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## EMVI

# Empowering Migrant Voices on Integration and Inclusion Policies

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## WP2: National Reports



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## **EMVI - Empowering Migrant Voices on Integration and Inclusion Policies**

### **WP2: National Report Austria\* July 2022**

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## I. Participation and Integration Structures in Austria

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### 1 Statistics on Migration in Austria

#### 1.1 Foreign citizens and persons with migration background

1.5 million people (about 17,7%) living in Austria don't have the Austrian citizenship – out of which a quarter of million people are born in Austria. The largest groups of “foreigners” (1.1.2021) are from Germany (208.732), Romania (131.824), Serbia (121.990), Turkey (117.580), Bosnia (96.990), Hungary (91.395), Croatia (89.007), Poland (65.604), Syria (55.372), Slovakia (45.362) and Afghanistan (44.002) (Statistik Austria, 1.1.2021). About one quarter of the population (2.14 million) has a “migration background” (defined as both parents are born in a foreign country) – 40% of which are from EU and EFTA states, 26% from former Yugoslavia (without Croatia and Slovenia), 12,6% from Turkey, 6% from Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq (ibid., p 28).

#### 1.2 Recognized refugees, subsidiary protection holders and asylum seeking persons

*“Austria hosts around 146.000 refugees and subsidiary protection holders and over 18.000 asylum-seekers. Most refugees come from Syria (close to 58.000) and Afghanistan (around 41.000), which are also the top nationalities of asylum-seekers”* (UNHCR, no date). According to the Ministry of Interior Affairs (BMI 2021), 39.930 persons applied for asylum in the year 2021 - 25.270 male, 2.700 female and 11.960 under age (among those 5.605 unaccompanied minors); in 2020 only 14.775 persons applied for asylum. The most applications were done by Syrian, Afghan, Moroccan, Iraqi and Somali citizens (ibid.). In 2020, 8.069 persons were granted asylum. Out of those the largest groups are from Afghanistan (2.875), Syria (2.751), Iran (705), Somalia (566) and Iraq (246). Around 39% of all completed asylum procedures were legally positive, 46% of the decisions were negative. 15% of proceedings were discontinued. The average duration of the asylum process is 3,9 months (BFA 2020).

#### 1.3 Gender

Among all persons living but not born in Austria, 51,1% are female and 48,9% are male (1.1.2020). In 2019, one third of all asylum applications were submitted by women, whereas 47% of all positive asylum decisions in the same year were issued to women (ÖIF 2020), mainly from Afghanistan (1.800), Syria (1.200) and Somalia (470). More women (54,5%) than men were naturalized (ibid.). Interestingly, 45,4% of women with migration background have a high school or university degree, compared to 37,9% of women without migration background. 11,8% of women with non-Austrian citizenship were unemployed, whereas 6% of Austrian women did not have a formal, paid employment in 2019 (ibid.).

#### 1.4 Regional distribution

The proportion of the population with a migration background is quite different among the federal states. It is particularly low in Burgenland (13.4%), Carinthia (14.5%), Styria (15.3%, 187.058 persons) and Lower Austria (16.4%). In Upper Austria (20.0%), Tyrol (22.0%) and Salzburg (23.6%) there is only a slightly below-average proportion of persons with a migration background, while in Vorarlberg (26.6%, 104.529 persons) there are slightly more people with a migrant background than the national average. Vienna has by far the highest proportion of persons with migration background with 46.2% (866.647 persons) (Statistik Austria 2021).

A look at the citizenships: in Burgenland 9,6% do not have the Austrian citizenship, 10,6% in Lower Austria, 11,3% in Carinthia, 11,9% in Styria, 13,6% in Upper Austria, 16,7% in Tyrol, 18,2% in Salzburg, 18,6% in Vorarlberg and 31,5% in Vienna (ibid.).

### Graz

In 2021, out of 333.049 inhabitants, 77.411 people registered in Graz have a different citizenship than the Austrian one. Out of these, the 10 largest countries of origin are: Croatia (9.076), Romania (8.827), Bosnia and Herzegovina (7.160), Germany (7.068), Turkey (5.577), Hungary (3.494), Syria (3.121), Afghanistan (3.112), Slovenia (2.513) and Russia (2.325). 38.978 persons living in Graz are EU citizens and 38.433 are non-EU citizens (Graz 2022).

### Lustenau

Lustenau has a long history of immigration. Especially in the 20th century many people, so called “Gastarbeiter” came to the municipality to work in embroidery. In 2011, there were people from 60 different nations living in Lustenau (Heinzle and Scheffknecht 2011). In 2022, there are already people from 89 different nations living in Lustenau. The five biggest nations apart from Austrians are Turkey (1.459), Germany (890), Romania (502), Bosnia and Herzegovina (267), and Syria (240). Today (status of July 2022), Lustenau has in total 24.984 inhabitants. 5.884 people have a different citizenship than the Austrian one. 3.178 people are from non-EU states. Around 2.500 are from EU states (source: anonymized lists from the registration office of the municipality).

## 2 Main official Institutions & Stakeholders for Migrant Integration

The main political institution responsible for “integration” is the “**Federal Ministry for Women, Family, Integration and Media**”. The ministry is headed by the ÖVP (Austrian People’s Party), just like the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of European and International Affairs – the two other relevant ministries dealing with asylum and migration. The ministry has been under the critique to frame gender-based violence and patriarchal structures as problem that is imported or is only happening in migrant communities and at the same time using the narrative of the “dangerous foreign/Muslim man”, carrying out a restrictive migration/integration policy in the name of gender equality (e.g. Der Standard, 2020).

The **Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF)** is responsible for the integration courses and exams mentioned in the Integration Act (see below), provides funding for integration projects and publishes integration reports. It has close links to the Austrian People’s Party and is under the critique to fulfill the conservative restrictive agenda of the people’s party (compare Bridge 2020). Also under harsh critique by the civil society was/is the **Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services (BBU)**, which is responsible for the legal advice and representation of asylum seekers and refugees, return counselling, and human rights monitoring of deportations. Since 2021, the legal advice of persons in the asylum process has been taken away from independent NGOs and put in the hands of this nationalized agency, which sole shareholder is the Ministry of the Interior.

### Relevant NGOs in the sector integration and asylum are, but not limited to:

- Asylkoordination
- Caritas Österreich
- Diakonie Österreich
- Hilfswerk Österreich
- Integrationshaus
- Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz
- Ute Bock Haus
- Volkshilfe
- ZARA Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismusarbeit (publishing the annual racism report)

## 3 Main legal framework for the Regulation of Integration

### 3.1 The Integration Act

The „**Federal Act for the Integration of Persons without Austrian Nationality Legally Resident in Austria**“ builds the main legal framework for the “integration of persons entitled to asylum, persons holding subsidiary protection status and other third-country nationals legally settled in Austria. According to this Integration Act, „integration measures are intended to enable persons to participate in social, economic and cultural life in Austria” (RIS 2017) - *political* participation is not mentioned.

One main part in the Integration Act, is the so-called “integration agreement”, which legally settled TCNs have to sign and that regulates that German language courses and “value and orientation courses” are obligatory and an “integration exam” has to be taken (RIS 2017). Further, the Act regulates the establishment and functions of an “expert council for integration”, an “advisory committee on integration”, the “integration monitoring” and a “research coordination office”. The following key areas of integration are listed in the Integration Act: “participation through gainful work, access to and acceptance of education offers, equal treatment of the sexes, and the rapid achievement of the ability to earn one’s living”. Further, it is said that the receipt of the Austrian citizenship is the “final point of a comprehensive integration process” (ibid.).

### 3.2 The Citizenship Act

The “**Federal Act on the Austrian Citizenship**” is particularly relevant for the political participation of migrants. It is evaluated as one of the most restrictive in the European Union (MIPEX 2020). According to the law (RIS 1985/2022), the citizenship may only be granted to a “foreigner” if, the person has resided lawfully and *without interruption* in the country for *at least ten years*. Furthermore, the proof of a fixed and regular own income is required (currently, after deducting fixed costs, around 1.000 Euro for individuals, around 1.600 for families). Additional criteria are: no court convictions, no pending criminal proceedings, no serious administrative violations; knowledge of German and a test proving “basic knowledge of the democratic order and basic principles as well as history” (see integration exam), no close relationship to an extremist or terrorist group, no danger to public peace, order and security. Persons receiving the Austrian citizenship lose the previous citizenship(s). The legal process takes several months up to years, and costs several thousand Euros of fees. Only under certain conditions (e.g. marriage to an Austrian, born in Austria, sustainable personal integration, extraordinary achievements) the citizenship can be given already after six years of residence in Austria (ibid.).

An amendment of the citizenship law (October 2019 with adoptions in May 2022) regulates the **granting of the Austrian citizenship for victims of NS-persecution and their descendants** (BMEIA 2022). Therefore in 2021 and the first quartal of 2022, the highest numbers of naturalizations are persons from Israel, the US, and the UK. In previous years, the highest numbers were among persons with previous citizenships from Bosnia, Turkey, Serbia and Kosovo.

#### Other relevant laws are:

- Federal Act Concerning the Granting of Asylum
- Federal Act on Settlement and Residence in Austria
- Federal Constitutional Law (regulating suffrage)
- Federal law on the external legal relationships of Islamic Religious Societies

## 4 Main policies in the country dealing/responsible for migrant integration

### 4.1 The Government Program 2020-2024

The topic of migration is probably the most controversial within the Austrian government between the Austrian People's Party and the Green Party. Interestingly enough, therefore in the joint government program a so-called "escalation mechanism" is described, guaranteeing a "coalition free space" in the case of a new "migration crisis" on the basis of which the People's Party would be allowed to act without the agreement of the Green Party and search for another majority in the parliament (e.g. with the right-wing Freedom Party) (Republik Österreich 2020). The government program further states that the "Austrian integration policy continues to be guided by the principle of 'integration through performance' ("Integration durch Leistung") and the principle of 'support and demand' ("Fördern und Fordern")" (ibid.). Under the topic of asylum a "preventative detention" for persons that *could* be a danger to the public security was planned but then evaluated as not in line with the Austrian constitution by experts and the Minister of Justice (Green Party). Under the topic of integration, the prohibition of the headscarf under the age of 14, more controls of child care and educational institutions with Islamic background and an "obligation to cooperate" for parents in schools is elaborated (ibid.).

