

# Sustainable labour market integration of migrants: Drivers of skills mismatch and skills matching policies and initiatives

Anna Ammann  
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## FOREWORD

This publication is based on Austria's contribution to the comparative EMN study *Fostering sustainable labour market integration of migrants: skills matching policies and instruments*. It was jointly prepared by Anna Ammann (Research Associate, IOM Country Office for Austria) and Leila Hadj Abdou (Deputy Head of the Migration Research and Law Department, IOM Country Office for Austria). Anna Dreimann (Intern, IOM Country Office for Austria) provided substantial support in the preparation of the study through literature research and editing, formatting, preparation of references and proofreading.

Special thanks are due to all those who agreed to participate in interviews or respond to written enquiries, thereby making an important contribution to this study (see [chapter 1.4](#)). Special thanks are also due to the following colleagues at the IOM Country Office for Austria for their valuable comments: Marian Benbow Pfisterer (Chief of Mission), Saskia Heilemann (Head of the Department for Migration Research and Law Department) and Alexander Spiegelfeld (Head of Integration, Labour Mobility and Social Inclusion Department).

## SUMMARY

Skills mismatch, in particular overqualification (i.e. the situation in which individuals are employed in lower-level jobs or jobs outside their field that do not correspond to their education or training, even though they have higher qualifications) is a relevant issue in the Austrian labour market. Certain groups are disproportionately affected by employment that does not match their qualifications, including migrants. Around 39 per cent of people aged 25 to 64 with tertiary education or training from a third country work in occupations that do not require a tertiary qualification. Against this background, the present study examines the drivers of skills mismatch among migrants and the policies and initiatives in Austria aimed at promoting employment that corresponds to their qualifications.

The drivers of skills mismatch are diverse, occur at different levels (systemic, employer-related and migrant-related) and affect different migrant groups in different ways. As the study shows, the main drivers include migrants' insufficient knowledge of German, which is also affected by the limited effectiveness of language programmes, and the inability to utilize the qualifications they bring with them. The latter results from differences between the education systems of the country of origin and Austria, from domestic regional disparities in labour demand, and from the complex and costly process of recognizing foreign qualifications. Although there are a number of support measures for recognition – such as contact points that are regarded across the European Union as examples of best practice – the recognition rate in Austria remains low (10%). Other factors influencing skills mismatch include the structure of Austrian enterprises, lack of experience in employing migrants, especially in rural areas, conscious or unconscious discrimination in the labour market, and restricted access to information and networks. Skills mismatch among migrants is further driven by financial pressure, the wish for financial independence and the lack of long-term residence prospects, all of which encourage migrants to prioritize immediate employment over employment corresponding to their qualifications. Residence regulations, such as income requirements, compound this factor. Psychological aspects – including loss of future orientation as a result of traumatic experiences, especially displacement, as well as caregiving responsibilities and traditional gender norms – also play an important role. Gender norms amplify barriers related to language proficiency and recognition. Women are more likely to work in regulated professions and other sectors, such as health care, that require stronger German skills. They also tend to have more limited networks relevant for labour market integration. In some cases, they hold higher educational qualifications without the corresponding work experience.

The variety of drivers and the heterogeneity of migrant groups call for different strategies to address skills mismatch. The study provides an overview of the policy debate and of the wide range of labour market and integration measures and initiatives in Austria that address skills mismatch, either directly or indirectly. As the study shows, existing measures focus primarily on employees (e.g. support with recognition, training measures, counselling, language promotion and mentoring) while comparatively fewer measures are directed at employers to incentivize the employment of migrants with appropriate qualifications. This imbalance is also reflected to some extent in the policy debate, which tends to concentrate on migrants' perceived deficits and the related challenges for labour market integration, while the overqualification and dequalification of migrants, and their negative consequences for the Austrian economy, receive comparatively less attention.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Focus and research questions

This study examines the phenomenon of skills mismatch among migrants in Austria and addresses the following questions:

- To what extent are (different groups of) migrants in Austria affected by skills mismatch?
- What are the main drivers of skills mismatch among migrants?
- What policies and initiatives exist to counteract skills mismatch among migrants and to promote their integration into the labour market in line with their qualifications?
- What challenges arise in the implementation of these policies and initiatives?
- What experiences exist in addressing the identified challenges, in reducing skills mismatch and in promoting labour market integration of migrants in line with their qualifications?

### Infobox 1: What is skills mismatch?

Skills mismatch (qualifications imbalance) among migrants refers to a situation in which the qualifications of a migrant do not correspond to the occupational tasks performed.

Qualifications may relate both to competences (e.g. language proficiency, technical know-how) and to formal educational and vocational credentials (e.g. apprenticeship, university degree). They may be higher (overqualification) or lower (underqualification) in comparison with the work performed. This form of skills mismatch is also known as **vertical skills mismatch** (Jooss et al., 2023). Overqualification and underqualification may also occur simultaneously, for example when a person is overqualified in terms of education but at the same time lacks certain competences required for the job, such as language or specific IT skills, and is therefore underqualified in those respects.

Skills mismatch in relation to the field of specialization is referred to as **horizontal skills mismatch** (Redmont and Brosnan, 2024). This form of skills mismatch occurs when the sector in which a person is employed does not correspond to the field of their education or training (working outside their field).

There is no standardized way of measuring skills mismatch. Depending on the data available, different approaches are pursued to capture the various dimensions of the phenomenon. Both direct methods (e.g. surveys of employees) and indirect methods (e.g. comparing the educational level of a group of employees under study with the average educational level of employees in the same occupation), as well as mixed methods, are applied (McGuinness et al., 2018). In the European Union Labour Force Survey (micro census), skills mismatch in the form of overqualification is reported on the basis of formal

education, using as an indicator the number of people with tertiary education<sup>1</sup> who work in a job that does not require such education (Eurostat, 2025a). Skills mismatch is often measured solely in terms of education and training. This is also due to the fact that competences – which may cover a range of different skills – are more difficult to measure.<sup>2</sup> An approach that focuses only on the education or training as an indicator overlooks the fact that some qualifications relevant to the labour market are acquired outside formal education, for instance through work experience (McGuinness et al., 2018:990).

Research shows that skills mismatch is far more common among migrants than among non-migrants in almost all OECD countries (e.g. Frattini and Dalmonte, 2024; see also [figure 1](#)). Existing studies highlight that skills mismatch among migrants depends on a wide range of factors, including those related to the country of origin (e.g. education system), the reasons for and circumstances of migration (e.g. labour migration or humanitarian grounds), the conditions in the host country (e.g. migration status, length of stay, recognition of qualifications, further training opportunities) and individual circumstances (e.g. age, gender, language skills; see also [chapter 3](#); Broschinski and Heidenreich, 2025; OECD, 2023).

The study addresses skills mismatch among labour migrants from third countries, migrants from third countries who have entered Austria through family reunification, persons granted international protection (asylum or subsidiary protection) and displaced persons from Ukraine with temporary protection status in Austria. Where data permit, the analysis of drivers, policies and initiatives is differentiated by these groups.<sup>3</sup> Seasonal workers and asylum-seekers have been excluded from the focus of the study, on the assumption that policy measures to counter skills mismatch are less targeted at these groups.

## 1.2 Background to the study

Despite the economic downturn beginning in 2023 and the decline in job vacancies (Public Employment Service, 2024c), Austria remained in 2025 (as of Q3, 2025) one of the European Union (EU) countries with the highest vacancy rate (Eurostat, 2025b). One of the main reasons for the increased demand for labour is the retirement of the baby-boom generation. Since 2021, the domestic labour supply in Austria – i.e. the number of available workers holding Austrian citizenship – has been in decline, with growth in the overall labour force attributable solely to foreign workers (Public Employment Service, 2024a:2).

Against the background of this growing labour shortage, attention has turned not only to intensified international recruitment but also to reducing skills mismatch and lowering unemployment among migrants already residing in Austria. The potential of migrants is often not utilized, and they work in jobs that do not match their qualifications. In all European countries, foreign-born workers show consistently higher overqualification rates than native-born workers, with those born outside the European Union (third countries) being particularly affected (see [figure 1](#)). In Austria, as of 2023, 44.4 per cent of those born in third countries aged 15 to 64 were employed in jobs for which they were overqualified, compared with 31.7

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1 This includes bachelor's, master's or equivalent degrees, as well as the completion of a short tertiary education programme.

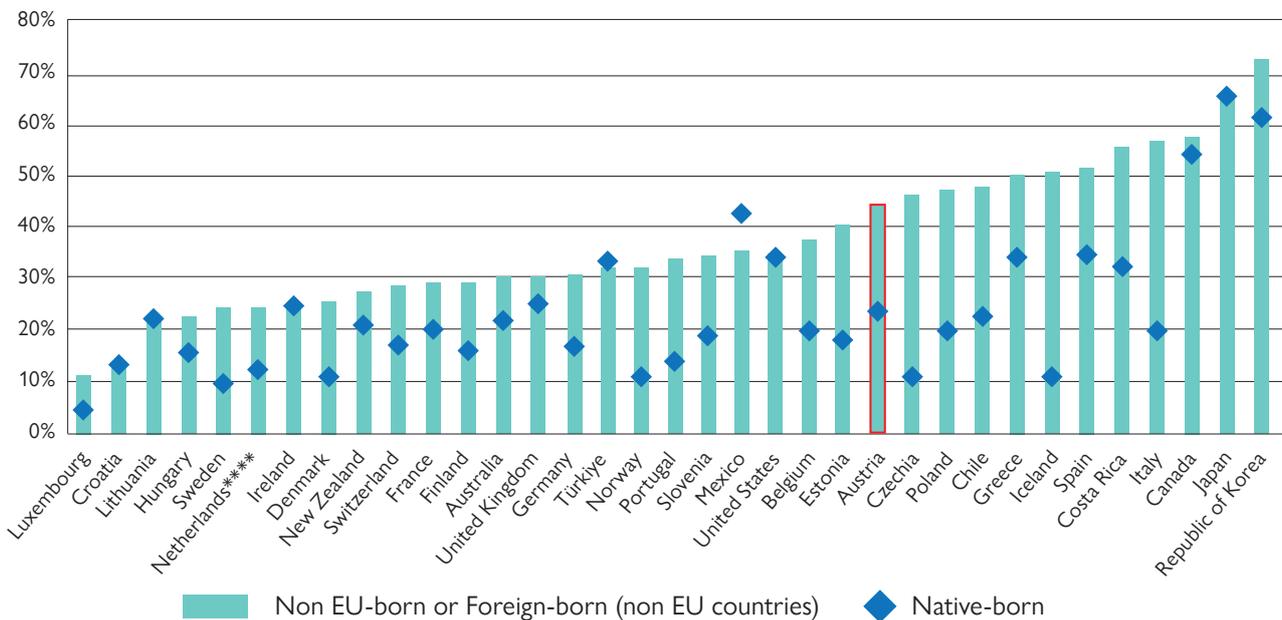
2 Some core skills (reading, writing, arithmetic and problem solving) are covered by the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), and there are now several other approaches to expanding the measurement of skills (see European Commission, n.d.a).

3 Unless a specific group is explicitly mentioned, the study refers to all these migrant groups.

per cent of those born in the EU (not shown in figure 1) and 23.3 per cent of those born in Austria.<sup>4</sup> Among those aged 25 to 64, the rate was 39.4 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

Skills mismatch entails significant costs not only for the individuals concerned but also for businesses, the economy and society at large. It has a negative impact on the income and well-being of migrants (McDonald and Valenzuela, 2009), government revenue, productivity, innovation and economic growth (McGuinness et al., 2018).

**Figure 1: Share of highly qualified persons\* working in a low- or medium-skilled occupation\*\*, by country of birth, as of 2023 or latest available year\*\*\***



Source: OECD, provided on 4 September 2025.

Notes: \*Corresponds to tertiary education according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 5-8.<sup>6</sup>

\*\*Based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) levels 4-9.<sup>7</sup>

\*\*\*Data drawn from the 2023 EU Labour Force Survey and the OECD Settling in report for countries outside the European Union. The data cover persons aged 15-64.

\*\*\*\*The official name is Kingdom of the Netherlands. Netherlands was used in this figure for spacing issues.

In order to address this issue, it is necessary not only to identify the drivers of skills mismatch among migrants but also to analyse existing labour market and integration policy measures – both of which are the focus of the present study. Existing research indicates that policy measures aimed at labour market integration can have a significant impact on skills (mis)matching. Research findings underscore that migrants do not constitute a homogeneous group (Redmond and Brosnan, 2024) that can be addressed with a single strategy. Labour market integration measures have different effects on different groups (Platt et al., 2022:370). Distinctions between groups are shaped not only by migration motive and region of origin, but also, for example, by migrants' gender or the time of their arrival (Csarman et al., 2025:42ff.; Redmond and Brosnan, 2024).

4 Data provided by the OECD on 4 September 2025.

5 See also Eurostat, n.d.a.

6 See also Eurostat, n.d.b.

7 See also ILO, 2025.

### 1.3 Definition of frequently used terms<sup>8</sup>

**Beneficiary of international protection:** A person who has been granted refugee status (asylum) or subsidiary protection status.

**Beneficiary of temporary protection:** A displaced person to whom temporary protection applies under Article 2 of the Council Implementing<sup>9</sup> Decision. In the Austrian context, the term "displaced person" is used.<sup>10</sup>

**Evaluation of foreign qualifications:** An expert assessment that determines the extent to which a foreign educational qualification or professional qualification corresponds to a domestic educational qualification/professional qualification (Art. 3 subpara. 2 Recognition and Assessment Act).<sup>11</sup> Evaluation is relevant when recognition is either unnecessary (e.g. in non-regulated professions) or not possible. It serves to enable employers and the Public Employment Service to assess qualifications (Art. 6 para. 1 Recognition and Assessment Act; Berufsanerkennung, n.d.)

**Labour market integration:** The extent to which migrants achieve the same labour market participation as nationals of receiving countries by using their skills and exploiting their economic potential.

**Migrant:** In the EU context, a person who either:

- i. establishes their usual residence in the territory of an EU/EFTA Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in another EU/EFTA Member State or a third country; or
- ii. having previously been usually resident in the territory of the EU/EFTA Member State, ceases to have their usual residence in the EU/EFTA Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months.

**Qualification:** the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work (European Commission, n.d.a.). The following terms are used in this study:

- **Dequalification:** Loss and/or devaluation of qualifications, e.g. through employment below one's level of qualification (Titelbach et al., 2021:10).
- **Overqualification:** A situation in which a person possesses a higher qualification – type or level, work experience – higher than his/her job requires (CEDEFOP, n.d.).

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<sup>8</sup> Unless other sources are specified, the definitions are based on EMN (2025), EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary.

<sup>9</sup> Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection. OJ L 71, 4.3.2022, pp. 1–6.

<sup>10</sup> See Regulation on Displaced, FLG II No. 92/2022, in the version of federal law FLG II No. 27/2023.

<sup>11</sup> Recognition and Assessment Act, FLG I No. 37/2018, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 76/2022.

- **Underqualification:** A situation in which a person does not have the level of qualification, skills or experience required to perform a job adequately (ibid.).

**Recognition of foreign qualifications:** Formal recognition granted by a competent authority confirming the validity of a foreign qualification for access to education and/or employment.

