

EMN Study

Integration of Migrant Women in Austria: Policies and Measures

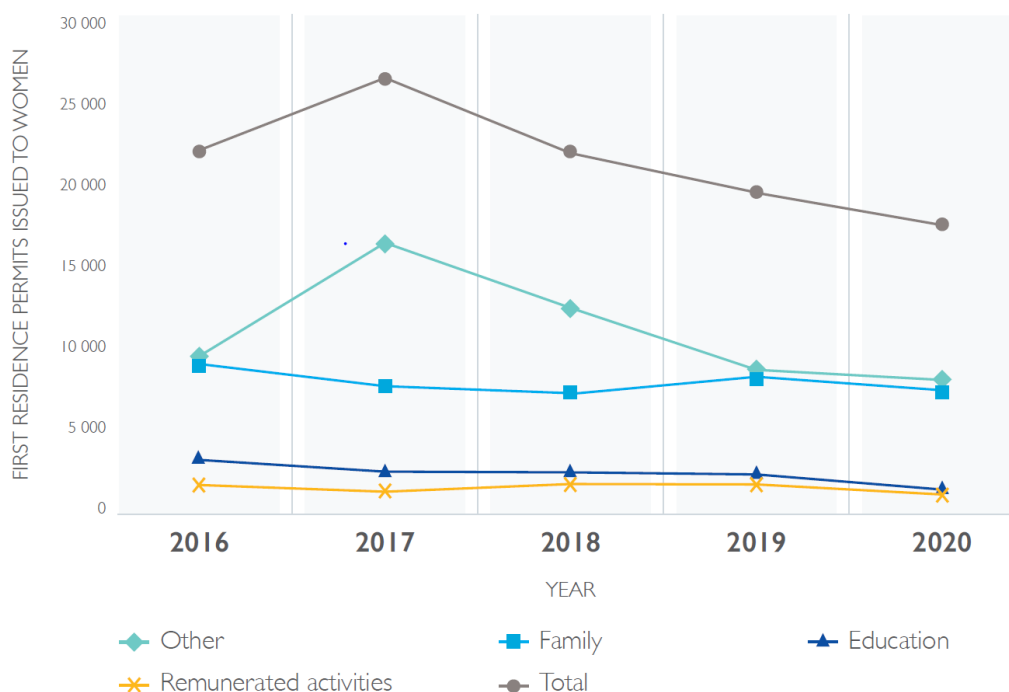
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SUMMARY

This study was conducted within the framework of the European Migration Network (EMN) on the basis of a common study template covering the reporting period 2016 to 2021 (2020 for statistics). The analyses are based in particular on Eurostat data and national statistics published in Austria as well as on key documents related to nationwide integration policy in Austria. Moreover, experts from governmental and non-governmental organizations provided inputs in interviews and in writing. The aim of the study is to identify the key challenges and possible opportunities for the integration of migrant women, and to understand whether and to what extent the particular situation of migrant women is taken into consideration in integration policies and measures. One focus is on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As is usual in the work of the EMN, the analyses focus on the group of third-country nationals.

While the immigration of migrant women from third countries to Austria decreased significantly after the peak in 2017 (2017: 27,037 first residence permits; 2020: 16,502 first residence permits; -39%), the number of female third-country nationals as a percentage of the female population in Austria increased slightly over the period under review (2016: 6.8%; 2020: 7.5%; +0.7 percentage points).

Figure 1: First residence permits issued to women from third countries by reason for issue, Austria (2016–2020)



Source: Eurostat

Women from third countries mainly come to Austria for “other” reasons (as refugees, for humanitarian reasons, other; 43%) and family reasons (41%). Specific integration challenges are associated both with these immigration reasons and with the gender of “woman”.

However, citizenship and the country of origin may also have a significant impact on integration outcomes, as national integration statistics and research reports show. Intersectionality, i.e. the way

in which gender overlaps with other personal characteristics, thus plays a particular role in the integration of migrant women.

