



Community Orientation

# Guidebook

AUSTRIA

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### **Editor**

Südwind Verein für Entwicklungspolitik und globale Gerechtigkeit, Laudongasse 40, 1080 Wien

### **Authors**

Sonja Jochum, Teclaire Ngo Tam, Andrea Ben Lassoued

### **Translator**

Robert Poth

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# Community Orientation **Guidebook** Austria

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This guidebook is produced as part of “STIRE: Supporting the Integration of Resettled”, a project which is being carried out in Austria, Ireland, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia and Romania. The main objective of STIRE is to support pre-departure and foster post-arrival integration of refugees that are resettled in one of the above mentioned countries. However, the information provided in this booklet can also be helpful to other refugees on their way to establish a new life in one of the mentioned EU countries.

In this guidebook you will find basic information about support services to help refugees to get started, to obtain social and healthcare services, learn the language and new skills, start work, get settled and successfully move forward with their lives. The guidebook is not meant to provide detailed information, but it rather serves as a starting point and a reference to available help and support.

You can find additional information about international protection (refugee status), the resettlement process and other useful information for refugees on the STIRE ([stire.org](http://stire.org)) project website.

This guidebook is also a source of useful information for service providers and volunteers in the local communities in one of the mentioned countries, who work with refugees, providing basic information and a list of resources and contacts that can help make the integration process easier for everyone involved.



# 1. Housing

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## 1.1 RECEPTION

As a **resettlement refugee**, you enter Austria with a visa. On arrival at the airport, you will be met by staff members of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and assisted with entry formalities. You will be received and welcomed by the competent authorities and informed about the first steps. During the first days, you will be accommodated in a federal reception facility where you will have to undergo some medical examinations before being granted asylum status. Once granted asylum, you have free access to the labour market and can look for an affordable accommodation by yourself.

Refugees **not entering Austria as resettled refugees** have first to make an application for asylum to a police authority. Then, they are accommodated in an initial reception centre (Erstaufnahmestelle) or a basic care centre (Grundversorgungsquartier). They will have to leave this centre at the latest four months after having been granted asylum.

## 1.2 GOVERNMENT SUBSIDISED HOUSING

As any Austrian citizen, resettlement refugees and other refugees may register for municipal flats. Demand is huge, however, and waiting times are usually very long. To be eligible for a municipal flat, the net income of all persons who want to live in the flat must not exceed a certain maximum level. Some cities require you to have resided in their municipal area for a certain minimum amount of time before you can register for municipal flats. You can get detailed information on this requirement and on the income limits at the municipal office of your place.



### 1.3 RENTING AN APARTMENT OR HOUSE

Most people **searching for a flat** check for advertisements in the internet<sup>1</sup> and in newspapers, ask acquaintances or contact aid organisations for support. Some people also use social networks to find a flat.

You should insist on a **written rental agreement** with the landlord.

 **Important:** You should go through the rental agreement thoroughly before signing. If in doubt, have it checked by experts.

**Prices** vary depending on the condition and location of the flat. Flats in a central area with good transport connections are usually more expensive than flats in suburbs. Compare the different offers. For a start, you should calculate the price per square meter.

 In flat advertisements, different **types of costs** are stated.

- **Monthly net rent** (sometimes called "Hauptmietzins")
- **Running costs** ("Betriebskosten"): costs of water and costs related to common areas of the house like electricity, cleaning, administration, lift etc.

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{net rent} \\ + \text{ running costs} \\ \hline = \text{Monthly gross rent} \\ \text{(this amount has to be} \\ \text{paid to the landlord)} \end{array}$$

**Attention!** Apart from the rent, you will have to pay for electricity, gas, internet and your household insurance, about 100 Euro all in all! Make sure that your household insurance includes liability insurance to protect you if you have caused harm to someone else accidentally.

When renting a flat you will have to make a **security deposit** ("Kautions"), a certain amount of money, usually three gross monthly rents. This deposit is a security for the landlord if something gets damaged or a tenant fails to pay the rent. The security deposit can be paid in cash, deposited in a savings book or as a bank guarantee. However you handle it, your landlord needs to have access to this money. You should insist on a payment confirmation (especially when paying in cash).

<sup>1</sup> Websites where you can search for a flat:  
<http://www.immobilienscout24.at/>  
<http://www.immobilien.net/>  
<http://www.immodirekt.at/>  
<http://www.privatimmobilien.at/>  
<https://www.willhaben.at/iad/immobilien/mietwohnungen/>

Flats are often offered via real estate agents who will charge a commission for their services, a so-called "**Provision**" (a maximum of 1-2 monthly gross rents depending on the duration of the rental agreement).

Sometimes furniture or electrical appliances bought or installed by previous tenants can be taken over against payment. The amount of such a payment is called the "**Ablösesumme**".

If you move to a new flat you have to register your new place of residence within three days with the appropriate registration office of your municipality/city. For registration you need a completed residence registration form ("Meldezettel") signed by the landlord and an official photo identification (a "Lichtbildausweis").<sup>2</sup>

**Counselling and care in case of impending loss of housing:** If you are about to lose your flat and urgently need a new one, you can get assistance from a variety of public and private organisations. A list of addresses is available [here](#).

