Labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees

Austria

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April 2016
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Summary table on the support available to (a) asylum seekers; (b) refugees; and (c) third country nationals (TCN) in Austria (underlining of the answer denotes that the provision is problematic)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Refugees</th>
<th>Asylum Seekers</th>
<th>Third Country Nationals</th>
<th>Recipients of Subsidiary Protection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the PES involved in the labour market integration of (a) asylum seekers (b) refugees (c) third country nationals (TCN)?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do (a) asylum seekers, (b) refugees and (c) TCN have access to:</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hiring subsidies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Startup (self-employment) support</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• On-the-job training</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other labour market integration support?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a systematic mentorship scheme in place for (a) asylum seekers (b) refugees and (c) TCN?</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are (a) refugees, (b) asylum seekers and (c) TCN eligible to receive unemployment benefits or unemployment assistance?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are benefits that are generally received by (a) refugees, (b) by asylum seekers (if applicable) and (c) TCN, conditional on job search requirements/activation?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the support provided to (a) asylum seekers, (b) refugees (c) TCN end as soon as they get a job?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify which services asylum seekers or refugees have access to that other TCN do not have access to.</td>
<td>Voluntary Integration Year Competence Check courses of AMS (PES)</td>
<td>Not eligible</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Voluntary Integration Year Competence Check courses of AMS (PES)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 What is the role of PES in integrating (a) (some) asylum seekers and (b) refugees?

If the PES is not involved, is there another agency dealing with the labour market integration of migrants?

Does the support offered differ according to different factors (e.g. socio-demographic characteristics, family circumstances, host country language skills etc)?

Does the support differ according to the skill level of the target group?

Are there specific programmes for these target groups?

To what extent do these target groups benefit from measures for broader target groups?

People entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection are actively counselled by the Public Employment Service (AMS).

In 2015, 88 151 applications for asylum were submitted, 72 % of them by men. Compared to the year before, it increased by 214 %. Concerning the country of origin, the three main groups were Afghans (29 %), Syrians (28 %) and Iraqis (15 %). All other countries of origin have a share of less than 4 %.

Under the terms of the Austrian Law, three key groups of refugees are distinguished:

a) People entitled to asylum (recognised refugees in accordance with the principles of the Geneva Convention): they have mostly equal status concerning labour market access as nationals or EU/EEA citizens.

b) People granted subsidiary protection (asylum procedure ends negatively, but on the basis of the principle of 'non-refoulement' they have a temporary residence permit): they basically have free access to the labour market and are partly treated as nationals.

c) Asylum seekers (in an ongoing asylum process, not yet legally concluded, with a factual deportation protection): very limited and permission-based access to the labour market. According to the Act Governing Employment of Foreign Nationals, only three months after submitting an asylum application, asylum seekers have the chance to get an employment permit. However, this regulation is overruled by the so-called Bartenstein-Decree issued in 2004, which defines that third-country-nationals have access only to jobs for the duration of maximum six months. De facto, asylum seekers can work only in agriculture or tourism, and only in the case that no EU-citizen applies for the job. Asylum seekers between 16 and 25 years old are entitled to start an apprenticeship training in professions with skilled labour shortage. According to recent PES figures, the number of work permits issued to asylum seekers

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1 The reasoning for including (some) is that there is no requirement by the EU that asylum seekers are included in integration policies.

2 Persons who have applied for international humanitarian protection but have not been granted it yet.

3 Covers all beneficiaries of international humanitarian protection – both refugees and subsidiary protection.

reduced from 768 in 2012 to 554 in 2014. In 2015, 583 work permits were issued, 109 of them for apprenticeship seekers.5

People under a) and b) are registered as unemployed at the PES and they are ‘actively counselled’. That means they receive job vacancies and course offerings as well as all other required active labour market policies (ALMP) measures.

People under c) are the responsibility of the provinces. They are registered and supervised by the PES only if they become entitled to unemployment benefits in the course of former permitted employment. However, in general they are not registered at the PES as unemployed and do not have any access to ALMP measures.