In the Austrian context, this refers to an official decision establishing the equivalence of foreign educational qualifications or professional qualifications with domestic ones (Art. 3 subpara. 1 Recognition and Assessment Act; Kirilova et al., 2016:52). Recognition requires that the qualification is essentially equivalent to an Austrian qualification, with only minor elements missing. Such elements must be addressed through compensatory measures,<sup>12</sup> which are prescribed in the recognition procedure.

**Skill:** The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. Skills may be described as cognitive (involving logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments; European Commission, 2025a). The term skills covers both general skills (not linked to a particular occupation or sector, e.g. problem-solving or communication skills) and specific skills, e.g. technical skills required for certain occupations; Lise and Postel-Vinay, 2020).

**Skills matching (promotion of employment commensurate with qualifications):** A process by which the skills of the individual are aligned with the qualification requirements of an enterprise. In the context of this study, the term skills matching also covers cases in which the educational qualification and/or the field of study corresponds to the occupation or employment (Jooss et al., 2023).

**Skills mismatch (skills imbalance):** A situation of imbalance between the skills – and qualifications – possessed by the workforce (supply) and those needed by the labour market (demand) (CEDEFOP, n.d.).

**Third-country national:** Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Article 20 (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)<sup>13</sup> and who does not enjoy the right of free movement, as defined in Article 2 (5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> These may be demanded, for example, in the form of a (multi-year) adaptation course or the completion of examinations (Art. 7 para. 2 in conjunction with Art. 3 subpara. 8 Recognition and Assessment Act and Art. 3 lit. g and Art. 3 lit. h Professional Recognition Directive).

<sup>13</sup> Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. OJ C 326, 26.10.2012, pp. 13–390.

<sup>14</sup> 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) (codification). OJ L 77, 23.3.2016, pp. 1–52.

## 1.4 Data collection and analysis

The present study was conducted by the IOM Country Office for Austria, acting as the National Contact Point (NCP) Austria in the European Migration Network (EMN) as part of the EMN Work Programme 2023–2025. To ensure comparability of results, the study was carried out on the basis of a common study template with a standardized catalogue of questions. It constitutes Austria's national contribution to the comparative EMN study "Fostering sustainable labour market integration of migrants: skills matching policies and instruments".

The findings of this national contribution build on existing international and national studies and reports and are based on a thematic analysis of 11 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with experts in the fields of labour market and integration, a written response from an expert of the Austrian Integration Fund and two interviews with migrants conducted to illustrate skills mismatch dynamics by way of example. The consulted experts are listed below:

- Josef Hochwald (Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General III – National Market Strategies, Department III/7 – Vocational Training and Skilled Labour, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism)
- Judith Hörlsberger (AST contact point coordination – Counselling Centre for Migrants)
- Ian Innerhofer (Head of the Knowledge Management and Integration Monitoring Unit; Deputy Head of Department II/2 –Integration Coordination, Directorate-General II – Integration, Office of Religious Affairs and National Minorities, Federal Chancellery)
- Maria Kaun (Officer, Department of Social and Health Policy, General Secretariat – responsible for departments, federal divisions and professional organizations, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber)
- Bojan Kumm (Job Coach, More Than One Perspective)
- Monika Nigl (Head of the Counselling Centre for Career and Further Education, Vienna Employee Fund (waff))
- Roland Sauer (Head of Directorate-General IX – Labour Market, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection)
- Gabriele Schmid (Specialist Staff Unit, Vienna Chamber of Labour)
- Gabriele Straßegger (Consultant in the Department for Social and Health Policy of the General Secretariat – responsible for departments, federal divisions, professional organizations, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber)
- Irene Strauss (Lawyer, Inspire – Education and Participation)
- Milica Tomic-Schwingschlögl (Migration Officer, Vienna Labour Market Service)
- Tetyana Teufel (Deputy Head of the Integration Service for Professionals, Austrian Integration Fund)
- Florian Zuckerstätter (Head of the Department for Employment of Foreigners, EURES and Complaints Management, Public Employment Service)

The migrants, in turn, are referred to anonymously in the study as listed below:

- Dr E. K. (Refugee from the Syrian Arab Republic, practicing medical specialist)
- Ms M. T. (displaced person from Ukraine, employee in a law firm)

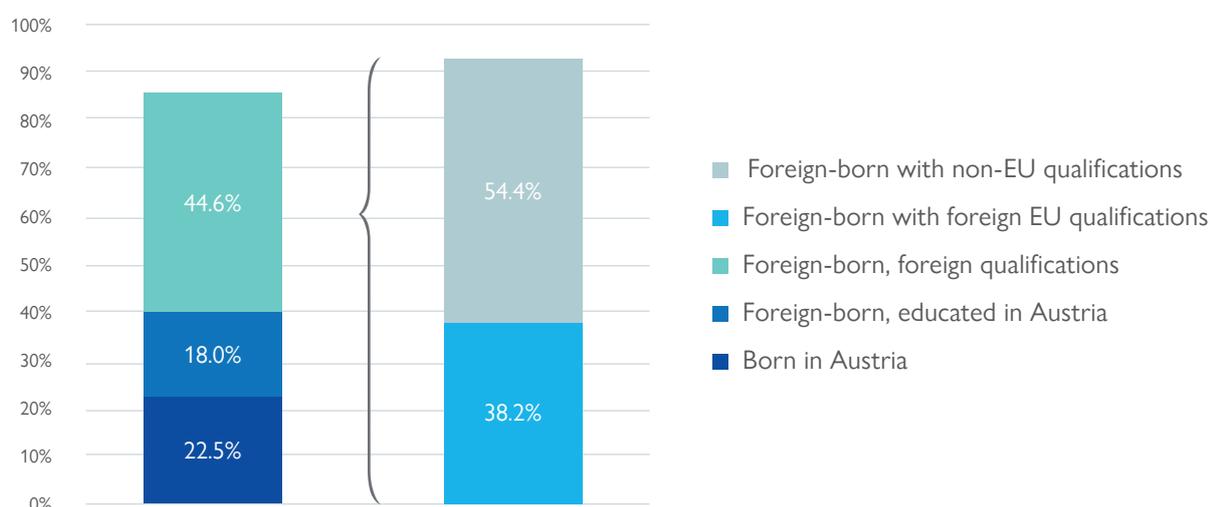
In addition, legal texts and parliamentary documents on legislative initiatives, press releases and media reports, as well as statistics provided by the OECD, form the key sources for the analysis.

The study was conducted in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

## 2. EXTENT OF SKILLS MISMATCH AMONG MIGRANTS IN AUSTRIA

According to OECD data, around 45 per cent of employed people in Austria aged 16 to 64 who were born abroad are overqualified (figure 2).<sup>15</sup> The data highlight that migrant women are affected to a greater extent by skills mismatch than migrant men (figure 3). The data also confirm that the place of education is decisive for the risk of overqualification. Among persons who were born abroad but educated in Austria, the rate is only 18 per cent (figure 2), whereas people with qualifications from third countries are much more likely to be affected by overqualification (figure 2).

**Figure 2: Share of highly qualified persons\* in Austria employed in low or medium-skilled occupations,\*\* by country of birth and place of education,\*\*\* 2023\*\*\*\***



Source: OECD, provided on 4 September 2025.

\*Corresponds to tertiary education, International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 5–8.<sup>16</sup>

\*\*International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) levels 4–9.<sup>17</sup>

\*\*\*The place of education refers to the country in which the highest qualification was obtained.

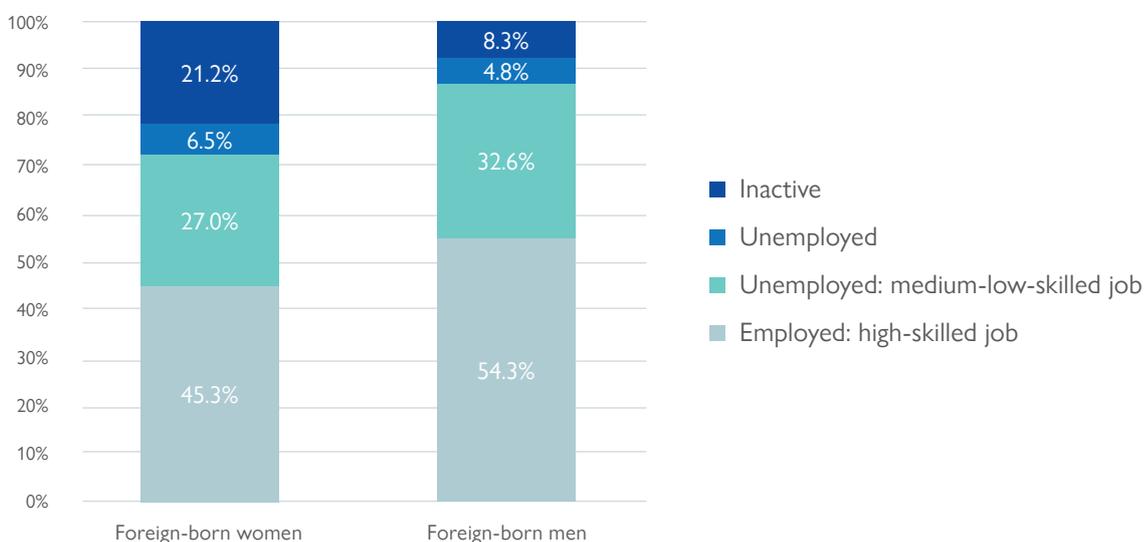
\*\*\*\*Data are based on the 2023 OECD Survey of Adult Basic Skills (Reading, Everyday Mathematics, Adaptive Problem Solving; PIAAC). The data cover persons aged 16–64.

15 In the majority of OECD countries, overqualification among foreign-born workers tends to decrease with the number of years spent in the host country, as shown by data provided by the OECD on September 4, 2025, on 15–64-year-olds from 2023. This is not the case in Austria. OECD data broken down by length of stay show that 32.5 per cent of migrants with tertiary education who have been in the country for less than five years work in medium- and low-skilled jobs, compared with 45.7 per cent of those who have been in the country for 5 to 10 years and 36 per cent of those who have been in the country for more than 10 years. In the majority of OECD countries, overqualification among foreign-born workers tends to decrease with the number of years spent in the host country, as shown by OECD data on 15–64-year-olds from 2023. This is not the case in Austria. OECD data broken down by length of stay show that 32.5 per cent of migrants with tertiary education who have been in the country for less than five years work in medium- and low-skilled jobs, compared with 45.7 per cent of those who have been in the country for 5 to 10 years and 36 per cent of those who have been in the country for more than 10 years, although – since the OECD data is not longitudinal – any cohort effects must be taken into account, i.e. the factor that, depending on the time of immigration, migrant groups with different characteristics have immigrated.

16 See also European Commission, n.d.b.

17 See also ILO, 2025.

**Figure 3: Share of foreign-born persons with tertiary education of working age (15–64 years) in Austria, by economic activity and gender, 2023\***



Source: OECD, provided on 4 September 2025.

Note: \*Data based on the EU Labour Force Survey (microcensus).

The effect of the place of education can be long term. A study of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who migrated to Austria found that those who had completed their formal education in Austria continued to show, even two decades after their arrival, a significant advantage in terms of employment commensurate with their qualifications compared to their slightly older peers who had completed their education in their country of origin. The study further highlights that refugee women in particular benefited from education in Austria; without it, they engaged in low-skilled jobs regardless of their educational attainment in their country of origin (Ludolph, 2023).

With regard to the group of employed refugees who migrated to Austria between 2014 and 2018,<sup>18</sup> the so-called FIMAS study, conducted in four waves of surveys (2018, 2019, 2022, 2023/2024), provides insights into skills mismatch. The 2023/2024 FIMAS survey (n= 899) found that 30 per cent of respondents considered themselves overqualified for their job because they possessed higher educational attainment or more extensive professional experience than was required for their job (Baumgartner and Röttger, 2025:19). The higher values recorded for men in earlier survey waves of the same study, which focused on refugees who had arrived in Austria during that period, suggest that over time, male refugees<sup>19</sup> were more likely to find employment that corresponded to their qualification profiles.

For Austria, there are also separate survey data on skills mismatch among displaced persons from Ukraine. A study by the Austrian Institute of Family Studies, which conducted surveys (n=833) in 2022 and 2023 (n=1,008)

18 For refugees in particular, the timing of their arrival is also crucial for their integration into the labour market, as long stays in refugee camps, for example, can lead to a loss of skills or a lower level of education from the outset (see also Csarman et al., 2025).

19 Due to the small number of working women in the first wave of the survey, no change was reported for this subgroup in the FIMAS study, see Baumgartner and Röttger, 2025:20.

among displaced women from Ukraine, found that almost half of the respondents did not consider their employment to correspond at all to their qualifications (2022: 45.6% and 2023: 47.7%). Furthermore, 18.1 per cent (2023) and 11.4 per cent (2022) assessed their employment as only partially corresponding to their qualifications. According to the authors, the fact that the 2023 figures exceeded those of 2022 may be due to the increased necessity of taking up employment (Mazal et al., 2023:19). Similar findings emerge from IOM survey data collected in 2023 (n=552), which showed that 65 per cent of those in employment at the time of the survey (n=144) reported working in positions for which they were overqualified (Heilemann, 2023:12).

A study published in 2025 (Gamper et al., 2025), which analysed the employment trajectories of people who migrated to Austria in 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2022, points to the effects of skills mismatch on the earnings of migrants. The study shows that, on average, the earnings of migrants are lower than those of the native-born population, with marked differences depending on the timing and type of migration (humanitarian or non-humanitarian) and on gender. According to the authors (Gamper et al., 2025:17), this is due to the fact that migrants often perform simple or marginal jobs, or work in sectors and enterprises with below-average wage levels. In many cases, the occupations and job classifications do not correspond to their prior professional experience. For some migrants, this situation becomes entrenched, leaving them employed on a long-term basis below their qualification level and correspondingly lower paid (ibid.).

## 3. DRIVERS OF SKILLS MISMATCH

The following section outlines the drivers of skills mismatch among migrants in Austria. It begins with systemic, Austria-specific factors, then turns to drivers on the part of employers, before addressing individual-level drivers among migrants.

Systemic, Austria-specific drivers	Drivers on the part of employers	Individual factors affecting migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usability of qualifications;</li> <li>• Recognition of third-country qualifications and professional licensing;</li> <li>• Temporal residence prospects;</li> <li>• Limited employment opportunities for asylum-seekers;</li> <li>• Regulations specific to residence permits;</li> <li>• Access to childcare.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enterprise size and culture;</li> <li>• Focus on formal qualifications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination;</li> <li>• Insufficient German language skills;</li> <li>• Access to information and networks;</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status;</li> <li>• Psychological state;</li> <li>• Gender norms.</li> </ul>

### 3.1 Systemic Austria-specific drivers

#### 3.1.1 Usability of qualifications

The extent to which migrants' qualifications can or cannot be utilized in the host country is a key factor in explaining skills mismatch. Usability of qualification can depend on the economic situation and the demand for those qualifications on the labour market, on legal requirements (e.g. statutory certification requirements) and on prevailing norms (e.g. employers' insistence on formal certificates, regardless of legal requirement (see [chapter 3.2.2](#)).

#### Labour market demand

International studies indicate that unfavourable economic conditions at the time of entering the labour market reduce the likelihood of skills matching, i.e. employment in line with qualifications, and that this effect may persist throughout an individual's career (Coraggio et al., 2024:54). Experts interviewed for this study also emphasized the link between the economic situation and skills (mis)match among migrants,<sup>20</sup> particularly highlighting that Austria's current shortage of skilled labour should, in principle, facilitate the inclusion of third-country nationals in the Austrian labour market and thereby support skills matching.

