



MATILDE

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

**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL AND
ECONOMIC POLICIES ON
MIGRANTS IN EUROPE
- GERMANY**



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Deliverable 3.1 and 4.1 - Country-based policy briefings on migration-related social and economic policies

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

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

TCN - Third Country National

WP - Working Package

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE POLICY BRIEFS

This document presents the impact assessments of a range of policies on migrants' interaction with the social and economic structure of the remote and rural areas in the MATILDE countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and in the United Kingdom.

Each report includes firstly a systematic gathering of information on existing policies that have a direct/indirect impact on migrants' interaction with the social economic structure of remote and rural areas. This includes also those policies that were not designed for this purpose but nonetheless contribute to shape such an interaction. The information for this task has been collected by means of desk research and informants' interviews.

Secondly, for each country we carried out a meta-analysis/literature review on the existing literature/research that has focused on assessing traditional and foundational economics as well as social migrants' impact in rural and remote areas in their country of settlement. The overall purpose of the meta-analysis was to pick up those elements that extant studies have indicated as drivers or barriers to social/economic integration and development. This review focuses on recent research – notably those produced in the last 10years – however it may include relevant research produced outside that period.

Thirdly, each report includes an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the policies and services explored through semi-structured interviews. A range of stakeholders has been consulted in gathering this information on the migration-related policies and governance in the socio-economic realm – policy makers and public officers, public service providers, practitioners and organizations working on migration related fields, social policies and territorial planning, experts/scholars, (social) entrepreneurs (both TCN and native) and other relevant stakeholder (e.g. unions' representatives, employers' organization leaders, etc.).

Finally, each country report includes two separate conclusions, describing if and how policy related factors act on the one side on the migrants' impact into the country economy and on the other on their social inclusion/impact. This final section also includes an inventory of good practices.



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5. GERMANY

Country: Germany

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BGL	- Rural district Berchtesgadener Land
COVID-19	- Coronavirus Disease 2019
GAP	- Rural district Garmisch-Partenkirchen
LAU	- Local Administrative Units
NEA	- Rural district Neustadt a.d.Aisch-Bad Windsheim
NUTS	- Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques
OA	- Rural district Oberallgäu
TAT	- Tür an Tür – Integrationsprojekte gGmbH
TCN	- Third-Country National
VIA	- VIA Bayern – Verband für Interkulturelle Arbeit e.V.

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5.1 OVERVIEW OF EXISTING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RELATED POLICIES REGARDING TCNS INTEGRATION AND IMPACT IN GERMANY IN GENERAL AND RURAL BAVARIA IN PARTICULAR

In the governance system of the Federal Republic of Germany, multilevel governance is a major principle. While the federal level (NUTSO) is responsible for migration policy, including citizenship and immigration legislation as well as labour market and welfare policies¹, the implementation is processed by the Federal States, i.e. the *Länder* (NUTS1, SVR 2017). The latter are given ample scope regarding the interpretation of legal documents, which may result in differing administrative practices between the Federal States. Federal States are also able to shape integration policies, in particular in the realms of education, cultural policy, and inner security (Gesemann & Roth 2015; Münch 2016) and can promote and offer additional subsidies programmes or action plans (ibid.). Moreover, they decide on the legal terms which regulate the self-government of rural and city districts (*Landkreise, kreisfreie Städte*, NUTS3) as well as municipalities (*Gemeinden*, LAU) and provide respective funding. The rural and city districts as well as municipalities, finally, are responsible for implementing economic and social policies, being processed by, e.g. the local foreigners' registration offices, social welfare departments or job centres (*Jobcenter*), and organise the communal life by virtue of their self-government (SVR 2017). While residence and livelihood issues are compulsory tasks for the rural and city districts as well as municipalities, many other tasks of integration are voluntary ones. Here, the rural and city districts as well as municipalities can decide for themselves whether and how they want to act (Schammann 2020).

Social and economic policies exist of various types on different administrative levels. They affect, but not exclusively, foreigners and migrants in general and TCNs in particular. Thus, general social and economic policies are included, but also those commonly termed migration and integration policies. According to their

¹ The Federal States (NUTS1), however, can influence legislation processes via the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*).

different degree of legal enforcement capacity and in terms of their temporal dimension, we distinguish between:

- regularly reworked and adjusted laws,
- regularly reworked and adjusted (funding) regulations and directives about how to implement laws, and
- strategic roadmaps and visions that provide the frame for future activities and intended adjustments of laws in the long run.

The social and economic policies have developed historically between the conflicting priorities of liberalisation and restriction (SVR 2019). Critical junctures, identified by Hess and Green (2016), are firstly based on historical events and resulting responsibility, e.g. the end of World War II with millions of expellees from Central and Eastern Europe, or the German reunification in the 1990s (see also MATILDE D2.1 Country report Germany, Weidinger & Spenger 2020). Secondly, junctures stimulating a change in social and economic policies and migration legislation include times of economic transformation, such as the post-war “economic miracle” (*Wirtschaftswunder*) from the 1960s, associated to an increasing labour demand as well as various economic crises leading to more restrictive measures (e.g. termination of recruitment of guest workers in 1973). Thirdly, transformations in the government participation and the positioning and self-understanding of political parties had an influence. The change to a social-ecological coalition between Social democrats (SPD) and Green Party (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*) in 1998, for instance, resulted in the recognition of Germany as a country of immigration and a reform of the Citizenship and Immigration Law. Most of the legislations and regulations illustrated in the text below were adopted or modified from 2005 on, following the implementation of the Immigration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*)². These were accompanied by many substantial and symbolic measures such as the installation of a Commissioner of the Federal Government for Migration, Refugees and

² The Immigration Act of 2005 originates from the discussions of the Independent Commission Immigration (*Unabhängige Kommission Zuwanderung / Süßmuth-Kommission*) that was implemented by the Federal Government in 2000 and which became known by the name of its chairwoman, the former presiding officer of the German parliament Rita Süßmuth (Kolbe 2020).

Integration (*Beauftragte* der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration*) in the Federal Chancellery, the establishment of an annual Islam Conference (*Deutsche Islamkonferenz*) and an annual Integration Summit (*Deutscher Integrationsgipfel*) or the negotiation of a National Integration Plan / National Action Plan Integration (*Nationaler Integrationsplan / Nationaler Aktionsplan Integration*).

