

THE SITUATION IN AUSTRIA

UNIT REPORT, "SYNERGIES" PROJECT, COMPILED BY LUDWIG ZEIER AND BIRGIT WALTENBERGER

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INTRODUCTION - TERMINOLOGY

In this section we would like to describe the validation situation of formal and informal skills of the educationally deprived in Austria, with a focus on immigrants and refugees. After describing the basic conditions in general, we will then discuss several examples of good practice as well as critical comments and recommendations. These will include interviews with 20 experts who represent important institutions and organisations in that particular field.

However, before we begin, we would like to define a number of key terms we consider to be relevant to this report.

EDUCATIONALLY DEPRIVED PERSONS

The term "educationally deprived" refers to a very diverse group of people. "Deprived" could relate to a person's cultural or geographical origin, their social background, personal problems or gender. "One speaks of an accumulation of risk factors if a person's parents have a low educational level, their place of residence is a large city (population of at least 300,000) and they have an immigrant background as well."¹

In this project we wish to focus on immigrants, especially those who have lately arrived in Austria. There are a number of different reasons why immigrants have problems in getting access to education - and this is by no means due to language barriers alone. In that context, we can safely assume that various groups of immigrants have specifically different requirements²

-) Education and school attendance have been hitherto limited or even impossible in the country of origin. Frequently, this lack of education is owed to a person's experience of exclusion or discrimination in their country of origin, because he or she - as member of an ethnic, religious or political minority - has been systematically hampered in their development.
-) In such cases, education or further education courses have had to be terminated. These courses are difficult to continue in Austria due to problems of accreditation and comparability.
-) Educational qualifications and professions that had already been practised in the country of origin are not officially recognised in Austria and therefore cannot be continued here.
-) Refugees who are in a precarious situation because their status of residence has not yet been clarified have no access to education.
-) First generation immigrants who are reasonably integrated within the Austrian labour market, but who have a certain knowledge deficit of the German written language. Persons belonging to this group are mostly employed beneath their educational level and hope to return to their home countries.
-) Naturally, there is a group of people consisting of "well qualified and educationally favoured immigrants who receive political and institutional advantages and social recognition"³ which, however, are not the main concern of this project.

It is common knowledge that educational disadvantages are handed down to the next generation; children and young people from families with an immigrant background are all in all amongst the

¹ Range 2012,1

² Cf.: Kastner 2015

³ Kastner, 2015, 2

most educationally disadvantaged groups in the European Union. People who came to Austria after the age of eight belong to the group of distinctly educationally disadvantaged persons - especially in comparison to the group of people who arrived in Austria before the age of eight.⁴

In Austria, the term “formally low-skilled” refers to people whose maximum formal qualification is a compulsory school leaving certificate. However, it should be noted that this definition is controversial. Hence, there are a number of formal educational qualifications that are not recognised in Austria (“qualifications acquired in foreign countries”) or formal educational qualifications such as integrated apprenticeships (“partial occupational qualification”) that are not included in the formal education system.⁵

The group of “formally low-skilled” persons is a very heterogeneous group that can be differentiated on the basis of various sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, social background, migrant experience, educational level). This requires the development of appropriate recognition procedures to address the many different initial situations: *“In order to provide recognition procedures [...] that will really help people, it will be necessary to take account of their many different social circumstances.”*⁶

As far as participation in continuing education is concerned, it is evident that this also coincides with a person’s formal educational qualifications. Low-skilled people participate much less in continuing education than those with higher formal educational qualifications. *“This leads to the assumption that those who do not participate in “formal” education processes in their initial stage of education are largely excluded from access to continuing vocational training.”*⁷ Moreover, the PIAAC study shows that participation in continuing education depends on a person’s literacy.⁸

RECOGNITION OF ACQUIRED NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMPETENCES

The “Synergies” project does not deal with all the effects of immigrant education deprivation, but rather focusses on the aspect of possibilities and the reality of recognising their competences. Subsequently, the way in which these competences were acquired plays a key role. As a rule, one can distinguish between three educational paths⁹:

- Formal learning means pursuing institutionalised and structured ways of learning that are finalised by a certification procedure. In German-speaking countries, this expression is limited to educational paths offered within the state-regulated education and qualification system (school, university, dual vocational education system), which lead to further educational or professional authorisations.¹⁰