### 4.2 The National Action Plans on Integration and Racism

In the **NAP on Integration** measures to implement the Government Program and the agenda of the Ministry for Integration are formulated. It focuses on the areas language and education, work and profession, rule of law and values, health and social affairs, intercultural dialogue, sport and leisure as well as housing and the regional dimension of integration – political participation is not on the agenda. There is a certain focus on strengthening migrant women, particularly regarding education, German courses, labor market integration, health care and gender-based violence (BKA, no date). The development of a **National Action Plan against Racism** is also in the Government Program but until now not formulated.

#### **Graz**

The newest Integration Strategy of the municipality of Graz is from the years 2015-2022. Five pillars are mentioned: languages, rights and obligations, culture and values, interreligious dialogue and identification. It has to be mentioned that Graz has had a major from the People's Party from 2003 to 2021, forming a coalition with the Freedom Party since 2017. Since November 2021, Elke Kahr from the Communist Party is the major of Graz, building a coalition with the Green Party and the Social Democrats. Thus, the municipality is in a transitional period and is currently developing a new Integration Strategy. The focus lies on a positive narrative of integration/migration, affordable housing, work to live on and a livable city (Graz 2022\_1).

#### **Lustenau**

The municipality of Lustenau has worked out an integration concept in 2014 (Marktgemeinde Lustenau 2014). It is called "living together in Lustenau". The main fields are appreciating the cultural diversity, politics and administration, education and further training, health and wellbeing, living and neighborhood, children and young people. In every field the concept contains goals, good practices and ideas for the future. There is no focus on women in the integration plan, but one on young people and children – political participation is not mentioned (ibid.).

There is no written Anti-racist action plan in Lustenau, but networking meetings take place. There is a committee of experts for extremism prevention (school directors, a delegate of Vorarlberg who is responsible for protection against violence, employees from the municipality, and from security services), that gathers regularly. They discuss cases in schools or the security apparatus to find a common solution.

## 5 Inclusion of migrants in the design and implementation of integration policies on national, regional, local level

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX 2020) ranks Austria among the countries that promote only “temporary integration”, criticizing that Austria goes “only halfway towards granting immigrants with basic rights and equal opportunities”. Furthermore, it does “not provide immigrants with a secure future in the country. Policies [...] encourage the public to see immigrants as foreigners and not fully as equals and neighbors”. Austria’s access to nationality as well as migrants’ political participation is labeled as “unfavorable” (ibid.). It further states, that “Austria continues to experience unfavorable policies towards their political participation as they still have no voting rights, few local consultative bodies and weak support for immigrant organizations” (ibid.).

The restrictive naturalization law leads to the fact, that about 1,5 million people (about 17,7%) in Austria – out of which a quarter of million people *born* in Austria - have no citizenship and are therefore not allowed to vote. In the age group 27 to 44, the percentage is over 40 percent. These numbers are rising, as every fifth child born in Austria has a foreign citizenship. Statistics show that the strict naturalization law mainly affects workers<sup>1</sup> / low-income earners - and in this group especially women, who tend to work in lower-paid professions (Kücüktekin and Odošašić 2022). These numbers even raise concerns how representative the democracy in the country is. According to expert estimates, about a third of autochthonous Austrians could not afford the citizenship or would not meet the conditions that were mentioned above (ibid.).

### 5.1 Examples of Political Participation of Migrants

The current “**Black Voices**” referendum (**Anti-racism referendum**) is one way of and a call for more political participation of migrants. It calls for a National Action Plan against Racism and demands targeting structural racism in areas such as education, health care, police and the labor market. The referendum also asks for the “introduction of the right to vote and stand for election at all political levels, starting from a registered period of residence of five years in Austria” (Black Voices 2022).

**Alma Zadic** is for sure a role model for political participation of migrants, having been a refugee from Bosnia in the 1990s, she is now the Minister of Justice - the first minister in Austria with a migration background.

The **Migrants’ Advisory Council Graz** is a political representation of the interests of third country nationals in Graz (10% of the total population of Graz). The council consists of nine members (non-EU citizens) elected also by non-EU migrants living in Graz. Members are elected through a direct and secret ballot that takes place on the same day as the Municipal Council elections Graz and serve for the same legislative period of 5 years. The council members work on a voluntary basis and convene regularly. The Migrants’ Advisory Council (formerly Foreigner Advisory Council) was established in 1995 by a policy resolution of the Municipal Council of Graz (Migrants’ Advisory Council).

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. in Vienna about 60% of workers are not allowed to vote (Kücüktekin and Odošašić 2022)

The Migrants' Advisory Council has the following tasks:

- Preserve and protect the interests of migrants
- Advise the city council and the administration through suggestions, recommendations and opinions
- Promote a better cohabitation among all inhabitants of Graz
- Inform and advise the associations and communities about its activities
- Reporting on the state and well-being of immigrants in Graz
- Organizing seminars, events and workshops on such themes as culture, politics, education, social issues and sports
- Networking and cooperating with the Graz municipal authorities, institutions and NGOs (ibid.)

## 6 Main Migrant Organizations

### 6.1 Graz

Graz has around 50 migrant-led associations, many of which are very active and well-organized. The following is a selection of three organizations founded by people with migrant background that have become important institutions in Graz, and two rather young associations, whose founders also participated in focus group discussions for this research.

- **IKEMBA** - Low-threshold, community-based access to outreach work, counselling, information: [www.ikemba.at](http://www.ikemba.at), [www.facebook.com/VereinIkemba/](https://www.facebook.com/VereinIkemba/), [office@ikemba.at](mailto:office@ikemba.at): IKEMBA is an association for intercultural, conflict management, empowerment, migration accompaniment, education and work.
- **CHIALA Association** - Culture, Diversity, Development: [www.chiala.at](http://www.chiala.at), [www.facebook.com/ChialaGraz/](https://www.facebook.com/ChialaGraz/), [office@chiala.at](mailto:office@chiala.at): CHIALA offers counselling on social issues, housing, employment, family and legal counselling for migrants, creative & anti-racist workshops for schools, youth centers and adults, cultural work, annual Chiala Africa Festival in Graz, first African media library in Graz, African buffet & catering
- **JUKUS Association for the Promotion of Youth, Culture, Sport**: [www.jukus.at](http://www.jukus.at), [www.facebook.com/www.jukus.at/](https://www.facebook.com/www.jukus.at/), [ali@jukus.at](mailto:ali@jukus.at): JUKUS offers anti-racism, youth work, leisure pedagogy, a youth center, promotion of health literacy, art and culture and programs for the promotion of social participation.
- **Katib Farsi Library**: <https://de-de.facebook.com/KATIBFarsiBibliothek/>, [roohullah.borhani@gmail.com](mailto:roohullah.borhani@gmail.com): The first Persian-language library in Styria, offering German and English books about Afghanistan or by well-known Afghan writers.
- **Fivestones Association**: [www.fivestones.at](http://www.fivestones.at), <https://www.facebook.com/FIVESTONES.at/>, [fereydun.zahedi@gmx.at](mailto:fereydun.zahedi@gmx.at): The platform has set itself the task of supporting the integration of immigrants into Austrian/European society and of attaching great importance to qualitative communication with others. It organizes events, workshops and conferences, and functions as central institution of the Afghan diaspora in Austria.

## 6.2 Lustenau

In Lustenau there are mainly cultural and religious migrant organisations and a sport association.

In the municipality there are three different mosque associations:

- **ATIB Lustenau**, Tavernhofstraße 17a, <https://kum.atiblustenau.at/>, chairman: Hassan Tas
- **VIKZ Lustenau** (Lustenauer Bildungs- und Kulturverein), Flurstraße 30, chairman: Mustafa Aktepe
- **AIF Lustenau** (Süleymaniye-Moschee), Kneippstraße 6, chairman: Mücahit Balkaya

There are two cultural migrant organisations:

- **Kizilca & Lustenau**, Kultur- und Sportverein, Reichsstraße 42, chairman: Halil Ilgeç  
This culture association is named after a Turkish village. In Lustenau there live about 700 people who come from this village.
- **Habes Kultur und Unterstützungsverein**, Bahnhofstraße 44a, chairman: Coskun Medet

Furthermore, there is one sport association:

- **Bocciaclub Galeb Lustenau**, Mesnergut 10 a, 6850 Dornbirn  
This culture and sport association was founded in 1971 by people from former Yugoslavia (source: <http://www.boccia-verband.at/bc-galeb-lustenau/chronik/>).

All associations in Lustenau can be found here: <https://www.lustenau.at/de/freizeit/vereine>

All mosque associations in Vorarlberg can be found here: <https://www.okay-line.at/Informationen/moschee-und-alevitishe-cem-vereine-in-vorarlberg-kontaktaten/>

## II. Evaluation of the One-To-One Interviews

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### 1 General Information

In Austria 16 in-depth interviews were conducted from May to July 2022. Seven Interviews were conducted with migrants living in Graz and seven in Lustenau, Vorarlberg. Among the interviewed there are persons who have been living in Austria for a long time (around 30 years) and persons who have been living in Austria for only a short period of time (around 4 months). The country of origin differs, but all are third-country-nationals: one person is from New Zealand, three from Iraq, one from Nigeria, one from Libya, one from Sierra Leone, one from South America, one from Iran, two from Syria, two people with a Turkish background and one person with a Philippine background. The age range is from around 20-70 years. 9 male and 5 female persons were interviewed. Although the situation of the people, their personal history and their needs differ, common identified obstacles regarding political participation and demands in order to make the voices of migrants heard, could be found. In order to gain more information about the situation in Lustenau there were additionally conducted 2 interviews with stakeholders. One person is councilwoman and one person used to work for the department “living together” in the municipality of Lustenau.