In the following, recent changes in selected legislations and regulations that can be seen to have (had) an impact on the presence and impact of TCNs in rural and mountain areas will be sketched drawing on the compilation of SVR (2019), Chemin and Nagel (2020a, 2020b) as well as Gomes and Doomernik (2020), whilst the evaluation of selected legislations and regulations will take place in chapter 2:

In terms of **education policies**, access to integration courses for asylum seekers with a good prospect of staying³ and individuals with toleration was facilitated in the Asylum Package I (*Asylpaket I*, 2015), whilst work-related German language promotion and the Recognition Act (*Anerkennungsgesetz* including the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act, *Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz*, 2012) aimed at facilitating foreigners' access to employment. In order to safeguard the coordination of educational offers for new immigrants on the level of rural and city districts (NUTS3), coordinators were implemented in 2016 and, today, are installed across the whole country.

In terms of **migration and employment-related policies**, in 2012 and 2013, several new bilateral recruitment programmes between the Central Placement Office (*Zentrale Auslands- und Fachvermittlung*) of the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and countries from the Balkan, North Africa and Asia tried to attract nurses to Germany in order to fill the demand for labour (SVR 2018; Kordes et al. 2020). In 2012, in addition, Germany implemented the EU Blue Card directive for High-Skilled Individuals⁴. The asylum compromise (2014), then, classified Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Macedonia, Senegal and Serbia as so-called “safe countries of origin”

³ Their countries of origin are recognised as being “unsafe Third Countries”. For a discussion on this, see Schultz (2020).

⁴ From 2000 to 2004, there was also a so-called “Green Card” for ICT professionals (Přivara & Rievajová 2019; Kolbe 2020).

allowing for accelerated asylum procedures. Simultaneously, however, it was decided that asylum seekers and individuals with toleration are allowed to work already three months upon arrival. Due to rising numbers of asylum seekers from the Western Balkan with low chances of receiving asylum, the Asylum Package I (2015) also classified Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro as so-called “safe countries of origin”. Simultaneously, however, the Western Balkan Regulation (*Westbalkanregelung*, 2016-2023) offered citizens of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, who did not receive benefits for asylum seekers according to Asylum Seekers’ Benefits Act (*Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz*, AsylbLG) in the past 24 months, the opportunity to enter the German labour market with a valid job offer by a German employer only. To better manage the influx of refugees, the Asylum Package II (*Asylpaket II*, 2016) encompassed the suspension of family reunification for individuals with subsidiary protection status for two years⁵ as well as accelerated asylum procedures for individuals from so-called “safe countries of origin”. In light of a prospering labour market, the Integration Act (*Integrationsgesetz*, 2016) then further improved forced migrants’ access to the labour market by abolishing priority checks for individuals with a good prospect of staying. To offer planning security for companies who employ forced migrants by means of a three-year vocational training, the 3+2-rule (*3+2-Regelung*) was implemented, saying that forced migrants with a negative decision on asylum can finish the vocational training and even continue to work in the company up to two years after. The 2019 Migration Package (*Migrationspaket*), then, included the Toleration for Education and Employment Act (*Gesetz über Duldung bei Ausbildung und Beschäftigung*) on the one hand. It extended the opportunities for a tolerated stay for the purpose of vocational training and offered a new type of tolerated stay permit, i.e. the so-called Tolerated Stay for Working Professionals (*Beschäftigungsduldung*). The Migration Package, on the other hand, entailed the Skilled Labour Immigration Act (*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*, FEG), which was put in effect in 2020. While until this date, working permits were issued in a very limited scope, e.g. for high skilled employees, scientists, understaffed professions or seasonal/temporary employment only, since then, fully trained specialists with a vocational training and university graduates are treated as equal, i.e. they are allowed to enter the country independent from trained profession. This went hand in hand with a reduction of administrative

⁵ In 2018, the family reunification to individuals with subsidiary protection status was limited to 1.000 persons per month.

burdens for companies and migrants, a speeding up of the recognition of foreign credentials and a better access to structured language training support.

In terms of **societal and welfare-related policies**, existing social policies, either affecting all people reliant on social welfare (Social Act Second Book, SGB II) or focussing exclusively on forced migrants such as the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act (AsylbLG), were adjusted in manifold ways in the last couple of years. The migration counselling for adult immigrants and the Youth Migration Services provided by the state were already developed in the course of the Immigration Law, while additional support mechanisms funded by the Federal States, e.g. the integration guides⁶ in Bavaria, were often introduced not before the mid-2010s. Newly emerging refugee relief groups and individual volunteers, however, represent a backbone of local integration activities. Therefore, their coordination and professional support was addressed as crucial. The Federal Integration Act (2016), finally allowed the Federal States to enact their own integration acts, from which for instance Bavaria made use (Bavarian Integration Act, 2016).

In terms of **housing and mobility policies**, Germany applies a dispersal mechanism and distributes asylum seekers between the Federal States according to the distribution key *Königsteiner Schlüsse*, which was introduced in 1974 to respond to the rising influx of asylum seekers (see Kordel & Weidinger 2019). In the last couple of years, the duration of the obligation to live in first reception centres was changed several times and differs, e.g. between families with minor children and individuals from so-called safe countries of origin. For subsequent accommodation, asylum seekers are further distributed within the Federal States, whereby the states draw on their own distribution keys (in Bavaria, for instance, the quota is based on population figures of the rural and city districts). During their first months in Germany, in addition, a geographic restriction to the

⁶ During the pilot phase (2015-2017), they were either termed coordinators of volunteers in the context of asylum (*Ehrenamtskoordinatoren Asyl*) or integration guides (*Integrationslotsen*). After that, the ministry did not differentiate according to migration status anymore, while the funding regulations for integration guides were published even together with the ones of refugee and integration counsellors (*Flüchtlings- und Integrationsberatern*).

responsible foreigners' registration office (NUTS3) is applied as part of the Asylum Act. For recognised refugees reliant on social welfare, the Integration Act (2016) implemented a three-year Residence Rule (*Wohnsitzregelung*) that was extended for an indefinite period of time in 2019. It reduces the freedom of movement at least to the Federal State, where the refugee lived during the asylum procedure. Federal States are allowed to issue even stricter regulations and prescribe the place of residence in a city or rural district (NUTS3) or municipality (LAU) even ("positive residence obligation")⁷. The driving permit regulation (*Fahrerlaubnisverordnung, FeV*), finally, regulates that, in case of long-term stays, TCNs need to transform their driving licenses issued in Third Countries to a German one.

⁷ In contrast, the Federal States can also impose a ban to move to a specific municipality or city in order to prevent social or societal exclusion ("negative residence obligation").