20 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025; Interview with Monika Nigl, Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - waff, 22 July 2025.

At the same time, labour demand driven by shortages can also exacerbate skills mismatch. One expert interviewed for this study<sup>21</sup> reported cases in which migrants were employed in lower-skilled occupations (e.g. in the hospitality sector) as a stopgap, and because of the high demand for labour in that sector, the Public Employment Service saw no need to place them in higher-skilled employment. It should be noted that while active labour market policy aims to place people in sustainable and qualification-appropriate employment,<sup>22</sup> the statutory mandate of the Public Employment Service does not include an obligation to ensure such qualification-appropriate placements.<sup>23</sup> According to the experts interviewed, the qualifications and competences of jobseekers are generally taken into account in Public Employment Service counselling.<sup>24</sup> However, as research has also shown, the focus of counselling depends in part on the individual counsellor (Huber et al., 2023).<sup>25</sup>

According to the assessments of the experts interviewed, despite the existing demand for labour, the Austrian labour market is only partially accessible to migrants.<sup>26</sup> This is due, among other things, to the focus on sector-specific qualifications and formal certification respectively the proof of comparability of vocational training completed in the home country.

### **Focus on sector-specific qualifications (dual training system)**

The extent to which migrants are able to make use of their qualifications – also depends on whether a country – and its labour market – is oriented towards general or sector-specific skills. General skills, unlike specific skills, are more readily transferable to other enterprises and even other sectors. They are acquired primarily through the public education system. Sector-specific skills, on the other hand, are acquired in a system that combines workplace training with education at a public institution (the "dual system"). Countries oriented towards sector-specific skills tend to be more challenging in terms of the labour market integration of migrants than countries with a stronger focus on general skills, as the former place greater emphasis on formal training and certification (Guzi et al., 2021:1830). Austria has a well-established dual training system (for vocational training). Accordingly, the experts interviewed for this study pointed to a particularly strong focus in Austria on formal certification.<sup>27</sup>

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21 Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

22 Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingschögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025; see also Art. 3 para. 6 Labour Market Support Act, FLG I No. 31/1969, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 106/2022.

23 The Unemployment Insurance Act regulates entitlement to unemployment benefits, one of the requirements for which is that the unemployed person is willing to work. Willingness to work means that the person must accept reasonable, mediated employment. Depending on the duration of unemployment benefit payments, there are certain restrictions on what is considered reasonable, based on the person's previous field of activity or occupation, but not on their skills and qualifications (Art. 9 Unemployment Insurance Act).

24 Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

25 Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025; Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

26 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025; Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

27 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025; Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025; Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025; Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingschögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025; Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025; Interview with Monika Nigl, Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - waff, 22 July 2025.

## Regional differences in labour demand

Labour demand in Austria also varies by region, which, given the unequal distribution of migrants across the country, can influence skills mismatch.<sup>28</sup> While the majority of migrants live in the federal capital, Vienna, there is a greater unmet demand for labour in western Austria.<sup>29</sup> In this context, the experts interviewed<sup>30</sup> pointed to a range of factors – from social networks to first-language medical care, affordability of housing and the level of social benefits (see also Dellinger and Huber, 2021) – that contribute to migrants being more likely to settle in Vienna. At the same time, they highlighted to a less welcoming attitude towards migrants in more rural regions, as well as migrants' own perception of being less welcome there (see [chapter 3.3.1](#)).

## Demand for intermediate qualifications

The Austrian labour market has a high demand for workers with certified apprenticeship qualifications. According to the most recent Skilled Labour Radar, 61 per cent of almost 2,500 member companies surveyed on behalf of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber that reported noticeable labour and skills shortages indicated frequent difficulties in recruiting staff with apprenticeship qualifications. By contrast, only 14 per cent reported difficulties in recruiting graduates of universities of applied sciences and 8 per cent in recruiting university graduates (Dornmayr and Riepl, 2025:1). Migrants, however, rarely hold apprenticeship qualifications sought by Austrian enterprises, not least because the dual apprenticeship training system exists as a vocational training option primarily in German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland).<sup>31</sup> While 50 per cent of Austrian nationals aged 25 to 64 have completed an apprenticeship or an intermediate vocational school, the share among foreign nationals is only 27.8 per cent (Statistics Austria, 2025). According to the experts interviewed, this also gives rise to misunderstandings on the part of migrants<sup>32</sup> – as one expert put it:

 "That seems to me to be one of the main factors behind a skills mismatch. People with a migration background who, for example, attended school abroad often do not understand at all what an apprenticeship means. In Austria, however, it is extremely important for entering the labour market and for qualified employment, and without such an apprenticeship certificate one will tend to remain in auxiliary jobs. Even if someone has worked as a skilled worker in their country of origin, this is not automatically recognized. [...] For a Public Employment Service adviser, it is difficult to explain to a jobseeker why they should complete further training ideally in a company, such as an apprenticeship-leaving examination or an intensive skilled-worker course, because these are in fact the entry point to qualified employment in the Austrian labour market."<sup>33</sup>

28 Although these regional differences are relevant in terms of skills mismatch, the demand for labour in the west of the country does not necessarily equate to employment opportunities that match qualifications. In addition to a demand for skilled workers (Dornmayr and Riepl, 2025:9), there is also a high supply of seasonal employment in tourism, some of which is low-skilled (Walch, 2023:95).

29 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025; Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025; Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

30 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025; Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025; Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

31 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025; Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingschlögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025; Interview with Monika Nigl, Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - waff, 22 July 2025.

32 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

33 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025.

### 3.1.2 Recognition of qualifications from third countries and professional licensing

On the one hand, recognition enables access to regulated professions. On the other hand, recognition and assessment also play a key role in non-regulated professions – which constitute the majority of occupations in Austria – for ensuring employment commensurate with qualifications (Biffl, 2019).<sup>34</sup> Recognition decisions and assessment reports must be taken into account by the Public Employment Service when providing support and placement (Art. 10 Recognition and Assessment Act).<sup>35</sup> Recognition is also relevant for classification under collective agreements, as these often refer to formal qualifications (Bichl, 2015). In this context, experts interviewed for the study emphasized that employers may in some cases not be interested in the formal recognition of qualifications, as this could result in higher classification and higher pay; this is highly disadvantageous from the perspective of migrants.<sup>36</sup> With regard to gender-specific differences, it is noteworthy that migrant women are more frequently employed in regulated professions (health professions, teaching professions, etc.). In order to take up employment commensurate with their qualifications, recognition of qualifications is therefore particularly essential for migrant women (Contact points for persons with foreign qualifications, 2025b).

The complex process of recognizing qualifications acquired in third countries respectively proving the comparability of vocational training completed in the home country was cited by the experts interviewed as one of the main drivers of skills mismatch among migrants.<sup>37</sup> This finding is also consistent with existing studies (Bichl, 2015; Biffl, 2019; Egger et al., 2024; Kirilova et al., 2016; Lindner et al., 2020:17; Tschiggerl, 2015). In view of the large number of different authorities and procedures for recognition, the process in Austria is very bureaucratic and formalized compared to other EU Member States (Perchinig and Perumadan, 2025). This is partly due to the formalized education and vocational system in Austria (Biffl et al., 2012:44ff). A European Union-level study further suggests that protectionism and the lack of political will on the part of some actors to delegate responsibilities in the field of recognition also play a role (Donlevy et al., 2017:88f). A particular challenge in the Austrian context is that qualifications from third countries are often difficult to compare with Austrian qualifications due to differences in education and vocational training systems.<sup>38</sup> Other countries place less emphasis on formal qualifications, which means that migrants often cannot provide certificates,<sup>39</sup> in many third countries, dual vocational training does not exist (Hadj Abdou and Ebner, 2025:36) or the required work experience cannot be documented.<sup>40</sup> The recognition of qualifications from the European Economic Area (EEA) is comparatively easier, as only essential differences are considered, which means that significantly fewer compensatory measures are required.<sup>41</sup>

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34 There are 203 regulated professions in Austria, see European Commission, n.d.b. This corresponds to approximately 12 per cent of the 1,732 professions listed in the occupational dictionary of the Public Employment Service, see Public Employment Service, n.d.

35 Recognition and Assessment Act, FLG I No. 37/2018, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 76/2022.

36 Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

37 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025; Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025; Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025; Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025; Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

38 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025.

39 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

40 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025.

41 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

Despite the central importance of obtaining recognition for employment commensurate with qualifications, the foreign qualifications of migrants are rarely recognized in Austria; the recognition rate is slightly above 10 per cent.<sup>42</sup> However, only a small share of migrants (13%) apply for recognition, while about 80 per cent of applications are approved (Expert Council for Integration, 2024:73). The low application rate can be attributed to the diverse education and training systems worldwide, which sometimes make comparison difficult, complex processes for requalifications, a lack of knowledge about recognition opportunities and the recognition portal,<sup>43</sup> the time required for the process and unpredictable, high costs.<sup>44</sup> Added to this is the limited predictability of compensatory measures,<sup>45</sup> as there is no central recognition authority and the various bodies make inconsistent decisions in practice.<sup>46</sup> Employed migrants must complete any compensatory measures in their spare time. Reconciling this with their schedules is particularly challenging for persons with care responsibilities or in full-time employment.<sup>47</sup> Compact recognition courses, which can be combined with German language courses, are not accessible to all, primarily due to their high cost and lack of funding opportunities (Egger et al., 2024). As one expert interviewed for this study noted, there is also insufficient financial support for supplementary courses.<sup>48</sup> For many migrants, recognition is not a priority immediately following their arrival in Austria; securing livelihoods, obtaining residence status and family reunification take precedence (Tschiggerl, 2015:78). The longer ago a qualification was obtained, however, the more difficult recognition becomes, as curricula are compared with current Austrian curricula, which evolve over time (Kirilova et al., 2016:122).

During the recognition process, migrants are often compelled to work in jobs that do not correspond to their qualifications in order to sustain themselves (Jobberie, 2025). This can lead to a devaluation of qualifications (dequalification)<sup>49</sup> and, according to the experts interviewed, a transition into employment commensurate with their qualifications at a later date is often difficult.<sup>50</sup>

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42 According to the EU Labour Force Survey (2021 Ad Hoc Module): 10.1 per cent for people who were not born in the EU. For people born in the EU, the percentage is 10.6. This puts Austria in eighth place in terms of recognition rates for people born outside the EU. Data provided by the OECD on 4 September 2025.

43 Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

44 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

45 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

46 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

47 Ibid.; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

48 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

49 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025; Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

50 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

## Infobox 2: Recognition procedure for foreign qualifications at a glance

There is no standardized procedure for recognition in Austria, but various forms of recognition are possible depending on the professional field and level of education (Berufsanerkennung, n.d.):

- **Recognition of school and school-leaving certificates:** Certificates of school attendance and examinations taken abroad are recognized by the Federal Ministry of Education (Art. 75 School Education Act).<sup>51</sup> Recognition is based on a detailed comparison of the examinations taken and classes attended with the equivalent Austrian certificate. Where individual subjects cannot be sufficiently demonstrated, additional examinations and/or classroom visits may be required (Federal Ministry of Education, n.d.).
- **Recognition of academic degrees:** Universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education are responsible for the recognition of foreign academic degrees and higher education qualifications in the corresponding fields of study. Applicants may be required to pass additional examinations and/or submit a scientific paper to establish equivalence with the corresponding Austrian degree (Art. 90 Universities Act,<sup>52</sup> Art. 6 Universities of Applied Sciences Act,<sup>53</sup> Art. 68 Higher Education Act<sup>54</sup>).
- **Equivalence of apprenticeship qualifications:** The Federal Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism is responsible for the formal recognition of vocational qualifications acquired through school and/or work with an Austrian apprenticeship certificate. Where equivalence cannot be demonstrated, the applicant must pass the final apprenticeship examination or parts of it in Austria (Art. 27a para. 2 and 3 Vocational Training Act).<sup>55</sup>
- **Recognition under intergovernmental agreements:**<sup>56</sup> In this special case, equivalence of certain programmes of study, examinations and academic degrees is established politically, and only an administrative confirmation by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (ENIC NARIC) is required (Contact points for persons with foreign qualifications, 2024:12; Kirilova et al., 2016:48ff).

As illustrated in [infobox 3](#), the practice of regulated professions requires professional licensing. In addition to recognition, licensing may entail various further criteria depending on the profession, such as German language proficiency at a specified level. Recognition and licensing are two distinct processes, for which there is no uniform, end-to-end support (Contact points for persons with foreign qualifications, 2025a).

51 School Education Act, FLG I No. 472/1986, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 29/2025.

52 Universities Act 2002, FLG I No. 120/2002, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 28/2025.

53 Universities of Applied Sciences Act, FLG I No. 340/1993, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 50/2024.

54 Higher Education Act 2005, FLG I No. 30/2006, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 50/2024.

55 Vocational Training Act, FLG I No. 142/1969, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 62/2023.

56 An overview of international agreements between Austria and other countries is available on the website of the Federal Ministry for Women, Science, and Research (see Federal Ministry for Women, Science and Research, n.d.).

### **Infobox 3: Professional licensing as a physician – the example of Dr E. K.**

The practice of medicine is regulated by the Medical Act<sup>57</sup> and requires a number of general and specific conditions, as well as registration in the physicians' register (Art. 4 Medical Act). The requirements include the recognition of the medical degree and proof of proficiency in German.

Some of the challenges of this procedure, as well as supportive framework conditions for successful recognition, are illustrated by the case of a physician from the Syrian Arab Republic who was interviewed for this study. Dr E. K. arrived in Austria in 2015 as a qualified specialist in surgery and was granted international protection. He received his professional licence in his field in 2019, four years after his arrival, following several professional examinations, a language test and hospital appointments for further training. Reflecting on this process, Dr E. K. stated: "It was not easy at all, but if you want something, you can achieve it. That was my motto from the start." Language was one of the key challenges for Dr E. K. in his professional integration. He learnt German through self-study, language tandems and subsidized medical language courses. However, the local dialect of the patients presented a barrier, especially at the beginning: "I wanted to understand people, but I cannot ask a patient to speak slowly or more clearly when they're having a heart attack and fighting for their lives," he explained, underscoring the central role of language in regulated professions. Another initial difficulty was the use of Latin technical terms, which is not common in Arabic. The lack of any orientation and support in preparing for the examinations required for the recognition process was a further challenge. However, according to Dr E. K., there is now support from the Austrian Medical Chamber in this regard. Because his training in the Syrian Arab Republic took place during the war, Dr E. K. mainly operated on gunshot wounds and lacked experience in minimally invasive surgical procedures, which are prevalent in Austria. To address this, Dr E. K. financed training courses at his own expense and took every opportunity during his hospital work to practise these procedures. One favourable framework condition he mentioned was an exception granted in 2015 for refugee physicians, under which they were not required to take up other employment for three years so that they could prepare for the recognition examinations. Dr E. K. and other refugee colleagues had actively advocated for this exception, which was supported by the Medical Chamber. Another supportive factor was the opportunity to spend time as a visiting doctor in an Austrian hospital, which he organized on his own initiative soon after his arrival, and which enabled him to become familiar with the Austrian system. Today, Dr E. K. is a senior physician in a hospital and additionally has his own practice.

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57 Medical Act 1998, FLG I No. 169/1998, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 21/2024.