In order to get a realistic picture of the political participation of people with migrant background in Lustenau, there are two main groups that have to be considered. As already mentioned in the desk research the municipality has a long history of migration. The people who came in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nowadays live here in second and third generation and of course many of them already have the Austrian citizenship, but still since they are the biggest group, they have to be considered. The other group are refugees and other TCN that came to Austria in the last 10 years.

## 1.1 Understanding of Integration

The Austrian Integration Act defines Integration as „a two-way process characterized by mutual appreciation and respect, with clear rules ensuring social cohesion and social peace“ (Bundeskanzleramt 2022). The understanding of Integration of migrants sometimes differs from the understanding of the native population and also from how integration is defined in a scientific way. *“Integration is the process during which a person gets to know the traditions of the place where they moved to and adapt to said traditions.”*, describes this young man how he sees integration (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022).

A young man from Libya stated that he feels personally integrated but physically not. He feels part of the society in Austria and he is able to communicate with it, but still there are a lot of things he is not allowed to do, but the native population is (e.g., to vote) (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022).

All the interviewed persons stated that especially language is one of the key factors for integration. Without speaking the language of the country where you live, it is hard to be a full member of the society. It is not only hard to interact with the local population, but you also cannot voice your demands, ideas and rights.

Integration is seen by the interviewees as an adapting and exchanging process in which they want to enter. *„Adapting does not mean you have to change yourself or where you came from. It’s the differences that make the place look so beautiful.”* (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022)

Measures like language classes or orientation classes are named as being helpful in the first month when arriving to a new country, but actual integration takes a lot longer (Iraqi man\_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). On this path of integration and adaptation to the new country a lot of challenges are met, not only language barriers but also discrimination and racism make the day-to-day life very hard, a young woman from Iraq points out. (Personal Interview, May 24, 2022). Discrimination is not only an issue in Austria, but also in the home countries, often being the reason why someone had to flee. *“I am used to discrimination, also in my home country, this is why I left my country.”* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022) The lack of empathy, the racism towards someone only because having a different skin color, not been taken seriously and threats of calling the police make the integration process hard for migrants. A refugee from Sierra Leone shares his experience about racial profiling: *“They put me in a car that is meant for criminals. But I was not a criminal, I was an asylum seeker, so I did not deserve to be in this car. [...] Asylum seekers and citizens should be treated the same way when it comes to being a suspect. Being in a cell, with no window, I was really scared. I did no crime that I deserved such a punishment.”* (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

To stay positive, stay engaged, go to German courses, seek for work and try to get in contact with the locals is hard but essential for the interviewed. A young man from Iraq highlights, that it is hard to be so involved and positive about circumstances you never wished for and to learn a new language you might have never been interested in (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Support is extremely important and mostly the support comes from civil society, friends and other engaged persons. *“I was very lucky, that so many people helped me, without them it would not have been possible to start my life here.”* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

Especially at the beginning migrants face a lot of challenges because they are not used the country and its society. This starts, as already mentioned, with languages but goes further, not knowing how to use

services, how to interact with authorities. This can lead to stress and depression (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

The lack of information is mentioned as one major challenge for migrants. Often, they are not fully informed about procedures, where to get support from or even if they receive money from whom it comes (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

## 2 Migrant Needs

### 2.1 Most important political needs for you/community/migrants

One of the main needs identified throughout the interviews is the need of information. Often it is not clear, where to get information about political participation, education or work possibilities from. The interviewees pointed out that often they do not know what kind of possibilities to participate politically exist. It is important to gain more knowledge about how politics and political engagement work in Austria. To know the rules and circumstances of Austrian Politics is crucial to them, in order to be active. *“Sometimes I wonder if some regulations and laws do not exist in Austria, or if I just simply do not know about them and do not know where to find this information.”* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). Also, in Lustenau the problem of lacking information regarding political participation was mentioned. *“I have been living here for 8 years, but I unfortunately do not have enough information about that.”* (woman with Philippine background, personal interview, June 7, 2022). She mentioned twice that she does not have enough information: one time when she was asked how she could politically participate and where, and once when she was asked which organizations could support her. A man with Turkish background (personal interview, June 4, 2022) also said, that *“the right for participation, the right for petitions, as well as the right to gather for example exist, but the people of his community are not informed about those things and about what they can do”*. Furthermore, he also mentioned, that the people are often not aware of the opportunities that are offered like for example language courses, tutoring or leisure time facilities.

The need to be heard as a Non-EU-Citizen is also mentioned several times. Not only do TCN often feel not informed, also if they raise their voices, they do not feel heard. (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022; Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

This is why gatherings as described by the Head of the Migrant Council Graz are very important. *“We meet up with migrant organizations in Graz to speak about current topics. This can be topics like the difficulties about Corona and homeschooling, especially because migrants often live in small flats. To provide this exchange about topics is very important.”* (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022) Topics raised in those meetings are brought to the city council by the Migrant Advisory Council, in order to represent the voice of TCNs.

Besides not being heard one person in Lustenau also mentioned that their success is not seen. A Syrian man points out (Personal Interview, June 14, 2022): *“We do not have a platform to talk, or to say something, the parties/the actual government does not give us the platform or the space to say something or to talk about us. There is no spotlight on the good things. Many refugees for example study at university or work as doctors or engineers but the spotlight is always on the negative things. If a refugee does something bad everybody writes about it and this is unfair”*. He also mentions his feeling about a lack of statistics showing the numbers of refugees attending university, working as doctors or engineers. He finds such data is only available for Germany and USA but not for Austria. The only data that is provided here is the number of arrivals and departures to the home country. *“There are many*

young people with a very good level of German and good work, but no one sees them. For the government this does not matter” (Syrian Man, personal Interview, June 14, 2022).

Culture and media, theater and music are important to give a space and a platform where being loud and demanding is tolerated. The two interviewed artists stated that art can be highly political and gives migrants a way to express themselves, because otherwise they are often not heard. (New Zealand man, personal interview, May 4, 2022; Iraqi man, personal Interview\_2, May 24, 2022)

Not being able to vote in any elections is seen as a discrimination and something that has to be changed. It is not clear to the interviewed persons why EU-citizens do have the right to vote in municipality elections but third-country-nationals do not. *“This is the painful thing, because government should be from the people for the people. This is what a democratic government is.”* (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022) Not having the same rights as other people living in the same city is hard to understand. *“Politics has been one of the greatest forms of joy. [...] I am not allowed to. It’s like I should keep mute but I love politics.”* (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022). Although they have been living here for a long time and they are not planning to go somewhere else, they are not allowed to vote: *“If I think after 8 years here, where will I be in 10 years, I think that I still will be here, my husband is here, my children are here, where should I go? In my opinion it is a pity, that we live here, but we are not allowed to vote here”* (woman with Philippine background, personal interview June 7, 2022). For people with a migrant background who already have the Austrian citizenship and therefore the right to vote it also does not seem right, that TCN are not allowed to vote: *“It would be great if they would get an opportunity to vote, they are also part of this country, they live here, they work here, they are people like we are, but are not allowed to vote, this really is a problem”* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022).

It could be seen that if someone does not plan to stay in Austria, also the right to vote does not seem so important. *“For me it is important to vote in my own country.”* (New Zealand man, May 4, 2022).

Two persons mentioned the problem, that even though they are married to a person with Austrian citizenship, they only get their visa for a short period: first for one year and later for three years. Every three years they have to apply for a new visa. In addition to that, the family allowance (Familienbeihilfe) is linked to their visa, which means that they do not get the money for some months until the authorities finished their process of approving the visa again (woman with Philippine background, personal interview, June 7, 2022; woman from Iran, personal interview, July 1, 2022). The woman from Iran also mentioned that the recognition of the validity of foreign driving licenses is quite difficult in Austria. In addition to that, it is difficult and takes quite a long time to get the Austrian citizenship. *“My children [who are born in Austria] are stateless, me and my wife have old Syrian passports which are expired and getting the Austrian citizenship is very difficult. We need B2 German level and 1000 € for the application.”* (Syrian man, personal interview, June 14, 2022). Before even thinking of citizenship, one must be legally in the country for at least 10 years.

Another difficulty that was mentioned is that *“the Austrian government does not give [the refugees] enough time to learn German before starting to work, and that is difficult. [...] I have got a degree in tourism, which means I have passed the A-levels and a 2-year long formation at an institute, and now I work in a packaging company. I do not have a problem with that. Work is Work, but I did not have enough time to work what I like and what I am good at. I have a lot of experience in tourism, also in the office and with the computer, but did not have enough time.”* (Syrian man, personal interview, June 14, 2022). Furthermore, he has the wish to get more support from the government, more German courses and possibilities to travel. The woman from Iran (Personal interview, July 1, 2022) mentioned that the German classes are quite expensive.

The main problems are seen in the fact that a lot of services are only accessible when having received a legal status in the country. While waiting for a positive asylum decision the rights of people are very limited. The restrictions regarding work, German classes or rights to travel make it hard for migrants to fully arrive and integrate into the society. Also, political participation is not really possible at this stage. The issue of long waiting times for a positive decision (up to several years) paralyzes the people. This quote of a young family father shows his frustration: *“During five years we were not allowed to work! We could not do anything! We were not even allowed to take part in official German classes. And now we cannot ask for an EU-residence title, because we have not worked. But we were not allowed to work!”* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

The wife of one interviewee (man with South American background, personal interview, June 7, 2022) supports voluntarily a family from Afghanistan that are seeking for asylum in Austria. He criticizes, that asylum seekers are often in the county for a long time - in this case 7 years - and not even allowed to work. For example there is a program from the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) where refugees from Ukraine are trained within 4 month to work in tourism. Such things are possible if there is a political will.

Another problem that was mentioned is racism, discrimination and a lack of chances. *“I cannot say that I have often seen that somebody tried to protect a person with migrant background”* (female community representative, June 9, 2022). She also states that the people often do not get enough chances because of wearing a headscarf or having a name that does not sound Austrian. *“If you send a job application to a company you often do not get a chance for a personal meeting, because of your name or your migrant background. That is a pity”*.