5.2 OVERVIEW ON EXISTING ANALYSES AND ASSESSMENTS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICIES

The “**complete programme language**” (see p. 9), including both the integration courses (language levels A1 to B1, Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, BMI) and the work-related German language promotion (B2 to C2, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, BMAS) was evaluated by both the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), a research institute of the Federal Employment Agency, and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), a political foundation related to the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The IAB found that refugees who have completed integration courses tend to have higher employment rates (Brücker et al. 2017). With regard to rural specificities, the FES detected that the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), which develops the courses, certifies public and private language course providers and contracts out the implementation of courses to them, faces only a limited number of providers in rural areas (Scheible & Schneider 2020). On site, adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen*), mostly sponsored by rural and city districts as well as municipalities, play a crucial role. Most recently, the course providers massively expanded their activities and hired personnel. While the local level is of particular importance (Schammann & Kühn 2016) – foreigners’ registration offices and Jobcentres provide entitlements and obligations for the participation in the courses – the authors recommend a transfer of competence to the local level (Scheible & Schneider 2020). They also plea for a stronger regionalisation of integration courses in order to react faster and better to the local and regional constellations and challenges (ibid.; see also Opinion Paper of Ohliger & Schweiger 2019). In order to meet specific challenges in rural areas, e.g. the low number of potential participants in language courses, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees introduced a minimum reward for teachers in such regions. Moreover, a reimbursement of travel costs to places where courses take place is foreseen, yet bureaucratic burdens for its accounting were identified. Finally, the seamless connection between official language and integration courses and internships as well as between official language and integration courses and lay language courses provided by volunteers is in need of further improvement (Scheible & Schneider 2020).

The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration (*SVR*), a politically independent think tank, the employer-oriented German Economic Institute (iW), the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), and

the Migration Strategy Group (MSG) on International Cooperation and Development, an initiative by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMFUS), the Bertelsmann Foundation and the Robert Bosch foundation (RBS), discussed and evaluated the **Western Balkan Regulation** as a potential alternative to asylum applications and legal trajectory for TCNs without prospects of staying (see p. 10). The evaluations conclude that the eased entry to the German labour market foreseen for individuals from the Western Balkan was able to reduce the number of asylum seekers from these countries, which are not considered unsafe. However, the number of working permits issued by the employment authorities and the number of visas issued by the embassies differed largely between the countries of origin depending on the regional demand, and already established diasporic networks with Germany. Simultaneously, long waiting times were common due the overload of embassies in the respective countries (Bither & Ziebarth 2018; SVR 2018). The most work permits were issued for the economically prospering Federal States of Bavaria and Baden Württemberg, which already had established migration systems with the Western Balkan, not least due to their geographic proximity. Immigration, to a certain extent, was sector-specific, i.e., the construction (42% of all issued allowances), hospitality industry (16%) and healthcare (10%) benefitted the most (Burkert & Haase 2017; Geis-Thöne 2018). The iW-Study adds that mostly skilled workers profited from the regulation, while less qualified people, e.g. from the minority of Roma, to a larger extent, have not made use of it (Geis-Thöne 2018). However, data are lacking to identify a potential over-qualification of employees (Bither & Ziebart 2018). In addition, SVR and MSG identified strategic shortcomings of the regulation, i.e. lacking incorporation of countries of origin and a lacking proactive communication strategy. As a consequence, the German Information Centres for Migration, Training and Career (DIMAK) that were established in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia already before the implementation of the regulation, were not used according to their original aim to assist the labour market integration of returning migrants in their countries of origin, but for the purpose to enter Germany instead, mostly. According to SVR and MSG, lessons learned from the Western Balkan Regulation with regard to both forced and labour migration are the call for a clear-cut migration policy with sector specific programmes considering the needs of the country of origin instead of a general opening and liberalisation based on a “best friends” approach (Bither & Ziebarth 2018, 38; SVR 2018). Due to the high acceptance among employers and potential foreign employees, the SVR recently opted for its extension until 2023.

Following an evaluation published by legal scholar Funke (2017) and SVR (2017), the **Bavarian Integration Act** (BayIntG), introduced in 2016, distinguishes between promotion of and an obligation to integration (Art. 1) (SVR

2017, see also p. 11). However, the expectations are merely addressing immigrants in general and refugees as the core target group in particular, e.g. with regard to their acculturation to the local culture and acceptance of a leading culture (*Leitkultur*, see also Bendel & Funke 2016). The law, thus, has an assimilative character, follows principles of order and security and can be considered protective by tendency. In general, the law includes only programmatic principles for integration policies and is a balancing act between legally non-binding nature and vague legal force (Funke 2017). Similarly, political scientist Zuber (2019) highlights the law's focus on restrictive and culturally monist measures in socio-economic and cultural-religious terms, which was found typical for regions characterised by sub-state nationalism.

Volunteers were recently addressed as crucial actors in the implementation of integration policies in rural areas, as reported in case studies, conducted, for instance, by the Robert Bosch Foundation (RBS, Ohliger et al. 2017; see also Kordel & Weidinger 2020; Schweiger & Veyhl 2020). Their specific local knowledge and networks support immigrants' access to housing, employment, education and many other realms of everyday life. As a consequence, **integration guides** (*Integrationslots*innen*) were hired in 86 of the 96 Bavarian rural and city districts to support and coordinate the work of volunteers, who mostly have a full-time position and are allocated to the rural and city district offices or to Third Sector Organisations such as Caritas (see p. 11). For many rural districts, the opportunity to hire integration guides was an important step into an active integration policy. In light of the renewal of the funding guidelines 2021-2023, an evaluation was conducted by social scientist Wegner (2020). Drawing from an online survey among integration guides, she concludes that integration guides have to cover a wide range of tasks, including, for instance, coordination of volunteers and projects, networking, knowledge transfer with regard to integration, organisation of events and PR activities (Wegner 2020), but have scope of discretion to set priorities according to local needs. In rural areas, integration guides evaluate their work as positive for integration on site, while 89%, for instance, agree that they are an important contact point for volunteers. On the other hand, however, they can rarely rely on adopted integration concepts and recognise a decrease in people who are willing to volunteer (ibid.).

In the realm of housing and mobility, the three-year **Residence Rule** (§12a AufenthG) introduced in 2016, is crucial for the settlement of recognised refugees reliant on social welfare as it limits the freedom of movement at least to the Federal State, where the refugee lived during the asylum procedure (see p. 12). Despite a scientific evaluation of its effects was claimed many times by various organisations, it is still lacking to date (SVR 2016;

BBSR 2017). Yet, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) monitors the regulation internally. Regarding implications on rural areas, a qualitative study conducted by the BAMF research branch points to a positive effect from the perspective of providers of integration measures and education infrastructures. However, respondents on NUTS3-level favoured an application of the regulation towards a local allocation (LAU) even (Rösch et al. 2020). The Institute for Employment Research (IAB) and the BAMF research branch also assessed the implications of the Residence Rule in terms of effects on labour and housing market integration. Comparing refugees among whom the regulation is applied with those, who are free to move, Brücker et al. (2020) estimate a reduced probability among the former group. In addition, results indicate that for the former group also access to private housing is hampered. However, no differences could be detected for access to language and integration courses (ibid.). In a nationwide panel survey, Tanis (2020) found that 25% among those refugees where the regulation is applied want to move on to cities afterwards, especially from Eastern Germany and rural areas. To sum up, the aims of the Residence Rule to foster integration, i.e. refugees' access to housing, to integration and language courses as well as to the labour market, may not be fulfilled, instead, it could have quite the reverse effect.

