

Labour Migration in Times of Labour Shortages in Austria

Leila Hadj Abdou and Prisca Ebner

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Publisher: National Contact Point Austria in the
European Migration Network
International Organization for Migration,
Country Office for Austria
Nibelungengasse 13/4, 1010 Vienna
Tel.: +43 1 585 33 22 0
Email: iomvienna@iom.int, emnaustria@iom.int
Internet: <https://austria.iom.int>, www.emn.at

This publication was issued without formal editing by IOM. This publication was issued without IOM Research Unit (RES) endorsement. This publication was issued without official translation by IOM Translations Unit (TRS). It is an unofficial translation of the original version in German, entitled *Arbeitsmigration in Zeiten des Arbeitskräftemangels in Österreich*. Environmentally friendly paper was used for printing.

Translation: V.I.T.A. Schächter-Hold e.U.

Cover: Artwork Ivo Monnerjahn

Design: LoiblMonnerjahnPartner, Vienna

Required citation: Hadj Abdou, L. and P. Ebner (2024). Labour Migration in Times of Labour Shortages in Austria. International Organization for Migration (IOM), Vienna.

ISBN 978-3-9519978-6-5 (PDF), German edition

ISBN 978-3-9519978-7-2 (PDF), English edition

ISBN 978-3-9519978-8-9 (paperback), German edition

ISBN 978-3-9519978-9-6 (paperback), English edition

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PREFACE

This publication is based on Austria's contribution to the comparative EMN study "Labour migration in times of labour shortages", which was first prepared by Prisca Ebner (Research Associate, IOM Country Office for Austria) in collaboration with Leila Hadj Abdou (Deputy Head of the Policy Research and Migration Law Unit, IOM Country Office for Austria). Anna Ammann (Research Associate, IOM Country Office for Austria) and Martin Stiller (Legal Associate, IOM Country Office for Austria) supported them with the clarification of legal issues. Based on this work, the final contribution to the comparative EMN study and the publication at hand was prepared by Leila Hadj Abdou. Sarah Zischka and Ida Hamacher (Interns, IOM Country Office for Austria) also made an essential contribution to this study by transcribing interviews, formatting the document and working on references.

Special thanks are due to the experts who were interviewed or provided written information for this study and thus contributed significantly to this publication: Nobert Bichl (Coordinator, Contact Points for people who gained professional qualifications abroad/ Counseling Center for Migrants), Gudrun Biffl (Former Director of the Migration and Globalization Department, University for Continuing Education Krems; Associate, Austrian Institute of Economic Research), Julia Bock-Schappelwein (Research Associate, Austrian Institute of Economic Research), Viktor Fleischer (Expert Vocational Training and Skilled Workers, Federation of Austrian Industries), Margit Kreuzhuber (Head of WORK in AUSTRIA, Austrian Business Agency), Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr (Deputy Head of the Department for Social and Health Policy, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber), Johannes Peyrl (Officer in the Labour Market and Integration Department, Vienna Chamber of Labour), Eva Pfleger (Director Department V/A/2 - Residence and Citizenship, Federal Ministry of the Interior), and Sylvia Vana (Director, Department IV/5 – Siting and Business Services, Industrial Policy, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy). A big thank you also to Roland Sauer (Director Section III - Labour Market, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy) for his valuable contribution to the event "[Trendbarometer Migration and Asylum 2024 – Labour Migration from Non-EU Countries](#)" held by EMN Austria, which helped to better structure the section on legal and policy changes of this study. Many thanks also to the Department for the Employment of Foreign Nationals and the Department of Statistics of the Public Employment Service, and to the Fraud Prevention Office of the Financial Police at the Federal Ministry of Finance for the provision of data.

We would also like to thank the following colleagues from the IOM Country Office for Austria for their helpful comments: Marian Benbow Pfisterer (Chief of Mission), Saskia Heilemann (Head of the Policy Research and Migration Law Unit), Katie Klaffenböck (Senior Project Coordinator, Counter-Trafficking), and Alexander Spiegelfeld (Head of Integration/Labour Mobility and Social Inclusion Unit).

SUMMARY

The study “Labour migration in times of labour shortage in Austria” analyses the regulation, strategies and initiatives regarding the immigration of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment for the period 2021 to 2024.

In the wake of developments such as digitization, the green transition and the increasing ageing of our societies, the world of work is changing. This is resulting in a declining labour force and shifting requirements in terms of professional qualifications. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the supply of labour in the European Union (EU) is not sufficient to meet the resulting demand for labour and skilled workers. In addition to other measures, immigration from countries outside of the European Union represents therefore a relevant response to this development.

This underscores the need to focus on existing labour migration policy approaches and instruments, with regard to their effectiveness in times of labour shortages, and to address their potential shortcomings. The aim of this study is to make a contribution in this regard.

The results of the study show that Austria is one of the European Union countries with the highest number of job vacancies. The labour shortage affects both occupations with higher and lower qualifications.

During the observation period, Austria responded to the existing labour shortage with a number of legislative amendments. Particularly since the law reforms in 2022, a proactive, strategic approach to the recruitment of labour from third countries has been pursued, which is also reflected in partnership agreements, the establishment of a cross-government strategy committee for international skilled workers, as well as increasingly service-oriented bureaucratic processes.

Challenges in the strategic recruitment of skilled workers from third countries, as the study points out, are the comprehensive realization of a whole-of-government approach, the different educational and vocational training systems in the countries of origin and Austria, the (associated) complexity of the recognition system for qualifications acquired abroad, the lack of agreements on social rights and the expansion of a welcoming culture. According to the experts interviewed for this study, successful recruitment hinges on close cooperation with countries of origin, counselling services and liberal labour market access regulations for the family members of recruited workers. In addition to a whole-of-government approach, a comprehensive approach that encompasses everything from promoting the host country to providing support for workers who have already been recruited is regarded as essential. The example of the WORK in AUSTRIA service centre, which is part of the Austrian Business Agency, demonstrates the positive impact of institutions that act as intermediaries between employers, employees from third countries and domestic authorities.

The new Austrian government programme for the period 2025-2029 indicates that labour migration will continue to play a relevant role in preserving Austria as a business location in the future, and that further reforms will be implemented.

I INTRODUCTION

I.1 Background

The world of labour in Europe is changing as a result of developments such as digitalization, the green transition and the increasing ageing of our societies. This is resulting in a declining labour force and changing requirements in terms of professional qualifications. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the labour supply in the European Union is not sufficient to meet the resulting demand for labour and skilled workers. Immigration from countries outside of the European Union, some of which have much younger populations, is therefore an important response to this development, in addition to other measures such as vocational education and training and the better utilization of the unused labour force potential¹ (European Commission, 2023b).

The key challenge for national labour migration policies is to calibrate the regulation of labour migration with the needs of the labour market (European Migration Network, 2015; Ruhs, 2020). The demand for labour cannot be easily predicted. Moreover, it is also not possible to exactly predict to what extent (newly created) opportunities to access the labour market will ultimately be taken up by migrant workers (Geddes et al., 2020:79). The increasing (and changing) demand in recent years has underlined the need to focus on the effectiveness of existing labour migration policy approaches, strategies and instruments of labour market policy and to adopt additional measures to better manage the shortage of labour and skilled workers (Hooper, 2023). The aim of the study is to contribute to this need by analysing labour migration laws, policies and initiatives in Austria.

I.2 Focus and research guiding questions

The overarching research question guiding this study is: what role does labour migration play in addressing current and future labour shortages in Austria?

The following questions are addressed by the study:

- Which are the (numerically) most important labour migration pathways from third countries?
- Which legal regulations, political strategies and initiatives are in place regarding labour migration to address labour shortages, and which new developments thereof can be observed?
- What are good practices, lessons learned, and existing challenges in using labour migration to address labour shortages?

To answer these questions, this European Migration Network (EMN) study look at regular immigration of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment, including temporary, seasonal forms of labour immigration. The study addresses the issue of labour shortages and labour migration at all qualification levels.

¹ The unused labour force potential represents the sum of the unemployed, the non-employed (hidden reserve available and not available), as well as the part-time underemployed (part-time employees who would like to work more and are available Klapfer, 2023).

Self-employment was analysed in a study by the EMN in 2019 and does consequently not fall under the scope of this study at hand (European Migration Network, 2019b).

Since the focus of this study is on international immigration for employment purposes, the study does not include third-country nationals who already reside in Austria or immigrate to the country for other reasons, such as international/temporary protection. The scope of this study does hence also not cover international students. The findings of an EMN study on international students in 2019 showed that employment or entry into the labour market is considered a secondary objective for this group (European Migration Network, 2019a:6).

In order to be able to trace recent developments, the study focuses on the period from 2021 to 2024. For reasons of availability at the time of writing this study statistical annual data is limited to the period up to the end of 2023.

1.3 Definition of terms frequently used in the study²

Labour market test: Mechanism that aims to ensure that migrant workers are only admitted after employers have unsuccessfully searched for national workers, European Union citizens (in European Union Member States this also means EEA workers) or legally residing third-country nationals with access to the labour market according to national legislation.

Labour migration: Movement of persons from one state to another, or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment.

Labour shortage: Shortage of labour of a particular type in a particular labour market which may be said to exist when the number of vacancies has been (or is expected to be) above a level considered to represent “normal” turnover at the prevailing wages and working conditions for an extended period (see also [Infobox 1](#))

Third-country national: Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).

Shortage occupations: Occupations for which employers face a shortage of suitable employees on the domestic labour market. The European Labour Authority (ELA) defines this as occupations for which the demand is greater than the supply of jobseekers with the required qualifications in the desired location. The ELA distinguishes between “severe shortages” and “widespread shortages” (European Labour Authority, 2022:8).

² Based on European Migration Network, 2018.

Seasonal worker: A third-country national who retains their principal place of residence in a third country and stays legally and temporarily in the territory of a European Union Member State to carry out an activity dependent on the passing of the seasons, under one or more fixed-term work contracts concluded directly between that third-country national and the employer established in that European Union Member State.³

I.4 Data collection and analysis

This study was conducted by the National Contact Point (NCP) Austria in the European Migration Network (EMN) as part of the EMN Work Programme 2023–2025. In order to ensure the comparability of the results, the study was prepared based on a common study template with a standardized set of questions used by all EMN Member States. The data collection and analysis was therefore thematically guided by this predetermined set of questions.

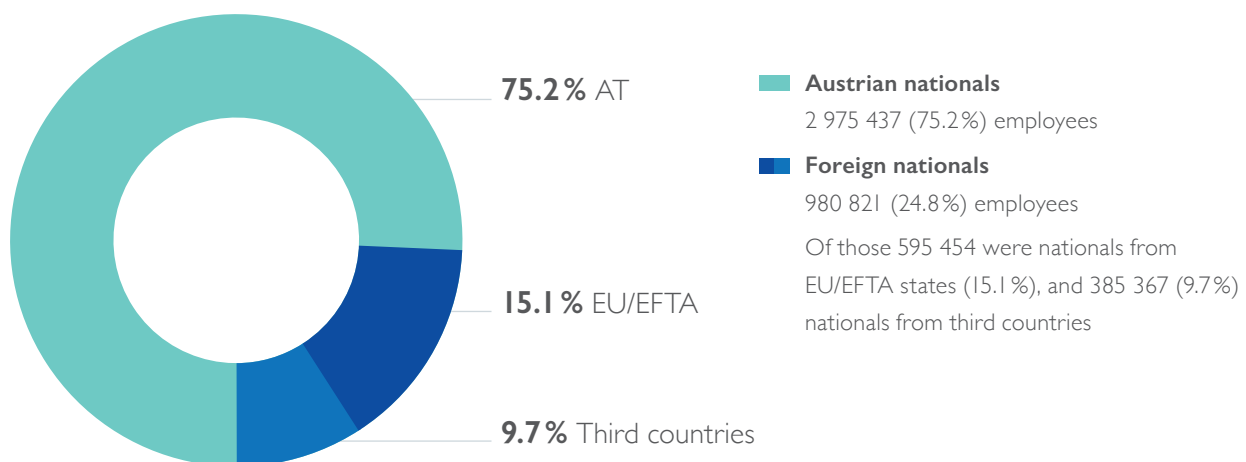
The results of this national contribution build on existing international and national studies and reports and are based on a thematic analysis of seven qualitative, semi-structured interviews and two written query responses from national experts in the fields labour market, employment of foreigners and labour law. In addition, legal texts and parliamentary materials on legislative initiatives, press releases and media reports as well as publicly available or requested statistical data from Eurostat, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, the Public Employment Service and the Ministry of Finance (Central Coordination Office) form the data basis for the analysis.

³ Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers. OJ L 94, pp. 375–390.

