

LLP- Grundtvig Multilateral Project FORWARD

FORWARD. Competence portfolio and pedagogical tools to identify, recognize, validate and improve the competences acquired by migrant women in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts

**National Report on Qualitative Research about the Employment Situation and Competence Acknowledgement of Migrant Women in Austria**  
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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



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## **1. INTRODUCTION: THE CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN AUSTRIA**

Austria has one of the largest shares of working-age immigrants in the OECD - 17% of the working-age population in 2010 was foreign-born (cf. Krause/Liebig 2011)

In the beginning of 2011, about 18% of the women in Austria had a migratory background. In total of about 750.000 migrant women are living in Austria. 43 % of these migrant women came from EU and EEA-countries, and 57% from third countries (1.1.2011). In summary most migrant women came from Germany, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo or Turkey (cf. ÖIF 2011).

As in other European OECD countries, causes for migration to Austria were labour migration prior to the first oil shock, family migration, the fall of the Iron Curtain in the late 1980s and even more: the conflicts in former Yugoslavia.

„In spite of its large immigrant population, the overall framework for integration in Austria is less developed than in other OECD countries.“ (Krause/Liebig 2011)

The Austrian labour market puts emphasis on formal qualifications, which means particular challenges for immigrants. Those who have acquired qualifications in their country of origin are frequently depreciated on the Austrian labour market (a co-ordinated system for the recognition of foreign qualifications is still lacking). Consequently, the incidence of migrants, who are overqualified for their current jobs, is among the highest in the OECD (cf. Krause/Liebig 2011).

In contrast to other OECD countries, Austria does not have a structured integration programme for new arrivals at the federal level. The only offers comprise training courses on German language for immigrants.

Nevertheless, the overall labour market integration process for immigrants is rather well developed in comparison to international standards. Austria has a rather favourable mix of origin countries of migrants. A large number of women are coming from high-income OECD countries and another large part is referred to Ex-Yugoslavia (both groups of migrants tend to have relatively favourable labour market outcomes). But especially women from lower income countries have outcomes which are as good as depicted in international comparison.

There is a disproportional high number of migrant women with either very high or very low educational skills. 25% of women from EU/EEA and Switzerland have reached a university degree, whereas 73% of women from Turkey and 48% from Ex-Yugoslavia reached only basic educational skills (cf. ÖIF 2011).

Only 59% of women with migratory background in Austria are actually employed (compared to women without migration background: 68%). The unemployment rate for migrant women is about 9% - for Turkish women about 14% (ibid.).

Moreover, migrant women are often working in low wage sectors with little career options such as in the areas of cleaning and temporary employment (labour leasing), where 46 % of female employees have a migration background in Austria (compared to only 27 % of male employees). The sector with the second highest percentage of migrants is tourism and catering (cf. Troger/Schallaböck 2011, cited according to Weiss/Kapeller 2012, p. 14).

Thus, a substantial downgrading of migrant women in respect to their qualification arises. Almost half of the academics, who are not born in Austria, got a position below their qualification level (for Austrian born women about 30% is valid). A similar discrepancy is observed at lower education levels. The tendency to work overqualified is even worse for first generation migrants due to the difficulties in recognition of their foreign diploma. Although this recognition is a high value issue, only about 17 % of migrant women apply for it in Austria (cf. Stadler/Wiedenhofer- Gallik 2009, cited according to Weiss/Kapeller 2012, p. 14).

Regarding the chances to be employed, we find multiple disadvantages of migrant women compared to Austrians as well as to migrant men. Migrant women are significantly employed

- a) at lower quota
- b) at lower average wages
- c) below their formal qualification
- c) in areas with low career options.

## 2 INTERVIEWS WITH MIGRANT WOMEN IN AUSTRIA

For the FORWARD project, 15 women from different countries were interviewed mostly at the offices of NGOs such as Frauenservice, SOMM, Danaida and Caritas. The FORWARD interview guideline was used. Interviews lasted from 40 to 70 minutes.

The main objective of the interviews was to reveal formally, non-formally and informally acquired competences, which could help to increase employability of the migrants.

The analysis according to the main categories was supported by the software MAXQDA and led to the following results:

### 1.1. TABLE OF RESPONDENTS

Respondent	Age	Religion	Country of origin	Citizenship at present	Duration of stay in Austria in years
A1	35	Muslim	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	10
A2	51	Muslim	Greece	Greece	25
A3	33	Muslim	Egypt	Egypt	5
A4	28	Muslim	Turkey	Austria	20
A5	31	Muslim	Bosnia	Austria	18
A6	28	Muslim	Tunisia	Tunisia	3
A7	30	Muslim	Kosovo	Kosovo	6
A8	34	Muslim	Iraq	Austria	10
A9	39	Catholic	Croatia	Austria	17,5
A10	42	Muslim	Turkey	Turkey	9
A11	47	Muslim	Bosnia	Austria	11
A12	39	none	Slovakia	Slovakia	14
A13	58	Buddhist	Russia	Russia	5
A14	40	Catholic	Rwanda	Rwanda	16
A15	41	Christian	USA	USA	1

Thus, the average age of interviewees was 38,4 years, and their average duration of stay at the time of the interview was 11,4 years.

