

# Case WORK

## COUNTRY REPORT

AUSTRIA

“SITUATION AND NEEDS OF THE VOLUNTEERS WORKING WITH  
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS”



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# 1. Context and Background of Migration

## 1.1. Main characteristics of the migrants presence: an overview – numbers, evolution and trends

In 2016, a total of 42,285 persons applied for asylum in Austria for the first time. This means a decrease after the record figure of 88,340 applications for asylum in 2015, but the number of applications in 2016 was about twice as high as the number of applications in 2014 (28,064); and also significantly higher than in previous years. In total, approximately 1.3 million applications for asylum were registered in Europe (i. e. in countries of the European Union, the European Economic Area and Switzerland). The number of applications for asylum in relation to the population was highest in Germany with 9.1 per 1,000 inhabitants, followed by Austria with 4.9 applications and Greece with 4.7 applications per 1,000 inhabitants. Most asylum seekers in Austria in 2016 came from Afghanistan (27.9%), followed by Syrians (20.7%) and Iraqis (6.8%).

In 2016, a total of around 27,500 legally binding positive decisions on asylum, subsidiary or humanitarian protection were taken. Of the 22,300 persons granted asylum in Austria in 2016, about 70% came from Syria, followed by 8% from Afghanistan and 6% from Iraq. 26,700 decisions on asylum, subsidiary or humanitarian protection were legally negative in 2016. A fifth of all negative asylum decisions concerned persons from Afghanistan, followed by those from Pakistan (10%), Nigeria and Iraq (both 8%).