For reasons of equality and non-discrimination, a differentiation according to socio-demographic characteristics, family circumstances or similar criteria would only be possible to a limited extent. In practice, such differentiations result from the existing language skills and gender. If a person has neither German nor English language skills or is illiterate, the acquisition of basic German language skills has high priority. This is also the case for asylum seekers in some provinces (Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tirol, Vorarlberg, Vienna), whereas these courses are organised and financed by the provincial governments (in cooperation with the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) and not by the PES. However, the participation depends on the availability of free places in German language courses, which are only available in limited capacities. The focus is on level A1 and A2. Courses with higher levels (B1 and B) are financed by PES, if it would be necessary for labour market integration. Since women are ‘positively discriminated’ at the PES, there is an attempt to fill the course places to 50 % by women, even though the refugees in total consist of approximately 75 % men and 25 % women.

Last year, 17 300 asylum seekers, on average, were looking for a job and in 2016 the number of people entitled to political asylum entering the labour market is expected to grow. Over 30 000 new people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection are to be expected in 2016.6

By end of December 2015, 21 902 people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection were registered as unemployed (74.7 %), as apprenticeship seekers (3.0 %) or in training (22.3 %).7

In 2015, about 6 200 people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection were integrated into employment.

Another task of PES is the assessment of skills and competences of refugees. In this respect, the Vienna PES started the pilot project ‘Viennese Competence Check’ (for details see Section 3). It turned out that it would be necessary to design training and educational courses according to the pre-existing educational and skill level of refugees.

2 How does the support provided to (a) (some) asylum seekers and (b) refugees compare to other categories of migrants (third country nationals)?

Due to different labour market access entitlement of the various migrant and refugee groups, the PES support differs respectively.

5 Internal statistics of AMS, December 2015 (data not published), made available by AMS February 2016.


7 Internal statistics of AMS, December 2015 (data not published), made available by AMS February 2016.
People who have been granted asylum status or subsidiary protection status have different PES support requirements than third-country nationals. The main reason is that administrative procedures are quite different for both groups. Third-country nationals have to apply for a red-white-red card, which is issued by the respective residence authority on the basis of an expert opinion from PES. PES checks the certificates and the matching of the third-country applicant to the respective vacancy. For people who have been granted asylum status or subsidiary protection status, this procedure is not required as they have access to the labour market.

According to the Unemployment Insurance Act (ALVG) entitlement to unemployment benefits and unemployment assistance is primarily based on the duration of a job with social insurance payments and the residence permits related authorisation to pursue an economic activity. There is no further differentiation between categories of migrants. However, it has to be considered that labour market access has a decisive influence on unemployment benefit claims.

In addition to the PES service and support, there are various NGOs with special counselling offers for certain groups of migrants and refugees. The scope of their offer includes legal advice (related to right of residence, labour market access regulations etc.), provision of leisure opportunities, housing counselling in Vienna (not for asylum seekers), social and psychosocial care, and cultural integration. Some of the NGOs offer labour market related counselling (e.g. job search possibilities for people entitled to asylum). This type of counselling has been outsourced from the PES decades ago, in order to offer encompassing counselling for migrants in general (including people entitled to asylum). Asylum seekers are only counselled relating to general labour market access regulations, but will not receive any job search support.

3 Do (a) asylum seekers, (b) refugees and (c) other third-country migrants have access to other ALMPs such as:

- Hiring subsidies
- Start-up (self-employment) support
- On-the-job training
- Other labour market integration support?

People entitled to asylum and people under subsidiary protection have access to all ALMP measures provided by PES. This refers especially to hiring subsidies or to participation in the PES business start-up programme. This is also the case for third-country nationals with a red-white-red-plus card. For third-country nationals with a red-white-red card the access to ALMP measures depends on the individual case which has to be checked with the regional PES office.

