

**Every year, more people move to South Tyrol than leave the country. The rural areas<sup>2</sup> in South Tyrol offer immigrants other location factors than the central conurbations of the Province. In the spring and summer of 2020, the IER - Institute for Economic Research of the Chamber of Commerce of Bolzano spoke with a total of 30 immigrants who have chosen a rural community as their new place of residence. The aim of these interviews was to get an impression of what makes the rural areas appealing from the immigrants' point of view and where there is still potential for improvement.**

The interview results indicate that the location factors can be assessed both positively and negatively depending on the immigrants' personal experiences. For example, finding a job, housing or dealing with bureaucracy were a challenge for some immigrants, whereas the same demands were no issue for others.

The perception of the rural areas in South Tyrol depends decisively on the personal expectations, the country of origin and the professional qualification of the immigrants. Moreover, those immigrants who have a South Tyrolean partner often experience the move to South Tyrol and integration into the village community with fewer difficulties than immigrants without a South Tyrolean partner.

However, there are also some aspects on which immigrants agree. For instance, the rural areas in South Tyrol offer a high

quality of life, tranquillity and a beautiful landscape. One shortcoming, however, is accessibility: In some municipalities, the connection to the public transport network is not satisfactory – especially in the evening hours. This means that people must rely on their own car for work related or private commutes. In addition, there are fewer cultural offers and shopping facilities in rural communities than in a city, which is not necessarily assessed negatively by all immigrants, but considered "normal" for rural areas.

As a consequence, the following economic policy challenges arise, some of which were also mentioned by the immigrants interviewed: In order to keep the rural areas in South Tyrol appealing to immigrants and qualified workers and to reduce the increasing migration from the countryside to the urban centres, it is necessary, among other things, to accelerate the comprehensive coverage with broadband internet as well as the expansion of the transport infrastructure and the public transport network. At the same time, it is important to give more support to enterprises and shops located in rural areas in order to avoid their closure or relocation to the urban centres and thus guarantee local supply and preserve valuable job opportunities in rural areas. Only these measures will allow the rural communities in South Tyrol to remain an interesting place to live and work for immigrants – and for the local population – in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> In this report, all municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants are considered to be part of the so-called "rural area", i.e. all municipalities in South

Tyrol excluding Bolzano, Laives, Appiano, Merano, Lana, Bressanone and Brunico.