



SOMRA

Intellectual Output 1

Executive Summary

Austria



The SOMRA project – Supporting meaningful Occupations for Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum seekers – offers an innovative approach to tackling climate change and refugee crises, by engaging refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants (MRAs) in meaningful occupations that transform them into environment role models with a sustainable impact in their new and previous home.

To achieve this, the SOMRA project will facilitate:



Findings for the holistic study report were collected via desk and infield research – interviews with MRA groups, professionals working with MRAs, and NGO (non-governmental organisations) representatives.

NGOs in Austria

NGOs in Austria work in many different areas and cover a large variety of fields of interest, ranging from all types of social and educational support work, environmental topics, and sports to the protection of historic buildings and gaming associations. The different types of NGOs can be described by their objectives and target groups. All NGOs active in Austria need to follow Austrian law and operate according to the authority requirements. There is no specific public institution that clearly defines NGOs and makes related decisions. Nevertheless, there are several prerequisites that entities have to fulfill in order to qualify as an NGO – they have to act publicly, be independent, voluntary, and dedicated to serving a greater cause and good. That being said, in Austria, NGOs are typically equated with associations and have to follow specific laws regulating the rights and duties of associations in Austria. The current version of the law regulating associations can be found online at:

<https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20001917>

Main Environmental and Social NGO networks in Austria

<p>Ökobüro</p> <p>Fights for the rights of the environmental movement.</p>	<p>EU Umweltbüro</p> <p>Competence centre for European environmental politics.</p>	<p>Naturfreunde</p> <p>Stand for affordable, varied, healthy leisure activities for young and old, as well as for environmental protection.</p>
<p>Umweltdachverband</p> <p>Platform for organisations from the fields of environmental protection, nature conservation, Alpine protection, agriculture, forestry and renewable energies.</p>	<p>Asyl in Not</p> <p>Independent human rights NGO providing unbiased legal advice and representation to refugees in the asylum process.</p>	<p>Asylkoordination Österreich</p> <p>Supports organisations, initiatives and volunteers in counselling and caring for refugees.</p>
<p>Helping Hands</p> <p>Helps foreigners to integrate in Austria, organises and runs various projects that offer help where it is needed. Focus on legal advice.</p>	<p>Beratungszentrum für Migrantinnen und Migranten</p> <p>Information, advice and support for migrants in Austria.</p>	<p>Flüchtlinge Willkommen</p> <p>Finding a new home for refugees in private accommodation, i.e. in shared flats or with families who provide a free room.</p>

Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers (MRAs) – Definitions

A person seeking asylum is one who flees their home, arrives in another country, whichever way they can, makes themselves known to the authorities, and submits an asylum application, has a legal right to stay in the country while waiting for a decision.

A refugee: has proven that they would be at risk if returned to their home country, has had their claim for asylum accepted by the government, and has permission to stay in Austria either long term or indefinitely.

The most recent numbers show that at the beginning of 2021, about 1.5 million migrants were living in Austria, which is a population share of approximately 17%. These numbers have been continuously rising over the last few years – as a comparison: in the year 2011, there about 913.000 migrants were living in Austria. The largest group of migrants comes from Germany (~209.000), followed by Romania (~132.000) and Serbia (~122.000). In terms of regional distribution within Austria, large differences can be noted: the proportion of foreign citizens and migrants is highest in Vienna and lowest in the federal state of Burgenland.



Barriers for MRAs to set up an NGO



Language. MRAs that arrive in a new country often do not have good foreign language skills and can experience barriers in communication. Good language skills are not only crucial when trying to find employment, but also integrating into the community. In addition, some persons may be illiterate which creates extra barriers and creates the

need for additional support. It is quite common that migrants are put or put themselves in groups with people from the same country. This does not particularly help with integration and language learning, there must be mixing with people from other countries and effort from the migrants to want to do this. One-to-one mentorship can be extremely helpful. In Austria, immigrants might get by with only knowing some English in the beginning, as most of the Austrian population speaks English, but they have to acquire a good level of the national language German in order to facilitate integration in the long run.



Qualifications. In addition to the language barrier, with refugees in particular, skills and qualifications gained in their home countries are often not recognised. Migrants coming from other EU countries have an easier transition, as their certificates are either recognized or can be transferred; however, this is very different and much more difficult for third-country nationals.

Mental and physical health. Inability to continue their old jobs can often frustrate and discourage refugees and asylum seekers, which can add to the trauma that they often have experienced in their home countries. Trauma needs long-term support to heal. If they can heal their trauma, they will be able to overcome other barriers and needs such as social needs, language, and educational barriers.



Education. More one-to-one support is needed to help children and young people to achieve well during their educational journey, however, often a lack of resources available does not allow this.

Racism. Many migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers will often experience racism, even if they have lived in a country for a while. The main challenge is the way the broader community thinks of and behaves toward migrants, refugees, and asylum

seekers. The mindset of a lot of people needs to change because everyone should have an opportunity and right to food, a warm place to sleep, and respect, among others.

Right to work

Migrants and refugees are often able to access jobs and benefits like all citizens, however, especially with the labour market, this can be hindered by a lack of language and skills. Work and/or residence permits are also required and it can be difficult for foreign citizens, in particular for third-country nationals, to acquire this.

Asylum seekers – Working as an asylum seeker differs slightly between countries. In Austria, asylum seekers are not allowed to work apart from community service. Children up to the age of 15 are required to go to school and teenagers up to the age of 25 are allowed to do an apprenticeship in shortage occupations.

Volunteering

Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are allowed to volunteer. Volunteering can help gain confidence, learn new skills, and improve language and will help to integrate into the community. There are many volunteering opportunities as a lot of NGOs will usually need volunteers, including working with the elderly, youth and children, environment and animals, and sports and outdoor activities. To volunteer, unless a position requires certain skills, no criteria are usually required. NGOs will mostly want an individual who has the willingness to learn, a degree of professionalism and ability to follow instructions, respect and diligence, good time management, and a personable manner. As volunteering work is not paid, these offers are also available for migrants without a certain legal status. For the bigger Austrian cities, in particular Vienna and Graz, there are websites listing volunteering opportunities in those municipalities. Interested people can go there to find a suitable placement in a field that they would like to participate in or get to know better.

Conclusion

Although most needs and gaps may be similar between countries, there are also some differences. In addition, different individuals, or groups of individuals of MRAs will have different needs depending on their situation. Some of the main gaps and needs include successful integration into society, racism from the community, language, lack in monetary aid and others.

Asylum seekers need more support and resources dedicated to them. This is the group that is the most restricted; not being able to work, being strictly monitored, low monetary aids can affect their



mental, physical, and social well-being. Often the asylum process can take years which means that they cannot fully feel like they are part of the society, as well as the uncertainty of their application for asylum.

One thing everyone can do is a volunteer. Either by being part of local community activities or a bigger organisation. As well as aiding integration into the community, volunteering allows people to gain new skills and increase their confidence. In many cases, confidence is what people need to get started. Many organisations take up volunteers in the environmental, animal and working with elderly and youth sectors.

A major issue is the lack of information about how migrants can get involved in voluntary work for NGOs. Language barriers are one of the main factors. Migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers who want to get involved with NGOs need to actively ask NGOs how they could get involved. This is because NGOs often do not specifically search for migrant volunteers but are happy when they want to get involved as they are a great asset to NGOs.