## 1.2. MIGRATION PROCESS

### REASONS FOR MIGRATION

The largest group of our interview partners is built by nine women, who came for any kind of family reunion (8 of them were following their husbands and one was following her father as a child). Another woman came to Austria by following her adult married daughter. Four of our interview partners were migrated because of war. They mostly escaped because of ethnic conflicts in their countries of origin. One interview partner came to Austria for academic education.

### COUNTRIES OF TRANSIT

Only three women (migrating because of war) had been in transit countries before arriving in Austria.

### COMPETENCES GAINED BY MIGRATION

Asking about their competences, which were gained through their migration process, our interview partners answered within four categories:

The most frequent answers revealed a change of personal values: Family and friends were realised to be of huge value, and also knowledge and skills (beyond recognized certificates).

*„Also dass wir alles gehabt haben in Ruanda, und ja, haben wir verloren, und ich denke mir, materielle Dinge sind unwichtig. Also wir haben nix gehabt, und wenn man gesund ist und vielleicht Freunde hat und Familie hat, das Leben geht irgendwie weiter, ja.“*

*[„We had everything in Ruanda, and yes, we lost it all, and I think material things are not important. We had nothing, but when you are healthy and have friends and family, life goes on anyway.“]*

About a quarter of our interview partners mentioned learning of languages and supposed that the most important learning outcome was their German language competence.

Another quarter of our interview partners mentioned their experience of de-skilling or downgrading. They recognized that the value of their knowledge or certificate was no longer granted after moving to foreign countries.

On the other hand, a benefit of personal strategies and a growth of self-consciousness were mentioned by about one third of our interview partners. Patience, personal strength, persistency, and orientation were in particular addressed.

In several cases a further step created a feeling of self-worth independent from work:

*„Du lernst eigentlich deinen eigenen WERT, beziehungsweise du lernst auch, andere Arbeiten zu schätzen. Und irgendwann einmal bin ich dazu gekommen: Es ist EGAL was für eine Arbeit du tust, es ist eigentlich JEDE Arbeit was wert.“*

*[„Actually you learn about your personal value and you learn to appreciate other kinds of work. Some day I came to see: each work is equal.“]*

This gain of personal strategies on the one hand and change of personal values on the other hand is in accordance with the results of a French project by Letitia Trifanescu (2012): From the perspective of biographical research some sort of identity reconstruction and new position so the self-concept is a common outcome of migration. Many events, phenomena and people are valued differently before and after migration.

An increased adaptability is frequently described together with the migration experience, as by Trifanescu e.g. „can much more easily deal with different situations now“; „ can reorganize ideas in a different context“.

On the other hand, we have to be careful not to become cynical in this discourse, but to look carefully about the so-called „competence growth“ instead of coping strategy.

When Thuswald (2008) writes about the „survival competences“ of migrant beggar women in Vienna, it is important to see these abilities in terms of competences, but also notice it is not simple informal learning but political deficiency causing this competence growth.

Discrimination can of course be an individual learning impulse, but it is still mainly an inhuman act.

### **1.3. FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD**

#### **FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD IN AUSTRIA**

Most of the interviewees were living with their husbands and children and no other family members in their household.

## **FAMILY IN COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**

The family surrounding in the countries of origin was quite complex. The relatives of women coming from war regions are often spread all over Europe, whereas relatives of women who came to Austria because of marriage, are often in their country of origin. In most cases the family members had supported their migration. Almost all interviewees are missing their families, especially at the beginning of their stay in Austria.

## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

About half of our interviewees noted there was no financial support by the families in their countries of origin or vice versa. A few women received support or were supporting their families (about the same percentage). The statement to this issue was mostly insufficient (not all migrant women gave details).

## **1.4. EDUCATION**

### **EDUCATION IN COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**

From our interview partners about a third had visited university in their country of origin (including two women, who had not finished their education because of civil war). All other migrant women had finished either a qualification for university entrance or a specific vocational training, which usually results in a certificate that was not recognized in Austria. None of the women had finished only primary school, but one (from Turkey) had not even been allowed to attend primary school.

### **EDUCATION IN AUSTRIA**

By far the majority of our interviewees were very active learners. One had finished a university degree and others absolved shorter training courses in Austria, mostly in the social or education sector. Trainings for integration, assistancy or childcare were frequently chosen.

### **FURTHER EDUCATION**

As described in the section „Career and learning aspiration“ below, the aspiration for further education and training in our sample was compelling: nearly every woman told us about her desire for further

learning, and the only exception who who did not share this desire was just finishing an intensive course.

Many of them had attended German courses in Austria and other education and training, see section above.

### **1.5. COMPUTER SKILLS**

About two thirds of our interviewees talked about intense computer usage.

They communicated per mail and skype regularly, were used to do internet research and used facebook and sometimes even translation tools. About one third had only few computer skills – and nobody had none. Interesting is also that the migrant women acquired their skills often by informal learning – only two women had an ECDL.

### **1.6. LANGUAGE SKILLS**

#### **FIRST (NATIVE) LANGUAGE**

Almost 30 % of the women in our sample described they had grown up bilingual, having two family languages such as Kurdish and Turkish, Slovak and Czech, French and Kinyarwanda.

#### **OTHER LANGUAGE SKILLS**

On average, our interviewees had learnt between 3 and 4 languages including their first language(s) and German. At the time of the interview they were able to use these languages more or less fluently. We suppose this is a higher degree of language competence than in the average Austrian population, where 22% of the population do not speak any second language according to the Eurobarometer (2012).