### 3.1.3 Temporary residence prospects

In the case of displaced persons from Ukraine, the temporary nature of residence prospects must also be considered as an explanatory factor for skills mismatch.<sup>58</sup> They are entitled to temporary protection in the European Union and have immediate, unrestricted access to the labour market. Temporary protection was originally granted for one year (until March 2023) and has since been extended several times at the European level, most recently until March 2027 (European Commission, 2025b).

When recruiting, long-term availability and planning security can be important factors for employers. For displaced persons from Ukraine, the extension of temporary protection by one year at a time may have been a hindering factor. Since October 2024, displaced persons have had the option of switching to the Red-White-Red Card Plus (Kohlenberger and Denys, 2025). For the displaced persons, the prospect of returning is also relevant,<sup>59</sup> which was particularly viewed as a concrete option at the beginning of displacement, as surveys show (Mazal et al., 2023:29ff). While some sought employment quickly, others, due to the expectation of return, did not initially pursue a (qualification-appropriate) job or the recognition of their qualifications, as one expert interviewed reported.<sup>60</sup> This is in line with research findings that uncertainty about the expected duration of the stay can reduce motivation for sustainable labour market integration and limit investment in language learning, training and further education (Fasani, 2024:37). However, this also encourages public authorities to prioritize employment in low-skilled jobs over employment commensurate with qualifications (EMN, 2024:11).

### 3.1.4 Limited employment opportunities for asylum-seekers

The primary purpose of asylum law is to offer refugees protection from persecution. It is not an instrument of controlled labour migration.<sup>61</sup> In this sense, the primary focus is on integrating jobseekers whose asylum proceedings have already been completed and who have been granted protection status into the labour market (Ebner, 2023:I).

In relation to persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status (who have unrestricted access to the labour market), an expert interviewed identified the restricted access to the labour market for asylum-seekers (see Ebner, 2023:13) as a cause of skills mismatch.<sup>62</sup> Asylum-seekers are not permitted to work during the first three months after admission to the asylum procedure. After that period, employment requires a work permit, which in turn depends on a labour market test by the Public Employment Service (substitute worker procedure).<sup>63</sup> The work permit is valid for a specific employer, meaning that in the event of a job change, a new work permit must be applied for.

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58 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025.

59 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

60 Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

61 Written input: Federal Ministry of the Interior, 26 November 2025.

62 Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

63 Art. 4 para. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals.

These regulations limit access to the labour market for asylum-seekers, making it difficult for them to take up employment commensurate with their qualifications during the asylum procedure and – due to the sometimes lengthy duration of the asylum procedure – even after their status has been granted.<sup>64</sup> This finding is also supported by studies showing that the first labour market experiences of refugees, the timing of labour market entry, and the existence and duration of employment prohibitions or restrictions can have long-term effects (Arendt, 2020:170; Fasani, 2024:43; Fasani et al., 2022; Kosyakova and Kogan, 2022).

Another expert interviewed noted that it is not the access to the labour market during the asylum procedure that is essential for labour market integration, but rather the swift and correct handling of the asylum procedure and thus the creation of prospects.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.1.5 Regulations specific to residence permits

In the interviews, experts identified two additional regulations that can lead to skills mismatch. These concern the income requirements for residence permits and the obligations of Red-White-Red Card holders to remain with a specific employer.

In Austria, residence permits may generally only be granted or renewed for third-country nationals if the individual has sufficient income to ensure that their stay does not constitute a financial burden for a public authority (federal, provincial or municipal).<sup>66</sup> The minimum income to be demonstrated is defined by law.<sup>67</sup> The income requirements apply both to the granting and renewal of residence permits under the Settlement and Residence Act<sup>68</sup> and to family reunification (under the Settlement and Residence Act and – unless an exception applies<sup>69</sup> – also under the Asylum Act 2005;<sup>70</sup> Ammann and Stiller, 2025:25). Due to these regulations, migrants may decide to take up employment not commensurate with their qualifications more quickly, rather than searching longer for employment that matches their qualifications, in order to meet the required income thresholds, as one expert interviewed observed.<sup>71</sup>

The admission of skilled third-country nationals to Austria primarily takes place via the Red-White-Red Card (RWR Card), which exists for various categories (e.g. skilled workers in shortage occupations, highly qualified workers, other key workers). The RWR Card authorizes the holder to settle and work for a limited period of time and is linked to a specific employer. The issuance of a RWR Card requires proof of comprehensive health insurance coverage. Furthermore, the stay must not conflict with public order and safety. Proof of

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64 Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

65 Written input: Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 13 October 2025.

66 Art. 11 para. 2 subpara. 4 Settlement and Residence Act.

67 For 2025, the benchmark for individuals is EUR 1,273.99 and for spouses or registered partners in the same household EUR 2,009.85, increasing by EUR 196.57 for each minor child. Regular expenses (e.g. rent) are taken into account in the calculation and therefore lead to a corresponding increase in the necessary income (Art. 11 para. 5 Settlement and Residence Act in conjunction with Art. 293 General Social Insurance Act, FLG I No. 189/1955, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 50/2025).

68 Settlement and Residence Act, FLG I No. 100/2005, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 50/2025.

69 Proof of income must be provided in cases of family reunification of persons entitled to subsidiary protection and persons entitled to asylum, unless the application is submitted within three months of asylum being granted. Minors entitled to subsidiary protection and asylum-seekers who submit their application within three months of being granted asylum are exempt (Art. 35 para. 4 subpara. 3 in conjunction with Art. 60 para. 2 subpara. 3 and Art. 35 para. 2a of the Asylum Act 2005).

70 Asylum Act 2005, FLG I No. 100/2005, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 17/2025.

71 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

legal entitlement to accommodation as well as proof of sufficient income are not required.<sup>72</sup> A switch to the Red-White-Red Card plus, which is not limited to a particular employer, is possible only after a minimum of two years.<sup>73</sup> Until then, job mobility is possible under the legal provisions if RWR Card holders apply for a new RWR Card prior to changing their employer.<sup>74</sup> This makes it more difficult to move from employment not commensurate with qualifications to employment commensurate with qualifications.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.1.6 Access to childcare

The lack of childcare places for children under the age of three (despite rising enrolment rates in recent years, see Kaindl and Schipfer, 2024:17; ORF, 2023b) as well as for schoolchildren in the afternoons and during school holidays was identified by several experts interviewed as an obstacle to successful labour market integration, as well as to participation in further training, which in many cases is a prerequisite for employment commensurate with qualifications.<sup>76</sup> One expert interviewed for this study emphasized that childcare is a key barrier to labour market integration, especially for women displaced from Ukraine, who have for the most part by now sufficient knowledge of German<sup>77</sup> (see also Perchinig und Perumadan, 2025:14).<sup>78</sup> Experts<sup>79</sup> further stressed that in most federal provinces, childcare places can only be taken up if parents are in active employment. Yet reliable childcare is in turn indispensable in order to take up employment (Baumgartner et al., 2023:14).

## **3.2 Reasons on the part of employers**

### 3.2.1 Enterprise size and culture

Almost all (99.8%) enterprises in Austria are small and medium-sized companies (Austrian Institute for SME Research, 2025). The small remaining share consists of large enterprises with more than 250 employees, which employ over one third (33.4%) of Austria's workforce (European Employment Services, 2025). In the expert interviews conducted for this study, it was repeatedly emphasized that company size is relevant to labour market integration and skills (mis)matching. Larger enterprises generally have more resources for the sustainable integration of migrant employees in the workplace.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, smaller companies may also provide opportunities for integration.<sup>81</sup> In this context, corporate culture and prior experience in employing

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72 Art. 41 Settlement and Residence Act.

73 Art. 41a para. 1 subpara.1 Settlement and Residence Act.

74 This means that all requirements, including any labour market assessment by the Public Employment Service, will be re-examined (Art. 41 Settlement and Residence Act in conjunction with Art. 20d para. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, FLG I No. 218/1975, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 67/2024).

75 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025. The implementation of EU Directive 2024/1233 will lead to simplifications in this regard (Written input: Federal Ministry of the Interior, 26 November 2025).

76 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025; Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025; Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingschlögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025; Interview with Monika Nigl, Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - waff, 22 July 2025.

77 For insufficient knowledge of German as driver for skills mismatch see [chapter 3.3.2](#).

78 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

79 Ibid.; Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

80 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025; Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

81 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025.

migrants play a decisive role, as one expert underlined.<sup>82</sup> This finding is also supported by international studies (Hauptmann and Keita, 2022). Enterprises that already employ foreign workers are also more likely to hire refugees, for example. Moreover, migrants working in enterprises with a diverse workforce feel less overqualified than colleagues in less diverse companies (Farashah et al., 2025).

### 3.2.2 Focus on formal qualifications

As set out in [chapter 3.1.1](#), the vocational training in Austria follows a dual training system with a strong focus on formal certification. Experts interviewed noted that employers sometimes require formal qualifications or an assessment of qualifications even in non-regulated professions, where recognition of a formal qualification is not a legal prerequisite for professional licensing (for regulation see [chapter 3.1.2](#)).<sup>83</sup> This means that the focus on certification is reflected not only in statutory requirements but also in prevailing labour market norms.

## **3.3 Individual factors on the part of migrants**

### 3.3.1 Discrimination

Ethnic discrimination in the labour market is one of the most widespread forms of discrimination in Europe (Lippens et al., 2023; European Union, 2023), including in Austria (Statistics Austria, 2022:45). The (conscious or unconscious) discrimination of migrants in the labour market in turn contributes to skills mismatch (Kerler and Steiner, 2018a:65; Mayerl, 2017; Schasche and Zweiger, 2019).<sup>84</sup>

Discrimination is evident, for example, in recruitment processes, (Kerler and Steiner, 2018a:29) when certain groups are favoured over others (Schedlberger, 2024), when German or dialect proficiency is required although not necessary to perform the job,<sup>85</sup> in scepticism towards foreign qualifications (Bichl, 2015), which are given less weight than Austrian or EU qualifications,<sup>86</sup> or when work experience acquired abroad is not recognized,<sup>87</sup> leading to migrants being employed in low-skilled jobs even though they have higher skills.<sup>88</sup>

Migrants also experience disproportionate levels of discrimination on other grounds (such as gender and age) compared to Austrian-born workers (Statistics Austria, 2022:45) and therefore face multiple discrimination. For example, women from certain countries of origin may be automatically channelled into the low-wage sector without consideration of their qualifications (Bassermann, 2018:49), or enterprises may take a negative attitude towards women wearing headscarves (Ortlieb et al., 2018:5). Discrimination and rejection

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82 Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025.

83 Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

84 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025; Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

85 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

86 Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025; Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

87 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

88 Ibid.; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

by colleagues are perceived as a problem especially in rural areas (Der Standard, 2025).<sup>89</sup> Experiences of discrimination vary between groups of migrants. Ukrainians, for example, report fewer experiences of discrimination compared to other groups such as people from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran or the Republic of Türkiye (Statistics Austria, 2024:16; IOM, 2023; Kosyakova et al., 2024). A recent study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) shows that people of African descent in the European Union – regardless of their nationality – are more often employed in unskilled labour and more likely to be overqualified compared to the population as a whole (FRA, 2024:88f). Slightly more than one third of respondents in the study (34%) reported experiencing racist discrimination when seeking employment, with the highest prevalence recorded in Austria (59%). Around one third of respondents (31%) also reported racist discrimination in the workplace, with a comparatively higher share (45%) observed in Austria.

### 3.3.2 Insufficient knowledge of German

One of the main drivers of skills mismatch identified in all interviews conducted for this study was insufficient knowledge of the host country's language. Available data also underline<sup>90</sup> that around 69 per cent of foreign-born persons with only beginner-level German skills are employed in positions for which they are overqualified; this share decreases to about 55 per cent among foreign-born persons with intermediate skills, and to 35 per cent among foreign-born persons with German as their first language or advanced skills. Lack of language proficiency poses a somewhat greater obstacle to migrant women in finding suitable employment than to migrant men (Statistics Austria, 2022:7). The segmentation of the labour market by gender and migration background also plays a role in this regard. Migrant women are more likely to work in sectors such as care or retail, where higher levels of German proficiency are required.<sup>91</sup> In other words, the relevance of the language factor is also strongly sector-specific.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, access to certain regulated professions ([chapter 3.1.2](#)) is legally contingent on a defined level of German proficiency. Furthermore, in some cases, it is not only knowledge of standard German that is important, but also knowledge of the respective local dialect in order to communicate effectively with clients or patients (see also [infobox 3](#)).

### 3.3.3 Access to information and networks

One factor that is important with regard to skills (mis)match is access to information. Knowledge of the labour market in Austria – for the purposes of effective job search and identifying suitable employers – as well as access to and awareness of other issues, such as recognition of foreign qualifications, childcare and eligibility for support measures, all of which are closely related to labour market integration, are essential.<sup>93</sup>

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89 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025; Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

90 Data provided by the OECD on 4 September 2025. This data is based on the EU Labour Force Survey (Ad Hoc Module 2021) for people aged 15 to 64.

91 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

92 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025; Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025; Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

93 Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025; Interview with Monika Nigl, Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - waff, 22 July 2025.

Networks play an important role in accessing this information. They may also act as intermediaries in the job search. As migrants have not grown up or been educated in the country of immigration, they tend to have fewer personal and/or professional networks<sup>94</sup> (Baumgartner et al., 2020; Baumgartner et al., 2021; Baumgartner and Röttger, 2025:38; Kerler and Steiner, 2018b:35; Viennese Integration Council, 2023). A recent study on Austria also points to gender-specific differences among refugees. Refugee girls and young women have smaller networks than refugee men. They spend more time with family members and less with their peers, whether with friends in Austria or from their country of origin. Their social capital is therefore generally less robust, and they can rely less on the support of other people in Austria. This also applies to their job search (Baumgartner et al., 2021).

As one expert interviewed<sup>95</sup> emphasized, ethnic networks in particular can also have a limiting effect if migrants are thereby primarily employed in "migrant economies", which can contribute to skills mismatch. This finding is also confirmed by research. A study on Germany (Kracke and Klug, 2021), for example, shows that migrants face a greater risk of overqualification if they only use informal job search strategies and rely primarily on friends or family members. In this context, it should be mentioned that the data of the Public Employment Service show that personal contacts are the most decisive factor in finding a job for foreign nationals, in contrast to people with Austrian citizenship (Statistics Austria, 2022:30).

### 3.3.4 Socioeconomic status

As emphasized by the experts interviewed for this study, one factor contributing to skills mismatch<sup>96</sup> is financial pressure, i.e. that people accept jobs for various reasons, even if they do not match their qualifications (see also [chapter 3.1.5](#)). One interviewee also noted in his work with migrants, that they perceived unemployment as particularly shameful.<sup>97</sup> Jobs in hospitality or shift work in warehouses or production, in which migrants are often employed regardless of their qualifications, are difficult to combine with measures that would lead to higher-skilled employment.<sup>98</sup> According to experts,<sup>99</sup> a transition to more highly-skilled work also requires financial support to cover living expenses while undertaking further training programmes.

### 3.3.5 Psychological state

Processes such as recognition and further training, which are relevant for employment commensurate with qualifications, require not only financial resources, but also motivation and perseverance,<sup>100</sup> i.e. investing in one's own human capital (see also [infobox 3](#) and [infobox 4](#)). Whether individuals have resources for such investments, or instead prioritize a rapid entry into the labour market also depends on psychological factors,

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94 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025; Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025; Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025.

95 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025.

96 Interview with M. T., displaced person from Ukraine, Employee in a law firm, 23 July 2025; Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025; Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025; Interview with Irene Strauss, inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

97 Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025.

