

AUSTRIA

ASYLUM AND MIGRATION OVERVIEW 2024

Aurelia Streit

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AUSTRIA

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OVERVIEW 2024

Aurelia Streit

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Asylum and Migration Overview 2024 has been produced within the framework of annual reporting by the National Contact Points (NCPs) in the European Migration Network (EMN). The report outlines the most important political and legal developments in asylum and migration in Austria in 2024. These are contextualized by information about civil society initiatives and public debates.

General developments in the asylum and migration sector

In 2024 the [National Council elections](#) were held in Austria on 29 September 2024. With a voter turnout of 77 per cent, the Austrian Freedom Party with 28.8 per cent of the vote secured the highest number of votes and achieved its best election result to date. The Austrian People's Party received 26.3 per cent, followed by the Social Democratic Party of Austria with 21.1 per cent. The New Austria and Liberal Forum came in at 9.1 per cent, while the Austrian Green Party received 8.2 per cent of the vote. The issue of immigration – second only to the issue of rising costs – was the second most important voting motive for voters in Austria, cited by 41 per cent.

Legal migration

Similar to the previous year, the political focus in the area of regular migration was on the existing shortage of labour and skilled workers. The Austrian Court of Audit produced two reports in April 2024 [examining the shortage of skilled workers](#) and the corresponding [labour migration policy instruments of the Red-White-Red Card system](#). In these reports, the Austrian Court of Audit identified the need to simplify and adapt the existing card system to better meet the increasing demand for skilled workers through migration from third countries. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in the issuance of the Red-White-Red Card (RWR Card) was highlighted.

In 2024, the government set up a database to validate the qualifications of healthcare and nursing staff from third countries, as well as a competence centre to expedite the recognition of professional qualifications acquired abroad. Moreover, the Austrian Integration Fund increased the funding available for qualified skilled workers to help cover the costs of obtaining professional recognition. As part of the measures to recruit nursing staff, a pre-check register was introduced for applicants from the Philippines to assess the recognizability of their qualifications in advance and to accelerate the recognition process. Measures were also taken to enhance Austria's competitiveness in attracting global talents, including the launch of the Austrian Business Agency's [Work in Austria Talent Hub](#), which connects Austrian companies with international skilled workers. To recruit skilled workers from third countries, Austria concluded a legally non-binding bilateral agreement, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the recruitment of key and skilled workers with [Indonesia](#) in 2024. Legally non-binding MoUs were also concluded with [Ghana](#) and [Kenya](#), which cover certain aspects of regular migration and, in particular, agreements on return cooperation.

International and temporary protection

In the area of family reunification, [stricter checks were introduced in May 2024](#) for document verification, and DNA testing was mandated. As a result of the political changes in the Syrian Arab Republic in early December 2024, ongoing asylum procedures and family reunification procedures were suspended and cases where asylum had been granted were reviewed.

In July 2024, an [amendment to the Federal Act Establishing the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services company with limited liability and the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum Procedures Act](#) came into force in accordance with a ruling by the Constitutional Court from the previous year (2023). The amendment legally guaranteed the independence of legal advice provided to asylum-seekers by the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services. This was achieved through measures such as the introduction of extended protection against termination and dismissal for legal counsellors.

Also in July 2024, a [pilot project](#) was launched in Upper Austria to introduce a benefits card system for asylum-seekers. Accordingly, asylum-seekers in basic care receive benefits in kind instead of cash. In 2024, the Austrian Parliament passed an adjustment to the maximum expense ratios as part of an [agreement](#) concluded between the Federal State and the provinces under Art. 15a Federal Constitutional Act. This amended the Agreement between the Federal State and the Provinces on Basic Care ([Amendment to the Agreement between the Federal State and the Provinces on Basic Care](#)). Among other things, it also affected the expense ratios for unaccompanied foreign minors.

In June 2024, the right of residence in Austria for displaced persons from Ukraine as beneficiaries of temporary protection was finally [extended until 4 March 2026](#). This was in line with the EU-wide decision on this matter, which was based on Directive 2001/55/EC (Temporary Protection Directive).

Compulsory education and training until age 18 was extended to displaced young Ukrainians as beneficiaries of temporary protection in July 2024. The aim was to help them integrate into the labour market. In addition, the exemption from tuition fees for Ukrainian students, which had been in place since 2023, was extended to the winter semester 2025/26.

Furthermore, a [new legislative package](#) came into force in October 2024, allowing displaced persons from Ukraine as beneficiaries of temporary protection who are already active in the labour market to move to the regular settlement scheme and thus gain access to the Red-White-Red Card Plus.

Integration

In the area of integration, one focus in 2024 was on teaching the values and norms of communal life. The Austrian Integration Fund and the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services developed basic rules courses for asylum-seekers, which had been held directly in the federal reception centres since June 2024. These courses provided an initial introduction to Austria and covered key topics relevant to asylum-seekers' stay in the reception centre.

The orientation and civic values courses offered by the Austrian Integration Fund provided persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status with information about the values and rules of community life in Austria. Since autumn 2024, the expansion from a three-day to a five-day course format was piloted.

The Austrian Integration Fund's digital learning platform "[My Integration in Austria](#)", which was launched in 2024, also aimed to increase knowledge about the values and rules of society. This platform was used for the interactive teaching of orientation and values knowledge for integration exams. It was supplemented by live sessions about the platform and exam questions.

A regulation issued by the Federal Minister of the Interior in July 2024 required asylum-seekers to engage in charitable work. One of the reasons for this was to increase their participation in society. Failure to perform this work would result in a reduction of their monthly pocket money.

The [National Strategy for Protection against Violence](#), which was published in 2024, targeted women from a migratory background – considered a vulnerable target group – with a series of initiatives. These included multilingual information campaigns about the support available to them. The 2024 [report of the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence \(GREVIO\)](#) praised a number of measures in place in Austria with regard to migrant women. At the same time, however, it highlighted the increased vulnerability of female asylum-seekers who have experienced domestic violence.

Border management, visa policies and irregular migration

In 2024, Austria carried out border controls at its internal land borders with Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia. It also strengthened cross-border cooperation with Hungary as part of Operation FOX and deployed additional police officers to support border security in the Western Balkan countries. Since 2022, Austria had succeeded in reducing irregular migration through a series of measures in partnership with Bulgaria and Romania. At the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 13 December 2024, EU Member States decided to abolish border controls at the land internal borders to and between Bulgaria and Romania starting 1 January 2025. A decisive factor for Austria's approval of this was the significant decline in the number of apprehensions and asylum applications in Austria, as well as in Bulgaria and Romania.

In June 2024, a meeting of the foreign ministers of the 14 Danube region countries took place in Vienna in the context of Austria's presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. A key area of cooperation among these Danube Region States was identified as enhanced collaboration in border control and migration management. In addition, Austria chaired the Salzburg Forum during the first half of 2024 – a security partnership for Central and South Eastern Europe and organized various meetings to further develop border protection measures and combat the smuggling of migrants.

Furthermore, the Joint Coordination Platform (JCP) supported the Western Balkan States in 2024 by providing expertise and exchanging best practices with the overarching goal of minimizing irregular migration

via the Western Balkan route. In this context, the JCP participated in the projects “Western Balkan Return Mechanism (WBRM)” (together with the Netherlands and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development) and “Strengthening Migration Management, Asylum and Return Processes in the Western Balkans” (together with Hilfswerk International).

In January 2024, an [agreement](#) was reached with Bahrain to strengthen cooperation on security and migration, and in September 2024 non-legally binding MoUs were signed with [Ghana](#) and [Kenya](#) inter alia on migration management and readmission. In addition, Austria and Turkmenistan signed a [cooperation agreement](#) in March 2024 focusing on irregular migration.

Trafficking in human beings

In March 2024, the Austrian Federal Government adopted the seventh [National Action Plan \(NAP\) on Combating Human Trafficking for 2024–2027](#). The plan included 103 measures in the areas of prevention, victim protection, law enforcement and international cooperation. In May 2024, the recommendation guidelines of the Working Group on Sexual Services – a sub-group of the Task Force on Human Trafficking – was published. It contains recommendations on the legal provision of sexual services. The document refers to the obligations under the Istanbul Convention to protect sex workers from gender-based violence and highlights the difficulties they face in accessing support services. Due to varying regulations across federal provinces, it recommended harmonizing legislation and improving cooperation between federal and provincial authorities.

Return and readmission

In two rulings issued in [June](#) and [October 2024](#), the Constitutional Court found that return decisions issued against an Afghan and a Syrian national were in line with the constitution. In response, the Federal Minister of the Interior ordered a review of removal options for Afghan and Syrian nationals and agreed to strengthen cooperation with Germany in this regard. In December 2024, the Federal Minister of the Interior requested the development of an “[Orderly Forced Return and Removal Program](#)” for Syrians following the fall of the Syrian Assad regime, which includes support for voluntary return as well as preparations for non-voluntary return, starting with criminal offenders. Initial measures to support voluntary return were already implemented in December 2024.

Austria also intensified its efforts to cooperate with third countries in the field of returns. In May 2024, a [bilateral implementing protocol](#) related to the EU readmission agreement with Armenia, which has been in place since 2014, entered into force. The MoU signed with [Indonesia](#) in May 2024, the MoUs concluded with [Ghana](#) and [Kenya](#) in September, which aim, inter alia, to strengthen cooperation in the area of return, as well as the MoU signed with Ecuador in December, focus on enhanced cooperation in the area of return. In addition, a readmission agreement between [Kuwait](#) and Austria was signed in September 2024.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Asylum and Migration Overview 2024 was produced within the framework of the European Migration Network (EMN),¹ which was established by Council Decision 2008/381/EC in May 2008.² The EMN provides up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum matters, with the aim of supporting policymaking at European Union (EU) and national levels as well as of disseminating this information among the general public. This is the twenty-first Asylum and Migration Overview (previously Annual Report on Migration and Asylum)³ compiled by EMN Austria, covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2024. The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of the most significant political and legislative developments relating to migration and asylum in Austria. It also aims to summarize the political and public debates in these areas.

In preparing the Asylum and Migration Overview 2024, EMN Austria followed common specifications developed by the EMN to facilitate comparability of the findings from all Member States. The terminology used within this report is (unless stated otherwise) based on the terms and definitions in the EMN Glossary 10.0 (European Commission, 2024), including the following key terms:

- **Asylum-seeker:** A person who seeks protection from persecution or serious harm in a country other than their own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments.
- **Integration:** In the EU context, a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU Member States for the most equal participation possible in the central spheres of social life.
- **Labour shortage:** A lack of workers of all kinds, including persons without vocational education and training (Bosch, 2011:584).
- **Material reception conditions (in Austria: basic care):** All measures taken by EU Member States in favour of applicants for international protection. In Austria, these reception conditions include, among others, housing, food, health insurance and clothing provided in kind, or as financial allowance or in vouchers, or a combination of the three, and pocket money.⁴

1 Further information on EMN Austria can be found at www.emn.at.

2 Council Decision of 14 May 2008 establishing a European Migration Network (2008/381/EC), OJ L 131/7. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu>.

3 Previous reports from the years 2004 to 2023 are available at www.emn.at.

4 Written contribution: Federal Ministry of the Interior; Department V/B/9 (Basic Care), 10 May 2025.

- **Refugee:** In the EU context, either a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it, and to whom Art. 12 (Exclusion) of Directive 2011/95/EU⁵ does not apply.
- **Shortage of skilled workers:** A lack of specialist workers with the relevant skillset and qualifications (Bosch, 2011:584).
- **Temporary protection:** A procedure of exceptional character to provide, in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of displaced persons from third countries who are unable to return to their country of origin, immediate and temporary protection to such persons, in particular if there is also a risk that the asylum system will be unable to process this influx without adverse effects for its efficient operation, in the interests of the persons and other persons requesting protection.
- **Third-country national:** Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20 para. 1 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union⁶ and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2 para. 5 of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).⁷

In order to allow for concise reporting and comparability, the Asylum and Migration Overview 2024 only reflects significant developments and debates defined on the basis of the criteria listed in the report specifications. These include amended or new legislation, strategic developments, fundamental political changes, and developments with high political priority or a significant impact on migrants. In terms of the public and political debate, different opinions exchanged in the Austrian Parliament or between ministries, political parties, or civil society actors, which accordingly received wide media attention, were included in the report. In addition, this year's report incorporated the election manifesto of the parties for the National Council election on 29 September 2024, making them an important part of the overall analysis. The following sources of information were consulted: press releases and websites of relevant ministries and government agencies, academic journals, studies, reports, policy documents, draft and enacted legislation, court rulings, parliamentary debates, and online media articles of the main daily newspapers (Austrian Broadcast, Kurier, Die Presse, Der Standard) in Austria.

The basis for the Asylum and Migration Overview 2024 is the “Annual Report 2024 on Migration and Asylum in Austria: Contribution to Annual Report of the European Commission” which was compiled by EMN Austria in cooperation with the Federal Chancellery, the Federal Ministry for European and International

5 Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast), OJ L 337/9, p. 9–26.

6 Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ C 326, p. 47–390.

7 Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code), OJ L 135, p. 27–84.

Affairs, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy⁸ and the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection and includes further information about relevant developments in 2024.

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The Asylum and Migration Overview 2024 was prepared in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

⁸ The names of the ministries used in this report refer to their names and responsibilities before the beginning of the new legislative period in 2025.

2 GENERAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIGRATION AND ASYLUM SECTOR

The National Council elections were held in Austria on 29 September 2024. The right to vote in the National Council elections in Austria is tied to citizenship, with Austrian citizens aged 16 and over being eligible to vote, regardless of whether their main residence is in Austria or abroad (Parliamentary Administration, n.d.). With a voter turnout

of 77 per cent the Austrian Freedom Party with 28.8 per cent of the vote, secured the highest number of votes and achieved its best election result to date. The Austrian People's Party received 26.3 per cent, followed by the Social Democratic Party of Austria with 21.1 per cent. The New Austrian and Liberal Forum came in at 9.1 per cent, while the Austrian Green Party received 8.2 per cent of the vote (Parliamentary Administration, 2024g).

- National Council election 29 September 2024 –migration as an important electoral motive

According to election polls, immigration was a decisive voting motive for 69 per cent of Austrian Freedom Party voters, 38 per cent for Austrian People's Party voters, 33 per cent of Social Democratic Party of Austria voters and 26 per cent of Green and New Austrian and Liberal Forum voters (Foresight and Institute for Strategic Analysis, 2024:46–50). The topics of migration and asylum were addressed by all parties in their respective manifestos for the National Council elections:

With regard to labour migration, the Austrian Freedom Party called for a targeted regulation of immigration aimed at attracting qualified workers in order to address the skilled labour shortage (Austrian Freedom Party, 2024a:50). Targeted selection of migrants is intended to prevent “immigration into the social system” (ibid.). The topic of integration was not directly addressed in the manifesto; instead, the party proposed linking the payment of social benefits to citizenship as a means of creating incentives for integration. In addition, beneficiaries of protection status should only be eligible for basic social assistance benefits, not exceeding the level of basic welfare provision (ibid.:42). In the area of asylum, the party called for stricter border controls and the outsourcing of asylum procedures beyond Europe. It rejected the joint EU asylum regulations, including the [Migration and Asylum Pact](#) adopted by the Council of the EU in May 2024. The Austrian Freedom Party's manifesto also proposed the temporary suspension of the right to asylum, restrictions on family reunification, and time-limited protection without a pathway to citizenship (ibid.:49–53). On the issue of return, the Austrian Freedom Party called for increased deportations (ibid.:51–52).

In its manifesto for the National Council election, the Austrian People's Party supported the recruitment of foreign skilled workers from abroad and proposed establishing a centre of excellence for apprentices to enable local training of international skilled workers (Austrian People's Party, 2024:61). At the same time, the party positioned itself against “immigration into the welfare state” (ibid.:6). On the topic of integration, it emphasized alignment with Austrian values and way of life, with a particular focus on promoting German language skills and conveying Austrian cultural norms, especially for school pupils (ibid.:192–194). Furthermore, stricter criteria were demanded for acquiring citizenship (ibid.:226). In the area of asylum, the Migration and

Asylum Pact was primarily viewed as a measure to curb irregular migration (ibid.:186). In its manifesto, the Austrian People's Party further proposed establishing deportation and processing centres abroad, along with return processing centres within Austria to combat irregular migration. The party also announced plans to replace cash benefits for asylum-seekers with in-kind support and to confiscate valuables upon entry. Stricter rules for family reunification were demanded, along with sanction mechanisms for countries of origin that do not cooperate on return procedures (ibid.:186–188).