2 CONTEXT: EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR SHORTAGE AND IMMIGRATION

In 2023, Austria had an employment rate⁴ of about 74 per cent. This places Austria in ninth position in the European Union, with its employment rate exceeding the European Union average of 70.4 per cent. Seven out of ten people in employment were employed in the service sector (Statistics Austria, 2024b:40). One quarter of employees in Austria in 2023 were foreign nationals, of which the share of third country nationals was 40 per cent and the share of nationals from EU/EFTA States was 60 per cent (see [Figure 1](#)) (Statistics Austria, 2024a:19). The proportion of foreign nationals varies greatly between sectors, with the highest shares found in accommodation and food service activities (57%), extraterritorial organizations and entities (55%), provision of other economic services (52%) and agriculture, forestry and fishing (52%) (Public Employment Service, 2024a).

Figure 1: Employees - annual averages 2023 by nationality



Source: Public Employment Service and Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024.

Since 2021, the domestic labour force potential (i.e. the supply of workers with Austrian citizenship) has been declining sharply (Public Employment Service and Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024). Since then, the expansion of the labour supply has been entirely driven by foreign workers (Public Employment Service, 2024d:2). This means that the decline in the number of domestic workers active on the labour market has been offset by labour migration from EU/EFTA States and third countries. Given the EU-wide demographic ageing, it can be assumed that the contribution of immigration to the labour supply, based on free movement from the EU/EFTA, will decrease (Public Employment Service, 2024d:3).

⁴ Share of employed persons in the working-age population. The employment rates listed above refer to the percentage of people aged 15 to 64.

2.1 Demand for labour and labour shortage

The demand for labour in Austria rose significantly during the economic upturn after the COVID-19 pandemic (EURES, 2023). Despite the onset of the economic downturn in 2023 and a decline in the number of vacancies (Public Employment Service, 2024c) Austria continued to be (as at Q3, 2024) one of the countries with the highest rate of job vacancies within the European Union (Eurostat, 2024). On average, there were 174,000 job vacancies in Austria in 2024. Vacancies emerge particularly in service occupations and among salespeople, tradespeople and technicians (Statistics Austria, 2024b).

The labour shortage affects both higher and lower-skilled professions. From the companies' perspectives around 44 per cent of the vacancies in 2023 only required a compulsory school leaving certificate or no minimum school qualification at all (Statistics Austria, 2024a:37).

The Austria-wide survey of companies on labour and skills shortages/demands (n=2,793 companies) from 2024 (Dornmayr and Riepl, 2024) shows that the tourism and leisure industry, trade and manual occupations, and transport and haulage are particularly difficult sectors in terms of recruitment. According to the survey (ibid.), the following professions have the greatest recruitment difficulties: cooks (incl. kitchen staff); trade/sales, IT specialists, electronics/electrical engineering, drivers, restaurant specialists. Although such surveys cannot determine the exact needs, they are an important tool for identifying issues.

Developed by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy and the Public Employment Service, the Skilled Workers Barometer uses several indicators to identify occupations exhibiting shortages. It classifies electricians and fitters, nurses (certified and uncertified), motor vehicle mechanics, carers and social workers as the top shortage occupations (as at Q2 2024; Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024a). A 2024 report on the Austrian care system underlined the fact that in comparison with other Western European countries, Austria has a low number of carers. This shortage of workers is already evident today and is reflected in high workloads and dissatisfaction with work in the care sector. From 2035 onwards, a significant increase in the demand for carers is projected for Austria (Famira-Mühlberger and Weingärtner, 2024).

One of the main reasons for the increased demand for labour is the retirement of the baby boomers, a trend that is set to continue. One factor that needs to be taken into account in meeting the demand for labour is the unused labour force potential. In particular, women (in part-time employment),⁵ older people, migrants (especially humanitarian migrants), younger people who are neither in training nor in employment, and people with health problems make up part of the unused labour force potential in Austria (Public Employment Service, 2024b).

⁵ In 2023, 31.6% of all employees in Austria worked part-time, with more than half of female employees working part-time (51.6%). This part-time employment rate for women is among the highest in Europe (Statistics Austria, 2024c).

Infobox 1: Definition and assessment of labour shortage and shortage of skilled workers

Austria does not have a generally accepted definition of the term “labour shortage”. In the context of migration – due to the stronger focus on skilled immigration – the term “shortage of skilled workers” (*Fachkräftemangel*) is typically used rather than the term “labour shortage”. “Shortage of skilled workers” is defined in a report by the Austrian Court of Audit, for example, as a situation in the labour market in which the demand for certain vocational skills significantly exceeds supply, at national or regional level, and which is not just a cyclical or short-term phenomenon (Austrian Court of Audit, 2024a).

The database for measuring labour shortages in Austria is limited (Austrian Court of Audit, 2024a:86; Pohler et al., 2023:40). There is a (legally binding) definition of the term “shortage occupations”, however, which is based on the ratio of jobseekers to vacancies reported to the Public Employment Service (“applicant-to-vacancy ratio”).

In the context of regulating labour migration – more precisely, the admission of skilled workers from third countries in shortage occupations – this applicant-to-vacancy ratio is used to assess labour shortage (see also 3.4). The “applicant-to-vacancy ratio” is often criticized as being too short-sighted for various reasons (see, for example, Austrian Court of Audit, 2024b:45). For instance, not all vacancies are reported to the Public Employment Service.⁶ Parameters such as demographics, digitalization, ecologization⁷ and wage developments are not taken into consideration.⁸ The annual change in the applicant-to-vacancy ratio also leads to planning uncertainty for companies with respect to staffing, as recruitment can be a lengthy process and it is often unclear whether the profession in question will be classified as a shortage occupation again the following year.⁹

In addition to the applicant-to-vacancy ratio, there are also national surveys on labour shortages/needs:

The Skilled Workers Barometer, an initiative that was jointly developed by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy and the Public Employment Service and introduced in 2023, looks at three sub-indicators: job competition, access to vacancies and the overall job market. The Skilled Workers Barometer offers quarterly results on skilled worker shortages at the occupational level, both for Austria and for the individual provinces (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024a).

An Austria-wide company survey on the demand for and shortage of labour and skilled workers is carried out annually by “ibw Austria – Research & Development in VET” on behalf of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (Dornmayr and Riepl, 2024:1).

For the care sector, a forecast of the demand for care workers in Austria commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection was compiled in 2019 (Austrian National Public Health Institute, 2019:6).

6 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

7 Interview with Julia Bock-Schappelwein, Austrian Institute of Economic Research, 23 July 2024.

8 Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

9 Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

2.2 Positions on immigration in response to labour shortages

The issue of labour shortage has been debated in Austria since the early 2000s, with the importance of labour migration increasingly being reflected in these debates (Biffl, 2023:106).

Business interest groups in particular – the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Federation of Austrian Industries – emphasize the need to address labour shortages by recruiting skilled workers from third countries (Der Report, n.d.). Employee interest groups, in turn, tend to focus on domestic workers or workers who are already resident in Austria as a solution. The latter interest groups are calling for improved labour market conditions and wages, training and upskilling, and the activation of inactive workers (Biron, 2022; Chamber of Labour Upper Austria, n.d.).

In party political debates on labour shortages, the emphasis on the relevance of immigration differs between parties (Hadj Abdou and Ruedin, 2023). None of the parties represented in parliament are completely opposed to labour immigration, including the Freedom Party (FPÖ). The 2024 election manifesto of the Freedom Party (FPÖ) states the following: “Where necessary, qualified immigration into the Austrian labour market should be possible.” (Austrian Freedom Party, 2024:74). In the past, governments which included the Austrian Freedom Party as a coalition partner did also liberalize access to the labour market for skilled workers from third countries (Kolbe, 2021).

In the context of existing labour shortages, the media coverage sometimes exhibits a critical stance on Austria’s ability to compete in recruiting foreign skilled workers and the RWR Card system (see [Infobox 3](#)). Indicators such as the OECD Indicators of Talent Attractiveness (OECD, 2023b), in which Austria scores poorly are used as a point of reference (Kromp, 2024; Szigetvari, 2023). However, the critical media debate on talent attractiveness does not necessarily reflect the perception of Austria in third countries of relevance to Austria. The Austrian Business Agency has observed in its discussions with partners abroad, such as in the Philippines, that Austria enjoys a very positive reputation as a country of destination.¹⁰ The press, moreover, also often refers to the results of international surveys according to which the Austrian capital is the world’s most liveable city for so-called “expats” (Die Presse, 2023; Ehrenhöfer and Heisterkamp, 2024).

In a survey conducted by IPSOS on behalf of the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Mol) in June 2024, 24 per cent of the respondents (n=1,253) rated Austria’s attractiveness in regard to the competition for the immigration of qualified skilled workers as very high or high, and 42 per cent saw a very high or high need to increase Austria’s attractiveness as a destination country for qualified workers from abroad (IPSOS, 2024).

¹⁰ Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

3 AUSTRIAN LABOUR MIGRATION POLICY

3.1 Labour migration system

Austria's labour migration system is a demand-driven system (Burmann et al., 2018:45). With the exception of a restricted jobseeker visa for highly skilled workers (Art. 24a Aliens Police Act¹¹), the employment of third-country nationals is based on job offers made by employers, which implies that employees are initially tied to their employer. As is typical in demand-driven systems (Devitt, 2024:291), it safeguards the interests of domestic workers through measures such as labour market tests and prescribed minimum wages, and is characterized by (initially) temporary settlement and residence permits.

The Austrian labour migration system also includes elements from the occupation-driven system (shortage occupation lists; residence and work permits for specific occupations) and from the human capital-based labour migration system (points system for desired skills/qualifications).¹² Even with these instruments in place, however, it can still be clearly classified as a demand-driven system since access to the Austrian labour market is subject to the requirement of an employment contract, labour market tests must be conducted, and no permanent residence permits are issued from the outset.

With the Red-White-Red Card (RWR Card) as its key instrument, the Austrian system is primarily aimed at (highly) skilled labour migrants (see [Infobox 3](#)). Lower-skilled immigration is possible on a limited temporary basis under a seasonal worker scheme (see [3.4](#)).

As this study report subsequently shows, Austria has taken a more proactive strategic approach to recruiting workers from countries outside the European Union, particularly since the reforms regarding the employment of foreign nationals from 2022 onwards (see [3.4](#)). The main driving force behind this shift has been the reduction in the supply of labour from the European Economic Area (EEA).¹³ The primary focus of the Austrian approach is to address the shortage of skilled workers by further developing the RWR Card (Austrian Federal Government, 2020:136; Federal Chancellery, 2023c).

Given the reduction in the supply of labour from the European Union, immigration from third countries is becoming an increasingly relevant component of Austria's response to the current labour shortage. Business interest groups, however, continue to regard the Austrian approach as "hesitant" overall, which is also attributed to party political dynamics, in other words the politicization of immigration in Austria.¹⁴

¹¹ Art. 24a Aliens Police Act 2005, FLG. I. No. 100/2005, in the version of federal law FLG. I. No. 56/2018.

¹² For further information and a classification of the different approaches, see also Devitt, 2024:290 ff; Kolbe, 2021.

¹³ Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

¹⁴ Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

Infobox 2: Stakeholder involvement

There are various exchange formats for stakeholder involvement in Austria in the field of labour migration policy. The involvement of the social partners in employment and migration policy is a historically cultivated practice (Biffli, 2023:79–131), although the involvement – especially that of employee representatives – has been viewed as decreasing in recent years.¹⁵ The Chamber of Labour itself noted that since 2017, they have not been involved in the RWR Card reforms.¹⁶

The following stakeholder engagement formats are currently in place:

- A new strategy committee for international skilled workers was established in December 2023 under the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy (Federal Chancellery, 2023c) (see [Infobox 6](#)).
- The Committee on Foreign Nationals (Art. 22 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals), as an administrative board of the Public Employment Service,¹⁷ is to be consulted on all legal matters relating to labour migration and the employment of foreign nationals.
- The Austrian Integration Fund has been organizing an Expert Forum for the Integration of Qualified Immigrants and Key Workers since October 2022. Its aim is to discuss the challenges and opportunities connected to the shortage of skilled workers in Austria (Austrian Integration Fund, 2022, 2024b).
- There is also regular exchange between the Austrian Business Agency, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Public Employment Service and the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs with regard to the practical coordination and implementation of the RWR Card (see [Infobox 3](#)).¹⁸

3.2 Regulation of labour migration

In Austria, the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals¹⁹ defines under which conditions the majority of third-country nationals can take up employment. In addition, the Settlement and Residence Act²⁰ sets out the conditions governing residence. This act distinguishes between short-term stays (less than 12 months) and longer-term stays (more than 12 months) with prospects of settlement. In principle, and unless specified otherwise in the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, third-country nationals may only be employed if a permit for their employment (work permit, posting permit or confirmation of notification) has been issued to their employer or if the third-country national has obtained a combined residence and employment permit (such as the Red-White-Red Card or EU Blue Card) (Art. 3 para. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals).