⁴ According to an interview with Richard MeislZeier 8 September 2016b

⁵ Cf.: Mayerl and Schlögl 2015, 383 ff

⁶ Mayerl and Schlögl 2015, 392

⁷ Mayerl and Schlögl 2015, 394

⁸ Mayerl and Schlögl 2015 395

⁹ Cf.: Zürcher 2007

¹⁰ Cf.: Gnahs 2003

- Non-formal learning denotes an educational path that is targeted and runs according to a certain plan, but which ends without a certification procedure. This form of learning often occurs as an educational activity in companies and in institutions offering further education. Certification evolving from these courses is often only valid outside the formal education system.
- Informal learning denotes the competences acquired in everyday life, within the family, during leisure time or at work. It does not involve a curriculum or certificate. Here, the private context is decisive.

Competences acquired through informal learning are not documented. As a result, they neither count as a qualification in an application procedure, nor can those concerned use them to gain access to higher education or to the labour market. It is in the interest of the European Union and national authorities to analyse and utilise those educational paths beyond the formal education system, not the least because they include the greatest part of acquired knowledge. This will help bring about "educationally adequate employment, economic and social participation as well as social mobility"¹¹

The paradigm shift of input-oriented to output-oriented qualification descriptions will help to clarify the qualifications and competences of workers who are becoming increasingly mobile.¹² The European Union's interest in this question has led to various initiatives, above all, to the creation of the European Qualifications Framework alongside corresponding national qualification frames yet to be developed, which will both implement the paradigm shift in the description of qualifications and competences and increase their national comparability. Other initiatives and decisions also pursue the same goal, e.g. entailing a more specific implementation of the EU's 2012 decisions requesting member states to provide possibilities to enable the certification of informally acquired competences by 2018.

As far as the situation in Austria is concerned, not only the target group of immigrants and refugees, but other educationally deprived groups, such as dropouts and early school leavers, would also benefit from an enhanced system of skill recognition. It follows that: of all employees, people born in foreign countries least exploit their educational status,¹³ especially if they are not Austrian citizens. In view of the continuing flow of refugees from Africa and conflict areas in the Near and Middle East, questions concerning the validation and educationally adequate integration of refugees are coming to a head. While there are especially highly qualified people in this group, there is a lack of qualified professionals in Austria such as doctors and skilled workers. However, this group of people is frequently unable to provide appropriate certification of their competences, and their educational pathways are scarcely comparable.

COMPETENCE

DEFINITION

The term "competence" has several meanings and is dependent on the context and concept in which it is used. Current interest in the term "competence" probably has to do with the desire to connect economics and pedagogy, everyday learning and institutional education as well as knowledge and ability.¹⁴

¹¹ Biffli et al. 2012, 2

¹² Biffli et al. 2012, 2

¹³ Biffli et al. 2012, 14-23

¹⁴ Zürcher 2007, 58

Winterton et al. have compiled a competence typology that attempts to structure the different dimensions of that term¹⁵:

| | professional | personal |
|-------------|--|---|
| conceptual | cognitive competence (knowledge and understanding) | meta-competence (learning abilities) |
| operational | functional competence (psychomotor and application-oriented skill set) | social skills (behaviour and attitudes) |

Specific terminology of both adult education and Human Resource Management often refers to the definition coined by philosopher of science John Erpenbeck and psychologist Lutz von Rosenstiehl who understand competences as "generalised self-organised dispositions - as an outcome of development processes - of complex and adaptive systems, particularly of human individuals, to reflecting creative problem solving actions with respect to general classes of complex and selective meaningful situations"¹⁶.

Competences can be subdivided into classes and types depending on the target and environment. Erpenbeck/von Rosenstiehl distinguish between four competence classes¹⁷:

- personal competences :
- activity and implementation-oriented competences
- specialist-methodical competences
- social and communicative skills

The European Commission has also proposed a definition of general competences¹⁸

"Competence includes

i) cognitive skills, which include using theories and concepts, but also implicit knowledge (tacit knowledge) gained through experience:

ii) functional competence (skills and expertise required to perform a certain activity;

iii) personal competence relating to behaviour in/ handling of a given situation;

iv) ethical competence encompassing certain personal and social values."