Your **rights** as a **tenant** include the right to receive the flat in the agreed condition (newly built, refurbished, well-kept) and, of course, the right of use and to receive a key and a spare key.

Your **obligations** as a tenant include the obligation to pay the rent on time and to use the flat with care. You also have to allow the landlord to make necessary repairs to the flat.

More information on housing is available at the following [link](#).

The organisation *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* has published a guidebook<sup>3</sup> on housing (in Vienna) with many tips and information for refugees, available in German, Arabic and Farsi.

## 1.4 OWNERSHIP

Everyone in Austria can buy a flat if she/he has the money to do so. You can take out a loan at a bank to buy a flat. You should inform yourself thoroughly and consider carefully whether you are able to repay the loan.

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2 This can be a valid identity card, a passport, a residence title, an Austrian driving licence.

3 German: <http://www.fluechtlinge-willkommen.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Wohnen-in-Wien-Deutsch.pdf>

Arabic:

<http://www.fluechtlinge-willkommen.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Wohnen-in-Wien-Arabisch.pdf>

Farsi: <http://www.fluechtlinge-willkommen.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Wohnen-in-Wien-Farsi.pdf>





## 2. Health care

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In Austria, health insurance is compulsory for anybody earning an income that exceeds the minimum income threshold<sup>4</sup>. Health insurance coverage is also provided to persons receiving unemployment benefits (via the Labour Market Service/Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS) and to persons receiving social assistance (Sozialhilfe). Insured persons have the right to be attended by a doctor in a doctor's office or - in case of emergencies - in a hospital. Most doctors in Austria have a contract with an Austrian health insurance institution, referred to as "Kassenärzte" or "Vertragsärzte" (contract doctors). The costs of their services are assumed by the Austrian health insurance institutions (in full or in part, depending on the health insurance institution).

 **Attention:** Many doctors in Austria don't have a contract with a health insurance institution. These are called "Wahlärzte" ("doctors of choice"). Their waiting rooms may be less full, waiting times may be shorter and they may have more time for you during a consultation than contract doctors, but often they are very expensive. Before any treatment, please ask how much it will cost. You have to pay for treatment yourself, though you will be partly reimbursed by your health insurance fund on submission of the receipt and a payment confirmation. A part of the remaining costs may be covered by a supplementary health insurance (Zusatzversicherung) you may have.

If you visit a doctor or a hospital, you will have to show your health insurance card (the "e-card"). You should also take an official photo identification with you<sup>5</sup>. The

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4 460.66 Euro as of 2020, the amount changes every year.

5 A photo identification is an identity card, a passport, a residence title, an Austrian driving licence.

Austrian Social Insurance (Österreichische Sozialversicherung) will send you your e-card by post on application.<sup>6</sup> You should take your e-card always with you to have it available in case of an emergency.

## 2.1 HEALTH INSURANCE

In Austria, health insurance is compulsory for anybody earning an income that exceeds the minimum income threshold<sup>7</sup>, whether working as an employee or self-employed. If you take up an employment with a salary above that threshold, your employer will register you for health, unemployment and pension insurance. The contributions are automatically deducted from your salary. Family members including husbands/spouses, registered partners and their children are co-insured (health insurance) for free if they have no health insurance of their own.

As a rule, health insurance covers only treatments required from a medical point of view. The costs of some services are not reimbursed by health insurance institutions although you are insured. This applies e.g. to opinions and certificates for authorities or employers and to many dental treatments. "Beauty surgeries", abortions or sterilisations are deemed private services which have to be paid by the patients themselves. To be on the safe side, you should ask **before** any treatment how much it will cost you.

## 2.2 PRIMARY HEALTH CARE SERVICES

In case of illness, you should always visit a general practitioner first<sup>8</sup>. General practitioners have many duties: They have to register the medical history of their patients, offer the yearly preventive medical check-up (provided free of charge) to help patients avoid health risks and, importantly, to detect illnesses early, provide vaccinations and nutrition counselling, perform ECGs, blood pressure measurements, pulmonary function tests, etc. If an illness requires special knowledge in a certain area, they will refer their patients to specialist doctors, so-called "Fachärzte/Fachärztinnen". To avoid unnecessary costs, you should choose a general practitioner contracted by an Austrian health insurance institution ("Kassenarzt").

**Attention!** Changing the doctor within one quarter (January - March, April - June, and so on) requires the consent of your health insurance fund. This does not apply to doctors standing in for your regular doctor (e.g. as a holiday replacement) and the General Practitioners' Out-of-hours service.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.chipkarte.at/formgen/?portal=ecardportal&layout=withNav&contentid=10007.791562&viewmode=content>

<sup>7</sup> 460.66 Euro as of 2020, the amount changes every year

<sup>8</sup> In Austria, a general practitioner is called a "praktischer Arzt/praktische Ärztin" and usually referred to as "Hausarzt" – the doctor you visit regularly.