15 Interview with Gudrun Biffli, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024.

16 Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

17 It is composed of representatives from the Chamber of Labour, the Austrian Trade Union Federation, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Federation of Austrian Industries and the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture.

18 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

19 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, FLG. I. No. 218/1975, in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 67/2004.

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

The European Union has no authority over how many people from third countries may enter its Member States in order to take up gainful employment (Art. 79 para. 5 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)). However, there are a number of directives which, due to their mandatory implementation, influence the regulation of labour migration at national level. As a result, they are part of the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals and the Settlement and Residence Act. This includes the European Union Blue Card Directive,²¹ the Seasonal Workers Directive,²² the Directive on third-country nationals in intra-corporate transfers,²³ the Directive on a combined work and residence permit for third-country nationals,²⁴ and the Directive on the legal status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents²⁵ (for a general overview and discussion, see Peers, 2022).

3.3 Most import access pathways for employment purposes

With regard to access pathways a basic distinction has to be made between temporary (but longer-term) skilled immigration through the RWR Card and the EU's Blue Card (combined residence and employment permit) and seasonal, lower-skilled labour migration (under the quota regulation, with visa and work permit). In addition, settlement permits and temporary residence permits are also available for certain categories of persons such as artists, researchers, self-employed persons and intra-corporate transferees (Federal Ministry of Interior (Mol), n.d.a).

Infobox 3: Red-White-Red Card

The Red-White-Red Card (RWR Card) was introduced for skilled immigration in Austria in 2011 and has been revised several times since then. An RWR Card can be issued for various categories of workers. With the exception of categories that fall under self-employment, the issuing of a RWR Card requires a specific job offer for the worker. Workers must reapply if they want to change employer.²⁶ A distinction must be made between two types of RWR Card.

The first type involves criteria-based immigration for skilled workers (and their family members) from third countries, for which a points system is used. To this end, criteria such as age, language skills, previous professional experience, and education and training are evaluated.²⁷

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- 21 Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC. OJ L 382, pp. 1–38.
 - 22 Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers. OJ L 94, pp. 375–390.
 - 23 Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer. OJ L 157, pp. 1–22.
 - 24 Directive (EU) 2024/1233 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 April 2024 on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State (recast). OJ L.
 - 25 Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003 concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents. OJ L 16, pp. 44–53.
 - 26 Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.
 - 27 For details see Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.b.

This criteria-based RWR Card covers the following groups (see Sauer, 2024):

- Very highly qualified workers
- Skilled workers in shortage occupations
- Other key workers
- Start-up founders

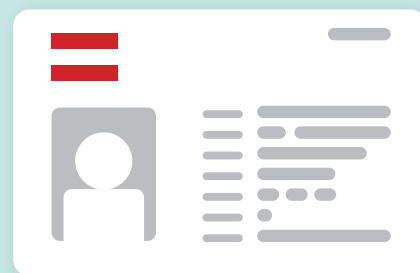
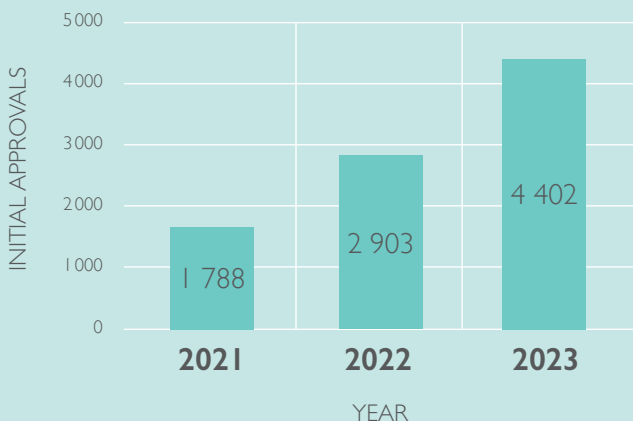
The second type of RWR Card does not involve a points system and applies to three groups of people:

- Graduates of Austrian universities;
- Core workers with an A1²⁸ level of German who have been in seasonal employment in the past two years and have prospects of a permanent employment contract with their employer;
- Self-employed key workers who have investment capital or will create jobs and provide an overall economic benefit.

Family members of RWR Card holders can apply for an RWR Card Plus, which provides them with free access to the labour market in Austria. In this respect, the family members of recruited skilled workers from third countries enjoy a more generous access to the labour market than the skilled workers themselves, as they are not tied to an employer.

There has been an upward trend in the number of RWR Cards issued each year in recent years (see Figure 2). The Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy aims to increase the number of RWR Cards issued to at least 15,000 per year by 2027 (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2023a). The total number of cards issued in 2023 would need to almost quadruple in the next four years in order to achieve this target.

Figure 2: Initial approvals of Red-White-Red Cards (2021–2023)

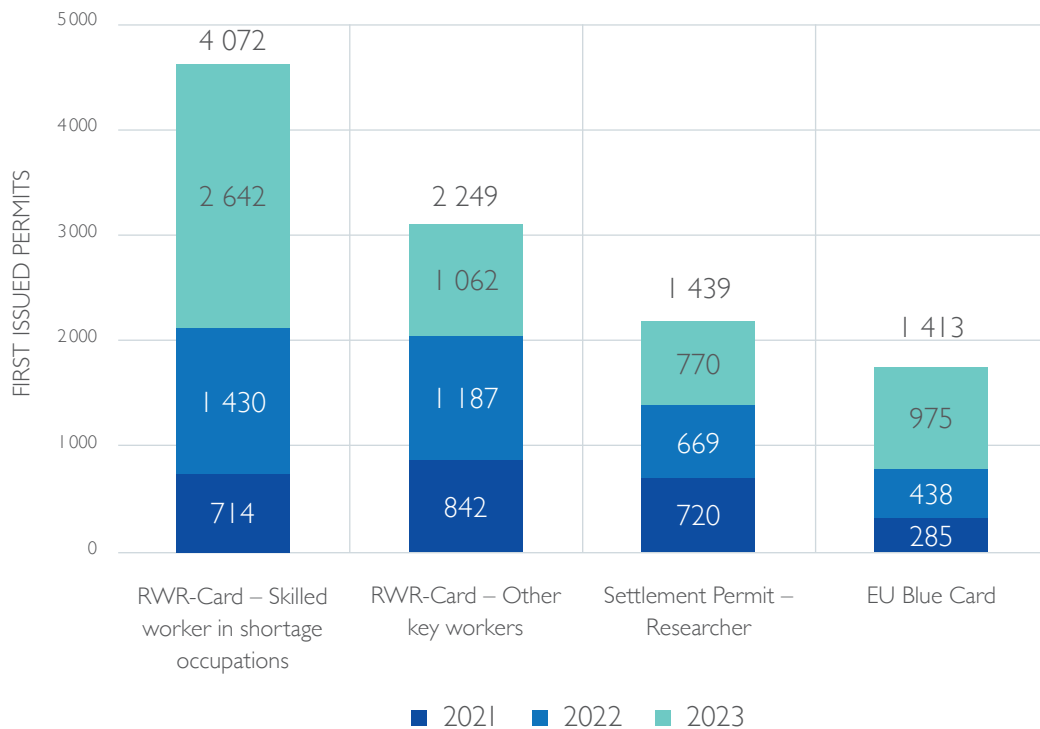


Sources: MoI, 2021:63, 2022:63, 2023:62.

The RWR Card system is generally viewed by labour market policy stakeholders in a positive light. At the same time, it is noted that there is room for improvement.²⁹ The provision enabling labour market access for family members of skilled workers under the RWR Card system in particular are seen by the ABA and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber as a competitive advantage and a good practice in Austria. However, it is noted that this provision could be more strongly promoted abroad.³⁰ The Chamber of Labour also pointed out that the RWR Card, originally an agreement with the social partners, should be viewed as a good practice, although there is room for improvement, for instance in the case of university graduates from abroad.³¹

From 2021 to 2023, RWR Cards for skilled workers in shortage occupations (4,072) and for other key workers (2,249) were the most frequently issued work permits (see Figure 3). There was a significant increase in 2023, particularly for skilled workers in shortage occupations (2,642 cards issued); this total is higher than in both of the previous years combined (2021: 714, 2022: 1,430).

Figure 3: Top four residence permits issued for the settlement of third-country nationals for the purpose of gainful (non-self-employed) employment (by year and residence permit- without seasonal employment)



Sources: Mol, 2021, 2022, 2023.

Please note: Residence data for seasonal workers (visa) not shown due to lack of availability.

29 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024; Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024; Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

30 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024; Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

31 Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

The settlement and residence statistics also reveal two other relevant paths to access the labour market in Austria. The first of these is via a settlement permit for researchers. The residence document “Settlement Permit – Researcher” entitles the holder to temporarily settle in the country and to take up gainful employment for a research facility (Art. 8 para. 1 subpara. 11 Settlement and Residence Act). The second is via the EU’s Blue Card – a combined residence and work permit for qualified third-country nationals who have a job offer in Austria. The Blue Card can be applied for in all European Union Member States with the exception of Denmark and Ireland. The requirements, including the amount of the minimum annual gross salary, are regulated slightly differently depending on the European Union State (for Austria, see [Table 1](#)).

There are also visas for gainful employment purposes, which are issued, for example, to seasonal workers (Art. 20 para. 1 Aliens Police Act): On the basis of Art. 24 Aliens Police Act, third-country nationals who wish to be engaged as seasonal or harvest workers in Austria (Art. 5 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals) may apply for a Visa C or D for this temporary employment³² (Mol, n.d.b). [Figure 3](#) does not contain any statistics for seasonal workers due to a lack of availability of this visa data. However, the number of work permits issued by the Public Employment Service for seasonal workers ([Table 4](#)) clearly demonstrates the relevance of this group. In June 2024, for instance, there were 4,610 work permits (issued and existing) for seasonal workers temporarily employed in tourism (Public Employment Service, 2024e). This corresponded to a quota utilization of 102.6 per cent during this particular calendar month, with strong variation of quota exhaustion depending on the month and sector (tourism, harvest work, forestry and agriculture).

Table 1: Overview of the main legal pathways for employment purposes

Legal pathway for employment purposes	Skill level(s) targeted	Key admission conditions
RWR Card – skilled worker in shortage occupations	Intermediate qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed vocational training in a shortage occupation according to the Regulation for Skilled Workers (see 3.4); Binding job offer in Austria (with the minimum salary required by law, regulation or collective agreement); At least 55 points in the points system, which takes into account qualifications, work experience relevant to training, language skills and age (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.c).

³² Visa C or D with the addition “employment”; is also required for unpaid employment such as an internship.

Legal pathway for employment purposes	Skill level(s) targeted	Key admission conditions
RWR Card – other key workers	Combination of intermediate and higher education qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binding job offer with the statutory minimum wage of EUR 3 030 gross per month (2024) plus special payments; • At least 55 points in the points system, which takes into account qualifications, work experience, language skills and age, and allocates bonus points for professional athletes (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.h).
Settlement Permit – Researcher	Higher education qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of a PhD or appropriate higher education qualification that provides access to PhD programmes; • Issued if the individual has sufficient means of subsistence and health insurance, and provided that there is no threat to public order and safety (Art. 21 Aliens Police Act; Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.i); • Hosting agreement with a research facility (Art. 43c para. 1 subpara. 3 Settlement and Residence Act); • Performance of an academic function requiring a qualification of this kind at the research facility in question (Art. 1 para. 2 (h) and Art. 2 para. 17 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals; Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.e.).
EU Blue Card	Higher education qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of a degree with a minimum of three years of study (with the exception of occupations in the information and communication technology sector);³³ • Binding job offer for at least six months in Austria, with the requirement that this employment must correspond to the individual's training; • Remuneration equalling at least the average gross annual salary of full-time employees in Austria plus special payments (2024: EUR 47 855).

³³ Proof of at least three years of relevant professional experience is sufficient to be employed as a key worker in information and communication technology if it is comparable to a university degree with at least three years of study and was acquired within the last seven years before submitting the application.

Legal pathway for employment purposes	Skill level(s) targeted	Key admission conditions
Visa C or D for seasonal workers	Low-level qualifications	Seasonal work for up to 90 days: Visa C Seasonal work for between 91 days and 9 months: Visa D <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacancy in accordance with the Seasonal Quota Regulation (see 3.4); • Issued if the individual has sufficient means of subsistence and health insurance, and provided that there is no threat to public order and safety (Art. 21 Aliens Police Act; Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.i); • Submission of documents required under legislation on the employment of foreign nationals (subject to work permit; Mol, n.d.b).