The Social Democratic Party of Austria emphasized the need for improved recruitment of qualified professionals, including through faster recognition of foreign degrees and vocational qualifications (Social Democratic Party of Austria, 2024b:25). In terms of integration, it called for German language courses to begin “from day one” (ibid.:88), and for the Integration Year – which requires asylum seekers and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status without employment to participate in labour market programmes – to be made available once again to asylum-seekers with a high likelihood of being granted protection (Art. 2f Integration Year Act).⁹ The party also advocated for reducing irregular migration to Austria. At the EU level, it called for a fair distribution of asylum-seekers among Member States, with the possibility of sanctions, aiming to reduce asylum applications by 75 per cent. The Social Democratic Party of Austria also supported speeding up procedures at the EU's external borders and the return of individuals without protection status or a valid residence permit in Austria (Social Democratic Party of Austria, 2024b:88). Lastly, the party advocated for lengthy prison sentences or deportation of criminal migrants (ibid.:89).

In their election manifesto, the New Austrian and Liberal Forum called for the reduction of bureaucratic barriers to the employment of qualified foreign professionals. This is to be achieved through the “promotion of talent through partnerships with third countries” (New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2024:31). Furthermore, the party called for the introduction of a modern immigration law and the possibility of dual citizenship to improve conditions for skilled migrants (ibid.:32). In the area of integration, they argued for a focus on language support (“German and multilingualism from kindergarten”), the teaching of liberal values (through compulsory ethics and “living in a democracy” lessons; ibid.:31), the expansion of the compulsory Integration Year, increased market participation among migrant women, and the removal of barriers to acquiring citizenship (ibid.). In the area of asylum, the fight against the causes of flight on the ground was called for, as well as the implementation of the EU Asylum and Migration Pact and measures to protect the EU's external borders (ibid.:32). On return, the New Austrian and Liberal Forum advocated return procedures for asylum-seekers through efficient return agreements that are linked to the disbursement of development cooperation funds. They also supported an active return policy as part of an EU-wide system (ibid.).

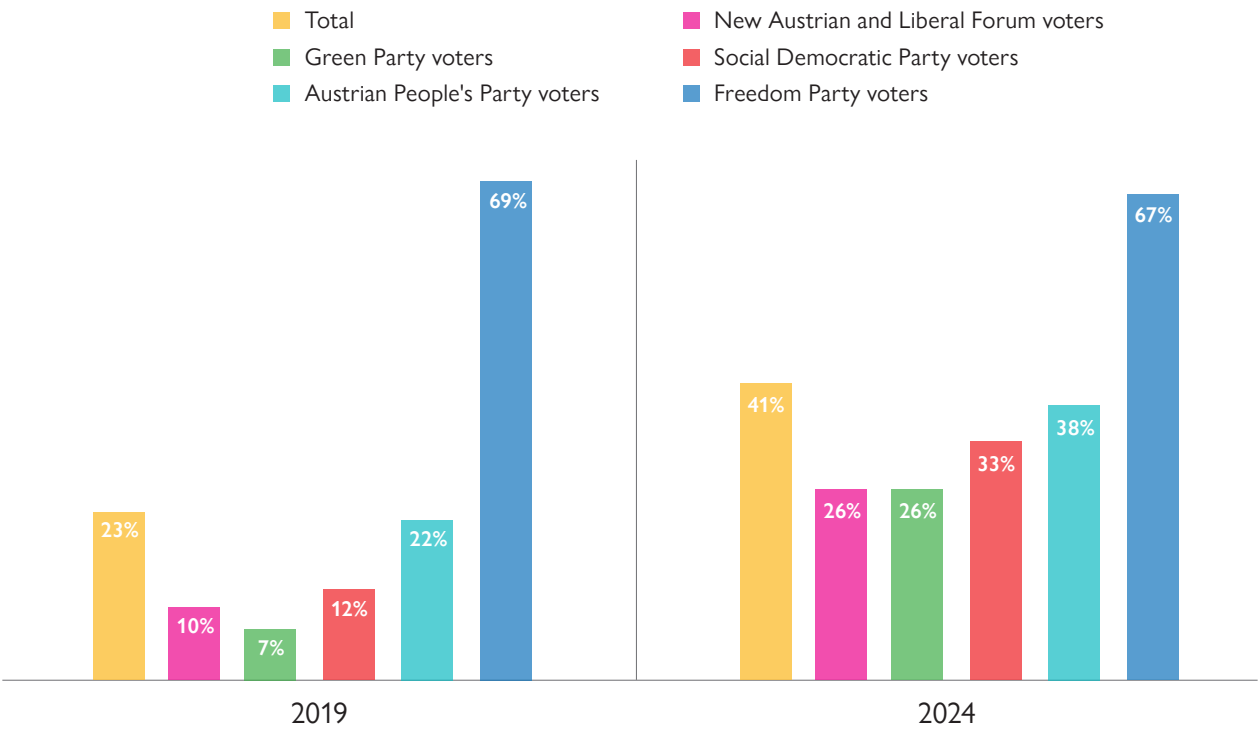
The Greens advocated for simplified recognition of qualifications acquired abroad and for mobility agreements with countries of origin for the recruitment of skilled workers (Austrian Green Party, 2024:45). On integration, they emphasised the promotion of German language courses and facilitated access to citizenship (ibid.:82). In terms of asylum policy, they called for an EU-wide distribution mechanism, safe and regular escape routes (such as through resettlement programmes or humanitarian visas) and a human rights-based approach to

⁹ Federal Act on the Labour Market Integration of Persons Granted Asylum and Subsidiary Protection Status and Asylum Seekers Likely to be Granted International Protection within the Framework of an Integration Year, FLG. I No. 75/2017.

border management (ibid.:80–81). For unaccompanied minors, they called for a stronger focus on the best interests of the child and clear guardianship rules (ibid.:81). The Greens also expressed support for the EU Asylum and Migration Pact and its provisions to ease the return of rejected asylum-seekers to safe third countries. These measures were described in the party’s national election manifesto as part of a balanced asylum and migration policy, which also includes cooperation with countries of origin on return. Skilled workers who are already working and well-integrated in Austria should no longer be subject to deportation (ibid.:80–81).

A comparison between the 2024 and 2019 National Council elections reveals changes in voters’ priorities, even though key issues such as immigration had already played an important role in previous election years – notably in 2017¹⁰ and 2019 (Perlot and Zandonella, 2019:22). While in 2019 other topics, such as climate protection, were at the forefront (ibid.) in 2024 immigration was the second most important voting motive – after the issue of rising costs – with 41 per cent (Foresight et al., 2024; Foresight and Institute for Strategic Analysis, 2024:45).

Figure 1: Comparison of the election motive “immigration” in the 2019 and 2024 national elections



Source: Foresight et al., 2024; Foresight and Institute for Strategic Analysis, 2024:40–45; Perlot and Zandonella, 2019:22–27.

As shown in Figure 1, immigration played only a secondary role in 2019 at 23 per cent (Perlot and Zandonella, 2019:22). By 2024, however, it had become significantly more important reaching 41 per cent (Foresight et al., 2024:45). In a long-term comparison, it becomes evident that immigration (as the category of asylum and

10 The topic of immigration played a central role in the election survey for the National Council elections on 15 October 2017: 58 per cent of respondents stated that the topic of “asylum and integration” was discussed “very frequently” during the election campaign (Perlot and Zandonella, 2017:28).

integration) was already a central election issue in 2017, with 58 per cent (Perlot and Zandonella, 2017:28). Therefore, the decrease in 2019 should be understood more as a temporary shift.

According to press reports, public and party-political debates on migration and asylum issues were highly polarizing and emotionally charged, as they touched on social fears, security concerns and issues of identity (Austrian Broadcast, 2024f; Kurier, 2024b). In addition, several attacks led to an increased focus on the topic of extremism shortly before the election. Fears of radicalization and concerns around internal security and migration became even more central in public and political discourse (Der Standard, 2024e).

Migration also dominated the European elections held on 9 June 2024 in Austria, alongside the war in Ukraine, climate protection and economic issues such as bringing key industries back to Europe (Der Standard, 2024b). In its EU election campaign, the Austrian Freedom Party was the only party to reject the EU's Migration and Asylum Pact (Austrian Freedom Party, 2024a:49–53).

3 LEGAL MIGRATION

3.1 Political debate

In 2024, the political discussion in Austria regarding regular migration focused on the shortage of skilled workers and included various priorities, including improving the Red-White-Red Card system, promoting the labour migration of women as an underrepresented group, and various other measures for recruiting skilled workers from third countries.

The positions of the various political parties, as outlined in their election manifestos for the national elections on 29 September 2024, reflect different approaches:

- Skills shortage as a cross-party focus
- Austrian Court of Audit criticizes the lack of an overall strategy
- Women as an underrepresented group in RWR Card issuance

The Austrian Freedom Party called for stricter control of labour migration. The party advocated for a targeted and selective approach in the international competition for qualified professionals to address the shortage of skilled workers – without allowing a general opening of immigration (Austrian Freedom Party, 2024a:50). The Austrian People's Party emphasized the importance of labour migration and called for an improvement in recruiting foreign professionals from third countries. The party also proposed increasing Austria's attractiveness as work destination through tax incentives for foreign professionals, as well as simplifying and digitalizing the Red-White-Red Card (RWR Card). Additionally, the Austrian People's Party supported the targeted recruitment of specialist staff, particularly in essential sectors such as healthcare (Austrian People's Party, 2024:61) and nursing. The Austrian People's Party also called for the expansion of the "Western Balkans regulation" (ibid.) to fill job vacancies in Austria with workers from the Western Balkans, provided no suitable workers are available on the Austrian labour market (ibid.). Moreover, the Austrian People's Party called for simplifying the recognition of foreign qualifications by eliminating the accreditation (nostrification) process for certain countries and universities. The party announced the establishment of a central labour scouting system and the targeted recruitment of young talent from abroad through a "performance centre for apprentices", to train them in Austria and retain them in the country in the long term (ibid.:61). The Social Democratic Party of Austria called for stronger integration of migrants already living in Austria to combat the shortage of skilled labour. They viewed improving the labour market integration of refugees through better qualification measures as a central component of a long-term solution (Social Democratic Party of Austria, 2024a:25). The New Austrian and Liberal Forum pushed for a more liberal immigration policy and called for reducing the bureaucratic hurdles in the recruitment of qualified professionals from abroad. The party proposed creating a modern immigration law and allowing dual citizenship, so that international professionals would not be forced to renounce their original nationality. In addition, the New Austrian and Liberal Forum outlined the establishment of an international talent pool through partnerships with third countries (New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2024:32). The Greens supported the targeted recruitment of qualified professionals from abroad and called for a modern immigration law to simplify the current complex

regulations, such as quotas and the RWR Card – especially in sectors facing acute labour shortages, such as healthcare, catering, and tourism (Austrian Green Party, 2024:45). They proposed simplifying recognition procedures for foreign qualifications to avoid dequalification. With the concept of “changing track” (ibid.), the party envisioned enabling refugees with sought-after qualifications to transition from the asylum system to regular residency. The Greens emphasized that the goal was to retain well-integrated and professionally established people in the country, both to address the shortage of skilled labour and to ensure solutions that are human-centred (ibid.:80).

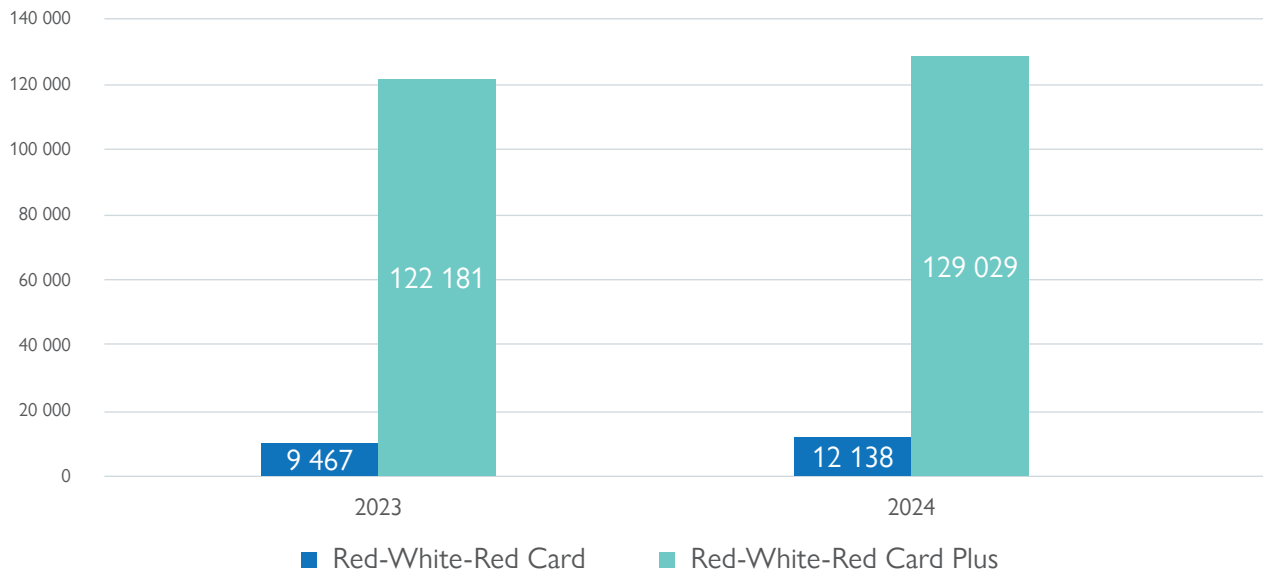
3.2 Analysis and recommended measures to address labour and skills shortages

In April 2024, the Austrian Court of Audit published a “Stocktaking Report on Skills Shortage” (Austrian Court of Audit, 2024a). In this report on skilled worker shortages in Austria, the lack of a comprehensive overall strategy to combat the skilled labour shortage was criticized (ibid.:7). Furthermore, it was recommended to place particular emphasis on the integration of non-working migrants into the labour market. When developing the measures, factors that support integration and are tailored to the varying needs of the affected groups should be considered – including in coordination with the federal provinces (ibid.:18).

Another report by the Austrian Court of Audit, also published in April 2024 and titled “Red-White-Red Card and EU Blue Card”, recommended a more effective design of the criteria-based immigration system (Austrian Court of Audit, 2024b). The current system is considered difficult to understand due to the numerous pathways to the Austrian labour market and the complex, often unclear approval criteria for applicants (Austrian Court of Audit, 2024b:10). The RWR Card system – with its five variants – and the EU Blue Card would thus generally combine comprehensible and coherent criteria such as formal education, professional experience, and minimum income thresholds. However, the report criticised that the variants are difficult to distinguish from one another, especially since there are frequent overlaps in education- and skills-related requirements and the target groups of the different card types often coincide (ibid.:10).

To improve the skilled immigration system, the Austrian Government set a goal for 2024 to significantly increase the number of RWR Cards issued and shorten application processing times, thereby easing access to the Austrian labour market for international professionals (Hadj Abdou and Ebner, 2025:26). As shown in [Figure 2](#), there were a total of 12,138 valid RWR Cards in 2024 – representing an increase of approximately 28 per cent compared to the previous year (2023: 9,467; Mol, 2023b:4; 2024f:4). In comparison to the RWR Card, the number of valid RWR Cards Plus, which grant unrestricted access to the labour market (Hadj Abdou and Ebner, 2025:11), rose by more than five per cent compared to the previous year, reaching a total of 129,029 valid cards (Mol, 2023b:4; 2024f:4). However, it is important to note the introduction in 2017 of multi-year validity for RWR Cards (Federal Chancellery, 2023a). According to the Austria’s impact monitoring, the number of individuals who, after two years, switch from a RWR Card to a RWR Card Plus, thereby extend their residence permit and gaining unrestricted access to the labour market, is used as a key indicator for assessing the effectiveness of labour migration policy (ibid.).

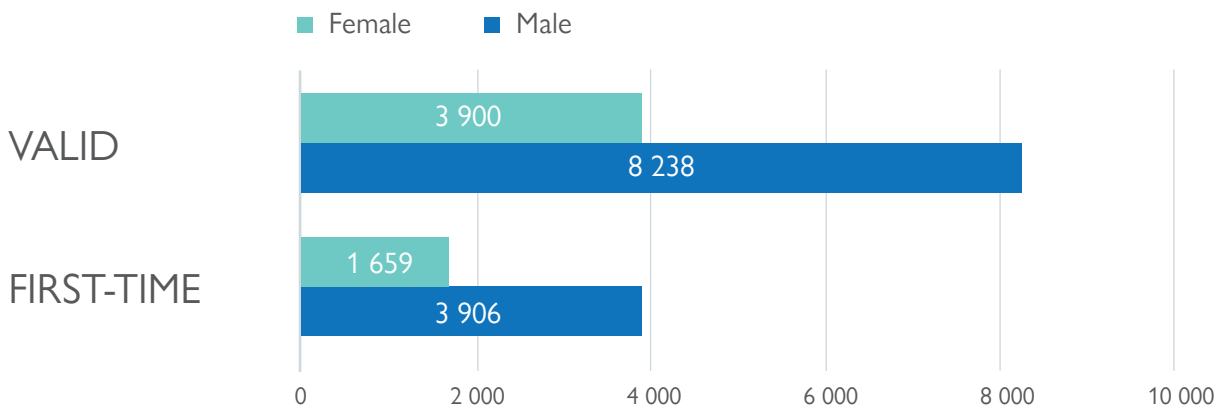
Figure 2: Development of valid “Red-White-Red Card” and “Red-White-Red Card Plus” residence permits in 2023 and 2024



Source: MoI, 2023b:4, 2024f:4.