98 Ibid.

99 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

100 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

such as the absence or presence of a future perspective.<sup>101</sup> As one expert interviewed explained, a loss of future perspective is particularly evident among more recent refugee cohorts who have arrived in Austria since 2020, as they come from more precarious circumstances compared to other groups:

 "[...] their focus on success or on the next step ends with the day after tomorrow, not with what they will do when they retire one day without having vocational training or having properly learned German. That provokes no reaction at all among people who for years have struggled simply to survive the next day, to make the next step, to cross the next border [...] so that only short-term goals can be pursued. And that's why I think many of these people cannot complete a three- or six-month course – it is simply far too long-term, because they cannot keep the goal in sight. [...] A pure German course where today we learn the genitive and the dative [...] why would that interest an adult who has spent three years in flight?"<sup>102</sup>

### 3.3.6 Gender norms

Traditional gender norms can also affect the (sustainable) labour market integration of migrants (Kosyakova and Salikutluk, 2023:13). This applies to gender norms in both the country of origin and the host country (Ruiz and Donato, 2025). As international research highlights (ibid.) qualified migrant women may be confronted with gender-specific biases that hinder their access to employment commensurate with their qualifications (see also [chapter 3.3.1](#)). Furthermore, care responsibilities – which, based on traditional gender norms, are predominantly assigned to women – impact on the labour market integration of migrant women in line with their qualifications. Care responsibilities contribute to lower employment rates and higher rates of part-time work (Baumgartner and Röttger, 2025:17f.; Bernhard, 2017:16). They may also limit both the willingness and availability to participate in training and language courses (Kosyakova et al., 2024:17; see also [chapter 3.1.6](#)).

In the context of skills matching, it should also be considered that individuals who have a high level of formal education do not necessarily have corresponding professional experience. This is a phenomenon that is also to some extent gendered. Evidence from the Competence Check for Women project carried out in Austria indicates that migrant women are more likely to have formal qualifications without work experience than migrant men (arbeit plus - Soziale Unternehmen Österreich, 2022:32). One labour market expert interviewed for this study<sup>103</sup> mentioned in this context that some migrant women from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds held tertiary qualifications but had never worked in positions corresponding to their formal qualifications, since this was not the primary purpose of their education. Education in such cases could serve primarily to enhance a woman's social standing, including with regard to future marriage prospects.

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101 At the same time, however, underqualified employment can also have a negative impact on the mental health of qualified migrants, see Raihan et al., 2023.

102 Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingschögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025.

103 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

## 4. MEASURES AND INITIATIVES TO PREVENT SKILLS MISMATCH AND PROMOTE SKILLS MATCHING

### 4.1 Political debate

The issue of the labour market integration of migrants in Austria is much debated. The focus of this debate is less on skills (mis)matching, than on the participation of migrants in employment more broadly. In recent years, public and political discussions have centred in particular on the comparatively low employment rates of refugees from Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as of displaced persons from Ukraine (Expert Council for Integration, 2023 and 2024; Hierländer, 2024; Knittelfelder, 2024; ORF, 2025). In the case of displaced persons from Ukraine, in contrast to other groups entitled to protection, reference was often made in the debate to their potential for the Austrian labour market due to their high educational qualifications in areas relevant to the Austrian labour market (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2024; Expert Council for Integration, 2022:71; see for example Austrian People's Party et al., 2025:90). Another group that has featured prominently in debates, again due to particularly low employment rates, is women from third countries (Kleine Zeitung, 2025; Sel, 2024; Szigetvari, 2023; Viennese Integration Council, 2023).<sup>104</sup>

The main challenges to labour market integration referred to in these debates include insufficient German-language skills among migrants, the (non-)recognition of qualifications and education obtained abroad, the complexity of recognition procedures and regional imbalances in the distribution of migrants, i.e. the labour shortages in western regions with lower immigration as compared to eastern regions with higher immigration but lower labour demand. For displaced persons from Ukraine, limited prospects of long-term stay and restrictions on supplementary income under the basic welfare support system have also been frequently discussed as obstacles to employment (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2024; Der Standard, 2024).

In the political debate during the period under review, the responsible government representatives advocated faster integration into the labour market of persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection (Duric, 2022). In other words, increasing weight has been given to the approach of "employment first" rather than "language first" in relation to labour market integration of (certain groups of) migrants (see e.g. Integration Minister Raab in ORF, 2023a).

The most recent Austrian government programme for the period 2025–2029 focuses on simplified and faster recognition and the optimization of interregional placement processes through the Public Employment Service. It also highlights the need for job-related German language courses and specialist language training (Austrian People's Party et al., 2025:97ff). In addition, the government programme provides for integration counselling for migrants, including, among other things, competence screening and acquisition of the German language as part of the compulsory integration year (Austrian People's Party et al., 2025:91).

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<sup>104</sup> Labour market data show that foreign birthplace, foreign citizenship, or migration background, especially in the case of persons from third countries, are associated with below-average labour force participation. This applies more to women than to men, see Public Employment Service, 2022.

In the run-up to the most recent National Council elections (2024), the issue of skills (mis)matching was explicitly addressed in the electoral platforms of the parliamentary parties only by the Green Party, in the context of highlighting the problem of overqualification among migrants. In its electoral platform, the party called for "manageable models for the recognition of qualifications and for the certification of additional skills in order to prevent dequalification, and employment in positions that do not correspond to the training" (Green Party, 2024:45). The Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) likewise called for a simplification of recognition procedures in their election manifesto for the 2024 National Council elections, but did not explicitly link this issue to overqualification, instead referring to the shortage of skilled workers and the need to recruit skilled workers from abroad (Austrian People's Party, 2024:61; Social Democratic Party of Austria, 2024:25).

Some media articles addressing the issue of skills mismatch focused primarily on the phenomenon of migrants being overqualified (Delcheva, 2023; Kohlenberger, 2023; Kurier, 2024; ORF, 2023a). These reports highlighted both the negative macroeconomic consequences and the individual economic disadvantages for migrants (ibid.). Journalists and migration researchers at times underscored the contradiction between the widely promoted recruitment of skilled workers abroad in response to labour shortages and the persistence of skills mismatch among migrants already residing in Austria: "While political Austria courts qualified workers from abroad who are expected to leave the country again once their work is done, there are numerous university graduates and skilled workers in the country who cannot find a job, least of all one that corresponds to their actual training" (Delcheva, 2023). An Austrian migration researcher likewise repeatedly emphasized during the reference period that it was paradoxical for policymakers to call for skilled immigration on the one hand, while on the other hand no group in the labour market was more affected by overqualification than migrant workers (Kohlenberger, 2023; Parliamentary Administration, 2023).

The issue was also discussed by the Vienna Integration Council. This council of the City of Vienna, made up of researchers and other experts, highlighted in a public statement the problem of overqualification among recognized refugees in the Austrian labour market (Viennese Integration Council, 2023).

Finally, the issue of skills (mis)matching was also addressed in the 2024 integration report of the Expert Council on Integration (Expert Council for Integration, 2024:7). This Council, established under Art. 17 Integration Act<sup>105</sup> advises the Government on matters of integration policy. The report stressed that, in addition to holding qualifications and training that cannot easily be utilized in the Austrian labour market, migrants often lack sufficient German proficiency to take up adequate employment (ibid.).

Reflecting on the debate on skills (mis)matching in Austria, an expert from the Chamber of Labour interviewed for this study emphasized that this debate is "conducted far too little in Austria", i.e. the question of how migrants might be employed commensurate with their qualifications is not yet sufficiently in focus.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, an expert from a non-governmental organization active in the field of labour market integration noted that the topic is viewed by the wider public primarily from the perspective of "any job is better than no job" and less

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<sup>105</sup> Integration Act, FLG I No. 68/2017, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 76/2022.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

from the perspective of adequate employment.<sup>107</sup> Another expert noted that the political debate on migration is very controversial, especially during election periods. In such debates, it is often overlooked that well-qualified individuals also migrate to Austria, and that their ability to obtain employment commensurate with their qualifications is constrained by "Austrian framework conditions".<sup>108</sup>

In summary, it should be noted that during the reference period for this study, the political and public debates on labour market integration were often framed in terms of the deficits of migrants and the associated existing challenges for labour market integration. In particular, the low labour market participation of migrants was at the centre of these debates. Public debates that addressed skills (mis)match with regard to overqualification and the associated dequalification of migrants played a comparatively minor role. These forms of skills mismatch were primarily addressed by migration researchers who contributed to the public debate, as well as by journalists in media reports drawing on academic findings.

## 4.2 Key actors

A number of actors are responsible for policy development and implementation in the field of skills matching. Before turning to a more detailed description of policy measures and initiatives (chapter 4.3), the main competent actors are presented here in overview.

Labour market policy, including labour law, labour market promotion and employment of third-country nationals fall within the remit of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2025).

The Public Employment Service is responsible for the operational implementation of labour market policy.<sup>109</sup> Its core tasks are to place jobseekers in vacancies, the safeguarding of employment and the provision of subsistence for unemployed persons.<sup>110</sup> The Public Employment Service offers a wide range of labour market policy services (e.g. provision of information, counselling on career choices, support with qualifications),<sup>111</sup> some of which are geared towards specific target groups (e.g. women with a migration background; Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:144f). The Public Employment Service can also delegate tasks to external providers.<sup>112</sup> For specific groups (e.g. displaced persons from Ukraine (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:145f) or long-term unemployed Turkish women)<sup>113</sup> counselling and support centres are commissioned by the Public Employment Service to assist them in addressing barriers to sustainable employment (e.g. questions of migration law) and to provide guidance and support them in their job search (Moshhammer et al., 2024:241).

To be eligible for support from the Public Employment Service in Austria, a person must be unemployed or at risk of becoming unemployed. Counsellors at Public Employment Service offices are instructed to actively

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107 Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025.

108 Interview with Monika Nigl, Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - waff, 22 July 2025.

109 Art. 1 para. 1 Public Employment Service Act, FLG I No. 313/1994, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 50/2025.

110 Art. 29 and 31 Public Employment Service Act.

111 Art. 32 para. 2 Public Employment Service Act.

112 Art. 32 para. 3 Public Employment Service Act.

113 Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingschögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025.

offer training to unemployed people who lack certain qualifications or skills, and in particular to those who face disadvantages in job placement. No more specific criteria are defined, which gives Public Employment Service counsellors a relatively wide margin of discretion. During participation in training programmes, participants receive a financial allowance equivalent to unemployment benefits (Hofer and Weber, 2006:159). Non-participation results in indirect sanctions: the Unemployment Insurance Act<sup>114</sup> stipulates that eligibility for unemployment benefits is contingent upon a person's willingness to work, which in turn requires participation in training and reintegration measures.<sup>115</sup>

Migrants with access to the Austrian labour market may register with the Public Employment Service as unemployed and thereby have the same access to Public Employment Service counselling and support services as Austrian nationals (Counselling Centre for Migrants, 2024). Access to the labour market for migrants is determined by their residence permit; the relevant provisions are contained in the Settlement and Residence Act<sup>116</sup> and the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals.<sup>117</sup> Persons granted asylum, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status and displaced persons from Ukraine are exempt from the scope of the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals<sup>118</sup> and have unrestricted access to the labour market.

The Federal Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism is responsible for vocational training and skilled labour (Federal Ministry of Economy, Energy and Technology, n.d.a and n.d.b).

The topic of integration of migrants and the coordination of related issues, which also includes labour market integration, falls under the responsibility of the Federal Chancellery and, more specifically, the Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Family Affairs (Federal Chancellery, 2025). Operational integration matters are handled by the Austrian Integration Fund.<sup>119</sup>

The economic and social partnership (short: social partners) is another key actor in labour market policymaking. The social partners comprises the Chamber of Labour and the Austrian Trade Union Federation on the employee side, and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture on the employer side (Social partners Austria, n.d.).

The implementation of (labour market) integration measures in Austria is often carried out by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which offer advice and support for migrants (Bešić et al., 2022:217).

Responsibility for the recognition and assessment of foreign qualifications depends on the type of recognition procedure.<sup>120</sup> The contact points for persons with foreign qualifications were established by the Federal Ministry

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114 Unemployment Insurance Act 1977, FLG I No. 609/1977, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 47/2025.

115 Art. 7 para. 1 and 2., Art. 9 para. 1 Unemployment Insurance Act 1977.

116 Settlement and Residence Act, FLG I No. 100/2005, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 50/2025.

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

118 Art. 1 para. 1 (a) and (k) Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals.

119 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025.

120 Federal Ministry of Education (ENIC-NARIC): Nostrification/evaluation of school and high school diplomas; Universities/Universities of Applied Sciences: Nostrification of academic degrees; Federal Ministry of Economy, Energy and Technology: Recognition/evaluation of apprenticeship certificates; Federal Ministry for Women, Science and Research: Recognition based on intergovernmental evaluation of academic degrees; State government offices: Recognition of certain professional qualifications for professional licensing (health sector).

of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection under Art. 5 Recognition and Assessment Act<sup>121</sup> and support migrants in the recognition process (see [chapter 4.3.1](#)). Many advisory services are hosted by NGOs (Ebner, 2023:32) and contribute their expertise to policymaking.<sup>122</sup>

### 4.3 Measures and initiatives

Labour market policy measures and the approaches guiding them are generally aimed at bringing inactive people of working age into the labour market. While skills (mis)matching involves the over- or underqualification of people who are already in employment, measures targeting inactive persons remain relevant. They have a steering effect on skills (mis)match, since initiatives promoting labour market entry can influence subsequent skills mismatch, either preventing it or, under certain circumstances, contributing to it (see [chapter 3.1.1](#)). Once people are already employed, state measures usually no longer apply, except when individuals are at risk of becoming unemployed (Hofer and Weber, 2006:159).

This section therefore provides an overview of key labour market policy measures and selected initiatives that address skills (mis)match. Some of the measures described here are specifically designed to support the sustainable and qualification-adequate labour market integration of migrants (e.g. the contact points for persons with foreign qualifications, reimbursement of recognition costs). Others pursue different objectives (e.g. reducing the shortage of skilled workers) or are more broadly focused on labour market integration yet indirectly contribute to the qualification-adequate employment of migrants.

The measures and initiatives presented below are categorized according to their main focus. Since some of the individual measures/initiatives cover multiple areas, they are mentioned in more than one category, with an indication provided in the respective description.