It should be noted that all legal migration paths for the purpose of employment described in [Table 1](#) are temporary. In the case of residence permits for qualified workers, however, an extension is encouraged and is usually granted (with exceptions in the case of long-lasting unemployment or criminal offences, for example).³⁴

Holders of a Red-White-Red Card or an EU Blue Card (who were employed for at least 21 months in the preceding 24 months) or scientists who have held a “Settlement Permit – Researcher” residence permit for two years can apply for a Red-White-Red Card Plus (RWR Card Plus) (Art. 41a Settlement and Residence Act, Art. 20e Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals; Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.g). When an RWR Card is issued, Module I of the Integration Agreement³⁵ is deemed fulfilled by law. Researchers and EU Blue Card holders are exempt from the requirements of the Integration Agreement (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.d). These persons are therefore issued an RWR Card Plus for three years (Art. 20 para. 1a Settlement and Residence Act) instead of the usual one year (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.g). The RWR Card Plus grants free access to the labour market, so permit holders are not tied to one specific employer (ibid.). The Chamber of Labour stated that issuing the RWR Card Plus for three years without requiring migrants to comply with the Integration Agreement (as other migrants are obliged to) can be seen as an incentive for individuals to stay longer in the country or as a means to facilitate the retention of workers.³⁶

The number of people who switch from an RWR Card to an RWR Card Plus and thus extend their residence permit after two years is used to measure the impact of the country’s labour migration policy. As part of an annual impact monitoring programme (Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport 2024b), the Mol uses this figure as an indicator for the impact objective “Ensuring demand and quality orientation in the area of legal migration, reduction of irregular migration”. Although a statistical comparison (rather than

34 Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024.

35 i.e. proof of German language skills at A2 level and knowledge of the basic values of the legal and social order.

36 Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

an analysis of individual cases) is used as the basis for this measurement,³⁷ the MoI regards this number as relatively accurate.³⁸ The results of the 2023 impact assessment show that the proportion of RWR Cards Plus issued, measured against the number of RWR Cards issued, was 54 per cent in 2023, falling short of the target of 95 per cent. Although there was an increase in the initial issue of RWR Cards, the number of RWR Cards Plus fell during the same period. For the interpretation of this data also the from 2017 onwards longer validity period of RWR cards need to be taken into account (Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport 2024a). Furthermore, it is sometimes the case that persons do not meet the requirement to have worked for 21 months (within two years) for an RWR Card Plus.³⁹ Some people switch to a different residence document or move to another European Union Member State.⁴⁰

With the exception of this impact assessment, there is a lack of findings and analyses on the impacts of labour migration policy, particularly regarding the impact of legislative changes on the recruitment of skilled workers (Austrian Court of Audit, 2024b:16, 31, 58).

Infobox 4: Posting of third-country nationals to Austria

The instrument of EU posting is also relevant in the context of labour migration. This instrument refers to companies from the European Union/The European Economic Area (EEA) that temporarily post workers to Austria for the provision of services (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy and Construction Workers' Leave and Severance Pay Fund, n.d.). In Austria, the most important occupations in relation to EU postings are construction professions, followed by electrician professions and metalworking professions.⁴¹ Although EU postings follow the regulations of the free movement of services and not the rules for labour migration, they can still be understood as a form of labour migration to Austria⁴² since third-country nationals can also be posted under the same conditions as EU citizens when they are employed in the sending country (Assmus et al., 2024). From 2021 to 2023, third-country nationals accounted for between 8 and 11 per cent of posted persons (see [Table 2](#)). The third-country nationals posted during the period under review came primarily from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo⁴³. By contrast, the posting companies are based primarily in Slovenia, but also in Croatia, Germany, Poland and Slovakia.⁴⁴

Given the occurrence of unlawful employment and working conditions (Danaj and Scoppetta, 2022; Geyer et al., 2022:34), postings have also led to controversies about wage dumping and adherence to labour standards (Krings, 2019:30–36).

37 Proportion of 'Red-White-Red Cards Plus' issued in relation to the number of 'Red-White-Red Cards' issued.

38 Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024.

39 For example, due to a change of job, termination of employment or caring responsibilities.

40 Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024.

41 Data provided by Public Employment Service, 6 September 2024.

42 Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024.

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

44 Data provided by Public Employment Service, 6 September 2024.

In addition to EU postings, according to Art. 18 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, it is also possible for employers not based in an EEA Member State to post workers from third countries to Austria. These postings are negligible in number compared to EU postings (totalling less than 400 persons in the period in question),⁴⁵ and they are subject to a labour market test.

Table 2: Number of employees posted and recorded in accordance with the EU Posted Workers Directive (2021–1st half of 2024)

Year	2021	2022	2023	1 st Half of 2024
Number of employees posted and recorded according to date received	197 651	219 074	226 992	104 902
Of which third-country nationals (total no.)	16 401	20 739	24 940	11 634
Of which third-country nationals (%)	8 %	9 %	11 %	11 %

Source: Data provided by the Federal Ministry of Finance, Fraud Prevention Office/Financial Police on October 4, 2024: Notification of a posting to Austria pursuant to Section 19 (3) of the Anti-Wage and Social Dumping Act.

Please note: The same person may be posted several times in a calendar year.

3.4 Key labour migration policy instruments

With regard to the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, the three key national instruments of labour migration policy in Austria are as follows: (1) the Regulation for Skilled Workers specifying shortage occupations; (2) numerical quotas for seasonal and harvest workers; and (3) the labour market test conducted by the Public Employment Service.

1. Regulation for Skilled Workers specifying shortage occupations

According to Art. 13 para. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, in the event of longer-term labour supply needs that cannot be met by the potential labour force available in Austria, the Federal Minister for Labour and Economy specifies, by regulation, shortage occupations for the following year in order to safeguard Austria's status as a centre of business and employment. Third-country nationals with an RWR Card can be admitted as "skilled workers in shortage occupations" for the shortage occupations listed in the Regulation for Skilled Workers (Art. 12a Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). Since 2019, it has been possible to add regional shortage occupations in order to address the specific needs of the regional labour markets (see also 4.4; Ebner and Humer, 2019:19). An RWR Card can be issued to a skilled

45 Data provided by Public Employment Service, 6 September 2024.

worker in a particular province for these regional shortage occupations (Art. 20d para. 5 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals).

The list of shortage occupations in the Regulation for Skilled Workers for 2024⁴⁶ has increased significantly compared to previous years:⁴⁷ in 2024, there are 110 shortage occupations nationwide and between 6 (Lower Austria) and 38 (Upper Austria) additional occupations in the nine Austrian provinces.

Potential shortage occupations are occupations for which there are no more than 1.5 registered jobseekers for each recorded vacancy (“applicant-to-vacancy ratio”), either nationwide or in specific provinces.⁴⁸ Occupations with an applicant-to-vacancy ratio of up to 1.8 may be included in certain circumstances – if companies are observed to be stepping up their training activities, for example, or if wages in a particular field of employment are seen to be rising at an above-average rate (Art. 13 para. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). An amendment to the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals and the Settlement and Residence Act⁴⁹ on 30 December 2023 added an exception for occupations in passenger transport and rail freight. In these sectors, jobs can be defined as shortage occupations – regardless of the applicant-to-vacancy ratio – if they are necessary for the provision and expansion of public transport services to support the mobility transition (Art. 13 para. 1b Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals).

2. Numerical quotas for seasonal and harvest workers

In the event of temporary additional labour supply needs that cannot be met by the potential domestic labour force available nor by European Economic Area or Swiss citizens or registered seasonal workers, the Federal Minister for Labour and Economy may also set numerical quotas by regulation (Art. 5 para. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals) for the:

- temporary admission of foreign seasonal workers in a specific economic sector; occupational group or region;
- short-term admission of foreign harvest workers.

Accordingly, quotas for the economic sectors of tourism, agriculture and forestry are prescribed regularly. The size of the quotas is defined in consultation with the Austrian social partners (Humer and Spiegelfeld, 2020:10f). Prior to 2022, the framework quotas in the Settlement Regulation⁵⁰ also applied; in this regulation, the Federal Government determined the maximum number of work permits for temporarily employed foreign nationals and harvest workers.⁵¹

46 Regulation for Skilled Workers 2024, FLG. II No. 439/2023.

47 In 2023 there were 98 shortage occupations nationwide according to the ordinance, 66 in 2022, and 45 in 2021, plus a different number of regional shortage occupations depending on the federal state. See: Regulation for Skilled Workers 2023, FLG. II No. 488/2022.; Regulation for Skilled Workers 2022, FLG. II No. 573/2021.; Regulation for Skilled Workers 2021, FLG. II No. 595/2020.

48 Proposals for the definition of shortage occupations are made by the Administrative Board of the Public Employment Service Austria, in which the social partners are represented (Art. 13 para. 2 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals).




49 Amendment to the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals and the Settlement and Residence Act, FLG. I No. 175/2023.

50 Settlement Regulation 2024, FLG. II No. 170/2024.

51 Accordingly, the Settlement Ordinance set maximum numbers of residence and work permits for temporary foreign nationals (4,400) and foreign harvest workers (200) for 2021. This regulation was repealed in 2022, as it had no discernible labour market policy control function in the past and was an obstacle to needs-based admission. See: Ebner, 2022:12f.; Austrian Parliament, 2021.

Table 3 shows the quotas for the period from 2021 to 2024, which were defined by the annual regulation on the temporary employment of foreign nationals in tourism, agriculture and forestry (Seasonal Quota Regulation).⁵² The quotas for tourism, in particular, have increased significantly. They were more than 3.5 times higher in 2024 than in 2021. With regard to this temporary employment, it should be noted that not all seasonal workers are shown in these quotas, and that work permits for seasonal workers (Table 4) are not the same as quota places. For example, registered seasonal workers (Art. 5 para. 6a and 7, Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals) are not to be included in the quotas. Moreover, additional work permits may be issued to seasonal workers who are already in authorized employment under a quota system, regardless of whether or not a quota place is available. Finally, quotas may also be exceeded by 50 per cent (in tourism) and by 30 per cent (in agriculture and forestry or harvest work) during peak season, provided that the quotas are not exceeded on an annual average.⁵³

Table 3: Quotas for the temporary employment of foreign nationals in tourism, agriculture and forestry (2021–2024)

		2021	2022	2023	2024
Tourism		1 263	2 989	4 287	4 495
Agriculture and Forestry		3 136	3 046	3 162	3 362
Agriculture (Harvest)		119	119	119	119
Total		4 518	6 154	7 568	7 976

Sources: Seasonal Quota Regulations 2021–2024.




Seasonal and harvest workers require a work permit to take up employment. The issuing of a work permit is subject to a number of requirements that apply to both employers and employees (Art. 4 para. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals); in particular, a labour market test is necessary (see point 3 below). In the period from 2021 up to and including the first half of 2024, the Public Employment Service issued a total of 89,044 work permits to persons from third countries (see Table 4), mainly to nationals of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo^{43, 54}

52 For an overview see: Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2024b.

53 See Amendment to the Seasonal Quota Regulation 2024, FLG. II No. 110/2024, Art. 4 para. 3.

54 Data provided by the Public Employment Service, 6. September 2024.

Table 4: Work permits issued to seasonal workers by the Public Employment Service (2021–first half of 2024)

Work permits issued	Women				Men und alternative genders*				Total			
	2021	2022	2023	2024 (First half of year)	2021	2022	2023	2024 (First half of year)	2021	2022	2023	2024 (First half of year)
Tourism 	2 969	6 221	8 204	4 403	3 518	7 110	10 050	5 407	6 487	13 331	18 254	9 810
Agriculture and Forestry 	2 785	2 837	1 464	927	10 202	9 768	7 692	4 902	12 987	12 605	9 156	5 829
Agriculture (Harvest) 	81	64	56	11	196	97	62	18	277	161	118	29
Total	5 835	9 122	9 724	5 341	13 916	16 975	17 804	10 327	19 751	26 097	27 528	15 668

Source: Data provided by the Public Employment Service, 6 September 2024.

Please note: These figures relate to permits issued; and several permits may be issued to the same person (see Art. 5 para. 3 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). Moreover, work permits for seasonal workers are not just issued to new arrivals or persons who have arrived for the season, but also to persons who already have a right of residence in Austria, including asylum-seekers.

*Men and alternative genders grouped together in line with the Public Employment Service data source.