Responsibility and independence are core characteristics of competence as "a proven ability to apply knowledge, skills, and personal, social and/or methodical abilities in work and learning situations, and to use them for one's personal development or professional career. The European Qualifications Framework defines competence in the sense of taking responsibility and gaining independence."¹⁹ Key competences for lifelong learning are described as those that people require for their personal development, social integration, active citizenship and employment.

¹⁵ Cited in Zürcher 2007, 61

¹⁶ Erpenbeck and Rosenstiehl 2007

¹⁷ Cited in Zürcher 2007, 65

¹⁸ European Commission 2005, 58

¹⁹ European Commission 2008, Appendix 1

In a narrower sense, the commission defines further competences that are significant in the context of lifelong learning: linguistic competence, foreign language competence, mathematical competence and basic natural science and technical competence, computer competence, learning competence, interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence, entrepreneurial competence and cultural competence.²⁰

We focus on the important question of how the competences are acquired. In the course of competence acquisition, various learning places - institutional and non-institutional - interact with each other; it is an open and not an exclusively planned and plannable learning process. It is especially difficult to describe informally acquired competences, which means that an intensive analysis of one's own learning biography is required.

MEASURING COMPETENCE

There are a whole host of methods and procedures to choose from, which are definitely dependent on the frame conditions of the actual measurement. Competences as such are not directly recognisable, they are rather only perceptible through observation - either self-observation or observation by others; processes may include quantitative or qualitative methods. To sum up, we can say that a valid and reliable diagnosis of competences is relatively difficult.

Competences can be judged by means of self-evaluation and evaluation by others, be it by way of testing or observing, but also by evaluating documents.

Of course, much criticism has been voiced by those involved in the discussion. Reutter accuses the concept of competence development of being janiform to some extent, because it is suspected of economising and commercialising the individual and of focussing solely on his or her professional and economic usability, i.e. "employability". Educational goals that are geared towards developing a person's personality or social commitment, on the other hand, will only play a minor role. He fears that a degradation of human competences to the status of goods will focus too much on a person's operational usability and exploitability, and quotes Karl Marx thus:²¹"[...] This is the time when the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought: virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc. – when everything, in short, passed into commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality[...]"²²

THE EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK

The comparability and permeability of education systems is a great concern on the European level. In that respect, then, perspectives are shifting: Input, i.e. curricula, is no longer the key factor; output, i.e. competences, has now become relevant. Hence, the recognition of informally acquired competences has become a serious issue. However, that process is much more difficult than initially thought.

An historic milestone in that development process was the European Union's Lisbon strategy offering vocational and general education programmes as well as lifelong learning strategies. While the agreements of the Bologna Process (from 1999 on) are significant for the comparability of standards and quality within the European Higher Education Area, the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) is applicable to the area of vocational education and training.

²⁰ European Union 2008

²¹ Reutter 2009, 50f.

²² Marx as cited in Reutter 2009, 51

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and the European Commission / Directorate General for Education and Culture jointly issued the “European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning” (2009), which are designed to improve practice in European countries.²³

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) together with its closely related counterparts, the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF), represents a hugely important step towards achieving comparability of learning outcomes. Based on learning outcomes, the EQF aims to facilitate the comparability of qualifications and competences in all European education areas, in order to promote the permeability of education systems and to foster mobility as well. The EQF proposes classifying learning outcomes on different qualification levels. These levels are based on the description of learning outcomes which are subdivided into “knowledge” (theoretical and factual knowledge), “skills” (on a cognitive and practical level) and “competences” (self-responsible action). Each of these are described on eight levels.²⁴ All European Union member states are now to apply this basic model to their own education schemes.

A system similar to that of the valuation system of higher education (ECTS) was developed to value vocational education (ECVET).

²³ Latest version: Cedefop 2016

²⁴ European Commission 2008

POSSIBILITIES OF RECOGNITION IN AUSTRIA²⁵

BASIC DOCUMENTS AND LAWS

The situation in Austria with regard to the recognition of competences is relatively complex and confusing

- due to the country's federal structure and related division of legislative and administrative competences between the Federation, federal provinces and municipalities
- as well as possibilities of co-determination held by various representative bodies and professional associations.