Considering immigration for labour purposes, the legislative procedure of the Skilled Labour Immigration Act (FEG) was critically accompanied by SVR. Its introduction was supported as it was a farewell to the “academic arrogance” of German labour immigration legislation (SVR 2019, 45) and especially eased the access of non-academics from Third Countries (Graf & Heß 2020). In light of the structure of the employment market in Bavarian MATILDE districts with SMEs and small handicraft businesses predominating, we expect the law to represent an important pillar. However, an in-depth evaluation is still missing. Apart from that, areas for further research encompass the evaluation of the role of specific legislations and regulations such as the Western Balkan Regulation or the Bavarian Integration Act and the role of different mediators (coordinators of educational offers for new immigrants; integration mentors, job mentors, welcome guides, canvassers of vocational training for refugees, migration counsellors for adult immigrants, youth migration services, refugee and integration counsellors) for the social and economic impact of TCNs in rural and mountain areas in Germany in general and in the MATILDE region Bavaria in specific.

5.3 ASSESSMENT OF THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF POLICIES THROUGH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

METHODS AND ETHICS ASPECTS RELATED WITH THE INTERVIEWS

To assess the strengths and weaknesses of policies with regard to the integration and impact of TCNs in the country and its selected remote areas, the policy brief draws on five semi-structured interviews with seven actors that were conducted in October and November 2020. In addition, participatory observation was undertaken in an online meeting of the Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Sport and Integration (StMI) with volunteers working in refugee relief (03.11.2020). The stakeholders for the interviews were chosen to represent the different political levels of the federal system with their respective legislative competencies (see chapter 1), i.e. the federal level (1 person), the *Länder* level, in this case one of the administrative districts within the Federal State of Bavaria (1 person), and the local level, i.e. the rural districts and municipalities (5 persons). Applying purposive sampling, interview persons were selected based on their competence regarding the themes of the policy brief and comprised policy makers, public officers and representatives of professional associations as well as practitioners and organisations working on migration-related fields, social policies and territorial planning. Due to on-going travel restrictions as well as for preventive reasons in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted audio-visually using the conferencing tool Zoom (for a critical methodological reflection, see Nehls et al. 2015) or via telephone. After having received the interviewees' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded. Afterwards, they were transcribed verbatim and were analysed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

EDUCATION POLICIES

With regard to education policies, Germany always considered language acquisition core for integration. The newly established **complete programme language** with its modular concept is considered adequate and based on the needs of TCNs. However, stakeholders are aware that rural peculiarities have to be considered more consequently for planning of courses (WP3WP4DE001). These include the low number of potential participants associated to a low number of TCNs in the rural catchment areas of the course providers, resulting in difficulties to meet the minimum number of participants for different levels of learning. Besides, since courses are often located in central small towns or, in case of advanced courses, in metropolitan areas, long travel distances are reported as a further challenge (WP3WP4DE001, WP3WP4DE003, WP3WP4DE004). During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become also obvious that the internet infrastructure in certain rural areas was not sufficient enough to safeguard virtual learning (WP3WP4DE001). Apart from that, interviewees noticed a lacking availability of technical equipment and insufficient technical capacities among low-income households in general and TCN households in particular (WP3WP4DE001, WP3WP4DE002, WP3WP4DE004). In addition to the public language and integration courses provided by state authorities, volunteers offered and still offer **lay language courses** for those who are not eligible due to their legal status or aim at bridging the time until official courses start on-site (WP3WP4DE002, WP3WP4DE003). Nevertheless, rural district administrations foster **access to language and integration courses** for all TCNs irrespective of their origin or on a case-by-case decision (WP3WP4DE002, WP3WP4DE003, WP3WP4DE005), but face scarce availability of courses and places due to the fact that the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees does not foresee granting permissions to more language course providers (WP3WP4DE002).

For young people in particular, the rural district of OA and the city of Immenstadt offer **exterior school learning support** in the family and the education house of the Islamic cultural association. For employees, companies provide self- or third party-funded language courses. For apprentices, in particular, companies had the idea of a **language-learning app**, which was developed by the Association of Bavarian Chambers of Crafts to foster work-related language acquisition (WP3WP4DE004). Finally, the Bavarian State Ministry for Education and

Cultural Affairs (StMK) reimburses costs for **interpreters** used in the educational context, which is hardly known though (WP3WP4DE003).

The **Professional Qualifications Act** generally provides an easier and faster process for the recognition of foreign credentials (WP3WP4DE003; WP3WP4DE004). However, despite a tightening of the process, procedures are still extensive in duration and expensive (WP3WP4DE003). Only if salaries are below a certain threshold, a subsidy for the recognition process can be granted (WP3WP4DE004). While counselling in rural areas is hampered due to the fact that potential users are scarce (WP3WP4DE001), a better flow of information towards TCNs is seen as the approach to a solution (WP3WP4DE003).

MIGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT-RELATED POLICIES

Due to the fact that many national policies in this field were implemented only recently, experts considered it too early to conclusively evaluate implications. In addition, structural changes of the policies in rural areas may even be visible later due to structural constraints or traditional mindsets. However, the same interviewee admitted that the federal level only recently focused on rural specificities with regard to employment-related policy-making (WP3WP4DE001):

“For a long time, we looked at the fact if they arrived in East or West Germany, [...] because conditions were so much different there [in Dresden] than in the Ruhr area. [...] Therefore, our core focus was not on the conditions in the rural space.” (WP3WP4DE001)

The intention behind the **Western Balkan Regulation** was a political signal effect to reduce the number of asylum seekers from the countries of the Western Balkan and provide a legal alternative for immigration to Germany. However, when the programme was extended in 2020, labour market-related aspects were considered more crucial (WP3WP4DE001). Interviewees reported quite positive experiences with employees from these countries, especially in the hospitality industry and in the care sector in rural areas (WP3WP4DE001, WP3WP4DE003, WP3WP4DE005). Nevertheless, applicants still have to wait long to receive appointments or documents from the embassies, while the recruitment of non-qualified workers was made more difficult due to prior recognition processes that were implemented following a decision of the regional coordinator of the Federal Employment Agency (WP3WP4DE004).

