

SOCIOECONOMIC AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF KOSOVAR IMMIGRANTS IN AUSTRIA

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, immigration rates have increased on a global level. They have also increased in Austria, where a considerable number of immigrants are of Kosovar origin. This paper investigates the degree of their socioeconomic and cultural integration into Austrian society. The main thesis of the research was that the systemic integration of Kosovar immigrants, including participation in the labor market, housing situation, is relatively high and will be better than their social integration, such as interactions with Austrians, inclusion in social activities and associations. Specific hypotheses were developed: (1) that system integration will be higher than social integration; (2) that people with the following characteristics: (2a) differences by gender, (2b) immigrants with higher education, (2c) family situation (married immigrants with children), (2d) immigrants with a strong attachment to the religion of their native country who mostly have conservative social attitudes, will have greater difficulty integrating into Austrian society, (2e) place of living - people living in larger cities, will be better integrated, and (3) immigrants from Kosovo will be quite satisfied with their life in Austria. Two sets of empirical data are used to test these hypotheses. One was a socio-demographic description of all Kosovars living in Austria using data from official statistics. The other source is our empirical study conducted in Austria during the period

August–October 2018. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 150 Kosovar immigrants aged over 15 years. The findings confirm the aforementioned hypotheses. They also show that the immigrants from Kosovo are quite satisfied with their situation in Austria; surprisingly, as much as two-thirds seem to be fully integrated in systemic terms..

Key words: *immigrants, integration, Kosovar, hosting society, Austria.*

Introduction: The problem

Kosovo, a former autonomous province of Yugoslavia, is a small and rather poor country at the Southern Balkan region with about 1.8 million people (2018). It is inhabited by a large majority (90%) of ethnic Albanians, mostly Muslims (Schmitt 2018). Kosovo was hit strongly by the dissolution of state-socialist Yugoslavia since several large-scale factories were closed down, leading to high levels of unemployment. It was hit even more by the civil war which broke out in the late 1990s when Albanian Kosovars, aiming at political independence, were violently attacked by the Serb army, encouraged by nationalist Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic. After US- and UN-interventions, a ceasefire was agreed and in 2008 Kosovo declared its independence which is recognized by most, but not all states around the world (Dzihic & Kramer 2005). Over these years, a great number of Kosovars fled or emigrated; today, over 400,000 live in other countries. Until the 1970s, most of them immigrated to the neighbor Balkan countries of Serbia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had a higher level of industrialization than Kosovo. Since Kosovo was economically less developed and had a large potential labor force, migration to these countries was beneficial in terms of providing many Kosovars temporary employment, improving their families' welfare (Gollopenni, 2016). From the beginning of the 1970s onwards, Kosovar citizens began migrating to Austria and other European destinations, as guest employees or seasonal workers. The poor social, economic and political conditions of Kosovo increased emigration rates over the years; the situation remains much the same even today. Many Kosovar citizens emigrated to north and west Europe and beyond in pursuit of employment, education, political asylum, improvement of living conditions and reunification with their families, to the extent that one third of the Kosovar population now lives abroad (SOK, 2011). Seen from a historical perspective, this is nothing new. The whole Balkan, and the areas settled by Albanians in particular, has seen continuous patterns of emigration over the centuries for reasons of work, ethnic tensions and wars (Schmitt 2018). The countries to which most Kosovars recently emigrated include Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Italy. In the last decade, the Kosovar migration rate even to the USA has risen.

The high rate of global migration has increased the need for interdisciplinary research and discussion of the problem of integration of immigrants into their host societies. In 2015, there were 244 million international migrants in the world (3.3% of the world's population); this was a rise of 155 million since the year 2000 when they accounted for 2.8% of the world's population (UN DESA, 2015; IOM, 2018). Many of the destination countries, including Austria, have developed policies and programs to aid the faster integration of immigrants, offering courses for learning the language of the host country and professional courses for employment. Several EU countries, such as Sweden, have adopted immigrant employment policies that do not make integration dependent on the need to learn Swedish. Conversely, Austria, Germany and Switzerland do require immigrants to learn the language of the host country. However, immigration as a process is quite complex and takes considerable time; much of this depends on the policies of the countries on the one side, and on the social characteristics of the immigrants who are accepted by these countries on the other. For example, Kosovar immigrants of the 1970s were mostly manual workers who took over jobs requiring few qualifications but hard physical labor and often extended working hours. Many had immigrated without their families but took care of them financially back in Kosovo; immigration was considered as temporary. Hence, for this category of immigrants, integration into the host society was more difficult than it was for those who later migrated with their families and had a higher level of education.

Kosovar immigration changed during the 1990s, and especially after 2000, and this has had a positive effect on integration. With immigrants now bringing their families with them, contact with host society members, such as neighbors and the children of host families through schools, kindergartens, and social and family events, has become easier. Indeed, family immigration has had a transformational impact on many aspects of immigrants' lives, including the change from temporary to permanent citizens of the host society, from manual to professional workers, from employees to employers and from poor to better conditions.