The report by the Austrian Court of Audit on the RWR Card and the EU Blue Card also emphasized that the recruitment of women under the RWR Card system should be promoted more strongly (Austrian Court of Audit, 2024b:61). In 2024, women accounted for around 30 per cent of first-time RWR Cards issued (1,659 out of a total of 5,565), and around 32 per cent of valid cards (3,900 out of a total of 12,138) – see [Figure 3](#) (MoI, 2024e:4;63). According to the report, women have so far been underrepresented in the federal government's strategic considerations and initiatives to recruit skilled labour from third countries. The report therefore recommended targeting this group (Austrian Court of Audit, 2024b:62).

Figure 3: Valid and first-time “Red-White-Red Cards” by gender in 2024



Source: Mol, 2024e:4, 63.

The skilled labour strategy of the Austrian Trade Union Federation called for easier access to German language courses and improved recognition and nostrification of foreign qualifications to integrate migrants into the labour market more quickly (Austrian Trade Union Federation, 2024). The 2024 National Integration Report (see chapter 5.2) emphasized that, to address the shortage of skilled labour, the potential of migrants already living in Austria should be better utilized. At the same time, the report stated that the targeted recruitment of qualified professionals from third countries should be promoted (Federal Chancellery, 2024b:71), preparatory integration measures should be implemented in the country of origin (ibid.:78) and the integration of family members joining later should be taken into account (ibid.:82). The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber identified the reduction of bureaucratic hurdles for the immigration of skilled labour from abroad as a central demand.

The 2024 Labour Radar – a survey commissioned by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and conducted by the Institute for Education Research and Economics in September 2024 – highlights how Austrian companies are affected by the shortage of skilled labour. Overall, 82 per cent of surveyed businesses reported bottlenecks, with particularly severe impacts noted in the hospitality, hotel, construction and healthcare sectors (Dornmayr and Riepl, 2024:1). Accordingly, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber emphasized that improving the framework conditions for the immigration of qualified professionals should be a top priority to safeguard the competitiveness of businesses (ibid.:2). The shortage of skilled labour was also addressed by the statutory representative bodies of employees. The Upper Austrian Chamber of Labour emphasized the urgent need to reduce bureaucratic hurdles when hiring foreign nursing staff (Austrian Broadcast, 2024a). In a study published in October 2024, the Austrian Institute of Economic Research emphasized the growing demand for nursing staff, also highlighting the significant labour shortage that already exists in the care sector, which is associated with high workloads and dissatisfaction (Famira-Mühlberger and Weingärtner, 2024:5).

3.3 National and international measures for the recruitment of skilled labour

In 2024, both national measures to improve the networking of international skilled workers with companies and a legally non-binding agreement with Indonesia for the targeted recruitment of skilled workers were concluded.

- On 14 August 2024, the online platform [Work in Austria Talent Hub](#) was launched as a new online service of the Work in Austria unit, part of the Austrian Business Agency (ABA). The aim of the Talent Hub is to match international skilled workers with vacancies in Austrian companies. Austrian companies can use the Talent Hub free of charge to introduce themselves, post job vacancies and network with skilled workers (ABA, n.d.). The report by the Austrian Court of Audit (see chapter 3.2) criticized the ABA's limited room for manoeuvre in its recruitment initiatives (Austrian Court of Audit, 2024a:79-81). In particular, it took issue with the strategy of focusing on specific target countries and narrowly defined occupational fields, notably excluding medical and care professions. The Court of Audit recommended broadening both the occupational fields and geographic regions and establishing the ABA as a central coordination body for other government actors involved in the recruitment of foreign skilled workers. It also noted that key aspects of the recruitment process – such as support in finding accommodation and addressing family reunification in the recruitment process – receive insufficient attention. Finally, the report proposed the introduction of a differentiated, gender-sensitive approach (see chapter 3.2) to addressing foreign professionals as a meaningful enhancement to the recruitment process (ibid.).
- According to the Federal Chancellery,¹¹ the Austrian Integration Fund Skilled Workers Service Centre, which was created in October 2023 as a service-oriented advisory facility, has become a central information hub for supporting the integration of international skilled workers, their families and companies by expanding its services – consultations, information events, expert forums and (company) German courses – or networking in 2024.
- On 30 September 2024, the opening of the Migrant Workers Office (MWO) for Filipino workers in Vienna was celebrated at the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2024). The MWO supports overseas Filipino workers. The opening ceremony for the Vienna MWO took place at the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber. The event provided an opportunity for Austrian stakeholders and companies to network with representatives of the Philippine Department of Migrant Workers, the Philippine Embassy in Vienna and labour market experts from the Philippines (ibid.).¹² The Philippines is one of the focus countries of Austria's International Skilled Workers Initiative to address the shortage of skilled workers (Hadj Abdou and Ebner, 2025:28; Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2024).
- At the end of 2024, the Federal Chancellery received funding approval from the European Commission for a mobility project with Egypt in the field of skilled worker mobility. Together with the International

11 Written contribution: Federal Chancellery, 26 May 2025.

12 Philippine law (Republic Act 11641) stipulates that a MWO should be established in every country where the Philippines has an embassy or consulate.

Organization for Migration (IOM) Country Office for Austria, the Federal Chancellery developed this pilot project to offer further training measures, language and value modules in the field of metalworking in order to fill the skills mobility partnerships with life (EAGLE project).¹³

In 2024, the Austrian government concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU; see [Infobox 1](#)) with Indonesia with the aim of strengthening the positive effects of labour migration for Austria and supporting the recruitment of workers:

- On 13 May 2024, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower signed another non-legally binding MoU¹⁴ regarding the recruitment of skilled workers to Austria (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024a). The MoU concluded with Indonesia is part of the international skilled labour initiative for qualified professionals from third countries. It includes, among other things, an analysis of qualifications and educational degrees from Indonesia in shortage occupations through the collaboration of the ministries of both countries, which will serve the creation of a pre-check register for qualifications obtained in Indonesia (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, n.d.b) and to accelerate the application procedures for Red-White-Red Cards (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024a). Furthermore, the MoU aims to promote cooperation in the area of return cooperation (see chapter [8.3](#)).

According to the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, Indonesia's young population, high level of education, and the country's efforts to further institutionalise dual vocational training (apprenticeship training) make it an important focus country for Austria in the recruitment of international skilled workers. The apprenticeship training is intended to enable qualified professionals in Indonesia to obtain a RWR Card more quickly (ibid.).

Non-legally binding MoUs have also been concluded with Ghana and Kenya, which include certain aspects of regular migration and, in particular, agreements on return cooperation (see chapter [8.3](#)).¹⁵

13 Written contribution: Federal Chancellery, 26 May 2025.

14 An MoU focusing on dual apprenticeship training was already concluded with Indonesia in 2022.

15 Written contribution: Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 22 May 2025.

Infobox 1: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

To specifically target skilled workers from third countries for the domestic labour market, Austria has concluded agreements in the form of Memoranda of Understanding with selected countries. Depending on the partner country, emphasis is placed on certain occupational sectors (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, n.d.a). While MoUs allow for the bundling of activities to promote Austria as a place to work and for implementing targeted measures aligned with each focus country, they do not constitute legally binding agreements or financial obligations under national or international law (European Labour Authority, n.d.).

Perspectives from third countries – the example of Indonesia: How do countries of origin view agreements on the recruitment of skilled labour? The example of the MoU with Indonesia¹⁶ shows that the Indonesian government sees the agreement primarily as an opportunity. The emphasis lies on aligning workforce qualifications with the needs of the international labour market and creating new career opportunities abroad. The MoU is also understood as an important step toward creating a clear legal framework for access to the Austrian labour market, with a focus on protecting the rights and welfare of Indonesian workers. In addition, the agreement is seen to promote bilateral exchange, technical training and cultural cooperation as part of efforts to attract Indonesian professionals to work in Austria (Antara News, 2024). However, challenges faced by Indonesian labour migrants are also being discussed, as highlighted by Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency with regard to Indonesian professionals in the health and care sector within the EU. This includes the lack of support from employers and insufficient protection of migrants during the migration process (National Research and Innovation Agency, 2024). In 2024, Indonesia sent 297,000 labour migrants abroad. According to the Indonesian Minister for the Protection of Migrant Workers, this workforce contributed to national economic growth by around 0.36 per cent and reduced the unemployment rate by 3.98 per cent (Xinhua News, 2025). In Austria, the proportion of Indonesian professionals is relatively low compared to professionals from other countries of origin. At the end of 2024, a total of 1,081 Indonesian citizens were registered in Austria, of whom only 25 held a Red-White-Red Card as a residence permit (MoI, 2024f:7;18).

16 Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Austria and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia on the Recruitment of Key and Skilled Personnel.

3.4 Measures for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications

To address the shortage of skilled labour, several measures were introduced in 2024 to recognize foreign qualifications. A particular focus was placed on the health and care sectors.

- Due to Austria's demographic ageing, there has been an increased demand for care and support services. As a result, the growing recruitment from third countries has led to a rise in applications for recognition of foreign qualifications (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2024b). In response, a database for the recognition (nostrification) of health and nursing professionals from third countries was developed in 2024 on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. This database supports universities of applied sciences (responsible for the recognition of qualifications for registered health and nursing staff) and the federal provinces (responsible for the recognition of qualifications for nursing assistants and assistant nurses from third countries) in assessing foreign qualifications. Information about the database has been available since 12 May 2024 on the [Nursing in Austria website](#). The website serves as a central contact point for nursing professionals with foreign qualifications who wish to work in Austria, helping to accelerate the recognition process (ibid.).
- On 29 May 2024, the Federal Government introduced a five-point package of measures for nursing and care in order to meet the growing demand for qualified staff and care services. The package covers all areas of nursing and care – from certified nurses and social care professions to 24-hour care and family carers. Among other measures, the package also includes a competence centre to accelerate the recognition of foreign professional qualifications. This competence centre complements the validation database referred to above (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2024c). The package of measures is aimed at ensuring the quality of nursing and care through financial support, faster recognition of foreign qualifications (see [Infobox 2](#)), national standards for social care professions, and more transparent and efficient processes, while at the same time improving conditions for care workers, people in need of care and their relatives (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2024a).
- To improve the overall recognition process for foreign qualifications, the pre-check qualifications register for the Philippines was introduced in autumn 2024. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy developed this register jointly with the Philippine authorities as part of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Recruitment of Qualified Professionals between Austria and the Philippines (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, n.d.b). It currently includes 102 recognized Philippine professional training courses that meet the requirements for occupations listed on the shortage occupation list under

- Database for nostrification of health and care professionals
- Action plan for the shortage of nursing staff
- Pre-check register for the Philippines

the 2025 Regulation for Skilled Workers.¹⁷ This allows for the individual assessment of qualifications to be waived, which shortens the process for issuing the RWR Card. The training content and its categorization in the Philippine Qualification Framework were aligned with the Austrian system. The register is regularly updated and expanded and supports the regional offices of the Public Employment Service as well as employers in assessing qualifications acquired in the Philippines quickly and reliably (ibid.). In addition to the Philippines, Albania, Brazil, Indonesia and Kosovo¹⁸ are also priority countries for targeted recruitment of skilled labour and are being considered for similar preliminary assessments of professional training programmes (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2025).

17 Regulation for Skilled Workers 2025, FLG. II No. 421/2024.

18 The reference to Kosovo is to be understood in the context of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

Infobox 2: Recognition procedure for foreign qualifications in Austria

Austria does not have a uniform procedure for recognizing qualifications acquired abroad. Whether formal recognition is required depends on the type of qualification and its intended purpose (e.g., professional practice or further training). A distinction is made between **regulated** and **non-regulated professions**. Formal recognition is only required for regulated professions (e.g. health professions; Egger et al., 2023:3–4).

There are four types of formal recognition processes for regulated professions (ibid.):

1. Professional recognition (licensing) for regulated professions

- Required for certain professions such as healthcare professions and apprenticeships.
- Employment in certain professions is only possible with proof of specific qualifications.

2. Nostrification of school and school-leaving certificates

- Verification of the equivalence of foreign certificates with Austrian curricula. If there are significant differences, additional examinations are required.
- Equivalence is often based on bilateral agreements and only requires administrative confirmation.

3. Nostrification of academic degrees for professional purposes

- University degrees obtained within the EU do not usually require nostrification.
- Bilateral agreements with some countries guarantee the equivalence of academic degrees.

4. Equivalence of apprenticeship qualifications

- Some apprenticeship qualifications obtained abroad can be considered equivalent to the Austrian final apprenticeship examination, taking professional experience into account. Where training content differs, the Austrian apprenticeship certificate can be obtained through additional exams.

A 2023 research report by the Social Research Institute “Analysis. Consulting. Interdisciplinary research” highlighted that individuals undergoing recognition and nostrification procedures face several challenges. Language barriers, high costs for translations and certifications and long waiting times particularly hinder the recognition process. As a result, many people are working in jobs that do not match their qualifications, leading to a loss of expertise (Egger et al., 2023:14). The recent study “Labour Migration in Times of Labour Shortages in Austria” by the Austrian National Contact Point in the European Migration Network (EMN) emphasizes that the differing education and vocational training systems between Austria and third countries often pose challenges in recognizing and comparing foreign qualifications (Hadj Abdou and Ebner, 2025:36).

4 INTERNATIONAL AND TEMPORARY PROTECTION

4.1 Political debate

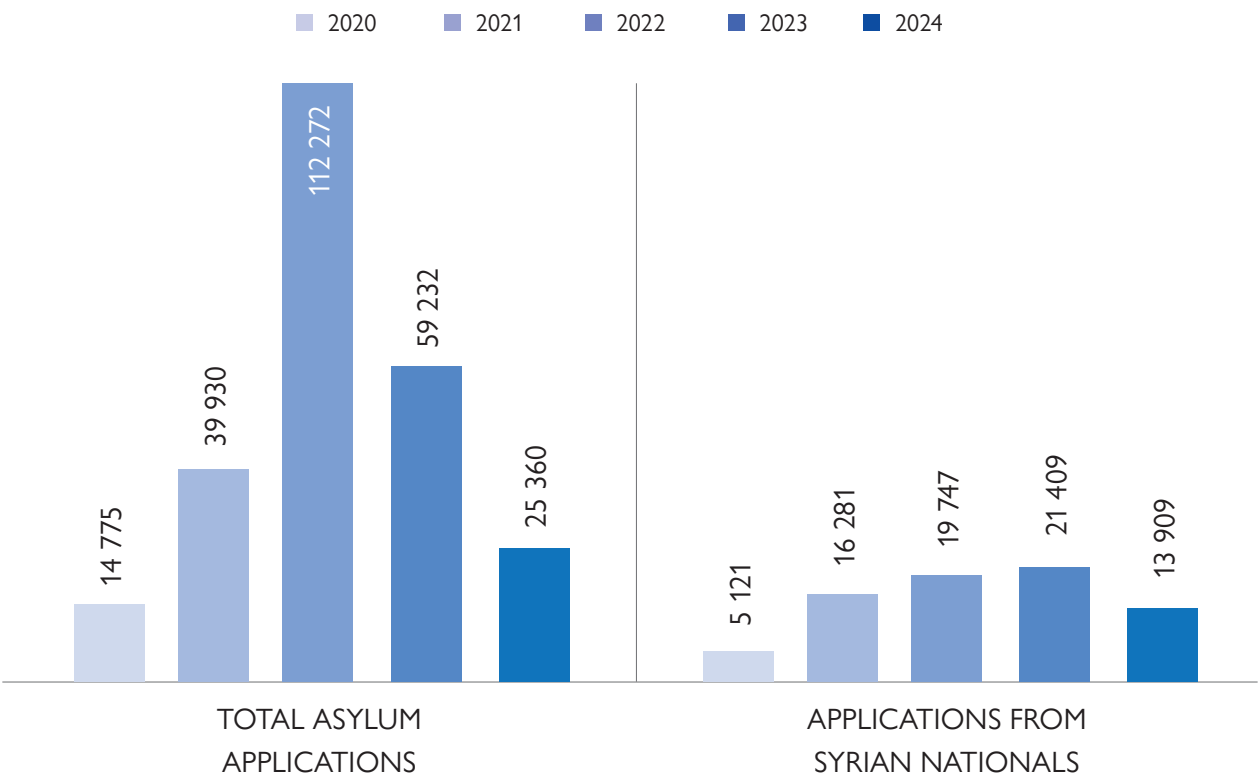
In the political debate among Austrian parties in 2024, different approaches to granting international protection were pursued. For example, the Social Democratic Party of Austria and the Greens continued to advocate the granting of international protection in their manifestos for the national elections, while also calling for a reduction in unlawful stays and a fair distribution of asylum-seekers within the EU (Social Democratic Party of Austria, 2024a:88; Austrian Green Party, 2024:80–81). The Austrian People's Party favoured stricter regulations on family reunification for persons entitled to protection, including an increase in the minimum age for spouses to join them from age 18 to 21 (Austrian People's Party, 2024:188) and the temporary suspension or quota system for family reunification within the framework of the EU emergency clause (*ibid.*:184). The emergency clause allows EU Member States to deviate from EU regulations in the area of migration and asylum to maintain public order and protect internal security (Art. 72 TFEU).¹⁹ The Austrian People's Party also called for changes to family reunification at European level to protect national social welfare systems. The party took the position that persons granted asylum should be required to prove their financial self-sufficiency for themselves and their families when applying for family reunification, meaning they must meet the self-sufficiency requirement in all cases. As a result, the preferential family reunification for this group would be abolished (Austrian People's Party, 2024:188). The New Austrian and Liberal Forum did not place any particular emphasis on demands for family reunification. Their positions focused primarily on speeding up asylum procedures to meet the needs of those seeking protection. They also emphasized the need for a return policy to combat irregular migration (New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2024:32). Among other things, the Austrian Freedom Party called for suspending asylum rights by means of an emergency law and immediately halting family reunification (Austrian Freedom Party, 2024a:47).