A remarkable finding is that the languages competences of the migrant women are much less focussed on English (compared to the Austria education system).

#### **GERMAN LANGUAGE SKILLS**

The majority of the interviewees had come to Austria without any German language skills.

In most cases they had learnt German by attending courses, some women mostly by conversing with Austrians, and in one exceptional case mainly by TV.

Overall, they often described their understanding of the language as very good, speaking as a bit difficult, reading as more difficult and writing as the biggest challenge.

### LANGUAGE USE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

All migrant women were speaking German with Austrian neighbours and officials – and almost all of them spoke their first (family) language at home, mainly for the benefit of their childrens language skills). Only four women spoke a mixture of languages at home, their family language and German and sometimes a third language.

Three of these four were living in an intercultural partnership with different first languages.

### GERMAN LANGUAGE SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY

Every single interviewee supposed German to be very important for finding a job.

University jobs were said to be the only exception where migrants do not need to speak German. The new integration law in Austria (demanding a GER-level of B1 for staying in Austria) was seen as a big challenge and problem for many migrants.

On the other hand there might also be resistance against learning German, as the following quotation shows:

*„Ich schimpfe mit meine Freudinnen immer, die Putzfrauen sind. Obwohl die gute Verkäuferinnen unten waren. Genau wegen der Sprache gehen die in Putzfirmen wo unsere Leute arbeiten. Da fühlen sie sich besser. Ja nicht Deutsch reden.“*

*[„I always criticise my female friends who work as cleaners here although they were good shop assistants. Just because of language they go to the cleaning companies where our people work. Here they feel better, avoiding to speak German“].*

On the other hand, the demand for perfect German language competence on labour market is seen as a Discrimination:

*„Ich weiß dass Leute integriert sein können auch ohne dass ihre Deutschkenntnisse wirklich super sind. Das wird überbewertet.“*

*[„I know that people can be well-integrated without perfect German language skills. The importance of speaking German is overrated.“]*

## 1.7. WORK EXPERIENCE

### CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

At the time of the interview, more than half of our interview partners had no paid work and were most often looking for a job.

The situation of EG is typical:

*“Na, in Ägypten ich bin Lehrerin, aber ich in Österreich kann ich nicht, ich bin Hausfrau.“*  
[“In Egypt I am a teacher, but here I’m only a housewife”]

Almost half of the interviewees had jobs in the social sector, often working in institutions with other migrants and being very satisfied with their current job situation.

These interviewees tend to be more satisfied with their life in general:

*P.P.: „Wenn du arbeiten, dann alles automatisch funktioniert. Du musst nur arbeiten, dann alles gut.“*  
[„When you have work, everything is running good. You only have to work, then everything is o.k.”]

### EXPERIENCE WITH PAID WORK

When asked about paid work in general, most of our interviewees mentioned some kind of loss linked to their migration. They often had a job they liked in their country of origin, and they were not able to find a similar job in Austria. The dominant impression is that good work is a very rare resource.

The following quotation is typical:

*“Ich habe viel Verantwortung [gehabt] als Buchhalterin und Ökonomin. (...) Leider in Österreich ich kann nicht irgendetwas machen. Ja wegen meiner Sprache.“*  
[„I was bearing a lot of responsibility as an accountant and economist. (...) Unfortunately in Austria I can’t do anything. Because of my language.”]

Besides this main experience, several other perceptions of paid work were presented by our interviewees: We met three women with academic background perceiving paid work mainly as an occasion for learning and development. One woman perceived work as a necessary task solely in case of a bad family income situation which is linked with a loss of status. Another woman, who is speaking excellent German and living in Austria since her childhood had absolutely no problem to find proper jobs.

## **JOB-SEEKING IN AUSTRIA**

When talking about their job-seeking experiences in Austria, we met several women who have not even tried looking for work, discouraged by vicarious experience of other women.

Some other women found their jobs via personal contact and emphasized this as the main way to get a job in Austria.

Many of our interviewees had made a big effort to find a job by writing hundreds of applications and spending lots of time on learning and organizing. It was a very exceptional case getting a job without a big effort (only one woman); most of our interviewees found this to be a very demanding challenge.

The Muslim women often attributed problems to find a job to their scarf. Without scarf it would be easier to get employed (one of them had tested this together with her sister. Her sister succeeded immediately to get a job without wearing her scarf, but she was formally rejected when wearing her scarf).

A main finding was that there is a big uncertainty of how to explain the perceived difficulties. Migrant women in Austria realize that job-seeking can also be very different for Austrian women. It is difficult for them to decipher the extent of their trouble getting a job caused by their migration background or not.

German language difficulties are commonly accepted to explain rejection. Unsettledness is the predominant feeling: is it (i) due to lacking work experience, (ii) due to language, (iii) due to personal appearance oder (iv) due to any unsaid cultural commitment or anything else that it is so difficult?

In two opposite cases (dealing with jobs in social /counselling sector) migration background was perceived to be an advantage.

## **UNPAID EMPLOYMENT AND FAMILY WORK**

Almost all interviewees managed the whole household and childcare work, in some cases with help of their husbands, in some cases also for the extended family as well as second-degree relatives. Household and childcare work were mostly taken for granted and often diminished (connotation: „only the household“).