In general, for people entitled to asylum and people under subsidiary protection special training courses are offered, e.g. German language courses (mainly A1 and A2, if required for labour market integration also B1 and B2) in combination with tailor made vocational training or completion of school degrees.

Voluntary Integration Year: From 2016 on, people who have been granted asylum status or subsidiary protection status are entitled two years later to complete a voluntary integration year, which is comparable with a voluntary social year. Asylum seekers or other third-country nationals are not eligible for that measure.

The respective persons are covered by health insurance and accident insurance but not by pension or unemployment insurance. The main target group are refugees who claim

Cf. URL: https://www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/content/12/Seite.120218.html
benefits from the means-tested income scheme. During their voluntary work, participants attend German language courses (A1 and A2) and vocational training. The main objective is their transition to a regular job.\(^9\)

**On-the-job-training:** People who want to pass a traineeship in order to improve knowledge and skills in practical skilled work, but without obligation to work and without claim for payment, are entitled to be employed for a period of up to three months. The traineeship has to be notified to PES by the traineeship provider two weeks in advance. This is the case for asylum seekers and other third-country nationals.

**The Competence Check:** A pilot project implemented by the Vienna PES is also an essential element for integrating recognised refugees into the labour market. In a five-week course for recognised refugees, the competences are checked through individual coaching and testing. The course is held in their native language and aims at identifying the competences and skills of the participants. The Austrian wide roll-out phase of this type of course is planned for 2016.

The results of the Competence Check were presented in January 2016.\(^{10}\) With the exception of nationals of one state (Afghanistan), the educational level of the asylum seekers who participated in the Competence Check is higher than expected.

**Graph 1: Educational structure of participants in Competence Check (898 Persons)**

![Graph 1](image_url)

Notes: Keine Schulbildung = no school education; Grundschule=primary school; Pflichtschule=compulsory school; Berufsausbildung=vocational education and training; Matura=higher education entrance qualification; Studium=university degree.


The skill level of people entitled to asylum who participated varies greatly between countries. In general, competence check-participants from Syria, Iran and Iraq are

\(^9\) Cf. URL: https://www.sozialministerium.at/site/Service_Medien/News_Veranstaltungen/News/Freiwilliges_Integrationsjahr_soll_Jobchancen_fuer_Asylberechtigte_verbessern

\(^{10}\) Slides from the Press Conference Competence Check see URL: http://www.ams.at/_docs/Pressekonferenz-Asylberechtigte-auf-Jobsuche-12-01-2016.pdf
found to be well qualified: 73% of Iraqis (total 40 participants), 67% of Syrians (total 187 participants) and 90% of the Iranians (total 100 participants) have completed higher education studies or vocational training. Participants from Afghanistan are mostly of low qualification. Only 26% have education higher than compulsory schooling, 25% completed compulsory schooling, 20% completed primary school and 30% of the participants are without any formal education (total 230 participants). According to information from the Vienna PES the main reason for this qualification structure is that Afghans show a high share of young asylum seekers (mainly unaccompanied minors) who didn’t finish at least compulsory school. And especially these 16 to 18 year old asylum seekers are a special problem group as they are not entitled to attend an Austrian compulsory school. For this group, the Vienna PES is currently developing special education and training courses.

In general, the qualification level of women is higher than that of men, yet with hardly any work experience.

What is particularly noticeable is the positive feedback of the PES advisors and coaches regarding the high level of commitment, the willingness to learn and the job flexibility of the refugees. These personal characteristics are absolutely necessary for a successful integration, but they are seriously threatened by the long asylum procedures and not rapidly implemented additional qualification facilities.

However, the optimistic results regarding the education do not necessarily imply an ‘easy integration’. Lack of language knowledge, traumatisation, the generally bad labour market situation etc. still remain a huge challenge. Another challenge is the wide spread training and support needs of the various refugee groups. In principle, tailor-made offers for smaller groups of participants would be necessary, which would require sufficient financial and logistic resources.