The debates on asylum were somewhat overshadowed by a decline in asylum applications (see [Figure 4](#)). This decline should be viewed in the context of several legal and structural changes in the area of international and temporary protection implemented in 2024. These include, among other things, the increased use of DNA testing for family reunifications to verify familial relationships. At the same time, more asylum status revocation procedures were initiated for Syrians granted asylum. Furthermore, the decline could be related to various measures aimed at combating irregular migration, such as increased border controls (see [chapter 6.1](#), [chapter 6.2](#) and [chapter 6.3](#)) and return measures (see [chapter 8.1](#) and [chapter 8.2](#)), which were increasingly implemented in 2024 and the previous year, 2023 (see the Austria Annual Report on Migration and Asylum (Ammann, 2024)).

After a peak in applications for international protection in 2022 (112,272), a decline was recorded from 2023 onwards, which continued in 2024 with a further drop to 25,360 asylum applications. In contrast, the number of applications from Syrian nationals initially rose until 2023, before also falling to 13,909 in 2024 (see [Figure 4](#); Mol, 2021:8;10, 2022a:1;4, 2023a:1–2, 2024a:1, 2025a:1).

¹⁹ Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (consolidated version), OJ C 202/1.

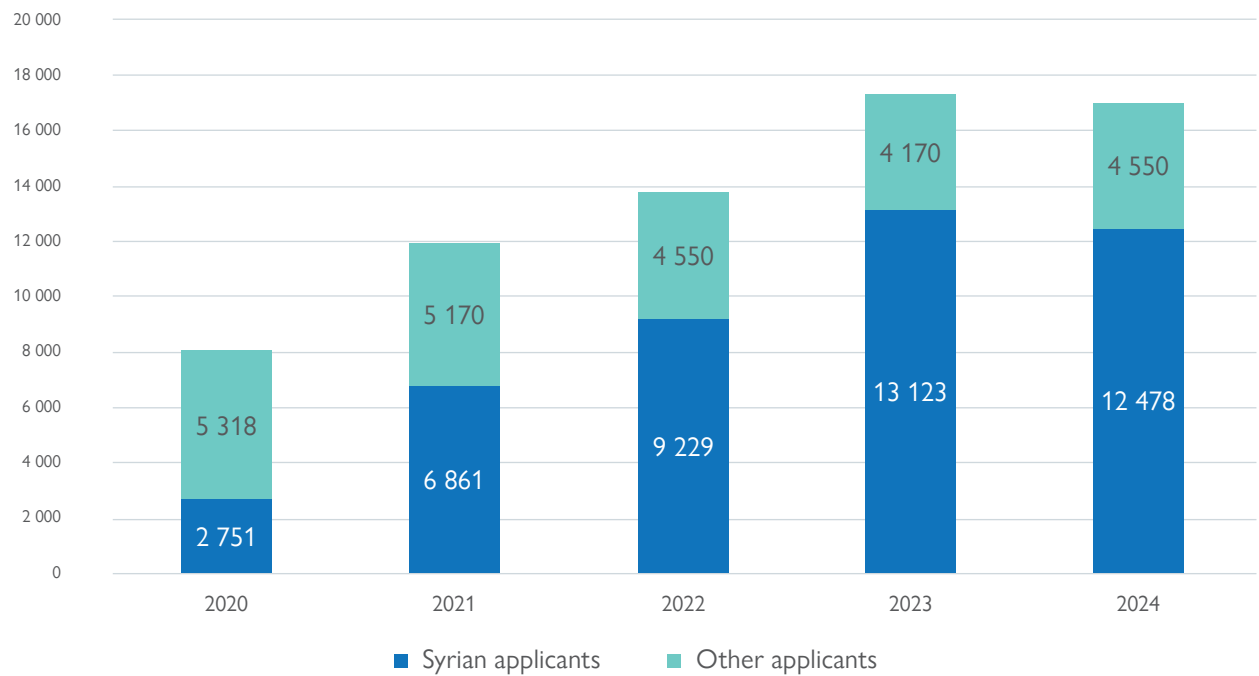
Figure 4: Total asylum applications from 2020 to 2024 compared to applications from Syrian nationals



Source: Mol, 2021:8; 10, 2022a:1; 4, 2023a:1–2, 2024a:1, 2025a :1.

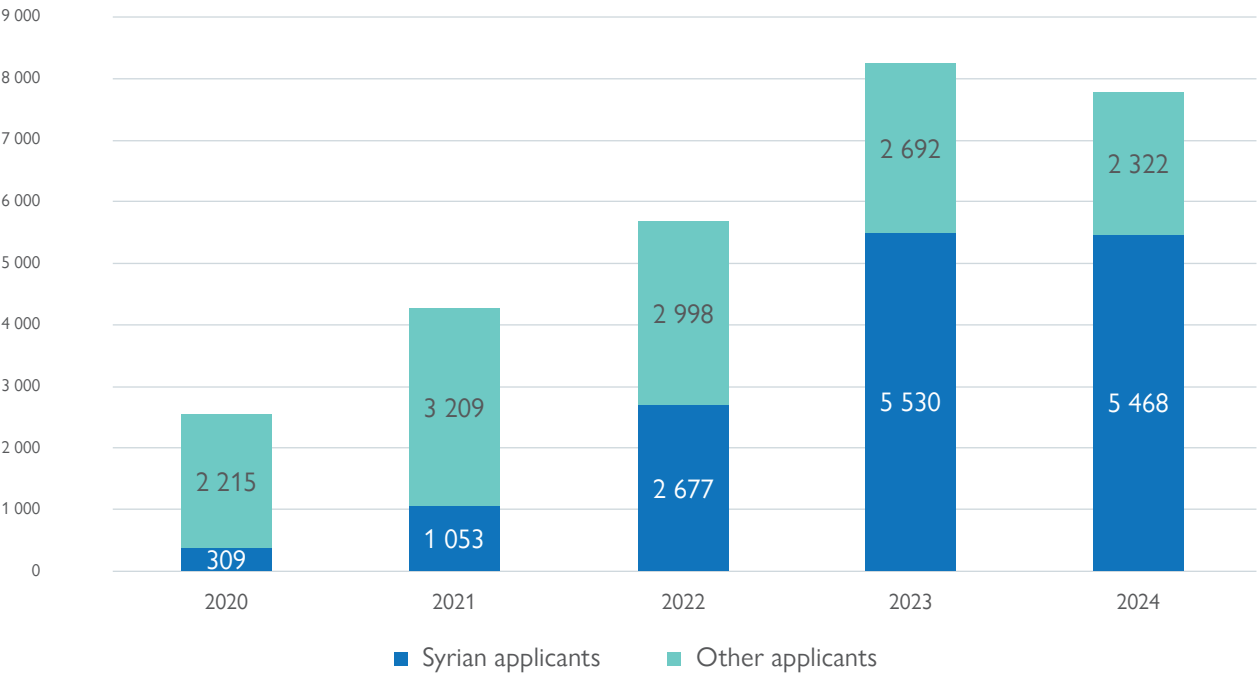
As shown in [Figure 5](#), there was a significant increase in finalized asylum decisions for Syrian applicants, particularly in 2023 (13,123), before the number fell slightly in 2024 (12,478). The number of subsidiary protection status granted, which is often issued to Syrian citizens, also increased. In 2024, the number of subsidiary protection grants was similar to the previous year (around 5,500), as [Figure 6](#) illustrates. A slight decrease is observed in both categories between 2023 and 2024 (12,478 asylum grants and 5,468 subsidiary protection status grants).

Figure 5: Development of final asylum grants (1st and 2nd instance) from 2020 to 2024, overall and for Syrian applicants



Source: Mol, 2021:34–35, 2022a:31–33, 2023a:32–33, 2024a:33–35, 2025a:31–33.

Figure 6: Subsidiary protection grants (1st and 2nd instance) from 2020 to 2024, overall and for Syrian applicants



Source: Mol, 2021:39–40, 2022a:36–37, 2023a:37–38, 2024a:39–40, 2025a:37–38.

4.2 Changes to family reunification and asylum status revocation procedures

On 10 May 2024, the Federal Minister of the Interior announced the introduction of stricter checks for document verification and greater use of DNA tests in the context of family reunification procedures under the Asylum Act (Der Standard, 2024a), both of which were subsequently implemented by decree (Mol, 2024i). Advisory for document processing were also increasingly deployed to detect forged or falsified documents in family reunification applications.

- Use of DNA testing in family reunification procedures
- Revocation of asylum status for Syrians

According to the Ministry of the Interior, the aim of these measures was to help to prevent system abuse (ibid.). The Federal Minister of the Interior also called for additional measures to be taken to further restrict family reunification, such raising the minimum age for spouses from 18 to 21 years and introducing economic self-sufficiency as a prerequisite (Der Standard, 2024a) for family reunification, in order to further restrict it (Mol, 2024i). This decision was prompted, on the one hand, by a debate about reducing family reunification, in which an overburdening of kindergartens and schools – particularly in Vienna – was highlighted, a situation attributed to the increasing number of children joining their families (Austrian Broadcast, 2024d). On the other hand, the decision also aimed to reduce irregular migration (Mol, 2024i; for further details on recent developments in family reunification procedures for third-country nationals in Austria, see Ammann and Stiller, 2025).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has criticized the increased use of DNA testing in family reunification procedures for persons with international protection. UNHCR argued that the re-examination of documents and the potential requirement for DNA testing could lead to risky journeys or financial losses for those affected. It stated that family reunifications are already lengthy procedures and that additional bureaucratic hurdles would hinder both the well-being of the families and their integration into Austria. UNHCR emphasized that DNA tests should only be ordered in cases of reasonable doubt (UNHCR Austria, 2024a).

Two weeks after the fall of the Assad regime in the Syrian Arab Republic and the establishment of a new transitional government, the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum initiated procedures in mid-December 2024 to revoke the asylum status of Syrian refugees (Parliamentary Administration, 2024i). To this end, 40,000 asylum decisions of Syrians who had been living in Austria for less than five years at that time were re-examined. In addition, all ongoing asylum applications from Syrian applicants were suspended (Parliamentary Administration, 2024h; 2024i). Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer had instructed the Federal Minister of the Interior in early December to suspend all current Syrian asylum applications and review all asylum grants in light of the political changes in the Syrian Arab Republic. The status of a person granted asylum can be revoked under certain circumstances. This is the case, for example, when a cessation clause under the Geneva Refugee Convention applies. A cessation clause may be invoked if there has been a change in the circumstances that were decisive for the initial recognition of the status of the person granted asylum (Federal Office for

Immigration and Asylum, n.d.). According to the Austrian Asylum Act,²⁰ “a procedure to revoke the status of a person granted asylum must be initiated in any case” if, based on official country documentation,²¹ a “substantial and durable change in the specific, and in particular political, circumstances that gave rise to the fear of persecution” has occurred (Art. 7 para. 2a Asylum Act 2005).

In December 2024, a number of civil society organizations²² appealed to the Austrian government to ensure legal certainty in asylum procedures for Syrian nationals. They criticized the proposed review of asylum grants, the blanket suspension of procedures and the ongoing debate regarding returns to the Syrian Arab Republic, which in their view is incompatible with human rights. They also advocated for clear criteria for family reunification and emphasized that repatriations to the Syrian Arab Republic are currently not feasible (Asylum Coordination Austria, 2024). In addition, they drew attention to the continued insecurity in the Syrian Arab Republic, underscoring the need for case-by-case assessments in line with the *non-refoulement* principle²³ (Amnesty International Austria, 2024b). UNHCR Austria argued that the decision to re-examine almost finalized family reunification cases leads to months of delays and imposes additional hardship on separated families (UNHCR Austria, 2024a). With regard to the labour market integration of Syrians, the Director of the Public Employment Service, Johannes Kopf, noted that large-scale voluntary returns of Syrians living in Austria are unlikely. In particular, those who are already integrated into the Austrian labour market are unlikely to consider return in the short term. In this context, only minor effects on the Austrian labour market are expected (Der Standard, 2024g).

20 Asylum Act 2005, FLG. I No. 100/2005 in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 67/2024.

21 At least once a calendar year, the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum prepares an analysis of the extent to which there has been a significant, lasting change in the specific, in particular political, circumstances that are decisive for the fear of persecution in particularly relevant countries of origin (Art. 3 para. 4a Asylum Act 2005).

22 Amnesty International, Asylum Coordination, Caritas, Diakonie, Diakoniewerk, Flüchtlingshilfe Doro Blancke, Fluchtpunkt, Das Integrationshaus, Queer Base, Sozialwerk Don Bosco, SOS-Balkanroute, SOS Mitmensch, Tralalobe, Ute Bock, Volkshilfe Österreich, Zebra.

23 The principle of *non-refoulement* prohibits the expulsion, extradition or deportation of persons if there is a risk of torture, inhumane treatment or serious human rights violations in the destination country (European Commission, 2024).

4.3 Legal advice

Infobox 3: Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services

The Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services is a non-profit agency under the sole ownership of the federal government. Under the remit of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, it is responsible for the reception and care of asylum-seekers and their legal advice. The Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services has existed since the Federal Act Establishing the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services company with limited liability was passed by the National Council on 16 May 2019 and came into force on 20 June 2019.²⁴

Since 1 January 2021, the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services has been providing legal advice to asylum-seekers before the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum and the Federal Administrative Court. The independence and freedom from instructions of legal advisors is stipulated in Art. 13 of the Federal Act Establishing the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services company with limited liability.

The Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services is responsible for implementing the basic care, where the federal government is competent. Since 2021, the activities of the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services have also included (Mol, 2024c):

- Legal advice;²⁵
- Return counselling;²⁶
- Provision of interpreters in asylum proceedings;
- Provision of human rights observers.

On 1 July 2024, an amendment to the Federal Act Establishing the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services company with limited liability²⁷ and the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum Procedures Act²⁸ came into force with regard to the legal advice provided to asylum-

- Legal amendments to the legal advice for asylum-seekers

seekers by the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services. The amendment led to the introduction of extended protection against termination and dismissal for legal counsellors (Art. 17a Federal Act Establishing the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services company with limited liability), provided for the statutory allocation of responsibilities within the legal advice sector (Art. 13a Federal Act Establishing the

24 Art. 2 para. 1 subpara. 2 in conjunction with para. 3 subpara. 2, Federal Act Establishing the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services company with limited liability, FLG. I No. 53/2019 in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 134/2024.

25 In accordance with Art. 49 to 52 of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum Procedures Act.

26 In accordance with Art. 52a of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum Procedures Act.

27 Federal Act Establishing the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services company with limited liability, FLG. I No. 53/2019 in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 167/2023.

28 Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum Procedures Act, FLG. I No. 87/2012 in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 134/2024.

Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services company with limited liability) and established a quality advisory board on matters of legal advice (Art. 10a Federal Act Establishing the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services company with limited liability). For this reason, the pre-existing quality advisory board on matters of legal advice was made mandatory and regulations were introduced regarding the allocation of advisory and representation cases to individual legal counsellors and their acceptance of such cases (Parliamentary Administration, 2024f). In addition, the amendment stipulates that the termination or dismissal of legal counsellors can only be deemed legally valid with the prior agreement of the head of the legal advice department and the management (ibid.). The aim of the amendment was to legally guarantee that legal advice provided to asylum-seekers by the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services is independent and that there is no requirement to follow instructions (ibid.). The change was prompted by the Constitutional Court ruling on 14 December 2023 (Constitutional Court, 2023), which confirmed the constitutionality of legal advice being provided by the State-run Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services, but deemed the legal independence of this process as still insufficiently safeguarded (ibid.). As a result, some provisions regarding legal advice provided by the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services were declared unconstitutional, as the independence and freedom from instruction of the legal counsellors were regulated in a general manner, but were not sufficiently safeguarded by law (Ammann, 2024:16).

The new legal regulation, which was initiated by the governing coalition parties (Austrian People's Party and Austrian Green Party), has already been passed by the National Council and the amendments entered into force on 23 July 2024 with further changes entering into force on 1 July 2025 (Parliamentary Administration, 2024a). With this legislative amendment, the government implemented the requirements set out by the Constitutional Court (ibid.).

4.4 Developments in basic care

Infobox 4: Basic care

Basic care²⁹ refers to the provision of daily basic needs for asylum-seekers and other vulnerable foreigners by the Austrian State. The target group for basic care includes: (1) asylum-seekers, (2) persons granted asylum, (3) displaced persons and (4) individuals who cannot be deported for legal or practical reasons (Mol, 2024c).

Based on an agreement between the federal government and the States pursuant to Art. 15a Federal Constitutional Act, basic care came into force on 1 May 2004. Accordingly, the federal government is responsible for the basic care of asylum-seekers in the initial phase of the asylum procedure, the so-called admission procedure. During this time, asylum-seekers are usually accommodated in federal reception centres. From the time of admission to the asylum procedure (i.e. after a positive decision to examine the asylum application based on the reason for flight), responsibility for accommodation and care is transferred to the federal provinces, which are responsible for creating the necessary

29 Federal Basic Care Act, FLG. I No. 405/1991 in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 53/2019.

infrastructure. The provisions of the Agreement between the Federal State and the Provinces on Basic Care³⁰ set the upper limit for the reimbursement of costs incurred (Mol, 2022b). Basic care includes, among other things, the following services (Mol, 2024c):

- Food;
- Accommodation;
- Medical and psychological care;
- Provision of goods for daily needs, e.g., clothing and school supplies;
- Pocket money;
- Information and advisory services.

The office of the Coordination Council between the Federal State and the Provinces, which deals with problem-solving, interpreting the Basic Care Agreement,³¹ and cost accounting, is located at the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Mol, 2024c).

In July 2024, the Federal Ministry of the Interior launched a pilot project to test the benefits card for asylum-seekers in basic care in cooperation with the province of Upper Austria. The benefits card will be available in participating provinces throughout Austria in 2025. It is issued to asylum-seekers over age 14 and can be used to receive certain benefits such as the pocket money and subsistence allowance (Mol, 2024n).

- Pilot project on the benefits-in-kind card for asylum-seekers launched
- Maximum expense ratios for basic care for unaccompanied minors adjusted

While the government argued that the benefits-in-kind card, by abolishing cash benefits, removes the incentive to enter the Austrian welfare system through the asylum process, prevents abuse and the outflow of funds from basic care to other countries, and also reduces administrative costs (Province of Upper Austria, 2024), the measure was criticized by civil society organizations. For example, NGOs emphasized the need to allow asylum-seekers freedom of choice over how they spend their allowances in order to strengthen their social participation and social integration (Volkshilfe Österreich, 2024; Association of Austrian Food Banks, 2024). According to reports by the Association of Austrian Food Banks and Asylum Coordination Austria, practical issues arose in the implementation of the pilot project because only very small amounts of money were transferred daily and organizations providing food donations, such as the food bank and social markets, were excluded from the system, making it harder for asylum-seekers to access affordable food (Association of Austrian Food Banks, 2024; Asylum Coordination Austria, n.d.). As an alternative to the benefits-in-kind card, the NGO Asylum Coordination Austria therefore proposed a solution such as the digital basic account model already practised in Vorarlberg or the Tyrolean payment card, which allows asylum-seekers to open

30 Agreement between the Federal State and the Provinces according to Art. 15a Federal Constitutional Act on joint measures for temporary basic care for foreigners in need of assistance and protection (asylum seekers, persons granted asylum, displaced persons and other persons who cannot be deported for legal or factual reasons) in Austria, FLG. I No. 80/2004.

31 Ibid.

their own bank accounts (Asylum Coordination Austria, n.d.). The province of Tyrol has had a payment card model since 2017 (Tyrolean Social Services, n.d.) and like the province of Vorarlberg, allows asylum-seekers to open their own bank accounts (Austrian Broadcast, 2024e) instead of using a benefits-in-kind card (Province of Vorarlberg, n.d.). Lower Austria launched a pilot project with its own benefits-in-kind model in June 2024 (Province of Lower Austria, 2024), which it intends to maintain. The Lower Austrian payment card model differs from other federal provinces because purchases can only be made in specific contracted businesses, and no international bank transfers are possible. In addition, the card does not permit cash transactions, so the monthly pocket money of EUR 40 still has to be paid out in cash. In contrast, asylum-seekers in Upper Austria can withdraw this amount from cash machines (Der Standard, 2024d). In Tyrol, asylum-seekers can withdraw cash from cash machines using the payment card, while this is not possible in Lower Austria. This payment card, like the one in Lower Austria, does not allow digital payments or international transfers (Tyrolean Social Services, n.d.).

On 5 July 2024, the Austrian National Council decided to adjust the maximum expense ratios in basic care as part of an agreement concluded between the Federal State and the provinces under Art. 15a Federal Constitutional Act to amend the Agreement between the Federal State and the Provinces on Basic Care. The amendments were based on the acknowledgement by the Austrian People's Party, the Social Democratic Party of Austria, and the Greens that the rates in effect until then were, particularly in light of inflation in Austria, too low to ensure full cost coverage of basic services and the provision of adequate care facilities. This led to a revision of the maximum expense ratios, in particular, in the area of care for vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors and persons with special needs, the maximum expense ratios were therefore increased and additional cost categories were introduced, which applied retroactively from 1 January 2024. The agreement also stipulated that, if necessary, accommodation, food and care for unaccompanied minors can also be provided in facilities commissioned by the Children and Youth Welfare Service. The maximum daily cost rate for accommodation, food and care for unaccompanied minors is EUR 112. If the unaccompanied minors are accommodated in facilities on behalf of the Children and Youth Welfare Service, the rate increases to EUR 130 per day (Parliamentary Administration, 2024f).

Austrian political parties such as the Greens and the New Austrian and Liberal Forum saw the agreement as an incentive for the federal provinces to adhere to the agreed quotas for the relocation of vulnerable individuals, which, currently only Vienna is meeting (Parliamentary Administration, 2024e). Civil society actors, including Amnesty International, highlighted that unaccompanied minors often remain in reception centres for months without access to child-appropriate care (Amnesty International Austria, 2024a). The adapted agreement no longer entered into force in 2024, as the necessary resolution had not yet been finalized in all federal provinces in 2024 (Parliamentary Administration, 2024f).

4.5 Temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine

The new legislative package³² announced on 4 July 2024, which includes amendments to the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals,³³ the Settlement and Residence Act,³⁴ the Asylum Act 2005,³⁵ and the Compulsory Education Act³⁶ allows displaced persons from Ukraine who are already employed in Austria to switch to the regular settlement scheme. The changes to the right of residence came into force on 1 October 2024. This allowed

- Legislative changes allow displaced persons to access the regular settlement regime
- Compulsory education extended to young Ukrainians

displaced persons to apply for a Red-White-Red Card Plus (RWR Card Plus; Mol, 2024d). The legislative package aimed to enable displaced Ukrainians who had already found employment in the labour market to transition into the regular settlement scheme (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024b). The aim was to improve the labour market integration of displaced persons in Austria (Lindmayr, 2024). This regulation must be considered in the context of the fact that, at the time, displaced persons were only entitled to a temporary right of residence until 4 March 2025 and the Federal Government was in the process of developing a solution for the prospect of long-term residence (Federal Chancellery, 2023b:2). To apply for a Red-White-Red Card Plus as a displaced person from Ukraine, the applicant must have been employed with full social insurance coverage or self-employed with insurance coverage in Austria for at least twelve months within the last 24 months. In addition, proof of German language skills at level A1 must be provided. The applicant must also demonstrate a secure means of subsistence for themselves and their family members (Mol, 2024d). A RWR Card Plus entitles third-country nationals to temporary settlement and provides unrestricted access to the labour market for both self-employed and employed remunerative activities (Hadj Abdou and Ebner, 2025:11). While many European countries had not yet developed clear regulations regarding the status of displaced persons after the end of temporary protection (The Expert Council on Integration and Migration, 2025), Austria, with this regulation, already provided longer-term residence prospects for displaced persons who met the criteria for application. By early December 2024, there were more than 2,000 applications for a RWR Card Plus for displaced persons and their family members in Austria (Mol, 2025b).

The Austrian political parties assessed the transition from temporary protection to the regular residence status differently. In their election manifesto for the national elections, the Greens emphasized the importance of a secure future and residence perspectives for displaced persons from Ukraine (Austrian Green Party, 2024:80) and saw the possibility of switching to the RWR Card Plus as an important long-term step (ibid.:45). The Austrian People's Party viewed this transition as part of a managed labour market integration strategy and an opportunity to reduce the shortage of qualified professionals, while the Social Democratic Party of Austria called for strengthening integration and qualification measures alongside legal options, so that displaced

32 Amendment of the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, the Settlement and Residence Act, the Asylum Act 2005 and the Compulsory Education Act, FLG. I No. 67/2024.

33 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, FLG. No. 218/1975 in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 67/2024.

34 Settlement and Residence Act, FLG. I No. 100/2005 in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 67/2024.

35 Asylum Act 2005, FLG. I No. 100/2005 in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 67/2024.

36 Compulsory Education Act, FLG. I No. 62/2016 in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 67/2024.

persons could establish themselves in the Austrian labour market in the long term. The New Austrian and Liberal Forum welcomed the legal certainty and integration provided by this step, but emphasized the need for an unbureaucratic, transparent process. The Austrian Freedom Party, on the other hand, criticized the potential for permanent immigration and took a sceptical view of the regulation, believing it could create the wrong incentives (Parliamentary Administration, 2024d). The Federation of Austrian Industries regarded the decision as a positive measure for labour market integration with long-term residency prospects. However, the Chamber of Commerce saw further need for measures, such as a requirement for labour market integration during the basic care phase, so that Ukrainian refugees could register with the Public Employment Service. International and civil society organizations expressed both support and criticism of the proposed law (Kurier, 2024a). UNHCR Austria, which had already called for a system change with long-term perspectives in 2023 (UNHCR Austria, 2023), considered the initiative as an important step for the first groups of employed Ukrainian refugees. As Caritas also emphasized, the required transition from basic care to social assistance would be crucial to better cover basic needs financially. Caritas criticized the continued provision of basic care instead of the possible receipt of social assistance, calling it detrimental to integration and financially inadequate. Diakonie criticized the measure because it did not meet the needs of a large group of displaced persons, as many – especially women with care responsibilities, individuals with health limitations and older people – would not have the opportunity to work full-time (Kurier, 2024a).

As of 1 July 2024, the obligation to attend compulsory education until age 18 also applies to young Ukrainians displaced by the war. The amendment to the Compulsory Education Act³⁷ bridges the gap between compulsory schooling and entry into the labour market by giving young people access to further education and training opportunities (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024c). The aim of this legislative amendment is to facilitate the integration of young Ukrainians into the Austrian educational system, thus improving their chances of obtaining more highly skilled jobs and facilitating their long-term labour market integration (ibid.). Before the law was amended, the NGO SOS Children's Villages emphasized the disadvantages of restricting long-term educational prospects for young Ukrainians. After completing compulsory schooling, Ukrainians without sufficient German language skills would not be entitled to further education or vocational training opportunities (SOS Children's Villages, 2024). The head of the UNHCR Austria office regarded the legislative change as an important step toward enabling young Ukrainians to continue their education (Pinter, 2024).

Introduced in 2022, the tuition fee exemption for Ukrainian students at universities and teacher training universities in Austria has been extended to include the winter semester 2025/26 (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, n.d.b). The Tuition Fee Regulation³⁸ has been amended to take this into account. Further support measures such as the [Ernst Mach Scholarship – Ukraine](#) are also still available (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2023). The aim is to provide financial relief for Ukrainian students and researchers in view of the ongoing war in Ukraine and to enable them to continue their university education in Austria (ibid.).

37 Amendment of the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, the Settlement and Residence Act, the Asylum Act 2005 and the Compulsory Education Act, FLG. I No. 67/2024.

38 Tuition Fee Regulation, FLG. II No. 218/2019 in the version of federal law FLG. II No. 23/2025.

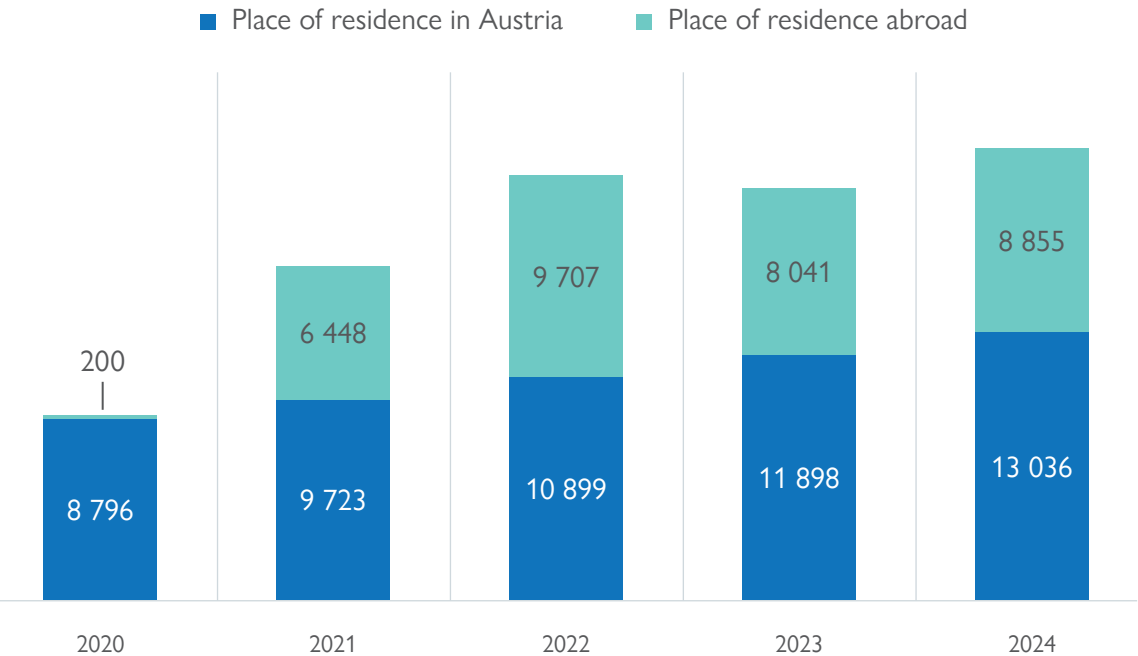
5 INTEGRATION

5.1 Political debate

The integration positions of the Austrian political parties reflected different approaches and visions for the successful integration of migrants. In its 2024 election manifesto, for example, the Social Democratic Party of Austria emphasized the need for an “integration compass” (Social Democratic Party of Austria, 2024a:88) that highlights fundamental values such as democracy, human rights and women's rights. It called for the increased provision of German language courses from day one and the creation of smaller accommodations that would better connect individuals to society. The Social Democratic Party of Austria also backed the reintroduction of a mandatory Integration Year, which includes labour market qualification measures, German language and values courses, as well as targeted support for women (ibid.). In response to the 2024 Integration Report (see comments in chapter 5.2), the need to further expand integration measures was also emphasized (Social Democratic Party of Austria Parliamentary Club, 2024). The Greens focused on promoting the German language and further training from day one and advocated easier recognition of professional qualifications as well as a labour market policy that makes better use of the potential of all migrants (Austrian Green Party, 2024:45). They support solutions such as “changing track” (ibid.) for asylum-seekers with in-demand qualifications in the Austrian labour market already working in Austria. They also backed an Integration Year for persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection to facilitate a quick entry into the labour market. The Greens further emphasized that easier access to citizenship would promote integration by linking rights with duties and strengthening social cohesion. They called for a reform of the Citizenship Act and for *ius soli* (principle of territoriality), which would grant citizenship to anyone born in Austria to a legally resident parent (ibid.:82). On 1 January 2024, this applied to approximately 271,000 individuals born in Austria but holding foreign citizenship (Statistics Austria, 2024). This proposal echoed a long-standing demand of civil society initiatives, such as SOS Mitmensch (SOS Mitmensch, n.d.). The Austrian People's Party called for the introduction of a social year with values courses and qualification opportunities for third-country nationals living in Austria for more than five years, with sanctions for failure to meet requirements. Overall, the Austrian People's Party emphasized that the number of migrants and their qualifications were key to successful integration (Austrian People's Party, 2024:192). The Austrian Freedom Party's integration concept in their election manifesto stressed the necessity of assimilation for immigrants. For example, they proposed granting citizenship only to those who have assimilated (Austrian Freedom Party, 2024a:49). The party strongly emphasized respect for Austrian values as a marker of integration (Austrian Freedom Party, 2024b). The New Austrian and Liberal Forum, on the other hand, criticized the current deportation practices, arguing that often the wrong people – well-integrated individuals – were affected, while insufficient measures were taken against those violating Austria's fundamental values. They called for a more targeted implementation of integration strategies and better handling of deportations (Salzburger Nachrichten, 2024). Regarding naturalizations, the New Austrian and Liberal Forum called for the legalization of dual citizenship (New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2024:32). According to current legislation, an important exception to the principle of avoiding dual citizenship in Austria is acquisition by descent from binational parents. If another nationality is acquired at birth in addition to Austrian nationality, for example through descent from the other parent or through the land principle, Austrian citizenship is not lost (Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, n.d.a).

