its anti-discrimination laws, Turkey has recently performed relatively well in other areas of the integration of Syrian migrants under temporary protection. The 2020 MIPEX (Migration Integration Policy Index) results demonstrate that Turkey performed well between 2015 and 2020 in the inte-
The local turn in migrant practices in Turkey

The migration of migrants in accessing education, health services, and naturalization. Turkey’s relative success in integrating migrants stems from the engagement of the Directorate of Migration Management, local governments, NGOs, and academia. Since the introduction of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the EU-Turkey Refugee Statement of 16 March 2016, local actors have become more active in strengthening the processes of integration of Syrian forced migrants residing in Turkey. Based on the findings of field research in the rural districts of Bursa, a neighbouring city of Istanbul, as well as extensive desk research including the scrutiny of legal texts (the Municipality Law and the Law on Foreigners and International Protection), policies at national and local levels, and secondary resources, this chapter analyses how integration policies, practices, and responses have evolved at both central and local levels since the mass migration of Syrians to Turkey.

The chapter presents a multilevel analysis of integration policies and practices giving voice to migrants, local stakeholders, and municipal actors, who offered their first-hand testimonies in semi-structured interviews held in the second part of 2021. Following participatory action research (Lewin 1946; Stringer 2014), various local actors in rural Karacabey, including municipal actors, civil society actors, and migrants themselves, were actively involved in the knowledge production process. A considerable number of stakeholders affiliated with public administrations, international organizations, education/training institutions, trade and/or labour unions, small/large private companies, and migrants was actively involved in the research. In parallel with the spatial distribution and sociodemographic characteristics of immigrants, the profile of local migrant stakeholders includes Syrians, Afghans, and Jordanians. Eventually, 27 immigrants (of whom nine were women, and four were children) were involved in our research activities. Three of the male participants were involved in various activities more than once.

MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE, LOCAL TURN, AND SUBSIDIARITY

To explain the complex institutional dimensions of governance, migration scholars have found the concept of multilevel governance (MLG) helpful (Panizzon and van Riemsdijk 2019; Scholten and Penninx 2016). MLG was initially defined as the dispersion of authority away from central government – upwards to the supranational level, downwards to subnational jurisdictions, and sideways to public-private networks (Scholten 2020). The interpretative lens of MLG emphasizes the questions of who the actors and institutions involved in governing migration are and their modes of interaction and political-legal commitment. MLG focuses on several policy levels, including
Assessing the social impact of immigration in Europe

global, supranational, regional, national, and local, on which migration policies are formed.

MLG explores how these policymaking levels interact, contradict each other, can be compromised, and have been systematically theorized through four modes: centralist; localist; multilevel; and decoupled (Scholten and Penninx 2016). The centralist mode of governance aims to bring policy convergence via top-down approaches with a clear hierarchy between government levels. Local governments in the localist mode frame migration policies, including reception, in a specifically local way, which in turn leads to policy divergence. The multilevel governance mode is one in which there is an interaction between the various levels of government without the clear dominance of one level, which engenders some convergence between policy frames at different levels, produced and sustained by their mutual interactions. In refugee governance state actors are likely to remain in charge of the asylum decision-making process and to retain at least some coordinating role in the actual provision of reception and integration by delegating some responsibilities to local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private individuals, which has been conceptualized as a local turn and a politics of subsidiarity.

The local turn refers to the delegation of the power of nation-states to municipal authorities and NGOs, Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), and private individuals. This turn is deepened by neoliberal forms of governmentality, and the Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations (UN) in 2016 and the EU’s efforts to engage with local governments in the migration control field (Kutz and Wolff 2020). Local actors act as service providers and creators of local discourses and interpreters of central or international discourses on the ground (Lowndes and Polat 2020). While the local level has been referred to in the discussion of migrant integration (Dekker et al. 2015), it has also been posited in explaining reception (Oliver et al. 2020) and protection through controlling access to asylum (Artero and Fontanari 2021).

SYRIANS IN TURKEY UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION

The first group of Syrian nationals found refuge in Turkey by crossing into the province of Hatay on 29 April 2011. Initially, the government expected that the Assad regime would soon collapse, and it estimated that at most around 100,000 Syrians would remain in Turkey for two or three weeks (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022). Following the escalation of the armed conflict in Syria, the government declared an open-door policy for Syrian refugees in October 2011. Accordingly, Turkey has allowed Syrians with passports to enter the country freely and treated those who may have entered without documents
in a similar way; it has guaranteed the principle of non-refoulment, offered temporary protection, and committed to the provision of the best possible living conditions and humanitarian assistance for the refugees (Kirişçi 2014). Meanwhile, a discursive component of reception became more apparent. State actors framed Syrians as guests. This political discursive frame was later complemented by the religiously loaded discourse of the **Ansar** spirit. The Turkish government quickly codified its Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) in 2014, echoing the EU’s Directive. The directive grants Syrians almost the entire spectrum of refugees’ social and civil rights in western societies. The number of Syrians has since increased, while their statuses have varied, as presented in Table 10.1 and elaborated further below.

Since 24 February 2022 Turkey’s Temporary Protection regime has granted 3,746,674 Syrian nationals the right to stay legally in Turkey and some level of access to fundamental rights and services. Other Syrians in Turkey have been granted citizenship and residence permits. Since 15 February 2022 the Minister of Interior reports that 193,293 Syrians have been granted Turkish citizenship. However, the temporary protection regulation blocks the path to citizenship and access to the application for individual international protection.

**LOCAL TURN IN REFUGEE GOVERNANCE IN TURKEY**

The salience of the local turn as a research agenda has been increasingly observable in a growing number of studies concerning Syrians. One research strand in this regard focuses on encounters at local levels through detailed anthropological studies. Theoretically, some studies benefit from the insights of border and borderland studies, which began to emerge in the 1990s in Turkish scholarship focusing on border economies, forms of border administration, and the maintenance of border security through the lens of anthropology (Aras 2020; Rottmann and Nimer 2020). Another research strand of the local turn in urban areas concerns the municipal authorities’ role in responding to the Syrian refugee situation (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022; Betts, Memişoğlu and Ali 2020; Genç 2018; Kale and Erdoğan 2019; Lowndes and Polat 2020; Kaya 2020). Local interpretations were enacted as part of specific approaches to refugee service delivery. Working with local NGOs, municipalities accessed international funds despite the national government’s vociferous critique of the EU refugee policy. Even in an increasingly authoritarian setting refugee policy was constituted through multiple and contingent processes of local government interpretation (Lowndes and Polat 2020).

Local municipalities are one of the key integration actors. However, their service provision is very uneven because of uncertainty about whether municipalities can provide services to non-citizens. Municipalities also provide...
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(or support the provision of) vocational training and job placement services, healthcare, childcare, legal aid, and social and financial aid to varying degrees. Some municipalities may be inactive because they fear legal and social repercussions. These municipalities are concerned about the negative reaction of local citizens to the reception and integration of refugees in their neighbourhoods (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022). An additional reason for the low service provision for migrants is that municipalities’ budgets may be insufficient because they are determined based on the population of citizens. Municipal actors do not know what they are allowed to do legally, so decisions are made individually and ad hoc. Meanwhile, refugees do not know why parts of the same city differ in their treatment of refugees. They must often navigate services with the aid of their peers or informal networks (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022).

Numerous programmes are run by NGOs within the integration sphere, but there is no centralized system for reporting activities and needs assessments, meaning there is a lack of coordination. It is impossible to know how the needs of women, men, children, or LGBTQ+ migrants are systematically served (or not) via the various integration programmes. There are many programmatic overlaps. For example, programmes for refugee children’s protection and integration are run by state agencies (e.g. the Ministry of Education), local institutions (e.g. municipalities, city councils), International Organizations (IOs) (UN agencies), International NGOs (I-NGOs), and local implementing NGOs. However, a lack of coordination and cooperation among these actors, actor hierarchies, and short-term earmarked funding seriously affect programme outcomes (Şahin Mencütek et al. 2023).

MIGRANTS, NATIVES AND MUNICIPAL LAW

Turkish municipalities follow the principle of fellow citizenship (Hemşehrilik in Turkish) embodied in Article 13 of the Municipal Law and strive to provide equal services to non-citizen residents and initiate projects that foster social cohesion between native and migrant communities. Syrian refugees have been forced to migrate, and because of the civil war most have suffered extreme trauma and impoverishment and are extremely vulnerable. As they struggle to rebuild their lives and meet their many needs with minimal resources in a foreign country, they face significant challenges, including the language barrier. It is unsurprising that their vulnerability and inability to communicate with locals tend to make Syrians introverted (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022).

Municipal responsibilities include ensuring that native and migrant communities coexist in peace, and their role in this respect is far more important than that of national and international actors (Scholten and Penninx 2016). The challenges nation-states face in realizing the 2016 UN Sustainable
Development Goals and in managing migration and social cohesion have increased significantly, and it is essential that they are also addressed locally. The migration studies literature (Scholten and Penninx 2016) confirms this is happening, and Turkish municipalities have recently started to play a more active role in this regard. This has been given further impetus by the 2016 EU-Turkey Refugee Statement.

The local environment for which municipalities are responsible is where migrants and native populations live, work, interact, use infrastructure, and receive services, the availability and quality of which affect social harmony, inclusion, and coexistence. The Turkish Municipal Law includes the principle of ‘fellow citizenship’, and municipalities are responsible for meeting the day-to-day needs of all residents and promoting a culture of coexistence. Article 13 of the Turkish Municipal Law states: ‘Everyone is a fellow citizen of the city in which he resides. Fellow citizens shall be entitled to participate in the decisions and services of the municipality, to be informed about municipal activities, and to benefit from the aid of the municipal administration.’ This article makes municipalities responsible for improving social and cultural relations among ‘fellow citizens’ and grants equal rights and responsibilities to all, whether legal citizens or not, and it is important for coexistence and the social cohesion between the native and migrant communities that the general public is made aware of this.

However, Article 14 makes an implicit distinction between citizens and non-citizens in the statement: ‘Municipal services shall be rendered in the most appropriate manner at the places nearest to the citizens’. This appears inconsistent with Article 13, which refers to ‘fellow citizens’, defined as all residents. Nevertheless, most municipalities accept and act in accordance with the principle of fellow citizenship in Article 13, rather than trying to avoid their equal responsibilities regarding resident migrants by appealing to a literal interpretation of Article 14.

Local municipalities in Turkey still lack central government funding for refugees. As the allocation from the national budget is only indexed to the number of Turkish citizens, the presence of refugees does not result in an increase (Betts, Memişoğlu and Ali 2020; Coşkun and Uçar 2018). Yet refugees do not contribute to the municipalities’ budgets, because they are not subject to local tax (Coşkun and Uçar 2018). The limitation on financial resources therefore becomes a critical issue for those municipalities hosting a large number of refugees. Growing numbers of refugees in many cities result in an increase in demand for infrastructure services such as rubbish and sewerage, which need to be compensated without any additional allocation (Coşkun and Uçar 2018). Furthermore, municipal administrators are exposed to the criticism of local residents, who object to the use of municipal resources for non-citizens (Kale and Erdoğan 2019).
The local authorities cooperate with civil society organizations to provide free services and orientation to Syrians about education, health services, and training opportunities. To overcome financial constraints, actively engaged municipalities seek external funding by establishing partnerships with NGOs and international actors. In other words, local municipalities have discovered some ‘bypass methods’ to obtain extra funds for the welfare of refugees (Betts, Memişoğlu and Ali 2020; Coşkun and Uçar 2018). Local governments have no legal, financial, or political-administrative responsibility or authority. Although they are not active in the formulation and implementation of policies to tackle the refugee issue (Coşkun and Uçar 2018), and they are not provided any extra budget by the central state to meet the needs of migrants under temporary protection, they remain important responsible actors.

KARACABEY, BURSA: TESTING LOCAL TURN IN A RURAL DISTRICT

Karacabey, the rural MATILDE region, is a district that stands out economically with its agricultural production and with other sectors like trade, industry, transport, and services. However, the vast and fertile soils of the Karacabey plain (776,744 hectares of agricultural land) afford great opportunities for the agricultural sector to make its mark on Karacabey’s economic landscape: most of its population is engaged in agricultural production. Besides, animal husbandry, especially horse and sheep breeding, is a highly developed sector in the area, which is known for breeding and raising Turkey’s best racehorses. As agriculture and animal husbandry play an important role in production, agriculture-based industry has developed, and this makes the area attractive for investment. Leading food industry factories are based in the area, as well as the import–export industry in the fields of feed, poultry, livestock, and dairy products (Ak 2017). Those working in the industry and agriculture work largely as seasonal workers.

The province’s land use covers an area of 1,088,638 hectares. Thirty-five per cent of Bursa’s land is mountains and uplands, 48 per cent plateaus, and 17 per cent plains (Bursa 2019). Forty-two per cent of agricultural land is used as farmland, 14 per cent for vegetables, 12 per cent for orchards, two per cent for vineyards, and 12 per cent for olive groves. The agricultural land area has decreased by around 17 per cent since 2006. This is due mostly to deteriorating soil fertility (Bursa 2019). Nevertheless, an increase in higher value-added vegetable, fruit, and olive fields has been observed (Özkan and Kadagan 2019). Bursa’s proximity to Istanbul makes it an important hub for providing fresh vegetables, olives, tomatoes, and so on for processing in the factories around Karacabey.
In terms of demographic structure Karacabey is one of Bursa’s 17 municipalities, with a population of 84,666 in 2021. Karacabey’s district includes 64 villages. Based on their proportion among foreign nationals in Bursa and Karacabey, Syrian migrants under temporary protection, as well as Afghans, are the focus of the case study. Syrians represent a specific subgroup whose population rate corresponds to more than five per cent of Bursa’s current population (3.1 million in 2021). The ratio of foreigners to the total population in Karacabey is 3.65 per cent (around 3,000). The foreign population figures include Syrians under temporary protection (2,828), which corresponds to 3.37 per cent of Karacabey’s total population (July 2021). Karacabey’s agricultural land also attracts thousands of seasonal workers, including Syrians, who come from the south-east and south of Turkey every year between April and September (Sönmez 2017).

Urban–rural linkages were a focus throughout the research activities conducted in Karacabey during the summer and autumn of 2021. The action research’s main focus was to understand the role of migrants in the labour market, especially in the agricultural sector, as well as how natives interacted with migrants. Issues of migrants’ welcome, housing, and access to services in Karacabey were therefore also scrutinized. Given the spatial distribution and sociodemographic characteristics of immigrants in Karacabey, the impact of international migrants’ integration on a rural labour market is at the centre of the research. In what follows the main local challenges and needs are addressed in relation to the governance of refugees by local actors that are not financially and administratively supported by central state actors. In other words, the sections below amplify the details of the local turn in the case of Bursa, Karacabey, an area that is also exposed to the neoliberal logic of migration governance based on the politics of subsidiarity or the delegation of responsibility from central to local actors without the central state’s provision of additional financial instruments.

CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

The Karacabey research identified major challenges and needs of the local participants, who expressed their willingness to see more agricultural-based and environmentally sensitive policies and practices in their region. The research also demonstrated that local stakeholders were very sceptical about the central state actors, which they believed were untransparent and inaccessible. This finding confirms the neoliberal logic of central state actors that are ready to delegate responsibilities for the governance of migrants’ integration to local actors without any financial or administrative support. This section reveals the local challenges and needs the local participants raised. Many raised the issues of depopulation, the central state’s indifference to agricultural production,
industrialization leading to the shrinking of agricultural land, and the impermanence of refugees that prevented their integration into different spheres of everyday life. Our interviewees also expressed their local needs, while describing the major challenges in their environment.

