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 international 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 emigrant 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

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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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The municipality’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 Luenger 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.
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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 previ-
ous ‘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 inte-
gration 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 accommoda-
tion. 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 precon-
dition for receiving a visa for those from third countries. However, the season-
ality 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

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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.
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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.

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