For migrant organizations providing infrastructure is one of the main political needs. In order to organize themselves, have meetings and plan activities, they need infrastructure like rooms, computers, printers etc. The frame to be a politically active has to be provided (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

It is especially important to include female voices when talking about political needs of migrants. Often men are visible and seen when raising demands, although women have a lot more to say and more concrete ideas when it comes to certain topics e.g., school, family, education (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

## 2.2 Most important fields of political life (e.g. right to vote/assemble)

Besides the right to vote, as mentioned in all the interviews also the receiving of information is raised as an important field of the political life. To know about political participation, what it means and why it is important, is crucial, mentions Eyawo Godswill, the head of the Migrant Council Graz (personal interview, July 4, 2022).

Associations which organize and cluster political demands and work in a community are fundamental for the participation of migrants in Graz. To be part of a migrant association in order to increase the power of the voice is seen as essential. How to find an association and what should be considered, in order to be successful is important and a need for migrants. To provide trainings and information regarding those topics can help migrant organizations to better organize themselves (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

Political principals like protection from discrimination, freedom of religion, opinion and expression as well as the right to assembly are all perceived as important. The right to speak up and voice demands and ideas is pointed out positively in Austria. Freedom of speech exists, as states a young woman from

Iraq, but often the stated demands are not heard. (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). The majority of participants in Lustenau highlighted freedom of opinion. The Syrian man expressed it this way: *“I can say everything, my own opinion about politics, political parties, the president”*. In comparison he also mentions at another point of the interview how the situation in his home country used to be *“we had only one political party. The party of the president- a radical one. This was dictatorship. In school before or after taking the A levels you had to enregister for Al-Baath Party, or you end up in prison. One party, no chance of thinking differently or expressing the own opinion.”* (syrian man, personal interview, June 14, 2022). Beside the freedom of opinion, the freedom of religion is very important for the man from Syria: *“For example I don’t have a religion. Here I can just say this. In Syria not everywhere”*. He also highlights the democracy in general, the protection of women and children, insurance, elections and schools.

### 2.3 Organizations/institutions/policies that promote political engagement

Civil society organisations play an important role when it comes to support for migrants and also the possibility to engage in a political way. Red Cross and Caritas are stated as institutions which help with questions, counselling or providing information about e.g., German classes (Libyan man, personal interview, May 12, 2022).

Political engagement is also found in work, regarding women empowerment and art. A young Iraqi woman points out that especially her engagement in different projects about women rights, languages classes for women and empowerment workshops held her quite busy. She was not only participating but also leading projects like those mentioned above. Engagement in such projects gave her motivation, led to new contacts and she felt as an active citizen (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). Often engagement like this is not merely seen as political engagement even though this work is highly political. The common understanding of political engagement seems to be firstly engagement in a political party.

Art associations also are fundamental when it comes to institutions which promote political engagement. A young artist from Iraq mentions the support he got from different art associations and civil society organization in order to establish his own shows and work as a self-employed artist. *“They really supported me. Thanks to Spektral, KAMA, Büro der Nachbarschaften or Mischmasch I got to know a lot of people and this is why I can do theater today.”* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

Throughout the interviews another organization called Megaphon was mentioned (a street magazine in Graz sold by migrants without official permit of residence/asylum seekers). The work for this magazine was seen as political participation since it gives the space to discuss and bring up ideas. This way it also gives hope to the sellers. *“The only organization we have is megaphone. These people have the information because they put it into the newspaper and then people will see this, and lawyers will see what is going on with these people and influence the policy makers.”* (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

In Lustenau, all interviewees said that they do not know institutions or organisations that promote political engagement. Most of them only know sports clubs or cultural and religious migrant associations, as well as Caritas and the municipality that helped the refugees a lot at the beginning but of course their focus is not on political engagement, even though participation in one of those organizations can also be political. The cultural and religious associations that were mentioned in the interviews, were already shortly described in the desk research. One more cultural association was mentioned in the interviews (man with South American background, personal interview, June 7, 2022) which is not only active in the municipality Lustenau, but throughout the federal province of Vorarlberg.

“Tierra Madura” is a sociocultural Latin-American initiative. They organise concerts, exhibitions, lectures, orientation help and have a radio program in Spanish that is called “La Hora Latina” every Wednesday evening from 8-9:30 in Radio Proton which is a free regional radio station in Vorarlberg.

### 3 Migrant’s readiness to politically participate/ engage

#### 3.1 Possibilities to participate politically for migrants now

Third-country nationals don’t have the right to vote in Austria. One fundamental human right is taken away from them, nevertheless are there ways how to participate politically nowadays.

Civic participation is important to a young Libyan man, in order to show concern for the society and to shape the society and city you live in. In Graz he sees various ways how to participate: be a member in a cultural association, participate in a protest/demonstration, volunteer etc. He points out that if activities are offered rather than people have to search for ways of participation, it is easier to participate e.g.: a radio workshop is offered to learn about activism and media (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022).

One possibility to make the voice heard is listed by a family from Iraq. They made good experiences by having direct contact with politicians in Graz. By taking an appointment and being able to raise concerns, questions and ask for help, they felt respected and heard by the politics. *“I have already talked a couple of times to politicians. I told them about our situation and the woman I talked to was committed to help us. But some people and some political parties do not want to hear us.”* (Iraqi man\_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

Events, local activities, community celebrations are seen as a possibility to engage with politicians. To have informal talks with them is pointed out as positive opportunity to participate (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). These events should bring politicians and people from different ethnic communities living in Graz together (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Social Media was also mentioned to be a platform where migrants can make their voices heard. (Iraqi man\_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022) Even though sometimes it is not clear who is really hearing the messages.

To be asked by politicians about own opinions and views is stated as something which would be great in the future. Often TCNs are not seen or heard as if they did not exist, states one woman from Iraq. (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). The children’s parliament in Graz is mentioned as a good practice example where people, without the right to vote (because they are too young) have the opportunity to formulate demands, ideas and raise concerns. *“Our son is part of the children’s parliament in Graz and there he speaks with politicians. There is no difference between people coming from Austria or not.”*, highlights a man from Iraq the fact that in the children’s parliament every child has the right to say something – regardless of being Austrian or not (Iraqi man\_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Participation in social projects was firstly not seen as political engagement by some interviewees, even though it is crucial and highly political. To be active in an association or in social projects is another possibility to be politically engaged for migrants. It can be even very important to them, since it is a way to raise their voice (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022). One interviewee in Lustenau for example participates in a women’s group where they for example prepared little presents and visited people in the retirement home who do not have any relatives to visit them. Furthermore, she gives tutoring sessions for children. Sometimes she also accompanies people from her community

to official authorities or social services or advises them where they could go (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022). Another interviewee is member of the parent's association at the school of his children (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022).

To participate through art in a political process is relevant to two of the interviewed, as they are artists and see in their art a way to express themselves. „*I write a lot of political texts. Theater is political. I write about my home country and also about Austria. Art and Theater are clearly a form of political participation.*” (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022) To play music, work at a radio station and try to make the unheard heard, is a way to participate for this young man from New Zealand (New Zealand man, May 4, 2022).

The Migrant Advisory Board in Graz is strongly arguing for the foundation of migrant associations. It is seen as fundamental that migrants organize themselves in associations so that their voices can be heard by politics. The more voices are gathered, the louder demands can be raised (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

Three interviewees of Lustenau do already have the Austrian citizenship linked with all its political rights. One of them is a member of the municipal council for a political party that is called “Heimat aller Kulturen (HAK)” (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022). One person is politically interested and participated for ATIB in the meetings with the municipality regarding the construction of the mosque, but he does not actively participate in a political party or take a function in the municipal council (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022). The third interviewee who already has the legal right describes his political activities this way, “*You think politically and if you think politically, you are already doing politics*” (man with South American background, personal interview, June 7, 2022). He also added that he is active in the culture initiative “Tierra Madura” and in the climate alliance “Klimabündnis Vorarlberg”, but not in a political party and he also does not want to do so.

All interviewees in Lustenau said that it would be good and helpful to have a Migrant Advisory Board in Lustenau. Three interviewees would like to participate if there would be founded a migrant advisory board. “*It would maybe feel a bit unfamiliar to me. At the beginning I would rather listen and then try step by step getting into it.*” (woman with Philippine background, June 7, 2022). She also added that it would be good to have a Migrant Advisory Board because this way she would get more information and learn a lot. Another interviewee (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022) states, “*it would be helpful, because then the people would immediately know where they should go [with their concerns]*”. The woman from Iran (July 1, 2022) says it would be easier if there would be an official Migrant Advisory Board because then there would be a direct link to the major. One person thinks it would be very helpful and she would wish to have something like that, but she expresses the concern that she cannot imagine that something like the Migrant Advisory Board gets funded under the current government (Female community representative, June 9, 2022).

### 3.2 E-Participation

„*To have an online portal to vote about how the city should look like would be great. Actually, it would be fair! If everyone could use it, that would be awesome!*” (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022) The statement of this young man from Iraq points out that participation in a city for everyone regardless the nationality is needed. He mentions the fact of living, working and paying taxes here but lacking opportunities to decide about the city he lives in. To have the possibility to raise ideas online could be a great opportunity for all citizens of a city (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

One concern about E-participation was raised regarding the accessibility for all people, such a platform needs to be multilingual and provide different languages spoken by the migrant communities (New Zealand man, May 4, 2022). Furthermore, the language must be easy to understand and the design has to be inviting and friendly. The user-ability should be guaranteed by a smooth procedure on the phone, as migrant communities are merely reached via phone. It could be a good tool, if it treats topics that are important to the users (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

In Lustenau five out of seven interviewees believe that a E-Participation Tool could be helpful. *“That would be for sure a good idea. Giving everybody the possibility to participate without excluding somebody, is very good”* (female community representative, personal interview, June 2022). One person was sceptic *“because the people have to use the internet and that is not so easy. Some people do not know enough about it”* (man with South American Background, June 7 ,2022). He added, *“you have to have certain abilities. At least you have to know reading and writing in German.”* Another interviewee is not sure if an online device would be helpful: *“I do not think that this helps. I would say that rather the personal contact helps. For example, to ask the people on the street at Saturday in front of the shopping mall. There you would for sure get more input”* (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022).