Resulting from the huge demand for skilled labourers – not least in the health sector of rural regions, the **Skilled Labour Immigration Act** provides one of the most liberal immigration regulations for TCNs at the moment as compared to international standards (WP3WP4DE001). So far, however, the effect of this law is only marginal due to the COVID-19 pandemic (WP3WP4DE001, WP3WP4DE003, WP3WP4DE005):

“The COVID-19 pandemic has shot it to pieces for us, honestly spoken. We were prepared and, before it came into force on the 1st of March, we had an incredible number of enquiries. [...] But until now, we still have no case where a contract was concluded and someone actually entered the country.” (WP3WP4DE003_2).

Generally speaking, advantages are reported in terms of the accelerated procedures, the pre-audit of the working contract and the eased family reunification (WP3WP4DE004). To warrant “fair” migration that provides advantages for the sending countries as well as a long-term integration perspectives for TCNs and their families in (rural) Germany, **bilateral agreements** could complement the Skilled Immigration Act in the long run (WP3WP4DE001).

The other part of the Migration Package, i.e. the **Toleration for Education and Employment Act**, is evaluated positively so far (WP4WP4DE003, WP3WP4DE004). However, due to high obstacles especially for the Toleration for Employment, numbers of residence permits issued are considerably low (WP3WP4DE003). The Foreigners’ Office in one district, however, exhausts all possibilities to issue working permits for TCNs (WP3WP4DE002), reflecting the high demand for labour among employers before the COVID-19 pandemic (WP3WP4DE001). Moreover, it has a social effect in the society, since employment of immigrants goes along with increasing prestige among local population.

As part of the pre-existing **Asylum Seekers’ Benefits Act**, the rural districts offered “refugee integration measures”, i.e., low-paid, unskilled employment, for instance at the local builder’s yards (WP3WP4DE002, WP3WP4DE003). While it was subsumed that this measure fostered their access to the regular labour market in the past (WP3WP4DE002), today, it became less important due to the above mentioned eased regulations in terms of access to the labour market (WP3WP4DE003). Access to the labour market is also facilitated by the **Temporary Employment Act**. However, due to the temporal restriction of contract work to 18 months and the warranty of equal pay after 9 months, termination of contracts are reported for the industry – but not the crafts

sector (WP3WP4DE004). Terminations in turn resulted in bureaucratically elaborate registrations at the *Jobcenter* (WP3WP4DE003).

It was acknowledged that **migrant entrepreneurship** was not considered as a political priority so far (WP3WP4DE001). Yet, the Chamber of Crafts and MigraNet/IQ provide consultation for interested parties, while recognition processes of foreign credentials include an exception check regarding the obligation to hold a master craftsman's certificate (WP3WP4DE003, WP3WP4DE004).

For the specific group of refugees, finally, **welcome guides** (funded by the Federal Ministry of Economy and Energy, BMWi, as well as the economy) and **canvassers of vocational training for refugees** (funded by the Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Sport and Integration, StMI) are evaluated as valuable support and contact persons especially for small and medium-sized enterprises. In favour of existing regular structures, funding for the canvassers of vocational training for refugees, is not used anymore (WP3WP4DE004).

Nevertheless, **negative attitudes** among employers **to hire TCNs** are reported. These stem from different salary expectations in the context of vocational training (WP3WP4DE002) or prejudices against foreigners (WP3WP4DE001). Regarding the former, mediation was provided by the Chamber of Crafts, while for the latter, a rural district administration set a good example and explicitly addressed foreigners when advertising a vacancy (WP3WP4DE003). With regard to private enterprises, already existing funding opportunities for companies to hire TCNs as well as measures to foster intercultural competencies among the workforce should be strengthened in the future (WP3WP4DE001). Experiences from the *Länder* level, however, show that the demand for such courses is low (WP3WP4DE004).

SOCIETAL AND WELFARE-RELATED POLICIES

All five rural districts make use of the funds provided by the Bavarian state in terms of **refugee and integration counsellors** as well as **integration guides**. The funding regulations for counselling and integration (BIR) applying to both kind of posts facilitated TCN's access to relevant realms of integration. Integration guides, for instance, qualified **lay interpreters** among TCNs, whose services are organised and accounted for by Third Sector Organisations such as non-statutory welfare providers using the volunteering fixed rate (*Ehrenamtspauschale*) (WP3WP4DE002):

“For languages, such as Arabic or Tigrinya, we had the problem (in 2015) to get interpreters. From CITY IN AUSTRIA we couldn’t get them most of the times. From Munich it took a few weeks, until someone came, however, with the problem, we couldn’t wait this long. [...] Therefore, we qualified 24 people, especially in the languages spoken by refugees. [...] Back then, we could use funds of the coordinator of volunteers in the context of asylum, i.e. state funding. And in 2019, when we applied for it again, we took it from the budget of the integration guide.” (WP3WP4DE002)

Most recently, these lay interpreters prepared translations of the “general ruling” regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in the rural district and expressed gratitude by showing local inhabitants that they are willing to “give something back” (WP3WP4DE002). The integration guide in the same district cooperates with local Third Sector Organisations or draws on Euregio funds for civic engagement (WP3WP4DE002). While the two posts and the funding regulations are generally evaluated positively, it is criticised that after 2015 the state all of a sudden “found money for integration” and seemed to neglect already established structures such as Commissioners for integration or lay integration guides (WP3WP4DE003).

To safeguard a socially inclusive environment for TCNs in rural areas, it is considered necessary to **combat right-wing extremism and reduce prejudices against foreigners among the local population** in general (WP3WP4DE001) and among earlier arrived immigrants in particular (WP3WP4DE003). The Federal Government is aware that it cannot govern integration by means of regulations. Therefore, its focus instead is on information campaigns, the provision of counselling services and funds that aim at empowering migrant organisations to act on eye level and at reducing prejudices (WP3WP4DE001). Regarding the latter aspect, also the German Sport Association and the Soccer Association provide funds to foster intercultural opening in sports clubs (WP3WP4DE003). In one of the rural districts, for instance, the integration guide organised a 3-day workshop on assuming a firm attitude against right-wing extremism in association with the Bavarian Working Group of Volunteering Agencies (IAGFA Bayern e.V.) after volunteers and their fosterlings faced a billboard campaign and negative experiences in restaurants (WP3WP4DE002). In a second district, instead, intercultural opening was and is envisaged by means of English language courses for employees of the rural district administration and their nomination as ad-hoc interpreters as well as by letting the ones of the Foreigners’ Office attend the annual “naturalization events” of “their” clients (WP3WP4DE003). To reduce prejudices,

interactions between TCNs and local inhabitants are crucial. The prerequisite to act on eye-level is reflected in the example of migrant associations partaking in the annual festival of a small town:

“Many towns have their inter-cultural festivals. We take part in the city festival, we are part of SMALL TOWN, so to speak [...]. We don't want any extra sausage. And this has developed from a small market stall to a 'global village', where we now occupy a huge space. We have different stalls from different continents, offering food from their culture, and even have our own stage programme. [...] And that is where encounters really happen, and that is what's really great. The migrants can present their culture and the [...] Germans, who are world champions in travelling, can have the world trip on their doorstep.” (WP3WP4DE003_1)

HOUSING POLICIES

Rural districts aim at providing housing for asylum seekers in (small) decentralised accommodation instead of (big) communal accommodation as it is envisaged in the **Asylum Act**. They also tried and try to spread the accommodation over the district to as many municipalities as possible or at least to the most accessible ones to make use of vacancies or take pressure from the housing market (WP3WP4DE002, WP3WP4DE003, WP3WP4DE005). With regard to the **Residence Rule** for recognised refugees reliant on social welfare, the Foreigners' Office in one of the rural districts expounds it very liberal and exhausts all possibilities to avoid its imposition, allowing migrants to move away from the district or allowing them to at least choose a place of residence within the district (WP3WP4DE002).

Due to the vicinity to bigger cities such as Salzburg (in the case of MATILDE district BGL) or the touristic character of the region resulting in the presence of second homes and seasonal migration (in GAP and OA) as well as the overall structure of the rural housing markets, housing for recognised refugees and their families is scarce⁸. While recognised refugees were often allowed to continue to live in the flats provided for asylum

⁸ The access to the housing market for recognized refugees was eased partly during COVID-19 pandemic due to the impossibility of entry of seasonal migrants (WP3WP4DE003).

seekers (WP3WP4DE002, WP3WP4DE005), where they occupied places for newly assigned asylum seekers as a consequence, the rural districts of NEA and OA, used funding of the **emergency programme** to even construct 7 respectively 2 new apartments dedicated to recognised refugees (Bayerischer Landtag 2020). To foster refugees' access to housing, rural districts offer **courses for tenant qualification**⁹ (WP3WP4DE002, WP3WP4DE003). While the Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Sport and Integration (StMI) offers course materials, the integration guide in one of the districts organises and implements courses based on previous local experiences (WP3WP4DE002). In the meanwhile, the other district offered to provide this course to all foreigners – however, with a low demand until now (WP3WP4DE003). The same district also grants refugees holding a certificate to this course a priority access to apartments owned by the rural district's housing association (WP3WP4DE003). Apart from that, access to the housing market is fostered by means of **mediators**, i.e. volunteers, entrepreneurs and employees of the rural district administration (WP3WP4DE003; WP3WP4DE004).

MOBILITY POLICIES

To foster economic and societal inclusion of TCNs in rural areas, mobility is considered a core determinant (WP3WP4DE002, WP3WP4DE003, WP3WP4DE004). Due to the fact that mobility in the countryside is primarily car-mobility, difficulties arise as driving licenses of TCNs expire 6 months after entering Germany. Following the driving permit regulation (*Fahrerlaubnisverordnung*) they need to complete a driving test before getting renewed their license at the rural district administration (WP3WP4DE003). If the driving license is a prerequisite of a job offer, the *Jobcenter* is able to provide **subsidies for the acquisition of a driving licence and a car**. Additionally, companies allow TCNs to privately use **company cars** or provide them **bikes** (WP3WP4DE004). Apart from that, social **events are dispersed** to different municipalities of the district to reduce driving distances (WP3WP4DE003), while **volunteers provide lifts** using busses from a charitable organisation, drawing on **travel cost reimbursements** by Third Sector Organisations (WP3WP4DE002).

⁹ The course known as “Neusäss Concept” started off as a project of volunteers in the Bavarian town of Neusäss (rural district Augsburg). Later, the course materials developed were used all over Bavaria and even beyond.

In terms of mobility, one of the interviewees reported implications of the **Geographic Restrictions for Foreigners** (Asylum Act), which are applied to asylum seekers during their first months in Germany in the specific contexts of border regions. Asylum seekers, for instance, cannot legally make use of the shorter and better (public transport) connections via Salzburg in Austria to get from the southern to the northern part of the district – or vice versa.

5.4 CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION FOR SOCIAL POLICIES

EFFECT OF POLICY RELATED FACTORS ON MIGRANTS' IMPACT INTO THE GERMAN SOCIETY

Generally, the statutory social security system does not differentiate between Germans, EU-migrants and TCNs. However, the reception of basic security benefits for job seekers can be detrimental to the extension of a temporary residence permit (Müller et al. 2014). Recently, a variety of policies on federal, *Länder* and municipal level was implemented, which initially aimed at the integration of TCNs. Yet, in a broader understanding of integration, i.e., inclusion into the society and participation, those measures had an indirect effect on migrants' impact on the German society in general.

Positive effects can be concluded from the establishment of various new positions in the public administration and in Third Sector Organisations, such as refugee and integration counsellors or integration guides, who foster social integration of newcomers of refugee background but also aim at empowering them. The latter is reflected, for instance, when it comes to empowerment and knowledge transfer, e.g. in terms of establishing a pool of lay interpreters for recently arrived migrants. However, the positions are bound to the duration of the funding schemes and are thus only limited in time, despite the fact that integration is addressed as a continuous task. Unlimited positions drawing on budget funds are scarce and only affordable for richer districts. Funding bodies also often define target groups of integration measures narrowly, e.g. to forced migrants with a good prospect of staying, and neither fail to acknowledge the diversity of TCNs nor follow a whole-of-society approach (Papademetriou & Benton 2016). Rural districts and municipalities make use of the legal margin left and try to provide services to as many inhabitants as possible – irrespective of their legal status (Aumüller 2009). Accordingly, also EU migrants may benefit from certain measures such as counselling or language courses (BBSR 2018).

In the social realm, the importance of volunteers has to be highlighted, especially in small towns and villages. Despite general critics on the neoliberal outsourcing of social inclusion of immigrants to civil society, the

proliferation of volunteering activities, e.g. as refugee relief groups for this specific target group, contributed to the mobilisation of local communities. However, it is unclear how sustainable this development is. The fields of action of both civil society and local administration encompassed the access to housing and mobility as well as the establishment of meeting opportunities. The latter is crucial to diminish prejudices and becomes most effective once the wider local population can be involved, e.g. when immigrants are made visible during a local feast.