## 2.3 SECONDARY HEALTH CARE SERVICES

As mentioned above, general practitioners are the first contact point in the health care system, referring you to other parts of the system as needed. Referrals have to be in writing. If specialised knowledge is required, your general practitioner will refer you to a specialist doctor; this is a “Überweisung”. If a certain examination needs to be performed, she/he will refer you to another doctor or a laboratory, specifying the examination needed (e.g. radiography, MRT ...); this is a “Zuweisung”. It will be again your general practitioner who will discuss the results of the examination with you. In urgent cases she/he will refer you to a hospital for inpatient treatment; this is called a “Einweisung”.<sup>9</sup>

**Attention!** Waiting times for examinations by specialist doctors are often very long. Appointments have to be made many weeks beforehand. You can call several specialists to find out where you can get the earliest appointment. Services by specialist doctors are also covered by your health insurance if they have a contract with your health insurance institution.

### Hospital

In Austria, hospitals provide **emergency medical care** 24 hours a day. If possible, treatments are provided in outpatient departments and you can go home on the same day. Otherwise you are admitted for inpatient treatment, thus you will have to stay in the hospital overnight.

Usually your doctor will provide you with a copy of the **Einweisung** with the required information for your treatment in the hospital. Before referring you to a hospital, she/he will give you information on your illness and its treatment. If you still have questions, you should not hesitate to ask for more information.

**Transport costs** to the hospital may be paid by your health insurance institution if you are not able to use public transport with an accompanying person. Yet in most cases, you will be taken to the hospital by family members or acquaintances.

For each day in a hospital, you have to pay a **contribution to hospital costs** of 23.5 Euro (as of 2020), but only for a maximum of 28 days per year. From the 29th day on you pay nothing. If you are exempt from the prescription fee (“Rezeptgebühr”, see below), you are also exempt from the contribution to hospital costs.

The provision of good health care often depends on the ability of patients to communicate with the medical staff. Many hospitals provide lists with **interpreters** that can be called in. In some hospitals, in particular in the provinces Upper Austria (Oberösterreich), Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), Styria (Steiermark) and Vienna (Wien), video interpreters may be called in if needed. If you cannot understand what the doctors say, tell them and don’t hesitate to ask whether interpreters may be called in.

<sup>9</sup> Currently paper forms are used for the different types of referrals; they are valid for one month. A switch to electronic versions is planned.

## 2.4 EMERGENCY HEALTHCARE SERVICES

If you are ill, you should consult your regular doctor (“Hausarzt”) first. In case of a medical emergency – when medical help is urgently needed – call the ambulance service (“Rettung”). You should also do so if you notice someone else in need because walking past someone who needs medical help is punishable in Austria. Provide first aid and stay with the patient until the ambulance and/or the police arrives. In less urgent cases you can contact the General Practitioners’ Out-of-hours service (Ärztendienst) for medical assistance.

When you need medicines outside regular opening hours, you can buy them – for a small surcharge – at a **night or emergency pharmacy** (Nacht- oder Notdienstapotheke). Every night and on weekends and holidays, about 280 pharmacies in Austria provide emergency services. They take it in turns, with every pharmacy on duty several times a month. You can find the nearest night or emergency pharmacy [here](#).

Some medicines are available without prescription. For antibiotics, many painkillers and special medicines you need a doctor’s prescription.

In case of fire you can call the fire brigade, in case of crime the police. Calls to all emergency phone numbers are free of charge from anywhere in Austria; no area code is needed.



Ambulance service: **144**

Fire brigade: **122**

Police: **133**

General Practitioners’ Out-of-hours service (Ärztendienst): **141**

Poison control centre (Vergiftungsinformationszentrale): **01 406 43 43**

Women’s emergency helpline: **0800 222 555** (English counselling available)

### Current health apps

- First aid – Red Cross<sup>10</sup>
- Apo-App (pharmacies services)<sup>11</sup>

## 2.5 MENTAL HEALTH

When you have experienced traumatic events before your escape and during your journey to Austria you may need psychological support. Just as you would visit a doctor for a physical ailment, you should consider looking for help with psychological problems you may have. Taking good care about yourself helps you to take better care of your family, to find your way in a new environment, learn a new language and to find work. Don’t shy away from taking this step though you might feel

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.fluechtlinge-willkommen.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Wohnen-in-Wien-Deutsch.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.apoapp.co.at/>



uncomfortable in doing so. You will notice soon that your everyday life becomes easier when you receive professional support in coping with psychological problems. If you need psychological counselling and/or a therapy you can contact professional psychologists. There are various organisations in each province (Bundesland) where you can get free counselling. You can find them [here](#).

Two further addresses are given below.

<b>Styria</b>	
<p><b>OMEGA</b> Transcultural centre for mental and physical health and integration</p> <p><a href="https://www.omega-graz.at/">https://www.omega-graz.at/</a></p>	<p>Karlauerstraße 6 8020 Graz Tel.: +43 316 77 35 54; E-Mail: <a href="mailto:office@omega-graz.at">office@omega-graz.at</a> Office opening hours: Appointments for therapies or psychological treatments only Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.</p>
<b>Vienna</b>	
<p>Project „NEDA“, Institute for womens’ and mens’ health</p> <p>Clinical psychological/ psychotherapeutic counselling and psychoeducational workshops for persons with flight experience in basic care</p>	<p>FEM, Womens’ health centre in the Hospital North Tel.: +43 1/27700 - 5600 (girls/women) FEM Süd Womens’ health centre in the Kaiser-Franz-Josef Hospital, Socio-Medical Centre South Tel.: +431/60 191 - 5201 MEN, Mens’ health centre in the Kaiser-Franz-Josef Hospital, Socio-Medical Centre South Tel.: +43 1/60 191 - 5454 (boys/men) Available languages in all the institutions above: Arabic, Dari/Farsi, German, English</p>

You can find therapists with foreign language skills [here](#).