### 3.3 Wishes for possibilities to participate politically

In all the interviews the opinion was shared that also non-EU-citizens have a lot to say and want to share their point of view, but it feels as if their voices are not accepted, not allowed and not wanted. The wish to participate, to bring input and to contribute to the residing country is seen throughout the conversations. *“I would appreciate group discussions in meetings, because that way we can get the first-hand information and after all information is everything.”* (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022) Round tables with politicians could be a good idea in order to raise concerns, ideas and discuss them (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

Not only to participate in the election of the Migrant Advisory Board in Graz, but also to participate actively in the community is something Eyawo Godswill wants to promote. *“We want, that migrants are also active in their district, in their housing areas and show that they are interested.”* (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

All interviewees said that topic-oriented meetings and round tables would be helpful, *“because talking to each other is the best opportunity we have”* (woman with Philippine background, June 9, 2022). *“That would be a great idea to involve all members of the public. That they can also say something and get the feeling of being recognized. That immediately gives you a better feeling”* (female community representative, June 9 ,2022). One interviewee raises an important point by saying *“Yes for sure it would be helpful, if regular meetings take place and if they are also taken seriously. If there are meetings between people with migrant background and the major, they also must be taken seriously, otherwise it does not make sense”* (man with South American background, June, 2022). One interviewee (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022) raised in this context again the difficulty that information often does not reach migrant communities. He says it would be helpful but *“some things are already open for public, but as already mentioned the migrant communities do not know it”*.

## 4 Main obstacles for Migrants' participation/engagement

### 4.1 Main obstacles

The first challenge is of course the legal situation that was also mentioned again by talking about obstacles *"I find that it is important to give everybody the right to vote. This is the right of everybody"* (woman from Syria, personal interview, June 21, 2022). *"I do not understand why this is not permitted. Exchange of ideas is always good. In my opinion this is a pity, because most of them are born here or grew up here [or are living here for a long time] and only because they do not have the Austrian citizenship, they are not allowed to say something. That really is a pity. They work here and pay taxes here. There are many hard-working people who are achieving good things for Austria"* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022).

As main challenge the language barrier was listed by all the interviewed. The difficulty to communicate and to understand especially at the beginning of a stay in Austria was pointed out. To learn the German language is hard and takes a lot of time, but is essential to the interviewees. The lack of information of German courses and the lack of free German courses makes it even harder for migrants to engage politically (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). A man from Syria (personal interview, June 14, 2022) describes the same problem by saying, *"Yes, German is a problem, but it is not only a problem of the refugees, but also from the Austrian government"*. In Lustenau the language problem is even bigger, since they have a very strong dialect. *"In my opinion it is beautiful to talk the dialect but especially with people who are learning the language we should talk standard German. People in Germany and Vienna for example, are better in talking the standard German than people here [in Vorarlberg]"* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022).

*"People want to feel accepted. Having a different cultural background, a different language, a different skin tone, a different age... these aspects can create some sort of mental barrier"* (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022). Differences regarding the ethnic background or the ethnic minority someone belongs to are also seen as barriers to engagement. Often people with migrant background feel not accepted by Vorarlberg's society which is also an obstacle for political engagement for them. *"The narrow-mindedness of the people in Lustenau is an obstacle"* (man with Turkish background, June 4, 2022). Especially the Turkish community faces the problem, that many of them are born here, but still not fully accepted by the society. *"I don't have to adapt [to society here]. I am born here. My parents had to adapt, but I do not have to do so anymore. I don't have to apologize for being part of this society. I always feel resistance, that is very exhausting. We are always held accountable for being here."* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022). The man with South American background (personal interview, June 7, 2022) says *"I am here and I don't have to apologize every time I open my mouth like the Turkish community always does, this is not right, because they are here since many years and paying their taxes and still always have to say please let me in. That is absurd"*.

Also, traditions and not knowing the habitus (how to "usually behave in society") were mentioned as an obstacle for political engagement. Different cultural backgrounds sometimes are seen as barriers, as seen in this example: *"As in Libya, one is not allowed to make eye contact with older people (including your parents), as this is seen as a sign of disrespect."* (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022). Furthermore *"not knowing anybody"* was stated as an obstacle (woman with Philippine background, personal interview, June 7, 2022).

Integration policies also hinder the way to participate as they are often quite restrictive and demand a lot of effort of the migrants. Not only does work in order to gain a minimum wage take up a lot of the time, also missing child's care reinforces the hurdles to political participation. When time is simply

limited and concerns about nourishing the family are taking up the mental space, political participation seems to be a luxury for some, who can afford it (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). There are a lot of reasons why someone might have different things on their mind like work, housing, children, education, etc. Sometimes there is simply no time left for participation (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

Another barrier was mentioned regarding the fear of deportation. Being in a vulnerable position can inhibit someone to actively participate, because the fear of having to leave the country is too big (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

As Austria has strict laws regarding the naturalization process, it is not easy to be active as a politician, points this young man from Iraq out: *“I believe it is very hard to work as a politician when you are not born in Austria.”* (Iraqi man\_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

*“I like to speak up, also in a loud way. But it is not heard. The right channels don’t exist. Maybe this is the case because I am a foreigner. They don’t see me. Maybe I am not important to them.”*, shows a man his frustration about the invisibility of foreigners (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Furthermore, the lack of information is pointed out as an obstacle to participation. As already described before the interviewed migrants have the feeling that they are lacking information about participation possibilities and also about their rights. They do not know where to get information from and where to ask for engagement. This sometimes may be a question of lack of language skills but even more often the accessibility to information is not ensured. The information is here, but it is not accessible by migrants. *“In the intercultural field we have to take an extra step. It is not enough putting a piece of paper at an entrance of a building, to make it accessible to everyone. You might have to knock on doors and invite personally.”* This classical problem of information transmission is explained by the Head of the Migrant Council Graz, and he stresses the importance of oral communication in migrant communities (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022). A Man with Turkish background (personal interview, June 4, 2022) also describes the same problem, that his community is lacking information about possibilities to participate. He mentions this several times.

The demand of changing the laws to make it more accessible to migrants to learn German, work and engage politically is raised. The feeling of not getting all the information needed stays. Some of the interviewees are very active and engaged, they are showing a lot of effort and courage, the system would have probably failed them, but with own will they could surrender.

## 4.2 Demands for overcoming obstacles

Dissemination of information is seen as highly important, to be politically active. To know what is happening in politics, which decisions are taken and where to voice own opinions should be transparent. The interviewed migrants feel a lack of information, which hinders them to participate actively. Since language was listed as a main barrier, this information should be accessible in different languages.

*“I would need an organization which represents the opinions of people who are not allowed to vote. This organization should be invited the city council on a regular basis.”* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). (Note from the author: this man did not know about the existence of the Migrant Advisory Council in Graz) To get more attention is seen as fundamental. Associations which are lobbying for TCNs, civil society organizations which are working with refugees, human rights organizations focusing on rights of migrants etc. are important to make problems visible. In Lustenau, where no Migrant Advisory Board exists there is the need for a *“leading hand”* mentioned to overcome obstacles. He asks for *“a*

*board or organization which really gets into contact with the people and talks to them” (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022).*

Throughout the research the high expectations and positive opinions of the new city government in Graz were expressed. (Note from the author: coalition of communist and green party since December 2021) A lot of hope is set into this coalition in order to strengthen migrant’s rights. To transform Graz into an international hub with different festivals, projects, community-driven initiatives by different ethnic communities is one approach to more political participation. To share and interconnect for cultural projects and to mix up people from different ethnic backgrounds is the vision of this artist: *“I want to make projects with different people, coming from different countries. I want to end the stereotypes. Just because someone is black, this does not mean he sells the Megaphon [a street magazine in Graz]. We need to mix up Graz, to bring the different communities together. I feel like in different worlds, when going from one district to another one in the city.”* By doing more cultural activities together, by promoting diversity in the city, he thinks political engagement throughout the whole society could rise (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

In order to reach more migrants in Graz and inform them about possibilities of political engagement for the Migrant Council it would be useful to write and communicate more often with all the migrants living in Graz. Due to data protection this is only possible before elections in close cooperation with the city. But to have a wider visibility also by working with NGOs together could reduce the gap of migrants who are eligible to vote for the Council and the actual electoral turnout (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

One advice for overcoming obstacles is *“talking more helps a lot. Like this I got to know for example one local councilor and received information this way”* (woman with Philippine background, personal interview, June 7, 2022). As already mentioned, a lack of information in the communities about their rights and where to get information from was stated as a problem. *“For this reason, it would be good to have a Migrant Advisory Board which can enlighten people about their rights”* (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022).

Another interviewee (man with South American background, June 7, 2022) stresses that welcoming all people with migrant background regularly (every year or half year for example) as it was promised by the municipal government in a former integration project is very important. This way the people in the municipality are informed who is here. This could be a way of overcoming obstacles.

Acceptance would also be important to overcome obstacles. *“We now live in 2022 and everybody should broaden his mind and acknowledge us. We are part of Austria, nobody can deny that”* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022). She also says *“through exchange we can get to know other cultures. That is also important in the municipal politics. In order to get active and bring together cultures also in associations”*. This could be helpful against racism and discrimination problems.

### 4.3 Migrant Advisory Board in Graz

The Migrant Advisory Board in Graz is a consultative organ of the city politics. It is foreseen by law that cities in Styria who have more than 100.000 migrants living in the city should have a Migrant Advisory Council. In order to make it successful it though needs political will and political motivation, as the Head of the Council in Graz states: *“At the foundation of the Board the mayor at that time was extremely important.”* The support of the city of Graz is fundamental for the work, the financial support for the rooms, infrastructure, the two employees and the budget dedicated to the Board makes the work possible (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

As successes of the work of the Council Eyawo states the following: the greater visibility of migrants in the city, the installation of an Integration Council at the City Government, an Integration Office and a budget which is dedicated to Migrants' interests. Also, the foundation of NGOs like the Anti-Discrimination-Office is seen as a success of the Board. Improvements in the housing sector, as opening community housing to migrants is also seen as fruits of their work.