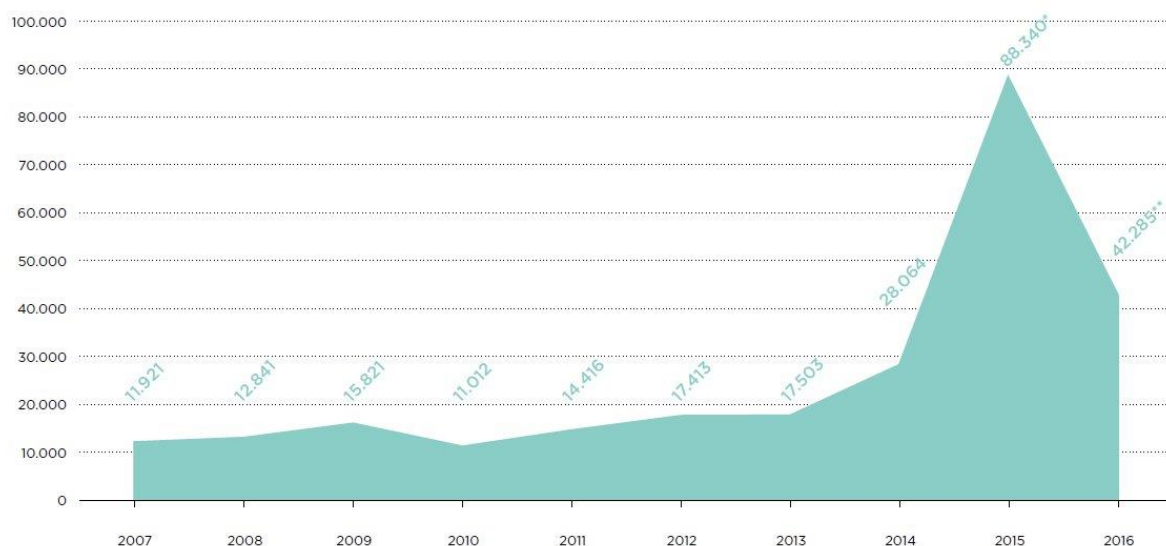


Fig. 1 Asylum applications in Austria between 2007 and 2016

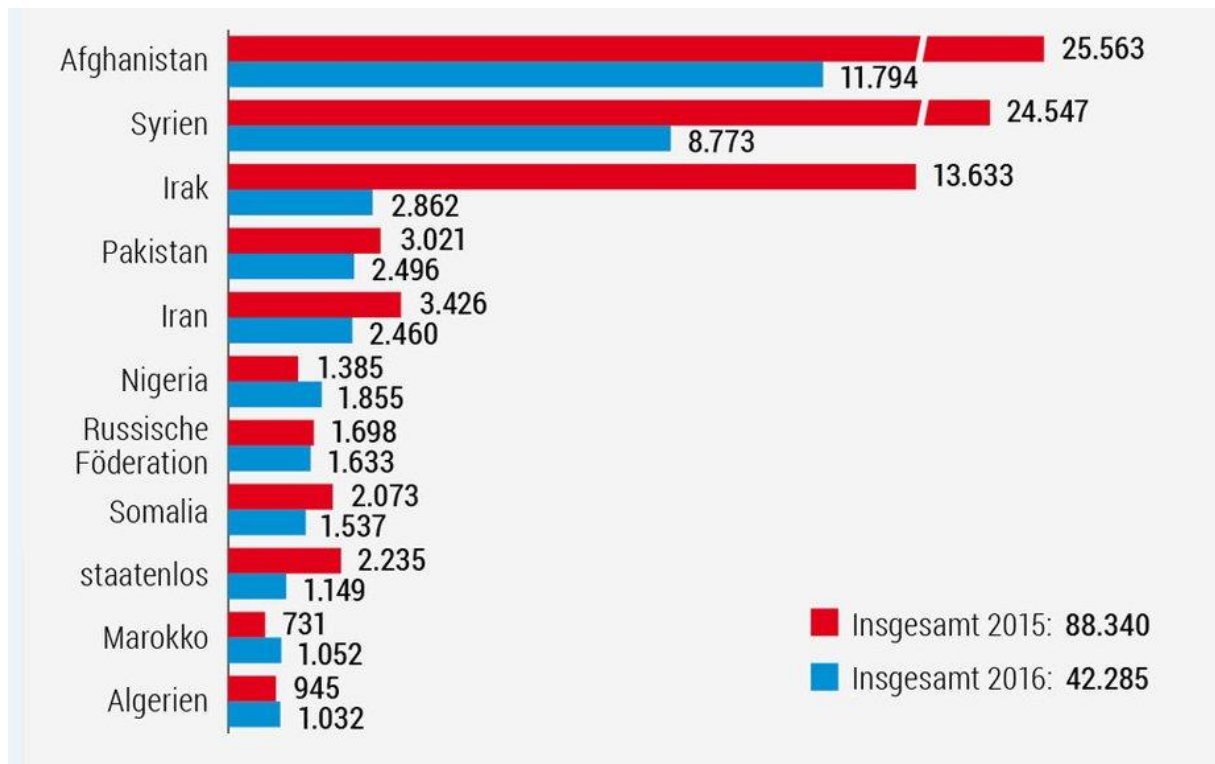


Fig. 2: Asylum applications in Austria in 2015 and 2016 by countries

## 1.2. Recent situation of the “refugee crisis” in Austria

The proportion of the foreign resident population in Austria was around 1.342 million at the beginning of 2017, or 15.3 percent of the total population. Most of them are not war refugees from Syria or refugees from economically weak nations. The majority of foreign nationals in Austria (as per 1 January 2107) are from Germany - followed by Serbia and Turkey.