## 3. Social services and welfare

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### 3.1 FINANCIAL BENEFITS

#### Basic care

During the asylum procedure you receive basic care. You can still receive basic care after you have been granted asylum, but only for four months from the day of the asylum decision. You should apply for **social assistance (Sozialhilfe)** as soon as possible.

You may apply for social assistance at the district administration authority/the magistrate or at the municipal office of your place of residence. The regulations on the provision of social assistance differ in each province. Furthermore, the system is new and not yet implemented in all the provinces; in some, the former “needs-oriented minimum support” (Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung) is still in force; it will be phased out gradually. The purpose stays the same: to ensure your financial survival when you have no income. To be eligible, your principal residence must be in Austria, your wealth must not exceed a certain maximum level<sup>12</sup> and you have to be willing to work. In addition, social assistance is only provided in full if you can be placed on the Austrian labour market, thus you need a German language level of B1 (proven by a B1 certificate issued by the ÖIF – the Austrian Integration Fund -, a confirmation of your language skills from the ÖIF or by way of a conversation with an official).

#### Unemployment benefits

If you lose your job through no fault of your own after having been employed for a longer period of time you can apply for **unemployment benefits (Arbeitslosengeld)** at the Labour Market Service (Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS).

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<sup>12</sup> 2020 the wealth exemption limit is 5000 €.



If you have children up to the age of 2.5 years you can apply for **childcare allowance (Kinderbetreuungsgeld)** at your health insurance institution.

You can apply for **family allowance (Familienbeihilfe, FBH)** for all children under the age of 18 and for all children under the age of 24 attending professional training (e.g. a university) at the tax office.

You can apply for **housing allowance (Wohnbeihilfe)** at the municipal office or at the social welfare office (in Vienna: at the Municipal Department 50, MA 50). The requirements for receiving a housing allowance differ in each province. Whether you are eligible for housing allowance depends on the size of your household, the size of your flat, the income of your household and your housing expenses. Some provinces require you to have resided in their provincial area for a certain minimum amount of time. You can get detailed information at the above mentioned authorities.

In every province you can get a **heating subsidy (Heizkostenzuschuss, HZ)** if your income is low enough. You can apply for it once a year at your municipality.

Persons in need of care are entitled to **nursing allowance (Pflegegeld)** if their need of care exceeds 65 hours per month as evidenced by a medical expert opinion. Applications have to be made at the Austrian health insurance fund (österreichische Gesundheitskasse, ÖGK).

In most provinces, persons living in precarious financial circumstances can apply for a **cultural pass**. It provides free access to cultural events. You can apply for the cultural pass at various aid organisations (e.g. Caritas, Red Cross, Diakonie).

### **3.2 SOCIAL BENEFITS**

Social benefits are also provided through **exemptions**. For example, you can apply for exemption from the **TV and radio licence fee (GIS)**. The application form is available at the municipal office. You can also apply for exemption from the **prescription fee (Rezeptgebühr)** and the **service charge for the e-card ("Service-Entgelt")**. This application has to be made at the Austrian health insurance fund (Österreichische Gesundheitskasse, ÖGK).

**Shopping at reduced prices:** You can shop in social markets or second hand shops or even get goods for free. There are distribution points in every province where you can get food for free. You can find the addresses [here](#).

In Austria, many organisations and institutions provide **counselling and advice** for asylum seekers, recognized refugees and migrants. A list with contact data is available [here](#).



## 4. Education

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In Austria, everyone has a right to education. All public schools are free. The Austrian education law establishes clear rights and obligations. Legal Guardians have an obligation to support the school's efforts to provide a good education for their children. They have to attend parents' evenings and parent-teacher-meetings and to ensure that their children attend school.

### 4.1 CHILDREN AND YOUTH

In Austria, children have to attend a mandatory (final) kindergarten year and complete nine years of compulsory schooling. In addition, there is a general training and education obligation for all young people under 18 ("**Ausbildungspflicht**"). Not complying with these obligations can result in fines of 500 Euro or more.

After kindergarten and primary school, a variety of types of schools and education pathways are available. A good overview of the Austrian education system can be found [here](#).

Children with a mother tongue other than German can get assistance in learning the language and may be assigned to German support classes and courses (for further information please see Chapter 6.1). In addition, children can get supplementary lessons in their mother tongue. Subject to a certain minimum number of participants, mother tongue lessons are available in any language. You can check with the school or look for information [here](#).

#### Kindergarten

Every child in Austria has to attend kindergarten in the year before the start of primary school. This final year of kindergarten is free. It has been introduced as a way to provide support to children from low-income families. Many children, however, attend kindergarten already from the age of three or four. Many kindergartens have special programmes and pedagogues to assist children in learning German. Best



thing is to check with the kindergarten. Children under the age of three may attend a crèche/nursery or a playgroup or be cared for by childminders.