**Depopulation and Metropolitan Municipality System as a Challenge to Agricultural Sustainability**

Depopulation in rural areas is a worldwide problem with socioeconomic and ecological consequences (Tenza-Peral et al. 2022; Camarero and Oliva 2019). This problem also constitutes an important challenge for Karacabey. The lack of structural measures for boosting rural development and providing self-sustaining enterprises to help rural producers stand on their own feet has resulted in the shrinking of investment in agriculture (Arıcı and Kirmikil 2017). This process has also triggered the emigration of young locals in Karacabey to neighbouring cities like Bursa and Istanbul. The ongoing demographic pressure, coupled with the fragmentation of inheritance, has rendered agricultural land idle for the last two decades. Our participatory action research has revealed that the younger generation’s outwards migration to urban centres threatens agricultural sustainability in Karacabey and neighbouring districts.

Karacabey’s vast area of agricultural land means there is a pressing need for agricultural workers, especially in the summer. Agricultural land in Karacabey and its neighbouring district, Mustafakemalpaşa, attracts thousands of seasonal workers from south-eastern and southern Turkey every year between April and September. Some are Turkish citizens; some Syrians. Both seasonal and permanent migrants and refugees are essential agents in the harvesting of fertile agricultural land, an activity neglected by locals because of young people’s reluctance to participate in agricultural production, the concomitant growth of emigration, and the fragmentation of inheritance.

The situation is worsened by the lack of support from central state actors for agricultural production and managing the mobility of migrant labour in Karacabey. The legal regulation changing the status of the villages and the boundaries of metropolitan municipalities has further diminished the allocation of sufficient resources for rural development. Law No. 6360 of 2012 rescaled urban areas through the absorption of rural ones (Savaş-Yavuzçehre 2016). The former villages lost their autonomous legal personality within the boundaries of metropolitan areas and were transformed into neighbourhoods run by the metropolitan municipality. Accordingly, 47 per cent of villages and 54 per cent of municipalities in Turkey lost their autonomous power to the metropolitan cities (Dik 2014). This legal and administrative change resulted in the transfer of common goods to metropolitan municipalities. In addition to the depopulation that has already created territorial inequalities, this regulation
is criticized for its hindrance of municipalities in supporting and developing agricultural production in rural areas (Arıcı and Kirmikil 2017). Our interviewees and local stakeholders during the research activities maintained this resulted in a failure to prevent depopulation and regulate supply and demand in both agricultural production and animal husbandry. It was reported that the only way to provide this balance was to rely on a seasonal agricultural workforce of mostly Syrian and Afghan migrants. However, the impermanence of seasonal migrants creates another problem. Native populations do not consider immigrants an asset for long-term local development. Local municipal and public administration actors therefore do not implement any policy to address seasonal migrants’ long-term problems. This also places social cohesion beyond local consideration.

Uncontrolled Industrialization and its Challenges to Rural Life

The agricultural production capacity of Karacabey, with its 776,744 hectares of agricultural land and 316,434 hectares of forestland, stands out economically. Animal husbandry, especially horse and sheep breeding, is also a highly developed sector in the district, which is known for breeding and raising Turkey’s best racehorses. Yet the uncontrolled industrialization and urbanization in Karacabey (Karaer and Başkaya 2017) gives rise to concern among the local population. During our research the local interviewees specifically articulated their concerns about environmental problems, especially industrial pollution from the uncontrolled concentration of industry poisoning the farmlands in the region.

Over-industrialization seems the main challenge. It creates further impediments to agricultural production. Our field visits and interviews with local stakeholders revealed that locals were greatly concerned about the preparations made by the central state actors to introduce a Hi-Tech Industrial Site (YTSB, Yüksek Teknoloji Sanayi Bölgesi) near Karacabey. Although the construction work in the area has already started, none of the local stakeholders, including the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry, has up-to-date information about what is going on. Locals expressed their anger and anxiety about the lack of consultation and information from the state actors about the region’s industrialization plans. There are rumours that some of the heavy industry in Gebze (an industrial district of Kocaeli, a city neighbouring Bursa in the North) will be moved to the district of Karacabey to ease the industrial and urban pressure in Gebze. Locals are genuinely concerned that such a move will result in heavy pollution of agricultural land, wildlife, and the lakes on birds’ migration routes. Such ambiguities and the lack of future prospects mean local youngsters are hesitant to stay in Karacabey. This places the immigrant workforce at the forefront of agricultural and industrial production. Many
The local turn in migrant practices in Turkey studies also show that the principles of sustainable development are unknown at the local level (Karaer and Baskaya 2017). The construction of the YTSB in Karacabey seems to pose an important challenge to agricultural sustainability. Dysfunctional local cooperatives/associations are also disappointed by this process. All these challenges have created a strong sense among local actors of being left behind in these remote places ‘which no longer matter’ to those at the centre (Rodriguez-Pose 2017).

Temporary Protection Status and Labour Market Informality

The research data demonstrate that international migrants prefer Karacabey for its job opportunities. Rural Karacabey hosts both Syrians and Afghans, who come to the region to work as seasonal agricultural workers. The district also hosts permanent migrants, who work in factories and workshops. Some immigrants also work in jobs that locals will not do. There are also those who are assigned to work in international projects funded by the EU, such as immigrant health workers employed in Migrant Health Centres (MHCs) within the framework of the SIHHAT project.9

Labour markets in Turkey face ongoing structural problems, including a high level of informality, to which immigrants are also exposed. Our interviews and observations confirm that international migrants’ work in Karacabey is very informal. The informal sector generally comprises jobs that are unattractive to the local population, including seasonal agricultural jobs (Caro 2020). Neither Turkish citizens nor international migrants are registered in seasonal agricultural assignments. Syrians under temporary protection mostly work informally as a cheap labour force. Most find themselves working in dirty, dangerous, and demeaning jobs in highly precarious and unsafe work environments. Because of this informality we did not receive a positive response from the leading industrial producers and factory owners to our requests to interview their migrant workers during our research.

The lack of access to the labour market also makes it exceedingly difficult for Syrians under temporary protection to formalize their status. According to a regulation introduced in January 2016 temporary protection status beneficiaries were granted the right 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) a quota system – the number of temporary status beneficiaries cannot exceed 10 per cent of the number of Turkish citizens working at the workplace. These restrictions directly affect the scope and extent of informal migrant labour, even though immigrants are crucial to closing the existing gap in the labour market – for example, Afghan shepherds and Syrian agricultural workers in Karacabey. The difficulties of obtaining a work permit
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seem to remain the same even for those who are investing heavily in industry in Karacabey. Two common impediments mentioned by our interviewees were difficulties encountered in naturalization and getting a work permit.

Some state actors such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Security argue that there are other reasons that prompt Syrians to cling to their informality in the labour market. According to a study by the ministry the EU’s humanitarian assistance programme discourages them from seeking formality. More than 1.6 million Syrians in Turkey rely on the EU’s Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) financial assistance. ESSN aid is given to each member of a migrant family if none has formal employment. This is believed to prevent many Syrian refugees who are eligible for ESSN aid applying for jobs in the formal sector, because they fear they will lose this aid.

The qualitative data gathered during the field research also show that gendered dynamics, intersectional discrimination, low salaries, and the instrumentalization of migrant labour remain the major problems to be solved. Concerning seasonal agricultural migrants, it was specifically stated that the system of dayibashilik (an intermediary person between landlords and seasonal workers) was open to extensive abuse, exemplifying the instrumentalization of the international labour force. A ‘dayibashi’ organized large groups of migrant workers. Groups could have more than 100 workers. In the summer of 2021 each seasonal worker would be paid 100 Turkish Lira (TL)/per day, from which the dayıbashi took a commission of 20 TL (in August 2021, 100 TL was worth approximately 10 euro). Impermanence also leads to a lack of interaction between locals and migrant communities. This negative correlation makes it difficult for migrants to contribute better to the setting in which they find themselves, which brings us to the challenges to social cohesion.

Challenges to Social Cohesion

One of the most frequently stated challenges during the research was migrants’ lack of Turkish language skills. The language barrier is among the serious challenges to immigrants, especially Syrians, generating a sense of territorial belonging and integration in education and work environments. The emphasis on Syrians living in a closed community with limited or no contact with locals demonstrates the lack of social cohesion (Kaya 2020; Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022), for which schooling is essential. However, precarious conditions such as Syrian families’ low income and education levels, parents’ employment status, and poor language ability have a negative impact on immigrant children’s school participation. The schooling of seasonal migrants’ children becomes an even greater issue in situ.

Syrians’ prolonged temporary protection status is key to understanding the root cause of the difficulties faced with respect to social cohesion. This
is a matter that is often discussed in various cities, including Bursa. Locals and immigrants interact little in everyday life in either the centre of Bursa or in rural Karacabey. The impermanence of seasonal jobs also plays a crucial role in the lack of interaction between locals and migrant communities in Karacabey. The field research findings reveal that this impermanence explains the inertia of the local authorities in handling the issue of social cohesion.

CONCLUSION

Despite the centrality of the state in designing policies, there is also adequate evidence for a discussion of the local turn to carry out a politics of subsidiarity. Non-state actors consistently navigate possibilities for participation in the spaces pertinent to refugee affairs in local settings. They play a considerable role in facilitating access to rights and services, and they increasingly become an essential part of the context. However, in many cases the local turn must be acknowledged with caution in state-centric response models because the efforts of non-state actors, intentionally or not, seem to comply with the state’s efforts to delegate the task of migrant integration to local actors without any financial or administrative assistance.

Based on the findings of the participatory action research, one can conclude that locals are very aware of the challenges and opportunities, especially in terms of migration’s socioeconomic impact on rural development and agricultural production. However, the lack of a rural-based approach at the central state level makes it difficult for local stakeholders in Karacabey to generate stronger models of coexistence between local citizens and migrant-origin individuals engaged in agricultural production processes.

Due to their legal precarity and impermanence, most refugees rarely participate in activities that involve confrontation with the receiving state authorities. They increasingly cooperate with local actors or international organizations, but they are seldom included in the decisions that affect them. At the individual level many refugees struggle to navigate such a complex and stratified system. In their everyday practices, they develop coping mechanisms to improve their reception conditions, empowering themselves for better protection and partial integration. Overall, they seek to overcome in-betweenness by moving to more permanent and dignified life conditions and by challenging the severe implications of impermanence. Some local actors also assist them to navigate impermanence and find belonging.

Our research in Karacabey has revealed that the emergence of local support structures in response to migrants’ experiences of deprivation can be celebrated at first glance as a sign of a welcoming culture. However, there is another, darker, side of the coin. The local turn in migration governance in Karacabey and elsewhere also points to the selective affinity of the politics...
of subsidiarity and a neoliberal policy doctrine that privileges re-privatization at the expense of the most vulnerable parts of the population. The central state’s lack of planning in the realms of agricultural production, financial support, administrative support, depopulation, environmental pollution, and over-industrialization results in the accumulation of responsibilities for local actors in sustaining agricultural production, managing the negative externalities of depopulation, governing migrants’ integration, and complying with the legal regulations outlined in the Municipal Law.

Migrant workers mostly work informally as cheap labour. The majority work in highly precarious and unsafe work conditions. A labour law specific to agriculture has not been enacted for many years because of the disorganization of the agricultural sector and the difficulties in distinguishing between worker and employer. The lack of social security for workers in agricultural production is another problem in rural areas. Structural and legal problems therefore create further precarity among agricultural workers in general, who have a strong sense of being neglected and left behind in these remote areas (Rodriguez-Pose 2017). Migrant workers in rural areas suffer even more in such circumstances. Reforming the labour law to empower agricultural workers will therefore require strong political will and a focus on the rural at central state level in the first place.

NOTES

1. I would like to express my gratitude to Fatma Yılmaz Elmas for her support during the action research. I am also grateful to those who contributed to the process of knowledge production in Karacabey and Bursa by actively participating in the formulation of the research question and recommendations.


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11. Immigrant integration in Austria and Sweden: a patchwork of multilevel governance and fragmented responsibilities

Marika Gruber and Daniel Rauhut

BACKGROUND

The European Union (EU) ‘refugee crisis’ is fundamentally a crisis of migration and integration governance and politics across the Union. Despite being presented as a recent phenomenon, the influx of economic and political migrants from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa makes it the consequence of a political crisis in the Union’s long-term EU external relations (Seyrek and Paul 2015) and of wider EU bordering issues (Laine 2018; 2020a; 2020b). Moreover, previous national integration policies for refugees have hitherto been unable to meet the often unrealistic expectations of politicians and the public in refugee-receiving and transit countries (CEC 2016; OECD 2016), which indicates both a policy and governance crisis.

Migration and integration issues are increasingly becoming multilevel policy issues. Refugee policies are in practice increasingly being Europeanized (Lavenex 2015). The recent crisis has seen the introduction of measures to assist countries and create a common Union approach to asylum (e.g. the Migration and Integration Fund), but the political rhetoric does not meet the practice (Laine, Moyo and Nshimbi 2020). Furthermore, existing policies such as social cohesion policies are being realigned to address the challenges. However, the limits of a common European approach are clear in terms of the failure to implement several directives in key areas (e.g. the refugee redistribution system) and find policies that appropriately balance security concerns with human rights obligations (Carrera et al. 2015). The situation is further problematized by certain Member States ignoring the Union’s migration approaches – for example, Denmark, France, Greece, and Hungary (Laine 2020a; Laine, Moyo and Nshimbi 2020; Rauhut and Sielker 2021). Crucially, there is tension between national governments and the EU concerning the
discretion Member States have in interpreting EU directives, as well as the involvement of regional and local governments (Scholten and Penninx 2016).

At the national level multilevel governance challenges are influencing integration policies. In the wake of New Public Management (NPM) inspired policies responsibility for integration programmes has shifted from the national to local levels, and the focus of integration has shifted from society or collectives to individuals. The marketization, privatization, and ‘NGO-ization’ of services related to integration policies have made governance more complex. While Spehar, Hinnfors and Bucken-Knapp (2017) argue that actors at all levels seek to shift the responsibilities associated with migrant integration to other levels, Dekker et al. (2015) find a multilevel dynamic of two-way interaction between national and local levels regarding integration policies. NPM governance has also increased the complexity and fragmentation of a multistakeholder (actors from the private, public, and third sector) policy environment (Stewart 2005), making the coordination of related policy areas (i.e. multidimensional governance) much more challenging (Fuertes and McQuaid 2013).

As policy is made as it is being administered (Parsons 1995), the interaction between policy formulation and implementation must be considered at its lower level. NPM embraces frontline discretion in a devolved/decentralized governance environment (Brodkin 2011), which highlights street-level bureaucrats’ key role in influencing how policies are delivered at the local level (Brodkin 2013; Lipsky 1980; Ireland 2004). However, institutional and organizational features will shape this discretion (Fuertes and Lindsay 2016), so it is important to analyse refugee and integration practices at the operational level. The research–policy dialogue has also become more ad hoc over time, and an increased politicization of integration issues (Wolf and Ossewaarde 2018) has made the institutionalized dialogue structures between producers and users of knowledge more complex (Scholten, Entzinger and Penninx 2015).