Socio-demographic characteristics of Kosovar immigrants in Austria

The socio-demographic characteristics of immigrants have a special importance for the host country. In the case of EU countries, including Austria, immigration has for decades had a positive impact in terms of compensating for gaps in their labor force. However, as a result of the high levels of immigration, sociocultural differences between immigrants and the citizens of the host society, as well as prejudices and stereotypes, came into play. In recent decades, public opinion and politics in Austria has to some degree changed from the earlier view of Austria as "an immigration country against its will" (Fassmann & Münz, 1995) to one that needs immigration and clearly profits from it (Haller & Verwiebe 2016; Haller 2019).

By 2011, 21,371 Kosovar citizens had immigrated to Austria (SOK, 2014), while according to Austrian Statistics, 25,025 Kosovar citizens currently live

in Austria (Statistic Austria, 2017). This number would be even higher if all Kosovar immigrants had registered their nationality as ‘Albanians from Kosovo’. Until 1999, Kosovar immigrants to Austria were registered as having ‘Yugoslav’ citizenship. This impossibility to register Kosovar immigrants under their own ethnic/national identity makes it hard to calculate their actual number living in Austria. Furthermore, a considerable number of Kosovars who subsequently took Austrian citizenship gave up their Kosovar citizenship. The most accurate data on Kosovar immigrants and asylum seekers can be found from 2008 onwards, i.e. after Kosovo was declared independent. From 2008 until 2016, 9,060 Kosovars sought asylum in Austria. On January 1, 2019, 25,549 Kosovars were living in Austria (Statistic Austria, Bevölkerung am 1.1.2018). The Austrian provinces in which most Kosovar immigrants reside include Vienna (6,708 immigrants), Upper Austria (6,785 immigrants), Lower Austria (4,002 immigrants) and Styria (3,625 immigrants) (Statistic Austria, 2017). At the start of the 1990s, many young Kosovars immigrated to Austria, representing the most economically productive as well as the most reproductively active population. By 2011, 56% of Kosovar immigrants were male and 43% female. Immigration in the period before that had been predominantly male. Female immigration grew after the year 2000, as a result of the desire of families to reunite and seek a better life together.

On average, Kosovar immigrants in Austria are young, dominated by those aged between 25–39 years (37%). A total of 73% (74% male and 72% female) are of working age (15–64 years), while 24% (23% male and 24% female) are aged 0–14 years. The average age of Kosovar immigrants in Austria is 28.6 years (Statistic Austria, 2017), while in Kosovo the average age is 30.5 years (SOK, 2014). The Kosovo community has the fourth youngest age profile in Austria (Statistic Austria, 2017). Also, the authors who have studied Kosovar Albanians in Switzerland (Dahinden, 2005) and Germany (Xheladini, 2012) describe the Albanian community as mainly young, with a large number of children and only a small number of elderly. Immigrant families from Kosovo are generally relatively large, with an average of 4.07 family members (Wanner, 2005). Nevertheless, this is smaller than the average family in Kosovo (5.9 members) (SOK, 2011). The fertility rate among Kosovo Albanians is also higher than the average rate in Western Europe (2.6 per birth in 2000; Wanner, 2005). In Switzerland, Kosovo Albanians will remain among the largest diaspora groups in the near future (Haxhikadrija, 2009).

The educational and professional composition of Kosovar immigrants up to the 1990s was not favorable. About 80% of immigrants had primary education and about 10% secondary education. However, this situation began to change for the better after 2000. Of the total number of immigrants interviewed (N=500) in a previous study, about 16% had no or incomplete primary education, 27% had finished primary school, 44% completed high school and 6% complete university studies (7% were uncategorized; Gollopeni, 2015). Women were significantly over-represented among those with lower levels of education. This

lack of education has meant that most Kosovar immigrants have to work in less skilled, disadvantaged jobs and work conditions where they have to work hard. The first years of immigration for most Kosovar immigrants are critical. Having to save money to help family and relatives in Kosovo made life hard for early Kosovar immigrants in Austria. However, their situation began to improve with the immigration of their families to join them. Up until the 1990s, Kosovar immigrants sought jobs in the primary and secondary sectors. Then, the situation started to change and many are now engaged in public life, and employed in important sectors of society such as politics, education, healthcare, sports clubs, and large enterprises, as well as becoming successful entrepreneurs. The employment rate of Kosovar immigrants in Austria is high, demonstrating the commitment of this community to look for steady work and become integrated into the host society. According to the Statistical Office of Kosovo (SOK 2014), the employment rate of Kosovar migrants was 93.8% in 2011 and 87% in 2012. This high employment rate is a result of the opportunities created by the Austrian economy and state, and by the professional preparation and willingness to work on the part of the Kosovar immigrants themselves. Based on the opportunities offered by the state of Austria, after Germany (33.1%), Austria (21.4 percent) is the main destination country for Kosovo emigrants where they migrate for educational purposes (UNDP, 2014).