3 Labour market test conducted by the Public Employment Service

If an employer wishes to employ a third-country national, the Public Employment Service in many cases needs to conduct a labour market test (also known as the “replacement worker procedure”). This involves verifying whether the state and development of the labour market allow this employment and checking that their employment does not conflict with important public interests or the interests of the economy as a whole (Art. 4 para. 1 and 2 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). An attempt is also made to find suitable replacement workers for the job in question from the existing pool of unemployed Austrians, European Union and European Economic Area citizens, and integrated third-country nationals (Art. 4b para. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). The company’s job profile for the vacancy in question is used as the basis for this process. The Public Employment Service suggests replacement workers to the company, which must then review these individuals. If the company does not wish to hire any of the replacement workers suggested, it must provide adequate reasons alongside proof of the required education, training and professional experience of the third-country national (Public Employment Service, 2022).

A labour market test is conducted when applications are made for work permits (e.g. for seasonal and harvest workers), as well as for RWR Card applications for other key workers or applications for European Union Blue Cards (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.a, n.d.h). The labour market test is waived in individual cases when applications are made for RWR Cards for skilled workers in shortage occupations, very highly qualified workers and core workers and for university graduates (Art. 4 para. 1 and Art. 12, 12b and 12d Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). For skilled workers in shortage occupations

the relevant regulations already state that there is a shortage in the labour market for the occupations listed (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2023).

Time horizon of labour migration policies

Based on the instruments of labour migration described in this section, it can be said that the Austrian labour migration system targets medium-term and short-term labour shortages: quotas are set for seasonal/cyclical needs and shortages in lower-skilled areas by a regulation issued for this purpose (Art. 5 para. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). This instrument addresses immediate needs. Another instrument, the shortage occupation list described above, is compiled annually and thus reflects current needs. It is not an instrument that facilitates long-term planning with regard to labour shortages. Approved RWR Cards in turn (including those for workers employed in shortage occupations), having been aligned with the EU Blue Card in 2017, are valid for two years.⁵⁵ This validity period indicates that Austria's policy approach exhibits a medium term perspective.⁵⁶

However, the Austrian model also implicitly exhibits a long-term perspective. Although RWR Cards are initially issued for a limited time, they are nevertheless based on the idea that skilled workers will remain in the country.⁵⁷ This is also underlined by the official categorization of the RWR system as "permanent employment" in the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals. The option to switch to an RWR Card Plus also addresses labour shortages in the long term. In addition, agreements concluded with third countries during the observation period also indicate a longer-term focus in the recruitment of skilled workers (see 4.2).⁵⁸

Infobox 5: Regularization as an answer to the labour shortage?

In contrast to other countries in which regularization of irregular migrants was or is part of the labour market policy with regard to shortage occupations (Perna and Puig Batalla, 2023), there is no legal employment pathway for irregular migrants for shortage occupations in Austria. Persons who are irregularly resident in Austria do generally not have access to the labour market. The only exception to this is persons whose international protection or subsidiary protection has been rescinded and whose removal is not permissible due to the *non-refoulement* principle.⁵⁹ These persons may commence employment once a work permit has been issued (Art. 4 para. 1 subpara. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals / Art. 46a para. 1 subpara. 2 Aliens Police Act 2005; Hinterberger, 2023:246).

55 Aliens Law Amendment Act, FLG. I No. 145/2017.

56 Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024.

57 Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024.

58 Written input: Viktor Fleischer, Federation of Austrian Industries, 31 July 2024.

59 According to this principle, individuals cannot be returned to countries where they are at risk of persecution, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or any other human rights violations, see European Migration Network, 2018.

3.5 Legal and policy changes in the context of labour shortages

There have been several legal and policy changes in response to labour shortages during the period covered by the study. The key changes are summarized by the following six points:

- RWR Card reform
- Facilitated admission to occupations in certain fields
- Possibility of employment for projects
- Changes in relation to seasonal employment
- Liberalization of private employment services
- Establishment of the strategy committee for international skilled workers
- Signing of bilateral agreements
- Changes at EU-Level

Red-White-Red Card reform

The key aims of the RWR Card reform in 2022 and 2023 were to address the shortage of skilled workers and to safeguard Austria's status as a centre for business, industry and employment (Sauer, 2024). Another development to be mentioned in the context of the RWR Card reform is the transposition of Directive (EU) 2021/1883 on the EU Blue Card in 2022. As part of this process, and as stipulated in the directive, the RWR Card was aligned with the EU Blue Card. While the RWR Card reform described below was concerned with more than just this alignment, certain developments did arise from the alignment process, such as the discontinuation of the requirement to provide proof of sufficient means of subsistence (described in the following) and the simplified procedures for IT specialists (Austrian Parliament, 2022). The key features of the RWR reform were as follows:

(a) Red-White-Red Card for core workers

Since October 2022, employees who have been employed as “registered seasonal workers” in the same industry for at least seven months of each of the last two calendar years are considered core workers according to Art. 12d Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals and are thus entitled, under certain conditions, to apply for a RWR Card (Art. 41 para. 2 subpara. 3a Settlement and Residence Act).

(b) Easing of eligibility criteria for the RWR Card

- The requirement to provide proof of sufficient means of subsistence in order to obtain a residence permit for the RWR Card has been removed. This applies to all categories of RWR Card (Art. 41 para. 1 and 2 in conjunction with Art. 11 para. 2 subpara. 4 Settlement and Residence Act).
- Changes to the minimum wage
The requirements for a specific minimum wage for the “Red-White-Red Card for university graduates” have been abolished (Art. 41 para. 2 subpara. 3 in conjunction with Art. 11 para. 2 subpara. 4 Settlement and Residence Act). Instead, since 2022, it is now sufficient for the salary to be consistent with usual local practice and the collective agreement currently in force (ABA, 2022; Art. 12b para. 2 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals).

The minimum wage for other key workers has also been reduced to 50 per cent of the General Social Insurance Act⁶⁰ maximum contribution basis plus special payments (Art. 12b subpara. 1 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals in conjunction with Art. 108 para. 3 General Social Insurance Act). In 2024, this was equal to EUR 3,030 gross per month plus special payments.

- Easing of language requirements

Since 2023,⁶¹ BI language skills in Bosnian, French, Croatian, Serbian and Spanish are included in the points-based assessment (see appendices A–D, Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). Previously, points were only allocated for English and German. The points allocation for the other key workers category has also been eased, with bonus points awarded for English proficiency (Appendix C, Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals) when assessing language skills for cases in which English is the company language (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2022).

- Easing of education and qualification requirements

The categories of higher education, vocational education and apprenticeships, which were previously treated differently, now have equal status when it comes to assessing the formal education and training of skilled workers in shortage occupations (see “completed vocational education and training in shortage occupations” in Appendix B, Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals).

IT specialists are also excluded from the requirement for formal training under certain conditions. Instead, three years of relevant work experience are considered sufficient to obtain an RWR Card as a key worker (ABA, 2022; see also Art. 12c para. 2 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals).

(c) Establishment of an RWR Card service centre

The Austrian Business Agency’s WORK in AUSTRIA unit (see [Infobox 7](#)) was enshrined in law (Art. 20h Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals) as a service centre offering support and advice for skilled and key workers applying for an RWR Card. The unit has been also granted the right to inspect application documents (Art. 20h para. 3 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals; Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2022).

Moreover, an Integration Service for Skilled Workers was established at the Austrian Integration Fund in 2023, offering information, counselling and events for pre-integration purposes and for living and working in Austria. There are also German language courses for skilled workers and their families (Austrian Integration Fund, 2023). Online German courses, orientation programmes and mentoring initiatives are envisaged as part of future preparatory programmes (Der Standard, 2023; Hofer, 2023).

(d) Streamlining of the application process

Changes relating to skilled workers, key workers and core workers in the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals (Art. 12a–d Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals) also created the possibility for the employer to simultaneously submit applications for RWR Cards for the employee and

60 General Social Insurance Act, FLG. No. 189/1955, in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 110/2024.

61 Amendment to the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, FLG. I No. 43/2023.

his/her family (nuclear family and registered partners, Art. 2 para. 1 subpara. 9 Settlement and Residence Act). Prior to the 2022 reform, the law stipulated that this could only be done at a later point in time (ABA, 2022).

In 2022, moreover, the administrative management of applications for RWR Cards was switched over to a common IT system for all residence authorities: the Application for Settlement and Residence, AnNa.⁶² This tool shortened processing times for applications considerably.⁶³

Facilitated admission to occupations in certain fields

In addition to the facilitations for IT workers already mentioned in the previous point, admission for skilled workers in shortage occupations in passenger transport and rail freight was also liberalized to support the mobility transition in the midst of a labour shortage (Art. 12a para. 2 and Art. 13 para. 1b Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals) (regarding admission for skilled workers in shortage occupations, see explanations under 3.4).⁶⁴

In the wake of the increased visibility of the health and care sector during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ammann, 2024:10f.; Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2023; Ebner, 2022:14), various legal amendments have also been adopted in relation to the care reform since 2021.⁶⁵ These changes make it easier for third-country nationals to access health and care occupations while the validation process is in progress (Federal Chancellery, 2023a).⁶⁶

According to a decree issued by the Federal Minister for Labour and Economy in April 2021, qualified nurses and care workers may be entitled to an RWR Card while the validation process is ongoing if they are allowed to be professionally active according to Art. 34 Health Care and Nursing Act⁶⁷ and if they meet the other prerequisites for obtaining the card (Ebner, 2022:14). Consequently, full formal recognition (validation of the foreign degree) is not always a requisite for applying for an RWR Card. The necessary German language skills and the regulations governing entry onto the register of health-care professions are, however, taken into account.⁶⁸

Based on an amendment to the Health Care and Nursing Act in 2022,⁶⁹ care specialist assistants who require additional compensatory and supplementary measures in order for their qualifications to be recognized as equivalent can take up temporary employment at a lower occupational level (i.e. as care assistants) as soon as they have been entered onto the register of health-care professions. In cases where only individual

62 Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024; Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024.

63 Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024.

64 Amendment to the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals and the Settlement and Residence Act, FLG. I No. 175/2023.

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

66 Written input: Norbert Bichl, Counseling Center for Migrants, 9 August 2024.

67 Health Care and Nursing Act, FLG. I No. 108/1997, in the version of FLG. I No. 109/2024.

68 Written input: Norbert Bichl, Counseling Center for Migrants, 9 August 2024.

69 Amendment to the Health Care and Nursing Act 2022, FLG. I No. 82/2022.

supplementary measures are required, it is possible to take up temporary employment at the same occupational level (care specialist assistant).

The subsequent amendment to the Health Care and Nursing Act⁷⁰ in the following year made it possible for care assistants to work under supervision while the validation process is still ongoing (Art. 89 para. 10 Health Care and Nursing Act). Care assistants who have trained abroad may also take up temporary employment for training purposes if they have obtained the corresponding permit from the governor of the respective province (Art. 89a Health Care and Nursing Act).

The 2023 amendment also made it easier for care assistants to have their qualifications validated because it explicitly clarified that both training and professional experience must be taken into account (Art. 89 para. 6 Health Care and Nursing Act; Ammann, 2024:10f).

Furthermore, in 2024, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection commissioned a website for care workers that serves as a guide for recognition and validation processes.⁷¹

Possibility of employment for projects

As part of the implementation of the RWR card reforms, the employment permit for project workers within the framework of projects (i.e. a temporary, usually one-off project) for a maximum period of six months was also introduced in 2022 (Art. 4a Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). The project employees are taken on as temporary employees solely for this project and for the duration of the project work (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.f).

Changes in relation to seasonal employment

(a) Introduction of a new Registered Seasonal Worker Regulation

A new regulation for seasonal workers was introduced in 2022. It is now possible for third-country nationals to register with the Public Employment Service as a “registered seasonal worker” according to Art. 5 para. 6a Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals if they have been

- temporarily employed under seasonal quotas;
- for at least three months;
- of at least three calendar years;
- during the past five calendar years;
- in the same industry: agriculture and forestry or tourism.

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

71 Austrian National Public Health Institute: [Nursing in Austria](#).

Registered seasonal workers still require a work permit; however, this permit is issued outside the quota, and the labour market test is waived. The Registered Seasonal Worker Regulation supplements the 2011 Registered Seasonal Worker Regulation, on the basis of which seasonal workers also continue to be employed (Humer and Spiegelfeld, 2020).

(b) Increased quotas for foreign seasonal workers in tourism, agriculture and forestry

See [Table 3](#).

Liberalization of private employment services

Another change⁷² made in the course of labour shortage (Parliamentary Administration, 2022) is the liberalization of private employment service through an amendment to Labour Market Promotion Act⁷³ in 2022 (former Art. 4 para. 8 Labour Market Promotion Act, see [4.1](#)).