This chapter discusses the governance perspective of integration policies in Austria and Sweden since 2000.1 The research questions will address 1) how the governance of integration policies is organized in Austria and Sweden, and 2) if the multilevel, multistakeholder, and multidimensional governance environment facilitates or hinders the implementation of integration policies. Especially when discussing how immigrants can redefine and renegotiate the social space, it is important to remember that there are differences in the interaction of rural and mountainous contexts with TCNs’ integration paths and impact. Integration processes that work in urban contexts may not work at all in rural and mountainous areas. The proposed questions will elucidate this. The chapter will start with a presentation of a conceptual framework based on NPM and the governance model by Scholten (2016), followed by a description of what the governance of integration policies looks like in Austria and
Sweden. We will then analyse and discuss both the findings and the potential best practices. Some concluding remarks will follow.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There is no single NPM reform model: different countries implemented their own public management reform concepts while taking national peculiarities into account. The public sector should be organized as private sector companies (Dawson and Dargie 2005), as was the use of independent public bureaucracy and private/independent organizations for public service provision, the separation of policymaking and administration, contracting out and the multisource supply of services, output control measures, and control through business methods, as well as the pay by outcome for administrative staff (Hood and Jackson 1991). Organizational restructuring, the use of management instruments, budgetary reforms, participation, customer orientation, quality management, marketization, and privatization became the determining NPM elements (Schedler and Proeller 2005). NPM is about administrative philosophy and the public sector’s organizational design (Barzelay 2005).

Based on the governmental problems which were diagnosed, efficiency drive, decentralization, the quest for excellence, and a public service orientation were the focus (Ferlie et al. 1996). Market orientation and the creation of quasi-markets have become a defining element in the NPM ideology and movement. Following this, control should be exercised through contracts that also require a split between commissioning (purchasing) and delivering (contracted) organizations (Dawson and Dargie 2005).

Providers compete for centrally allocated funds, and improvements in public service quality are fostered by performance measurement and the publication of performance data (Dawson and Dargie 2005). Benchmarking is a powerful tool for comparing costs, performance, outcomes, processes, technology, or structures with other units based on key indicators to identify possibilities for (continuous) improvement (= best practices). Hence, benchmarking can help create a quasi-competition in public administration areas, which are not usually subject to market competition (Olev – Online Verwaltungslexikon 2012).

However, the effects of NPM implementation have not been entirely positive. The decentralization of public service provision and its control has led to a weakening of hierarchical instruments as outsourced regulatory agencies with the establishment of strong institutional and professional autonomy. Coupled with the pressure to waive political interference, a loss of political control has occurred. Furthermore, coordination and capacity problems have arisen due to horizontal fragmentation. Such fragmentation has led to turf wars within the same organization which hampered the effectiveness and efficiency of service provision. Moreover, the cooperation in networks or partner-
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Multilevel governance means the involvement of multiple actors (state and non-state) at the local, national, and supranational levels (Saito-Jensen 2015). The involvement of different actors represents a cooperative mode of governing public/private networks (Mayntz 2003). Especially regarding integration issues, a multilevel governance approach is essential, because an increasing dispersal of related policies over the different government levels can be observed (Scholten and Penninx 2016). Moreover, the post-NPM and New Public Governance model (Osborne 2010) focus on outcome instead of output orientation (as pursued in the NPM reforms) and on the collaboration and involvement of participating organizations, trust, and the continuous training of public servants (Christensen and Lægreid 2011). The increasing decentralization can be seen in the shift of integration measures offered by the national state to the local level, because the latter is closer to the people (Wehling 1992) and thus to the daily challenges of integration.

The multidimensional aspects the post-NPM highlights leads to its impact on governance and policy implementation. Scholten’s (2016) governance typology can be used to explain how and why the outcome of the policies in the studied areas have changed or not. He outlines four governance types of immigrant integration:

- A centralist model, with a hierarchical top-down relationship between levels of government and a clear division of labour.
- A localist bottom-up model, in which the principle of subsidiarity determines policy competences at various levels. The key principle is that what can be done locally should be done.
- A ‘perfect’ multilevel governance, with national and local governments together setting policy agendas: hierarchies in implementation are absent; interaction and coordination take place on a level playing field in networks and forums.
- ‘Decoupling’ refers to a situation in which hierarchies are vague and vertical relations are absent. Hence, ‘in a single policy domain, there may be policies at different levels that are dissociated and may in fact even been contradictory. Evidently, this type can lead not only to policy conflicts between government levels but also to conflicting policy messages to the policy target groups and diminish policy effectiveness’ (Scholten 2016, 977).

Scholten’s fourth type of governance model/type can be assumed to decrease the integration of immigrants as a policy implementation risk to be ineffective. The third type of governance will involve not only interaction and coordination between various administrative levels but also among relevant actors and
across various related policy areas. It will ensure that policies are not dissociated or contradictory between different levels, actors, and areas (i.e. ‘perfect’ multilevel, multistakeholder, multidimensional governance).

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Austria: Manifold Actors and Intertwined Responsibilities

The central competence in the field of migration remains with the federal government (see Figure 11.1), the Ministry of the Interior asserting the central power (Federal Ministries Act; BMG; BGBl. No. 76/1986). However, the issuing of residence permits in accordance with the Settlement and Residence Act (NAG; BGBl. Nr. 100/2005) is the responsibility of the provincial governors and is carried out by the settlement authorities. Where third country migration relevant to the labour market is concerned, the assessment of labour market requirements is done by the Public Employment Service, based on the labour force shortages identified by the occupation list determined by the Ministry of Labour (Bundesministerium für Digitalisierung und Wirtschaftsstandort 2022a). The responsible authority for conducting asylum proceedings in the first instance and for granting or denying international protection is the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA). This authority directly reports to the Federal Minister of the Interior (BFA, n.d.). Appeals against asylum decisions by the BFA can be lodged with the Federal Administrative Court (Bundesministerium für Digitalisierung und Wirtschaftsstandort 2022b). The federal government has concluded a constitutional agreement with the federal states (Art. 15a B-VG): while the federal government is responsible for allocating asylum seekers to the federal states, the latter are in turn responsible for providing them with basic care.

The Integration Act applies to the integration of foreigners legally residing in Austria (IntG; BGBl. I Nr. 68/2017). Institutional responsibilities in the field of integration developed late. In 2008 the topic of ‘integration’ was included in the Austrian government’s programme for the first time. Consequently, the National Action Plan for Integration (NAP.I) was adopted in 2010 and can thus be seen as the ‘founding document of integration’ policy (Rosenberger and Gruber 2020, 65). Moreover, an independent expert council on integration was established, which has advised the government and identified integration priorities since 2010. In the same year the Integration Advisory Council was established to ensure networking, coordination, and knowledge transfer between representatives of the federal government, the provinces, social partners, the Association of Municipalities and Cities, the Federation of Austrian Industries, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Bundeskanzleramt 2021).
Figure 11.1  Integration policy governance structure in Austria
The tasks of the Austrian Integration Fund, which is linked to the federal government, include the provision of German courses, values and orientation courses, the handling of the Integration Agreement, orientation counselling, and integration assistance (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds 2021). Due to its comprehensive tasks, Wohlfarth and Kolb (2016, 6) describe it as the ‘central service organ of Austrian integration policy’. For several years ‘integration through performance’ was the guiding political principle (Rosenberger and Gruber 2020). Measures in the fields of language and education, as well as work and occupation, were promoted above all (Wohlfarth and Kolb 2016). The Public Employment Service therefore plays a particularly important role (e.g. job placements, training, and the implementation of the ‘integration year’, which is compulsory for all who are entitled to asylum and have yet to find a job) (AMS Österreich 2021). The federal states and their departments for asylum and/or integration issues started integration activities earlier than the federal government, but have relatively few competences and are more responsible for service implementation (e.g. basic care for asylum seekers) (Wohlfarth and Kolb 2016).

However, Austrian integration policy has been described as a ‘bottom-up phenomenon’ (Wohlfarth and Kolb 2016, 4), in which the municipalities are considered ‘integration pioneers’ (ibid., 4) because they have been working on integration matters since the 1990s. The Austrian municipalities are not obliged to offer integration services (Gruber 2010), although many of them provide it based on the municipal’s right of self-administration (Art. 118 para. 2 B-VG), which allows municipalities to autonomously implement services that address the exclusive/predominant interest of local communities. In this context they are responsible for housing, childcare, funerals, awarding grants to associations, or the employment of migrants as an autonomous economic entity, for example (Gruber 2021). However, NGOs not only offer voluntary accompaniment to appointments with the authorities, language courses, and publicly funded leisure activities; they also offer advocacy (Schwenken 2007).

Sweden: Marketized and Privatized Integration Services

The responsibility for immigrant integration lies with the Ministry of Employment (Figure 11.2). The Swedish Migration Agency has the responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees. When an asylum seeker arrives in Sweden, they can decide where to live if they can arrange accommodation by themselves. The Swedish Migration Agency offers accommodation to those who cannot arrange it themselves. However, an asylum seeker cannot choose the refugee centre where they are accommodated. An asylum seeker who finds accommodation on their own must leave contact information and be available at any time. The refugee centres are run by the Swedish Migration Agency.
Note: * Immigrants with professions where a labour shortage exists in Sweden can enter national programmes to get a job quickly; the others are directed to municipal labour market efforts.

**Figure 11.2** Integration policy governance structure in Sweden
Immigrant integration in Austria and Sweden (Laine and Rauhut 2018) but can also be subcontracted to private actors (Migrationsverket 2020).

Refugees who arrange accommodation on their own are already settled in a municipality. The Swedish Migration Agency assigns those in refugee centres to municipalities. If a refugee is dissatisfied with the reallocation, they are allowed to arrange housing on their own (Laine and Rauhut 2018; Hoekstra, Kohlbacher and Rauhut 2017). The Public Employment Service coordinates the introduction programmes for refugees and has the responsibility for all work-oriented measures. However, most of these measures are subcontracted to private actors. The refugees receive allowances and benefits to make a living, and these are paid by the Swedish Social Insurance Service (Hernes and Trondstad 2014).

The integration work itself is done at the municipal/local level. The government pays the municipalities for (most of) their expenses for a maximum of two years. The municipality must then finance the costs of integration by themselves (Karlsson et al. 2014). However, the competences and discretion between different government levels reveal a lack of coherence. While the government has the competence in policies related to social issues, education, and the labour market, the municipalities have competence in housing issues (Emilsson 2015; Karlsson et al. 2014). As refugees are resettled by the government based on the available housing, many refugees find themselves unemployed and socially excluded. Due to the lack of competence, the municipalities have limited manoeuvring space in issues related to education, the labour market, and social policies (Hoekstra, Kohlbacher and Rauhut 2017).

Besides the public actors, NGOs and private actors are involved in the integration programmes. Most NGOs agree with the government to share its policy ambitions but then have little to do with the practical work (Hernes and Trondstad 2014). Private companies are subcontracted by the Public Employment Service to help the refugee find a job with coaching at the local level (Riksrevisionen 2015; Statskontoret 2011). At the local level municipalities subcontract private actors to run both language training (Skolinspektionen 2021; Statskontoret 2009) and adult education and civics courses for refugees (Hernes and Trondstad 2014; Skolinspektionen 2020). At the regional level the County Administrative Board is responsible for coordinating local and regional integration efforts and reporting back to the government (Hernes and Trondstad 2014).
ANALYSIS

Austria: Integration Governance between Multilevel Structures and Recentralization

An analysis of Austria’s integration governance structure shows that the interventions of the NPM administrative reform – for example, the Integration Advisory Council, composed of members who belong to the different government levels, including non-state and civil society actors – are an expression of multilevel governance. Another form of multilevel governance and the interweaving of responsibilities is represented by the federal state agreement (Art. 15a) in the area of basic care provision for asylum seekers and refugees, and in the financing and implementation of ‘integration assistance’. This is a voluntary bid for integration measures such as language courses, education and training, and measures for social gatherings that is implemented by private institutions such as NGOs or religious institutions, as well as by municipalities and federal institutions such as the Austrian Integration Fund and financed by the federal government through project funding (Implementation of the Residence Act; BGBl. Nr. 466/1992). However, multilevel integration governance in Austria not only concerns the vertical but the horizontal level – for example, the federal level and its different ministries, which deal with different subjects relevant for integration (e.g. education, labour, social affairs), partly pursuing conflicting objectives (e.g. meeting the demand for labour versus protecting the domestic labour market or avoiding measures that contribute to the integration of asylum seekers) (Rosenberger and Gruber 2020), which is a ‘perfect’ example of the ‘decoupling’ problem Scholten describes (2016).

The introduction of the Integration Agreement in 2003 sought to limit immigration (Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger 2012). Insofar as the obligation for third-country nationals to learn German was not fulfilled, the residence permit could be withdrawn or not renewed (Pöschl 2006). The execution of the Integration Agreement was entrusted to the Integration Fund, which was able to extend its responsibilities. However, this also affected the existing integration governance, as it meant a recentralization of responsibilities to the federal level (Integration Fund) and a weakening of the NGOs that had previously offered language courses (if course providers are not certified by the Integration Fund, their courses are not acknowledged for the purpose of fulfilling the Integration Agreement) (Rosenberger and Gruber 2020).

The Act on the Establishment of the Federal Agency for Care and Support Services (BBU-G; BGBl. I Nr. 53/2019) has amalgamated the basic care in federal asylum centres, as well as the carrying out of legal counselling, return counselling and return assistance, human rights monitoring with regard to
possible deportations, and the provision of interpreters during procedures (§2 BBU-G) since January 2021 at the federal level. This brought a further centralization and limitation of the roles of private or third-sector agencies such as NGOs. There was strong criticism, especially because the independent information and legal representation of people in asylum procedures, which had previously been the responsibility of NGOs, was now transferred to the state (Brickner 2021). Finally, the increased competition between private providers of integration measures must be mentioned, because the number of (social) enterprises and NGOs has increased since the strong inflow of refugees in 2015 and subsequent years. However, in parallel various tasks have been returned to the state, and increased competition for the remaining funds is associated with this.

Swedish: From Top-down to Decoupling?

The multidimensional Swedish immigrant integration governance structure has many clear characteristics of both NPM and post-NPM. Several different authorities are involved at the national level, but each has a very limited field of responsibility. Moreover, several NGOs are involved in immigrant integration policy formulation, but they have little to do with implementation.

The main integration work is done locally, and the municipalities have the formal responsibility to ensure integration services are provided to the clients. However, the operational responsibility lies with a subcontracted private actor. The key local actors (‘integration pilots’) are subcontracted from the national Public Employment Service (Hernes and Trondstad 2014). As refugees who have obtained their residence status can move wherever they want to in Sweden, attractive municipalities receive more refugees than they can handle, and they have limited opportunities to refuse the resettlement of refugees in their municipality. Apart from the first two years, the municipalities must cover the costs until the refugees can provide for themselves (Karlsson et al., 2014). Although it takes approximately seven to eight years for refugees to get a job (Ennerberg 2019), it takes refugees an average of 17 years before they have the 12-month consecutive employment that qualifies them for the social insurance system (Gustafsson, MacInnes and Österberg 2017).

Moreover, the municipalities must subcontract services to promote immigrant integration – for example, language teaching, social studies, adult education, labour market training, and housing (Hernes and Trondstad 2014). As the service providers are economic actors operating in market conditions, it is common for them to seek to ensure the profitability of their activity first. Hence, the difficult cases are dumped onto other agents (Spehar, Hinnfors and Bucken-Knapp 2017), or the quality of the services is poor (Skolinspektionen 2020, 2021; Riksrevisionen 2015; Statskontoret 2009, 2011).
The regional level in Sweden has neither discretion nor competence in welfare issues except for healthcare (Gruber, Rauhut and Humér 2019). Although the regional County Administrative Board has formal responsibility for coordinating local and regional integration efforts (Hernes and Trondstad 2014), the regional level appears real only on paper.