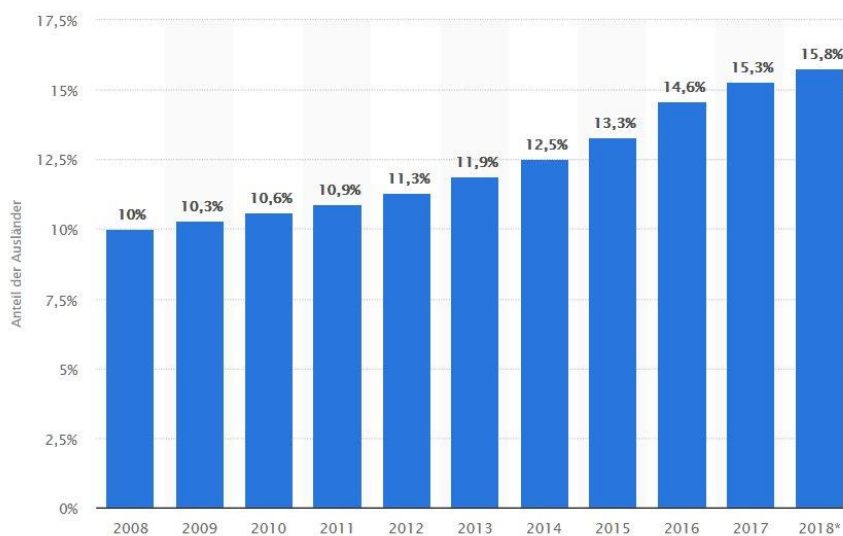


Fig. 3: Proportion of foreigners living in Austria

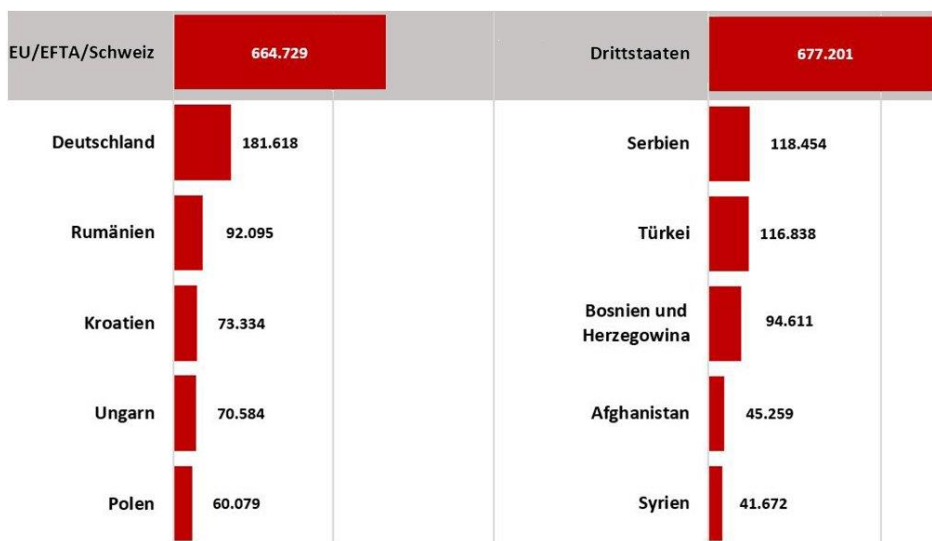


Fig. 4: Foreigners living in Austria by country of origin

### Language and education

Persons with a migration background living in Austria have a significantly different educational profile than the population without a migration background. For example, immigrants are disproportionately well represented in the highest and lowest levels of education, while the domestic population has an above-average share of the middle education level (education and vocational training). These differences in the structure of education are relatively constant over time, although in recent decades there has been an increase in the level of education among both the Austrian and foreign population. The increase in the foreign population is mainly due to the immigration of highly qualified workers from other EU countries.

In Austria, all children and young people are required to attend school for nine years. From 1 January 2015 to 30 June 2016, a total of 14,233 children and youths under the age of 14 who had fled the country were sent to school in Austria. In 2015, 9815 refugee children and adolescents were admitted to Austrian schools; in the first half of 2016, a further 4,418 pupils were enrolled. The largest proportion of refugee children and young people went to school in Lower Austria (23.7%) and Vienna (22.7%). 14.6% were enrolled in Upper Austria and 13.4% in Styria. The lowest school enrolments were in Salzburg (3.5%) and Burgenland (2.8%).

There is still a need for action in education policy among those young people who do not have a school leaving certificate. Around 8% of non-German-speaking pupils who were 14 years old on 1 September 2011 had not completed compulsory schooling two years later, at the end of the 2013/2014 school year. Boys (10%) were more affected than girls (6%). Of the peers with German colloquial language, on the other hand, only 2% had not completed compulsory schooling two years later. Although on this aspect newer statistics are not available, we can assume that this situation has worsened considerably, due to the high number of children and youth coming from Afghanistan.

### Employment

With a total unemployment rate (national definition) of 9.1% in 2015 (+ 0.7 percentage points compared to 2014), the unemployment rate for foreigners was 13.5%, significantly higher than for Austrian nationals (8.1%). Turks and third-country nationals were more than twice as often unemployed (19.8% and 25.1% respectively) than Austrians. Better-skilled workers from the EU Member States that joined the EU in 2004 are pushing out the low-skilled and older first-generation immigrants from Turkey, the former Yugoslavia and other third countries. Workers from other EU and EEA countries as well as Switzerland were not affected by the displacement; their unemployment corresponded to that of the Austrians.

Of the 424,523 persons registered as unemployed (including training participants) in 2016, just under a third (125,750) were foreign nationals. The number of persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection among unemployed foreigners was particularly high: A total of 25,027 refugees were unemployed or undergoing training in 2016. Almost two thirds of all unemployed refugees lived in

Vienna (65.7%), followed by Lower Austria (9.7%) and Upper Austria (8.6%). In Vorarlberg and Burgenland, the proportion of unemployed refugees was very low at 1.7% and 0.6% respectively. Unemployment among Syrian refugees is particularly high: Approximately 4 out of 10 unemployed asylum seekers (40.9%) came from Syria, followed by Afghans (19.5%) and Russians (13.4%).

### 1.3. Asylum system: : overview of the asylum procedure and reception centers/system

A total of 42,285 first-time asylum applications were filed in Austria in 2016, a decrease of 52.1% compared to 2015. The development of asylum applications shows that while the number of applications for asylum in Austria remained relatively constant between 2006 and 2013, there was an increase of 60.3% in 2014 compared to the previous year. In 2015, 88,340 asylum applications were registered (without resettlement) - more than three times as many as in 2014, a record number in the history of Austrian asylum. In 2016, effective measures such as the agreed maximum number of 37,500 refugees per year and the closure of the Balkan route led to a significant decrease in the number of asylum applications (42,285).