Nonetheless, we do not know in detail what the motives were that led to the high levels of Kosovar immigration and how Austria became one of the four most preferred countries of Kosovar immigrants. Until the 1990s, Kosovars immigrated mainly for reasons of employment, to join their families and because of war (1999); since 2000, the main motive has become the reuniting of families, employment, education and better living conditions. According to the Kosovo population census (2011), the main causes of Kosovar emigration are family reunion (46%), employment (35%), war 1998–1999 (8%) and education (1%); 10% gave ‘other’ or no reasons (SOK, 2014).

Immigration and integration policies in Austria

According to the statistics, every year 50,000 to 60,000 citizens from various countries around the world immigrate to Austria (Statistic Austria 2017). In Europe, problems arose when the labor immigration previously thought to be temporary became permanent, in particular when workers exercised their right to bring their families over to join them. The first phase of immigration from ex-Yugoslavia to Austria took place between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s and was initiated by the Agreement on Labour Recruitment with the former Yugoslavia in 1966 (Mijić, 2019). As a result, the need to design policies and strategies for integrating immigrants into host societies grew. For example, the Netherlands has offered compulsory courses for newly arrived immigrants from non-EU countries since 1998, with attention focusing on the acquisition of a sufficient level of Dutch language skills as well as some basic knowledge of

Dutch society. Since then, the Dutch example has been followed by other EU member states such as Finland, Denmark, Austria, Germany and Belgium. Denmark is an example of a member state that has made decisive efforts to set indicators for cultural integration, including instruments for measuring integration (Entzinger & Renske, 2003).

Large-scale labor migration had long been taking place in Austria, the term "integration" appeared for the first time in the Aliens Police Act of 1987. During the same period, with the FPÖ, the issue of migration moved from the political fringes to the center. The popular initiative "Austria first" was carried out, restrictive measures were called for, the topic was culturalized, with a focus on religion and values (Sieglinde & Oliver, 2020). In 2003, Austria formulated an agreement on the integration of immigrants who voluntarily come to Austria, and since 2010 a National Integration Action Plan (NIAP) has been in place, intended to contribute to a coherent integration policy. In 2011, integration measures were presented in a comprehensive way in the first Integration Report (Expertenrat für Integration 2011). The Integration Agreement of 2003 was mainly concerned with reuniting families. Immigrants had to attend a language course and reach an A1 level of fluency within four years of their arrival in Austria. Three years later, the level was raised to A2, which now has to be reached within five years. Since 2011, third-country nationals are required to have German language knowledge (level A1) prior to arriving in Austria if they wish to apply for a special residence permit. The aim of the integration agreement is to empower third-country nationals to participate in social, economic and cultural life in Austria (Expertenrat für Integration 2011). Other areas covered in the Action Plan include language and education, work, the rule of law and values, health and social issues, intercultural dialogue, sport and leisure. Since 2003, every immigrant in Austria has had to take a compulsory language and integration course.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Based on the theoretical literature (Bretell/ Holifield 1999; Esser 2001; Han et al. 2003; Heckmann 2015) and previous studies on migration and integration (Gollopini 2015, 2016, 2017; Feigl 2013; Faustmann 2017; Statistik Austria 2017), we propose three main three hypotheses and five minor hypotheses. The first and last hypotheses are related to the general level of integration of Kosovar immigrants, hypotheses 2a to 2e deal with the effects of specific personal and social characteristics.

Hypothesis 1 (system vs. social integration): There exists a difference between system integration and social integration. Harmut Esser (2001, p. 19) has developed a scheme of four possible types of integration that is useful for our study (see [Chart 1](#)). The scheme cross-classifies the two aspects of system integration and socio-cultural integration. He distinguished between four types of integration (see [Chart 1](#)): full integration (both in the system and social aspect); assimilation (social, but not system integration); segmentation (system, but not social integration); and marginalization (neither system nor social

integration). We think, however, that this model has to be supplemented by including the degree of integration to and connection with the society of origin and the destination society. In this perspective, five types of integration emerge (see [Chart 1](#)).

Using this perspective, five types of integration or non-integration result: (1) Assimilation by constraint which happened, for instance in the 19th and 18th centuries in France when all local languages were suppressed in favor of standard French. (2) Voluntary assimilation which happens in many cases of immigrants of later generations who assimilate to the host societies. In Austria, for instance, this happened with most 19th century immigrants from the Czech lands or Hungary. (3) Multiple integration, which means that the immigrants continue to be affiliated with their country and culture of origin but are also well integrated into the host society. Today, it might be the case for many Germans who are the largest group of immigrants in Austria, because they speak the same language and many of them work in relatively high skilled jobs (Bodenbenner, 2012). (4) Segmentation or the emergence of parallel societies; this might occur among some immigrants from the Arabic-Islamic world, as well as for Chinese and other Asians, because their culture is quite removed from the German-Austrian culture; they usually have close family relations and contacts within their own ethnic groups. (5) Marginalization will be most typical for illegal immigrants, particularly those from Africa, because many of them have low education, few qualifications and little support from compatriots because they typically arrive as single persons; moreover, it is also almost impossible for them to bring their family members to Austria.