The issue of acquiring citizenship was also taken up in the public debate. The citizenship regulations in Austria were criticized as extremely restrictive and there were calls for faster naturalization of migrants (Austrian Broadcast, 2024b). The need for a reform of the Citizenship Act was highlighted, as citizenship is seen as an essential participatory right that promotes integration (ibid.). The adjustment in regard to high financial requirements, long processing times and strict residence requirements were deemed necessary to ease access to citizenship (Catholic Church Austria, 2024). It was noted that in 2024, Austria saw a 9.8 per cent increase in naturalizations compared to the previous year, with a total of 21,891 people acquiring Austrian citizenship, as shown in Figure 7. Of these, 8,855 individuals (40.5 %) had their residence abroad. A significant proportion of this increase, around 40 per cent of the naturalizations, resulted from granting citizenship to politically persecuted persons from the Nazi regime and their descendants. With 5,102 individuals, those from Israel formed the largest group among the naturalized, followed by Syrians (2,241) and Turks (1,392). While the naturalized individuals from Israel – with a few exceptions – continue to live in their country of origin, almost all naturalized Syrians and the majority of Turks are resident in Austria (Statistics Austria, 2025; Austrian Broadcast, 2025a).

Figure 7: Development of naturalizations in Austria from 2020 to 2024 by place of residence (in Austria and abroad)



Source: Statistics Austria, 2025.

5.2 Changes in the area of integration measures

With regard to integration measures for persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection, the Austrian Integration Fund has been piloting the expansion of mandatory values and orientation courses from three to five days since fall 2024 and is setting new thematic priorities on security and belonging (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024c). The expansion of the values and orientation courses to five days took place against the background of evaluation reports and recommendations from experts, as stated by the Austrian Integration Fund (ibid.). Under the Integration Act, these courses are mandatory for persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status as well as legally settled third-country nationals who receive social assistance (Art. 5 and 16c para. 1 Integration Act). According to the Austrian Integration Fund, the values and orientation courses provide a way to integrate people into the labour market and teach them about Austrian culture and history, the Austrian legal system and the principles of the Austrian welfare State (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024c).

- Expansion of mandatory values and orientation courses (pilot phase)
- Austrian Integration Fund and Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services offer mandatory basic rules courses
- Range of online preparatory courses for integration exams expanded
- Integration report highlights adult language acquisition as a key aspect of integration policy

Since June 2024 the Austrian Integration Fund in cooperation with the Federal Agency for Care and Support Services (see [Infobox 3](#)) developed mandatory basic rule courses for asylum-seekers, which have been taking place directly in the federal care facilities.

Non-participation may result in a reduction of pocket money (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024a). As part of the basic rule courses, essential information for the asylum procedure is provided. In 90-minute modules, the course content covers the following topics: culture and manners, rights and duties, democracy, the rule of law, equal rights and the prevention of antisemitism.³⁹ According to the Austrian Integration Fund, the courses are intended to provide course participants with initial orientation during the asylum procedure and promote their integration into the social and legal environment (ibid.). By the end of the year 2024, nearly 2,000 modules had been conducted, with close to 4,500 participants. In 90 cases, according to the report by the Ministry of the Interior, participation was refused, resulting in a reduction of pocket money from EUR 40 to EUR 20 in those cases (Mol, 2025d).

With the launch of the new digital platform [My Integration in Austria](#) published in September 2024, the Austrian Integration Fund expanded its range of online preparatory courses for the interactive teaching of orientation and values knowledge for integration exams (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024d). The courses offered by the Austrian Integration Fund were primarily aimed at persons granted asylum and subsidiary protection, but also at asylum-seekers with a high probability of being granted asylum, as well as displaced

39 Written contribution: Federal Chancellery, 26 May 2025.

Ukrainians (Austrian Integration Fund, n.d.). This service is supplemented by live sessions held once a week, covering the platform and exam questions ([Online Exam Preparation Courses – Language Portal](#)). The aim of the platform is to expand opportunities for flexible, time- and location-independent preparation for the values component of the Austrian Integration Fund integration exam across different language levels (A1 to B2), and to strengthen knowledge about social values, rules, rights, and responsibilities in Austria (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024d). Support should be provided for persons preparing to take the language and integration exams, according to the Austrian Integration Fund (ibid.).

The 2024 Integration Report by the Expert Council for Integration in the Federal Chancellery was published in July 2024. It provides a comprehensive overview of integration in Austria and has been issued annually since 2011. The integration report is legally enshrined in the Integration Act (Art. 18 para. 1 subpara. 2 and 3 Integration Act). As noted in the Integration Report, the Austrian Integration Fund registered a record high of 67,500 German language course places offered in 2024, along with around 80,000 integration examinations administered (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024e). According to the report, three pillars are central to sustainable integration: language acquisition, labour market integration, and commitment to Austrian values (Federal Chancellery, 2024b:10–11). The report also described challenges within the integration process. It emphasized that the high number of individuals granted protection and the diversity of origin groups, particularly in the Vienna area, place existing integration structures under strain. According to the report, integration measures need to be adapted, especially in the area of refugee migration, in order to meet the increased demand for literacy and basic education courses. It stated that successful integration and social cohesion can only be ensured if the reduction of irregular migration is an integral part of integration policy. The report argued that targeted support for those genuinely in need of protection is essential, as state and societal resources are limited and overburdening the integration infrastructure must be avoided (ibid.:3). Moreover, it highlighted the need to tailor integration measures more specifically to different target groups, as the conditions and needs of individuals entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection, displaced Ukrainians, family members joining relatives and skilled professionals vary (ibid.:10). For displaced Ukrainians, it identified the rapid recognition of qualifications obtained in their country of origin, comprehensive expansion of childcare services, and increased use of career platforms as crucial to enable sustainable and qualification-appropriate entry into the Austrian labour market (ibid.:64–65). To address the shortage of skilled labour, the report also recommended better utilization of the domestic potential of migrants and targeted recruitment of professionals from third countries (ibid.:71; see chapter 3.3), as well as the inclusion of family members in the integration process (ibid.:82).

5.3 Measures to support the labour market integration of asylum-seekers

On 16 July 2024, a regulation⁴⁰ issued by the Federal Minister of the Interior came into force, setting out the conditions under which asylum-seekers and other foreigners can, with their consent, be called upon to engage in charitable work.

- Regulation by the Ministry of the Interior on charitable aid activities for asylum-seekers

This allows asylum-seekers to take on a variety of jobs, such as charitable work for the Federal State, the provinces, municipalities and non-profit public sector organizations. This could also include work for non-governmental organizations that run approved civilian service institutes and have at least five civilian service posts. A payment of EUR 1.60 per hour is offered as an incentive to encourage people to engage in charitable work. If no charitable work is performed, the monthly pocket money provided for asylum-seekers is reduced from EUR 40 to EUR 20 (MoI, 2024m). Those who are unable to work for health reasons are exempt from this obligation (MoI, 2025d). According to the Federal Minister of the Interior, the guiding principle behind this measure is to prevent abuse of the basic care system and to ensure that basic care remains both fair and sustainable (MoI, 2024j). A strict set of rules is intended to foster the successful integration of asylum-seekers in community life, while the measure also supports the idea that people who receive support in Austria should be expected to give back to the community. At the same time, this is intended to prevent potential abuse of the basic care system (MoI, 2024m). In contrast, Amnesty International Austria argued that only unrestricted access to the labour market for asylum-seekers would accelerate their integration and simultaneously bring overall economic benefits to society (Amnesty International Austria, 2024a). In a parliamentary inquiry by New Austrian and Liberal Forum MPs to the Federal Minister of the Interior in May 2024, the concept was already criticized before its introduction. It was pointed out, among other things, that this policy contradicted the fact that asylum-seekers have previously only had limited access to the labour market (Parliamentary Administration, 2024c).

By the end of 2024, 2,650 people had completed around 183,000 hours of community service. More than 72 per cent of asylum-seekers have fulfilled this obligation. The 28 per cent who did not engage in community service had their pocket money reduced (MoI, 2025d).

40 Regulation of the Federal Minister for the Interior on the Employment of Asylum-seekers and Certain Other Foreign Nationals for Charitable Assistance Activities, FLG. II No. 201/2024.

Infobox 5: Labour market access for asylum-seekers

According to Art. 15 of the EU Reception Conditions Directive,⁴¹ which sets minimum standards for the reception of asylum-seekers in EU Member States, asylum-seekers must be granted “effective” access to the labour market no later than nine months after filing an application for international protection, provided that no first-instance decision by the asylum authority has been issued.

The following requirements must be met in Austria to take up employment:

- Employment can be started three months after submitting the asylum application.
- From this date, employers can submit an application for a work permit to the Public Employment Service.
- Within six weeks, the Public Employment Service reviews the application for a labour market test. Before a work permit can be issued, the Public Employment Service checks each case to determine if any Austrian nationals, citizens of Member States of the European Economic Area (EEA) or well-integrated foreigners are registered who are willing and qualified to take up the position (Public Employment Service, 2022).

Until previous decrees were repealed by the Constitutional Court in 2021, the work permit was primarily limited to seasonal work and harvest assistance (Ebner, 2023b). Since June 2021, employment has been allowed in all sectors, provided that no qualified substitute workers are available. Since then, asylum-seekers have also been able to start an apprenticeship, provided they receive a permit (Ebner, 2023a:1; Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2023). In addition, asylum-seekers are allowed to engage in self-employment starting from the fourth month after submitting their application, provided they meet the relevant trade and professional requirements.

However, according to a study by the National Contact Point for Austria in the European Migration Network (Ebner, 2023a:2–3), significant challenges still remain regarding asylum-seekers' access to the labour market. These challenges arise from limited financial resources for integration measures, as well as practical and bureaucratic hurdles (e.g. lack of language skills, lengthy recognition of qualifications).

41 Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast), OJ L 180/96, p. 96 –116.

5.4 Integration and protection measures for migrant women

The targeted outreach and support of women is central to integration measures. This was highlighted in the [report by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence \(GREVIO\)](#) of September 2024, which addressed women with a migration background as a vulnerable target group. The report monitors compliance with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (“Istanbul Convention”; Federal Chancellery, 2024a:5). It evaluates the progress made in Austria regarding the support, protection, and provision of justice for victims of violence against women and domestic violence, with regard to selected provisions of the Istanbul Convention.⁴² It includes the assessment by the independent group of experts of the Council of Europe, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention (ibid.). Experiences of violence and family control can prevent women with a migration background from participating in integration-promoting measures such as language courses, education, or entering the labour market. Therefore, the report emphasized that particular attention should be given to their situation in order to enable their social participation (ibid.:50–51).

With regard to integration, the report particularly highlighted the cooperation between the Public Employment Service Austria and violence protection centres as part of the mandatory German language courses at the Public Employment Service.⁴³ This concerned cases where migrant women might otherwise not have been permitted by their husbands or families to leave their home unaccompanied (Federal Chancellery, 2024a:50).

To support women affected by violence, especially those with a migration background, the Austrian Integration Fund and the Austrian Medical Association launched a joint initiative against violence against women in July 2024. Multilingual posters and information materials were distributed in around 2,000 gynaecological and paediatric practices in Austria. These materials provide information in the six most common origin languages about key support services and emergency helplines, aiming to inform women with a migration and refugee background quickly and with low barriers about available assistance. The goal was to reach those affected directly in their everyday lives and to strengthen their safety and integration (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024b).

In addition, around 5,300 women were reached in the Austrian Integration Fund women's centres in Graz and Vienna through multilingual counselling, seminars and expert consultations on topics such as labour market integration, education, health, family, self-determination, and protection from violence. Complementing these efforts, specific measures were introduced for the first time for male refugees in stressful life situations,

42 The Istanbul Convention was signed by 13 States, including Austria, on 11 May 2011 and is the first binding agreement under international law to combat violence against women. It covers all forms of violence, including FGM, forced marriage and domestic violence, and is considered the „gold standard“ of violence prevention. The convention commits to prevention, victim support and prosecution. Austria ratified it on 14 November 2013 and it entered into force on 1 August 2014. In 2015, Austria established the National Coordination Office „Violence against Women“ (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, n.d.a).

43 On the other hand, with regard to asylum, the report also emphasized that asylum seekers who have been victims of domestic violence are sometimes housed in State facilities that do not offer the necessary level of protection (Federal Chancellery, 2024a). In a statement by Austria on the GREVIO report, it was noted in response to the last point that, in addition to appropriate training of Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services staff, there is close cooperation with specialized organizations (e.g. in the field of LGBTIQ, human trafficking, forced marriage, genital mutilation). Women traveling alone are also accommodated in separate areas with exclusively female staff. In the event of any suspected criminal acts, the police will also be informed immediately, as the Federal Chancellery emphasized in a written contribution on 28 January 2025. Furthermore, the Austrian government has responded to the demand for higher and long-term financial support for specialized support services. According to the statement, in addition to the violence protection centres, funding from other sectors – such as the integration and family sector – for facilities and projects in the area of violence prevention and counselling has also been significantly increased in recent years. In addition, specific counselling services have been continuously expanded (Federal Chancellery, n.d.).

addressing topics such as frustration, violence, relationship or family conflict (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024e).

A report by an NGO coalition referring to the GREVIO report called for improved protection measures for women with a migration background, who face a higher risk of becoming victims of violence. Key demands included systematic training for judges in the field of gender-based violence, the establishment of a specialized monitoring centre for the prevention of femicide, and the comprehensive collection and evaluation of data on gender-based violence to make the scale of such violence visible and ensure effective protection measures (Association of Feminist Single Parents – FEM.A, 2024:20–21).

In September 2024, the final report of the study “Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) in Austria” (Jirovsky-Platter et al., 2024), which for the first time provides a comprehensive picture of the prevalence of female genital mutilation in Austria, was published. In addition to a statistical extrapolation, according to which there are almost 11,000 girls affected by FGM/C and between 1,700 and 3,000 girls at risk of FGM/C in Austria, the study includes an online survey of healthcare professionals. Furthermore, the situation of those affected, mainly from Egypt and Somalia, is also examined. Based on the data and findings generated from the surveys and interviews, the authors of the study developed recommendations for action, including the expansion of holistic care, a national register for better documentation and improved training for healthcare staff.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Written contribution: Federal Chancellery, 26 May 2025.

6 BORDER MANAGEMENT, VISA POLICIES AND IRREGULAR MIGRATION

6.1 Political debate

The issues of border management and irregular migration played a central role in the election manifestos of Austrian parties for the 2024 national elections. Party positions ranged from human rights-based and solidarity-driven approaches to strict security and isolationist policies.

The Green Party, in its 2024 manifesto, called for a “human rights-based policy and border management” (Austrian Green Party, 2024:80). While supporting controlled borders – particularly to ensure protection – the Greens emphasized that human rights violations at the EU’s external borders had not been adequately prosecuted. They therefore demanded independent control mechanisms, greater transparency at the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), and safe and legal escape routes to prevent dangerous migration paths. Individuals without protection status and those who have committed criminal offences should be required to leave Austria – but always with respect for human rights, especially in the case of vulnerable groups, the party stressed (ibid.:81). The New Austrian and Liberal Forum advocated addressing the root causes of displacement by supporting countries of origin and transit, and by creating safe and legal migration routes to curb smuggling networks (New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2024:32). Like the New Austrian and Liberal Forum, the Social Democratic Party supported fast-track procedures at the EU’s external borders. While the Social Democratic Party of Austria did not take an explicit stance on anti-smuggling measures, it supported reducing unlawful stays in Austria (Social Democratic Party of Austria, 2024a:88). The Austrian People’s Party pushed for the reduction of irregular migration through robust external border protection, asylum centres in third countries, and consistent deportation of criminal asylum-seekers (see chapter 8 on return migration). To combat human smuggling, the Austrian People’s Party proposed a dedicated border protection unit with 2,500 officers and tougher penalties (Austrian People’s Party, 2024:186–187). The Austrian Freedom Party demanded expanded border security under its “Fortress Austria” concept (Austrian Freedom Party, 2024a:46). All irregular border crossings should be prevented without exception, and sensitive border areas within Austria should be secured with fences. In addition, the Austrian Freedom Party supported the creation of legal grounds for pushbacks at the border and rejected the processing of asylum applications if applicants had entered via safe third countries, such as European Economic Area Member States or Switzerland (Austrian People’s Party, 2024:46; Austrian Freedom Party, 2024a:46).

