Chapter 5. Block 2. Time and space: Keys for migrants and host communities to live together

Objective 4. Design integration policies that take time into account throughout migrants’ lifetimes and status evolution

Use integrated approaches from Moment Zero/Day One

The Vienna Social Welfare Fund and the Municipal Department for Integration and Diversity (MA 17) jointly created the operative system of “integration from Day 1” and very close co-operation started on this matter. It aims to help newcomers settle in Vienna as quickly as possible. Important pillars are language learning from the beginning and the access to “Start Wien”. Start Wien functions on a one-stop-shop principle and serves different kinds of migrant and refugee groups that want to settle in the city. As soon as new asylum seekers, refugees and migrants register at the Municipal Department (Immigration and Citizenship), they are offered individual counselling by employees of MA 17 in 25 languages. This first consultation clarifies the migrant’s concrete information needs. The following “Start Coaching” is split up into several modules (e.g. labour market, education, housing, healthcare, human rights, legislation and society) and after attending an introduction event, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are given vouchers for language courses (for EU citizens worth EUR 150, for third-country nationals EUR 300, as they are subject to the Integration Agreement). Originally implemented for third-country nationals as of 2008, the need to broaden the measure to include newcomers from the European Union was soon realised, and accomplished in 2011 (Reeger and Enengel, 2016). As of 2015, Start Coaching Vienna is also specifically offered to asylum seekers upon arrival in Vienna. MA 17 and FSW jointly developed “Start Wien Refugees”. Many network partners are active in this measure: MA 17 and MA 35, FSW, WAFF, AMS, Social Partners, the Vienna Business Agency, Interface, and the Counselling Centre for Migrants.

From 2016 onwards, the process was intensified together with the Public Employment Service (AMS, which has been a longstanding partner engaging in this field). An important outcome of the co-operation is the competence check (see Chapter 3), including educational coaching and positioning based on skills assessment aiming for integration into the national education system. (AWZ, n.d. Version 3). Further, the education database, which gathers information on individual education and qualification profiles, in German classes for example, includes validation processes of migrants’ and refugees’ competences. The common goal of MA 17, FSW and AMS Vienna is continuous integration without system discontinuities. Accordingly the city has adapted the aspect of timing into their integration concept realising that the time during asylum procedures can be used for educational assessment and other measures. This goes beyond the approach of the national level (BMEIA), where integration measures are implemented at a later stage for asylum seekers, mostly once asylum has been granted.
Consult with migrant communities and actors with longstanding experience in integration issues

According to the representatives of the city of Vienna (OECD questionnaire, 2017), there are no institutionalised measures for the involvement of migrants in local decision-making processes or as to other aspects of their participation in the city’s public and political life. Vienna does not have a permanent co-ordination platform with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and migrant associations discussing strategic integration questions. The Vienna Integration Conference was abolished in 2009. Despite the lack of institutionalised dialogue, local integration vision and initiatives are developed in consultation with relevant groups as it has been the case for the Start Wien project. As mentioned in Objective 5 below, continuous dialogue is ensured through the meetings that MA 17 holds at the district or city level covering specific topics. Through this practice MA17 communicates and co-operates with more than 400 migrant associations.

As to voting, naturalised migrants have voting rights at all levels of representation (district council, city council); EU citizens can only vote on the district level; and third-country nationals do not have any voting rights at all. In the view of municipal officers, limited voting rights can lead to reduced feelings of integration, which can be widespread in some districts with a high share of migrants.

Objective 5. Create spaces where the interaction brings migrant and native communities closer

Already in 2005/06 the city conducted a large study stressing the importance of creating functional public spaces to foster integration. It highlighted that public spaces could become indicators for accomplishing social integration and influence urban planning (Stadt Wien, 2006).

Encourage bottom up initiatives that fosters integration and participation

On top of city’s awareness of the importance of public spaces, several other measures have been put in place to foster proximity between different groups in the city and sustain civic engagement.

One important tool for ensuring proximity at the level of districts and neighbourhoods are the regular meetings with civil society organisations, including migrant organisations held in the local offices of MA 17 (OECD questionnaire, 2017). These meetings focus on specific topics and mainly aim at an exchange of views and ideas. Furthermore, all residents have the right to address petitions to the City Council on any issue. These petitions have to be discussed in the respective working groups of the City Council.

The project Migra-Bil, co-ordinated by MA 17, provides representatives of associations as well as individuals with a migrant background with the opportunity to acquire basic knowledge in the areas of voluntary work, event organisation and intercultural communication. Participation is free of charge (Stadt Wien, n.d.).