Many actors are involved in immigrant integration at different governance levels and representing the public, private, and third sector. Although the Ministry of Employment has the formal responsibility, most of the practical implementation work is subcontracted to private actors. What the regional level actually does is unclear. As integration policies are supposed to be implemented at the local level, one might expect the financial aspects of the implementation of the immigrant integration policies to be well defined. They are not. As the state only compensates the municipalities for their immigrant integration costs during the first two years, the municipalities have an incentive to keep the costs as low as possible when subcontracting private actors. Scholten’s (2016) ‘decoupling’ type is very close when the governance of immigrant integration policies in Sweden is described: the responsibilities are blurred, the financial conditions are unclear, and the operational responsibility is ultimately given to private actors in market conditions.

DISCUSSION

The NPM orientation in integration governance sheds light on some problems such as the decoupling phenomenon which conflicting goals express in the integration governance of Austria and Sweden: in Austria the integration governance has been organized since 2011 in parallel and concurrently, both interdepartmentally and departmentally: integration policies are decided by the Integration Ministry, while the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of the Interior must also take important integration policy decisions. This can result in competing goals (Rosenberger and Gruber 2020). Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger (2012, 53) complain that despite the establishment of an institutionalized integration policy, ‘the competence to implement integration measures is still dispersed among different actors and levels of government. […] [T]here are sometimes substantial differences in the way each of these actors/levels approaches to the integration issue.’

In Sweden the decoupling problem is expressed by two exemplars of conflicting goals: the first is that refugees are resettled where housing is available (or where refugees find housing by themselves), and that is not usually where jobs are generally available; the second shows that while the public sector’s objective is to produce public goods, the objective for the markets is to generate profits for stakeholders. With such disparate objectives
the efficiency of implementation can be questioned. The contracting out of integration-promoting services such as language courses or (vocational) training to private companies, social enterprises, NGOs, and associations, which is largely practised by the responsible governance levels in Austria and Sweden due to their private sector orientation, has not only led to competition among providers, as envisaged by NPM which should potentially contribute to an increase in quality; it has also led to some critical developments.

First, the project funding, which is mostly granted on a one-year basis for the implementation of the specific service, is based on a competition-oriented process to which the institutions can apply with detailed project proposals. This means integration services need to be provided on a longer-term basis to achieve corresponding impacts and are referred to as temporary ‘projects’ instead of being anchored as regular services. This entails the disadvantage that integration service providers that have been carrying out the specific project for years and have proven their quality of execution and the project’s positive effects must quake every year about whether they will still be in a position to offer an urgently needed service to migrants. Established well-functioning structures and accumulated expertise can thus be destroyed. Moreover, the constant creation of new structures is inefficient.

Second, a strong private sector orientation may also lead to private providers taking up only those persons for the (training) ‘project’ whom they see as having a good potential for labour market placement, because the number of persons placed in an apprenticeship can be used as a criterion for reporting to the responsible funding body. As profit maximization is a priority for a business(-oriented) company, the admission of persons with greater job placement difficulties or more intensive learning needs can be avoided. Additionally, suitable service providers and projects may not be found for certain services, which, however, should be offered in any case. These examples show instances where state action (in this case state offers) is necessary.

In Sweden no indication of the centralization of immigrant integration work is visible, nor is there any tendency to reduce private sector involvement. In recent years Austria’s right-wing government coalition has fostered the centralization of both the basic care for asylum seekers and of the integration of support for recognized refugees and third-country nationals. Non-governmental institutions have thus been pushed out of care, and social contact with civil society has been hindered. The NGOs’ body of work has been portrayed increasingly negatively, while the Integration Fund has been strengthened as a fund of the Republic of Austria and expanded to become the administrative hub for integration policy (Rosenberger and Gruber 2020).

Although the centralization of basic care for asylum seekers and the integration of support have created a clearer responsibility and distribution of tasks, central elements of NPM, such as multilevel governance or competition
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orientation, have been diminished. In addition, the customer-oriented positioning in this approach must also be critically questioned. Following Scholten’s government types (2016), Austria’s integration policy has developed from a ‘localist bottom-up model’ to a somewhat ‘centralist model’. In general, the state of the implementation of the (post-)NPM model in Austrian integration governance must be questioned. While EU-funded projects increasingly aim to report project outcomes and impacts (as pursued in the NPM reforms), Austrian national integration funding bodies still focus on outputs (e.g. the number of courses and participants) (Bundeskanzleramt 2022).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have discussed the governance perspectives of immigrant integration policies in Austria and Sweden. The findings suggest that the organization of immigrant integration is anything but effective, and that federal Austria and centralized Sweden struggle with similar challenges. Tasks that formerly belonged to the state, such as refugee accommodation and care (public goods), are often subcontracted to private companies. There is an attempt to implement integration policy goals, which are defined in policy papers up to the level of the European Union, through measures by private institutions, NGOs, and projects at national, EU, and local levels. Elements of contracts, competition, and a focus on impact orientation in all calls can be found. However, this has led to funding uncertainty for urgently required facilities and services. Moreover, the findings also indicate that the multilevel, multistakeholder, and multidimensional governance environment hampers the implementation of integration policies. ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth’ seems an appropriate description of the problems.

As both countries appear to struggle with ‘decoupling’ problems, it is difficult to point to any examples of best practice. The market and marketization can achieve much, but our findings indicate that for this welfare service provision in rural and mountainous areas it is more appropriate to speak of missing markets or market failures; it appears questionable to rely on market actors in these regions. Rather, in this study we see a fragmented patchwork of responsibilities. When responsibility is not clearly defined, nobody tends to take it voluntarily. This is an important lesson of this paper, and it illuminates an urgent need to rethink the role of the market, especially in immigrant integration in rural and mountainous regions.

NOTE

1. A comparison between federal Austria and the centralized nation-state Sweden is interesting, which has previously been highlighted in regional research on
welfare issues (Gruber, Rauhut and Humer 2019). Besides this, Sweden and Austria were among the top three countries receiving the most asylum seekers in the EU during 2015 (European Union 2018).

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12. ‘A spanner in the works’: exploring the relationship between provision of welfare and integration in rural areas

Susanne Stenbacka and Tina Mathisen

INTRODUCTION – REFUGE MIGRATION INTO RURAL AREAS IN SWEDEN

In this chapter we examine the parallel processes of rural municipalities receiving and integrating refugees and experiences of decreased access to physically placed public services from a rural justice perspective. We aim to expose how the perceived distribution of resources, or state withdrawal, is aligned with experiences of social cohesion and integration measures from the perspective of rural municipalities in Dalarna in Sweden. Many municipalities in peripheral and remote European regions face similar challenges following the decline of services and changing living conditions in Europe’s rural areas (European Commission 2004; Rodríguez-Pose 2018).

We base our exploration of the relationship between the provision of welfare and integration in rural areas on three observations. Rural places are becoming actors in global migration movements and the globalization of places instead of acting as passive recipients (Woods 2007; 2018, Hedberg and do Carmo 2012, Stenbacka 2013; 2018). The presence of the welfare society is crucial here. The Swedish model is built on a structure in which individuals (partly through tax) contribute to and can be supported by the welfare state when necessary. However, rural areas are characterized by limited access to essential services like grocery stores, pharmacies, libraries, and educational facilities and thereby an increasing loss of meeting places (Moberg 2019; Slätmo et al. 2022). They therefore need to address their work with integration in circumstances of scarcity. From a policy view integration is equivalent to labour market participation. Political reforms have emphasized the migrant’s individual responsibilities for labour market establishment (the activation reform 2010; 2018), underscoring the importance of work for both the individual and society. However, access to work depends on other factors like lan-
guage skills and education, as well as support from the Swedish employment service or other actors. It is therefore interesting to examine the intersection of welfare and integration from a socio-spatial justice perspective that highlights rural realities. This chapter therefore focuses on education and labour market establishment.

Another aspect is the prevailing societal discourse claiming that spatial polarization between the city and the countryside is increasing (SOU 2017 193, 35). The search hits for polarization in the Swedish daily press more than quadrupled in the 2010s (Oscarsson et al. 2021). Sometimes such polarization tendencies, including dissatisfaction and support for political parties at the outer edges, are expected to be connected with service closures and reductions (Andersson 2020). However, the differences between Swedes living in big cities and in rural areas regarding the economy, education, health, social capital, left–right attitudes, and party sympathies have not grown but remained remarkably the same in most cases (Larsson, Hedberg and Holmberg 2020). Nor have researchers found any fertile ground for anti-establishment movements in the Swedish countryside (Erlingsson et al. 2021). The 2022 election meant a change in the political geography. The support for the right wing was stronger in rural areas than in metropolitan areas, and vice versa for the left wing. The advance of the Sweden Democrats (throughout the country except in Malmö municipality), was more accentuated outside the metropolitan areas, indicating a tendency towards polarization. However, it can also be noted that the differences between city and country are smaller than ever (Öhrvall 2022).

Departing from these three observations, it seems relevant to investigate how international migration and integration intersect with welfare access issues.

CASE DESCRIPTION AND METHODS

Dalarna County, in western inland Sweden, includes two larger municipalities, Falun and Borlänge, with 38,000 and 52,000 inhabitants respectively. The other 13 municipalities consist of towns of between 5,000 and 12,000 inhabitants, and the county is classified as predominantly rural (Statistics Sweden 2022). Like many Swedish rural regions, Dalarna has undergone major economic restructuring, urbanization, and rural depopulation. It also faces an ageing population and the outmigration of young people, leading to a skills shortage and lower tax revenues. Immigration has been important for Dalarna to increase its population and replace young people of working age. An estimated 13 per cent of the total population in the region are foreign-born today, and of them more than 60 per cent have arrived during the last ten years. This leads to labour market integration challenges, including the validation of former education and work and upskilling to match migrants with the Swedish local labour market’s demands. The foreign unemployment rate in Dalarna
is quite high – 38 per cent (compared to 26 per cent nationally), while it is approximately ten per cent among those born in Sweden (Statistics Sweden 2022). Adult education and language and labour market training are key to the region’s integration work in accordance with the national political agenda. Matching the needs of the labour market and education is also important. The health and elderly sector especially needs more staff, and migrants are advised to educate themselves for such work.

Rural–urban relations within Dalarna and the region’s participation in the globalizing of international migration and refugee settlement in relation to the general trends of neoliberalism, privatization, and welfare retrenchment make Dalarna an interesting case to illuminate ongoing processes in other similar Swedish and European rural regions. The material consists of 14 in-depth interviews with a total of 21 interviewees at national, regional, and local levels between October 2020 and March 2021. The interviewees included policymakers, experts, stakeholders and public service providers, practitioners, and organizations working within migration-related (directly or indirectly) fields. By interviewing representatives from all levels, we gained an insight into how regional and national policymaking was perceived and implemented locally. We could also identify how different levels and sectors interacted and cooperated, including qualitative assessments. Our aim to illuminate stakeholders’ and practitioners’ experiences and explore mechanisms and connections between and across different governance levels motivated our methodological approach. We also conducted three focus group interviews with three to six participants. They focused on (a) the provision of services of general interest, (b) regional development and planning, and (c) Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and social enterprises. Some of the focus group participants were among the 21 interviewees.

To gain insights into refugee integration and welfare service trends and narratives, we also conducted a media analysis of the nine local newspapers in Dalarna: Dalademokraten; Falukuriren; Borlänge Tidning; Nya Ludvika Tidning; Mora Tidning; Södra Dalarnas Tidning; and Avesta Tidning. The material was gathered from the Mediearkivet (Retriever) database, Scandinavia’s largest print and online media digital archive. We conducted two parallel searches, one with a focus on refugees and integration, one focusing on welfare and public service. The words used for the first search were ‘integration’, ‘migration’, ‘migrant’, ‘immigrant’, ‘refugee’, ‘asylum’, and ‘unaccompanied minor’. The words for the second search were ‘welfare’, ‘service’, ‘the public employment service’, ‘health centre’, ‘school’, and ‘care’. Both searches included the names of all Dalarna’s municipalities. We thus got a hit on an article containing ‘refugee’ and ‘Älvdalen’, or ‘school’ and ‘Borlänge’. The period between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2020 was chosen to gather articles from both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as we
expected this to feature prominently in public health service media coverage. The welfare and service search generated 2,288 articles, and the integration search resulted in 116. However, as most of the articles were reprinted in all the newspapers, the actual number of articles was considerably smaller. We employed thematic analysis,\(^1\) using insights from both studies to answer the question about the relationship between integration and welfare services in rural areas. While the interview study afforded an insight into experiences of integration measures in relation to cutbacks, the media analysis afforded insights into a broader trend of concerns about state retrenchment within different public sector areas.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND – SPATIAL JUSTICE FROM A RURAL PERSPECTIVE**

Geographically uneven development is a fundamental aspect of the creation and maintenance of individual and social inequalities leading to social and spatial injustice (Soja 2010, 72). Nevertheless, scholars have examined spatial justice from a mainly urban scale, including social and material distribution and access to public space within the city (Lefebvre 1970; Mitchell 2003; Soja 2010). For Lefebvre (1970) justice was not merely about the right or access to something within the city; it was also about the right to participate in urban political transformation. This indicates the relationship between access to welfare services (including state withdrawal) and opportunities for participation and inclusion in society. As Eriksson and Tollefsen (2022) underscore, state retrenchments mostly affect the most vulnerable groups – children and young people, the unemployed, immigrants, and racialized groups – regardless of where they live. A theory of socio-spatial justice therefore needs to consider the relationality of space and that nationally generated policies with big city regions in mind may work out differently in rural regions with smaller populations than was intended.

Recently, the spatial justice framework has been identified as an approach that can highlight and address questions of rural inequality (Rauhut 2018; Jones et al. 2019; Carolan 2020; Eriksson and Tollefsen 2022). Both media and policy often portray rural regions as backwards and lagging in economic growth and regional competitiveness, existing only with the centre’s support (Eriksson 2010; Jones et al. 2019). Neoliberal and market-oriented public service policies have led to a centralization of services in urban areas (Rauhut 2018; Kullberg et al. 2018). They have been shown to undermine existing resource allocation systems and hinder opportunities for innovative and cooperative solutions in rural areas (Kullberg et al. 2018). Researchers focusing on the Swedish northern periphery have also pointed out that regional policies and
the tax system’s uneven structure systematically render the rural contribution to the national economy invisible (Eriksson and Tollefsen 2022, 221).

Nancy Fraser theorizes justice through a three-dimensional framework, including redistribution, recognition, and representation (Fraser et al. 2004). Redistribution focuses on economic structures and how people can be hindered in equal societal participation because of a maldistribution of resources (Fraser and Honneth 2003). We know rural municipalities’ economy plays a significant role in their possibilities to offer adequate welfare services to their inhabitants compared to their urban counterparts. A Swedish study has also highlighted that today’s equalization system (compensating for differences and creating equal economic conditions between the country’s municipalities and regions) is partly built on outdated information and among other shortcomings fails to account for refugee settlement costs (SOU 2017, 161). Many rural municipalities therefore face increased expenses because of limited labour market participation and increased demand for support. While service digitalization can be a more resource-efficient solution, broadband access is also scarce in remote areas, and studies show an urban–rural divide in access to fixed broadband, especially access to Next Generation Broadband (Lundgren et al. 2020).

