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**The impact of the “refugee crisis” of 2015: Policy responses and stakeholder practices in Austria**

In comparison to other countries across the EU, Austria has been a major receiving country during the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015, with about 88,000 asylum seekers entering the country in that year alone. Despite its long tradition as a de facto immigration country, starting from labor migration during the ‘guest-worker’ era of the 1960s through forced migration from formerly communist countries to the pronounced EU-internal migration following Austria’s EU accession in 1995, the new immigration situation is far from everyday politics. Generally characterized as a restrictive immigration policy state, Austria nonetheless shows high admission rates due to the asylum related character of the latest migration dynamics. The admission and integration of refugees but also of other groups of migrants has become a highly politicized topic that has already resulted in a series of migration and integration policy reforms.

Departing from this latest phase of migration to Austria, we seek to understand the current developments regarding two types of policies that both aim at normalizing a situation previously perceived as challenging – namely immigration and integration policies. Our aim is twofold. Firstly, we are going to describe governance trends on the federal level regarding access to territory, the asylum procedure, legal statuses and civic integration programs, as well as on the provincial level concerning reception, social aid, and integration initiatives. Secondly, we will analyze how in contrast to these formal rules important stakeholders have been managing the lasting migratory dynamics and how they assess the new situation.

In our approach, we think of governance as a process entailing specific conceptualizations of what a problem and a respective solution is. Accordingly, actors active on different levels and in different fields (state and non-state actors) may hold different values and ideas. Not only on the level of the EU but also in Austria, the migration-related events of 2015 brought to the fore differing and competing perceptions and interests of various actors, leading to potentially inconsistent/incoherent policy outcomes. In this vein, we seek to address the following research questions: What are important reforms on the federal level and what are the similarities and differences in the governance responses on the sub-national level? How do the policy frameworks provided by the national und sub-national level enable or constrain important stakeholders in their everyday business?

The paper will be based on preliminary results from the H2020 project RESPOND “Multilevel Governance of Mass Migration in Europe and Beyond”. In methodological terms, we will draw from (1) an in-depth analysis of the legal and policy framework of migration and asylum in Austria and (2) a sample of qualitatively based semi-structured interviews and a focus group with key informants and stakeholders including state and non-state-actors active on the national and on the federal provincial level. The interviews will be conducted in two Austrian provinces, namely Vienna and Upper Austria, and analyzed by means of qualitative content analysis. This methodological strategy will allow us to capture both formal policy responses as found in texts and the approaches that can be found in the actual practices of involved stakeholders.