In terms of housing, recent immigration unravelled challenges associated to the specific structures of rural housing markets as well as discrimination processes in terms of access to housing. For the specific group of asylum seekers, decentralised accommodation, even in peripheral locations, was a common strategy to mobilise vacancies (residential buildings or hotels) or take pressure of the housing market, while courses for tenant qualification and rental mediators supported the acquisition of appropriate private accommodation (Weidinger & Kordel 2020). Specific policies to regulate relocation, i.e. the Residence Rule is mostly evaluated positively by stakeholders, since it offers a better predictability to plan and implement integration measures on-site and more easily warrants minimum amounts of participants, demanded, for instance, by language course providers (Kordel & Weidinger 2019, see also conclusion for economic policies). On the other hand, however, the Residence Rule is evaluated negatively as it leads to a reduced labour market integration and a limited access to the private housing market.

In terms of mobility, the issue of accessibility of certain infrastructures is commonly addressed as a core issue for social integration and participation of TCNs in rural areas. For those who cannot afford an own car, volunteers or neighbours provide lifts to overcome limited public transport. However, the reimbursement of travel costs is easier for volunteers than for TCNs attending language and integration courses, but is only sought occasionally by the further group. To obviate the need to travel, another important pillar represent decentralised consultation-hours of counselling services.

GOOD PRACTICES

Since 2015, **VIA – the Association for Intercultural Work in Bavaria** (*Verband für Interkulturelle Arbeit in Bayern e.V.*) hosts the project NIKO (*Netzwerk interkulturelle Öffnung Kommunen in Bayern*), which is an acronym for Network for intercultural opening of rural districts and municipalities in Bavaria, and is part of the

IQ Network Bavaria / MigraNet (see also Good Practice below). The project aims at fostering intercultural opening, welcoming and recognition culture as well as integration management especially in small and medium-sized towns and rural districts, drawing on information material, counselling, staff training, seminars and conferences for local practitioners. Regarding the latter, VIA organises annual Bavarian Integration Conferences for rural districts and municipalities, which bring together the most important stakeholders of the administrations involved in integration in the Free State of Bavaria.

The small town of Hofheim in the rural district of Haßberge in Northern Bavaria proactively engaged with the topic of refugees and nominated a Commissioner for Asylum even before the first allocations of asylum seekers in 2014. Together with the six other municipalities of the **intercommunal alliance Hofheimer Land** and the newly founded refugee relief group, they organised accommodation and addressed the specific needs of asylum seekers by means of providing lay language courses and lifts to courses, supporting recognised refugees to find appropriate housing, making use of an existing vacancy monitoring, or matching migrants' skills with the labour demand of local enterprises (BBSR 2017; Rhein 2017; Galera et al. 2018). In this respect, the so-called "asylum coordinator", who was hired in 2016 funded by the Office for Rural Development Lower Franconia (*ALE Unterfranken*), drew on successful measures of the rural development and reused them for asylum purposes, leading Galera et al. (2018) to term the Hofheimer Land as "exemplary integration laboratory for migrants" (ibid. 18). Later, the position of the asylum coordinator was redesigned to a "contact point for newcomers" that takes into account also EU-citizens. While so-called welcome centres or one-stop shops were previously established only in metropolitan areas, the Hofheimer Land provides a successful example in rural areas. Most recently, the programme "We and Here" (*Wir & Hier*) was launched, aiming to establish a welcome and staying culture and to foster intergenerational and intercultural participation. Accordingly, a de-migrantization is encouraged by applying a whole-of-society approach.

The **Integration Council Oberallgäu** (*Integrationsbeirat Oberallgäu e.V.*) with its 177 members is the "voice" for migrants' interests in the rural district. It aims at establishing and retaining good relationships between local inhabitants and individuals with a migration history, at supporting migrants in socially, culturally and educationally challenging situations, and at capacity building. Founded in 1979, its activities expanded from the small town of Sonthofen to the Southern and more recently also to the Northern part of the district (Allgäuer Zeitung 2020) as well as from foreigners to expatriates and Germans with a migration background (Landkreis

Oberallgäu 2020). As a result of the Integration Council's attempt, in 2001, the rural district administration created the position of a **Commissioner for Migration and Integration**, which was staffed with the chairwoman of the Integration Council. Together with a working group, the Commissioner launched an annual integration monitoring (since 2009), an annual naturalisation event and an integration conference (both since 2011) as well as an integration plan that defines the most important fields of action (2011, renewed in 2014). To provide respective offers for migrants, the implementation of the integration plan is underpinned by an integration fund. The field of action "employment", in particular, was brought forth further by means of the participation in the project "Arrived and now? Labour market integration of refugees" funded by the Bertelsmann Foundation and the IQ-Network (2016).

CONCLUSION FOR ECONOMIC POLICIES

EFFECT OF POLICY RELATED FACTORS ON MIGRANTS' IMPACT INTO THE GERMAN ECONOMY

In addition to the social perspective, immigration and integration of TCNs must also be seen from an economic perspective, where the maximisation of net gains is negotiated with the maintenance of distributive justice. In the course of the proliferation of a meritocratic element in German migration policy (Schammann 2018, 2019), it became obvious that labour and performance appear as new structural principles. Embedded in discourses around demographic change and labour shortage, an eased access to the labour market for most of the TCNs – including forced migrants – was recorded in the last couple of years (Thränhardt 2015; Grote 2018; Laubenthal 2019)¹⁰.

While a comprehensive evaluation of the Skilled Labour Immigration Act is too early, the Western Balkan Regulation instead is monitored positively. Yet, it became clear that waiting times in German embassies are still too long and the regulation itself is not based on a clear-cut policy that takes into account both needs of

¹⁰ Nevertheless, Germany maintained a deterrent-based approach to forced migrants and continued to increase restrictions to reduce the numbers of asylum seekers (Crage 2016).

Germany and the countries of origin. Despite processes were adapted, the recognition of foreign credentials is still considered too bureaucratic and expensive. The same is true for the introduced Toleration for Education and Employment Act, where legal obstacles prevent companies from hiring forced migrants, though positive effects are reported. Contract work is another important entry point for TCNs to the labour market. Due to the restriction of contract work to 18 months and the obligation to warrant equal pay after 9 months, contracts are often terminated then, preventing sustainability. Besides the regular system of active labour market policy (Social Act Second and Third Book, Tangermann & Grote 2018), there are a variety of measures to foster TCNs' access to the labour market. Economic policies, however, lack a specific focus on migrant entrepreneurship, despite the fact that one fourth of all new companies are founded by migrants (Metzger 2020). Due to the political structure of Germany with both federal and *Länder* level, disharmonised and inconsistent processes are observable (see also Přívvara & Rievajová 2019).