Establishment of a strategy committee for international skilled workers

A strategy committee for international skilled workers (see [Infobox 6](#)) was established by the Austrian Federal Government at the end of 2023 and held its inaugural meeting in March 2024 (Sauer, 2024). All affected state departments and institutions, the provinces and actors from the social partnership are represented in this strategy committee under the chair of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 2023b). Besides increasing the number of RWR and Blue Cards and reducing processing times for applications, the strategy committee aims to improve the employment figures for employees from European Union and European Economic Area countries and boost the labour market integration of persons granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status (Sauer, 2024).

Infobox 6: Tasks of the strategy committee for international skilled workers⁷⁴

- Implement a nationwide strategy for skilled worker immigration;
- Identify destination and focus countries for the recruitment of workers;
- Promote Austria as an attractive location for workers;
- Coordinate recruitment activities abroad;
- Expand German courses in focus countries;
- Simplify the process of verifying academic qualifications gained abroad;
- Make changes to health laws to help meet labour supply needs;
- Establish standardized pathways for training, education, recruitment and immigration;
- Introduce a pre-check register to make it easier to recognize qualifications;
- Digitalize application procedures;

⁷² Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

⁷³ Labour Market Promotion Act, FLG. No. 31/1969, in the version of federal law FLG. I No. 106/2022.

⁷⁴ See Sauer, 2024.

- Adhere to the relevant international standards for ethical recruitment;
- Promote educational exports, education and training;
- Exchange information on cooperative partnerships within the European Union in the context of the European Public Employment Service (EURES);
- Improve labour market integration and the qualification of migrants living in Austria.

Signing of bilateral agreements

Greater importance was attached to bilateral cooperation with third countries in the field of skilled immigration from 2022 to 2024 in Austria (Ammann, 2024:5f., 11f.; Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, n.d.b; Stiller, 2023:45f.). For an overview of recent bilateral agreements see [4.2](#).

Changes at European Union level

Finally, the changes at European Union level should also be mentioned here. The European Commission's package on Skills and Talent Mobility, adopted in 2023, provides for various areas of work and measures to increase the attractiveness of the European Union for workers from third countries. These include facilitating the recruitment of workers from outside the European Union through the EU Talent Pool; simpler and faster recognition of professional qualifications and validation of qualifications acquired in third countries; establishing talent partnerships to improve cooperation with partner countries on talent mobility and skills development; facilitating mobility of learners and teachers under the "Europe on the Move" initiative; improving mobility within the European Union and promoting legal migration pathways in partnership with third countries (European Commission, 2023a).

These new European Union instruments and measures are primarily seen as an interesting addition to national activities. However, when implementing the European Union instruments and in regard to the countries on which the talent partnerships are focussed, the question arises in Austria as to how these fit into national strategies.⁷⁵

With regard to the focus countries defined by the EU Commission for talent partnerships (European Commission, 2023a),⁷⁶ Austria's primary cooperation partner is Egypt. The Austrian Federal Chancellor made a bilateral visit to Egypt in April 2023 and again in March 2024 as part of an European Union delegation (Federal Chancellery, 2023b, 2024).

The numerous changes taking place during the observation period of the study reflect remarkable political dynamics aimed at strengthening the recruitment of skilled workers from abroad. At the same time, the scope for changes to laws and policies in the field of labour migration is limited due to factors such as the politicization of migration and structural features of the Austrian labour market system (see [3.1](#)).

⁷⁵ Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024; Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

⁷⁶ Bangladesh, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan and Tunisia.

The Austrian government programme 2025–2029 of the Austrian People's Party, the Social Democratic Party of Austria and the New Austrian and Liberal Forum, which was published shortly before the completion of this study at the end of February 2025, indicates that Austria will continue to focus on strengthening the recruitment of skilled workers. The further strategic development of labour migration is a priority of the government programme to preserve Austria as a business location (Austrian People's Party, Social Democratic Party of Austria, New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2025, p. 34). According to the programme, this includes a series of planned measures and legal changes – from the expansion and development to the RWR card system, the digitalization and the simplification of application and recognition processes, to the increase of quotas to cover the seasonal demand of workers (see also 5).

4 RECRUITMENT OF WORKFORCES

4.1 Initiatives, institutions and stakeholders

Austria does not have an institutionalized recruitment mechanism for foreign workers. In recent years, however, a strategic focus on recruitment from third countries has been introduced at national level, which includes a range of recruitment measures.

The Strategy Committee for International Skilled Labour, which was established at the end of 2023, is the key component of the strategy for recruiting international skilled workers in Austria (Federal Chancellery, 2023c) (see 3.5). This committee is responsible for identifying target and focus countries for the recruitment of labour and the coordination of recruitment activities (see Infobox 6).

The International Skilled Workers Initiative is central to recruitment in this context. Since 2019, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber has been developing an initiative for the recruitment of skilled workers in shortage occupations from third countries. The International Skilled Workers Initiative was then introduced as a strategic measure in 2022.⁷⁷ Its key focus areas include skills assessment and qualification measures, recruitment from countries outside the European Union, and improving public image and communication. Indonesia, the Philippines and Kosovo⁴³ were chosen as focus countries for this initiative (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2024b). Twelve jobs on the list of shortage occupations that are particularly affected by labour shortage and are in the fields of IT, manual labour, electronics, the care sector and tourism were chosen as the focus occupations (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, n.d.a). In addition to establishing structures and partnerships, the aim of this initiative is to connect stakeholders and pave the way for recruitment in the future. Austrian companies which already employ workers from these countries or plan to do so are also envisaged to play an active role (Ebner et al., 2023:10).

In cooperation with the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy has incorporated the objectives and focus countries of the International Skilled Workers Initiative into the nationwide strategy for skilled labour migration, which is also reflected in Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with the International Skilled Workers Initiative focus countries Indonesia and the Philippines (see 4.2). Moreover, as part of the 2023 Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement between Austria and India⁷⁸ was also included as a pilot country in the group of focus countries.⁷⁹

Another key component with regard to recruitment from third countries is the liberalization of private employment agencies in 2022. This was made possible by the deletion of a passage in the Labour Market Promotion Act (formerly Art. 4 para. 8 Labour Market Promotion Act). Previously, the approval of the Public Employment Service – with the exception of artists – was a prerequisite for recruitment agencies to become

77 Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

78 Memorandum of Understanding between the Austrian Federal Government and the Government of the Republic of India on a Comprehensive Partnership on Migration and Mobility, FLG. III No. 127/2023.

79 Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

active in third countries, but this approval was only granted in exceptional cases.⁸⁰ With the reform of 2022, this requirement was removed, making it possible for recruitment agencies to operate in third countries.⁸¹ From the perspective of the Austrian Business Agency and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber this change was a key step towards effectively recruiting skilled workers from third countries.⁸²

Companies can also receive support with international recruitment from the Austrian Business Agency (see [Infobox 7](#)), as part of the International Skilled Workers Initiative (see [above](#)) and from the trade centres of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber abroad.⁸³

At a regional level, some of the provinces have also launched initiatives to recruit care workers from third countries (see [4.4](#)).⁸⁴

Infobox 7: WORK in AUSTRIA

The amendment to the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, which came into force on October 1, 2022, enshrined in law that the Immigration and Residence Service Center, which is part of the WORK in AUSTRIA division of the Austrian Business Agency (ABA), is to provide comprehensive support services for companies and international skilled workers. The ABA provides its services free of charge as a site agency of the Republic of Austria, under the jurisdiction of the Federal Ministry of Labor and Economy.

The organization's legal remit includes the provision of digital information in multiple languages about the Red-White-Red Card (RWR Card) and the EU Blue Card as well as support and counselling for companies and skilled workers during both the application process and the individual steps of the procedure (Art. 20 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). In addition to this, the ABA provides third-country nationals with support on issues relating to residence and employment. It promotes Austria as a business location at events and online in selected target markets to specialists in the fields of IT, technology and life sciences.⁸⁵ As part of its Community Building scheme, it provides people from different communities with information on living and working in Austria, while the Talent Hub and Matching events aim to bring together employers and employees looking for a job in Austria. Company onboarding processes are another focus of the ABA. To this end it has produced together with the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber a guide with tips for establishing initial contact for newly recruited workers and for the first few weeks of employment.⁸⁶ The ABA not only regards itself as an

80 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024; Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

81 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024; Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

82 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024; Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

83 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024; Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024; Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

84 Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

85 For details see Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, ABA and Mol (n.d.). [Your future made in Austria](#).

86 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

interface connecting recruitment agencies, companies and foreign workers, but also offers know-how transfer to recruitment agencies.⁸⁷

Experts see the involvement of the ABA's service centre WORK in AUSTRIA as a good practice.⁸⁸ The Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy stated that the establishment of the ABA's service centre is an important structural addition with a major leverage effect for the recruitment of skilled workers from third countries. The ABA's programmes are part of the Austrian location and industry strategy. These programmes are especially important in the search for highly qualified persons and those with specialized technical qualifications for Austria as a business location.⁸⁹ The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber appreciates the role of the ABA as an interface and greatly values its counselling and support services.⁹⁰

4.2 Bilateral agreements

At national level, the following legally non-binding bilateral agreements with third countries were aimed, among other things, at promoting the positive effects of labour migration for Austria and the respective partner countries or to facilitate the recruitment of labour:

- The Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement between Austria and India⁹¹ came into force on 1 September 2023. It is the first comprehensive migration and mobility agreement that Austria has concluded with a third country, and it covers various areas including labour migration. However, it does not include any provisions for new access routes or easier access to the Austrian labour market outside the current legal situation and legislation (Federal Chancellery, 2022:2).
- On 25 October 2023, Austria and the Philippines signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the recruitment of skilled workers.⁹² The MoU provides among other issues for the establishment of a recruitment pathway for skilled workers from the Philippines and aims to position Austria as an attractive location for skilled workers, particularly in the care sector (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, n.d.b). - On 30 September 2024, the Philippines also opened a Migrant Workers Office in Vienna (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2024a).
- Furthermore, a MoU between Austria and Indonesia was signed on 13 May 2024. It provides for the management of migration flows, as well as the recruitment of key and skilled workers. In addition on the recruitment of key workers and skilled workers.⁹³

87 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

88 Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024; Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024; Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024; Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

89 Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

90 Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

91 Memorandum of Understanding between the Austrian Federal Government and the Government of the Republic of India on a Comprehensive Partnership on Migration and Mobility, FLG. III No. 127/2023.

92 Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Austria and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines on the Recruitment of Professionals and Skilled Workers.

93 Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Austria and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia on the Recruitment of Key and Skilled Labour.

- On 13 September 2024, Austria signed a migration and mobility agreement with Ghana. In addition to the readmission of irregularly staying migrants, the MoU also envisages legal migration routes for qualified workers (Die Presse, 2024).
- On 26 September 2024, Austria and Kenya signed a MoU that, in addition to cooperation on return, it aims to provide legal migration routes for work purposes between the countries as well as technical and vocational training (Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, 2024).

4.3 Ethical recruitment

As private employment services are a relatively new market in Austria, the question of quality assurance in recruitment arises. While Austria has a number of safeguards in place with regard to recruitment agencies (including the option to withdraw business licences), the ability to monitor practices in third countries is limited.⁹⁴ Stakeholders in Austria consider the question of a suitable quality assurance mechanism to be important, also with regard to good and sustainable partnerships with the countries of origin.⁹⁵ The Federation of Austrian Industries noted that quality assurance of certain standards for future employees guaranteed by public authorities can also become a competitive advantage for Austria.⁹⁶ The Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy moreover stated that, in the context of the recently established partnerships with Indonesia and the Philippines (see 4.2), third countries are very committed to reviewing recruitment practices locally.⁹⁷ Various stakeholders are currently looking at what a quality safeguard mechanism for recruitment in Austria could look like in the future. One possible option would be a self-certification model for recruitment agencies, which would set the standard for ethical and fair recruitment practices.⁹⁸ The global International Organization for Migration (IOM) initiative IRIS Ethical Recruitment, which is taken note of also in Austria, offers such a certification model. The IRIS certification system assesses recruitment agencies' compliance with both the standard set by IRIS and the relevant international human rights and employment law instruments (IOM, n.d.). One of the main principles of IRIS is that employers assume responsibility for all recruitment costs, so that migrants are not liable for costs incurred as part of their recruitment (IOM, 2019).

Efforts to prevent and curb brain drain, an essential element of ethical recruitment, are currently only present at a rudimentary level in Austria.⁹⁹ The issue of brain drain was one of the aspects taken into account when selecting the focus countries and regions in the context of the International Skilled Workers Initiative.¹⁰⁰ As well as investigating other factors, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber also carried out an analysis of the needs situation and requirements in the countries of origin.¹⁰¹ In countries or regions at risk of brain drain (Albania and Kosovo⁴³), targeted measures were taken in order to generate added value locally.¹⁰² The Austrian

94 Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

95 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024; Written input: Viktor Fleischer, Federation of Austrian Industries, 31 July 2024.