Our general hypothesis is that the system integration of Kosovars (participation in the labor market, living in good housing situations) will be better than their social integration (having contacts with Austrians, participation in social activities and associations) and their identification with Austria. However, most of them will retain their affiliation to the society and culture of origin; thus, the predominant form of integration would be multiple integration.

Hypothesis 2: In addition, we also hypothesize that there will be differences by gender, level of education, family situation, religious affiliation and place of living.

Hypothesis 2a (gender): There exists a difference between men and women. Most male Kosovars will fall into type 2: they will be employed and live in acceptable housing conditions, but they will be only weakly integrated into Austrian society; female Kosovars will be less integrated both in terms of systems and social integration. The reason is that they often have only basic education and came to Austria for reasons of family re-unification, thus, have few contacts with Austrians.

Hypothesis 2b (education): Immigrants with higher education will be better integrated both in systemic and social aspects. The reasons for this are that they will have better jobs and because it is easier for them to learn German. However, in some regards immigrants with lower education will be better integrated in terms of system aspects, because it is easier for them to get lower-skilled jobs in construction, industry, personal services, restaurants. Those with

higher education will look for better jobs, where the competition is stronger because native Austrian citizens are preferred and where there are higher requirements concerning knowledge of the German language

Hypothesis 2c (family situation): Immigrants with families (married with children) will be better integrated in system in terms of jobs and housing because there will be more pressure on them to secure an income. They will be worse off in terms of the social aspect, such as contacts with Austrians, however, because they are more focused on their family and immediate social circles.

Hypothesis 2d (religion): Immigrants with a strong attachment to the religion of their native country who mostly have conservative social attitudes, will have greater difficulty integrating into Austrian society. They will tend to remain within their ethnic community in Austria; they will also plan to return to Kosovo more frequently. Immigrants who are Muslims will be less integrated than those who are Christians. However, Muslim immigrants from Kosovo will be better integrated than Muslim immigrants from Turkey or the Near East because Islam is more traditional and restrictive in the latter countries. Statistical data show that Turkish immigrants are significantly less well integrated into Austrian society than are immigrants from former Yugoslavia (Statistic Austria, 2017; Aschauer et al. 2019). These data also show that children of Turkish immigrants have a greater need for support courses in school with 97% needing such courses compared with 67% of all other immigrants and immigrants from 66% Albania (Statistic Austria, 2017, p. 45).

Hypothesis 2e (place of living): Immigrants in the larger Austrian cities, particularly in Vienna, will be less integrated in terms of system and social aspects than will those in smaller towns and in the countryside. One reason for this is that there are more immigrants competing for jobs in the large cities; another, that more of their compatriots live in these cities and thereby they will tend more to remain within their ethnic circles.

Hypothesis 3 (overall subjective well-being): In general, immigrants from Kosovo will feel quite happy and satisfied with their situation in Austria. It has been shown that in general, 89% of immigrants (in terms of having citizenship of another country) feel at home in Austria (Statistic Austria, 2017, p. 95). This is in spite of the fact that they tend to hold lower occupational positions and earn less than Austrians because they compare their present situation with that in Kosovo; the opportunities in Austria are much better than in their country of origin.

Research Methods

The study was conducted with 150 Kosovar immigrants living in Austria, and it was carried out during August, September and October 2018; the method used were semi-structured interviews in the Albanian language.¹

¹ The first author of the manuscript took care of the translation from Albanian to English.

Contact with the respondents was achieved through two channels: a) the social network Facebook; and b) mobilization of members of the Albanian community in Austria. With regard to the first, a number of years ago we created the social network site, Kosovar immigrants. Today, the site has around 3,000 followers and/or immigrants living in various parts of the world. Through this site, we were able to identify 285 Kosovar immigrants residing in Austria, from which we randomly selected a sample of 75 immigrants. A further 75 immigrants were identified and contacted for the interviews by mobilizing the Kosovo community in Austria in two ways: Through direct contact with immigrants and via contacts identified through Kosovo organizations in Austria. Of the total number of interviews carried out, 120 were conducted as face-to-face interviews, while 30 were conducted through Viber or Skype. During the interviews, we took notes at the same time and recorded the conversations so that they could be easily evidenced. In order to preserve the confidentiality of the respondents, we only used codes (P1–P150) to identify the interviewees.

Table 1: Descriptive data on the sample of the respondents

Number of respondents	Total 150
Gender	Male 66% Female 34%
Average age of respondents	40.1 years
Religion	Islam 71% Catholic 12% Other 17%
Education level	Primary school 23% Secondary school 55% University studies 13% Other 9%
Year of immigration	Before 1990s 11% During '90s 51% After 2000 38%

To measure their degree of integration, the following indicators were taken into account: knowledge of the German language, employment, friendships with Austrians, membership of Austrian organizations, experience of discrimination, identification with Austrian culture, housing and segregation.