In terms of language courses, which serve the basis for further education and employment, the eased access to language courses is evaluated positively. External events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, however, unravelled inconsistencies in educational policies, for instance, with regard to rural specificities. (Infra)structural disadvantages, e.g. bad internet connection, lacking technical equipment of TCNs as well as lacking technical capabilities among TCNs, negatively affected the change to virtual courses and hampered their long-term language acquisition. Similar to social integration, however, mobility is a core issue for the educational and labour market integration of TCNs in rural areas. While reimbursement of travel costs was previously acknowledged for teachers, it is still a major issue for participants of such courses. To overcome limited public transport connections, especially in the beginning when TCNs do not have an own car, lifts are provided by volunteers as well as work mates, while companies may offer the use of a company car.

Positive effects can be concluded from the establishment of various new positions in the public administration, in chambers and in Third Sector Organisations, such as refugee and integration counsellors, welcome guides, canvassers of vocational training for refugees, job mentors or coordinators of educational offers for new immigrants, who foster economic (and social) integration of newcomers but also aim at empowering TCNs. The latter is reflected, for instance, when it comes to empowerment and knowledge transfer, e.g. in terms of establishing a pool of lay interpreters for recently arrived migrants. However, the positions are bound to the duration of the funding schemes and are thus only limited in time, despite the fact that integration is addressed

as a continuous task. Unlimited positions drawing on budget funds are scarce and only affordable for richer districts. Funding bodies also often define target groups of integration measures narrowly, e.g. to forced migrants with a good prospect of staying, and fail to acknowledge the diversity of migrants nor follow a whole-of-society approach (Papademetriou & Benton 2016). Rural districts and municipalities make use of the legal margin left and try to provide services to as many inhabitants as possible – irrespective of their legal status (Aumüller 2009). Accordingly, also EU migrants may benefit from certain measures (BBSR 2018).

GOOD PRACTICES

The **IQ (Integration through Qualification) Network Bavaria / MigraNet**, funded by the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and the European Social Fund (ESF) hosted at MATILDE local partner TAT, aims to improve the employment opportunities of people with a migration background. Therefore, firstly, MigraNet launched counselling centres to provide advice on the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad (see also figure 1). Secondly, job training schemes in the context of the Recognition Act is provided, e.g. bridge training in order to support the full recognition of foreign professional credentials. Thirdly, the IQ Network Bavaria develops intercultural competence of key labour market stakeholders and offers training and advice in *Jobcenters*, employment agencies, municipal administrations and small and medium sized enterprises. Fourthly, so-called “regional skilled workers networks – immigration” (*Regionale Fachkräftenetzwerke – Einwanderung*) connect relevant stakeholders and advice both companies and skilled workers. In cooperation with the Bavarian Association of Rural Districts (*Bayerischer Landkreistag*), the Bavarian Municipal Newspaper (*Bayerische Gemeindezeitung*) and the Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Sport and Integration (StMI) as well as interested municipalities and regional or local offices for economic development, MigraNet organises “Bavarian Skilled Workers Forums” (*Bayerische FachkräfteForen*). In most cases, the one-day event is implemented as a fair to make the variety of rural economies visible to potential employees in general and immigrants in particular. Apart from the four priority areas, the programme “company coach” (*Unternehmenscoach*) aims to support companies willing to recruit international employees, while the Xenex

programme provides advice for immigrants keen to setting up businesses and has a special emphasis on forced migrants.

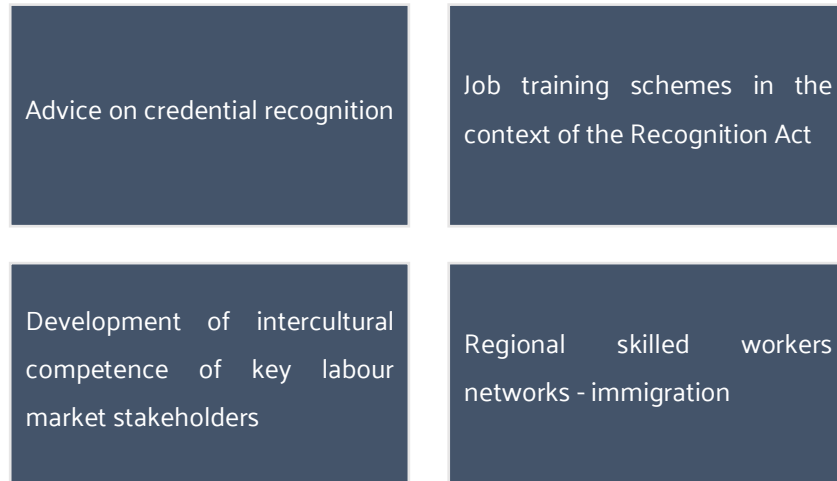


Figure 1: Priority areas in the IQ Network Bavaria

Good practices that aim at enhancing the economic participation of immigrants firstly address the preconditions for accessing the labour market, i.e., their educational attainment. In order to identify specific needs of immigrants¹¹ and match them with existing offers in the district as well as connect all relevant actors such as kindergartens, schools, educational providers, companies, municipalities, administrations, *Jobcenter*, associations and volunteers, the previously mentioned **coordinators for educational offers for newcomers** are key stakeholders in the Bavarian MATILDE districts (except for NEA). In the rural district of Regen, for instance, the coordinator who was hired in 2017 initially wrote an extensive report about the current educational situation drawing on statistical data gathered, established a pool of interpreters and cultural

¹¹ Initially targeting only immigrants of refugee background, the coordinators currently are able to follow a more holistic approach and take into account all (international) newcomers.

mediators and organised parent-teacher conferences for international parents. Lately, she took over the management of the local “working group school – economy” (*AK Schule – Wirtschaft*), which aims at strengthening the cooperation between schools and companies, and initiated and implemented cooperative projects with the districts of Rottal-Inn and Passau, e.g. a summer vacation school for children targeting German language acquisition and a series of workshops for pedagogic professionals that were held digitally due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To tackle the shortage of skilled nursing staff, the rural district of NEA recently decided to firstly create a network of relevant actors on nursing and elderly care and to secondly implement a new generalist vocational training at the district school for nursing profession. While the core aim of employers such as hospitals, rehab clinics, old-age homes and providers of mobile care is to recruit apprentices from the region, i.e. school-leavers and career jumpers, also international applicants like TCNs are taken into consideration. A newly hired **coordinator for care** supports the implementation of the training course, e.g. by means of assisting the recruitment and integration process. So far, she was involved in marketing efforts, the organisation of accelerated visa procedures, which were enacted in the course of the new Skilled Labour Immigration Act earlier in 2020, as well as the elaboration of an integration plan (Nordbayern.de 2020). In addition, she accompanies international migrants to visits to the authorities and fosters their housing search. With regard to the latter, she can draw on regional expertise, which the district administration gained after having to search for accommodation for asylum seekers and recognised refugees in the last couple of years.

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