The second dimension – recognition – refers to culture and identity. Fraser argues that it is not enough to understand ‘who gets what’, but also who gets to decide what counts and ‘what people need’ (Fraser et al. 2004, 375). There is thus a relationship between economic distribution, class, and status in society. This fits well with a spatial analysis, particularly related to an urban norm that has been found to underpin social discourse and policy. The third dimension – representation – focuses on the political in decision making, and in our case whether the rural population experience local and national political parties and policies as representing them and their interests. The media is another arena that has proved important in contributing to people’s interest in politics and the extent to which they perceive the political system as responsive and political participation as meaningful (Hansen and Pedersen 2014; Strömbäck and Shehata 2010). We next explore how the perceived distribution of resources – state withdrawal and decreased access to services – aligns with social cohesion from the perspective of Dalarna’s rural municipalities.

PROVISION OF WELFARE AND INTEGRATION IN RURAL AREAS

Equal access to welfare services in Sweden has been seen as a precondition for people to successfully integrate, rather than a bonus for integrating (Borevi 2010). Refugees’ social inclusion in Swedish society is to be achieved through the same measures as the general population, and targeted support for newly
arrived immigrants supplements this. Swedish municipalities are responsible for integration measures and refugees’ welfare needs, overseeing language and civics courses, schooling, childcare, and elderly care. The state offers financial compensation during the first two years. If migrants are not self-sufficient after the two-year settlement period has ended, the municipalities are financially responsible for their subsistence. The Settlement Act was adopted in 2016 to improve the settlement of new arrivals on the labour market and in society. It obliges all Swedish municipalities to accept new arrivals for residence, meaning rural communities are highly involved in the mission to receive refugees and taking responsibility for their settlement.

Theoretically, refugees have the same access to welfare services like schooling and healthcare as the general population. However, they differ in their opportunities to use various services because of their socio-spatial positions. An interviewee maintained there was no lack of resources for good-quality services, but there were significant geographical differences in where these services were found: ‘Good service is available but not necessarily in the often remote places where migrants live’ (#006). Refugee households also lack the majority population’s access to a car in rural areas.

A study for Sweden’s largest civil service union, Fackförbundet ST, showed government service points in the country decreased by 37 per cent between 1997 and 2017. In Dalarna the decrease was even steeper, with a decrease of 45 per cent (Moberg 2019). According to a survey of the state’s local presence by the Swedish Agency for Public Management, as many as 71 per cent responded that it was important that they could visit a physical office. This was particularly so for respondents living in rural areas, people with a lower level of education, and people with a migrant background (Statskontoret 2016).

Unsurprisingly, overall local media coverage focuses on two of Sweden’s most prominent political debates, healthcare and education. In both areas the discussion concerns economy and localization. There is an ongoing debate about the privatization of healthcare services and whether tax receipts should go to private practices owned by risk capitalists (Södra Dalarnas Tidning 2019-08-23, Mora Tidning 2019-12-11, Falu-Kuriren 2019-11-26). Articles about schools and education focus either on expansion and investment, often in larger towns, or on closures in rural areas. Articles that specifically discuss integration overall have a positive outlook and highlight successful integration projects (Nya Ludvika Tidning 2019-10-30, Avesta Tidning 2020-03-18), migrants’ participation in the labour market (Avesta Tidning 2020-04-27, Falu-Kuriren 2019-11-20), and financial compensation for municipalities that settle refugees (Falu-Kuriren 2019-09-20).
Labour Market Integration – A National Responsibility with Varied Local Outcomes

Redistribution focuses on economic structures and resource distribution. This is exemplified by public services related to labour market integration and education. Our informants recurrently return to the reduced presence of the Swedish Public Employment Service, the national authority responsible for individuals’ opportunities to participate in the labour market and the settlement of new arrivals. Their main task is to contribute to a well-functioning labour market. Their mission includes the prevention of exclusion and increased employment for those hindered from joining the labour market. The Swedish Public Employment Services have undergone extensive reorganization; the two major changes are a transfer of responsibilities and a decrease of local representation. Before 2009 the municipalities were responsible for new arrivals. The Act on Establishment Initiatives for Certain Newly Arrived Immigrants (SFS 2010) transferred the responsibility and most of the resources to the Swedish Public Employment service. This shift is described as a little ‘messy’:

… the institutional memory is blurred. What was the purpose, the ambition of this reform? It was not really specified within the broader mission of the Swedish Public Employment service. But the mission was a little broader than their ordinary assignment. And the Swedish Public Employment Service is decreasing their local offices. They’ve lost the content of their mission a little. (#004)

The reorganization of the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen, AF) meant that at the beginning of 2022 there were 88 offices with permanent staff, 24 offices to which staff travelled, and various kinds of cooperation in 103 municipalities offering personal meetings (Swedish Public Employment Service 2021). At the beginning of 2019 there were 238 offices with staff in 218 municipalities (Swedish Public Employment Service 2020). A disadvantage of decreased local presence is that ‘…knowledge about the local labour market, local business life, and local employers’ risk is being lost’ (#004). This knowledge is described as crucial for implementing intelligent and individual solutions, and its lack risks delaying labour market participation. Such close contact with different actors and the local labour market’s character are described as important. As many migrants do not understand the complex immigration bureaucracy, how to navigate the system, and the help they can get, proximity to key institutions and personal guidance has been underscored as an important factor in successful integration.

We’re trying to identify the success factors. It has a lot to do with being close to institutions and personnel that can offer guidance and coach them personally ini-
tially – which isn’t really compatible with the distance service [i.e. digitalization of service] trend we’re now seeing. (#004)

In a debate article published in March 2022 (Svenska Dagbladet 2022-03-31), 15 local politicians in Dalarna conclude that shutting local AF offices has entailed the disappearance of local knowledge about both jobseekers and the business community, the end of common work previously organized at the individual level, and the people farthest from the labour market being most affected. Politicians call for clearer control of AF regarding municipalities’ role and opportunities in collaboration with the jobseekers most distant from the labour market. It is also emphasized that there is a risk that increased digitalization will make contact more difficult for certain groups.

A survey of the Swedish Public Employment Service’s assignments shows a negative overall image: 72 per cent of municipalities state that the authorities’ physical presence is inappropriate for supporting jobseekers. Furthermore, 95 per cent of municipalities provide one or more forms of support to jobseekers who are part of the Swedish Public Employment Service’s responsibility; municipal employees step in and provide support to the unemployed (for example, enrolment at the Swedish Public Employment Service, activity reporting, interpreting decisions, and coordination of settlement initiatives for new arrivals). The survey raises questions about how the authorities can continue to work to ensure quality and equivalence while responding to jobseekers’ and employers’ needs across the country, as 42 per cent of municipalities report that they lack a constructive dialogue with the employment service about how to ensure a local presence (SKR 2021, 6).

Even in the media analysis the rollback of the Public Employment Service is evidently a potent issue in Dalarna. It concerns how to reduce the region’s unemployment figures. In one debate article Anders Knape, the Chairman of Sweden’s Municipalities and County Councils (SKR), states: ‘Clear signals show that those farthest from the labour market do not receive enough support to gain employment. This is reinforced by the ongoing and rapid reorganization of the Swedish Public Employment Service’ (Nya Ludvika Tidning 2019-09-18).

Another media theme is that by shutting offices the state reduces its presence in Dalarna’s rural municipalities, while the Swedish Public Employment Service hires new employees for a new national office in the region’s capital, Falun. The national organization’s mandate is the detection and prevention of social security fraud, and it is not a public service (Falu-Kuriren 2019-09-23). The media also focuses on the lack of connection between the government and the execution of the Swedish Public Employment Service’s reorganization. One article is entitled ‘Next to provocative’ (Dalademokraten 2019-11-29), referring to a ministerial statement about the importance of local presence.
when offices are already closed; the closure of several offices took place quickly, but it is stated that the government emphasizes the importance of a local presence. A parallel message is that decisions crucial for the development of smaller communities are made quickly and with insufficient anchoring in either the government or local communities.

These contemporary circumstances show that municipalities have extensive responsibilities for their citizens, and in certain areas they also cover for the state, as our interviews also express: ‘… they see that if we don’t do this, these people … will need livelihood support, so we must act. There’s no clear division of responsibility’ (#009). We therefore discern a dissatisfaction with the distribution of responsibilities, a lack of a national strategy for the local level, an agreement concerning what the goal should be, and a lack of communication between different sectors and levels.

Fraser’s first dimension, redistribution, focuses on economic structures and how the maldistribution of resources prevents people participating on equal terms in society (Fraser and Honneth 2003). Rural municipalities experience the shrinking number of offices as negative because fewer resources are placed in rural areas, while municipalities face the issues the offices were supposed to address. The economy of rural municipalities plays a significant role in their opportunity to offer adequate welfare services to their inhabitants, and this may be negatively affected if the reduced presence of the state authority means municipalities need to increase their commitment without compensation.

Consequences of Inflow and Outflow – State Compensation and Local Efforts

In this section we focus on the structures needed to secure stable refugee settlement. Besides catering to immediate needs such as housing and food, areas related to education, care, and administration need to be strengthened, both with monetary resources and staff, as the population grows and includes new groups. Our interviewees frequently refer to the period between 2015 and 2016, when there was a large influx of refugees. Rural communities were faced with the major responsibility of catering to the newly arrived refugees. They describe this as a tough situation but one in which municipalities and civil society rose to the occasion and cooperated in the provision of basic services, larger school spaces, teachers, and volunteers to distribute clothes and provide social activities. The interviews indicate the influx of refugees during this period was generally welcomed, and many private individuals wished to volunteer alongside the civil society sector. However, the pressure on social services and the education system was great, particularly for some of our case municipalities, which received a relatively large number of unaccompanied refugee minors.
While adult asylum seekers are the responsibility of the Swedish Migration Agency, the municipalities’ social services are responsible for unaccompanied minors. A representative from one of the case municipalities describes how the social services almost broke down, and that many employees resigned because of the workload. ‘It was a little too tough for a municipality as small as ours. … So many arrived. The state should have governed the distribution better’ (#015).

An informant representing a national authority maintains institutions at different levels may have various incentives. For example, the National Migration Agency needs housing and a certain number of beds, while a local municipality considers other sectors and contexts. A factor mentioned is that the arrival of migrants has surprised some municipalities, resulting in tension.

… if there was a better dialogue between the state and the municipality, you wouldn’t end up in these conflicts. This is the basis of the population’s polarization and problems. The ordinary resident may blame municipal councils for putting the municipality in this situation, but it’s just as much a surprise to them. (#004)

Another important aspect is that since 2015/16 the number of people granted a residence permit for protection has continuously decreased, and municipalities have therefore received fewer new arrivals. Fewer arrivals can be challenging for small municipalities: it requires the downsizing of established services while maintaining the capacity to cater to different migrant groups’ various needs. Some of our informants involved in the reception of unaccompanied minors at the peak of the refugee crisis were now worried that the knowledge and expertise they had built in the organization would diminish, and that it would be difficult to rebuild the capacity should the number of asylum seekers again increase (#008; #011). Yet municipalities still took care of the unaccompanied minors arriving in 2015/16. A change in the reimbursement system for unaccompanied minors in 2017 (SFS 2017) is described as changing the prerequisites for working with this group.

In one municipality the integration coordinator explains that they had had a well-established organization for taking care of unaccompanied minors. The reimbursement per individual has now been reduced,² and they are unable to sustain the high level of support they want:

At first, we got SEK 1,900 per individual per day until they turned 21. That made it possible to have full-time personnel working with the minors. They could work both with practical knowledge … and regarding different cultures, and we could give them the right guidance. … We could be with them all the time, in different situations. And when we ‘let them go’ when they turned 21, they’d come such a long way! If we look at how it went for ten of the first (unaccompanied minors) we welcomed [in the municipality], all are self-sufficient today. But that’s a record we’ve been unable to maintain: we’re unable to work with them to the same extent. (#008)
This agrees with findings from previous research regarding unaccompanied minors, which has shown that Swedish municipalities often struggle to maintain a high quality of social services for them, and that they generally have very little adult contact (Lundberg and Dahlquist 2012; Seidel and James 2019). A recent challenge is the closing down of housing for asylum seekers. In 2015 it was difficult to find enough housing quickly. With declining asylum seeker numbers the reverse is the case. Municipalities want the migration agency to keep housing in place, as it helps avert population decline and provides work opportunities for the rural population (#005). Another issue is municipalities’ opportunities to plan regarding the school economy, for example. Municipalities are financially compensated for the education of each asylum-seeking child. For small rural schools, losing students also means less money to keep their full teaching staff, which may have consequences for the quality of teaching for the children who stay.

The media’s school debate focuses on large deficits, centralization, and rural school closures. New schools are being built in urban areas; it is suggested rural schools should be closed. In an article entitled ‘Keep the village schools’ (Dala-Demokraten 2020-05-30) it is suggested that the state should assume responsibility for schools so that it is not the responsibility of municipal budgets to provide good schools for their inhabitants. The principle that the school should be equal for all regardless of background or where you live is key for principals and teachers, who worry that forced cutbacks make it difficult to meet the requirements of the Swedish education law (Dala-Demokraten 2020-05-30, Borlänge Tidning 2020-05-30).

Fraser’s second dimension – recognition – refers to culture and identity, what counts, and ‘what people need’ (Fraser et al. 2004, 375). This section has illuminated the rural experience of ‘being there for the needs of the state’ rather than being recognized on merit and where the needs and opportunities of the local context are considered. The interviewees voice their experiences of a state policy which, intentionally or not, has assumed that rural areas and places constitute a resource in meeting sudden national needs, and that the same areas lose this status when needs change. From the rural perspective local needs are not accounted for. The structure around the reception of refugees was developed primarily from a national perspective, and there was too much focus on where to find available housing and the principle that every municipality should share the responsibility. However, experience reveals specific local circumstances and needs are not accounted for, either during or after settlement. Education and school policy are areas where local needs do not correspond to what is provided.
Remote Decision Making and Lack of Representation

The third dimension in Fraser’s framework (Fraser and Honneth 2003) addresses representation in relation to political and decision-making processes. In our case this is related to whether the rural population experience local and national political parties and policies as representing them and their interests. Such issues are connected with communication: the anchoring of decisions, distribution of responsibilities, and discussions of consequences. We focus on views of state interventions and experiences of state withdrawal and expectations of municipalities. A recent study exploring regional differences shows how residents in rural places are more concerned about other residents’ behaviour or living conditions, while residents outside urban areas are more concerned about the negative consequences of public institutions’ decisions, such as closures or reduced access to public service (Erlingsson et al. 2021, 51).

One informant from a national authority says that Sweden is a country with a generally positive attitude towards migrants, and that this is also the case in specific localities. If tensions arise, he says, it is probably because the concentration of migrants in some places is disproportionate to the majority population, which he connects with competition for basic services: ‘suddenly, the municipality’s population finds all dental appointments are booked for one year ahead’ (#006). In addition to the withdrawal of public funds and reorganization there may be recruitment difficulties.

Both local and national interviewees reflect on the lack of services and wonder if it might lead people to draw simple conclusions that scapegoat migrants.

In several remote villages they shut the healthcare centre and opened asylum health centres. To implement such policies without a dialogue with citizens is like placing a spanner in the works. Sadly, it leads to everyday racism and polarization. (#010)

Interviewees from civil society especially discuss young adults from the majority population, whom they describe as outside society because they lack education and work opportunities. A civil society representative working with local youth projects in several rural areas in Dalarna explains that young people are particularly vulnerable when rural schools close, and this may lead to some young people feeling neglected. A recent study by the Swedish agency for youth and civil society (Saarinen 2019) revealed that more than 50 per cent of rural young people felt excluded or that they were not actively participating in society, connecting this with access to education and public transport. Some of our interviewees working with young people say they fear some local young
people may become an easy target for extreme right-wing groups, which they see as offering easy explanations for rural problems.