Results

In this section, we start with a description of the duration of stay in Austria and the future plans in this regard. Then, we present the findings in the order of the hypotheses: We describe the degree of systemic integration followed by social

and cultural integration; finally, we investigate the identification with the host country, experiences of discrimination and subjective well-being

Duration of stay and integration

To understand the impact of the duration of stay on integration, we employed three questions: How long have you been in Austria? How long do you plan to stay in Austria? and, what are your plans for the future? Our results showed that 51% of the interviewees had immigrated to Austria during the 1990s. About half, 49%, of the immigrants think that they will stay permanently in Austria, 30% that they will return to Kosovo and 9% think they might migrate further to another country.

Here were some open ended answers to this question: *“When we came to Austria, we thought we would go back to Kosovo very soon. But the years passed by and we stayed in Austria, and now we only go to Kosovo for holidays,”* said a 45-year-old male, P12. *“I think I will live in Austria until I die,”* commented a 36-year-old male, P64. *“With my body I am in Austria, but my heart is in Kosovo.”* said a 48-year-old male, P76. A 23-year-old male, P1 said, *“I will return to Kosovo when I retire.”*

Those who were against returning to Kosovo were mainly women; they justified their attitude in terms of the difficult social and economic situation and the lack of female emancipation there. Based on research results of Pajaziti et al., Albanian diaspora have been well accommodated – adapted within the Austrian context, stating that they are even quite happy with their lives, just as in their homelands. This can also be verified by the fact that they have already begun to purchase real estate there and have settled well in this respect (Pajaziti & Memeti, 2019). Those in favor of returning were more qualified immigrants and those at the beginning of studies who were thinking of returning as soon as they had completed their studies in order to find employment in Kosovo. Asked about their plans for the future, responses showed immigrants’ commitment to investing in providing the best living conditions for their family, their children’s education and employment in Austria. A typical answer was the following: *“I want my children to grow in Austria, to educate them and let them have a better life and job,”* a 39-year-old male, P74.

The results of the study revealed a correlation between duration of residence and system integration but none between duration of residence and social integration. Before 2000, Kosovar immigrants immigrated without their families and without qualifications. They were devoted to working in order to help their family in Kosovo financially. This situation prevented their social integration. However, it began to improve after 2000, following the immigration of their families.

Structural integration through employment

Structural integration is of special importance because it determines the level of immigrant integration into the host society. According to Austrian Statistical data and our empirical findings, Kosovar immigrants in Austria are rather well integrated in systemic terms of employment and housing. However, up to 2000 this systemic integration mainly applied to being employed in the primary and secondary sectors of agriculture, construction and building or industry. Most of the immigrants in this study had completed their secondary education: men had the advantage over women in that about two-thirds of them, 57%, have completed secondary education, 21% primary, 17% undergraduate and 5% other. Women do not have quite as much education, with 43% of them having completed only primary education, 50% secondary education and 7% had done some undergraduate studies.

Those who immigrated before 2000 had lower levels of education. For socio-economic and political reasons, many Kosovar immigrants did not have the opportunity to continue their studies in Kosovo. In fact, some of them were forced to stop studying and immigrate to Austria. A man, aged 53 years, told his story:

It was the 1980s, the political and economic situation was difficult. We were many brothers and sisters, all of us excelled in school but we lacked the economic conditions. And so, in the first year of my studies I decided to immigrate to Austria. They were the toughest years of my life. I did not know where to go, where I would be when night fell, or whether I would have food to eat, water to drink, and jobs to do; I just decided to temporarily emigrate to help my family economically, and now I have been in Austria for the past 31 years (53-year-old male, P24).

Similar hard experiences were reported by another man, aged 39:

I finished high school and didn't know what to do. I helped my uncle in the store, took care of the family cattle, but this work had no prospects. My father had been in Austria for more than seven years, since the Serbian political system (1991) had left him without a job, and one day I told my father that I too would go to Austria to be with him. And so, it happened, but I didn't think I would stay so long. At first, they were very difficult years, I didn't know anybody, I didn't know the language, I did a lot of hard work, the housing conditions were bad. (39-year-old male, P80).

In Kosovo after 2000, the political situation improved. However, the economic situation remained severe, forcing many Kosovar citizens to immigrate to Austria, like this 34-year old woman, "I graduated from the high school of medicine in Kosovo and started working there as a nurse, but the salary was too low, insufficient to cover basic living needs. Since my boyfriend was in

Austria, we decided to get married and after a while (three years of marriage) I emigrated myself “(34-year-old woman, P79).

Like many others, a young man, aged 28, decided to remain in Austria after having studied there for some years. “As soon as I graduated from my undergraduate studies [2011], I applied to and was admitted to postgraduate studies at the University of Vienna. I like the life here; I have adapted to the living conditions; I have made friends and I work. And seeing that in Kosovo there is no work, no prospects and citizens are leaving Kosovo, I asked myself why I should go back; and so, I decided to live in Vienna” (28-year-old male, P77).