The PES plans to invest about EUR 68 million in integration measures for people entitled to asylum. Almost 62,000 recognised refugees will benefit from these investments. However, profound German language knowledge is crucial for the successful integration into the labour market. Therefore, the PES will provide tens of thousands places on German language training courses Austria wide for asylum seekers who are looking for a job.

In order to assess and evaluate the skills of the recognised refugees in detail, the number of the participants of the Competence Check will be increased up to 13,500 throughout Austria. Apart from Vienna, Competence Check measures are currently implemented in Upper Austria, Carinthia and Salzburg. But there is no common design of the Competence Check measures. For example, in one province, competence checks are carried out in the mother language of the refugees, and in another in German language. Some Competence Checks include an in-depth stocktaking of all formal and informal competences, some other only check the labour market relevant skills.

Consulting and support institutions will take over special services (e.g. the so-called Contact Points for people with qualifications acquired abroad provide support for the recognition of qualifications) to provide intensive support for 18,100 people entitled to

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11 The decade-long war is certainly one of the reasons for the low education level and the lack of occupational experience of people from Afghanistan.

12 Cf the compilation of the ‘Media Service Point New Austrians’, URL: http://medienservicestelle.at/migration_bewegt/2016/03/30/integration-in-den-bundeslaendern-deutschkurse-und-arbeit-im-mittelpunkt/. The ‘Media Service Point New Austrians’ is a team of independent journalists with migrant background. It is sponsored by the Chamber of Labour, the Federation of Austrian Industries, the association ‘Economy for Integration’, the PR agency ‘The Skills Group’, the Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and the Federal Chancellery.
asylum. In addition to this, the PES is going to implement measures related to vocational training and advanced training (5,700 courses) as well as related to the support regarding the integration into the labour market (2,100 integration allowances). Furthermore, PES will offer German language courses for 22,400 refugees (see chart 1). The focus of PES financed German language courses is on A2, if required for labour market integration also on B1 and B2. Basic German language courses (A1) are mainly financed by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF).

Table 1: Austria-wide support measures 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mittelnahme zur Integration</th>
<th>Plan-TeilnehmerInnen</th>
<th>Planausgaben 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deutschkurse</td>
<td>22,400</td>
<td>23,60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kompetenzchecks</td>
<td>13,500</td>
<td>12,40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beratungs- und Betreuungseinrichtungen, spezielle Beratungen (wie z.B. Anerkennung)</td>
<td>18,100</td>
<td>7,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus- und Weiterbildung</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>15,82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beschäftigung (wie z.B. Eingliederungsbeihilfen)</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>9,26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insgesamt (Förderfälle/Teilnahmen)</td>
<td>61,800</td>
<td>68,40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4 What are the concrete obstacles/challenges faced by (a) asylum seekers and (b) refugees in successfully integrating into the labour market?

Due to legal regulations, asylum seekers have extremely restricted access to the labour market. Long lasting asylum procedures are responsible for the long absence of refugees from the labour market. The recognition of qualifications, language problems, the lack of social networks in Austria and traumatisation are obstacles for a smooth integration process.

First of all, it should be stated once more, that during the first three months of the asylum procedure, asylum seekers are subject to prohibition of employment. After that period, asylum seekers have access only to jobs in selected fields. As soon as asylum seekers are accepted as refugees or people with subsidiary protection status, they have unrestricted access to the Austrian labour market. In other words: the basic problem of successfully integrating asylum seekers into the labour market is that they have no or very limited access to the labour market. Several studies and reports, most recently the OECD report (2016)\(^{13}\), recommend integration into the labour market as early as possible, because of better integration prospects in the long run.

As of beginning of October, young asylum seekers (up to 25 years old) are entitled for an apprenticeship training in shortage occupations, such as cutter, roofer or power engineer\(^{14}\). This is only possible under the condition that no Austrian or EU citizen can be found for the apprenticeship. Data shows that in reality only very few vacant apprenticeship places in these shortage occupations exist. A demand for apprentices can be observed especially in occupational fields such as restaurants and tourism, which


\(^{14}\) For the detailed list see: URL: http://www.migration.gv.at/de/formen-der-zuwanderung/dauerhafte-zuwanderung-rot-weiss-rot-karte/fachkraefte-in-mangelberufen.html#c2910
was already open for asylum seekers before. De facto, the new regulation is not expected to improve the situation of young asylum seekers on the labour market.

