4. **Long-term needs to achieve social inclusionary pathways for migrants**  
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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...
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-
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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
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 first- 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).
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 overburdening 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.
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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 newcomers’ 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
‘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.

REFERENCES


Assessing the social impact of immigration in Europe