About a quarter of the migrant women did unpaid civil work, supported other migrants by talking to refugees, translating for a NGO, working as a political representation or contributing to different

projects for their countries of origin. This work was mostly seen as a matter of course and described very modestly.

The competences gained by these experiences were described very differently. Some migrant women stressed the meaning of German language improvement through learning with their children as well as during working outside. Others mentioned personal experience by improved networking, a stronger ability to deal with disappointment, or a growth in self-efficacy in general.

### **COMPETENCES GAINED BY WORK**

The migrant women had a lot of benefit from their work experience, which they described on different levels.

Sometimes, learning was associated with some kind of assimilation: one woman told that her main learning outcome was the finding that she had to conform to her environment and learn a diplomatic way of communication. Similar to that, another woman talked about the acquaintance to the different organisational cultures of each institution she worked in.

Other women associated learning with key competences being transferable to future jobs:

*“Überhaupt den Überblick zu bewahren, was die Prioritäten halt sind im Beruf. Und dann, ich habe gelernt flexibler zu sein, mich auf Neues, also ständig wieder einzustellen und auch Neues zu erlernen.“*

*[„To keep a general overview about the priorities in my job. And then to be flexible, to adopt to new situations permanently, and to learn new issues.“]*

Even a complete re-evaluation of their own personality was a possible outcome:

*“Es war für mich einfach [die Erkenntnis]: Ich KANN was. Wenn mir jemand die Chance gibt bin ich fähig irrsinnig viel zu lernen. Und es ist egal in welchem Bereich.“*

*[„I just learnt that I CAN do a lot. When I get a chance, I can learn really a huge amount, independent from which area it is.“]*

other women talked about their advanced functional knowledge (e.g. how to cut hair) or the transfer of this know-how to their family (e.g. how to teach their children similar to their pupils).

### **CAREER AND LEARNING ASPIRATION**

As a part of the interviews, women were also asked about their ideal job as well as their aspiration for further education and training.

About a quarter of the interviewees said they already HAD their ideal job in Austria (all of them working in the social sector with migrants or in childcare).

The aspiration for further education and training in our sample was compelling: nearly every woman told us about her desire for further education and the only exception who did not was just finishing a course in childcare.

About half of the women also had dream jobs such as lawyer, chemist, teacher, nurse or bus driver (often not compatible with their education at the time of the interview).

Two women explicitly stated they had no preference and nothing like a dream job - they wanted JUST A JOB, regardless of which one.

This finding corresponds to theories of job satisfaction showing that a decrease of chances is leading to a lowered aspiration level. Under bad circumstances it may be smart to be content with a lower achievement. Thus, subjective and objective success are not necessarily proportional.

#### **NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR EMPLOYMENT**

The most important requirement (named by more than half of our interviewees) was German language competence as a first step and precondition for everything else.

Secondly (also named by one third to nearly half of the interviewees), any completed education (diploma) was said to be important to find work.

Some factors were named twice, that is i) an attractive appearance or proper look and ii) characteristics like patience, tolerance and adaptability.

Besides these consensual factors, there were only single nominations for other important factors for finding a job, such as enough time, sufficient childcare, intelligence, a contact network, an attractive appearance, social competence, a friendly and positive charisma, or personal effort.

#### **DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MIGRANT WOMEN**

When asked for experiences of discrimination, not all interviewees answered in a distinct way.

Two women told us about discrimination and connected this explicitly to their scarf:

*„Bis zu meinem 21. Lebensjahr habe ich kein Kopftuch getragen und nachher habe ich entschieden eine zu tragen und ab dem haben hier die Schwierigkeiten begonnen.“*

*[„Until I was 21 I did not wear a scarf, but then I decided to wear one – and from this time on, the difficulties began.“]*

Four women were sure they had perceived no discrimination at all.

The majority of the women either negated discrimination, but told stories indicating insulting behavior against them. Or they revealed discrimination as a very subtle and concealed act:

*„Das ist es ja: wenn du nicht weißt woran es liegt! Natürlich neigt man dann dazu, zu sagen, "ja natürlich weil ich Ausländerin bin". Wo ich aber nicht überzeugt bin.“*

*„You never know due to what it is! Of course you tend to say, it is because I'm a foreigner. But I'm not convinced.“*

*„Es ist eben diese versteckte Diskriminierung. (...) Meiner Meinung nach, es sagt dir keiner sie nehmen dich nicht weil du nicht Österreicherin bist.“*

*„It is this hidden discrimination. In my opinion, nobody tells you they don't take you because you are not Austrian.“*

*„Es ist schwierig, ich weiß es nicht! Vor allem dass ich weiß, dass damalige Ex-Studienkolleginnen und -Kollegen auch nicht leicht gehabt haben (...) einen Job zu finden.“*

*„It is difficult, I don't know! Especially because my former college friends also had problems to find a job.“]*

When interpreting this, we have to face the restricted validity of these answers.

What is perceived as discriminating and how one can talk about it widely depends on at least four factors: i) the experiences in the country of origin (what is an appreciable „bad experience“?), ii) the freedom to talk about bad experiences in the country of origin, iii) the (perceived) current political discourse in the host society and iv) the possible comparison to the situation of the autochthonous population (which degree of job-seeking difficulties is „normal“?).