<b>Main focus of the measures and initiatives</b>	Recognition of foreign qualifications and professional licensing
	Validation of non-formally acquired skills
	(Re-)qualification
	Advisory services and information provision
	Language support
	Competence-based matching and networking between workers and employers
	Promoting diversity in enterprises

The following overview presents both State measures and a selection of initiatives by non-State actors. It covers measures at the federal level, including legislative changes (described at the beginning of each

121 Recognition and Assessment Act, FLG I No. 37/2018, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 76/2022.

122 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

subsection), as well as selected initiatives by non-State actors or at the regional level. The focus is on those measures and initiatives referenced by the experts interviewed for this study. With regard to projects by non-State actors, it should be noted that there are a large number of initiatives that cannot be presented exhaustively here due to the limited scope of the study.<sup>123</sup> For example, the Federal Chancellery supports integration projects from both national and Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) resources. In 2025, 39 of the 148 projects supported (26%) focused on the labour market or labour market integration. The funding volume for these projects totalled EUR 6.2 million.<sup>124</sup>

#### **Infobox 4: Illustrative example of the significance of measures and initiatives for sustainable labour market integration using the example of Ms M. T.**

Ms M. T., who worked as qualified lawyer in the administration of the city of Lviv in Ukraine, arrived in Austria with her two children in February 2022. After her arrival, she actively pursued re-entry into her legal professional field. She researched online, translated information on her own initiative and learned German through courses and self-study. Despite acquiring German language skills, she initially lacked profession-specific vocabulary, as this was not covered in the available courses. According to Ms M. T., her case officer at the Public Employment Service showed little interest in helping her find a job in her field. Instead, she was sent job advertisements for sales positions. Due to a lack of other options and with the support of her mentor of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber's Mentoring for Migrants programme, she began training as a legal assistant. By completing an internship as part of this training programme, Ms M. T. managed to start working in a law firm, where she was later offered part-time employment as legal assistant. In order to take up this job, she had to abandon the training, which she did not see as a disadvantage, since in the meantime her law degree had been formally recognized. Ms M. T. does not see the fact that she continues to work below her qualifications as a limitation. The decisive factor for her is that she is working in the legal field again. She also highlighted as supportive the childcare programme of the City of Vienna in the summer months, funding for German courses – although Ms M. T. also noted the poor quality of some of the funded courses – and the opportunity to participate in the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber's Mentoring for Migrants programme.<sup>125</sup>

Beyond the importance of personal motivation and goal orientation, which requires a degree of mental stability despite the experience of war (see [chapter 3.3.5](#)), Ms M. T.'s report underscores the relevance of funding and support structures, such as childcare, mentoring and internships in counteracting skills mismatch among migrants. At the same time, her experience points to challenges, including the lack of information in migrants' native languages, the limited range of profession-specific further training and language courses, and the fact that retraining in a non-specialist or lower-level field has a lower (perceived) value than the recognition of existing qualifications.

123 For an overview of the integration projects funded by the Federal Chancellery, see Federal Chancellery, n.d.

124 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025.

125 Interview with M. T., displaced person from Ukraine, employee in a law firm, 23 July 2025.

#### 4.3.1 Measures and initiatives relating to the recognition of foreign qualifications and professional licensing

In Austria, several measures aim to support migrants in the recognition process and thereby contribute to skills matching.

Relevant legislative changes:

##### ■ **Legal facilitations in recognition for persons granted asylum, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status and displaced persons from Ukraine**

The Recognition and Assessment Act,<sup>126</sup> which came into force in 2016, aims to simplify the recognition procedure (Austrian Parliament, 2016),<sup>127</sup> promote the labour market integration of people with foreign qualifications in jobs matching their skills, and facilitate access to recognition for refugees (Art. 1 Recognition and Assessment Act; Austrian Parliament, 2016). For persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status who are unable to submit the documents required for recognition due to their displacement, the competent authorities must establish the formal qualification by other means. Possible methods include practical or theoretical examinations, sample tests, work samples or expert opinions (Art. 8 Recognition and Assessment Act). With an amendment to the Recognition and Assessment Act<sup>128</sup> in 2022, this regulation was extended to displaced persons from Ukraine.

##### ■ **Practice as a nursing assistant during the recognition procedure**

Professional licensing in regulated professions is governed by complex requirements which vary by profession. These can be difficult for migrants to meet and may therefore contribute to skills mismatch (see [chapter 3.1.2](#)). In response to staff shortages in the health-care and nursing sector (Ammann, 2024:10; Austrian Parliament, 2022:6), measures were introduced in this field to allow nurses to work at an early stage and familiarize themselves with the Austrian care system.

Qualified nurses, nursing assistants and nursing assistants can be entered in the register of health-care professionals while completing supplementary examinations and work as a nursing assistant for a maximum<sup>129</sup> of two years.<sup>130</sup> Nursing professionals may, during this period and in parallel with their employment, complete the supplementary examinations required for recognition and acquire the German language skills necessary for professional licensing.<sup>131</sup> This option, introduced in 2022 for registered nurses and nursing associates<sup>132</sup>

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126 Recognition and Assessment Act, FLG I No. 37/2018, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 76/2022.

127 The Recognition Directive is decisive for the recognition of qualifications acquired within the EEA (with regards to regulated professions; Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications. OJ L 255, pp. 22–142).

128 Amendment to the Integration Act, the Recognition and Assessment Act and the Education Documentation Act 2020, FLG I No. 76/2022.

129 This deadline cannot be extended (Art. 31 para. 1a, Art. 89 para. 9 and 10 Health and Nursing Care Act).

130 Art. 89 para. 9 and 10 Health and Nursing Care Act.

131 Prerequisites for professional licensure in the health-care and nursing sector include (depending on the profession) German language skills at the B1-C1 level (except in the case of German-language training or at least one year of professional experience in a German-speaking country; see Contact points for persons with foreign qualifications, 2024; Egger et al., 2024:5).

132 Amendment to the Health Care and Nursing Act, the Regulation of Advanced Medical-Technical Services Act and the Paramedic Act, FLG I No. 82/2022.

and in 2023 for nursing assistants,<sup>133</sup> allows them to practise at a lower qualification level, or, in the case of nursing assistants, under the guidance and supervision of senior nursing staff. This enables them to familiarize themselves with the Austrian health system, gain work experience and develop their existing skills in the Austrian context (see also the illustrative example in [infobox 3](#)).

### ■ **Consideration of professional experience in the recognition process in the care sector**

To speed up and facilitate recognition, legislative amendments adopted in 2023<sup>134</sup> and 2024<sup>135</sup> explicitly provide that relevant professional experience must be taken into account in the recognition procedure (Austrian Parliament, 2024).

National measures:

### ■ **Contact points for persons with foreign qualifications**

To ensure that recognition procedures are as brief as possible and to facilitate the integration of migrants into the labour market in line with their qualifications (Contact points for persons with foreign qualifications, n.d.; Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:143), four contact points for people with foreign qualifications have been established nationwide.<sup>136</sup> The contact points provide free, multilingual counselling, guidance and support applicants in the recognition and assessment of their qualifications free of charge and work closely with the Public Employment Service and other authorities (ibid.). However, the contact points do not have any influence on the decision to impose compensatory measures.<sup>137</sup> Their services include, for example, clarifying whether formal recognition is necessary or possible, assisting with applications and obtaining certified translations of documents, and providing information on further education and counselling opportunities (Contact points for persons with foreign qualifications, n.d.).

The support provided to migrants in the recognition process through the contact points for persons with foreign qualifications<sup>138</sup> as well as through other initiatives, e.g. the project "Anerkannt" implemented by the NGO Inspire – Education and Participation and consultations by the Austrian Integration Fund<sup>139</sup> were identified as good practices. In 2022, the contact points received the "Global Validation of Prior Learning" award, which honours outstanding initiatives in the validation of competences (Panek, 2022).

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133 Amendment to the Health Care and Nursing Act 2023, FLG I No. 108/2023.

134 Ibid.

135 Amendment to the General Social Security Act, the Industrial Social Security Act, the Farmers' Social Security Act, the Basic Social Assistance Act, the Federal Care Allowance Act, the Health and Nursing Care Act and the Labour Market Policy Financing Act, FLG I No. 109/2024.

136 The contact points are established in accordance with the legal requirements of Art. 5 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals.

137 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

138 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025; Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025; Interview with Irene Strauss, Inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025; Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingenschlögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025.

139 Interview with Irene Strauss, Inspire – Education and Participation, 7 July 2025.

## ■ Integration Service for Professionals

The Integration Service for Professionals, established in 2023 at the Austrian Integration Fund as a contact point for foreign skilled workers and enterprises (Ammann, 2024:26), promotes skills matching among migrants through counselling<sup>140</sup> and reimbursement of costs.<sup>141</sup> As part of the counselling, the job profile is identified, the competent authorities and application processes (especially for the recognition of qualifications) are explained, and applications for financial support are processed. Reimbursable costs include those for the recognition and assessment of qualifications (including the cost of document translations and administrative fees) as well as for language examinations required for professional licensing as a medical doctor, dentist or pharmacist, up to an amount of EUR 2,500 (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024c:2f). In this way, migrants are encouraged to have their qualifications recognized;<sup>142</sup> support for recognition is therefore a key component of the measure, which also includes other aspects, such as advisory services and information provision. The target group includes persons granted asylum, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status, displaced persons from Ukraine, migrants with various residence permits (including the RWR Card and the RWR Card plus), EU citizens, and Austrian nationals with foreign qualifications (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024c:3). In the health sector<sup>143</sup> there are additional reimbursement options for tuition fees paid by individuals in the recognition process in order to complete compensatory measures at an Austrian university or university of applied sciences (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024a).

Selected initiatives:

## ■ Project "Check in plus" – to support recognition and job search for migrants with intermediate and higher qualifications

The project, available in Vienna, is implemented by the Counselling Centre for Migrants as counselling and support centre and funded by the Public Employment Service Vienna.<sup>144</sup> It supports migrants in the recognition of their qualifications and in preparing for their job search. The target group includes people with intermediate and higher qualifications, especially those with a degree in general medicine or dentistry, non-medical health-care staff (nurses, etc.), economists and technicians (Counselling Centre for Migrants, n.d.a). Participants receive financial support in the form of guidance and supervision.<sup>145</sup> In addition to support with recognition, the programme includes individualized advice, including the planning of suitable training measures and the provision of information on professional networking opportunities (job fairs, mentoring programmes; Counselling Centre for Migrants, n.d.b). The project therefore also features advisory services and information provision. To participate in the programme, registration as a jobseeker with the Public Employment Service and German language skills at level B1 are required, among other things (Counselling Centre for Migrants, n.d.a). Each year, 400 people receive counselling through the project. In recent years, the

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140 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025. Consultations are also offered to migrants before they move and information is made available to them.

141 Written input: Tetyana Teufel, Austrian Integration Fund, 31 July 2025.

142 Ibid.

143 According to the funding guidelines, the following professions are covered: Doctor (human medicine), certified health care and nursing professional, medical-technical services with tertiary education qualification, midwife, see Austrian Integration Fund, 2024a:2.

144 Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingschlögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025.

145 Ibid.

programme has particularly supported refugee doctors, accompanying 250 of them through the recognition process (Counselling Centre for Migrants, n.d.b).

- **Project "Anerkannt!" ("Recognized!") – support for the recognition of qualifications and job search for migrant women**

As part of the target group-specific project "Recognized!", the non-profit association Inspire – Education and Participation, based in Styria, provides counselling and support to migrant women in the recognition of their qualifications and in their job search. The association also connects participants with other migrant women who are employed in positions commensurate with their qualifications,<sup>146</sup> so that the project also features networking between workers and employers.

#### 4.3.2 Measures and initiatives to identify informally acquired skills

Skills assessments and evaluations implemented by various actors promote skills matching by making informally acquired skills of migrants visible.<sup>147</sup> Some projects focus specifically on migrant groups, while others are open to all persons, including migrants.

National measures:

- **Work trials**

As discussed in [chapter 3](#) (see [chapter 3.1.2](#), [chapter 3.2.2](#) and [chapter 3.3.1](#)), employers are often unable to assess the competences of migrants. Work trials can help counter this and were repeatedly mentioned in the interviews conducted for this study as an important measure for skills matching.<sup>148</sup> This measure, implemented by the Public Employment Service, is used to assess a person's professional suitability in connection with the potential conclusion of a specific employment relationship with a particular employer. The target group includes registered unemployed persons who are unable to provide proof of their qualifications and competences. The federal guideline of the Public Employment Service mentions migrants as an example target group for this measure (Public Employment Service, 2025c:61).

- **Competence checks for persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status**

These competence checks record the qualifications, professional experience and competences of persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status registered with the Public Employment Service (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:146). The formats differ among the federal provinces (Gatterbauer, 2019:135) and may include counselling and information on various topics, psychological tests

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146 Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025.

147 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025.

148 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025.

and – where available – short work trials (Bogdán et al., 2017:14; Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:146). A final report is prepared on the basis of the assessment (Bogdán et al., 2017:14). On the basis of this competence check, the Public Employment Service supports the target group in their job search and through (re-)qualification measures (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:146).

Selected initiative:

#### ■ **Project MIKA: "Mit Kompetenz ankommen" ("Arriving with expertise")**

The project "Mit Kompetenz ankommen", implemented by the Austrian Youth Workers' Movement, focuses on the assessment of competences among displaced persons, persons granted asylum, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status, and other migrants. Following the competence assessment, the project offers follow-up support (e.g. for the recognition process), as well as practical work placements and specialized language courses for commercial and administrative professions (Austrian Young Workers Movement, n.d.). While the main focus is on skills assessment, the project also covers the recognition of qualifications along with advisory services and information provision.

#### 4.3.3 Measures and initiatives for (re-)qualification

Differences between education systems and Austria's strong focus on formal certification contribute to skills mismatch (see [chapter 3.1.1](#)). When recognition of foreign qualifications is not possible, individuals must complete a new course of training in Austria to obtain a formal qualification (Lindner et al., 2020:18). Requalification measures aim to build on existing competences so that they can be used in the labour market. Such measures are implemented through the programmes of the Public Employment Service and may, where necessary, be accompanied by targeted support activities (e.g. orientation for persons whose first language is not German, specialized courses to improve access to higher-skilled labour market segments, and job search and application assistance; Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:142). According to studies on persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection in Austria, requalification is essential for this group to gain a foothold in the labour market in the medium term (Gatterbauer, 2019:135).

In view of qualification measures, the interviewed experts referred to projects that aim to recognize or make use of skills acquired in working life, such as the project "Du kannst was" which focuses on apprenticeship qualifications that are in demand on the Austrian labour market and is open to both persons with and without a migrant background (Chamber of Labour Upper Austria, 2025).<sup>149</sup> Adult vocational training and workplace-related training (AQUA) were also considered as important company-based and practical professional qualifications funded by the Public Employment Service.<sup>150</sup> Bilingual training and further-training programmes were also mentioned as a good practice to qualification processes.<sup>151</sup> According to one expert, these programmes work well if when participants already have sufficient knowledge and are familiar with

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149 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

150 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025.

151 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025; Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025.

technical terms in their first language.<sup>152</sup> The Public Employment Service is currently gathering initial positive experiences with bilingual training courses in which participants do not yet have sufficient knowledge.<sup>153</sup>

National measures:

### ■ Labour foundations

Experts interviewed for this study<sup>154</sup> repeatedly cited labour foundations, which serve the vocational re-integration of persons who have become unemployed, as a relevant labour market policy instrument. Their focus, however, is on vocational reorientation and upskilling (Public Employment Service, 2024c). For example, the JUST 2 JOB – placement foundation supports young adults whose initial vocational training is not recognized or usable by providing them with (advanced) vocational training leading to subsequent employment (Aufleb, n.d.; Public Employment Service, 2024b; Public Employment Service Styria, 2024).