These young adults feel they have no place in society, but [in their view] a place is given in society to migrants, and they get money through public subsidies so they can get by. But this group is totally criminalized and pushed away. (#008)

Besides these concerns we see no increased explicit polarization tendencies in the interviews or in the local media, which corresponds to previous findings (Larsson, Hedberg and Holmberg 2020). However, we see a concern for polarization among informants, and that the prevailing conditions in rural areas sometimes prevent migrants’ social and economic inclusion. This dimension is linked with the first, redistribution. Tension and dissatisfaction with the perception of rural municipalities and how resources are distributed also affect experiences of representation and participation. Departing from Fraser’s third dimension – representation – we find certain local conditions indicate a lack of representation.

We find no significantly outspoken negative connection between scarce resources or poorer access to public services and refugee settlement. However, some voices make this connection. In one article about school closures a representative of the Sweden Democrats accuses the Social Democrats and the left-wing party in Avesta of wanting to settle too many migrants, claiming this causes a difficult economic situation and the closure of rural schools (Avesta Tidning 2020-04-17). Another article discusses a change in the so-called EBO Law, which prevents asylum seekers choosing where to live. According to a representative of the Social Democrats in Borlänge municipality the law will contribute to preventing segregation and provide the municipality with better opportunities to offer good schools and healthcare if the number of asylum seekers decreases (Borlänge Tidning 2019-11-25).

CONCLUSION

Fraser’s theoretical framework reveals processes that affect the opportunities and experiences of local life. Experiences signal that redistribution, or access to resources, does not respond to the areas of responsibility following the reception and settlement of refugees. Rural areas’ needs are not recognized, and policy has largely departed from the state’s needs. We can also discern a quest for increased representation. Two aspects concern experiences of being neglected, both among young individuals and local politicians. We should add that media representation of certain groups – young people or international migrants – is scarce. If they are visible, it is rarely as citizens with recognized perspectives and opinions.
Integration may be experienced in many ways (Laine 2022), but as economic, social, cultural, and political participation concerns people and their immediate local context, close and reachable institutions and arenas are crucial. It is important to distinguish between access to physical services and services in general. A decrease in physical access is often motivated by increased digital access, but this does not always correspond to existing needs. Work is considered key to integration, and it also permeates integration policies. Migrants are also key to meeting existing and local labour needs, yet the role of a contributing societal actor requires local structures and welfare functions. Examples are access to basic education and the Swedish Public Employment Service within a reasonable distance.

We have shown integration policy implementation depends on other welfare structures’ presence. Although our study’s practitioners highlight this, local media does not present it for public discussion. Integration policy needs to be mainstreamed with policies for developing and managing welfare. This study increases knowledge of regional cohesion and adds to knowledge of the role municipalities play in fulfilling international and national political and humanitarian goals. It also contributes to a nuanced discussion of how rural conditions can be linked with polarization, or a concern for polarization. Instead of distrust of the state, more state intervention is desired, as the state is seen as the proper actor in ensuring social justice is spatially distributed. The struggle for rural justice involves both migrants and locals alike (Laine 2022; Tollefsen and Eriksson 2022). Our interviewees reveal a fear that the opportunities for integrating refugees well both socially and economically are slipping through their fingers.

NOTES

1. We first read through the whole material to gain an overview. In the next step we divided the articles from the integration search into four categories and the welfare and service articles into six categories. We then chose to focus on the categories most relevant to our purpose. These categories were 1: school structure and closure; 2: the public employment service and service centres; 3: public/private healthcare services; and 4: reduced service/satisfaction with service. The two largest categories were COVID-related articles and ‘other’, which were extracted from the analysis.

2. Since 2017 the general reimbursement per individual has been SEK 1,350 per day until the age of 18 (SFS 2017).

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**Media Articles**

13. Structures, trends and turning points of Norwegian and Swedish integration policies

Ulf Hansson, Deniz Akin, Zuzana Macuchova and Per Olav Lund

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade most European countries experienced the arrival of increased numbers of immigrants. Following the dramatic escalation in the number of people fleeing to Europe in 2015, many countries faced a set of short- and long-term challenges. Accommodation and shelters needed to be organized in the short term for refugees; one of the main longer-term challenges has been facilitating newcomers’ integration into European societies (Vogt Isaksen 2020). The latter has also raised questions about how to define and implement integration.

In this chapter we focus on labour market integration challenges and policies in Norway and Sweden. These two countries provide a useful comparison framework for several reasons. First, with their strong welfare systems both countries have high employment rates. However, they both report low employment rates among immigrants (Karlsdóttir et al. 2017). Second, their immigration history has shared features. Both countries experienced increasing numbers of guest workers and labour migrants in the early 1970s, which was gradually followed by the introduction of restrictive immigration measures (Vogt Isaksen 2020, 2). Finally, the speedy transition of immigrants to employment is regarded as crucial in the Nordic countries, because it reduces the pressure on their welfare states, and it contributes to immigrants’ social integration, which enhances their wellbeing (Calmfors and Sánchez Gassen 2019).

Empirically, our study focuses on analysing the Midt-Gudbrandsdal and Nord-Østerdal regions in Norway and Dalarna County in Sweden. They are all rural and mountainous. Previous research has shown that the resettlement of refugees and other immigrant groups can pose both challenges and opportuni-
ties in remote regions. As they are sparsely populated, newcomers contribute both economically and demographically to these regions’ development (see also Zahl-Thanem and Haugen 2019). However, issues such as the lack of employment opportunities can make it difficult for immigrants to participate in the labour market. Through our comparative study, we aim to describe and discuss structural conditions and integration policies that can inform immigrants’ transition to employment in these regions.

We have chosen to emphasize immigrants’ labour market integration in our study for several reasons. As earlier studies demonstrate, integration is a multidimensional term, and it can refer to both a process in which immigrants are becoming ‘an accepted part of the society’ (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016, 14), as well as the goal of this process. There is an extensive discussion of the issue, both around the theoretical definition of the concept of integration and how to measure integration empirically (Ager and Strang 2008; Barstad and Molstad 2020; Sætermo, Gullikstad and Kristensen 2021). Various dimensions of integration are commonly considered in the theoretical definition of immigration: employment; education; social inclusion; and active citizenship (Ager and Strang 2008). In the empirical measurement of integration the focus is mainly on its employment dimension. As Diedrich et al. (2020, 4) state, ‘The notion that a person is integrated when he/she has found employment dominates research into integration in many disciplines’. Similarly, Gauffin and Lyytinen (2017, 11) refer to employment as ‘… considered to be the core indicator of integration’. Labour market participation is utilized elsewhere and prioritized by the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) and the Zaragoza integration indicators used by the European Commission, for example. Further, they cite Crul and Schneider (2010), who refer to employment as important in the context of immigrants’ integration in wider society. It is also important that both Norway and Sweden have high employment rates among men and women, and being unemployed can therefore have a further implication for immigrants’ exclusion. In our study we emphasize how language proficiency affects labour market integration, and how living in a mountainous and rural area may pose additional challenges for immigrants’ employment.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The data for this chapter were collected within the MATILDE framework (see Chapter 1). The Norwegian case study relies on data collected through 10 individual interviews and three group interviews, conducted with regional and national policymakers, experts, stakeholders, and public service providers in the first half of 2021. Additional data were collected through participatory action research in the form of world-café workshops organized during the second half of 2021 as two-day events in the two case study regions.
Midt-Gudbrandsdal and Nord-Østerdal in Innlandet County in Norway. The workshop in Midt-Gudbrandsdal consisted of 30 participants from the public sector, migrants enrolled in language training at the adult education centre, and representatives of the third sector. All the migrants participating in the workshop were TCNs, with varying levels of proficiency in Norwegian (from beginner to intermediate), ethnic background (mainly Middle Eastern and African), marital status (single, married with children), gender (four women, five men), education level, and duration of residence in the case region (ranging from less than a year to four years). Forty people participated in the Nord-Østerdal workshop: individuals from third-sector/volunteer organizations; private sector/businesses; the public sector; and migrants enrolled in language training, the introduction programme, or upper secondary education. Twenty-three migrants participated in the workshop, representing diversity in migration purposes (flight, family reunification, work migration), gender (equal representation), marital status (single, married, married with children), employment status (student, fulltime employee, jobseeker, language course attendee, pupil, etc.) and background (European, African, Asian, Middle Eastern).

A similar approach was used for the Swedish case study. The data drew on 14 interviews held in March and April 2021 with local employees and managers. In addition to the interview the research involved two workshops (action research) in two of the case study municipalities (Hedemora and Vansbro). Furthermore, three roundtable discussions with six stakeholders and 12 students attending Swedish for foreigners/immigrants (SFI) courses offered to migrants. The roundtables and group discussion were organized in May 2022.

NORWAY

Immigration to Norway

Immigration has been on the country’s political agenda since labour migrants began to arrive in Norway in the 1970s. Although immigration was halted in 1975, migration to Norway continued through other legitimate ways such as family reunification and refugee arrivals (Hagelund 2002). At the beginning of 2022 there were 819,400 immigrants in Norway (Statistics Norway). The largest groups were from Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Syria, and Somalia. By the end of March 2022 8,641 people had applied for asylum in Norway.

As a destination country for various types of immigration, integration has been a key term in Norway’s immigration policies and politics. It seeks to ensure immigrants become part of society, economically, socially, and/or culturally (Sætermo, Gullikstad and Kristensen 2021). However, there has
been a lack of clarity in the definition of integration. As a political concept its meanings have also changed over time in Norway (ibid.).

In the 1980s formulations of integration revolved around concerns regarding immigrants’ responsibility to adapt to Norwegian society, while protecting them from assimilation (Hagelund 2002). The 1990s were marked by the ‘imperative character of integration’ (Hagelund 2002, 407), when it was formulated in terms of obligations to participate in the political and policy context. In 2022 the political focus is on integration’s functional aspects such as employment and language training (Gullikstad 2009; Valenta and Bunar 2010).

In Norway the Directorate for Integration and Diversity (IMDi) implements the state’s refugee settlement policy as stipulated in the Integration Act. A key element of this ‘state-assisted integration’ (Valenta and Bunar 2010, 463) is the Introduction Programme, which is designed for newly arrived refugees between 18 and 55 years of age and family members who arrive in the country later. Participation in the introduction programme is both a right and obligation for the target group members. During this compulsory course participants receive not only language tuition but also information about Norwegian society. Failure to participate in this programme is not only penalized through withdrawal of cash benefits but has negative consequences for refugees’ judicial status (ibid.). It is also important to mention that several organizations are involved in integration work.

At the regional level municipalities play a key role in integration: not only do they settle refugees in cooperation with the IMDi, they also ensure refugees and their families receive training in social studies and Norwegian. Municipalities must also facilitate integration by participating in working life and society. Municipalities generally organize the refugees’ settlement through ‘refugee offices’. Smaller municipalities sometimes cooperate with neighbouring municipalities. It is also noteworthy that several NGOs are involved in regional integration work at volunteer centres, the Red Cross, sport clubs, Grendelag (small neighbourhood organizations), and so on, which facilitate the participation of children, young people, and adults in becoming part of a community. The population decline in rural and remote municipalities means the resettlement of refugees and other immigrant groups in these regions is deemed valuable by policies and regional strategies in Norway, as well as in other European countries (Zahl-Thanem and Haugen 2019). However, settlement in remote areas can create problems for refugees in social inclusion and integration through labour market participation.

Concerning social inclusion, a recent study shows that people living in rural areas express significantly less positive attitudes towards immigrants than people living in urban areas in Norway (Zahl-Thanem and Haugen 2019), which may affect immigrants’ overall integration. Previous research has iden-
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tified barriers to labour market integration, such as low demand for labour in small districts and employers’ reluctance to hire immigrants (Søholt, Tronstad and Bjørnsen 2014). Refugees who have settled in remote areas have considerably fewer employment opportunities than those who have settled in more centralized or urban areas, especially around the capital of Norway. Those who have settled in the most remote areas also relocate most often to more urban centres (Hernes et al. 2019; Svendsen, Valenta and Berg 2017).

However, it is also crucial to note that rural and remote areas can provide other qualities for immigrants’ wellbeing and social inclusion. Children’s wellbeing and access to schools and social activities are emphasized as attractive features of rural and remote municipalities (see Solheim and Røhnæbæk 2019). However, it is also pointed out that there are fewer opportunities for socialization in district regions for immigrants who do not have families (ibid.). In what follows we give an overview of the two Norwegian case regions where we have studied local structural conditions and integration policies.

Overview of the Case Regions

The Norwegian case focuses on two regions, Midt-Gudbrandsdal and Nord-Østerdal. Both are in Innlandet County, which had a population of 371,253 in 2021 and is one of 11 counties in Norway (Figure 13.1). Midt-Gudbrandsdal comprises three municipalities with a total of 13,077 inhabitants, while Nord-Østerdal comprises six municipalities with a total of 14,684 inhabitants. Table 13.1 illustrates the population distribution and background in the case regions.

Both regions are rural and mountainous, characterized by smaller settlements and dense populations. Compared to Norway overall, the regions’ municipalities are classified as second least central municipalities or least central municipalities (Høydal 2020). Depopulation and unemployment characterize them (Lund et al. 2016, Vareide 2008), and compared to Norway overall the region’s inhabitants have a proportionally greater need of public welfare services (Prop nr 1S (2021–2022), Grønt hefte-Table-e-k). TCNs thus represent a potential resource for the whole region, adding to the workforce and contributing to demographic growth. There have been some challenges with integration. However, these regions are known to have an asylum seeker settlement strategy, and they have shown good results in integration work compared to the county’s other regions.

In both regions the municipalities have chosen to establish regional offices to organize the introduction programme. In Midt-Gudbrandsdal the Midt-Gudbrandsdal Flyktningetjeneste and in Nord-Østerdal the Tynset opplæringsenter are responsible for training in Norwegian and social studies, primary school education for adults, and the introduction programme. Tynset
Figure 13.1: Innlandet County with the case regions Midt-Gudbrandsdal and Nord-Østerdal.
Table 13.1 Inhabitants in Midt-Gudbrandsdal and Nord-Østerdal regions (counting date: 1 January)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Midt-Gudbrandsdal</th>
<th>Nord-Østerdal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation immigrants</td>
<td>1,145</td>
<td>1,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian-born with immigrant parents</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population without first-generation immigrants and Norwegian-born</td>
<td>12,051</td>
<td>11,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13,328</td>
<td>13,177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Norway, Table 09817 and 07459.

opplæringssenter also coordinates the settlement of refugees in Tynset and provides guidance and practical assistance to asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants who have been reunited with their families, and working immigrants. The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) cooperates with the municipalities on issues such as social security and job training when the introduction programme is finished.