Furthermore, the perceived discrimination may well be linked to a subjective feeling of „rightfulness“ or the right discourse migrants are used to. So we cannot always expect valid, comparable answers to this question.

## **1.8. SETTLEMENT, LIFE AND CULTURE IN AUSTRIA AS A HOST COUNTRY**

### **INITIAL DIFFICULTIES IN AUSTRIA**

The main initial difficulties when coming to Austria derived from two areas: lack of German language

competence and a deficient contact/network situation.

Most of the interviewees stated similar to the following woman:

*„Ist nur für Sprache. Sprichst du gut Deutsch ist nichts schwierig.“*

*[„It is only the language. If your German is good, nothing is difficult here.“].*

A poor network (while missing family and friends) was the second problem often reported (and sometimes explicitly linked to German language fluency). Sometimes, job downgrading (3 cases) and racism (2 cases) were additionally mentioned.

### **RECOGNITION OF EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATES IN AUSTRIA**

More than half of our interviewees had some kind of certificate when coming to Austria. But only about a quarter of their certificates were recognized in Austria.

This experience was especially offending when perceived as a nonsystematic decision - by accident, as for example one woman who had almost finished her Bachelor when she had to migrate because of civil war:

*„Es ist unglaublich, ja! (lacht laut) Ich hab eben - ich hab das NIE verstanden, HEUTE noch nicht ganz verstanden, wieso die Matura nicht anerkannt wird, aber eben ein paar Fächer von der Uni eh angerechnet worden sind! Es ist für mich irrsinnig und UNSINN!“*

*[„It is unbelievable! I never understood, until now I do not understand, why my qualification for university entrance was not recognized while some of my certificates from university were recognized yet. It seems complete nonsense to me.“]*

### **KNOWLEDGE OF AUSTRIAN CULTURE**

The term „culture“ was interpreted very differently by the interviewees, but most of them thought that knowledge of culture is of minor importance to find a job in Austria. However, it was seen as crucial to know what Austrian people expect regarding communication, respect or promptitude.

## **1.9. CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS**

Currently, there are some national efforts to change these difficulties in Austria, such as plans for

- the enhancement of ENIC-NARIC Austria for graduates, see [http://www.bmwf.gv.at/home/academic\\_mobility/](http://www.bmwf.gv.at/home/academic_mobility/)
- four new, additional certification agencies for all levels of qualifications in Austria
- one additional certification agency for the recognition of informally acquired competences

Current EU strategies supporting the recognition of competences may be

- a partial access system (which is mainly discussed for regulated professions) and
- the development of a European professional card, see [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/qualifications/policy\\_developments/european\\_professional\\_card\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/policy_developments/european_professional_card_en.htm)

### 3 FOCUS GROUPS / GROUP DISCUSSIONS

For the FORWARD project, two group discussions with practitioners were arranged. They were chaired according to the focus group guidelines with specified questions developed by FORWARD.

**Group discussion 1 with trainers (T):** 22nd of May 2012, from 14:00-15:00

Number of participants: 5 (Maria Nimmerfall, Birgit Mayerhofer, Anke Vogel, Karin Kügler, Ingrid Franthal)

Chair: Birgit Aschemann, minutes: Kristina Gril

**Group discussion 2 with counselors (C):** 30th of May 2012, from 12:45-14:00

Number of participants: 8 (Daniela Hinterreiter, Erna Schuller, Gudrun Auer, Edith Abawe, Petra Leschanz, Adriana da Silva Ferro, Sigrid Fischer, Uli Leger-Pözl)

Chair: Anke Vogel, minutes: Kristina Gril

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#### *Situation of migrant women*

Main questions in this part of the discussion were: „*What countries do your migrant clients mainly come from? Which are the main causes for their migration process? In your opinion, what main difficulties do they face in Austria? Do you think that there is enough legal support for their integration? If not, what provision does the legal system lack?*“

Main Results:

On the one hand there are migrant women in the training courses who already worked in Austria, on the other hand there are women who did not work in Austria so far. In the majority of cases migrant women who never worked in Austria come from African countries, from Ghana, Sudan, Egypt, Cote d'Ivoire, Congo, Nigeria and Togo. There are also many migrant women from former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Rumania and Bulgaria. In the last years the number of migrant women from Pakistan and Chechenia has increased.

Counselors are mainly working with migrant women from former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Croatia, rarely from Slovenia), from Turkey, Egypt, Rumania, Ukraine, Russia, Chechenia, Poland, Germany, England, Spain and Italy.

Generally the migrant clients of our discussants have access to the Austrian labour market (women participating in AMS trainings need to have an employment permit). Only migrant women from Bulgaria and Rumania are excluded from free access to labour market until 2014. .

The reasons for the migration process were described very heterogeneous: counselors stressed that each process is different. Several possible factors for the migration process are marriage and the moving of family members to Austria. In some cases the better job opportunities or the higher payment are pull factors for migration. Furthermore the factors flight because of civil war or the economic crisis in Europe were mentioned as reasons for migration.

One consistent explanation of trainers and counselors for the difficulties in labour market integration was seen in the lack of German language skills. At the same time counselors mentioned the problem of Austrian society, which is attuned to German as the only official language and not supporting multilingualism.