You can register your children for kindergarten at the municipal office (Gemeindeamt) or the magistrate. Places in kindergartens are limited, and it may be difficult to get a place. For this reason we recommend to **register your child for kindergarten as early as possible** (in big cities shortly after birth).

### Pre-school

During the final kindergarten year, children are prepared for primary school. The pedagogue will tell you during a counselling talk whether your child is ready for school or whether attendance of the pre-school year is recommended.

 You can find more information here:

- Child care: [https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie\\_und\\_partnerschaft/kinderbetreuung.html](https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/kinderbetreuung.html)
- Kindergarten: <https://www.bildungssystem.at/kindergarten/kindergarten/>
- Pre-school: <https://www.bildungssystem.at/volksschule/vorschule/>

### Primary education

Every child reaching the age of six prior to 31 August of a given year has to attend primary school in the following September. Primary school education lasts for four years. Parents have to register their children at the appropriate school. The registration procedure differs in each province (Bundesland). You can find information on the procedure in your province [here](#). Alternatively, you can check with the kindergarten or the municipal office on available schools in your neighbourhood.

School places are assigned by the school or by the Education Directorate (Bildungsdirektion). When you make the registration, take your child with you to the school so that the school administration may determine whether it is ready to attend school. To be ready for school means that the child will be able to complete the first grade of primary school without being overstrained.

If there are grounds to assume that this is not the case, the child has to attend pre-school for a year. Starting with the school year 2019/2020, children are evaluated for their German language skills. If a child is ready for school but has insufficient knowledge of German, it will be admitted as an extraordinary pupil to the first grade of primary school and be taught in German support classes.

 You can find more information here:

- <https://www.bildungssystem.at/volksschule/volksschule/>
- [https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/bildung\\_und\\_neue\\_medien/schule/Seite.110003.html](https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/bildung_und_neue_medien/schule/Seite.110003.html)
- German support classes/courses: [https://www.help.gv.at/linkaufloesung/applikation-flow?leistung=LA-HP-GL-Deutschfoerderklassen\\_und\\_Deutschfoederkurse\\_BMBWF&quelle=HELP&flow=LO](https://www.help.gv.at/linkaufloesung/applikation-flow?leistung=LA-HP-GL-Deutschfoerderklassen_und_Deutschfoederkurse_BMBWF&quelle=HELP&flow=LO)

## Secondary education

After primary school, your child may attend a New Secondary School or the lower level of an Academic Secondary School (AHS), both lasting for four years. Registration is made directly at the school. The requirement for both types of school is a successful completion of the fourth grade of primary school. For admission to an AHS, a child's marks must be very good. Your child's primary school teachers can recommend an appropriate secondary school. It should have only very good or good marks in German, Mathematics, Reading and Writing. Children not meeting these requirements can take an entrance examination at an AHS.

After the fourth year of the New Secondary School or Academic Secondary School, the child has attended eight years of school, so it has to attend school for at least a further year to complete compulsory education.

 You can find more information on lower secondary schools here:

- <https://www.bildungssystem.at/schule-unterstufe/>

The ninth year of compulsory education may be completed at a Pre-vocational School. This school is providing internships and vocational orientation to prepare your child for the entrance in the world of work. After completion of the Pre-vocational School one can start to learn a profession.

In any case, the training and education obligation for all young people under 18 ("Ausbildungspflicht") means that after the Pre-Vocational School, some kind of further training/education is required (e.g. apprenticeship, school or practical training). In Austria, many professions (about 250) can be learned through an apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are a combination of (paid) practical training at the workplace and acquisition of theoretical background in a vocational school. Depending on the profession, an apprenticeship may take 2 to 4 years and is completed with an apprenticeship diploma (Lehrabschluss). After completion, one is an expert in the respective profession, a skilled worker or so-called "Facharbeiter", and one can earn significantly more than unskilled workers. As an alternative to pre-vocational school and apprenticeship, one can also attend an upper secondary school.

 You can find more information here:

- Apprenticeship: [https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/bildung\\_und\\_neue\\_medien/lehre.html](https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/bildung_und_neue_medien/lehre.html)
- Apprenticeship occupations:
- <https://www.beruflexikon.at/berufe/>

## Higher education

A variety of upper secondary schools exists in Austria. First, there is the Academic Secondary School (AHS). The AHS comprises a four-year education and a final examination, the Higher Education Entrance Examination ("Matura" or "Reifeprüfung"). After successful completion of an AHS, you are entitled to attend a university or a college or to start working in civil service, banks or insurance companies for example. An AHS may be attended right after primary school (for eight years) or after successful completion of the New Secondary School (for four years).



Apart from the AHS, one can attend a School for Intermediate Vocational Education ("Berufsbildende mittlere Schule", BMS) or a College for Higher vocational education ("Berufsbildende höhere Schule", BHS). Depending on the occupational area, a BMS can take from one up to four years and provides a partial or completed professional education. A BHS takes five years to complete and concludes with a "Reifeprüfung" and diploma examination. In contrast to a BMS, a BHS thus provides both a professional education and an entitlement to attend a university or a college.