According to Eurostat data, female third-country nationals are at a significant disadvantage in terms of employment, for example. The percentage of women from third countries aged between 20 and 64 who participate in the labour market in Austria is well below the equivalent figure for men (2020: 56% vs 80%). The activity rate for Austrians is higher overall (2020: 77% for Austrian women, 84% for Austrian men), with the difference between third-country nationals and Austrians being particularly pronounced for women. In 2020, a year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated measures to contain the virus, the activity rate among female third-country nationals fell significantly (-4 percentage points), while male third-country nationals and Austrian men were less affected (-1 percentage point in each case). Austrian women actually experienced a decline of only 0.2 percentage points. The national integration data published in relevant publications is only of limited use for the purposes of this study, however. In particular, the lack of data disaggregated by sex and citizenship and the separate reporting of certain countries do not allow the group of “female third-country nationals” to be analysed. Qualitative and quantitative studies on the integration of persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status in Austria also show that women’s employment trajectories in Austria did not develop as well as those of men. Preliminary evidence on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that women refugees (as opposed to men refugees) switched to inactivity more often and were less likely to return to employment. Representatives of the Federal Chancellery, Austrian Integration Fund and non-governmental organizations see patriarchal structures and the gender-specific distribution of roles when it comes to housework and childcare as an overarching challenge for the integration of migrant women in Austria. Experts assume that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a retraditionalization or reinforcement of existing gender roles, which increased the integration challenges for migrant women. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic is said to have reinforced traditional roles and worsened socio-economic conditions, two major risk factors for domestic violence. Migrant women are also particularly affected by the economic and social consequences of the pandemic due to the intersectionality of gender and citizenship. National integration data for the pandemic year of 2020 disaggregated by sex and citizenship have been published but do not allow for an analysis of female third-country nationals – the focus group of this study.

For several years, the integration of migrant women has been a priority of Austrian integration policy and a central work priority of the Federal Chancellery, which took over the responsibility for integration from the former Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and International Affairs in 2020. The Federal Chancellery describes women as “driving forces” and “multipliers” of integration. A particular goal of integration policy is therefore to promote gender equality and equal rights for men and women by strengthening self-determination and independence. To this end, the gender mainstreaming strategy and gender-specific measures are combined, according to the Federal Chancellery, and compulsory measures are also applied. The following documents relating to nationwide integration policy in Austria were examined as part of the study: Government Programme 2020–2024, National Action Plan on Integration, 50-Point Plan Towards the Integration of Persons Granted Asylum and Beneficiaries of Subsidiary Protection Status and Action Plan on Women’s Health. Concerning the target group “migrant women”, there is a particular focus on civic integration and on the empowerment of women and equality. Other important areas of national integration policy for women include language training, health and protection against violence. What is striking, however, is that the labour market integration of migrant women is mentioned far less frequently in key policy documents than the other areas. Most policies are aimed at women with a migrant background and not explicitly at women from

third countries or certain groups of migrant women. The policies target both first-generation immigrant women and also explicitly second-generation and third-generation women.

The amount of funding for specific integration measures for migrant women at national level more than tripled over the period under review (2016–2021), from €1.37 million in 2018 to €4.79 million in 2021. Hence, in Austria, a wide range of integration measures for women are in place at local, regional and national level. However, non-governmental organizations state that in order for such integration services to be used effectively, the target group must be informed about these services and provided with comprehensive support. Based on the indicators (a) mentions in literature, (b) positive evaluations, (c) awards and (d) confirmation by experts, the following three measures were identified as “good practice”:

- *Kompetenzcheck für Frauen*
Project on labour market integration for women aged 18 and over with international protection status who are registered with the Austrian Public Employment Service in Vienna, funded by the Vienna Public Employment Service.
- *Mama lernt Deutsch*
German courses and basic education for female migrants and asylum seekers living in Vienna, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, the City of Vienna and the European Social Fund.
- *NACHBARINNEN in Wien*
Outreach advice and support for social, health and education issues in Vienna for migrant and refugee women and their families from third countries, funded by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, the City of Vienna, the Public Employment Service and by donations.

There is political awareness of the specific impact that the coronavirus crisis has had on women. However, specific national integration policies – such as targeted strategies or action plans – are not known to have been developed to lessen the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the integration of migrant women specifically. Instead, policies relating to the situation of women and integration policies are both seen as cross-cutting issues in all political decisions and measures to tackle the pandemic. In terms of measures, emphasis has been placed on new measures (migrant women were actively informed about COVID-19) as well as on the expansion of existing measures (advice services now cover additional topics and needs) and their adaptation (switch to digital/online formats).

Nothing is known about the concrete development of new policies or the further development of existing policies for the integration of migrant women specifically. However, due to the relevance of the issue and because women with a migrant background are particularly affected by the pandemic, there are plans to expand and further develop integration measures aimed specifically at women, especially in the areas of the labour market, education, health and protection against violence. At a structural level, a dedicated women’s advice centre is to be set up in the Vienna Integration Centre to support female refugees and immigrants.