Trainers also described the following observation: migrant women who enjoyed high status in their country of origin often are afraid to be employed under their qualification and thereby lose their status in Austria. As a consequence, they sometimes withdraw from labour market and concentrate upon their role as mother and housewife in order to protect their self-esteem. This sometimes leads to a daily communication situation restricted to their native language and fixing the dread to speak German.

Also counselors had the opinion that migrant women have not many perspectives in our society and therefore stick to their family or community.

In these explanations by practitioners, the direction of causality was inverse to the common opinion that migrants reduce their chances by staying close to their families – the opposite may be the case.

„Headscarf is a drama“. Wearing a scarf is mostly obstructive for migrant women when they are trying to find a job. Trainers report that women often make an effort to find a job but are rejected because of their scarf. As a consequence, especially young women tend to take off the scarf in order to get access to the labour market.

Labour market integration is also obstructed by discrimination, racism and islamophobia. For instance, a woman from Togo made a vocational training as an aesthetician and visited a cosmetic-school in France. After that she moved to Graz and had a job interview with the (female) chief of a large cosmetic company. She was rejected with the explanation that she was indeed an open minded, very friendly person but the „weird“ colour of her hands was supposed to discourage the customers.

Furthermore, the counselors mentioned structural problems such as difficulties with the nostrification process. Another example was that of a pregnant women who lost a document and consequently lost

her status and her rights for social benefits - in this case neither the country of origin nor Austria seemed responsible for the woman.

In addition, a high number of children was also mentioned as a problem for labour market integration. Because of child care the migrant women cannot attend courses or go to work. Of course the same principle affects Austrian women, but they have a lower number of children in average (cf. ÖIF 2011).

The following needs on level of law or society were mentioned:

- residence title independent from labour market access (for special cases)
- clear responsibilities as an answer to structural problems
- an alternative perspective on migrant women, who are often seen as a „load“ lacking any competences and qualifications
- a differentiated discourse instead of generalizations: migrant women are young or old, have higher qualifications or never went to school etc., they are individuals, with their own character and personality and each migration process and experience in Austria is different.

To focus on race, culture or even „migration background“ in order to explaining difficulties can easily become an act of „othering“ and a part of the difficulties itself.

### **Competences of migrant women**

Main questions in this part of the discussion were: *„What skills do migrant women bring from their country of origin? What competences do migrant women lack or need to find a job in Austria? Are diplomas, licenses or other certificates compatible with the same documents in Austria? How smooth is the process of recognition of certificates in Austria? Does a training system for migrants exist? Do you think that migrant women usually acquire non-formal competences during their migration process, and which ones? Do you think that such competences are an advantage in searching a job? Do you think that competences acquired in household and in care activities could help in finding a job? Does your experience show that migrant women take part in community activities? Do they have any networks of mutual assistance?“*

Main Results:

Although the discussants tried to avoid stereotypes, they tended to paint a very positive picture of “the migrant woman” and named the following competences they observed or assumed:

- Migrant women in Austria are often **multilingual**. For instance women from African countries are often fluent in English and French.
- The family structure and connection is often very important for migrant women. Often they are sending money to their families in the country of origin. This fact leads to the assumed competence „**handling with money**“, as migrant women often do not have much money for their life in Austria as well.
- In general, the migration process demands a certain amount of **decision making and reflection**. Migrant women who are leaving their countries of origin have to reflect their perspective very clearly.
- Besides migrant women were described as **courageous**.
- Trainers also mentioned the competence of **organisation and management** gained by the migration process.
- Counselors added some other ideas and said that the **ability to assert oneself** increased during the migration process.
- According to the counselors, migrant women have to be very **adaptive, patient, flexible, moderate, and resilient**.
- As a result of the migration process migrants need to (re-)define their self-worth and develop some sort of **independence** from their environment.

All these competences – of course not alive in every migrant woman – have the potential to be useful on labour market.

The question about the lack of competences of migrant women was seen very critical in the group discussion by trainers as well as by counselors. When talking about a lack of something there is an implicate power discourse (“who has to learn and who can stay like he/she is?”). Discussing the lack of competences of hegemonic society would probably deliver more possibilities for change.

Anyway counselors mentioned that a lack of self-confidence and self-initiative can be reasons for unemployment as well as a lack of knowledge about official procedures in Austria.

The migrant clients of the discussants mostly had a university degree, completed a vocational training or went to school in their country of origin. Anyway, in Austria they had a problem with nostrification.

According to the counselors, it is easier for migrant women from other European countries than from third countries to have their formal qualifications recognized. Nevertheless, the process of recognition was described as very expensive and time-consuming. The following

institutions were named as helpful in the recognition process of formal qualifications: Omega (Graz), Frauenservice (Graz), ISOP (Graz), and ENIC-NARIC (Vienna).

Only few counselors had heard about programs for recognizing informal competences of migrants. It seems difficult to recognize informal competences – even for people with Austrian origin.

In the opinion of trainers the language skills are seen as very important for finding a job. The fact is that employers tend to make high requirements. Therefore women have to be fluent in German language even when they are fluent in English or French. Trainers argued that the high demands for language skills also in underqualified jobs, are mostly hidden racist acts.

Competences in child or house care were judged as useful for migrant women when trying to get an internship. Anyway competences in house care could be more useful for jobs in the kitchen or in a restaurant than competences in child care to find a job in the care-area. At the same time counselors argued that migrant women are often exploited by the Austrian society when they are seen as cheap work forces in these areas, as there is a black market especially for care and housekeeping.