#### 1.3.1 Arbitrations

In 2016, a total of 65,242 legally binding decisions have been taken. 35,431 were accounted for by asylum decisions, 7,879 by decisions on subsidiary protection, 10,940 by decisions on humanitarian residence permits and 10,992 by other decisions. A total of 27,552 decisions were legally binding positive and 26,698 legally binding negative. Applicants accounted for 38.5% of positive and 18.1% of negative decisions. There were a total of 10,677 repatriations, of which 5,797 were voluntary and 4,880 forced repatriations.

#### 1.3.2 Asylum approvals

##### Positive decisions

In 2016 a total of 22,307 persons were granted asylum in Austria. In total, 40.2% of those who were granted legal asylum were women. 69.6% of positive asylum were granted to persons from Syria, followed by 7.9% of Afghan citizens and ranked third with 7.6% by persons whose nationality is unknown. In relation to 2015, there were 54.8% more positive asylum decisions.

##### Negative decisions

In 2016, 13,124 legally binding negative asylum decisions were taken, of which 18.6% concerned women. 20.6% of the negative decisions on asylum concerned persons from Afghanistan, with 10.9% of the asylum seekers coming from Pakistan in second place, followed by 8.3% from Nigeria.



**1.3.4 Unaccompanied minors**

In 2016, 3,900 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum. Of these, 9.5% were under 14 years of age. Asylum seekers from Afghanistan rank first in both the under 14-year-olds and 14 to 18-year-olds, followed by Syria and Iraq in the under 14-year-olds, and Pakistan and Somalia in the 14- to 18-year-olds.

The increasing number of refugees arriving over the Mediterranean route via Italy is not currently affecting the number of asylum seekers in Austria. In 2017, the number of asylum applications decreased. In the first five months of the year, there were 10,520 applications for asylum, a decrease of 53 percent compared with the previous year (22,419).

In the first five months of 2017, 747 asylum applications were received from unaccompanied minors, 72 of which were younger than 14. 182 refugees - all from Syria - have so far been brought to Austria as part of resettlement programmes. The number of open asylum procedures also declined, reaching a peak of 79,723 in 2015. Meanwhile, the backlog of proceedings has been reduced to 67,366 outstanding cases in the first and second instance

## 2. The state of Art of Volunteers' work with Asylum seekers and refugees

### 2.1. Main characteristics of volunteer “phenomenon” in Austria (kinds of associations, main sectors, evolution and trends)

Volunteering is of great importance in Austria. In recent years, measures have been taken to promote voluntary commitment at diverse levels and in a wide variety of areas to continuously improve the framework conditions for realizing this significant commitment. The Federal Act on the Promotion of Voluntary Commitment (Federal Act on Volunteering) created a legal framework in 2012 for the first time to support this socially important and valuable commitment.

Some 2.3 million people work in organisations and associations without pay. Volunteering offers added value to our society, but it is not a substitute for paid work. The time spent on volunteering is considerable. The majority of the volunteers are working up to 30 days a year.

The majority of the volunteers are regularly involved. Many people get involved - often additionally - in time-limited projects. Voluntary commitment not only benefits society but also the individual. Volunteering is not only an interesting balance between work and training, it is also an exciting opportunity to acquire new skills, develop one's own strengths, take on responsibility, contribute, help shape and remain active. This opens up many new perspectives.

The participation rate in total volunteering is the same for women and men. Nearly half (46%) of all Austrians are volunteers.

A comparison of formal and informal volunteering shows that the proportion of men in the formal sector is around 6 percentage points higher than that of women. Conversely, it is in the informal sector, i. e. neighbourhood aid, where considerably more women than men (33% vs. 28%) are active.

Participation in volunteering is high in all age groups. The figure for the 15-29 year-olds is 43%. The share of 30 to 59-year-olds is 46 to 50 percent. The 60- to 69-year-olds have the highest participation rate (57%) - i. e. those who want to and are able to participate in non-profit activities even after the end of their paid employment. This applies both to volunteer work and neighbourhood help. Even among the 70 to 79 year-olds, many still participate in volunteering (43%). But even among the over-80s, a quarter are still active in one form or another of volunteering.

#### Disaster relief and rescue services

A total of 360,000 people in Austria volunteer for disaster relief and rescue services. Together, they produce 1.3 million working hours per week in a wide range of applications.

