

EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Austria

1 INTRODUCTION

Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.

Austria has no extensive tradition of citizens' initiatives to integrate immigrants. Integration support is primarily carried out by NGOs, humanitarian organisations, immigrant self-help organisations and religious communities. However, in times of large refugee flows, during the Bosnian war for example, regional initiatives emerged.

Long-established volunteer based integration projects such as "[Connecting People](#)" puts unaccompanied minors in contact with Austrian or migrant adults residing permanently in Austria. The project was initiated by [asylkoordination Austria](#) in 2001. Similar projects have been established in [Graz and Munich](#).

The association [Land der Menschen](#) (Land of the people) in Upper Austria, founded in 2000, is a confederation of twelve support organisations working for the promotion of a peaceful and respectful coexistence of natives and foreigners in Upper Austria.

The project "[Mentoring for Migrants](#)" (Mentoring für MigrantInnen) is another example. It was initiated by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO), together with the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) and the Labour Market Service (AMS) in 2008. It supports qualified persons with an immigrant background in entering the Austrian labour market. [See report](#)

3 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.

Considering current refugee movements to and especially through Austria, a number of initiatives by individuals, groups of persons and organisations have emerged. Many cooperate with major humanitarian organisations such as [Red Cross](#), [Workers' Samaritan Federation](#) and [Caritas](#). NGO [Volk](#), for example, helped organise the large-scale concert "[Voices for Refugees](#)", which was attended by 150,000 people at Vienna's Heldenplatz (Heroe square). [Vienna Refugee Hotline](#) attempts to coordinate those wanting to support refugees. Throughout Austria, a [Volunteer Portal](#) was launched by the Austrian Integration Fund.

In the summer of 2015, the "[Train of Hope](#)" initiative settled at Vienna's main train station. A variety of people, mainly students in the first phase, were engaged to organise assistance for refugees at Vienna Central Station. Later, a [Viennese Sikh community took over the kitchen](#) of the project.

Some, especially around the refugee camp Traiskirchen, were active in first hand support and collected donations in kind and cash. It is the case for the association [Happy.Thankyou.Moreplease – Flüchtlingshilfe aktiv](#). A variety of others integration initiatives were developed in a wide range of municipalities in Austria. Some of which were selected for the daily newspaper [Kurier's Integration friendly municipalities award](#).

4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.

Without volunteers, many refugees who passed through or settled in Austria would have lacked necessary services. Although, no official numbers are available, a significant amount were young people.

5 INNOVATION ASPECT

Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.

New initiatives supported refugees at the borders - in Nickelsdorf, Spielfeld, Salzburg, etc. -, in train stations - Vienna, Linz, Salzburg, etc. -) or in camps. They created also platforms allowing them to find accommodations. Independently, in new structure or in cooperation with professional organisations, the wave of volunteerism was innovative in its capacity of rapid reaction.

6 ADDED VALUE

Description of the added value of such initiatives (both long-established and new), including the uniqueness of their activities compared to the existing practices of the (1) state and (2) NGOs.

Thanks to the high number of volunteers involved, new initiatives were able to organise a variety of activities in different integration fields. The current integration work for refugees would not exist without them.

7 IMPACT

Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.

Although very impactful in the initial months, first signs of exhaustion are starting to be noticeable. Some initiatives are no longer operational and public support is limited to basic services, as no further integration steps are taken. Cooperation with authorities is also not always easy and sometimes characterised by mutual misunderstanding.