The Migrant Council comments on current issues and gives statements, always highlighting the importance of equality amongst humans. „*We are a mouthpiece for migrants. Migrant associations voice their demands and issues and we bring them to politics, since we have meetings with the mayor or the speaker for Integration.*” (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022)

Empowering the Council by giving it more budget and a higher stand in politics is one of the current topics it is working on. The councilors are working on a voluntary basis and only get a small compensation for the meetings.

The model would need elected councilors who are experienced in politics and who know well how politics work in Austria, but the reality often is different, as there is a lack of these people. Eyawo describes this as a structural problem of the Board.

Another main difficulty is the rather low voter turnout. The majority of the migrants does not vote or does not even know that they could vote at the election for the Migrant Advisory Board. To reach the migrants is described as difficult, since the Board can only communicate with and actually reach migrant associations. However, a lot of migrants are not part of an association. To have a greater visibility is one the goals of the Board. Steps towards this direction are always taken, as a new column in a local newspaper. (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022)

To be a powerful body politics have to take the Board seriously and involve them in decisions. “*The signals of the government in power are very positive. Now we can think big and do a lot of things*”, states Eaywo, but he acknowledges that progresses and power should be enshrined in law, and not the goodwill of the politicians. It is important that the Migrant Advisory Board has real power and that their demands are heard and put into practice. This is sometimes very hard, since politics do not represent migrants, who cannot even vote for them (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

One of the main concerns regarding the Migrant Advisory Board was its power. Since it is not a decisive body, but a consultation body most of the interviewees were quite skeptical about its possibilities to change something. Insecurities and doubts about the official status of the board also led to not voting. “*I got an invitation to vote, but in the end, I didn't go, because I thought they couldn't change anything anyways.*” (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

A lack of information is also to be stated here. Not everyone who is allowed to vote in the Migrant Advisory Board is aware of his/her right. The demand that information about the elections is officially and wide spread by the city of Graz is raised (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Nevertheless, it was stated that a consultation body like the Migrant Advisory Board could be a good instrument and should exist in other cities and countries as well. (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022) “*Some sort of civil council could be interesting, but not too often in order that people want to participate.*”, wishes this man from New Zealand. (New Zealand man, May 4, 2022)

### III. Evaluation of the Focus Group Discussions

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#### 1 General Information

In total three focus groups were conducted in June and July 2022 in Austria, two of them in Graz, Styria and one in Lustenau, Vorarlberg. The majority of the participants has a migrant background themselves and gender equality was given. Representatives of the Migrant Council Graz, heads of migrant associations, politicians and social workers were amongst the participants.

In Vorarlberg the focus group was a mixture of politicians or people that work for the municipality, politicians with migrant background and people with migrant background that are not allowed to vote. Since Vorarlberg is quite small the participants of the focus groups are also kept anonymously. There were three male and two female participants.

#### 2 Political Participation and Integration

##### 2.1 Understanding of political participation

*„Actually, everything you say is political, by only opening your mouth it starts to be political.“* (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022) The chair-woman of the Migrant Council Graz is giving a wide and open picture of political participation. In the focus groups the understanding of political participation was quite vast. *„You cannot do anything in an unpolitical way“*, stresses also Masomah Regl, the speaker for Integration at the City Council in Graz (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The participants agreed that political participation starts with small acts, small decisions to take and does include a lot more than active participation in e.g., demonstrations, protests or elections. Political participation is found in schools, community centers, art and discussions about needs and strategies.

In the focus group in Lustenau the participants concentrated on the importance of being allowed to vote rather than talking about political participation in general. Being allowed to vote is seen as motivation and enrichment (person from Switzerland living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). This man raises the question: *“Why should people who live here, who have Lustenau as their home town not be allowed to vote?”*. Another participant (local councilor in Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022) states that not giving people the right to vote leads to confusions, because it is often not linked with the habitual residence (e.g. Turkish people living in Austria since years are not allowed to participate and vote here but in Turkey, a country they only visit some weeks per year to make holidays there).

##### 2.2 Understanding of Integration

*“To organise yourself in a cultural community is totally normal. It gives you the feeling of belonging and of home. Something familiar in the midst of the strange. Security. To deduct from that, that you don’t want to integrate is malicious.”* (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022)

Integration is a concept widely discussed, always present in media and still so unclear in its practice. Often it is connoted negatively, but actually community and connection should be important is claimed in one of the focus groups (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022). The concept of giving and receiving is the base of integration. Mutual respect should be the ground (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022). For real integration same rights and same chances are needed. This means also participation, the right to vote. People should not be treated differently due to their nationality or their right to vote, stretches Ali Özbaş (focus group, June 8, 2022).

All agreed that for integration the language of the residing country is important. Only by knowing the language one can understand the system and actively participate in the community (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022). Therefore, it is extremely important to have a wide offer of German classes, being accessible to all people living in Austria not knowing the language yet. However, it should not hide other problems by only focusing on the language barrier. For integration a lot more is needed than just knowing the language (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022) However, it was seen throughout the research that if authorities or the service sector don't offer their services in different languages the same access for everyone is not guaranteed.

Institutionalized structures are often racist and unfair. It is important that everyone has the same rights and obligations. Often certain qualities are attributed to certain ethnic minorities, which are then applied to the whole group. However, it is important, that persons with a migrant background are not seen as a homogenous community, because they are not *"When talking about integration we need to free ourselves from structural racism. But how?"*, demands the Chair-woman of the Migrant Council Graz, by a change in the narrative of migration and a reframing when talking about those topics. Structural problems have to be taken care of; it is not possible that we only see certain communities represented in our daily lives (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

Integration is missing, claims the former Chair-man of the Migrant Council Graz, when certain schools only have children with native German language in a class and other schools not even one. This is especially problematic, because by segregation and clustering of minorities a real integration will never be possible. *"Integration has to start with the children, today multilingual children are very common, to me it seems that just politics is behind here."* (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022) Even though, it is important to show successful stories of people with migrant background, especially for children and teenagers it is important to not only show successful persons, but also show that not being at the top is ok. People should also be welcome without a top career here (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022).

According to Emina Kofrc the most important task regarding integration would be to see a human being with its interests and skills, not whether he/she is a migrant (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022). One participant (female local councilor of Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022) confirmed that integration for her is a *"two sided process"* and added that she does not like the termini *"integration or inclusion or worst case even assimilation"* because they suggest that *"here is the right thing and people have to adopt and subordinate to it and become like the people here"*. It is also criticized that the local community does not understand that it is not only upon the migrants to integrate but also upon them to broaden their horizon. She criticized that she often hears *"they have to integrate"*. She appeals to the majority population to understand that integration can only work if *"we first open our doors and are ready to let people in, only then we can expect people to walk through it towards us"*. Being allowed to vote would also have an effect *"on the feeling of belonging and promote the idea of integration"*. People have to be allowed to be part of the decision process and the society and able to participate in shaping this country in order to get the wish to give something back. Having the feeling of only being tolerated does not led to this wish (ibid).

Another participant (man from Syria living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022) mentions that the integration politics in Austria is *"sharp on Arabic refugees or Muslims"* and that he does not understand why. Even if someone wants to integrate, laws often hinders that process. If someone loses everything, he/she needs time to understand that and adapt. Integration needs time instead of facing the expectation of immediate integration with a lot of rules and directives. People need time and another form of integration. He also gives the example that although he has finished his B1 level in German and

is working, the ÖIF keeps calling and telling him that he should come to their office and register for German courses.

Education is seen as very important for integration, but not only for migrants but also for the majority population. One participant (community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022) states that he does not care whether it is called integration or inclusion but for him *“education is the key”*. Beside education upbringing is an important factor.

The participating community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background (focus group, July 5, 2022) raises the point that integration has nothing to do with religion. He gives the example that *“some people say if a woman does not talk German but does not wear a headscarf, she is integrated but it would be more important that the woman has studied, knows German and can actively participate”*. Furthermore, it is stressed that integration is a two-sided process and one example is mentioned: if the government does not allow teachers with headscarf, this means that female teachers wearing the headscarf have to decide between working or wearing the headscarf, although the decision to wear the headscarf is also a women’s right (man from Syria living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022).

The female local councilor of Lustenau (focus group, July 5, 2022) points out the urge of change, since the integration policy has not worked until now. There were always only migrants in the focus of the policy and she opts for a change.

### 2.3 Most important fields/rights of political life of migrants

The right to vote is in Austria linked with the citizenship. All people without the Austrian nationality are not allowed to vote and this number increases. Even if a person has lived for a long time (like for example 30 years) in Austria, the right to vote and participate politically in this way is taken away from him/her.

*“As long as migrants don’t have the right to vote, they are not important to politicians”*, points out Jakša Buljubašić and shows the problematic that in that way politics and laws are not made in the interest of migrants. (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022) This invisibility feels highly unsatisfying to the participants of the focus groups.

The right to vote is crucial, but still a high approach. Without low-threshold approaches the possibility of a low voter-turnover remains. The core mission of the Migrant Advisory Board in Graz is to make migrants visible in Graz. This means also the voter-turnover has to increase. Furthermore, the power of the Board has to be strengthened in the City Council. The demands and ideas have to be heard and taken into consideration. (Frösch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022) To bring the demands of migrants to politics is highly important, since it is only them who know what they need. The Migrant Advisory Board is a speaking organ for these migrants, who do not have the possibility to voice their opinion in other elections (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022).

*“In Vienna already one third of the population is not allowed to vote. Only seven members of the 183 members of the parliament in Austria have a migration background and of course all of them have been through the naturalization process a long time ago”*, points out Edith Glanzer, who has been actively lobbying for human rights for a long time. The problem is still seen in the gap between social milieus as high social capital still shows more initiatives against traffic e.g. (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022).

Important political fields for migrants don’t differ from what is needed by the native population. Housing, work, mobility, green spaces, parking spaces etc. – all those issues concern migrants as well as Austrians (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022).