In the opinion of the discussants, migrant women tend to have a strong social network but mostly with migrants from the same country or the same religion. Connections to Austrian people seemed rare. Furthermore migrant women seem to spend much time in and with the family and take care of the children or grandparents.

Counselors also argued that networking has to be seen differentiated. Some migrant women have strong social networks, others less. Networks sometimes tend to be stronger in Austria than in the countries of origin. On the other hand sometimes women are not even allowed to take part in religious communities.

Anyway social networks are useful to share experiences, for example where you can rent cheap flats or buy cheap cars etc., and often they offer some sort of consulting services.

### **Employability**

*Main questions in this part of the discussion were: „What are the main competences that migrant women should acquire to be employed in Austria? Have you developed any successful strategies to work with women on their competences– e.g. a strategy to put their focus on the competences (resources) they have (and show these competences), as well as to the competences they could/should acquire? What do you advise to do to increase the employability and social inclusion of migrant women?“*

#### Main Results:

First of all, counselors stressed the fact that migrant women as well as companies and the Austrian society need competences to provide and support the ability and opportunity for work. Austrian society needs an alternative approach. Besides it is important to question critically our own perspective as researchers and developers in this discourse.

German language skills were seen as crucial for employability. In Austria most areas of operation are predominantly focused on German language; some exceptions are jobs in research and engineering.

Another important factor for increasing employability is the recognition of language skills apart from German.

Trainers mentioned that it is very important to work on migrant women's competences, although the migrant women themselves sometimes do not like this perspective in the beginning of the courses. It was seen as important to support women in recognising their competences and to discover and identify them on their own. If women are able to understand the procedure, they are able to work on the competence-procedure and identification of their competences on their own. This process is very important for their self-confidence and self-worth.

The strategies trainers use in their course is mainly group work. In particular it means that all course members are working on the competences of one women. Other trainers are using some tools similar to CH-Q to raise the self-esteem of migrant women and to enable them to name their competences. All in all, counselors as well as trainers stressed the importance to make competences of migrant women visible.

As regards the question how to increase employability, counselors also mentioned the preconditions for employment such as basic social and financial security, encouragement and empathic listening. The political situation and political will was said to be the most important precondition at all.

Trainers also mentioned that beauty, willpower, social and communication skills are important for finding a job in Austria. Each of these factors can also be seen as an indicator for the level of existing barriers against migrant women or as an indicator for the tough demands of the current labour market situation in general.

## 4 COMMENTS BY THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP

The outcomes of the study were commented by the following Austrian experts and members of the NSAG in June 2012:

- Elke Schildberger, VHS Linz Kompaz, <http://www.kompetenzprofil.at/>
- Annette Sprung, University of Graz, [https://online.uni-graz.at/kfu\\_online/visitenkarte.show\\_vcard?pPersonenId=4B9FD052DF069DEC&pPersonenGruppe=3](https://online.uni-graz.at/kfu_online/visitenkarte.show_vcard?pPersonenId=4B9FD052DF069DEC&pPersonenGruppe=3)
- Reinhard Zürcher, PH Wien, <http://www.phwien.ac.at/forschung/ueber-uns-119.html>
- Thomas Fritz, VHS Wien lernzentrum, [http://www.vhs.at/lernraum\\_team.html](http://www.vhs.at/lernraum_team.html)
- Angelika Hrubesch, VHS Wien lernzentrum, [http://www.vhs.at/lernraum\\_team.html](http://www.vhs.at/lernraum_team.html)

Their comments concerning the interpretation of the data were incorporated into this report.

The experts appreciated the study as a lively insight into the situation of migrant women in Austria. On the other hand they missed the clear connection to the portfolio FORWARD is developing and talked about some doubts about the impact of a portfolio on the competence recognition of migrant women in Austria.

The following competences of migrant women were confirmed at least by one of the NSAG members:

- language learning competences
- adaptability
- flexibility

Furthermore it was noticed that the counsellors had observed much more competences than the migrant women themselves. This was seen as an argument to work on the perception of own competences with migrant women – for example by portfolio work.

Nevertheless the portfolio work with migrants was seen as difficult because of the language demands of the portfolio. There are many words for competences which have no precise common meaning in Austria (what exactly is cooperation or flexibility?). It will be challenging to explain the meaning of these words for migrants coming from diverse cultures.