**Arts, culture, entertainment and leisure**

More than 432,000 volunteers work in Austria in the diverse fields of art, culture, entertainment and leisure. They represent a weekly output of almost 1.8 million working hours. More commitment can only be found in the sports sector.

**Voluntary commitment to art, culture, entertainment and leisure**

It is deeply rooted in the communities and districts of Austria. The Austrian brass band association (ÖBV) with 3,195 bands and associations, youth orchestras and music school orchestras with a total of 140,710 members (2012) is one of the major cultural sponsors. The Chorverband Österreich (ChVÖ) is the umbrella organisation for 3,256 choirs in which 82,156 singers meet regularly. The Federation of Austrian Traditional Costume and Homeland Associations includes 1,282 clubs and 340 youth groups with 120,542 members.

**Environment, nature and animal welfare**

This field has become increasingly important in Austria in recent years. Approximately 216,000 volunteers work approximately 901,000 hours a week. The environmental umbrella organisation (UWD) currently comprises 39 environmental and nature conservation organisations with around 1.3 million members. Its member organisations include the Austrian Alpine Association and its youth organisation, Naturfreunde Österreich (Austrian Friends of Nature) and Naturschutzbund (Nature Conservation Association) and its youth organisation. Common concerns are the sustainable protection of water as a natural resource, the use of climate protection and renewable energies, the commitment to domestic protected areas and the preservation of the diversity of genes, species and ecosystems.

**Ecclesiastical and religious areas**

In the church and religious spheres, volunteering plays a significant role with around 360,000 volunteers and more than 1.4 million working hours per week. In Austria, this area is dominated by the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.

**Social and health sector**

In the social and health sectors, there are many overlaps with other areas (e. g. religion, education, rescue services). Approximately 288,000 volunteers work 1.16 million hours a week.

**Political work and representation of interests**

Approximately 216,000 people in Austria volunteer their time in the field of politics and lobbying. They provide more than 868,000 working hours per week. Volunteer work is carried out, among other

things, for political parties, in local councils or for professional interest groups (e. g. the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions, the Federation of Industrialists' Associations).

**Civic activities and communities**

The field of civic activities and community life has a long tradition in Austria (e. g. for the improvement of the townscape). Thanks to the new information and communication technologies, new civic activities have also developed. Around 360,000 volunteers work for the community in Austria. In 2012, the volunteers worked almost 924,000 hours per week.

**Sport and exercise**

Approximately 576,000 people in Austria volunteer for sports and exercise. They work almost 2.2 million hours a week. The sport thus takes first place in terms of both the number of volunteers and the number of hours worked. Almost every Austrian municipality has a sports club.

## 2.2. The role of volunteers in organization hosting/working with refugees and asylum seekers

Currently, more than 50 organisations are engaged in Austria in the work with refugees. Almost all of them are supported in their work by volunteers. The most important are:

- [Arcobaleno](#)  
Social and cultural integration of foreigners in Upper Austria
- [Asyl in Not](#)  
It offers counselling and support for asylum seekers (recognised refugees) in legal and social matters.
- [Asylkoordination Österreich](#)  
Supports organisations and committed individuals in advising migrants and refugees and offers, among other things, addresses of asylum authorities at federal and state level as well as links to organisations in the field of asylum.
- [Beratungszentrum für Migranten und Migrantinnen](#)  
Offers counselling and support for foreign workers and their family members as well as vocational and educational counselling for asylum seekers (recognised refugees).
- [Caritas Österreich – Hilfe für Flüchtlinge](#)  
Accommodation and care, counselling and representation as well as assistance with the integration of refugees
- [Caritas Österreich – Hilfe für Migrantinnen/Migranten](#)  
Assistance in finding work and housing, training measures, counselling of migrants etc.
- [Caritas der Erzdiözese Wien – Asyl und Integration](#)  
Asylum centre, centre for migrants, social service at the airport, education and legal advice, psychosocial service centre (traumatic treatment) etc.
- [Deserteurs- und Flüchtlingsberatung Wien](#)  
Advice and support for refugees, especially in matters of asylum and residence law.
- [Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst](#)  
Counselling, care, accommodation, education and medical and psychotherapeutic treatment of asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and Austrians