Secondly, asylum procedures last several months. In 2015, in total about 90 000 asylum applications were made. For around 60 000 applications the decision was pending.\(^{15}\) The average duration of asylum procedure increased from four months in 2014 to six months in 2015.\(^{16}\)

Thirdly, at the end of January 2016 the Council of Ministers decided a reform of the Asylum Act, including amongst others that the asylum status will be granted only for the duration of three years and then has to be approved again. Apart from an increased administrative burden for asylum authorities, the temporary asylum status will lead to a weak labour market position, as it is unclear how long the legal status will exist and the respective person is available.

Opening the access to the labour market for asylum seekers does not seem to be an issue at the moment, despite an agreement between the social partners and positive signals from the government during the last year 2015.

Beside the question of the access to the labour market, the issue of qualifications is vital. Adequate education or training measures could improve the success of labour market integration. The before mentioned Competence Check, with a planned Austrian wide roll-out phase in 2016, addresses people entitled to asylum and could be assessed as a very important instrument. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the 'time' factor, clarifying the skill profile of asylum seekers at an early stage (e.g. at the beginning of the asylum procedure) would be important in order to prepare adequate training programmes. For a successful integration there is of course a need of differentiation. Those with no or little education to acquire basic knowledge such as numeracy and literacy need special courses. These people will need much longer to integrate and this will not be achieved in one or two years.\(^{17}\)

Foreign gained qualification increases the likelihood of over-qualification and lower returns in the labour market. The recognition of certificates acquired abroad are expected to improve the situation. A new regulation for such recognitions of qualifications was under review in the last month and will now be adopted by Parliament. The plan is to set up an online portal as a focal point for requests for recognition. The requests are forwarded to the appropriate authorities which will have three months for a decision.

Another obstacle faced by asylum seekers and refugees will be the lack of networks in Austria which are often very helpful in finding a new job. That was the case, for example, with the immigration of people from former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

Other problems exist as well, such as mental and physical health problems, language problems and cultural differences as well as the high number of unemployed people who are residents of Austria.

5 **Is there a systematic mentorship scheme in place for (a) asylum seekers and (b) refugees integrating into the labour market?**

There is no systematic mentorship in place.

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\(^{15}\) cf. www.bfa.gv.at/publikationen/statistiken/start.aspx

\(^{16}\) According to the Ministry of the Interior, cited in: derstandard.at/2000028941068/Das-oesterreichische-Problem-mit-der-Asylstatistik

\(^{17}\) Interview with Thomas Liebig, Senior Migration Specialist in the International Migration Division of the OECD’s Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs. In: Der Standard. URL: http://derstandard.at, 29 Jänner 2016.
Austria does not have any specific systematic labour market integration assistance or mentorship scheme such as the ‘Mentoring for migrants’ programme, which is focussed on EU migrants and qualified third-country nationals with German language skills at B1 level at least. Yet there exists a broad range of counselling institutions and care facilities funded by the public sector (see point 10 below). In addition, a lot of NGOs offer individual mentorship, mostly carried out by volunteers.

Recently some initiatives started to support special groups of refugees and asylum seekers. As there are many academics and prospective students amongst the asylum seekers and refugees who would like to pursue their studies in Austria, Universities Austria has launched a project called MORE, which offers academic and artistic courses and seminars at Austrian universities to refugees and asylum seekers for free. MORE started in Autumn 2015, and now all public universities have joined. In addition people entitled to asylum have the opportunity to carry out a traineeship at the institutes of the Academy of Science. So mentoring schemes are only available for people entitled to asylum with academic background. The mentoring programme for migrants (offered by the Austrian Integration Fund, The Chamber of Commerce and the PES) is open for settled migrants with at least apprenticeship degree or secondary school leaving examination, sufficient German language skills and entitlement to labour market access. De facto this programme is accessible for well-educated and settled migrants.