6.2 Extension and reintroduction of border controls

The internal land border controls introduced in 2023 by the Federal Ministry of the Interior at Austria's borders with Czechia and Slovakia remained in place throughout 2024 (Mol, 2024h), most recently ordered by regulation from 16 October 2024 to 15 April 2025.⁴⁵ Controls at the internal land borders with Hungary and Slovenia were reintroduced by regulations issued by the Federal Ministry of the Interior on 12 May 2024⁴⁶ and 12 November 2024,⁴⁷ each valid for a period of six months (Mol, 2024p). According to the Ministry of the Interior, the border controls were implemented to reduce irregular migration (ibid.). In addition to Austria, nine other EU/Schengen countries are conducting internal border

controls to combat irregular migration. The Ministry of the Interior stated that these controls are essential for addressing weak points in the control network and blocking alternative routes for criminal smuggling operations (ibid.). Safety concerns related to Ukraine, the volatile situation in the Middle East, and the overall high terrorist threat in the European Union are also significant factors, according to the Ministry of Interior.⁴⁸

- Border controls ordered at the Austrian-Czech and Austrian-Slovak borders
- Border controls at the borders with Hungary and Slovenia reintroduced
- Abolition of internal land border controls at the borders with Bulgaria and Romania

In December 2024, Austria gave its consent for the abolition of internal land border controls to and between Bulgaria and Romania. Austria was the last EU country to veto the full Schengen accession of Bulgaria and Romania (Austrian Broadcast, 2024g). According to the Ministry of the Interior, Austria, together with Bulgaria and Romania, has succeeded in limiting irregular migration through a variety of operational measures since 2022.⁴⁹

As early as December 2023, Austria had agreed to the Council decision on the Schengen enlargement to include Bulgaria and Romania; however, only sea and air internal border controls were lifted as of 31 March 2024 (Austrian Broadcast, 2024g). The two countries have been full Schengen members since 1 January 2024. Subsequently, land internal border controls were also abolished as of 1 January 2025 (Federal Chancellery, 2025). The aim of Austria's decision was to strengthen European integration and to promote economic and political relations with Bulgaria and Romania, while maintaining security at the EU's external borders (Austrian Broadcast, 2024g). A key reason for this decision was the significant decline in the number of apprehensions and asylum applications in Austria, as well as in Bulgaria and Romania (ibid.). As a result, an agreement on a border protection package was reached in November 2024 in Budapest between the interior ministers of Austria, Bulgaria and Hungary, as well as Romania (Mol, 2025e). In the context of Bulgaria and Romania's accession as full members of the Schengen Area, both the Federation of Austrian Industries and the Austrian Chamber of Commerce emphasized the central importance of freedom of movement for Austrian industry.

45 Temporary Reintroduction of Border Controls at the Internal Borders with the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, FLG. II No. 278/2024.

46 Temporary Reintroduction of Border Controls at the Internal Borders with the Republic of Slovenia and Hungary, FLG. II No. 117/2024.

47 Temporary Reintroduction of Border Controls at the Internal Borders with the Republic of Slovenia and Hungary, FLG. II No. 309/2024.

48 Written contribution: Federal Ministry of the Interior, Department V/A/5/a (EU Migration Affairs), 28 January 2025.

49 Written contribution: Federal Ministry of the Interior, Department V/A/5/a (EU Migration Affairs), 23 May 2025.

The latter regarded the expansion of the Schengen Area as a significant step, as it would provide advantages to the domestic economy, particularly by opening additional markets and ensuring unrestricted mobility of people and goods. Austrian companies that are significant investors in Bulgaria and Romania could benefit from investments in these countries borders (Austrian Broadcast, 2024g).

6.3 International police measures in border security and cooperation with neighbouring countries

Infobox 6: Operation FOX

Operation FOX is an Austrian police mission that has been ongoing since 1 December 2022. It supports Austria's neighbouring country, Hungary, in combating irregular migration. For this purpose, a dedicated police unit was established, which is mainly deployed on Hungarian territory in cooperation with a Hungarian liaison officer. The focus is on identifying smugglers and assisting with border control to reduce irregular migration. The deployed immigration and border police officers have received specialized training and can be deployed flexibly. Operation FOX is professionally and operationally overseen by the Department for Operational Border and Alien Police Management within the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior. Any measures following the apprehension of individuals are taken exclusively by the Hungarian police in accordance with Hungarian law.

Their areas of responsibility include (Parliamentary Administration, 2023):

- Search measures (measures to locate irregular migrants);
- Cross-border police cooperation;
- Aliens police;
- Police processing of asylum claims;
- Border control and surveillance.

In 2024, Austrian police officers were deployed in Serbia and Hungary, particularly as part of “Operation FOX” (see [Infobox 6](#); Mol, 2023c). In March 2024, the Federal Minister of the Interior presented a five-point action plan, which included the continuation of “Operation FOX”, the deployment of up to 130 police officers in countries of the Western Balkans, and the establishment of a specialized unit to combat human trafficking in the Federal Criminal Police Office (Federal Chancellery, 2024d). Despite a decline in human trafficking crimes, this issue remained a focus of domestic policy (ibid.). According to a report by the Austrian Broadcast, smuggling-related crime declined significantly in 2024. The number of apprehensions fell by half compared to 2023, reaching around 30,000 cases (Austrian Broadcast, 2025b). The Federal Ministry of the Interior (Mol) publishes an annual situation report with statistics on migrant smuggling but data for 2024 was not yet available at the time this report was written (Mol, 2024b). In media coverage, the Mol pointed to the effectiveness of “Operation FOX” in combating irregular migration (Der Standard, 2024c). This was criticized by civil society organizations such as Asylum Coordination Austria, which argued that the drop in arrivals from Hungary to Austria was primarily due to Serbia's restrictive border policy and a shift in migration routes (ibid.).

On 19 September 2024, Austria also deployed 30 additional police officers to support border security at the Hungarian-Serbian border (Mol, 2024o). According to the Ministry of the Interior,⁵⁰ the strengthened international cooperation, such as through trilateral train controls between Hungary and Austria, as well as the deployment of up to 145 police officers in countries of the Western Balkans, aimed at combating irregular migration and cross-border crime, with a focus on organized crime and joint investigation and control measures (ibid.).

As part of the agreement reached on 22 November 2024 in Budapest regarding a border protection package between the interior ministers of Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania (see chapter 6.2), the deployment of a joint contingent of 100 border officers to the Bulgarian-Turkish border was agreed upon (Mol, 2025e).

- Five-point action plan, including the continuation of Operation FOX to combat smuggling networks
- Deployment of police officers to the Hungarian-Serbian, North Macedonian-Serbian border and Bulgarian-Turkish borders
- Austrian chairmanship of the meeting of the 14 Danube Region States on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region
- Austria chaired the Salzburg Forum, focusing on combating irregular migration

On 20 June 2024, the foreign ministers of the 14 Danube region countries met in Vienna. The meeting took place within the context of Austria's presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, focusing on geopolitical challenges, security threats, and cooperation in the Danube region. An important aspect was the strengthened cooperation in the areas of border controls and migration management (Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, 2024d). The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), in place since 2011, promotes cooperation between countries along the Danube. The aim is to develop cross-border solutions. A total of 14 countries are involved, including nine EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia) and five EU accession candidates (Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine; Parliamentary Administration, 2024b:6). The main objective of the meeting and Austria's chairmanship was to strengthen cooperation between EU Member States and the accession candidates in the Danube Region, particularly in areas such as border controls, irregular migration and cross-border crime (Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, 2024d). From the Austrian government's perspective, the geopolitical situation in Europe and the Danube Region – including the war in Ukraine – underscored the need for closer regional cooperation. Austria viewed the integration of accession candidates and the improvement of security and migration cooperation within the Danube Region as key steps toward creating a more stable and secure region (ibid.).

In the first half of 2024, Austria held the chairmanship of the Salzburg Forum, a Central European security partnership established in 2000 on the initiative of the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior. While the forum is concerned with security issues as a whole, there is also a strong focus on irregular migration. On 3 and 4 April 2024, a border police meeting took place in Parndorf, Burgenland in the context of the forum. This included discussions on the further development of the “International Border Security Task Force” along

50 Written contribution: Federal Ministry of the Interior, Department II/BPD (Federal Police Directorate), 17 May 2025.

the so-called “Western Balkan route” (Salzburg Forum Ministerial Conference, 2024). On 3 and 4 June 2024, experts met in Vienna as part of the Forum to discuss the topic of smuggling, with an emphasis on the role of Europol, the EU’s law enforcement agency. The Salzburg Forum held a ministerial conference in Laxenburg, Lower Austria, on 25 and 26 June 2024, which addressed the implementation of the European Union’s Pact on Migration and Asylum, combating the smuggling of migrants and irregular migration, and pursuing a common approach to fighting all forms of extremism and terrorism (Mol, 2024l). The Joint Declaration of the Ministers of the Salzburg Forum highlighted the need for “new approaches and innovative solutions” in relation to migration, including the implementation of pilot projects as well as comprehensive cooperation with third countries along the migration routes (Salzburg Forum Ministerial Conference, 2024).

Furthermore, the Joint Coordination Platform (JCP) supported the Western Balkan States in 2024 by providing expertise and exchanging best practices with the overarching goal of minimizing irregular migration via the Western Balkan route. In this context, the JCP participated in the projects “Western Balkan Return Mechanism (WBRM)” (together with the Netherlands and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development) and “Strengthening Migration Management, Asylum and Return Processes in the Western Balkans” (together with Hilfswerk International).⁵¹

6.4 International agreements with third countries

At the beginning of 2024, a police attaché was posted to the Austrian embassy in Baghdad, Iraq to strengthen direct dialogue and operational cooperation between the two countries (Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, 2024b). The primary aim of this cooperation was to reduce irregular migration and strengthen the internal security of both countries by intensifying collaboration in the area of cross-border crime. In addition, Austria strives to support Iraq in its efforts to promote stability and prosperity in the region, but also to reduce negative repercussions on Europe (ibid.). From the perspective of the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, a stable development of the country has a direct impact on Europe, particularly with regard to migration. Furthermore, the measures were guided by a mutual interest in wanting to tackle irregular migration (ibid.).

- Cooperation with Iraq, the Kingdom of Bahrain and Turkmenistan to reduce irregular migration
- Memoranda of Understanding with Ghana and Kenya to reduce irregular migration

On 11 January 2024, the Austrian Federal Minister of the Interior and his counterpart from the Kingdom of Bahrain signed an agreement on strengthening cooperation in the areas of internal security and migration (Mol, 2024g). The agreement is primarily aimed at Austria’s cooperation with Bahrain in matters relating to security, including combating the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings (ibid.). The main factor behind this strengthened cooperation is the growing mutual interest of these two countries in combating transnational challenges relating to security (ibid.).

51 Written contribution: Joint Coordination Platform, 20 May 2025.

On 11 March 2024, the Austrian Foreign Minister and the Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan signed a cooperation agreement covering the period 2024–2025, which provided for regular political consultations in areas such as irregular migration and the political situation in Afghanistan (Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, 2024c). Due to its geostrategic location at the interface between Europe and Asia, as well as its proximity to key actors, such as the Russian Federation and Iraq, Turkmenistan is considered an important country in terms of security, particularly in the context of the situation in Afghanistan (Ibid.).

On 13 May 2024, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, and the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower signed a legally non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the immigration of skilled workers to Austria. The agreement not only aims to recruit qualified professionals but also seeks to strengthen cooperation in the areas of combating irregular migration and readmission (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024a).

In September 2024, the Austrian Foreign Minister and his Ghanaian counterpart signed a legally non-binding MoU (Ghanaian Times, 2024), which is intended to strengthen certain aspects of regular migration and, above all, cooperation between Austria and Ghana in the areas of irregular migration and readmission (Der Standard, 2024f). The MoU between Kenya and Austria published on 26 September 2024 (Schallenberg, 2024) also included cooperation in the area of reducing irregular migration and readmission (Government Advertising Agency, 2024; further information on the individual MoUs can be found in chapter 3.3 on regular migration aspects and chapter 8.3 on cooperation in the area of return).

Austria also further expanded its cooperation with other EU countries in 2024 in order to sustainably reduce irregular migration. A particular focus was placed on the external dimension of migration and on new solutions aimed at sustainably strengthening reception and protection capacities along all migration routes and achieving an orderly, fair and humane protection system. In this regard, a ministerial letter signed by 15 EU interior ministers (including Austria) was sent in May 2024. It called on the European Commission to promote new approaches and solutions to establish a more humane asylum system (including safe third country concepts, return centres) and to conclude new comprehensive migration partnerships with third countries (EMN Belgium, 2024). The various aspects of third country cooperation were also the focus of the National Conference of the European Migration Network on 18 November 2024 in Vienna, which took place on the topic of migration partnerships and welcomed international participants and speakers, including from Mauritania, Kenya and Rwanda.

As part of the measures to prevent irregular migration in countries of origin and create alternatives, the Federal Ministry continued and expanded information campaigns in countries of origin and transit. This concerns the Federal Ministry of the Interior's own online campaign "Myths about Migration" as well as three Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) information campaigns co-financed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and other EU Member States. The latter include the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) projects "PARIM II" in Pakistan and "MIRAMI" in Iraq as well as the Seefar project "Pathways", which is being implemented along the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Western Balkan route using social media interventions.⁵²

52 Written contribution: Federal Ministry of the Interior, Department V/A/5/c (International Migration Communication and Research), 23 May 2025.

7 HUMAN TRAFFICKING

7.1 Measures to combat human trafficking

Infobox 7: Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking

The Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking was established in 2004 by the Austrian Federal Government to coordinate and strengthen national efforts against human trafficking. It is led by the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs and brings together all relevant ministries, government agencies, federal provinces, social partners and specialized NGOs. The aim of the Task Force is to develop national action plans to combat human trafficking and to monitor their implementation.

The Task Force reports regularly on the implementation of the National Action Plan and organizes events to raise public awareness of the issue (Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, n.d.b). An annual conference focusing on recent developments in human trafficking is held around 18 October, the EU's Anti-Trafficking Day. The Task Force also publishes informational material aimed at both potentially affected victims and public and private organizations that may come into contact with those affected (ibid.).

On 13 March 2024, the Austrian Federal Government's Council of Ministers adopted the seventh National Action Plan (NAP) on Combating Human Trafficking for 2024–2027 (Federal Chancellery, 2024c). The Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking (see [Infobox 7](#)), which was initiated in 2004, has developed the new NAP in collaboration with all the relevant actors (Federal Chancellery, 2024e). The action plan comprises a total of 103 measures relating to

national and international cooperation, as well as prevention, victim protection, prosecution, evaluation and monitoring (ibid.). The implementation of the national action plan allows trafficking in human beings to be combated in a systematic, coordinated manner while also helping Austria to fulfil its obligation to coordinate comprehensive political measures to tackle violence against women and to support trafficked persons in line with the Istanbul Convention (Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, 2024a; see [chapter 5.4](#)). In addition, the Working Group on Sexual Services – a subgroup of the Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking – published its catalogue of recommendations in May 2024, offering guidance on the legal provision of sexual services. It refers to the obligations of the Istanbul Convention to protect sex workers from gender-based violence and highlights the challenges they face in accessing counselling centres. Given the varying regulations across the provinces, the report recommends harmonizing legislation and strengthening cooperation between the federal and provincial authorities (Federal Chancellery, 2024e). In 2024, the Working

- National Action Plan to combat human trafficking 2024–2027
- Catalogue of recommendations by the Working Group on Sexual Services

Group on Child Trafficking focused on revising the “Guidelines for Identifying and Dealing with Potential Victims of Child Trafficking”.⁵³ These guidelines provide an overview of the manifestations and risks of child trafficking in Austria and outline reporting procedures for professionals who may come into contact with potential victims (e.g., police, child and youth welfare services, or the asylum and immigration sectors). The updated guidelines are expected to be published in 2025 and will be integrated into a national referral mechanism as outlined in the current National Action Plan. The Working Group on Human Trafficking for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation facilitated exchange on issues such as wage and social dumping, illegal employment, and workplace inspections.⁵⁴

In 2024, several actors delivered training on human trafficking, including the Federal Criminal Police Office, the LEFÖ Intervention Centre for Trafficked Women, MEN VIA Victim Protection, Child and Youth Welfare Services, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Austrian office of the international network ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking). The target groups of these training sessions included the police, the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services and child and youth welfare institutions.⁵⁵ In September 2024, Caritas published a report on the situation of forced marriage in Austria. The report highlighted the revision of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive,⁵⁶ which for the first time, explicitly defines forced marriage as a possible form of exploitation under the crime of human trafficking. In cases of suspected forced marriage, the report recommended examining potential trafficking-related forms of exploitation, particularly sexual exploitation, and in some instances, labour exploitation (Caritas Wien, 2024:21).