- [FIBEL – Fraueninitiative Bikulturelle Ehen und Lebensgemeinschaften](#)  
Provides information and advice on legal issues (stay, asylum, work permits, family law, etc.) and social and cultural issues.
- [Helping Hands](#)  
Lawyers offer free advice on foreign law and integration, as well as racism issues.
- [Hemayat](#)  
Offers interpreter-supported medical, psychological and psychotherapeutic care for victims of torture and people with war traumatizations from Vienna and the surrounding area.
- [I am Refugee – Verein zur schrittweisen Integration von Flüchtlingen](#)  
Provides information on the step-by-step integration process and a structured overview of the respective integration offerings. The website is available in German as well as Dari, Farsi, Arabic and English.
- [Interface Wien GmbH](#)  
Promotes the integration of children, young people and adults with an immigrant background into society as a whole through educational, information and advisory measures.
- [NIPE – Netzwerk für Interkulturelle Psychotherapie nach Extremtraumatisierung](#)  
NIPE is a network of 8 institutions providing psychotherapy for refugees, especially for severely traumatised adults and children.
- [OMEGA – Transkulturelles Zentrum für psychische und physische Gesundheit und Integration](#)  
The association OMEGA, headquartered in Graz, offers advice and support in various languages. The offer is aimed, for example, at asylum seekers, persons entitled to asylum, people with subsidiary protection, people without legal residence permits, etc.
- [Österreichischer Integrationsfonds](#)  
The Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) is a fund of the Republic of Austria and a partner of the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs as well as numerous stakeholders in the field of integration and migration in Austria. He advises refugees and immigrants in their integration process at seven locations (Vienna, Graz, Linz, Salzburg, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt and St. Pölten) as well as in numerous mobile counselling centres throughout Austria. In its activities, the ÖIF addresses asylum seekers, subsidiary protection beneficiaries and third-country nationals, people with a migration background, institutions, organisations and multipliers in the fields of integration, social affairs and education and Austrian society. The ÖIF offers a wide range of consulting services, particularly in the areas of language and values development.
- [Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz – Migration und Suchdienst](#)  
Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants receive assistance and support measures, e. g. help with family reunification, etc.

- [Plattform Rechtsberatung](#)  
Supports the team of independent legal counselling of the Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst in Tyrol and carries out public relations work and awareness-raising in the area of asylum and migration.
- [SOS Menschenrechte Österreich](#)  
Provides care and accompaniment for refugees as well as projects in the field of anti-discrimination and human rights education. The association is mainly active in Upper Austria.
- [SOS Mitmensch Burgenland](#)  
Legal advice and social care for refugees
- [Flüchtlingsprojekt Ute Bock](#)  
Counselling and counselling of asylum seekers living in Vienna and, in many cases, homeless asylum seekers and other refugees in need of assistance
- [Verein menschen.leben](#)  
Mainly active in the fields of integration/education/language, asylum, women's work, psychological care and youth work; provision of accommodation for unaccompanied minor refugees, women's specific accommodation and care for asylum seekers, etc.
- [Verein Menschenrechte Österreich](#)  
Legal advice in asylum procedures and foreign police procedures, return counselling, detention on remand, integration of asylum seekers and subsidiary protection beneficiaries
- [Verein Projekt Integrationshaus](#)  
Counselling and counselling centre for asylum seekers, persons entitled to asylum (recognised refugees) and migrants
- [Volkshilfe Österreich](#)  
Refugee houses, counselling services, integration and education projects, etc.
- [Volkshilfe Österreich – Beratungsstelle FAIR](#)  
Advice, information and support for migrants and recognised refugees in St. Pölten on job-seeking, translation problems or legal issues
- [ZEBRA – Interkulturelles Beratungs- und Therapiezentrum](#)  
Target groups of the association's work in Graz include asylum seekers, convention refugees and traumatized persons as well as migrant workers. The association offers employment counselling, legal and cultural support.
- Train of Hope - Flüchtlingshilfe  
This .organisation emerged out of nowhere when in summer 2015 thousands of refugees arrived at the Austrian border. Several hundred volunteers organised food, shelter, information and medical aid. They were supported by the Austrian Railways who let them use big a part of the

newly opened central railway station in Vienna. In winter 2016, the big wave was over and Train of Hope was founded as non-profit organisation for refugee aid.

An analysis of the volunteers in autumn 2015 claimed that one in four Austrians was involved in helping refugees (23.1%). Here as well was a difference depending on the level of education: While 19.8% of the compulsory school graduates committed themselves to refugees, the proportion of those with highest school education or a university degree was 32.1%.

### 3. Volunteers' needs

#### 3.1. Who are they? Knowing and analyzing volunteers' motivations, needs, attitudes, skills, expectations and beliefs

ECC organised two focus group meetings in January and February 2018 where we collected information from volunteers working with refugees and asylum seekers. We collected inputs on various fields, following the Volunteers Focus Groups Guidelines that had been elaborated by the Italian partner. Altogether, eleven persons took place. They came from the following organisations:

- Train of Hope
- Caritas
- Diakonie Flüchtlingshilfe
- Hemayat
- Flüchtlingsprojekt Ute Bock
- Volkshilfe Österreich

In the following, a summary to the questions and discussion points is given:

- 1) How would you define your role of volunteer in a general sense?