96 Written input: Viktor Fleischer, Federation of Austrian Industries, 31 July 2024.

97 Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

98 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

99 Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024; Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

100 Albania, Brazil, Indonesia, Kosovo (see footnote 43) and the Philippines.

101 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

102 Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024; Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

Federal Economic Chamber stated that the possibilities of teaching and educational exports are assessed in the context of the International Skilled Workers Initiative.¹⁰³

As part of the RWR Card application process, the Public Employment Service is currently investigating companies for past irregularities (Art. 4 para. 1 subpara. 2 and subpara. 5 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals) and will initiate investigations should any indications of this come to light.¹⁰⁴ The application for labour market approval will be rejected in cases where the third-country national will not be employed at the employer's company but will be supplied to third parties as labour (Art. 4 para. 1 subpara. 7 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals), or where the employment contract came into being through employment services not authorized under the Labour Market Promotion Act and the employer was or should have been aware of this (Art. 4 para. 1 subpara. 6 Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals). The Labour Market Promotion Act also includes the following basic tenets for employment services (Art. 3 and 5 Labour Market Promotion Act; European Migration Network, 2024):

- Use of the employment service must be voluntary.
- There must be no obligation to accept an offer of employment.
- The employment service must be impartial.
- The employment service must be free of charge for jobseekers (with the exception of artists and athletes).

Austrian employment law standards, for example collective agreements, apply as soon as third-country nationals commence employment in Austria. Almost all employees (95 %) are covered by collective labour agreements (Biffl, 2023:82). However, as the Chamber of Labour argues, in practice tying the RWR Card and the work permit to a specific employer, as is common in the Austrian labour migration system, creates a barrier for workers in terms of asserting their rights such as claiming compensation for overtime hours.¹⁰⁵

Infobox 8: Skills Mobility Partnerships in Austria

Skills Mobility Partnerships (SMPs) are an instrument designed to allow both countries of origin and destination to benefit from the advantages of migration and mobility, as well as being mutually beneficial to migrants, employers and society as a whole. In practice, this means that SMPs act as platforms for cooperation, enabling both countries of origin and destination to invest in employee training for both labour markets in the spirit of partnership. In 2023, IOM Austria conducted a study to investigate the feasibility of Skills Mobility Partnerships in Austria (Ebner et al., 2023). In collaboration with the Federation of Austrian Industries, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the ERSTE Foundation and renowned experts, the study examined whether SMPs in Austria can be implemented with countries outside the European Union. The study revealed that relevant stakeholders in Austria and potential

103 Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

104 Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

105 Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

partner countries have great interest in SMPs, but that there are also major barriers to the practical implementation of such partnerships (ibid.:25).

At the time of writing this study, IOM was planning to launch the SMP project “EAGLE” in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Chancellery in 2025. The project promotes economic cooperation and strengthens the regular migration routes between Egypt and Austria. The aim is to mobilize Egypt’s labour potential through targeted skills development. The focus is on further technical training (TVET) in metal technology and modern welding for the transport sector as well as language courses. According to the plan a total of 125 people are envisaged to be trained, 100 of whom will migrate to Austria. EAGLE graduates and companies will receive intensive support before and after migration. Integration and onboarding strategies are developed together with the companies, supplemented by intercultural training and other offers to facilitate the entry into the new working environment and social integration.¹⁰⁶

4.4 Regional initiatives

When it comes to recruitment, it should be noted that there are also regional imbalances in the context of labour shortages and recruitment in Austria, as in other European Union countries. In general, the supply of workers is higher in eastern Austria, partially due to the location of the capital (and its significant immigration)¹⁰⁷, and the demand for workers is greater in the west.¹⁰⁸ This is linked to the tourism sector and the high seasonal demand for workers in seasonal jobs, where the proportion of foreign workers is particularly high.¹⁰⁹

Initiatives to combat regional imbalances with the help of foreign workers within Austria include:

- **Regional shortage occupation lists:** Since 2019, in addition to a nationwide list of shortage occupations, the Minister of Labour has also been able to define shortage occupations for certain provinces by regulation (Parliamentary Administration, 2018).
- **Regional recruitment initiatives and cooperative arrangements at provincial level:** The nine Austrian provinces have, for the most part, their own strategies for the recruitment of third-country nationals,¹¹⁰ which indicates the existence of labour competition within the country.¹¹¹ Since 2023, individual provinces have been actively recruiting health care and nursing staff from third countries, particularly in the care sector. Upper Austria and Burgenland, for example, rely on individual cooperation arrangements for recruitment from the Philippines and India (Catholic Church in Austria, 2024; Province of Burgenland, 2023; Province of Upper Austria, 2023; Upper Austrian Health Holding, 2024). Individual

¹⁰⁶ Written input: Alexander Spiegelfeld, IOM Austria, Head of Integration / Labour Mobility and Social Inclusion Unit, Vienna, 25 October 2024.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024; Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024; see also: Austrian Federal Economic Chamber; [WKO Fachkräfte-Radar - Stellenandrang nach Berufsgruppen](#).

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

¹¹¹ Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

facilities in Tyrol, Carinthia and Salzburg in turn recruit care workers from Columbia, for example (Austrian Broadcast, 2023; Ebenführer, 2024; Prlić, 2023; Talent & Care, n.d.).

- **Regional support and counselling services for skilled workers:** In addition to the national advisory service offered by the Austrian Business Agency, some individual provinces also have private or regional initiatives concerned with the admission and retention of skilled workers in Austria, as well as offering advisory services for “expats”, for example by the business location agencies in the provinces. Examples of these include the [Carinthian International Center](#) and [welcome2villach](#) in Carinthia, [Business Upper Austria](#) in Upper Austria, [Expat V](#) in Vorarlberg, [Club International – CINT](#) in Styria, [Welcome to Lower Austria](#) in Lower Austria and the [Vienna Business Agency](#) in Vienna. The Austrian Integration Fund Integration Service for Skilled Professionals offers subject-specific German courses in the provinces (Austrian Integration Fund, 2024a).

5 CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT WITH REGARD TO LABOUR MIGRATION POLICY

5.1 Challenges

Whole-of-government strategy

One of the challenges with regard to labour recruitment at the time of writing is the implementation of a comprehensive national labour migration strategy.¹¹² Although a number of steps have been taken to combat labour shortages, as illustrated in this report, the comprehensive national implementation and design remains a relevant issue. One factor fuelling this challenge is Austria's constitution as a federal state. The Austrian federal states have in some cases developed their own and different regional recruitment strategies (see 4.4).¹¹³

Lower qualified migration

In the view of the Austrian Chamber of Economy, immigration in the non-skilled sector represents a further challenge. According to the expert interviewed, the labour shortage, which also affects the lower-qualified sector, requires further legal liberalization, such as the abolition of quotas, as the existing labour market test is considered sufficient.¹¹⁴ In lower-skilled areas or areas with low added value the costs associated with recruitment play a particularly important role.¹¹⁵

Recognition of qualifications acquired abroad

The recognition of foreign qualifications of third country nationals in the context of the Red-White-Red Card (RWR Card) is only necessary for so-called regulated occupations (in particular, occupations in health and social services, but also for architects and lawyers) (ABA, n.d.; Austrian Integration Fund, n.d.). Formal recognition is not necessary for non-regulated occupations. The individual must, however, have a comparable level of education based on a legally defined concept of comparability.¹¹⁶

Despite the recent simplification measures (see 3.5), immigration for third-country nationals in regulated professions is still difficult. Problems with the recognition (or non-recognition) of qualifications can also lead to the employment of migrants in positions below their skill level (skills mismatch).¹¹⁷ According to the Counselling Center for Migrants (Coordination, Contact Points for people who gained professional qualifications abroad), it is extremely difficult for third-country nationals, who are still abroad, to have their qualifications fully recognized without the support of agencies and dedicated employers.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Written input: Viktor Fleischer, Federation of Austrian Industries, 31 July 2024.

¹¹³ Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

¹¹⁶ Written input: Norbert Bichl, Counselling Center for Migrants, 9 August 2024.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024.

¹¹⁸ Written input: Norbert Bichl, Counselling Center for Migrants, 9 August 2024.

Challenges in the recognition and comparability of qualifications acquired abroad often arise due to differences in education and vocational education and training systems.¹¹⁹ For example, an equivalent to the Austrian dual education system (apprenticeships) often does not exist in third countries.¹²⁰ Yet, Austrian companies with labour shortages are finding it particularly difficult to recruit persons who have completed an apprenticeship, and for this reason, the majority of employers are in favour of enabling third-country nationals who have reached the age of majority to undertake apprenticeships in Austria (Dornmayr and Riepl, 2024:46).

The federal system also contributes to the complexity of the recognition process. Due to the federal principle, the provinces have, in some cases, different laws (Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and Austrian Integration Fund, 2014) concerning the recognition of qualifications for occupations where this is a legal requirement (regulated professions), in the care sector for example. In such cases, the province in which the jobseeker wishes to work is responsible for granting recognition of their qualifications. This topic has already been taken up and discussed in the strategy committee for international skilled workers (see [Infobox 6](#)).¹²¹

Austria is currently also developing a system of pre-checks to speed up the recognition of qualifications by comparing them using a database. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy is already working on a database of this kind for the RWR Card for the focus countries Indonesia and the Philippines.¹²² The overall aim is to develop a database for specific pilot occupations, listing education establishments and education levels as well as their Austrian equivalents. This will make it easier to check and compare qualifications in the future.¹²³ According to the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber expert interviewed, this approach will enable both companies and skilled workers to plan with greater certainty and will simplify administrative processes on the whole.¹²⁴ At the current time, each application still has to be checked individually – a time-consuming process for the authorities.

Social security agreements

Another important point with regard to successful recruitment is social security agreements. Social security agreements are bilateral contracts under international law which essentially help to safeguard the social rights of persons with social insurance in cross-border employment, that is employment abroad, for example by taking into consideration periods insured in the other contracting country when obtaining or continuing entitlement to benefits (Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, n.d.).

The absence of such agreements can present a challenge when recruiting foreign workers. According to the experts interviewed,¹²⁵ signing such agreements would make Austria a more attractive destination for employment compared to other countries and drive the successful implementation of partnership agreements.

119 Written input: Norbert Bichl, Counseling Center for Migrants, 9 August 2024; Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024; Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

120 Written input: Norbert Bichl, Counseling Center for Migrants, 9 August 2024; Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

121 Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

122 Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

123 Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

124 Interview with Julia Moreno-Hasenöhr, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 22 August 2024.

125 Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024; Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

An agreement has already been reached with Brazil, although Brazil is yet to ratify this.¹²⁶ There is currently no such agreement in place with India, the Philippines or Indonesia, which are countries Austria has also focused on with regard to recruiting skilled workers (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022).

Citizenship law

A further challenge encountered when recruiting skilled workers is the fundamental notion enshrined in Austrian citizenship law that dual or multiple citizenship is to be prevented (Stiller, 2019:75). Austrian citizenship law does not allow for dual or multiple citizenships, with exceptions granted in certain cases (Art. 28 Citizenship Act 1985), including the acquisition of another citizenship by descent. Those who voluntarily acquire foreign citizenship generally lose the right to Austrian citizenship.

According to the Austrian Business Agency expert interviewed,¹²⁷ this provision has especially led to difficulties in the recruitment of former Austrian citizens living abroad who have acquired a foreign citizenship, as they are often not willing to relinquish this citizenship. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development points out, though, that recruitment of a country's own diaspora is an important factor for economic growth (OECD, 2023a).

Welcoming culture

One expert interviewed¹²⁸ stated that the political debate on migration and the negativity surrounding these debates also presents a challenge. According to the expert from the Chamber of Labour, Austria could step up efforts to create a more welcoming culture and to proactively highlight prospects in the country.¹²⁹ In this context, the Federation of Austrian Industries expert¹³⁰ pointed out that successful recruitment processes for workers from abroad also include a welcoming culture at the municipal level. Initiatives could range from an image campaign to concrete measures such as the arrangement of housing, or English-language services at municipal offices.

Command of and proof of German language proficiency

According to the experts interviewed for this study, finding suitable German-study formats for workers is another constant challenge. This is also reflected in the perception of challenges by employers. According to the companies questioned for the Labour Force Radar survey, a prospective employee's German language proficiency presents the biggest hurdle that companies face when employing skilled workers from abroad (74 %; Dornmayr and Riepl, 2024). According to the expert from the Austrian Business Agency, greater flexibility on the part of companies regarding their requirements and

¹²⁶ Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

¹²⁷ Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

¹²⁸ Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024.