The Vienna Charter was a unique initiative in Europe (OECD questionnaire, 2017). It provides the framework for good neighbourly relations by actively promoting dialogue between citizens and building solidarity. It is a written agreement between people who live in Vienna, an agreement they have reached mutually and out of their own conviction. The city of Vienna merely facilitated the process in which people could express their views on how good neighbourly relations should function and what they would do to
contribute to them. It was not about what politicians or the city administration should do, but rather about what each individual could do to improve the way people live together in their city. The Viennese themselves chose the topics for the charter and actively participated in its development. They were able to participate both on and off line. Based on the input provided, an advisory committee identified what the charter should address (OECD, n.d.).

In total, 651 charter talks were held in all districts of Vienna in 2012 and at nearly every kind of venue imaginable (in pubs, offices, schools, private flats, parks, and public swimming pools). Some 8 500 people participated, investing a total of 12 700 hours into discussing good neighbourly living. The participants represented a true cross-section of Vienna’s population: children, young people, senior citizens, blue and white-collar workers, entrepreneurs, persons not in employment as well as people with different mother tongues and countries of origin, people with special needs, people with different religious beliefs, world views and political opinions, and people with different sexual orientations.

Although there had been doubts during the planning phase and at the beginning of the process as to whether it would even be possible to create a single text from the many, possibly diverging opinions, the results were very surprising. The vast majority of the contributions and wishes overlapped strongly in several key issues, so that the main contents and core elements of the text were very clear. They were assembled into the “Vienna Charter”, which was presented to the public as the result of the process in a press conference in November 2012.

**Communication with citizens on integration issues takes place at neighbourhood level**

Communication with the native population about immigration is also part of the city’s approach to integration. Three lines of measures are currently applied (OECD questionnaire, 2017):

- **Neighbourhood offices – intercultural work on site**: The teams of the three field offices of MA 17 provide services on site for all Viennese. They promote good neighbourly relations in the districts and in the city. They are contact points for all questions, ideas and suggestions regarding good relations in the neighbourhood and how to improve them.

- **Information talks in the districts**: In light of the increased number of migrants and the recent influx of refugees into the country, many people have concerns about how this will affect their lives in the city. The city tries to address fear and questions by giving information talks about migration and integration in district offices of the MA 17. The teams of the local offices of MA 17 are available to discuss all questions regarding this topic with the people in the districts.

- **Voluntary conflict workers**: This measure aims to promote conflict management in case of neighbour disputes that can sometimes be linked to cultural awareness issues and poor communication. It has been operated for many years. Skilled conflict workers support neighbours in finding solutions to their conflicts. Voluntary conflict workers are a free service in addition to the mediation services of the neighbourhood service “Wohnpartner” for municipal social housing. The service is also available for people who live in private housing.
During the peak in inflows of refugees, the city of Vienna tried to reassure its citizens by quickly housing asylum seekers in federal reception centres, and organised public events in these sites. MA 17 supported the messaging around managing asylum seekers inflows around a positive approach to preventing a feeling of insecurity.

Another initiative worth mentioning in this context is Asylum Coordination Austria (Asylkoordination Österreich), a large platform of NGOs dealing with migrants and asylum seekers and their situation in Austria. Established in 1991, its main tasks and goals are to inform and sensitise the public to the problems and needs of migrants and refugees, organising workshops, discussion and to publish on these matters (see www.asyl.at). Furthermore, meetings with partner NGOs aim at an exchange of experience, organising seminars and training courses. They also seek to give advice to policy makers and are embedded in European networks.

Key observations: Block 2

- Vienna places considerable importance on starting integration from Day 1, meaning the day of arrival. The city’s one-stop-shop support structure “Start Wien”, which includes language courses and targeted counselling, is a good example facilitating an early integration process that is adapted to the needs of different migrant groups.
- The city is very active in opening consultative channels and spaces for interaction between native and migrant communities. Neighbourhood offices of MA 17 regularly consult with over 400 civil society and migrant organisations having long-standing integration experiences.
- The city is engaged in offering information to all citizens on policies related to migrant integration, for instance the MA 17 field offices organise information talks in the districts. During the peak of refugee arrivals of asylum seekers the city organised public events in federal reception centres to reassure its citizens.
- Further, the city facilitated the creation of the “Vienna Charter”, a document that defines a framework for good neighbourhood relations. This document was developed through a unique participative process open to everyone, and involving 8 500 participants.
- Institutionalised entry points for migrant participation in policy-making processes at the local level are still lacking.
- Despite the city awareness of the importance of public spaces for fostering integration this study didn’t collect significant evidence of public spaces attractive for different groups where they can meet and develop common interests (Barcelona could provide some interesting practices), or encouraging bottom-up initiatives for creating spaces that foster integration (Paris could provide some interesting practices in this sense).

Notes

1. Start Wien mainly aims to provide basic information about aspects like education, health, and accommodation, as well as cultural aspects of values and living together.
Please cite this chapter as:


DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304147-10-en