The majority of participants stated that they see their role as “helpers” supporting the organisation where they work in their tasks.

- 2) Thinking about your own experience, what are the areas where volunteers working with refugees and asylum seekers are involved?

The answers varied to a great extent, ranging from language learning support via administrative support to giving legal advice in asylum and migration issues.



## 3) What do you do?

The majority (7) of the participants engages in language learning activities and private tuition for young refugees. One third of the respondents were involved in administrative activities, one person works in an organisation giving legal advice.

## 4) How much time do you spend for these volunteering activities?

The answers varied between 3 hours per week and 2 days (given by a person who is already retired).

## 5) What do you think are the characteristics someone volunteering with refugees/asylum seekers must have?

The analysis of this question did not yield a clear picture. In the discussion during the focus group, the general opinion was that whatever technical and professional skills a person has, they might be needed depending on the type of voluntary work. There was general agreement on personal competences, especially empathy. Concerning age and gender, no clear preferences were stated. However, one issue led to a vivid discussion, namely to which extent Muslim men accept advice and support from women. There were no preferred nationalities, but it was stated that nationals from the same country where a refugee comes from can give substantial support – provided that he or she has already roots in the host country.

## 6) What do you think is the identity that volunteers working in the sector “build” for themselves?

It was obvious that this question met most participants unprepared. In general, they see themselves a kind people who are acting ethically. They feel respected by their environment. Some mentioned that they would like to receive more attention and appreciation from the organisation where they work as volunteers.

## 7) What concrete critical issues you have faced in your work and what can their causes be?

- a) in relation to training: Inadequate preparation? Inconsistency between activities carried out and training received that create specific expectations? Lack of training? On what aspects? What skills do you need?

The most frequently mentioned training method consists of peer tutoring; i.e. new volunteers accompany older volunteers in the first days or weeks and learn by doing. Regular supervision was reported only by one person.

- b) in relation to work organization: Excessive workloads? Are you asked for things you should not do? There is not continuity in what they do. Etc.

Those participants of the focus group who are working already for a longer time (and this was true for half of them) reported that their work load had decreased after the climax in autumn 2015. In general, volunteers are satisfied with their situation; but some of them mentioned that they would like to do other work.

c) in relation to beneficiaries: Conflicts with them? Lack of intercultural skills? Specific situations of vulnerability needs a specialized worker and cannot be delegated to a volunteer. Etc.

While most of the focus group participants mentioned that their work is highly appreciated by their clients/learners, five people told also about incidents where conflicts had arisen. In retrospect, they said, these situations have occurred because their clients/learners seem to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. It was interesting to experience that only a minority of volunteers knew about this terminus.

d) in relation to relationship with different professional roles: Conflicts with other organization's staff? Are they supportive enough? Lack of understanding of different roles? Etc.

No conflicts have been reported; support from the administration is at a sufficient level.

e) in relation to emotionality: Being in contact with suffering, disadvantages that cannot be solved? Sense of powerlessness? Sense of loneliness? Etc.

This was a very emotional point, especially in the light of the new right-wing Austrian government that raises a lot of fear that the situation for refugees in Austria will become more tight

F9 vocation? What is more important, competence or vocation? Can they be conflicting? How? Etc.

Again the political aspects dominated this question: Most participants feel they now it is even more important to help refugees and to show signs of tolerance.

8) What are the possible solutions to the critical issues you have identified?

a) in relation to training:

Given the fact that the participants had not received substantial training, only "introduction" into their job by peer learning, at first they were not prepared to identify what they want to be trained, the level of satisfaction, or even the evaluation of the results of training. In the course of the meeting, however, it turned out that a great majority would prefer to have a substantial training, also and foremost about psychological background, and that they would need more support such as regular supervision.

b) There is general satisfaction and no big potential for improvement has been stated.

c) in relation to beneficiaries:

Here we discussed several issues: that some female participants had experienced difficulties with Muslim men who did not accept their help; the question of food (halal meals etc.); and the fact that many volunteers are not prepared to encounter clients with post-traumatic stress disorder.

d) in relation to relationship with different professional roles:

Almost all participants would prefer to receive more training, some expressed also their wish to have a clearer division of tasks and responsibilities.

e) in relation to emotionality:

Supervision is definitely the most urgently wanted activity that the employing organisation should provide.

f) in relation to motivations:

Since all participants feel highly motivated, they did not see the need for further increasing their motivation.