Admission to a AHS (upper level), BMS and BHS requires the successful completion of the eighth year of compulsory education (or the fourth year of the New Secondary School or of the AHS, lower level). Registration is made directly at the respective school. All three types of schools offer different focus areas.

 You can find more information on upper secondary schools here:

- <https://www.bildungssystem.at/schule-oberstufe/>
- <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/schule/schulsystem/sa.html>

## 4.2 ADULT EDUCATION

In Austria, you can learn new skills and acquire additional qualifications at any age. Good qualifications do not necessarily guarantee professional advancement, but may strengthen your position on the labour market. Some training courses are offered for free, for others you have to pay. In many cases financial support is available. The Labour Market Service (AMS, Arbeitsmarktservice) will provide you with information on available subsidies. Even as an adult you can catch up on many educational qualifications including the primary school certificate, the pre-vocational school qualification and an apprenticeship diploma (Lehrabschluss). By passing certain examinations, you can also gain access to higher education at universities and colleges: a Higher Education Entrance Examination ("Reifeprüfung") issued by an AHS or BHS, an Academic Secondary School for working adults (Abendgymnasium), Add-on courses (Aufbaulehrgänge), a Limited Higher Education Entrance Examination (Studienberechtigungsprüfung, SBP) or a Vocational Higher Education Entrance Examination (Berufsreifeprüfung). Many of these educational courses are offered in the evening, so you can attend them alongside your work. Their duration depends on whether the education/training is attended full-time or part-time. You can register directly with the training/education providers.

Many BHS (Colleges for Higher vocational education) offer post-secondary courses, so-called "Kollegs", where you can learn all the subjects taught in an BHS within two to four years. Some of these Kollegs are offered as evening courses as well.

 You can find more information here:

- <https://www.bildungssystem.at/zweiter-bildungsweg/>
- [https://erwachsenenbildung.at/bildungsinfo/zweiter\\_bildungsweg/ueberblick.php](https://erwachsenenbildung.at/bildungsinfo/zweiter_bildungsweg/ueberblick.php)
- Kolleg <https://www.bildungssystem.at/tertiaere-kurzausbildungen/kolleg/>

### 4.3 RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

Many people have acquired qualifications (professional qualifications, school certificates, other diplomas/certificates) in their countries of origin. If you have diplomas (e.g. a High School certificate or academic degrees), you can apply for their recognition. In case of academic degrees, this is called nostrification ("Nostrifikation"). Often you may have to pass supplementary examinations in Austria. If a recognition is not possible, the diploma may be evaluated to determine the Austrian qualification most similar to your qualification and what you have to do to acquire this Austrian qualification.

For information on the recognition of diplomas please contact the Drop-in-Centre for persons with qualifications acquired abroad (AST, "Anlaufstelle für Personen mit im Ausland erworbenen Qualifikationen"). There you will also get information on the required documents, the costs of the recognition and whether you have to pay them in full or in part. You can find the address and phone number of the AST in each province at the following link:

- <https://www.anlaufstelle-erkennung.at/anlaufstellen>

Alternatively, you can do your online recognition on your own under the following links:

- University degree: <https://www.aais.at/>
- Profession: <https://www.berufsanerkennung.at/>

 You can find more information here:

- <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/Hochschule-und-Universität/Studium/Anerkennung-von-Abschlüssen/Allgemeine-Informationen-über-die-Anerkennung-von-Abschlüssen.html>
- <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/Hochschule-und-Universität/Studium/Anerkennung-von-Abschlüssen.html>

If you have a **driving licence** issued in your country of origin, you can apply for its conversion to an Austrian driving licence (at least in part). Often – depending on the country where the licence was issued – the practical examination has to be passed again in Austria. If you live in a municipality, applications have to be made at the district administrative authority (Bezirkshauptmannschaft), if you live in a city at the magistrate or the provincial police directorate (Landespolizeidirektion).

- You can find more information, including on which documents are required, at the following [link](#).





## 5. Work

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### 5.1 RIGHT TO WORK

As soon as you have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection, you are allowed to work in Austria. Yet access to many professions (e.g. baker, hairdresser or shoemaker) is restricted to persons with the respective qualification. Qualifications acquired in your country of origin, such as a college or university degree or other professional skills, may be recognized (for more details, please read the previous chapter). In some cases, you will also need a qualification (a certificate of competence or “Befähigungsnachweis”) if you want to work self-employed, and any such activity must be registered and approved. If you intend to work self-employed, you can contact the Founder Service (“Gründerservice”) of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce (WKO, Wirtschaftskammer Österreich) or request information at the Labour Market Service (AMS, Arbeitsmarktservice).

**Social assistance** (“Sozialhilfe”) is provided to cover the basic needs of persons without income. Any income you have will be taken into account in determining whether and up to which amount you are entitled to social assistance. For more information on social assistance please see Chapter 3.

If you have been employed for a certain time and lose your job, you are entitled to receive unemployment benefits (“Arbeitslosengeld”). For more information please see Chapter 3.1.

### 5.2 HOW TO FIND WORK

You can get assistance in searching for work at the local office of the **Labour Market Service (AMS, Arbeitsmarktservice)**. The AMS supports job seekers also by offering courses (e.g. German language courses), and you can get information on how to apply for a job properly. In AMS offices, you can use self-service computers to search for jobs.