## 5 SWOT ANALYSIS

### SWOT on the situation of migrant women regarding their employability on Austrian labour market

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mostly high career and learning aspiration</li> <li>• high percentage of migrant women with very high educational skills</li> <li>• language learning competence</li> <li>• benefit of personal strategies and a growth of self-consciousness</li> <li>• about two thirds of our interviewees: intense computer usage</li> <li>• almost 30 % of grown up bilingual ; on average m.w. had learnt 3 - 4 languages</li> <li>• competences in decision making + reflection</li> <li>• competences in organisation + management</li> <li>• competences in change management and networking</li> <li>• change of personal values – ability to deal with critical life events (migration is one)</li> <li>• personal strength, persistency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ free national support in German language learning (only few training hours)</li> <li>▪ national plans in Austria for the enhancement of ENIC-NARIC Austria for graduates; some new certification agencies for all levels of qualifications and one for informal competences (forthcoming)</li> <li>▪ Current EU strategies like partial access (for regulated professions) and the development of a European professional card (forthcoming)</li> </ul>
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• household, caring (similar to women with Austrian origin)</li> <li>• competence in „handling with money“ (coping poverty)</li> <li>• adaptive, patient, flexible attitude</li> <li>• migrants need to (re-)define their self-worth and develop some sort of independence from their environment <i>(each of these topics is linked to the thread of being downgraded and exploited on the Austrian labour market)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• migrants are often seen as a homogeneous group instead of supporting them individually (cf. “othering” and “culturalizing”)</li> <li>• basic social and financial security is sometimes lacking for migrants without a permit to stay and/or work in Austria</li> <li>• lacking German language competence is often an argument against an employment (the majority came to Austria without any German language skills)</li> <li>• a diploma or certificate is crucial for a job in Austria, but the nostrification process is difficult (legal and financial barriers)</li> <li>• labour market integration is obstructed by discrimination, racism and islamophobia, especially in case of (head)scarf</li> <li>• disproportional high number of migrant women with very low (as well as very high) educational skills</li> </ul>

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

There are huge differences between the acknowledgement of professional qualifications and the acknowledgement of informally acquired competences. The acknowledgement of professional qualifications is regulated by an existing directive on EU-level for some special professions and by national processes of nostrification for many other professions. The recognition of informally acquired competence is not compulsory and not regulated in Austria, neither for migrants nor for people with Austrian origin.

Therefore, the assessment and recognition of migrant women's competences cannot successfully be achieved by a single instrument but must take place in a special political and cultural environment. A general Austrian strategy for the recognition of formal professional skills and the validation of informal competences is urgently needed.

### Recommendations on a structural and legal level:

- a user- friendly, multilingual (online) information centre for migrant's competence acknowledgement
- a central national office with well-informed contact persons responsible for competence acknowledgement at a national level ([www.berufsanerkennung.at](http://www.berufsanerkennung.at), [www.nostrifizierung.at](http://www.nostrifizierung.at))
- information campaigns on competence acknowledgement for counsellors and employers
- the inclusion of competence assessment procedures into the regular work of employment agencies
- the establishment of competence assessment procedures in certification authorities
- reduced legal and financial barriers to formal approval (e.g. in Austria university law, where nostrification demand a job engagement)
- reduced examination risks (for instance in extern graduation of apprenticeship) by supporting structures

### EU strategies supporting the recognition of competences may be

1. a partial access system (which is mainly discussed for regulated professions) and
2. the development of a European professional card, see [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/qualifications/policy\\_developments/european\\_professional\\_card\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/policy_developments/european_professional_card_en.htm)
3. and the existing directive on the recognition of professional qualifications, see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:255:0022:0142:en:PDF>

**Each (new) competence recognition tool should:**

- disclose (define) the used term and model of competence
- consider the situation and subject aspects of competence (competences are visible only under good conditions) instead of testing competences like qualifications
- decide if the objective is formal recognition (then certification should include requirement-oriented structures) or the objective is de-facto recognition (approval and empowerment, including subject-oriented evaluation)
- be tailored to language skills of participants (in Austria: German skills)

**Quality Standards for competence assessment of people with a migration background** (according to migra.net) include the following principles:

**Information and transparency for the participants**

The participants should be able to easily recognize objectives, procedure, used terms, possible utilisations and conclusions of the results. An extensive first questioning is needed to clarify the procedure, the method and the goal.

**Free will**

The participants should be able to use the instrument independently and for themselves. Thus competence assessment should feature the character of an accompanying self-assessment.

**Realisation and Qualification**

Counsellors as well as assessors should form multi-cultural composed teams with an interdisciplinary profile. Whenever test procedures are applied and used to assess competences, several observers are needed.

**Language**

Tasks need to be tailored to the language level of the participant or supportive services have to be made available (e. g. visualisation of texts, translations,...). The procedures should differ according to the GER-level (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. A glossary should be used.

**Choice of methods**

Procedures of competence assessment should include people-oriented elements (e.g. biography reflection, role behaviour) as well as standards-oriented elements (e.g. testing).

**Connectivity**

The participants of competence assessment should always benefit from the procedures. An offer for guidance, qualification or work shall be added.

**Self-assessment / assessment by others:**

Self-assessment elements should be part of the whole competence assessment process, not only assessment by others.

**Recommendations for a new portfolio for migrant women**

- We recommend to develop a picture-supported instrument (which is nearly language-free) or a language-based instrument with translation to migrants' languages and assistance by translators
- We recommend to carefully avoid putting a focus on female competences such as social competences, caring, household management etc. – in order not to consolidate the traditional bias.
- Similar to that, migrant competences should not be reduced to the language learning process, but should also include change management, coping with critical life events, building new networks, belonging to different communities, gathering new information, and so on (maybe even dealing with poverty and downgrading).
- Pedagogical support material (such as the handbook) should help the assessors to reflect explicit and implicit theories about “the women” and “the migrants”
- We recommend to work with an incomplete list of competences with examples and space for add-ons.
- An additional part written by trainers in each personal portfolio is recommended (good practice in MIKA migrant portfolios).
- If possible, the toolbox should also contain electronic tools if possible (for example apps).

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