In their manifesto for the national elections, the Greens emphasized the importance of a common EU asylum policy that takes into account protection against human trafficking. They called for safe migration pathways, such as resettlement programmes and humanitarian visas, to offer people orderly protection while also combating human trafficking and smuggling (Austrian Green Party, 2024:80). The Platform against Exploitation and Human Trafficking hosted a panel discussion on the topic of “Structural barriers to labour market access – breeding ground for exploitation and human trafficking?”. The platform called for a residence permit for all victims of trafficking, regardless of ongoing legal proceedings, and for easier access to the labour market for those affected (Platform against exploitation and human trafficking, 2024). Church-based organizations also advocated against labour and sexual exploitation as well as contemporary forms of human trafficking. They criticized the inadequate legal framework that enables exploitation and called for a legal reform to improve protection for victims. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to ensure minimum wages, social security contributions, and more effective labour inspections, as restrictive labour laws often push migrants into the informal economy (Vatican News, 2024). From a civil society perspective, it was also suggested that a centralized overview of available informational materials on human trafficking and sexual exploitation in multiple languages is needed to improve access to these resources (Hope for the Future, 2024).

53 Written contribution: Katie Klaffenböck, IOM Country Office for Austria, 23 April 2025.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA, OJ L 101/1, p.1–11. In 2024, a revision of the directive was adopted, which expanded the list of examples of exploitation purposes of human trafficking to include „the exploitation of surrogacy, of forced marriage, or of illegal adoption” (Caritas Wien, 2024:21).

8 RETURN AND READMISSION

8.1 Political debate

In the 2024 national election manifestos, the political parties represented in the Austrian Parliament displayed significant differences in their approaches to the issue of return. The Greens did not present deportations as an independent migration policy tool but referred, in the context of the Migration and Asylum Pact, to the planned facilitation of deportations to safe third countries as part of a necessary “balanced asylum and migration policy between humanity and order” (Austrian Green Party, 2024:80–81). The New Austrian and Liberal Forum emphasized an efficient return policy within the framework of an EU-wide system. Repatriation agreements should be strengthened by linking them to the disbursement of development cooperation funds (New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2024:32). The Social Democratic Party of Austria also supported effective returns. It called for strengthening return agreements with safe countries of origin and creating models such as Care & Support Agreements with safe third countries. The party further proposed that individuals without protection status, who cannot be returned to their countries of origin, should be transferred to third countries (Social Democratic Party of Austria, 2024a:88). The Austrian People’s Party emphasized that deportations should be improved through the establishment of deportation and processing centres abroad, as well as return centres in Austria modelled after the Danish example. The Austrian People’s Party also called for the enforcement of criminal sentences in third countries for convicted criminals without residence rights (Austrian People’s Party, 2024:186). The Austrian Freedom Party advocated for a combination of coercion and incentives for return and consistent deportations following negative asylum decisions. Foreign nationals who are criminal or extremist should be expelled. Additionally, the party supported the establishment of exit centres with mandatory attendance and a return ban for asylum-seekers who travel to their home countries on holiday (Austrian Freedom Party, 2024a:51–52).

The total number of departures from Austria increased slightly between 2022 and 2024. This was accompanied by a steady rise in forced removals, particularly due to deportations, as shown in [Table 1](#), while Dublin transfers⁵⁷ remained almost constant. The number of voluntary departures decreased, and in 2024, it was lower than forced removals for the first time in several years (Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 2025:21).

⁵⁷ A so-called Dublin transfer refers to the return of an asylum seeker to another EU member state or one of the four countries associated with the Dublin Regulation: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. The basis for this is the so-called Dublin III Regulation (Dublin III Regulation 604/2013), which lays down rules for determining the Member State responsible for conducting an asylum procedure.

Table 1: Number of departures from Austria by category, 2022 to 2024

	2022	2023	2024
Voluntary departures	8 079	6 910	6 353
Forced removals	4 471	5 990	6 954
Dublin transfers	1 100	1 240	1 184
Deportations	3 371	4 750	5 770
Total departures	12 550	12 900	13 307

Source: Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 2023:20, 2024a:21, 2025:21.

In the media debate on return, the Minister of the Interior referred to high deportation numbers as an indicator of a successful return policy (including the effect of measures such as “Operation FOX”, see chapter 6.3). In this context, NGO representatives emphasized that a significant proportion of deportations concern EU citizens (Der Standard, 2024c). In 2024, the most deported nationalities included Slovakia (1,807), Hungary (864), Romania (567), Poland (425), Bulgaria (198) and Czechia (180; Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 2025:21). Together, these countries accounted for 70 per cent of deportations in 2024.

8.2 Legal developments and political measures on return

In two different cases in July and October 2024, the Austrian Constitutional Court ruled that the denial of international protection and the return decision issued against an Afghan and a Syrian national were in line with the constitution (Constitutional Court, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). The Constitutional Court reviewed the cases mentioned above on the basis of complaints raised against judgements of the Federal Administrative Court (Constitutional Court, 2024c). The Federal Minister of the Interior consequently instructed the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum to review the removal options (Austrian Broadcast, 2024c).

NGOs highlighted the challenges in returning individuals to Afghanistan, noting that without cooperation from the local regime, such as for the issuance of travel documents or willingness to accept returnees, deportations could not be carried out. In such cases, those affected often have no choice but to remain in a tolerated stay status, which is accompanied by a work ban and limited integration opportunities, as highlighted by the NGO Asylum Coordination (Gahleitner-Gertz, 2024).

- Return decision for Syrian and Afghan nationals in accordance with the constitution
- Repatriation programme for Syrians
- Financial assistance for voluntary Syrian returnees

On 11 December 2024, the Austrian Federal Minister of the Interior presented his plans for a new “Orderly Return and Deportation Strategy” for the repatriation of Syrian nationals to the National Council, which was developed immediately following the fall of Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian Arab Republic. The plans aimed to support voluntary returnees and prioritize the deportation of criminals as well as “individuals who are not willing to (...) adapt to our cultural values, (...) those who do not work (...).” (Parliamentary Administration, 2024i; see also chapter 4.2). Already during a meeting of European Union Ministers of Home Affairs in Luxembourg on 13 June 2024, the Austrian Federal Minister of the Interior agreed to intensify its cooperation with Germany for the purpose of carrying out removals and forced returns to the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan (Mol, 2024k). So far, the number of voluntary departures among Syrians has remained very low. In 2024, there were only 88 voluntary departures by Syrian nationals, meaning that the Syrian Arab Republic was not among the top 20 nationalities for voluntary departures from Austria. This contrasts with countries like Turkey (1,240), Serbia (600), and Georgia (340), which topped the list of voluntary departures (Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 2025:21).

Based on an immediate measure by the Federal Ministry of the Interior in December 2024, the financial assistance for Syrian nationals who wish to voluntarily return to their home country was increased to up to EUR 1000. Interested individuals must contact a return counselling centre of the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services. There is no legal entitlement to this return assistance (Parliamentary Administration, 2024i; Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 2024b).

The United Nations emphasized that the right to asylum must continue to be upheld for Syrians. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has called for applications to be assessed fairly and individually. Temporary suspension of decisions was only acceptable if access to asylum procedures and protection remained guaranteed. Return must be voluntary, safe and dignified (UNHCR Austria, 2024b). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) pointed to the still fragile security situation in the Syrian Arab Republic: Millions of people are still dependent on humanitarian aid, significant parts of the infrastructure were destroyed, and the return of displaced persons would continue to pose a considerable challenge. Return should therefore only take place voluntarily and with protection measures in place. IOM called for increased humanitarian support, stabilization, and the protection of rights such as housing and property security. It also stressed the importance of reliable data for needs assessment, calling on the international community to take joint responsibility and continue to support the neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic (IOM, 2024). Civil society actors, including *SOS Mitmensch*, called on Austrian policymakers to continue providing Syrian refugees with protection measures in view of the unstable situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. It was pointed out that many Syrians contribute significantly to Austrian society (*SOS Mitmensch*, 2024). The NGO *Das Integrationshaus* also criticized the proposed reviews of asylum procedures and returns, urging that asylum rights for Syrians continue to be upheld in order to offer protection prospects (*Das Integrationshaus*, 2024).

8.3 Cooperation with third countries in the area of returns

The implementation protocol⁵⁸ to the readmission agreement between Austria and Armenia came into force on 1 May 2024. The main aim of the implementation protocol is to ensure that Armenian persons without a valid residence permit in Austria are returned in an efficient, orderly manner in accordance with the law. The implementation protocol is driven by the interest in further reducing irregular migration (Mol, n.d.). In 2024, Austria signed several legally non-binding Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with third countries, which included, inter alia, agreements on cooperation in the area of return. The legally non-binding MoU between Austria and Indonesia on the immigration of skilled workers to Austria, signed on 13 May 2024, is primarily aimed at recruiting qualified skilled workers, but also contains a passage regarding increased cooperation in the areas of readmission (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024a).

- Implementation protocol to the readmission agreement between Austria and Armenia
- Memorandum of Understanding on return agreements with Ecuador, Ghana, Indonesia and Kenya

In September 2024, the Austrian Foreign Minister and his Ghanaian counterpart signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which, among other things, aims to strengthen cooperation between Austria and Ghana in the area of readmission (Ghanaian Times, 2024). The aim of this MoU is to intensify cooperation in the reduction of irregular return and readmission in particular (Der Standard, 2024f). The MoU between Kenya and Austria published on 26 September 2024 (Schallenberg, 2024) also included cooperation in the area of reducing irregular migration and return (Government Advertising Agency, 2024; see also chapter 3.3 on aspects of regular migration and chapter 6.4 on cooperation in the area of irregular migration).

In September 2024, a readmission agreement was also concluded between Austria and Kuwait (Mol, 2025c:2). On 6 December 2024, Austria and Ecuador signed a Memorandum of Understanding on consular cooperation between the two countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, 2024), which also includes provisions on cooperation in the area of return.⁵⁹

The Joint Coordination Platform (JCP), as a coordination mechanism to combat irregular migration along the Western Balkan route, continued its work in 2024 in accordance with the Vienna Declaration on effectively combating irregular migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Route, with a strong focus on the area of return assistance, including through the training of escorts for forced returns. In 2024, 60 escorts (police officers) were trained in Austria – 24 of whom are from Bosnia and Herzegovina and twelve each from Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.⁶⁰

58 Agreement on the Readmission of Persons residing without Authorisation – protocol (Armenia), FLG. III No. 59/2024.

59 Written contribution: Federal Ministry of the Interior, Department V/A/5/a (EU Migration Affairs), 7 May 2025.

60 Written contribution: Joint Coordination Platform, 20 May 2025.

ANNEX

A.1 List of translations and abbreviations

English term	English abbreviation	German term	German abbreviation
Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals	-	Ausländerbeschäftigungsgesetz	AuslBG
Agreement between the Federal State and the Provinces on Basic Care - Art. 15a Federal Constitutional Act	-	Grundversorgungsvereinbarung – Art. 15a B-VG	GVV
Asylum Act 2005	-	Asylgesetz 2005	AsylIG 2005
Austrian Broadcast	-	Österreichischer Rundfunk	ORF
Austrian Business Agency	ABA	Austrian Business Agency	ABA
Austrian Federal Economic Chamber	-	Wirtschaftskammer Österreich	WKÖ
Austrian Freedom Party	-	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	FPÖ
Austrian Integration Fund	-	Österreichischer Integrationsfonds	ÖIF
Austrian People's Party	-	Österreichische Volkspartei	ÖVP
Austrian Trade Union Federation	-	Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund	ÖGB
Child and youth welfare	-	Kinder- und Jugendhilfe	KJH
Citizenship Act	-	Staatsbürgerschaftsgesetz	StbG
Compulsory Education Act	-	Ausbildungspflichtgesetz	APfIG
Constitutional Court	-	Verfassungsgerichtshof	VfGH
End Child Prostitution and Trafficking	ECPAT	End Child Prostitution and Trafficking	ECPAT

English term	English abbreviation	German term	German abbreviation
EU Strategy for the Danube Region	EUSDR	EU-Donauraumstrategie	EUSDR
European Boarder and Coast Guard Agency	Frontex	Europäische Agentur für die Grenz- und Küstenwache	Frontex
European Economic Area	EEA	Europäischer Wirtschaftsraum	EWR
European Migration Network	EMN	Europäisches Migrationsnetzwerk	EMN
European Union	EU	Europäische Union	EU
European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation	Europol	Europäisches Polizeiamt	Europol
Federal Administrative Court	-	Bundesverwaltungsgericht	BYwG
Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services	-	Bundesagentur für Betreuungs- und Unterstützungsleistungen	BBU GmbH
Federal Chancellery	-	Bundeskanzleramt	BKA
Federal Constitutional Act	-	Bundes-Verfassungsgesetz	B-VG
Federal Law Gazette	FLG.	Bundesgesetzblatt	BGBI.
Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs	-	Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten	BMEIA
Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research	-	Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung	BMBWF
Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy	-	Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Wirtschaft	BMAW
Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection	-	Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz	BMSGPK
Federal Ministry of the Interior	Mol	Bundesministerium für Inneres	BMI
Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum	-	Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl	BFA

English term	English abbreviation	German term	German abbreviation
Federation of Austrian Industries	-	Industriellenvereinigung	IV
Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence	GREVIO	Expertengremium des Europarats für die Bekämpfung von Gewalt gegen Frauen und häuslicher Gewalt	GREVIO
Integration Act	-	Integrationsgesetz	IntG
International Centre for Migration Policy Development	ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development	ICMPD
International Organization for Migration	IOM	Internationale Organisation für Migration	IOM
Joint Coordination Platform	JCP	Joint Coordination Platform	JCP
Memorandum of Understanding	MoU	Memorandum of Understanding	MoU
Migrant Workers Office	MWO	Migrant Workers Office	MWO
National Contact Point	NCP	Nationaler Kontaktpunkt	NKP
New Austrian and Liberal Forum	-	NEOS – Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum	NEOS
Non-governmental organization	NGO	Nichtregierungsorganisation	NGO
Official journal of the European Union	OJ	Amtsblatt der Europäischen Union	ABl.
Public Employment Service	-	Arbeitsmarktservice	AMS
Red-White-Red Card	RWR Card	Rot-Weiß-Rot – Karte	RWR-Karte
Red-White-Red Card Plus	RWR Card Plus	Rot-Weiß-Rot – Karte plus	RWR-Karte plus
Schengen Borders Code	-	Schengener Grenzkodex	SGK
Settlement and Residence Act	-	Niederlassungs- und Aufenthaltsgesetz	NAG
Social Democratic Party of Austria	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs	SPÖ

English term	English abbreviation	German term	German abbreviation
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR	Hoher Flüchtlingskommissar der Vereinten Nationen	UNHCR
Western Balkan Return Mechanism	WBRM	Western Balkan Return Mechanism	WBRM

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EUROPEAN MIGRATION NETWORK

The European Migration Network (EMN) was established in 2003 by the European Commission on behalf of the European Council, to respond to the need for a regular exchange of reliable information in the field of migration and asylum at European level. Since 2008, Council Decision 2008/381/EC has provided the legal basis for the EMN.

The EMN consists of National Contact Points in the EMN Member Countries (EU Member States except Denmark) and in Observer Countries and is coordinated by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.

Based on an agreement with the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, the National Contact Point Austria is located in the Policy Research and Migration Law Unit of the Country Office for Austria of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Since 1952, when Austria joined IOM as one of its first Member States, the IOM Country Office for Austria has worked to assist migrants and to analyze national migration issues and emerging trends to develop and implement projects and programmes.

The objective of the EMN is to provide European Union institutions and the authorities of Member States with up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum in order to support evidence-based policymaking. The EMN also serves to provide the general public with relevant information.

The main tasks of the National Contact Points in implementing the work programme of the EMN include preparing reports, studies and other publications, providing information through so-called Ad-hoc Queries, and facilitating the exchange between research, policy and practice by organizing events and establishing national networks of relevant stakeholders.

All publications of the EMN are available on the website of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs and on the website of EMN Austria (www.emn.at).