In addition, the AMS provides an online platform where you can look for jobs. You can also use other online portals, check for job offers in newspapers and ask people you know.

- AMS: <https://www.ams.at/>
- Tips for applying: <https://www.ams.at/arbeitsuchende/richtig-bewerben#wien>
- Online portals where you can look for work:
- AMS: [https://jobroom.ams.or.at/jobroboter/jbr\\_entry.jsf;jsessionid=0074BD85AEA56F6EF40CC942E2881B2D.ams1eam01lsjboss1](https://jobroom.ams.or.at/jobroboter/jbr_entry.jsf;jsessionid=0074BD85AEA56F6EF40CC942E2881B2D.ams1eam01lsjboss1)
- Karriere.at: <https://www.karriere.at/jobs/aktive-arbeitssuche>

### 5.3 EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS

In Austria, you can work either as an employee or self-employed. Employees have a boss and work for a company. Employment contracts may be concluded verbally or in writing. It is recommended to conclude a written contract in order to be protected in case of a dispute. There are different forms of employment contracts:

- **regular employment contract:** full-time (usually 38.5 - 40 hours per week); part-time (fewer hours per week), marginal employment - the salary does not exceed 460.66 Euro per month (as of 2020)
- **freelance contract:** you work as an independent contractor (not as a regular employee with a salary) and you are paid based on time worked - income taxes have to be paid by the independent contractor
- **contract for works:** you work self-employed, therefore you are responsible for paying all income taxes and social security contributions.



Attention: Marginally employed persons should arrange and pay for their own insurance (health and pension insurance).

When you start a new job, there is usually a probation period of one month. The period of notice (usually 1 - 3 months) and the modalities of the termination of the contract (when and in which form) are stipulated in the employment contract. Often a contract may only be terminated at the end of the month. It is recommended to terminate in writing so that you have written evidence if needed. At the beginning of an employment you should have a bank account set up so that your salary can be paid into it.

### 5.4 SALARIES, SOCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND TAXES

In Austria, a distinction is made between gross salary (salary before deduction of taxes and social security contributions) and net salary (salary after deduction of taxes and social security contributions). Taxes and social security contributions are auto-



matically deducted by the employer; the amount paid out each month is the net salary. In job offers, the gross salary is specified. The amount remaining after deduction of taxes and social security contributions can be calculated [here](#).

Attention: In Austria, to engage in paid work without paying compulsory social security contributions (health and pension insurance) is a punishable act both for employers and employees; it is a kind of illegal employment often called "Schwarzarbeit" ("black work").

## 5.5 RIGHTS OF EMPLOYEES

All rights and obligations are stipulated in the employment contract. A short explanation of the most important rights is provided below. In case of legal disputes with your employer you can contact the Chamber of Labour (AK, Arbeiterkammer). The AK offers free counselling over the phone and in person. A list of the addresses and phone numbers of the AK in each province is available [here](#).

### The most important rights, explained in short:

- **Weekly working hours**

In Austria, the regular weekly working hours for full-time employment are 40 hours, in some professions/industries 38.5 hours. There are clear rules on how many working hours per day and per week are allowed - usually 12 hours per day and 60 hours per week. In addition, there must be a break of 30 minutes after six hours of work. Special rules apply in some occupational areas, in particular in the health and tourism sectors. You can find these rules [here](#) and [here](#).

- **Holidays**

Every employee is entitled to 25 days of annual leave. In addition, there are several public and religious holidays when employees don't have to work and schools are closed.

- **Vacation and Christmas allowance**

Two times per year (usually in the months of November and May), an additional salary is paid. These payments (the so-called "Sonderzahlungen") are sometimes referred to as a 13th and 14th salary.

- **Minimum wage**

Every year, a minimum wage is agreed on for each occupational group which is legally binding for every company. The salary must not be lower, but may well be higher, depending on your qualifications.

- **Sickness absence**

If you cannot work because you are sick, you will still receive your salary, for some time at least. For how long depends on the employment contract and on how long you have been working for the company. After this period, you

will get sick pay ("Krankengeld") from the health insurance institution ("Gesundheitskasse"). If you are ill, you have to inform your employer as soon as possible and submit a doctor's sick note.

- **Protection against discrimination**

In Austria, a job may only be assigned based on merit and qualifications without regard to sex, origin or religious beliefs. Job applicants are entitled to compensation/damages if they have been discriminated against on such grounds. You can find some advice on this issue [here](#) (in German).

Information on wearing a headscarf at work is provided [here](#).

Employees and employers have obligations. The main obligation of employees is the obligation to work. This means that employees have to perform the agreed work at the contractually agreed time and place of work. In addition, they have a duty of good faith to their employer. This means that they always have to act in the interest of the company. Some companies have established security policies (e.g. obligation to wear protective clothing) or specific rules on breaks (sometimes somebody has to be present all the time, and the employees have to take their lunch break one after the other); these have to be complied with. In most companies in Austria punctuality is very important. The employers have an obligation to pay the agreed salary, to ensure that all the rights mentioned above are respected and to provide for a working environment that is as safe as possible.





## 6. Learning the language

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The official language in Austria is German. It is important to learn the language so that you are able to participate in public life (in the school, at the doctor's office, when dealing with authorities).