¹²⁹ Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

¹³⁰ Written input: Viktor Fleischer, Federation of Austrian Industries, 31 July 2024.

expectations of applicants would be advantageous. For example, it could be sufficient for candidates to only be required to reach a certain level of proficiency in German after completion of a certain period of residence.¹³¹

Since January 2024, foreign workers with long-term residence prospects in Austria have been eligible for funding from the Austrian Integration Fund for German courses at work or alongside their employment. This measure was implemented after a pilot phase in 2023.

Infobox 9: The (subordinate) role of work experience and soft skills in immigration for employment purposes

The points system for the RWR Card takes work experience into account during the application process. For example, applicants need at least 55 points to obtain an RWR Card in the “other key worker” category. Twenty of these points may be issued for work experience. One point is granted for each half year of work experience gained abroad and two points for each half year of work experience in Austria (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.h). The same principle applies to applications for the RWR Card for skilled workers in shortage occupations; however, only work experience, which corresponds to one’s training is taken into account here (Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy et al., n.d.c). According to the expert Gudrun Biffl, in international comparison, the value placed on work experience gained abroad is relatively low in Austria. This makes it more difficult to gain access to the labour market, particularly for people with intermediate qualifications.¹³²

Soft skills (cross-disciplinary key skills) are not taken into account in the RWR Card points system or by the other instruments that regulate labour market access.¹³³ The challenge here is in defining objective criteria for soft skills.¹³⁴ In practice, however, work experience and soft skills play an increasingly important role.¹³⁵

5.2 Lessons learned

Whole-of-government action

A lesson learned, which addresses the challenge to implement a whole-of-government strategy mentioned above is that ongoing dialogue and close cooperation between the various national actors is necessary for the effective recruitment of skilled workers. The establishment of a cross-government strategy committee for international skilled workers (see 3.5) points to this lesson learned, and represents a solution in that

131 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

132 Interview with Gudrun Biffl, University for Continuing Education Krems, 24 July 2024.

133 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024; Interview with Johannes Peyrl, Federal Chamber of Labour, 13 August 2024.

134 Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

135 Written input: Viktor Fleischer, Federation of Austrian Industries, 31 July 2024.

regard. The experience of Austrian experts shows that processes enabling coordination between actors and a harmonization of regulations are especially important in federal systems with multiple actors and different regulations.

Cooperation with countries of origin

Austrian experts also emphasize the importance of recognizing the needs of the workers' countries of origin. This includes planning activities closely with the governments of these countries and maintaining regular contact with the different embassies with regard to the recruitment of foreign skilled workers.¹³⁶ Effective cooperation arrangements between the authorities in both the country of origin and the country of destination are also essential and should be taken into account when selecting partner countries.¹³⁷

Holistic approach in recruiting

According to the experts interviewed for this study, a holistic, strategic approach, taking into account all steps in the process, from the planning stages and initial contact with workers in their country of origin to assistance in the country of destination, is crucial for the successful recruitment of workers from abroad, especially in a competitive environment. (Potential) foreign workers and their family members must therefore have access to contact persons to guide them through every step of the process, and employers must be provided with support to help them to retain staff after recruitment.¹³⁸

Inclusive regulations and open, service-oriented state bureaucracy

Inclusive family regulations within labour migration policy are another decisive factor for success in the competition for foreign skilled workers.¹³⁹

In addition to attractive statutory regulations, a service-oriented administration of the application process is considered crucial for the recruitment of foreign workers.¹⁴⁰ Another insight from Austria in this context is the importance of the digitalization of application processes. Austria launched this process with the introduction of an internal IT system (Application for Settlement and Residence, AnNA, see 3.5), which enables to connect the different Austrian authorities, thus making the application process demonstrably much more effective. This step is to be continued as part of the digitalization of the entire application process, even if a personal appearance to take fingerprints will always be necessary, according to the interviewed expert from the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁴¹ Further measures to simplify this process, such as offering English-language indications in application forms, are also relevant here.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

¹³⁷ Interview with Sylvia Vana, Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, 19 August 2024.

¹³⁸ Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

¹³⁹ Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Margit Kreuzhuber, Austrian Business Agency, 2 August 2024.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024.

¹⁴² Interview with Eva Pflieger, Ministry of the Interior, 31 July 2024.

6 CONCLUSION

In the wake of demographic and economic changes, particularly the decreasing supply of labour from the European Union and the European Economic Area, there have been a series of strategic changes in the field of labour migration from third countries in Austria during the period under review. This was particularly apparent in the 2022 and 2023 reforms to the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals aimed at facilitating and supporting the immigration of skilled workers. Lower-skilled labour migration was primarily addressed by increasing quotas for seasonal workers.

One main development to come out of the 2022 reforms of the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals was the incorporation into national legislation of the Austrian Business Agency initiative, WORK in AUSTRIA, as a service centre for international skilled workers. WORK in AUSTRIA acts as an interface connecting recruitment agencies, companies and foreign skilled workers. The Service centre is a good practice example.

The 2022 liberalization of private employment services was another important step in addressing labour shortages through recruitment in third countries. This step can be seen as significant for effective recruitment. At the same time, despite Austria's extensive labour and social law provisions, the change also raises questions about safeguards concerning ethical recruitment.

Another important development was the establishment of a nationwide, cross-government strategy committee for international skilled workers in 2023, a measure which strengthens Austria's whole-of-government approach on labour migration. The results of the study indicate that the whole-of-government approach and the implementation of comprehensive whole-of-government strategies require a continued effort.

The International Skilled Workers Initiative, implemented by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber in cooperation with the Austrian Business Agency, is another key initiative. The goal of the International Skilled Workers Initiative is to position Austria as an attractive employment destination in selected third countries (focus countries) and to support domestic companies in their recruitment of skilled workers. The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber focus countries were integrated into the national strategy for controlled immigration of skilled workers. Related to this development, there has been an increase in the number of bilateral agreements, which, among other objectives, deal with recruitment from third countries.

In addition to other challenges, such as German language skills, the system for the recognition of foreign qualifications represents a significant hurdle in the recruitment of workers. The comparability of qualifications presents a particular challenge due to the difference between education and vocational training systems in third countries and in Austria. Austria's federal structure also means that there are differences within the country in regulating and processing the recognition of qualifications. With regard to this challenge of the recognition of qualification, measures such as a simplified process for verifying qualifications in the care sector have already been implemented, and the creation of pre-check databases to speed up recognition have been initiated in Austria.

In addition to the legal changes that Austria has made, especially since 2022, administrative changes are also important. The digitalization of application procedures in the area of residence and settlement, which has already been initiated and is envisaged to be further expanded, should be mentioned here in particular.

Overall, a political momentum regarding labour migration aimed at enhancing recruitment of workers from third countries is evident during the observation period of the study. At the same time, labour migration is shaped both by the politicization of migration and the structural characteristics of the Austrian labour market system, which limits the scope for legal and policy change. The composition and political agenda of the future Federal Government, which is about to be formed after the most recent general election in 2024 and is not yet evident in detail at the time of writing, will be of particular importance for future developments.

This momentum is also reflected in the Austrian government programme 2025–2029, published by the Austrian People's Party, the Social Democratic Party of Austria and the New Austrian and Liberal Forum in February 2025. The programme identifies access to international skilled workers as one of the three pillars of the national strategy for skilled workers (Austrian People's Party, Social Democratic Party of Austria, New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2025, p. 34). The programme addresses key points of labour migration policy, including some of the challenges identified in this report, in terms of policy reforms to be implemented. For example, the programme envisages an evaluation and the further development of the indicators for the shortage occupation list. The experts interviewed for this study considered the list in its current form to be too short-sighted. There are also plans for more efficient professional recognition for skilled workers from third countries as well as simplified, accelerated and more cost-effective recognition procedures, especially in regard to nostrification, in order to recognize qualifications already acquired more quickly (Austrian People's Party, Social Democratic Party of Austria, New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2025, p. 92) – another key point taken up in this study with regard to effective recruitment from third countries. The new government programme also addresses the challenge, identified in this study, for businesses to be able to plan with regard to the Seasonal Quota Regulation. It is announced that the publication of the Seasonal Quota Regulation will be ensured and at the same time the processing time will be shortened (Austrian People's Party, Social Democratic Party of Austria, New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2025, p. 47).

Overall, the government programme places a strong emphasis on qualified immigration, which is to be promoted by legal changes to the Red-White-Red Card (RWR Card), by speeding up processes, by digitalization and by making the system more flexible (Austrian People's Party, Social Democratic Party of Austria, New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2025, p. 74). In this context, the government programme includes a number of specific points on expanding the RWR Card system, such as opening the RWR system to companies that provide Austrian businesses with third-country nationals in shortage occupations, or introducing a RWR Card for adult apprentices as a pilot project (Austrian People's Party, Social Democratic Party of Austria, New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2025, p. 34). The programme also envisages an increase in seasonal quotas and a separate, joint seasonal quota for the EU accession countries Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo⁴³ (Austrian People's Party, Social Democratic Party of Austria, New Austrian and Liberal Forum, 2025, p. 46). This suggests that both a focus on skilled immigration within the framework of (the expansion of) the RWR Card and a focus on cyclical, seasonal labour migration through quotas are envisaged and will be expanded.

Regarding the future role of labour migration in times of labour shortages it will be key to what extent and in what form these and other points that are also addressed in this study will be implemented in the coming months and years under the new Austrian federal government, which took office in March 2025.

ANNEX

A.1 List of abbreviations and translations

English term	English abbreviation	German term	German abbreviation
Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals	–	Ausländerbeschäftigungsgesetz	AuslBG
Aliens Police Act 2005	–	Fremdenpolizeigesetz 2005	FPG
Austrian Business Agency	ABA	Austrian Business Agency	ABA
Austrian Federal Economic Chamber	–	Wirtschaftskammer Österreich	WKÖ
Austrian Freedom Party	–	Freiheitliche Partei Österreich	FPÖ
Austrian Integration Fund	–	Österreichischer Integrationsfonds	ÖIF
Austrian People's Party	-	Österreichische Volkspartei	ÖVP
Chamber of Labour	–	Arbeiterkammer	AK
Construction Workers' Annual Leave and Severance Pay Fund	–	Bauarbeiter-Urlaubs- und Abfertigungskasse	BUAK
Coronavirus disease 2019	COVID-19	Coronavirus-Krankheit-2019	COVID-19
European Economic Area	EEA	Europäischer Wirtschaftsraum	EWR
European Employment Services	EURES	Europäisches Netz der Arbeitsvermittlungen	EURES
European Free Trade Association	EFTA	Europäische Freihandelsassoziation	EFTA
European Labour Authority	ELA	Europäische Arbeitsbehörde	ELA
European Migration Network	EMN	Europäisches Migrationsnetzwerk	EMN
European Union	EU	Europäische Union	EU

English term	English abbreviation	German term	German abbreviation
Federal Chancellery	BKA	Bundeskanzleramt	–
Federal Law Gazette	FLG.	Bundesgesetzblatt	BGBI.
Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs	–	Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten	BMEIA
Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport	–	Bundesministerium für Kunst, Kultur, öffentlichen Dienst und Sport	BMKÖS
Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy	–	Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Wirtschaft	BMAW
Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection	–	Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz	BMSGPK
Federal Ministry of the Interior	MoI	Bundeministerium für Inneres	BMI
Federation of Austrian Industries	–	Industriellen Vereinigung	IV
General Social Insurance Act	–	Allgemeines Sozialversicherungsgesetz	ASVG
Health Care and Nursing Act	–	Gesundheits- und Krankenpflegegesetzes	GuKG
ibw Austria - Research & Development in VET	ibw Austria	Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft	ibw
International Organization for Migration	IOM	Internationale Organisation für Migration	IOM
Labour Market Promotion Act	–	Arbeitsmarktförderungsgesetz	AMFG
Memorandum of Understanding	MoU	Memorandum of Understanding	MoU
National Contact Point	NCP	Nationaler Kontaktpunkt	NKP

English term	English abbreviation	German term	German abbreviation
New Austrian and Liberal Forum	-	Das neue Österreich und Liberales Forum	NEOS
Official Journal of the European Union	OJ	Amtsblatt der Europäischen Union	ABl.
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD	Organisation für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung	OECD
paragraph	para	Absatz	Abs.
Public Employment Service		Arbeitsmarktservice	AMS
Red-White-Red Card (Plus)	RWR Card	Rot-Weiß-Rot – Karte (plus)	RWR - Karte
Settlement and Residence Act	–	Niederlassungs- und Aufenthaltsgesetz	NAG
Skills Mobility Partnerships	SMP	Skills-Mobilitätspartnerschaften	SMP
Social Democratic Party of Austria	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs	SPÖ
Social security agreements	–	Abkommen über soziale Sicherheit	ASS
subparagraph	subpara.	Ziffer	Z
Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union	TFEU	Vertrag über die Arbeitsweise der Europäischen Union	AEUV

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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).