For many Kosovar immigrants, the first years of immigration were hard because of their lack of knowledge of the German language and the need to work hard and send money back to Kosovo. Thus, structural integration for Kosovar immigrants was far more important to them than social and cultural integration. Prior to immigrating to Austria, around two-thirds of the immigrants, 69%, had been unemployed, were engaged in temporary work, and earning low wages that could not provide good family welfare; many were in jobs with no contract or social and health insurance. In Kosovo, unemployment was higher for female (81% were unemployed) and non-qualified immigrants. The following remarks of a man, 41 years of age, testify how difficult this period was for many. *“I worked in the construction sector as a construction worker. I started working early in the morning and finished at 6 pm or maybe later than that. I worked 12 hours a day for an average daily salary of 20 euros” (41-year-old male, P3).*

For most of these men, the employment status changed for the better after they immigrated to Austria. Of the total number of Kosovar immigrants interviewed, 93% of men and 50% of women were employed. Female immigrants exhibited much higher

unemployment rates in Austria as a result of their commitment to care for the family and raising children as well as their lack of qualifications.

A characteristic of Kosovar immigrants in Austria is their change of occupation. Seventy per cent of those interviewed no longer worked in the same job or profession as they had in their country of origin, but only 20% now had better jobs; most held a position at the same or a lower level. Most are employed in construction, the hotel or restaurant trade or in agriculture, or they work as cleaners, drivers or gardeners; a few are employed in the education, health or social services sector. Furthermore, a considerable number are entrepreneurs. The study also shows that most Kosovar immigrants tend to be happy with the elements of their work such as income, career opportunities and work colleagues, in Austria. Eighty-seven percent are very satisfied and 13% are satisfied. Most enjoy job satisfaction in their workplace, not because their working status in Austria is good compared with other Austrian citizens but because it is good compared with the economic difficulties they experienced in Kosovo.

Housing and segregation

Housing is a basic human requirement, and every immigrant is faced with this issue on the first day of his or her arrival in the destination country. In order to learn more about housing conditions and segregation, the study asked three questions: Are the living conditions of Kosovar immigrants the same as those of Austrians? Do Kosovar immigrants live in separate or mixed neighborhoods? What were their living conditions like in the years when they first immigrated to Austria? Our findings gave a surprising picture: more than half of the interviewed believed their living conditions to be better than those of Austrian citizens. This was justified by the fact that many of them personally owned their houses. The fact that Kosovar families in Austria still retain elements of the traditional Albanian family, having a large number of family members, up to five and where money is managed by the head of household, probably contributed to making it easier and faster to improve their housing conditions. The following two respondents describe in detail how they came to their own house. *“I have a house where I live with my parents. I bought the house with my personal money and that of my parents,” 48-year-old male, P117. “Me and my husband worked day and night until we got to this day, where we now have our home,” 53-year-old female, P104.* This finding seems to support the thesis that urban areas with greater concentration of foreigners provide more opportunities than the opposite thesis that ethnic enclaves are a kind of trap (Kogan & Kalter 2005).

These results indicate that the living conditions of many Kosovar immigrants are similar or even better than as those of Austrian citizens. In fact, in nearly all Viennese city districts with a high concentration of immigrants, the majority are relatively poorer Austrian families (Schwarzl 2019). However, in the first waves of immigration, housing conditions for Kosovar immigrants were not at all good. During group discussions between immigrants, they often talked about how they suffered in this regard by making jokes with each other. For instance, *“Do you remember when we slept in the park, in the phone box, the station? Yes, the initial housing conditions were catastrophic. We had to sleep in a ‘Heim’. We had just one room to share between four to six friends” 55-year-old male, P133.*

Hence, the first generation of Kosovar immigrants experienced worse conditions, but the situation improved for immigrants who came to Austria to join their families. A 49-year old woman reported in this regard, *“No, when we immigrated to Austria, my husband had been initially provided with adequate housing because it was required under Austrian state regulations,” 49-year-old female, P111.*

Over the years of living in Austria, the lives of Kosovar immigrants have improved. They now enjoy good living conditions and all of them live in mixed neighborhoods with Austrian citizens and other communities.

Social integration

The social integration of individuals refers to the extent of their relationships with other people and their degree of social inclusion into Austrian society (Esser 2001). Social contacts require the presence of others and they reflect a particular form of social action. The special significance of friendship is based on the fact that “they are freely chosen and can be interrupted at any time and therefore convey personal recognition and social attractiveness to other relationships” (Pelizäus-Hoffmeister, 2001).

Our study examined three indicators of social integration: the friendships of Kosovar immigrants with Austrian citizens, the impressions Kosovars have of Austrian citizens and Kosovars’ membership of organizations in Austria. More than two-thirds of those interviewed had friendships with Austrian citizens and other communities in Austria. The number of friendships was very high among the young and educated generation of immigrants. In general, friendships were established through three channels: school, the workplace and the social-family circle. However, only one-third of Kosovar immigrants had been integrated into Austrian organizations. “One has to note in this regard, however, that this form of activity is also not widespread among Austrians themselves; only about half of them are formal members in a voluntary association”². The lowest degree of integration was found among older immigrants, females and low-skilled persons. Most of these interviewed put their lack of integration into Austrian organizations down to the fact that they have no time or have a lack of interest. Those who were integrated were mainly integrated into humanitarian associations such as organizations that assist vulnerable children or families in need, the Red Cross and similar organizations, volunteer firefighters and political parties. Most of those interviewed, 90%, had a positive attitude towards Austrian citizens, and were very grateful to the Austrian state for the assistance it had given to Kosovar immigrants and refugees during the Kosovo war (1999) and at other times. A 49-years old woman commented thus, “*I would very much like to organize an international diaspora conference and invite the Austrian citizens and institutions, to thank them in the name of Kosovar society for the hospitality they have given us as immigrants and refugees from Kosovo.*” (49-year-old female, P133).