German language courses help you to learn the language quickly. In addition to German courses, it is important to practice at home. You should also try to find German speaking friends and acquaintances you can practice with, watch German movies and listen to German radio programmes. In the internet, you can practice for yourself. Furthermore, there are language cafés in many cities and municipalities where you can practice the language.

### **6.1 CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Children and young people under the age of 15 are subject to compulsory schooling. They have to be registered at an appropriate school as soon as possible. If their knowledge of German is insufficient, they may be admitted as extraordinary pupils (for a maximum of two years). When their command of the language is good enough, they become regular pupils. Extraordinary pupils don't receive marks.

The language skills of children and young people with a mother tongue other than German are evaluated. Depending on the results, they are assigned to special language support classes or language support courses, which take place in parallel with regular lessons. At the end of each semester, a switch from language support classes to language support courses is possible. The objective is to provide the children and young people with the utmost support in learning the language so that they are able to follow the regular lessons as regular pupils as fast as possible.

Often municipalities organize learning cafés where the children may get help with their homework.

## 6.2 ADULTS

To successfully find work, you should have a minimum German language level of A2. The obligation to achieve a certain language level will also be part of the integration agreement you may have signed.

There are different language course providers in each province. The costs of the various courses may differ considerably, too. Some courses are free, others you have to pay in full or in part. On the web site of the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF, Österreichischer Integrationsfonds) you can get information and find language course providers in your vicinity. You can visit the nearest office of the ÖIF to find out whether you are entitled to financial support; if so, you may attend certain German language courses for free. If the ÖIF is not in a position to help you, then check with the district administrative authority (Bezirkshauptmannschaft) or the Labour Market Service (Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS). You can register directly with the course providers.

Attention: If you are registered for a course and realize that you don't need it, you should unregister in time to avoid having to pay cancellation fees.

There are also evening courses for persons who work during the day.

## 6.3 PRACTICING THE LANGUAGE ONLINE

- <https://sprachportal.integrationsfonds.at/deutsch-lernen>
- <https://www.deutschakademie.de/online-deutschkurs/choosereference.php>
- YouTube channel with many German grammar videos for different levels: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5ZnpdkQlit8TWhGVDiDnQQ/playlists>
- Grammar explanations and exercises: <https://www.grammatikdeutsch.de/>
- German learning blog with articles and backgrounds: <https://www.deutsch-perfekt.com/deutsch-ueben/grammatik>
- Various exercises on a variety of topics: <https://www.deutschalsfremdsprache.ch/>
- Business German course: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYvWsln4Dc3GGAv8rymiG6Q/videos>
- Learning German with English explanations: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbxb2fqe9oNggIAoYqsYotQ>





## 7. Community engagement

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In Austria, volunteering is highly valued. Joining an association or engaging in a voluntary activity is an effective way to meet people and practice the German language. Moreover, you may gain additional qualifications by volunteering which could be useful when looking for work. Volunteering is very important for our society, but it is no substitute for paid work. Most people engage in voluntary activities alongside their work duties. There are many sports and cultural associations. Many people also volunteer with rescue services (Red Cross, Malteser, Mountain Rescue Service) or NGOs (Non-governmental organisations). You can check with the municipal office (Gemeindeamt) or the magistrate – chances are that they have lists of all the associations active in your area. Then you can contact them in person.

 You can find more information here:

- <http://www.freiwilligenweb.at/de/freiwilliges-engagement/freiwilligennachweis>
- <http://www.freiwilligenweb.at/node/2544>



## 8. Free legal aid

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The Chamber of Labour (Arbeiterkammer) offers free legal advice in all matters related to **labour law** (including maternity protection, protection against dismissal during pregnancy, maternity leave, etc.). (For contact information please see Chapter 5.5.)

**During the asylum procedure** or when you receive a negative asylum decision, you can get free legal advice by the Verein Menschenrechte Österreich (Human Rights Association Austria) or by the ARGE Rechtsberatung (Working Group on Legal Advisory Support). At some ARGE offices, also persons entitled to asylum can get legal advice. The different addresses in each province are available here:

[ARGE](#)

[Verein Menschenrechte](#)

When you decide to **return to your country of origin** (during the asylum procedure or within 14 days after a negative asylum decision), you can get assistance by [Rückkehrhilfe](#).

**Victims of crime** can get counselling over the phone by professional lawyers. The Emergency Call for victims is available every day, round the clock at the phone number **0800 112 112**.

If you need **personal legal advice**, you can call the hotline of the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministerium für Inneres) at the phone number **0800 99 99 99**, available from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m.; calls to the hotline are free within Austria.

You can find more information [here](#).

If you have lost a **family member** during flight and do not know her or his whereabouts you can contact the **Search Service** of the [Red Cross](#).





**RCT ZAGREB**



Suedwind advocates sustainable global development, human rights and decent working conditions worldwide. Through campaigning, educational work in and outside of schools and the publication of the Suedwind magazine, the non-governmental development organisation raises awareness on global interdependencies and their effects. The organisation carries out projects on local, regional, national, and international levels. Suedwind has been working towards a more just and peaceful worlds since 1979.

[www.suedwind.at](http://www.suedwind.at)