Findings

According to the informants, issues related to education and formal qualification play an important role in determining immigrants’ labour market participation, largely because there is a dearth of unskilled jobs and considerable competition for the few that exist. One of the informants at the ministry level reflects on this:

We’ve seen that no matter what we’ve done, around 60 per cent are in work or education the following year [after the introduction programme] – around 70 per cent of men and 50 per cent of women. We’ve made various efforts without seeing great effects. (WP3NO3)

The same informant argues that the introduction programme, whose primary focus is on language and work training, should be organized to enable participants to gain formal education and qualifications to give them a better chance in the employment market. The informant says:

Formal education/qualification is important whether you have immigrant background or not. … figures from Statistics Norway show that it is often the education that counts more than perhaps that you have immigrated. The statistics show if you compare immigrants who have taken upper secondary education in Norway, they have approximately the same employment rates as the rest of the population.
These are the steps you must take. This is something we’re trying to do through the integration reform. (WP3NO3)

Another informant also raises the importance of educational programmes to elevating immigrants’ formal competence and skills:

Municipalities are struggling with population decline and general trends – people are getting older and so on, but more specifically, it’s about accessing skilled labour. This is a huge challenge – recruitment, especially within health and care. There are huge discussions on this regarding labour market inclusion, how to ensure that those who are excluded and don’t want to be can gain competence/skills that enable them to contribute. Qualification paths [educational programmes] adapted to the needs of different groups are needed that teach skills that can actually be used, so I’m very positive about this. (WP3NO6)

It is also important to facilitate the recognition of immigrants’ skills, competences, and formal education acquired in their country of origin. Stakeholders said the current mapping of immigrants’ formal and informal skills was a lengthy process that imposed certain limitations on TCNs’ employment opportunities, (World Café, Nord-Østerdal, see also Røhnebæk et al. 2022). The world cafés identified the frequent lack of recognition of immigrants’ informal or undocumented qualifications. Stakeholders mentioned that a good mapping of these qualifications would have been useful for matching the available competences and job opportunities in the regions.

Living in a rural and remote region can bring additional challenges related to education. For example, in both workshops the participants highlighted that logistics and transport had major implications for integration in rural and remote regions characterized by dispersed settlements (Røhnebæk et al. 2022). Having access to a car can be important for participation in social arenas and the labour market. As one informant says, transport limitations can prevent some from attending classes:

The educational opportunities are so scattered. If you live in XX, you must travel to XX to study. Many of these who arrive lack the opportunity to do so. If you move here with four kids and do not have a driving licence … We know the bus service isn’t good enough. (WP3NO16)

Language skills are considered a vital component of immigrant labour market integration and inclusion. They are also necessary for accessing knowledge that brings participation opportunities. One informant elaborates on this multifunctional role of language:

They [immigrants] have the same rights, but I don’t think that’s where the problems are. It isn’t easy to navigate the public systems. … Evidently, newly arrived immi-
grants don’t know the language or culture – they won’t have the same prerequisites at least from a short-term perspective, and there may be many challenges. … It isn’t just about equal formal rights but about understanding how society works, what the governments’ role is, and so on. (WP3NO6)

In addition to hampering communication, a lack of language proficiency can prevent immigrants obtaining a driving licence in Norway, which indirectly affects their employment potential. Challenges in obtaining a driving licence were mentioned in the world cafés (both in NØ and MG). Although the theoretical driving test is available in several languages, driving theory courses are only available in Norwegian in these regions (Røhnebæk et al. 2022). Regarding this issue, most participants suggested that offering such theory classes in different languages would have made it easier for immigrants to pass the exam. It is important here that the emphasis is on the extent to which the overall system can be expanded to include immigrants, rather than pressurizing immigrants to intensify their effort to excel in their language proficiency.

SWEDEN

Immigration to Sweden

Historically, Sweden has been an attractive destination for both voluntary migration and forced migrants (refugees). Liberal labour migration policies and asylum policies are among the common explanations for the large number of immigrants coming to Sweden (Parusel 2016). Until the end of the 1960s there was high demand for labour migrants in small and medium-sized manufacturing industries throughout the country. Between 1970 and 1985 refugee and family migration became more important, and immigration to Sweden since the mid-1980s has been dominated by the refugee ‘crisis’ (Migration Policy Institute 2018). The Swedish authorities were unprepared to accommodate the arrival of 163,000 asylum seekers, which constituted the largest number of asylum seekers per capita of any European state (International Migration Outlook 2022).

By the late 1990s the Swedish government had set the goal and direction for the country’s integration policy, with a focus on equal rights and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic and cultural background. The national policy moved from ‘migration’ to ‘integration’, with clearly stated goals (Prop. 1997/98:16, 1):

The goals of the integration policy shall be equal rights and opportunities for all regardless of ethnic and cultural background, a society with society’s diversity as a basis and a societal development characterized by mutual respect and tolerance,
and for which everyone, regardless of background, shall participate and share responsibility.

While a range of policies concerns employment and aspects of housing, the country lacks a national integration strategy *per se*, and there is a general emphasis on equality, obligations, and possibilities for everyone regardless of ethnic or cultural background. Concerning the integration of ‘new citizens’, it is possible to link the concept to participation in society and working life and to society’s efforts to adapt to the new citizens.

Sweden has a universal welfare system that aims to provide high-quality welfare services to all its citizens ‘from cradle to grave’ (Government of Sweden 2017). Migrants with residence permits also qualify for these services, including child allowances, parental benefits, a housing allowance (if they have a low income), sickness benefits, and pensions (European Commission 2020). Since 2013 those without a residence permit are entitled to the same emergency healthcare as asylum seekers (Swedish Migration Agency 2020). Children without a residence permit have a right to full healthcare and dental cover (ibid.).

A new legal framework entered force in 2018 (Prop. 2016/17:175). The previously established programme saw a range of changes concerning its running. Among other things there were now further provisions and regulations, and new arrivals were assigned to a labour market policy programme [*Etableringsprogram*] with an individual action plan and a proportionate action system that included a warning and shutdown. The processing of establishment compensation was moved to the Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

No Swedish ministry or authority focuses specifically on integration. At a governmental level two departments share integration work: the Department of Employment (Ministry for Equality) and the Department of Justice (migration). The Swedish Migration Agency is the agency responsible for both residence and work permits. The Swedish Migration Agency also provides temporary accommodation for asylum seekers, or they can arrange their own housing by staying with relatives or friends, for example. Swedish immigrant integration legislation and policies are designed at a national level, while the geographical focus of policy implementations may vary from the national to the local. The *Aliens Act Ordinance* (2006, 97), regulating immigrants’ conditions for entering, staying, and working in Sweden, exemplifies a nationally designed and implemented policy. In contrast the *Initiative for Asylum Seekers and Certain Newly Arrived Immigrants*, entering into force on 1 February 2017, is largely implemented at the local level. This policy aims for asylum seekers’ better and faster integration in society and working life. It also targets those who have been granted a residence permit and live in the Swedish Migration Agency’s facility accommodation. County Administrative Boards are assigned
the task of coordinating the actors and working with resources allocated for various initiatives, especially regarding asylum seekers’ integration. Examples of early interventions are the skills mapping of asylum seekers, various initiatives offering language training from the first day in Sweden or knowledge about Swedish society and the labour market, and health promotion.

Having received a residence permit, all adult migrants in Sweden have the right to participate in the SFI, a state-subsidized basic Swedish language programme. Municipalities are responsible for providing SFI courses. In November 2020 the government proposed that to be entitled to social assistance [försörjningsstöd], an individual must be working or actively seeking work. The proposal clarifies that the applicant is also obliged to participate in the SFI to be eligible for maintenance support. There were previously no requirements for participation in the SFI beyond being above 16 years of age, living in Sweden, and possessing a basic knowledge of Swedish. Foreigners residing in Sweden are eligible for generous education benefits, including free Swedish courses for immigrants (Education Act 2010, 800). They can also apply for grants and loans from the Swedish Board of Student Finance (CSN) to enrol in adult education or at higher education institutions (CSN 2020).

The 2017 legislation (2017, 584) is an attempt to harmonize integration legislation. The law emphasizes the role played by the Public Employment Service and the County Administrative Boards as responsible agencies for the promotion of cooperation between the various agencies in the field. The education obligation for new arrivals with limited education and deemed distant from the labour market is also connected to the programme and the changes in 2018. The Public Employment Service can therefore assign new arrivals who take part in the Etableringsprogram to apply for and participate in regular adult education to increase their skills. New arrivals can study full-time during their establishment period. Those who do not follow the Swedish Public Employment Service’s instructions on education can lose their benefits (Lag 2017, 584).

Regarding migration and employment, education level and age on arrival are factors influencing integration into the labour market. Forslund, Liljeberg, and Åslund (2017) show that immigrants with a better education settle considerably more quickly. Furthermore, age on arrival significantly affects the opportunity to become established on the labour market. However, in referring to the employment gap previously mentioned, Szulkin et al. (2013) suggested migrants who had been in Sweden longer might have fared better yet struggled with matching employment. In the last three decades rural areas in Sweden have undergone substantial economic and demographic changes: population decline, outmigration, and the working age population have been among the research agenda’s themes (Hedlund and Lundholm 2015). Small rural municipalities have much at stake, as international immigration may

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*Sources and Notes:*

- Forslund, Liljeberg, and Åslund (2017)
- Szulkin et al. (2013)
- Hedlund and Lundholm (2015)
reverse the problems of population decline and contribute to the maintenance of economic and social sustainability (Hedberg and Haandrikman 2014). International migration is also perceived as one of the remedies to the labour market vacancies typical of rural areas (ibid.; Hedlund et al. 2017). While the native-born population is increasingly leaving rural for urban areas, Hedberg and Haandrikman (2014) show that foreign-born immigrants are taking their place and living in the countryside. Although some of this flow comprises migrants from other Nordic countries, TCNs especially contribute to the rejuvenation of the population structure of rural areas (Hedberg 2010). Regarding immigrants’ employment prospects, Vogiazides and Mondani (2020) recently showed that the most advantageous regions for immigrants to gain their first employment are at the extremes of the population density distribution: the Stockholm region and small town/rural regions. Vogiazides and Mondani (2020) suggest this is because of the accrued opportunities for socialization with native-born residents, which may be beneficial in the job seeking process. Benerdal (2021) points to the short decision path and the relative ease of finding the right person as advantages for immigrants running a business and working in small municipalities.

**Case Description**

The Swedish case focuses on Dalarna County (Figure 13.2). One of Sweden’s 21 counties, it is located slightly below the centre of Sweden, bordering Norway in the northwest. The northern part of the county is sparsely populated and is mountainous and covered mainly by forests. The centre of the county, the area around Lake Siljan, is a popular tourism location. While there are several industrial towns in the south, some face economic restructuring. In 2021 the population of Dalarna County was 288,287. It was distributed in 15 municipalities, with populations between 5,000 and 42,000 inhabitants. The MATILDE project focuses on three municipalities in Dalarna County, the municipalities of Älvdalen, Vansbro and Hedemora (see Figure 13.2). The municipality of Älvdalen is in the northern part of the county, with 7,121 inhabitants. Vansbro is in the centre of the county, with 6,807 inhabitants. Hedemora is in the south of the county, with 15,457 inhabitants. In 2021 there were 37,562 foreign-born residents in the county of Dalarna, accounting for 13 per cent of the population. The foreign-born population has grown steadily from 7.9 per cent in 2008. However, despite this increase, the share of the foreign-born population remains below the national average of 19.8 per cent. International migration is important for Dalarna County’s demographic balance. The foreign-born population in Dalarna (as well as in Sweden generally) is significantly younger than the native-born population, and a larger proportion of people is of working age (Region Dalarna 2020a).
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Migrants could play a vital role in filling vacancies in the labour market, especially in healthcare and elderly care (Stenbacka 2013). Moreover, the tourism sector usually offers many jobs in diverse services (the tourism sector in Dalarna involves both a winter and a summer season). Syrians (4,812) constituted the most populous foreign-born nationality in Dalarna County in 2021, followed by Finns (4,381), Somalis (3,966), Eritreans (2,039) and Iraqis (1,691).

Findings

A recurring theme with respect to TCN migrants’ labour market integration, emerging in both the interviews with stakeholders and with TCN migrants, was the role which language proficiency played in relation to employment prospects. To some extent, issues and challenges related to knowledge of Swedish were raised by both interviewees representing private companies operating in the region and employees with a TCN background.


Figure 13.2 Location of Hedemora, Vansbro and Älvdalen municipalities

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Findings

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The specific role *language proficiency* played in the employability of TCN migrants varied depending on the type of work position. For example, in a tourism destination where TCNs were mainly employed as cleaners, the manager (WP4SW026) responsible for recruiting new employees mentioned that to be able to perform the job, TCN workers needed to receive instruction in Swedish. A lack of elementary Swedish in the case of cleaners was mentioned as a decisive factor in the recruitment process:

I try to tell those I talk to that they if don’t get a job, they must go and learn Swedish. There are so many who call to complain that they can’t get a job. (WP4SW026)

Similarly, a manager of a local grocery store (WP4SW029) contemplated the challenges of employing TCN workers:

Work in a grocery store is knowledge-intensive, and an ability to speak Swedish is required. We work hard to support our staff to improve their language skills. But if a person barely knows the alphabet, it’s very difficult to integrate them into work that requires you to understand questions about allergies and so on. (WP4SW029)

It was apparent that the level of *language proficiency* varied with respect to the position for which TCN workers applied. For more qualified positions like those in a company producing food and beverages there were also higher expectations of language ability. An HR manager (WP4SW023) of an enterprise producing food and beverages emphasized that TCN workers needed to have a good or very good knowledge of Swedish to avoid mistakes concerning food containing different allergens:

It is absolutely crucial that we get the recipes right, so we don’t mix the wrong type of herbs, allergens, and what have you – there’s a range of issues we need to consider. (WP4SW023)

The HR manager (WP4SW023) also referred to former employees who failed to achieve the acceptable level of Swedish required for their jobs. The home-care sector is another example where good language proficiency is required. In Sweden this sector encompasses a large share of employees with a migrant background, many from TCN countries. In recent years there have been several cases where a lack of Swedish has led to serious issues with staff being unable to read instructions or communicate with individuals in their care (see e.g. Kommunalarbetaren 2018). A manager of a homecare unit (WP4SW021)
in one of the case study municipalities also referred to the need for language skills/knowledge among homecare workers with a TCN background:

The requirement is that you should be able to speak and make yourself understood in Swedish and read and write in Swedish, which is the main language at work. You can then get help with understanding things – for example, some words. … We may have to explain a little extra. … You must be able to have a conversation. … We often receive criticism that our staff’s Swedish is weak. … It’s a difficult nut to crack – we do everything we can. … We may be able to offer more support for those who are weak. … They may be good at reading, but it’s important to speak Swedish … (WP4SW021)

As previously mentioned, the requirements for language proficiency in the homecare sector are probably more complex than for cleaners. The work’s complexity makes it essential that homecare workers understand caregivers and vice versa. The manager of the homecare unit (WP4SW021) reflected further on the challenges related to language proficiency and emphasized the need for homecare workers to be able to understand and speak the language to interact with clients about medicine and ask them about the food they wanted, for example.

Awareness of the importance of language proficiency was also apparent in the interviews with employees with a TCN background employed in the homecare sector. They mentioned the need to be able to speak Swedish to communicate with the caregivers with whom they worked, as well as with their managers and other employees. Among the interviewees who were employed as factory workers a command of Swedish was also referred to as important and seen as key to both employment and social integration.

Another important issue emerging from the fieldwork was the former qualification/education verification and employment mismatch. The interviews revealed that a mismatch between education and employment of workers with a TCN background existed. One of the interviewees (WP4SW031), a worker with a TCN background currently working in the homecare sector, said that he perceived the work in the homecare unit in the municipality as an ‘in-between-job’ while the Swedish authorities processed his qualification from his country of origin. He anticipated this process to be rather long and planned to use the time to practise his Swedish. The interviewee described his study background from his home country: ‘I’ve studied to be a veterinarian. I’ve also worked as a teacher in (home country). I worked as a university rector.’