Cultural integration

Migration connected with globalization will certainly have a significant impact on migrant’s cultural identity. A key indicator of cultural integration is knowledge of the language of the destination country (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997; Tubergen, 2006; Haller 2009). In order to measure the level of cultural integration among our sample, we asked them about their knowledge of the

²Retrieved with June 28, 2019: <https://www.nachrichten.at/panorama/chronik/Zahl-der-Vereinsmitglieder-in-OEsterreich-nimmt-ab;art58,2924626>

German language, their language of communication in the family, workplace and society, their sources of information about social events in their country of origin and the host country, and their attitudes towards the basic laws of the state of Austria.

About half of the respondents of our sample had a satisfactory level of German, which had been gained through education, professional courses or at the workplace. The lowest levels of German knowledge were found among the elderly, the low qualified and females. Apart from the elderly immigrants, everyone else showed strong interest in learning German. Further, the study found that most of the immigrants communicated in German in their workplace, and in both languages, Albanian and German, with their family members. In the family, adults spoke in Albanian while their children, who were born and educated in Austria, spoke in German. Based in research results of Pajaziti et al. as regards the language of communication in families, we can conclude that Albanian immigrants in Austria utilize their own mother tongue as the main means of communication (62%); 34% communicate in both languages and only 4% communicate exclusively in German (Pajaziti & Memeti, 2019). In terms of how immigrants are treated by Austrian citizens if they do not know German, most claimed that Austrian citizens are polite and try to help; however, there were also some reports of negative experiences. We asked from which sources the immigrants mainly received information on social events in the country of origin and the host country. For about half of Kosovo's immigrant's media sources in both countries were the main sources of information. In addition, information was obtained from the Internet and from social networks. Finally, in terms of attitudes of the Kosovar immigrants to the basic laws of the Austrian state, most, over 90%, were satisfied with Austrian laws and often called them perfect. One interviewee said in this regard, *"In Austria only the law applies, so the Austrians have achieved this development as a result of law enforcement,"* (57-year-old female, P148).

Identification with the host country

As a result of developments in technology and means of communication, immigrants are able to receive real-time information about the social and cultural events going on in the host country, thus allowing them to integrate faster and more easily. Immigrants' identification includes two issues: Their acceptance of the host country's culture and their degree of integration. To investigate this among the Kosovar immigrants in Austria we used three indicators/ questions: a) I feel proud to be identified with Kosovar culture; b) I feel proud to be identified with Austrian culture; and c) I feel proud to be identified with both cultures (Kosovar and Austrian).

The results showed that Kosovar immigrants are mainly proud and happy to be identified with the culture of their country of origin (97%). But that this happiness and pride does not in any way close them off to Austrian culture; more than half, 52%, feel proud and happy to identify also with Austrian culture. As one interviewee said, *"I am a citizen of Austria, so why not feel*

proud and happy to be identified with the culture of Austria?” (21-year-old female, P106). Over 80% of male and female respondents feel proud and happy to be identified with both cultures. More than two-thirds of the females are happy to be identified with both cultures. A typical answer in this regard was, “Yes, 100% I am proud and happy to identify with both cultures!” (55-year-old female, P43). Thus, we can say that many Kosovars in Austria show multiple integration in terms of [Chart 1](#). The same was found in a large study on immigrants from former Yugoslavia and Turkey (Aschauer et al. 2019).

There was a difference regarding identification with the culture of the host country between citizens, practitioners and non-practitioners of Islam in Austria. Believers of Islam did not like to be identified with Austrian culture. Islamic practitioners, the elderly and the low skilled are more conservative; thus, these three social categories are more closed in terms of identification with Austrian culture and are happy to be identified only with the culture of their country of origin. These categories of immigrants are structurally but not socially integrated. Since the number of Christian respondents was very small (12%), it was impossible to perform comparisons and analyses based on religious affiliation.

Discrimination

To find out the extent to which Kosovar immigrants feel discriminated against in Austria, the study considered the following two indicators: Have you ever felt you were treated badly or unlike Austrian citizens because of your religion / race / ethnicity / nationality? Do you feel foreign in Austria?