As of April 2016, an online platform for refugees (www.refugeeswork.at) offers support for refugees and asylum seekers to find adequate and legal traineeships, training places, or jobs (as far as they have labour market access) in companies. It also supports companies to overcome bureaucratic obstacles when willing to offer any traineeship or job.

6 Are (a) refugees and (b) asylum seekers eligible to receive unemployment benefits or unemployment assistance?

The entitlement to the unemployment benefits and unemployment assistance is primarily based on the duration of job tenure and thus depends on labour market access.

According to the Unemployment Insurance Act (ALVG) the entitlement to the unemployment benefits and unemployment assistance is primarily based on the duration of job tenure (with social insurance payments) and the residence permits related authorisation to pursue an economic activity. There is no further differentiation between categories of migrants.

De facto, asylum seekers are not eligible to unemployment benefits or unemployment assistance. Only people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection may draw unemployment benefits or assistance as far as they fulfil the respective criteria (especially concerning job tenure).

In the area of social welfare benefits there is a different situation. Asylum seekers in Austria have access to the so-called basic care, but they do not have access to the means-tested minimum income.

The entitlement to the means-tested minimum income for people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection is provided only five months after the respective status acquisition, other migrants are entitled immediately. The same applies to social benefits such as childcare allowance. At the moment in some provinces a cut of social benefits for people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection is planned\(^\text{18}\). The envisaged cut amounts to half of the regular benefit level.

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\(^{18}\) For the debate in Upper Austria see: URL: http://derstandard.at/2000033812315/Mindestsicherung-in-OberoesterreichSchwarz-Blau-will-auf-520-Euro-kuerzen
7 In what ways are benefits that are generally received by (a) refugees and by (b) asylum seekers conditional on job search requirements/activation?

Receipt of unemployment benefit is dependent upon job search activities. Asylum seekers who are in basic care, are not obliged to carry out job search activities.

Recipients of unemployment benefits and unemployment assistance are obliged to prove their willingness to work. In general these recipients have to be available for any job placement activities and they have to demonstrate their job search activities to their PES counsellor. This is the case for all recipients irrespective of any refugee status.

If people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection receive means-tested minimum income and they are fit for work, they have to accept any reasonable placement offer or offers for training courses provided by PES. Otherwise their benefits are cut.

Asylum seekers who are in basic care, are not obliged to carry out job search activities. If people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection receive means-tested minimum income, as of February 2016 some provinces started to implement so-called 'value courses'. These courses should impart values such as democracy, gender equality, rule of law etc. If refugees do not participate, the social benefits will be cut. This is also the case for not participating in German language courses.

8 Does the support provided to the (a) asylum seekers, (b) refugees and (c) other migrants end as soon as they get a job or does it continue for a while during the first phase of their employment? If yes, what support continues?

Income related support ends with taking up a job

The general rules of 'granting income related social benefits' apply here, such as for housing benefits. People entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection who receive means-tested minimum income will lose their social benefits when taking up employment, except where the wage is lower than the defined poverty threshold.

For asylum seekers the situation is different. Asylum seekers who are in basic care and are employed in seasonal jobs and earn more than EUR 120 per month will lose basic care and health insurance.

9 To what extent are social partners systematically involved in (a) labour market integration service provision and/or (b) labour market integration service/policy definition and design?