Another interviewee (WP4SW032) – now working in the municipal homecare sector – referred to working as a liaison officer for aid workers and as an international Red Cross worker. Similarly, an interviewee working in an enterprise producing food and beverages had studied computer sciences at univer-
sity in her native country (the Philippines). Another interviewee (WP4SW032), a woman currently working as a cleaner in the resort, mentioned that she had studied in her home country to become a high school natural sciences teacher.

A manager (WP4SW026) in one of the enterprises in a rather remote part of Dalarna highlighted the challenges concerning public transport and just as in the case of Norway (see above) the challenges of remoteness. She said transport to and from the destination was one of the main challenges for hiring a new workforce. In some peak periods the enterprise needed to organize its own shuttle transport to bring workers with a TCN background from where they lived. According to the manager (WP4SW026) in the 2020/2021 season a large proportion of the cleaners were employees with a TCN background, some of whom lived 120 kilometres from the resort. The manager also mentioned that when a vacancy arose, she often deliberately contacted workers with a TCN background with access to a private car and a driving licence, as this made her job easier.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In this chapter we have focused on the challenges and policies related to migrants’ labour market integration in Norway and Sweden. When read together, these two case studies reveal the challenges that inform immigrants’ labour market integration in rural and mountainous regions. Both the Swedish and Norwegian case studies point to key issues such as language proficiency, documentation, and verification of formal and informal skills that determine immigrants’ employment transition. It is important here to note that language remains an essential part of employment integration, regardless of the time spent in the country. Language skills are not only considered necessary to obtain a job, they are also regarded as a vital facilitator for immigrants’ navigation in public: language and communication skills facilitate immigrants’ access to information and a network that provides work opportunities. In this sense both case studies suggest there is a need for the reinforcement of language learning policies, as well as the dissemination of critical information in immigrants’ native languages, at least during the early stages of their resettlement.

Besides language proficiency, the findings of both case studies indicate that the case regions’ geographical structure may have implications for immigrants’ labour integration. Because they are sparsely populated, there are few job opportunities, which makes competition for jobs fierce. In these circumstances immigrants may encounter additional challenges when they cannot document their previous education and experience. This may result in a mismatch between immigrants’ competence and the kind of work they obtain where they settle, as they may be employed in low-skilled occupations.
As a policy recommendation at the national level, we suggest that structured support and recognition procedures for informal qualifications would improve immigrants’ working life participation in these regions. This would help them formalize their informal skills and competences and shorten their transition to the workforce. At the regional level we suggest that establishing job centres as supplements to the regional and local Labour and Welfare Services would lower barriers to the labour market. Functioning as a hub and a meeting place, job centres would provide opportunities for small-scale ad-hoc employment in the regions, which would facilitate access to low-barrier short-term employment opportunities and on-the-job language training.

NOTE

1. The programme was regulated through the Introduction Act, which was introduced in 2003. On 1 January 2021 the Introduction Act was replaced by the Integration Act as part of a major integration reform. The new act places greater emphasis on education, training, and work, more clearly specifying expectations and responsibilities of the national and regional/county authorities and municipalities.

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Jussi P. Laine, Daniel Rauhut, and Marika Gruber - 9781803927695
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14. Conclusions: renegotiated remoteness and the social impact of immigration

Daniel Rauhut, Jussi P. Laine and Marika Gruber

This volume has sought to provide an innovative assessment of the social impact of immigration on Europe. It has also sought to promote a change in the perception of migration and related policies and practices. Alone and collectively, the chapters in this volume have paid particular attention to the impact of third-country nationals (TCNs) in Europe’s rural and remote regions, many of whom face several challenges stemming from weakening demography and the lack of a labour force, with multiple side effects. The contributions illuminate TCNs’ role in the collective production of places and in the generative processes conducive to the redefinition and renegotiation of the social space, contributing to the process of renegotiating remoteness. The focus on remote and rural areas – often with limited public services and reduced mobility, for example – uncovers the impact TCNs can have on demographic trends, socioeconomic dynamics, and migration patterns in a specific region.

The opportunities for immigrants and the host population, policy responses, societal attitudes, and the perceptions about TCNs arising from such processes contribute to the production of places, and how social space is renegotiated and redefined. Although remote and rural areas are often affected by challenges such as population ageing, depopulation dynamics, labour force shrinkage, and peculiar exposure to natural hazards, TCNs can contribute to the revitalization of these regions. While significant differences can be observed between different countries, regions, and localities, the findings support the argument that Europe’s rural and remote regions hold great potential not only for immigrants themselves and their respective new host societies but above all for something new to be created together and shared with others in the very process of redefining ‘we’ (Laine 2022).

This concluding chapter summarizes the major findings in this volume concerning how TCNs can contribute to renegotiating and redefining remoteness. While the contributions in the first part of the volume discuss social policy issues related to immigration, the contributions to the second part approach the topic more from a governance perspective. Together, they seek to balance
the debate on the impact of immigration by highlighting both the need and the evidence to consider immigrants as valuable resources rather than additional burdens for these regions. As there are many misconceptions regarding the role immigration can or could play, as well as the role of remote and rural areas, it is crucial to understand the actual dynamics and their impact on the specific localities better and provide evidence-based accounts of the role of immigration in our societies. Rural and remote areas have much in common, but they are not the same.

The chapters point to the development whereby remote areas, while often considered backward and inferior to urban areas and central places, can be and already have been attributed with a new value through the societal reproduction and change involving different groups of inhabitants. Previous studies of migration to rural Europe have highlighted the development potential immigration can have for rural and remote areas (Kordel, Weidinger and Jelen 2018; Galera et al. 2018; Kasimis et al. 2010), yet considerate action in place-planned policies, practices, and perceptions is required to grasp that potential and make it count. The perception of remote and rural regions tends to be coloured by a centralist perspective in which the ‘urban’ and ‘metropolitan’ provide the focus around or against which the non-urban gets its meaning (Powell and Boyne 2001; Rauhut 2018). As discussed in the introduction, remote and rural areas have particular needs and challenges relative to urban areas, but governance and resources also differ between remote and rural areas and urban areas (Laine, Rauhut and Gruber, Chapter 1). Not only have remote and rural regions been marginalized in discussions of economic and societal development in favour of the urban, rural and non-urban challenges have disappeared from the regional development agenda (de Souza 2018). The result is increasing disintegration and discontent, and a lack of discretion prevents EU Member States (re)acting (Rauhut, Sielker and Humer 2021). If proactive policies are implemented, these areas have great economic potential (Gløersen 2022). This volume also supports these findings.

SPACE, PLACE, AND REVITALIZATION

Immigration has an impact on space and place, and this can lead to a revitalization of remote and rural areas. However, it also needs adequate framework conditions and supporting structures. Immigrants often come with skills and bring new ideas that challenge existing ideas in the place of residence, while simultaneously transmitting impressions and ideas from the place of residence to the place of origin. The impact of transnational migration cannot be underestimated in revitalization processes (Haller and Verwiebe 2016) but should be seen as a process of movement and settlement across international borders in which individuals maintain or build multiple networks of connection with their
Border regions have become transnational in several places, especially when they are in peripheral, remote, and mountainous areas (Pöllänen, Havukainen and Davydova-Minguet, Chapter 5; Krasteva, Chapter 6). Migrants’ opportunity to enter the labour market is reduced, often because of legal constraints (Gruber et al., Chapter 3), as is accessibility to welfare services (Semerci et al., Chapter 9). Finding adequate and affordable housing is also frequently difficult (Kordel et al., Chapter 2; Lardiés-Bosque and del Olmo-Vicén, Chapter 8).

There is no quick fix for the various challenges the integration programmes in many EU Member States face or for making migrants, especially refugees, feel more at home in their host country. It is therefore important to work on a long-term basis with integration, inclusion, and settlement (Machold, Dax and Bauchinger, Chapter 4). However, many labour migrants have consciously chosen to take jobs in remote and rural areas, while refugees resettled in them often have not. Although the local and regional authorities in some case study areas hope refugees will stay, they usually leave as soon as they can, making rural, remote, peripheral, and mountainous areas scenes of transitory TCN migration (Krasteva, Koleva and Ninova 2021; Rauhut 2021; Hansson, Klerby and Macuchova 2021; Gruber et al. 2021; Warhuus Samuelsen and Taivalsaari Rønnebak 2021; Laine and Rauhut 2018). The lack of a place attachment results in immigrants leaving rural and remote areas (Gilli and Membretti 2021; Kordel, Weidinger and Spenger 2022). Building place attachment is crucial to make refugees feel at home and welcome (Machold, Dax and Bauchinger, Chapter 4).

GOVERNANCE, POWER, AND INEQUALITIES

The neo-liberalization and marketization of welfare and regional development policies have hit many peripheral, remote, and mountainous regions hard (Lobao et al. 2018; Essletzbichler, Disslbacher and Moser 2018), allegedly making them ‘places that don’t matter’ (Rodríguez-Pose 2018). The absence of a functioning market, the low population density, and huge distances make most remote, peripheral, rural, and mountainous regions unprofitable for the market. The retrenchment of state intervention leaves these regions with little support (Borges, Humer and Smith 2015). However, with missing markets and market failures the responsibility always defaults to the national government (Rauhut 2018).

Several of this volume’s contributions point to the resulting implications. The marketization of integration services in peripheral, remote, and mountainous regions suffers from a decoupling of responsibility, implementation, and financing, which implies a market failure or missing markets (Gruber et al. 2021; Warhuus Samuelsen and Taivalsaari Rønnebak 2021; Laine and Rauhut 2018).
and Rauhut, Chapter 11). The implementation of integration policies depends strongly on the presence of other welfare structures. The state retrenchment in welfare service provision related to immigrant integration in peripheral, remote, and mountainous regions is met by a demand for state intervention (Stenbacka and Mathisen, Chapter 12). As the required resources are unavailable it is difficult for local authorities to deal with labour market issues, housing, education, and language training (Hansson et al., Chapter 13; Gruber et al., Chapter 3; Kordel et al., Chapter 2). Hitherto, the neoliberal ‘local turn’ in the integration of immigrants in these areas has generally shown itself incapable of dealing with the tasks it was supposed to solve (Kaya, Chapter 10).

To turn the development trend around, the implementation of any social policy or project targeting support at immigrants should consider inclusive coverage for all members of that society, especially the most vulnerable (Semerci et al. Chapter 9). However, this requires not only a clear governance structure but a redistribution of power; remote and rural regions often lack power when it comes to negotiations with central government (cf. Essletzbichler, Disslbacher and Moser 2018; Rodríguez-Pose 2018). Unless the power relations between central government and lower governance levels, as well as between urban and peripheral and remote and rural regions, are adjusted, both the underlying inequalities between immigrants and natives and the regional inequalities will prevail.

RENEGOTIATING AND REDEFINING REMOTENESS

The social impact of immigration, which in this context can be understood as the changes to the social structure (demographic trends, social polarization or inclusion, civic participation, service provision, etc.) and the transformation of the lifeworld (Habermas 1981), means the everyday world we share with others is much more than a step-by-step process for the identification of outcomes and fulfilment of certain legal requirements. It can be a mechanism for promoting social sustainability, as well as a tool for positive social change (Momtaz and Kabir 2018).

In speaking of immigrants’ ability and agency in renegotiating and redefining remoteness, we mean how migration changes or transforms the lives of people in specific territories. A positive social impact by immigration is not the same as successful integration, nor can we assume causality between these concepts (Laine 2022). As deliberated in this volume’s introduction (Laine, Rauhut and Gruber 2023, Chapter 1), a positive social impact is more than just integration; it is about the good functioning of a society. We consider a positive social impact of immigration on the host society to be achieved when a plus-sum game is obtained – when immigrants and their integration add extra value to society that would not have been created without them. A negative
social impact of immigration on the host society is therefore when the opposite occurs; it can also occur when a zero-sum game occurs, and competition for resources, rights, and recognition is amplified.

This volume’s contributions have shown that the process in which immigrants and the host society renegotiate and redefine remoteness does not generate explicit causality between the steps. For example, before the financial crisis in Spain immigrants to rural areas counteracted depopulation and thus generated revitalization. However, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have fundamentally changed this development (Lardiés-Bosque and del Olmo-Vicén, Chapter 8). In social processes it is not uncommon that we sometimes need to take one step backwards to take two forwards. Moreover, the time-lags related to social processes are sometimes significant and will determine how long it will take before any social impact – positive or negative – materializes. For example, in the Austrian Alpine area the empirical evidence indicates that a positive impact may materialize for the second generation, but not necessarily for the first (Machold, Dax and Bauchinger, Chapter 4).

The chances of obtaining employment (Gruber et al., Chapter 3), adequate and affordable housing (Kordel et al., Chapter 2), and access to welfare services and education (Semerci et al., Chapter 9) are vital for the renegotiation and redefinition of remoteness, whether we are discussing immigrants or the host population. So are governance aspects: different actors at different levels must be given the appropriate competence and discretion to solve the tasks assigned to them. However, our research shows this is not always the case (Kaya, Chapter 10; Gruber and Rauhut, Chapter 11; Stenbacka and Mathisen, Chapter 12; Hansson et al., Chapter 13; Kaya, Chapter 10). A positive social impact in remote, peripheral, and mountainous regions will be achieved when these aspects generate a plus-sum game from immigration. Both immigrants and the host population will then be able to positively renegotiate and redefine remoteness.

LESSONS LEARNED

Immigration to Europe’s rural and remote regions is characterized by specific forms of living together that entail tolerance and solidarity, and that certainly present challenges while offering great potential. The opportunities highlighted by the preceding chapters can best be captured when assessed not as something obtainable by a particular group but above all as something new to be created jointly and shared with others in the process of redefining ‘we’ (Laine 2022, 64). Such categorial debordering and opening up to transnationalism and multiculturalism are relatively new to many of the analysed regions. Learning-by-doing takes time; there is no denying that successful examples have been somewhat rare thus far. However, there are numerous examples of
trial-and-error attempts with examples (both good and less good) in which the respective host society and the newly arrived immigrants try to find ways to create plus-sum solutions.

We can identify situations where bottlenecks in such processes generate obstacles to positive development. We can also identify the factors that have prevented the grasping of migrants’ potential. The bottlenecks are generally found in relation to employment possibilities, housing, and the accessibility of welfare services and education, and they affect natives and immigrants alike. Moreover, we also notice that the introduction of New Public Management does not improve the situation in the remote and rural regions we have analysed. The strong presence of the public sector in many of these regions was a response to market failures and missing markets; when the public sector is dismantled, the market does not fill its vacuum (e.g. Gruber, Rauhut and Humer 2019). The retrenchment of the public sector in these regions reduces the opportunities for renegotiating and redefining remoteness.

The social impact of immigrants, various forms of transnationalism, and increased cross-border mobility have fuelled processes to redefine and renegotiate the perception of place and space. Such processes of renegotiating and redefining remoteness in these regions are still in their infancy. However, as immigration to remote and rural regions is a relatively new phenomenon, it is positive that these processes have started. It is even more positive that these processes are in motion when most immigrants come from non-European countries and represent visible minorities. Seeking to rejuvenate remote areas and draw attention to their untapped potential without acknowledging the contribution immigrants (could) bring seems counterproductive. Europe’s remote areas have significant value and potential, yet as the contributions in these volumes have shown, their capitalization indeed needs place-sensitive sustainable approaches and innovative governance strategies capable of seizing the opportunities amidst the evident challenges.

NOTE

1. In Scotland immigration has had a positive effect on mitigating the depopulation trend in many remote and peripheral areas (Caputo et al. 2021).

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