### ■ Skilled worker intensive training

A key qualification measure in the field of intermediate vocational education and apprenticeship training is the Skilled Worker Intensive Training (*Facharbeiter:innen-Intensivausbildung*).<sup>155</sup> The training is a qualification programme<sup>156</sup> run by the Public Employment Service that enables adults without a recognized or usable vocational qualification to obtain an apprenticeship qualification within a shortened apprenticeship training period (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:94; Vienna Employment Promotion Fund, n.d.).<sup>157</sup> The measure is therefore relevant for migrants whose vocational training or experience is not recognized in Austria – for example, because the curricula differ significantly or because the person has no formal certificates (Moshhammer et al., 2024:196). The aim of the training is to improve participants' labour market opportunities while serving as an important instrument for reducing skills shortages. The training is offered in numerous apprenticeships (Public Employment Service, 2025b) – for example, in climate-relevant professions such as electrical engineering and plumbing within the framework of the eco booster (*Öko-Booster*) project (Chamber of Labour Vienna, n.d.; Moshhammer et al., 2024:21), which is particularly relevant for persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status.<sup>158</sup> The training is implemented by external training institutions (e.g. BFI, Jugend am Werk, waff) on behalf of the Public Employment Service (Vocational Training Institute Lower Austria, n.d.; Vienna Employment Promotion Fund, n.d.; Moshhammer et al., 2024:197). All persons registered with the Public Employment Service (including migrants)

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152 If individuals do not have a command of technical terms in their first language, support in their first language is not necessarily needed for technical terminology. Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

153 Written input: Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 13 October 2025.

154 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

155 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025; Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025; Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingenschlögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025; Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

156 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025; Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

157 The statutory apprenticeship period lasts between two and four years, depending on the occupation, see [österreich.gv.at](https://www.oe.gv.at), 2025. The apprenticeship diploma can be made up for within 12 to 24 months as part of the Skilled Worker Intensive Training, see Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:95.

158 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

are eligible to participate, provided that they fulfil<sup>159</sup> the participation requirements.<sup>160</sup> During training, participants receive a training allowance from the Public Employment Service to cover their living expenses (Vienna Employment Promotion Fund, n.d.). In 2023, 35 per cent of participants were non-Austrian nationals (Moshhammer et al., 2024:198).

## ■ Training and further-training allowances of the Public Employment Service

The cost of education and training required for migrants to make use of their existing on the Austrian labour market represent a barrier and thereby contribute to skills mismatch (see [chapter 3.1.2](#) and [chapter 3.3.4](#)). Funding opportunities are therefore an important measure to help expand competences and counteract skills mismatch. The Public Employment Service provides financial support for labour-market-related education and training measures in accordance with the Public Employment Service's Federal Directive on Training and Further-Training Allowances (Public Employment Service, 2025c). Allowances can be granted only if agreed between the Public Employment Service and the applicant or approved electronically by the Public Employment Service.<sup>161</sup> Depending on the specific allowance, certain eligibility criteria must be met, e.g. a maximum gross monthly income of the applicant (Public Employment Service, 2025c:24ff). According to a data analysis by the former Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, the majority of recipients of Public Employment Service training and further-training allowances were non-Austrian nationals (57% in 2023; Moshhammer et al., 2024:114f). There is no legal entitlement to receive an allowance (Art. 34 para. 3 Public Employment Service Act).

- **The allowance for course costs** (e.g. course fees, learning materials) pursues the labour market policy objective of eliminating or reducing cost-related obstacles that may arise from participation in vocational training, further-training or career-orientation measures, or from job search activities considered relevant from a labour market perspective (Public Employment Service, 2025c:24). The allowance is granted for participation in courses on the open education market and, according to research findings, particularly improves the employment prospects of foreign nationals in particular (Eppel et al., 2022:4,33).
- **The allowance for ancillary course costs** (e.g. travel and accommodation costs) aims to eliminate or prevent cost-related barriers associated with participation in specific labour-market-relevant measures, such as vocational training, further-training measures or work trials, as well as participation in a labour foundation when the distance from the place of residence creates additional expenses (Public Employment Service, 2025c:52).
- The **subsistence allowance** serves to secure livelihoods during participation in specific labour-market-relevant measures, such as vocational training and further-training measures or work trials,

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159 The prerequisite is a referral from the Public Employment Service and completion of the clearing phase, see Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:95. Further participation requirements vary depending on the training provider and the profession and include, for example, good knowledge of German (Jugend am Werk, 2025a and 2025b).

160 Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

161 In the case of an electronic application for support, the Public Employment Service checks whether all eligibility requirements are met and whether placement without the granting of support appears unrealistic in the foreseeable future (Public Employment Service, 2025c:31).

as well as during participation in a labour foundation. In 2023, almost half of the funding recipients (43%) were non-Austrian nationals (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:183).

Selected initiative:

#### ■ **Project "Du kannst was" ("You can do it")**

The project "Du kannst was" offers persons with several years of professional experience,<sup>162</sup> but without a formal qualification – or whose vocational qualification is not recognized in Austria – the opportunity to obtain a formal vocational qualification (Chamber of Labour Upper Austria, 2025). The project is implemented in five Austrian federal provinces by the Chamber of Labour, Economic Chamber and the respective federal province as project partners (ibid.).

#### 4.3.4 Advisory services and information provision

Lack of knowledge about the Austrian labour market and related topics contributes to skills mismatch (chapter 3.3.3). Counselling and information services address this issue and enable migrants to compensate for information gaps.

Selected initiatives:

#### ■ **Project "StartWien" ("StartVienna")**

One project that addresses information gaps and related skills mismatching is the City of Vienna's StartWien project. It offers migrants individual orientation talks and information events in over 20 languages, covering various topics (StartVienna, n.d.a). Comprehensive information on the world of work in Austria is made available at events and on the project website (StartVienna, n.d.b).

#### ■ **Start-up support for persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection**

This programme, implemented by Interface, an agency of the City of Vienna, provides targeted advice to persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status in Vienna in the first two years after being granted status, including advice on job search. As part of the comprehensive counselling process, participants' level of education and professional experience are recorded and possible pathways and opportunities in the Viennese labour market are developed. Clients are actively supported in their job search and guided through the individual steps (Interface Vienna, 2025:18).

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162 The project is geared toward over 20 different professions, see Chamber of Labour Upper Austria, 2025.

## ■ **Project "KomIn – Kompetenzorientierte Intensivberatung" ("Competence-oriented intensive counselling")**

The association *migrare*, based in Upper Austria, supports migrants who are registered as jobseekers with the Public Employment Service by providing intensive, multilingual counselling and assistance with job applications and job search. Counselling focuses on the competences of the project participants. Access to the project is through referral by a Public Employment Service counsellor (*migrare*, n.d.).

### 4.3.5 Language support measures

Given that insufficient German language skills are one of the major drivers of skills mismatch (see [chapter 3.3.2](#)), and that proficiency in German is often a prerequisite for professional licensing in regulated professions (see [chapter 3.1.2](#)), job-specific German language courses are an important instrument for addressing skills mismatch.<sup>163</sup>

National measures:

## ■ **German courses by the Austrian Integration Fund**

In accordance with the Integration Act, the Austrian Integration Fund provides German language courses throughout Austria.<sup>164</sup> The range of courses<sup>165</sup> has been made more flexible in recent years (e.g. courses at off-peak hours, courses with childcare options) to enable working people and people with caring responsibilities to participate and to promote their German language acquisition.<sup>166</sup>

## ■ **Austrian Integration Fund language portal**

Another key measure for learning German is the Austrian Integration Fund's language portal ([www.sprachportal.at](http://www.sprachportal.at)).<sup>167</sup> This online learning platform was relaunched in 2023 and provides a wide range of digital learning materials, topic-specific courses and resources, all available free of charge. The portal serves in particular to improve the compatibility of employment and language acquisition (Ammann, 2024:26). The language portal also offers specialized German courses for the health-care and nursing sector (Sprachportal, n.d.b). The German for Work course series also aims to prepare students for everyday working life and provides information on various topics such as the application process and professional profiles. The series is open to learners at all language levels (Sprachportal, n.d.a).

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163 Interview with M. T., displaced person from Ukraine, employee in a law firm, 23 July 2025; Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025; Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025; Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025; Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025; Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingenschlögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025; Interview with Monika Nigl, Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - waff, 22 July 2025.

164 Art. 2 para. 4 Integration Act, FLG I No. 68/2017, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 76/2022.

165 In accordance with Art. 4 para. 2 of the Integration Act, the Austrian Integration Fund offers German language and literacy courses for persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection and Ukrainian displaced persons aged 15 and over.

166 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025.

167 Ibid.; Written input: Tetyana Teufel, Austrian Integration Fund, 31 July 2025.

## ■ Austrian Integration Fund German courses in enterprises

Another measure by the Austrian Integration Fund to counteract skills mismatch is the promotion of job-related and job-preparatory German language courses held directly in enterprises or at nearby course institutes.<sup>168</sup> The courses are designed for persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection and displaced persons from Ukraine who are either already employed or potential employees of the company. The courses provide language training (from literacy up to C1) and instruction on values and orientation (Austrian Integration Fund, n.d.c). The measure was piloted in 2023 and has been available nationwide since 2024 (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024b).

Enterprises also receive support from the Integration Service for Professionals in the planning and implementation of German language courses (e.g. creation of suitable curricula, identifying appropriate training institutes and designing online German modules with sector-specific vocabulary; Austrian Integration Fund, n.d.b).

## ■ German courses by the Public Employment Service

The German language courses offered by the Public Employment Service primarily serve to facilitate labour market access for migrants (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:142), with the aim of subsequently enabling them to enter employment<sup>169</sup> or participate in training and further-training measures (ibid.). The Public Employment Service provides general German and literacy courses (as a basic qualification and in cooperation with the Austrian Integration Fund) as well as occupation-specific German language courses (ibid.). While, in principle, all migrants registered with the Public Employment Service have access to German language courses, these are in practice particularly relevant for persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024a:146). Due to the demographic composition of the clients (about one quarter are persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status), the Public Employment Service Vienna offers an especially wide range of German language courses.<sup>170</sup>

### 4.3.6 Measures and initiatives for competence-based placement and networking between workers and employers

With regard to the lack of professional networks, the experts interviewed for this study emphasized the relevance of job placement and interaction between enterprises and employees and referred to instruments such as job fairs<sup>171</sup> and internships.<sup>172</sup> The importance of the latter was also underlined as particularly valuable by the interviewed migrants as they enable participants to get to know the Austrian system in their

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168 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025.

169 Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingschlögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025.

170 Ibid.

171 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025.

172 Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025.

professional field and acquire specific knowledge that is relevant to employers when considering future employment (see [infobox 3](#) and [infobox 4](#)).

National measures:

### ■ **Public Employment Service competence matching**

The interviewed experts for this study identified the Public Employment Service's competence matching system as an important development in the field of skills matching.<sup>173</sup> The instrument, which was piloted in 2022 and has been in use since mid-2023 (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024b:1f), aims to reduce both the level and duration of unemployment (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2023:14) through more efficient and sustainable job placement – including for migrants without formal qualifications (Staudacher, 2023). Competence matching replaces the previous search mechanisms of the Public Employment Service and since 2024 its use has been mandatory for Public Employment Service counsellor (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2024b:2). The instrument also includes elements of competence assessment, recording formal qualifications and self-assessed competences.<sup>174</sup> However, soft skills (e.g. empathy, initiative, ability to work in a team, flexibility) are not included (Staudacher, 2023). An IT tool matches the competences entered by jobseekers with those sought by employers and displays corresponding results.<sup>175</sup>

### ■ **Interregional job placement**

As noted in [chapter 3.1.1](#), there is an imbalance between the supply of labour in the east (especially Vienna) and the availability of vacancies in western Austria, which can also increase skills mismatch in some cases. To address this regional imbalance, the Public Employment Service may place jobseekers in employment outside their region, within the limits set by law. A labour-market policy priority in this regard is the interregional placement of persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status (Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy, 2023:23; Public Employment Service, 2025a). The legal limits on interregional placement are set by Art. 9 para. 2 Unemployment Insurance Act<sup>176</sup> in the context of entitlement to unemployment benefit. Under this provision, employment is deemed reasonable if it can be reached within a reasonable time or suitable accommodation at the place of work is available. Furthermore, the right to choose one's place of residence is protected by the constitution<sup>177</sup> and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).<sup>178</sup> To ensure that interregional placement works well, the Public Employment Service and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber recommend that enterprises support workers in finding accommodation or provide housing (Public Employment Service, 2025a), offer information on childcare options and promote flexible working arrangements (e.g. teleworking, four-day week; Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2019).

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173 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025; Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025; Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025; Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025.

174 Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025.

175 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025.

176 Unemployment Insurance Act 1977, FLG I No. 609/1977, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 47/2025.

177 Art. 6 Constitutional Act on the general rights of citizens, ILG No. 142/1867, in the version of federal law FLG I No. 684/1988.

178 Art. 2 European Convention on Human Rights (Protocol No. 4), FLG III No. 434/1969, in the version of federal law FLG III No. 30/1998.

## ■ Career platforms

As highlighted in [chapter 3.3.3](#), a lack of information about career opportunities and the absence of networks contribute to skills mismatch. Career platforms help address these challenges.<sup>179</sup> The Austrian Integration Fund and the Integration Service for Professionals cooperate with enterprises to support recruitment through career platforms, bringing together employers and jobseekers in various formats.<sup>180</sup> Enterprises are brought together with jobseekers in various formats (Austrian Integration Fund, n.d.b). The target groups include persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status as well as displaced persons from Ukraine who take part in ÖIF courses (Austrian Integration Fund, n.d.d), as well as highly qualified migrants through the career platforms of the Integration Service for Professionals.<sup>181</sup> Candidates are invited by the Austrian Integration Fund based on a preliminary interview with the enterprise, in which staffing requirements and qualification requirements are assessed. The career platforms were launched by the Austrian Integration Fund in 2022 (Austrian Integration Fund, 2023a). Since then, 19,000 persons granted asylum, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status, and displaced persons from Ukraine have taken part on 150 career platforms (as of August 2025; see Austrian Integration Fund, 2025). Partner enterprises include IKEA, the Austrian post office, McDonald's, ISS, Spar, REWE, Lidl, and Marriott Vienna (Austrian Integration Fund, n.d.d).

Selected initiatives:

## ■ Sustainable job placement through "More than one perspective" (MTOP)

MTOP is a Vienna-based social enterprise that acts as an interface between refugees and third-country nationals (MTOP-Associates) as well as enterprises and brings them together (Lindner et al., 2020:32; More than one perspective, n.d.). MTOP maintains close contact with enterprises in Vienna and the surrounding area and therefore has insights into the corporate culture and job requirements, which helps to identify suitable participants for recommendation.<sup>182</sup> According to experience reports, placement through initiatives such as MTOP increases the likelihood of employment and accelerates job searches (Lindner et al., 2020:19ff). Personal contact between MTOP associates and enterprises is considered a key success factor and enterprises also view intermediary organizations such as MTOP positively (Lindner et al., 2020:24–32).

## ■ Job search support and networking with enterprises through "FairMatching - job placement and empowerment"

The non-profit organization FairMatching supports people with a refugee or migrant background in Salzburg in their search for work. It creates low-threshold meeting formats for refugees and enterprises. The target group includes persons with very specific (and often difficult-to-place) competences or unclear occupational profiles, high-potential candidates whose qualifications require individual career planning, and persons with unspecific or otherwise difficult-to-place professional profiles. For enterprises, the association offers diversity

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179 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025.

180 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025.

181 Ibid.

182 Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025.

workshops and coaching to minimize cultural barriers, thereby addressing both sides of the employment relationship (Fair Matching – Arbeitsvermittlung und Empowerment, n.d.).

#### 4.3.7 Mentoring programmes

In Austria, there are two mentoring programmes for qualified migrants that support their integration into the labour market (Achkar, 2025:40). Mentoring programmes consist of several components (in particular advisory services and information provision by mentors and support in building networks) and thus address, in particular, the lack of access to information and networks (chapter 3.3.3).