### 3.2. What are the key factors for successful integration? And what the critical points?

During some interviews with key actors, these questions were discussed. The Austrian refugees organisation scene has seen a considerable growth in the past years, and also considerable changes in acceptance from the average citizens. Whereas in 2015 a large part of the Austrian population was in line with the welcome culture, there is a growing tendency to vote for closing the borders and to reduce or stop immigration. The current political situation only mirrors this development.

In this context, volunteering which has been widely highlighted about social inclusion, and regarded as expression of civic engagement, should be seen in a new perspective.

Under increasing pressure to professionalize volunteer management, i.e. under the principles of efficiency and control, some key actors fear that a certain social exclusion of the volunteers might be the result of using these principles in the volunteer management practice. If volunteers—much like money—are only regarded as resources or assets, there is a trend to measure volunteering in a similar way as to calculate how many hours have been worked. In this case, quantity rules over quality.

The interviews suggested to put more emphasis on social inclusion of the volunteers. Volunteers should work alongside staff rather than in a strict hierarchy. They should be involved at all organizational levels, not just in front-line work but also in supporting managers and directors, perhaps as volunteer consultants, trainers or researchers. The interaction between staff and volunteers should be more flexible, whereby staff members mentor volunteers, but volunteers also play a mentoring role, sharing expertise with staff.

Another important aspect arose in the question how to actively encourage and support former “clients”, i.e. refugees who want to volunteer. This aspect is especially important because of the low number of Austrians speaking the language of the refugee countries (Arabic, Farsi, Pashtun). In fact, during the height of the refugee influx in autumn 2015 a great number of migrants were involved, especially at the Vienna central station in the “Train of Hope”. This approach should be followed and further developed, but it will be necessary to keep in mind that when clients become volunteers, their relationship to the organization changes significantly. As clients, they came to the organization for help and services. As volunteers, they now come to the organization to get and give help and develop a sense of pride through their participation. It will be necessary to provide extra support to those volunteers.

**“I want to contribute to an open society”**

Nelly E. is a 21 years old student in Vienna. Over the past three years, she has been engaged in voluntary work.

Where have you been working?

*I had actually three commitments. The first was at the Ute Bock Haus. I applied there and was accepted after an interview with people working in the administration.*

What did you do?

*I was responsible for collecting and checking the mail that arrived for the refugees who live there. They receive post not only from their families, but also from the public authorities concerning their refugee situation, their asylum process, whether they are allowed to stay or not, etc. These letters arrive at registered letters and must be answered within a certain time, otherwise they face heavy consequences.*

How long did you work there?

*Almost one year. It was a regular job, three day a week from 12 to 18 o'clock, sometimes also longer. But without payment.*

Which support did you get?

*The person who had done this job before explained what I should do. Otherwise, there was not much support. I also did not have much contact with the employed social workers and psychologists. Finally, the administration told me that they did not need me anymore, and that was that.*

Did you get some certificate or confirmation?

*No. But I did not care, because this was in August 2015 and I rushed to the Hauptbahnhof (central station) where each day hundreds of refugees arrived. Everybody who wanted to help was welcomed. There was no boss, but it worked fine!*

So how did the organisation work?

*We had short meetings each day where we decided together who is responsible for what. That worked fine as long as the emergency situation lasted, for three months or so. Only when fewer refugees arrived and it became clear that the Hauptbahnhof would return to normality, then the competition broke out and various fractions started to compete about how to establish an association. It was then that I decided to leave.*

You said you have been working in three places?

*Yes, my current voluntary work is on a strictly private level. From my previous jobs, I know a lot of people, also many refugees, and so I help them when they need a translation, or a just contact with Austrians. I want to contribute to an open society here in our country, especially now with this right-wing xenophobic government. I want to show them that there is another Austria.*

## 4. Conclusion and considerations/suggestions

Overall, the findings from the focus groups and the interviews with key actors show that in Austria there is a large number of organisations working with or for refugees and asylum seekers. Almost all of them – with the exception of state and municipal institutions – employ volunteers; a large number is working exclusively with volunteers, some of them even in the administration.

The current shift to a right-wing policy in Austria is accompanied by growing fear that the work of refugee organisations might become more difficult, but it has also led to attitudes of determination and solidarity among the volunteers who will not give up.

The focus groups and the interviews with key actors have also shown that there is considerable space for improving the training of volunteers for the tasks that they are supposed to do. From the organisation's point of view, this fact is explained with lack of money. We have noticed that volunteers would appreciate more introductory training in intercultural issues and that they would also need regular supervision.

## Annexes

### References:

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