Most of the immigrants we spoke to claimed never to have felt discriminated against. A 53-year old woman said in this regard, *“No, I never felt discriminated against. I just concentrate on my business and don’t pay attention to what others think.” (53-year-old female, P117)*. However, some had experienced some discrimination. Our results show that this discrimination occurred most often in workplaces and institutions, through contact with Austrian citizens. Most reported incidents of discrimination happened against the more conservative immigrants and those who practice Islam. A 33-year old male reported, *“As soon as I started work, when my employer realized that I am of the Islamic faith, he did not welcome me and with an arrogance told me that the Islamic religion has no place here. But I kept working in silence, and over time my employer repented of his actions, realizing that the Islamic religion was not as he perceived, and later apologized to me.” (33-year-old male, P109)*. Discrimination was mainly mentioned by followers of Islam, who have more conservative attitudes, are more closely associated with their community and are less open to other communities.

Conversely, our results showed that about half of the immigrants do not feel like strangers in Austria. One 30-years old man proudly stated, *“Why should I feel like a stranger?! I have Austrian citizenship, I have my home in Austria, I have my job. No, I do not feel like a stranger, I’m a human on this planet and for me there is no state border, there is only one planet, and we are all on this*

planet and each of us can decide where we want to live," (30-year-old male, P127). A number of other interviewees echoed the sentiments of this immigrant, *"Over the years, we are becoming more and more foreign to our country of origin than we are to the host country,"* (34-year-old female, P49). Immigrants who were more likely to feel foreign in Austria were those born in Kosovo who immigrated without their family, those with a low level of education and the elderly people.

Conclusion

Over the years, the number of Kosovar immigrants in Austria has increased, thus establishing a Kosovar immigrant community in Austria. This study set out to explore the level of socio-economic and socio-cultural integration of these immigrants. On the basis of our results, we can conclude that the level of their socio-cultural integration is satisfactory. Kosovar immigrants show a high level of systemic integration, with 93% being employed, and have good housing conditions. The lowest level of integration into the labor market is for women, a situation related to the fact that they are focusing on housework and care for the family, and their lack of knowledge of the German language. Moreover, most Kosovar immigrants are satisfied with their job, due to its favorable comparison with the difficult conditions in Kosovo. The study has shown that, in terms of employment, immigrants with low levels of qualification are somewhat better integrated than those with high qualifications. Highly qualified immigrants seek better jobs, where competition with locals is high. Therefore, immigrants in this category have higher levels of dissatisfaction and often try to migrate further to another country or to return to Kosovo. Up to the 1990s, most Kosovars immigrated because of the economic and political situation; in the late 1990s, they emigrated as refugees; and after 2000, they emigrated to reunite with their families, for employment and for better living conditions.

Most social-scientific theories argue and many studies have shown that the duration of immigration is critical for integration (Aschauer et al. 2019). The findings of our study show that the duration of immigration had a positive impact on immigrants' systemic integration but less so on their social integration into Austrian society. Difficult socioeconomic and political circumstances in the country of origin, Kosovo, and the need to financially assist their families still living there in Kosovo, has influenced Kosovar immigrants to be more concerned about employment and income; hence, they had little interest in social integration into the host country. Nevertheless, integration into Austrian society, improved living conditions in this country and difficult socioeconomic situation in Kosovo (Gollopeni, 2020) have led nearly half of our sample to plan to stay permanently in Austria, with only a third planning to return to Kosovo. Also, previous studies with the Kosovar diaspora show that about half (50%) of migrants do not plan to return to Kosovo (Gollopeni, 2017).

Thus, many Kosovars exhibit the pattern of multiple integration, a close connection to their society of origin and of destination.

The study also revealed that about half of the immigrants whom we interviewed have a good knowledge of German. Poor German language skills were mainly found among elderly immigrants and females. However, interest in learning German is high among most Kosovar immigrants. High employment rates, and youth education especially, have resulted in nearly two-thirds of our Kosovar immigrants having regular contact and friendships with Austrian citizens. However, their integration into Austrian associations is weaker. Only few participate in Austrian associations; the arguments of this lower level of integration are their self-reported lack of leisure time and lack of interest.

Although many authors have claimed that immigrants feel discriminated against or biased by members of the host society, this is not the case for most of these Kosovar immigrants. About half of the respondents said that they did not feel like foreigners in Austria, which points to the extent of their integration.

“The majority of Austrian Albanians have found a positive environment in Austria; they have adapted well with the setting and are doing well; only a quarter of them still feel as foreigners, desperate and dissatisfied” (Pajaziti et al., 2019). In addition, about also half of them said that they feel happy and proud to be identified with the Austrian culture. This suggests that they are accepting the cultural values of the host society, leading in some time to their full integration into Austria. An additional conclusion from the findings of our study is that Kosovar immigrants who are of Muslim faith and practice Islam in Austria are integrated in terms of employment but less so in terms of social integration. This community is more restrained and more conservative than other communities and its members wish more frequently to return to Kosovo.

In conclusion, we can state that the systemic integration, employment and residence, of Kosovar immigrants into Austrian economy and society appears to be rather high, while their social integration is at a satisfactory level; overall, around two-thirds of the Kosovar immigrants in Austria in our sample appear to be multiple integrated in terms of the four-fold scheme in [Chart 1](#).

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Chart 1: Different forms of integration into the society of origin and the host