Selected initiatives:

##### ■ **Project "Mentoring für Migrant:innen" ("Mentoring for migrants")**

The project "Mentoring für Migrant:innen" – an initiative of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Austrian Integration Fund and the Public Employment Service – (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2025b) was repeatedly cited by interviewed experts as an important initiative that promotes skills matching among migrants (see also Achkar, 2025:65ff).<sup>183</sup> For each mentee, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber assigns a mentor, who accompanies and advises their mentee for a period of six months (Austrian Integration Fund, n.d.a). Migrants who hold at least an apprenticeship qualification or equivalent training, have access to the Austrian labour market, possess German language skills at level B1 or higher, and have lived in Austria for no more than ten years are eligible to apply (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2023). Evaluation results show a high level of satisfaction among mentees, with perceived professional similarity between mentor and mentee correlating with higher satisfaction and a stronger perceived impact (Neuwirth, 2015).

##### ■ **"KOMPASS - Karrierewege für Zuwanderinnen" ("Career pathways for migrant women")**

"KOMPASS - Karrierewege für Zuwanderinnen" is a mentoring project that specifically supports women with a migration background and little work experience in entering the labour market (Achkar, 2025:50; Austrian Integration Fund, 2023b; Integration projects Austria, n.d.; Karriere, 2023). The project has been implemented since 2021 by the Austrian Integration Fund in cooperation with the job platform [karriere.at](https://www.karriere.at) and partner enterprises such as Siemens and Austrian Federal Railways (Austrian Federal Railways, 2025; Siemens, n.d.). Participation requires access to the labour market and German language skills at A2 level. Over a four-month period, participants are accompanied by mentors, take part in workshops, group coaching sessions and job application training (Integration projects Austria, n.d.). Partner enterprises offer information events and internships (ibid.) and support participants in expanding their professional networks (Austrian Integration Fund, 2023b). In the first round, 100 migrant women took part in the project; more than half subsequently found suitable entry-level internships, additional training corresponding to their qualifications and concrete employment (ibid.). The programme targets migrant women of all educational levels and aims in particular to

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<sup>183</sup> Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025.

facilitate adequate employment entry for highly qualified migrant women (Austrian Federal Railways, 2025; Karriere, 2023; Kurier, 2022; Siemens, n.d.).

#### 4.3.8 Promoting diversity in enterprises

As outlined in [chapter 3](#) (see [chapter 3.2.1](#) and [chapter 3.3.1](#)), a negative attitude and (conscious or unconscious) exclusion of migrants in enterprises contributes to skills mismatch. Measures promoting diversity and an open corporate culture help counter this driver.<sup>184</sup>

National measure:

##### ■ **Impulse counselling for enterprises**

Interviewees repeatedly mentioned Impulse counselling for enterprises, a programme<sup>185</sup> through which the Public Employment Service offers enterprises of all sizes free advisory services on various topics (Moshhammer et al., 2024:141). One possible area of counselling includes the integration of persons with a migration background (Public Employment Service, 2024d:13). According to evaluation results, participating enterprises were most interested in the topic of in-company training, while diversity and inclusion was chosen by only a small number of enterprises (Endel et al., 2023:13f).

Selected initiative:

##### ■ **Service and information page of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber**

The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber provides companies with tips on recruiting people with a migrant background and refugees (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2025a).<sup>186</sup>

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184 Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOP), 9 July 2025.

185 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

186 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025.

## 5. CHALLENGES AND RESULTING INSIGHTS

This section describes challenges in implementing measures and initiatives to address skills (mis)match and presents findings based on these challenges. According to the experts interviewed for this study, the main challenges concern language acquisition and recognition of qualifications. Other issues highlighted included the need to strengthen diversity management at the level of federal provinces, expand support and cooperation for enterprises, and improve outreach to certain groups of migrants.

### 5.1 Language acquisition

As existing studies and experts interviewed for this study have noted, the extensive range of language measures can only address the challenge of insufficient German language skills to a limited extent.<sup>187</sup> For example, a recent study on persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status from the Syrian Arab Republic in Austria underlined that several factors limit the effectiveness of German-language courses (Csarmann et al., 2025:128). These include long waiting times between consecutive course levels, the quality of courses, the practical applicability of what is learned, and the difficulty of reconciling work and language learning.

As emphasized during the expert interviews, some migrants remain trapped in a "language course spiral":<sup>188</sup>

 "The Public Employment Service says you cannot get anywhere without German and a lot is spent on language courses for that reason. I might send people [without German skills] to a mobile phone shop, and then they stay in the mobile phone shop, or in a barbershop, or they stay in a Turkish or Arab supermarket. But they don't move on from there; they don't get [...] a qualified job [...]. That's why there's a constant push to take more German courses, even when people have already completed Austrian Integration Fund courses – they often do another one because they may have a certificate, but it doesn't work in practice. This has been common Public Employment Service practice for years. Without sufficient language skills, nothing works."<sup>189</sup>

At the same time, several experts noted that language learning also takes place in the workplace, and therefore faster labour market integration can itself support language acquisition.<sup>190</sup>

The Austrian Expert Council for Integration promotes the approach of "entering the labour market early to work consistently on language skills". It has stressed the need for greater flexibility, for example by

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187 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025; Interview with Monika Nigl, Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - waff, 22 July 2025.

188 Migrants can attend courses offered by the Austrian Integration Fund twice, after which they are initially barred from attending further courses. People who have been barred by the Austrian Integration Fund or who, despite having a course certificate, do not have the relevant knowledge in practice are sent back to courses by the Public Employment Service, as according to the Public Employment Service they are not employable due to their low language level, although they are also barred after completing two courses and then attend courses at the Austrian Integration Fund again. Interview with Milica Tomic-Schwingschlögl, Public Employment Service Vienna, 15 July 2025.

189 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

190 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025.

adjusting supplementary income limits and providing individually tailored support programmes, to improve the compatibility of employment and participation in language courses (Expert Council for Integration, 2024:80).

To address the challenge that migrants remain caught in a "language course spiral" and spend long periods of time solely focused on learning German, while falling behind in terms of professional experience, a new integration programme and an integration database is currently being developed, as foreseen in the government programme (Austrian People's Party et al., 2025:98). The database is intended to enable the relevant authorities and agencies to better understand what professional and labour market experience exists and what integration and labour market measures from various agencies (including those beyond the Integration Act) have already been completed.<sup>191</sup> Based on this information, authorities are better able to assess which further job placement measures are appropriate – for example, whether to recommend a general or a vocational German course, or initiate recognition of qualifications. According to the expert from the Federal Chancellery interviewed for this study, this measure is expected to enhance skills matching, as it contributes to improved cooperation between different institutions and promotes the development of tailored labour market integration pathways.<sup>192</sup>

## 5.2 Recognition

Although there is a strong awareness in Austria of the complexity surrounding the recognition of foreign qualifications, no fundamental simplification of the system has yet been achieved (Hadj Abdou and Ebner, 2025:36). For many groups, recognition remains difficult – as reflected in the low recognition rates (see [chapter 3.1.2](#)) – leading to more training courses being completed instead.<sup>193</sup>

With regard to the health-care and nursing sector, a needs assessment commissioned by the Austrian Integration Fund also emphasizes that the facilitated access to professional practice (see [chapter 3.1.2](#)) must be considered in connection with residence status. If individuals fail to meet the requirements for professional registration within two years, they risk losing both their professional licence and, consequently, their residence permit (RWR Card). To avoid this, qualified nursing staff often apply for recognition at a lower level than their original qualification (e.g. as nursing assistants rather than as qualified health-care and nursing professionals), since the supplementary requirements are easier and therefore quicker to fulfil (Egger et al., 2024:5).

Contrary to the legal provisions (see [chapter 4.3.1](#)),<sup>194</sup> the professional experience of migrants is often not taken into account in the recognition process in the care sector, as one expert interviewed for this study highlighted.<sup>195</sup> Overall, experts stressed that professional experience should be given greater consideration in order to facilitate recognition.<sup>196</sup>

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191 Interview with Ian Innerhofer, Federal Chancellery, 10 July 2025.

192 Ibid.

193 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

194 See Art. 31 para. 1 and Art. 89 para. 6 Health Care and Nursing Act.

195 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

196 Ibid.

The cost of compensation measures for recognition can pose a major barrier for migrants with limited financial resources (chapter 3.1.2). An expert interviewed for this study therefore pointed to the need for increased financial support options.<sup>197</sup>

One positive development aimed at reducing the complexity of admission procedures for third-country nationals to the Austrian labour market is the introduction of pre-checks of formal qualifications. These involve a database recording foreign educational institutions and qualification levels, as well as their comparability (Hadj Abdou and Ebner, 2025:36). Expanding such a database has proven highly complex<sup>198</sup> and is currently limited in scope.<sup>199</sup> At present, pre-checks are being used for applications for RWR Cards from Indonesia and the Philippines (ibid.).

### 5.3 Support for enterprises

As shown in chapter 4, labour market policy measures are primarily aimed at employees, while comparatively fewer focus on employers. However, as highlighted in the expert interviews conducted for this study, there are also information gaps on the part of enterprises. For example, many employers are not aware that they can in many cases employ migrants without formal recognition of their qualifications, provided they consider the person's skills to be sufficient.<sup>200</sup> Enterprises also often lack knowledge about available funding opportunities.<sup>201</sup> Interviewed experts therefore identified a need for awareness-raising initiatives, targeted support, and closer cooperation with companies.<sup>202</sup>

### 5.4 Measures at the level of the federal provinces

Experts interviewed for this study emphasized the need for regional measures and a "welcoming culture in the federal provinces"<sup>203</sup> to encourage migrants to remain in Austria's western federal provinces<sup>204</sup> and to promote interregional placement.<sup>205</sup> Specifically mentioned were measures to promote the early inclusion of migrants in the regional labour market,<sup>206</sup> housing policy measures<sup>207</sup> and measures to promote diversity,<sup>208</sup> including the development of diversity management at regional level.<sup>209</sup> Research findings on persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection in Austria also point to the positive effects of housing support in terms of advice on staying which consequently has a positive effect on the labour market integration of these persons (Dellinger and Huber, 2021:11).

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197 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

198 Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025.

199 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025; Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

200 Interview with Judith Hörlsberger, Counselling Centre for Migrants, 7 July 2025.

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid; Interview with Bojan Kumm, More Than One Perspective (MTOPI), 9 July 2025.

203 Written input: Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 13 October 2025.

204 Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025.

205 Interview with Josef Hochwald, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism, 26 June 2025.

206 Ibid; Interview with Gabriele Straßegger, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 9 July 2025.

207 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

208 Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

209 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

## 5.5 Limited outreach to women arriving through family reunification

A key challenge in addressing skills mismatch and labour market integration of migrants overall is the limited outreach to some migrant groups. For example, women arriving in Austria through family reunification – who make up the majority of persons migrating to Austria under this pathway (Ammann and Stiller, 2025:8ff) – are often not registered with the Public Employment Service and are therefore difficult to reach.<sup>210</sup> As a result, there are few measures specifically aimed at this group.<sup>211</sup> Initiatives that specifically support hard-to-reach groups – such as women who come to Austria through family reunification – were therefore considered as particularly relevant by the interviewed experts.<sup>212</sup> In this context, the activities of the association Nachbarinnen (Neighbours),<sup>213</sup> which supports migrant women through outreach work, were mentioned.<sup>214</sup> Interviewed experts called for the expansion of existing support measures which aim to engage this group of migrant women,<sup>215</sup> to support them in entering the labour market,<sup>216</sup> and help counteract potential dependency relationships.<sup>217</sup>

## 5.6 Psychological support

As outlined in the section on drivers ([chapter 3.3.5](#)), psychological strain associated with migrants – especially in the context of experiences of displacement – can also represent a barrier to sustainable labour market integration. This gives rise to a high and currently unmet need for psychosocial support services, such as therapy places, as well as for trauma-sensitive training and continuing education programmes for counsellors working in the field of labour market integration (Csarmann et al., 2025:131).

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210 Interview with Maria Kaun, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 26 June 2025.

211 The Integration Service for Skilled Workers offers various counselling services for family members of recruited skilled workers, see Hadj Abdou and Ebner, 2025:23; Austrian Integration Fund, n.d.b. Support for women who have joined their husbands who have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection is offered in Vienna by Interface Wien. In recent years, mainly Syrian women have been advised as part of the project Startbegleitung (start support; Interface Vienna, 2025:11ff).

212 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

213 The activities of the non-profit association Nachbarinnen (Neighbours) aim to reach out to isolated migrant women and promote their integration. Activities include home visits, counselling and assistance with administrative procedures (e.g. Public Employment Service). The participating women are supported by trained social workers from their community (see Nachbarinnen in Wien, 2024).

214 Interview with Roland Sauer, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 9 July 2025.

215 Ibid.

216 Interview with Gabriele Schmid, Chamber of Labour Vienna, 30 June 2025.

217 Interview with Florian Zuckerstätter, Public Employment Service, 24 June 2025.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

As this study has shown, migrants in Austria are particularly affected by skills mismatch, as they often work in occupations that do not correspond to their qualifications. The extent and drivers of this mismatch vary across migrant groups and include systemic, Austria-specific factors (e.g. complex recognition procedures), employer-related factors (e.g. company culture and size), as well as individual factors on the part of migrants (e.g. insufficient language proficiency).

Given the heterogeneity of migrants and their life situations, as well as the broad range of drivers for skills mismatch, a combination of different measures is essential. Such measures should contribute to creating access to professional opportunities and to fostering an open and non-discriminatory environment in which migrants can fully apply their potential and competences (Platt et al., 2022:369).

As the study shows, Austria has a wide range of measures and initiatives aimed directly or indirectly at reducing skills mismatch and promoting skills matching. While research findings are available for some of these measures and initiatives, there is little to no evidence on the effectiveness of others in terms of skills matching. Further research in this area could generate policy-relevant insights.

Particularly challenging with regard to reducing skills mismatch are language acquisition and the continuing complexity of the recognition of foreign qualifications. A number of measures are currently being developed or planned, which, if implemented effectively, are expected to have a positive impact on these ongoing challenges. These include, for example, an integration database designed to improve coordination between institutions and enable customized labour market integration pathways, as well as enhanced cooperation with third countries to establish qualification databases facilitating the comparability of credentials.

Most measures and initiatives in Austria focus on employees. By contrast, initiatives that primarily target cooperation with and support for employers to promote employment in line with migrants' qualifications and skills remain underrepresented. This is an area where greater emphasis could be placed.

Finally, strengthening measures at provincial and regional level to promote interregional placement and retention of migrant workers also appears advisable, as indicated by the findings of this study.

# ANNEX

## A.1 List of abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation
European Centre for the Development of Professional Training	CEDEFOP
European Convention on Human Rights	ECHR
European Economic Area	EEA
European Employment Services	EURES
European Free Trade Association	EFTA
European Labour Force Survey	LFS
European Migration Network	EMN
European Network of Information Centres – National Academic Recognition Information Centres	ENIC-NARIC
European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations	ESCO
European Union	EU
Federal Law Gazette	FLG
Fundamental Rights Agency	FRA
Imperial Law Gazette	ILG

Term	Abbreviation
International Organization for Migration	IOM
International Standard Classification of Education	ISCED
International Standard Classification of Occupation	ISCO
More Than One Perspective	MTOP
National Contact Point	NCP
NEOS - New Austrian and Liberal Forum	NEOS
Non-governmental organization	NGO
Official Journal of the European Union	OJ
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD
Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies	PIAAC
Red-White-Red Card (Plus)	RWR Card (Plus)
Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union	TFEU
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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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 analyse 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](http://www.emn.at)).