Social partners are not systematically involved in labour market integration support

Austria has a long tradition of social partnership in all economic and societal areas. Integration of refugees has been a major issue in the political discussion between the social partners. The role of the social partners in the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees is to bring up arguments against or in favour of an earlier labour market access and to participate in the political discussion. But social partners are not involved in the design of ALMP measures or in the service provision for asylum seekers and refugees. The only exception is that employed people entitled to asylum or employed people granted subsidiary protection may call on counselling services of the Chamber of Labour which are open for all dependent employed people.
On the issue of eased labour market access, there was some movement from the political stakeholders. In summer 2015, the Minister of Labour was still against an eased access of asylum seekers to the labour market. The main argument was the deteriorating labour market situation in Austria. The position – also from the social partners – has changed in the meantime. The whole government is in favour of a more liberal labour market access. The social partners agreed that asylum seekers should be entitled to work in any sector, if PES assesses a need for certain professions.19

Nevertheless, the Trade Unions expressed some concern about a general access as they are afraid of a wage dumping effect. Against this background, some representatives of the trade unions demand a labour market test before setting out a work permit. This would mean an additional task for PES counsellors.

Conversely, the Federation of Austrian Industries demands an eased labour market access for asylum seekers without any labour market test.

The current debate on earlier labour market access for asylum seekers is focussed on the extension of community service in public institutions and the speedup of asylum procedures.

10 To what extent is the labour market integration of refugees well-coordinated within the country? Do employment agencies and asylum authorities coordinate?

There is no clear coordination of integration support for refugees provided by several institutions.

In the context of labour market integration of refugees, several players are involved, such as PES, Austrian Integration Fund and the provincial governments. The Chamber of Commerce is involved in the programme ‘Mentoring for Migrants’, which addresses migrants in general, but only those with an employment permit and German language skills (at least B1). As already mentioned, this type of mentoring scheme is more geared towards well-educated third country nationals with good German language skills.

Between these stakeholders there is not any coordination concerning the systematic integration support of refugees (people entitled to asylum, people granted subsidiary protection). The 50-point plan of the Assembly of Experts (established by the Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs) contains some recommendations for the field of employment.20 This includes a comprehensive stocktaking of skills and competences of people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection, financial support for the qualification recognition procedures, vocational orientation for young refugees, and occupation-related German language courses. As accompanying measures, a contact point for companies willing to hire people entitled to asylum and a mentoring scheme for refugees were proposed. But the proposals do not refer to the organisations involved and the interface between all players involved.

There is some overlap in basic support, especially basic German language courses which are provided by several institutions. A point of discussion is if the PES is responsible for financing the majority of the language courses or if other institutions should co-finance these courses.

19 The common position and recommendations of the social partners for handling the refugee situation in Austria cf. URL: https://www.wko.at/Content.Node/Interessenvertretung/Arbeit-und-Soziales/Sozialpartner-Herausforderungen-der-Fluechtlingssituation.html

20 Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, 50-point plan – Plan for the integration of people entitled to asylum and people granted subsidiary protection [50 Punkte – Plan zur Integration von Asylberechtigten und subsidiär Schutzberechtigten in Österreich], compiled by the Assembly of Experts, Vienna, 2015
In March 2016, in a common press conference a better coordination between the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) and PES was announced. The ‘value courses’ provided by ÖIF, will be integrated into training courses provided by PES for people entitled to asylum or for people granted subsidiary protection. These value courses are conducted by ÖIF trainers and ÖIF interpreters are available on request. The general coordination of the course and the provision of premises is organised by PES. In Vienna, the offers of the city of Vienna (e.g. START VIENNA programme) are complementary to the ÖIF and PES offers. The implementation of these courses and trainings doesn't follow a coherent Austrian-wide strategy. Each province has its own focus and special offers, and respective activities are concentrated on the Vienna region.

In addition to the above mentioned players in the field of labour market integration, a great number of counselling and care centres from various NGOs offer counselling in the field of education and employment\(^{21}\).

A cooperation between PES and the asylum authorities (especially the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum) only exists in a rudimentary form at the interface of the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals (AusIBG). This occurs i.e. when dealing with issues relating to jobs of asylum seekers that require a work permit. Apart from that there is no closer cooperation.

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\(^{21}\) See Internet: https://www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/content/12/Seite.120218.html
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