Political engagement requires first of all time to be involved, if someone does not have the resources, he/she will not be active (Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022). The same statements could be found throughout the personal interviews as well. This approach claims though that political participation would come after basic needs like housing, education, food, family etc. However, this does not take into account that all of these topics are highly political. When looking at the housing or education sector migrants often suffer from racisms and inequalities or access is not given the same way to all inhabitants of a city. This makes those topics relevant also in a broader point of view.

*„Now is the time to really strengthen the Migrant Advisory Board in Graz. The legal framework should be strengthened and the actual idea of the Board should be put forward in order to be prepared if the wind changes again.“* (Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022)

### 3 Structure of Political Participation

#### 3.1 Organizations/institutions/policies that promote political engagement

In other cities in Styria, Austria (Kapfenberg, Leoben, Mürzzuschlag) a Migrant Advisory Board also existed, but these Boards failed. Migrants were interested and involved, but local politics were not supportive and interested enough to keep this organ alive. In Graz there was more pressure, more migrant communities who wanted to be visible and actively engaged (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022).

Other organizations promoting political engagement were not mentioned in the focus groups in Graz and Lustenau.

#### 3.2 Possibilities to participate politically for migrants now

Social and cultural capital play its part when it comes to political participation. Persons with a lower level of education often are not aware of their possibilities to participate. *“This can also be seen in the city. In some areas houses and streets are constructed without asking the residents. In other districts this would not work, because the residents complain, make a petition, talk to a district politician. People often do not know of the existing possibilities to raise their voice.“* (Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022)

The social background plays a significant role in the question whether someone is politically active. Amongst migrants and amongst Austrians there are some interested in being active citizens and others not. Whether someone is used to live in a democracy and voice their opinion may play a part in the understanding of being an active citizen (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022).

*“Without the Migrants Advisory Council there would not be any political participation at all.“* (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022)

As mentioned in the interviews as well personal discussion with politicians are seen as positive and important in order to empower migrants.

Art and cultural events also play a role and can serve as connecting hub and opportunity to meet and discuss with politicians or other interested active citizens. Linked with an intercultural program, events like those can also reinforce integration and exchange between communities (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022). The interviews showed the same findings, highlighting the importance of events and come-togethers in order to stimulate participation.

Informal groups on social media play an important role when exchanging help, demands, questions etc. *“The facebook group „Jugo-Gruppe-SOS-Graz has almost 15.000 members. You can find anything there: workers for construction work, help regarding child care etc. For me this helps to see the problems in the*

community. *Then I can meet up with the city councilor in charge and lobby for the interests.*”, claims the Chairwoman of the Migrant Advisory Board (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

In Lustenau there is no Migrant Advisory Board. For this reason, there is almost no legal way to participate for TCN unless they have the Austrian citizenship. There is one process regarding the construction of a mosque in Lustenau which could be perceived as somehow integrating migrant voices into politics. As already shortly mentioned in the interviews there were two meetings between the municipality and members of the mosque association ATIB. The interviewees that participated for ATIB did not describe the meetings in a negative way, but the participation female local councilor of Lustenau (focus group, July 5, 2022) criticizes that there was no real involvement of migrant’s wishes. ATIB rather presented the project and then tried to adopt it to the wishes of the municipal council to get a permission. This process is still going on. The community representative (focus group, July 5, 2022) mentioned that it was a pity that those people who were against the project did not openly say it and express what they expected to be changed. The female local councilor (focus group, July 5, 2022) also criticized this and added that there was no honest discussion, because instead of saying what they want to be changed, they said nothing and in the end they even claimed that ATIB did not adapt their plans at all which is not true.

### 3.3 Obstacles of political participation

One of the main obstacles defined is the priority of political participation. As already mentioned above to participate politically is often not important if other issues are taking the energy, resources and space. *“Someone who has been in the asylum process for six years might not have neither energy nor the mental capacity to engage politically. The question here is how to empower refugees.”* (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022) It is claimed throughout the focus groups that only if the personal existence is assured political engagement can happen (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022). It has to be clear to the people, why they should engage politically. Making visible how this engagement can lead to improvement in personal areas would be important (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022). If someone struggles to survive, is traumatized and the access to education, asylum and language is not given, the question whether to go voting or not might not even come to his/her mind (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022).

Another identified obstacle is the vulnerability of migrants. A person in a vulnerable situation might be afraid to raise the voice, denounce something publicly or get active in political art. If a political action could hinder the right of residence, have negative consequences on the personal situation or even play a negative role in the asylum or naturalization process, it is understandable that the wish to participate politically is low. If fear plays its part, the voices get quiet. *“Austria has one of the strictest naturalizations laws in Europe and we are seeing constant aggravations of the asylum right. Of course, those people are not politically active!”* (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The accessibility is mentioned as a further obstacle concerning participation. To reach migrants is easier if they are organized in associations. Around 20% of the migrants in Graz are organized, but 80% are hard to reach. (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022)

A certain tiredness of politics is also seen, no interest or motivation, since change is not expected to come (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022).

A different understanding of politics hinders the engagement as well. Information and explanations about the political situation and power of politics in Austria would be helpful in order to engage more migrants. The political knowledge has to be transmitted for those who want to participate (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022).

There is an inhibition to say something for people with migrant background. Both interviewees without the right to vote mentioned that: "I rather say nothing, otherwise they say what do you want" (man from Switzerland living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). This is highly interesting because he neither has a language nor a cultural barrier, but still does not dare to talk. "If I say something against it, they say go back to Syria" (man from Syria living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). He also shortly explains that in Syria it was forbidden to talk about politics and that he never was allowed to participate in free elections in 30 years. He took only part once in elections in Syria but this was not on a voluntary basis.

## 4 How could Political Participation work in the future?

### 4.1 E-Participation

E-Platforms can be a good tool, as long as they are easy to use, accessible and usage on phones is guaranteed. Posting, reading and writing might have a lower barrier to participation. It is easier than speaking up in a meeting or in front of a group (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022).

One concern was raised, that E-Participation should not be the only tool, since personal discussions and events are important. Only Online-Tools will not reach everyone or be suitable for every community (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022). Personal contact is needed and a lot more efficient in local contexts (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022). Especially complex subjects might not be able to be treated on an Online-Platform. Age differences were also mentioned and could play a role regarding the success of such a portal. For younger generations it might be easier to use, but for older generations it might be too complicated (person from Switzerland living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022).

The usability in different languages was mentioned as an important asset. In Lustenau also the concern that there could be a language barrier in using the tool was mentioned (female local councilor of Lustenau focus group, July 5, 2022).

Another thought raised was the follow-up of the issues raised on an E-Platform. *"The question is, what happens afterwards?"* (Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022) An efficient and trustable system, how to follow-up with the topics has to be ensured.

Additionally, it was mentioned that there would be needed a linking person who animates people to express their opinion in the E-participant tool, otherwise people might not participate because they believe that their opinion is not important enough (female local councilor of Lustenau focus group, July 5, 2022).

### 4.2 Wishes for possibilities to participate politically

*„The question is not about how can someone with a migrant background make oneself heard, but how can the Austrian institutions make sure that migrants are included? For political participation it should actually not matter where you come from.“* (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022) Glanzer underlines that also political parties should not ignore migrants and take their demands seriously.

To overcome the obstacle of lack of information about political participation, the organization of associations is proposed. Associations have a wider range of information, bring ideas, demands and people together. Therefore, their influence can be higher. In associations members can learn about political participation and information can be transmitted and spread to friends, family etc. (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022). To work with associations also has the advantage to recognize political or religious hardliners and talk with them, preventing that they go underground. The Migrant

Advisory Board then has an overview of their activities. Furthermore, it is easier to reach women groups inside those associations (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

To focus on community building activities like neighborhood initiatives, sports events, language exchange cafés etc. is seen as an important opportunity to connect, engage in discussions, raise awareness about political participation (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022; Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022; Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022). To connect persons between communities and promote intercultural, international organizations was seen as important. To organize beyond ethnic associations is fundamental for good cooperation and participation which goes further (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022).

Since there is no Migrant Advisory Board in Lustenau, there is a strong wish for it to be established as possibility to participate. There are many topics that affect all people living in Austria and the majority population is not aware of the needs of other communities with migrant background regarding those topics. Therefore, it would be very important to establish a migrant advisory board to have an official platform where those needs can be heard and taken into account by the politicians (female local councilor of Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022).

Another participant (community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022) states that the migrant advisory board could also be a good way for people with migrant background to get to know the municipality politics. From his own experience he knows that entering the community politics is very hard at the beginning. The first five years it was quite hard to keep up not even imagining to take part in the discussion, because there are many different resorts like sports, construction, and so on and you are not an expert in all these fields. It would also be important to have experts for the different topics in the Migrant Advisory Board. A teacher in school or kindergarten with Turkish or Syrian background could easily contribute to the education committee, because he/she is an expert in this field. Without this knowledge it is more difficult to follow.

Afterwards the legal form that the migrant advisory board should have in order to be successful was discussed. The female local councilor of Lustenau (focus group, July 5, 2022) states that if there was a Migrant Advisory Board founded in Lustenau there has to be a political resolution to ensure that it is taken seriously in consideration and accepted by politicians. She proposes that cornerstones would have to be determined that for certain decisions, like for example decisions of a certain financial volume, and certain topics the advisory board has to be consulted. She compared it to the environment committee or the “Gestaltungsbeirat” which means advisory council for design.

Additionally there was discussed that many people of the Turkish community have problems that can be solved without being a politician or councilor. For example, they want that somebody talks to the housing department. It would be helpful to have somebody working in the municipality who speaks their language, like an ombudsman. Some municipalities in Austria have something like that and in Germany as well. There it works even better (community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022). He says that he could quit his job if he would not need the money and help 8-10 hours per day people from his community with their problems. Another participant (female local councilor of Lustenau, focus group July 5, 2022) says that she knows a second politician with migrant background that even had to withdraw from politics, because there where so many things people thought she is responsible for, like for example letters they could not understand, that she could no longer combine her work as politician and her family situation. The idea to have speakers in the municipality that are accepted and trusted by the community and could be a connector between the politics and the administration, was raised.

Furthermore some ideas of forms of political processes that could facilitate the participation of all people were collected. One proposal was having workshops or innovation laboratories when it comes to designing something in the municipality. A second one was an idea box, where people could write anonymously, when they have a proposal (person from Switzerland living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). Others perceived it critical to have anonymous proposals, because they believe everything that is anonymous is not taken seriously (man from Syria living in Lustenau and a community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022).

There is a platform, which is called “tuoscht mit” in Lustenau which means “participate!” in the dialect of Lustenau. People can send their problems or proposal over the platform to the municipality and then they are distributed to the responsible person in the municipality (female local councilor of Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). According to the desk research some workshops and innovations labs already took place in Lustenau in the past.

## 5 Role of authorities, consultative bodies and CSO

### 5.1 Possibilities of authorities regarding increase of political participation of migrants

The possibility to work in the municipality should be opened to third country nationals. *“I am very optimistic that there will be some positive changes in the coming years.”* (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022) There is a need for sensibilization and awareness raising amongst public institutions, the city authorities and the service sector (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022).

To work against racial profiling and to stop and prevent racism should be one of the main concerns of authorities. Especially women wearing a headscarf suffer from racism (98% of racist incidents are reported by Muslim women) (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The service sector and authorities are lacking interpretation for non-German speakers. In Austria there is no recognition for linguistic diversity. Stefanie Stadlober demands sensibilization concerning this topic and linguistic support in public institutions (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022).

Another possibility for local authorities to include migrants more in a participation process is to reinforce the cooperation between the Migrant Advisory Board in Graz and district offices and district councilors (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022). Especially migrants not having experience with this political process would need the help of the Board in order to be politically involved in their district. A system should be invented, which empowers the Board to help citizens, invite them, organize meeting etc. (Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022).

### 5.2 Migrant Advisory Board in Graz

The Migrant Advisory Board in Graz was founded in order to give third country nationals the opportunity to vote for a political councilor who represents their ideas. Since they are not allowed to vote in Austria, the Migrant Advisory Board is an organ which represents migrants in the city of Graz. This consultative body has the power to bring collected demands into municipality politics, nevertheless is the power limited (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022). *„Our work is not easy, we are only a consultative body and do not have real political power. We can advise as much as we want, it won't help if nobody listens.”* (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022) It is important that the Board is given power and taken seriously, if not the voters will not see the reason of going to an election (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022). Clear communication about our possibilities, about what is in the power of the Board and what not towards the electorate is therefore important (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022; Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022).

The strategy of the newly elected Board is to demand more budget, work on visibility, to have an international team, be a connecting hub, to strengthen the relationships between communities and associations and to make a review of existing associations after Corona. Content which is treated is concerning all inhabitants of Graz: cost of energy, child care, housing, how to deal with war etc. (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

One of the weaknesses of the Board is its dependence on politics. Only if there is political will, the Board can work well (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022). *„Is it the right way to make special institutions for persons with a migrant background? Will it than not always be good will? “*, critics Edith Glanzer the low power of the Board and the dependence on politics. This strong dependence should be ended, in order to strengthen it. A lot of the success of the Board also depends on the engagement of the elected councilors and their degree of involvement and participation (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The Advisory Council is seen as tool which is fair enough, but only because nothing better exists. It is felt as unfair, that community elections are not accessible for migrants. *“Some have therefore also not voted for the Advisory Boards – as form of protest. But more information about its work and power has to be distributed.”* (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022)

The vote-turnover at the last election was with 4,5% quite low. One explanation is that the power of the Board was suppressed the last years. Migrants have not seen successes, because the political will was missing (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022). There is a lot of hope regarding the coming years, since the political parties in power have changed.

To raise more awareness about the Migrant Advisory Board the idea, to distribute leaflets before municipal elections was raised. Every information stand of a political party could hand out those leaflets to people, who are not allowed to vote (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The difficulty of reaching all migrants is a problem for the Board. Due to data protection, it can only reach migrants who are organized in associations (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022). However, a lot of migrants are not organized in associations and the question remains how to reach and involve them (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022).

*„Actually, we do not need the Migrant Advisory Board, we just need the right to vote in municipality elections – active and passive voting rights.”* (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022)

## 6 Gender Aspect of Political Participation

This aspect generally is a huge topic in politics. In Austria only 5% of all majors are female. One reason probably is because the working hours as politician are not very family friendly. Another problem are prejudices. The female local councilor in Lustenau (focus group, July 5, 2022) gives an example: from women it is rather expected that they are familiar with topics like education but not with building houses for example. There are very rigid prejudices, against which women have to fight but they are often not ready to do so. Not having enough women in politics is generally a huge problem, which should be tackled (ibid.).

The importance of role models was mentioned twice during the discussions. Once when it comes to gender aspects and a second time regarding people with migrant background in politics. It is stated that the number of female politicians and politicians with migrant background has to increase in Austria (community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022).

The local councilor in Lustenau observed decreasing numbers of women wearing a headscarf nowadays comparing to a couple of years ago. She raised the question if women were pushed from society to take

off their headscarf, because this is often wrongly associated with a low standard of education and German language. For this reason role models of women wearing a headscarf in politics would be important (female local councilor in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). She added that she hopes to have such role models in the Migrant Advisory Board, once it is established in Lustenau.

## 7 Legal framework, integration policies

A strong inequality is seen in the treatment of refugees from different countries. Not only is the perception of the society, influenced by media, differently when it comes to migrants from different countries, but also the legal framework differs between e.g., refugees from Afghanistan or Ukraine. Although both communities fled from war, they are received and treated in a different way, which is seen as highly problematic and unfair. Everyone should have the right to education, regardless the asylum status (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022). Throughout the focus groups as well as the interviews this problematic was mentioned several times. *“This whole debate about the naturalization process and voting rights is extremely frustrating. We have had this discussion for several decencies already.”* (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022)

In all the focus groups the missing right to vote was discussed and criticized. The right to vote is linked to the feeling of belonging. If people are not allowed, they will always feel like second-class persons. People feel in many things not addressed (female local councilor in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022) She gives the example that teachers often complain that parents with migrant background do not assist parent- teacher conferences and says *“I believe this comes, because no political concessions are made, so that they can fully participate in decisions, and be part of the society, but are always somehow excluded, maybe even consciously.”* Another participant (local councilor in Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022) concludes *“I can understand if people are not allowed in the first year after coming to Austria, but after maximum three years everybody should be allowed to vote at least in the municipal elections”.*

*“What does the native population think regarding voting rights for migrants? This should also be part of the public discussion. We need to sensitize the locals concerning this issue.”* (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022) The missing voting right is seen as a discrimination. The goal should be to have voting rights on community level (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022). *“It’s time, that working people, who pay taxes are allowed to vote. It is a scandal! This I wanted to change in my work at the Migrant Advisory Board – but of course without success.”* (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022) This statement well summarizes the whole debate about the Migrant Advisory Board, which is a good tool, but only because the real tool does not work. The actual solution to have voting rights also for TCNs seems to be impossible to install, even though in other countries this right already exists. *“If we take the last opportunity to participate from people, what remains? If we take the voice of people away who are brave enough to say something, what remains? We have to ensure a least this type of participation.”* (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022)

In contrast to TCN, EU citizens are allowed to vote in the municipal elections. But this can also lead to confusion as this man shows with an example: His wife has a Turkish background and the German citizenship and he has the Austrian citizenship, his son therefore the German and the Austrian citizenship. His wife is allowed to vote in Germany if there are parliamentary elections and in Austria if there are elections in the municipality. This is only one example how confusing it can be. This man clearly states that it would be better if people were allowed to vote where they live and not elsewhere. Additionally, he sees a missed opportunity of Austria and the EU of not granting voting rights to people with migrant background here, when the Turkish President Erdogan allowed Turkish persons living abroad to vote in Turkey.

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## Interviews

### **Graz:**

Personal Interview (2022, May 4) with a man from New Zealand.

Personal Interview (2022, May 12) with a man from Lybia.

Personal interview (2022, May 17) with a man from Sierra Leone.

Personal Interview (2022, May 24) with a man from Iraq.

Personal Interview\_2 (2022, May 24) with a man from Iraq.

Personal Interview (2022, May 24) with a woman from Iraq.

Personal Interview (2022, July 4) with Eyawo, Godswill Head of Migrant Council Graz.

### **Lustenau:**

Personal Interview (2022, June 4) with a man with Turkish background.

Personal Interview (2022, June 7) with a woman with Philippine background.

Personal Interview (2022, June 7) with a man with South American background.

Personal Interview (2022, June 9) with a female community representative  
(Gemeindevertretungsmittglied) with Turkish background.

Personal Interview (2022, June 14) with a man from Syria.

Personal Interview (2022, June 21) with a woman from Syria.

Personal Interview (2022, July 1) with a woman from Iran.

## Focus Groups

### **Graz:**

Focus Group (2022, June 2) with Irina Karamarković (Chairwoman Migrants Council Graz, Artist, Activist for Human Rights and Labour Rights for Musicians), Jakša Buljubašić (Singer, Former Chairman Migrants Council Graz), Stefanie Stadlober (Member of Association “gemma! GEMEINSAM MACHEN“ – migrant association focus civic participation), Edith Glanzer (former managing director of „Zebra“ – counselling for migrants, now: Head of the Office of Green Party at municipal level), Masomah Regl (interpreter; Speaker for Integration in the Council for Integration, City Government of Graz; founder of the migrant association “Five Stones”).

Focus Group (2022, June 8) with Roohullah Borhani (Head of Kardib Farsi Library), Emina Kofrc (head of Counselling Office at „Zebra“, social worker), Ali Özbaş (Head of association „JUKUS“), Christopher Fröch (Speaker for Health in the Council for Health & Integration, City Government of Graz).

### **Lustenau:**

Focus Group (2022, July 5) with one female local councilor (Gemeinderätin) of Lustenau, one male community representative (Gemeindevertretungsmitglied) of Lustenau with Turkish background, one refugee from Syria living in Lustenau, one person from Switzerland living in Lustenau, one female employee of the office Zusammen.Leben (living together) in Lustenau.