This already applies to the recognition of formally acquired competences. Recognition of acquired non-formal and informal competences is not yet sufficiently developed and rarely practised. With reference to the EU's Lisbon strategy, Austria has also implemented new legal regulations and preparatory steps that aim to clarify and facilitate recognition procedures.

A major document in that context is: "**Lifelong Learning Strategy in Austria**"²⁶, containing 10 lines of action that determine the framework for creating a lifelong learning strategy. The line of action no.10²⁷ defines the development of recognition procedures of non-formal and informally acquired competences in all education areas. This involves:

-) the implementation of NQF and provision of "Awarding Bodies" [*German*: "Qualifikationsverantwortliche Stellen" (QVS)]
-) further development of school and university curricula based on an outcome-oriented approach - this would also apply to institutions of continuing education if required for classification within the NQF.
-) development of an Austrian validation strategy to recognise the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning processes (including federal ministries, federal provinces and social partners).
-) development and implementation of models of balancing competences to ascertain and recognise learning achievements and experience, creation of competences of an expert team and of cross-sectoral quality assurance systems for applied accreditation procedures.

All of these efforts are continued in the new 2016 **Recognition Law**²⁸. Having learned from German experience, Austria was reluctant to centrally recognise regulated professions. Thus, many of these professions continue to exist together with a host of different recognition procedures. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the installation of a central portal, which will wind up recognition procedures more

²⁵ This description is based on the research report Biffel et al. 2012

²⁶ Austrian Federal Government 2011b

²⁷ Austrian Federal Government 2011b, 46

²⁸ Published on 11th July 2016 in the Federal Law Gazette I No. 5/2016.

speedily, will ease the present situation somewhat. In addition, it could also help to clarify the present state of validation, providing that information could be retrieved on the portal. ²⁹ It remains to be seen how this will really develop in the future.

Work on the **National Qualifications Framework**³⁰ supplementary to the European Qualifications Framework began in 2008. In 2010/2011, the coordination body (*German*:NKS) for the NQF was set up, information events concerning the NQF ("NQF Road Show") were carried out, and other development work relating to the formulation of criteria and adaptation of procedures was tackled ("simulation phase").³¹ The Austrian "Federal Act on the National Qualifications Framework" (NQF Act) entered into force on 15th March 2016³². This law defines the legal framework within which qualifications (certified qualifications in all education areas) are to be classified on eight levels.

The aim of NQF is to provide a transparent description of qualifications from all education areas and their comparability in Austria and Europe. Learning outcomes of various educational and vocational areas are sufficiently represented on the principle of equivalence (but not similarity) and are thus rendered comparable. Classification of qualifications, however, has no effects on the recognition of qualifications.

In its conception, the Austrian NQF is closely connected to the EQF Classification into 6 to 8 levels is carried out according to two different sets of descriptors ("Y-model"). University degrees are classified according to the Dublin descriptors. Classification of other qualifications is based on NQF descriptors and "reference qualifications", which, as selected qualifications of the Austrian qualification landscape, reflect the requirements of each relevant level. In that sense, they form "qualificatory cornerstones" intended to offer an orientation aid for classifying different qualification levels - e.g. an apprenticeship diploma is provisionally classified as Level 4 and the Master Craftman's Certificate as Level 6.

The OeAD (Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research) is responsible for coordinating the nationwide implementation of NQF. The National Coordinating Authority (NCA) is responsible for managing classification applications. It assesses, processes and administers such applications. A publicly accessible registry will be provided in which qualifications and their classification are retrievable. ³³

The National Coordinating Authority has compiled a NQF handbook that defines the format required for classification applications. Applications for classification will be accepted as of autumn 2016. It will also be possible to submit applications for the classification of non-formally acquired qualifications via NQF service points that are yet to be created.

The National Coordinating Authority manages application for classification procedures of formal and non-formal qualifications. In the case of formal qualifications, the ministry submits the application. Non-formal qualifications will be dealt with by the proposed service points (NQF service

²⁹ At least this is how Dr Schönggrundner from the Federation of Austrian Industries sees the situation. Zeier 8th September 2016a

³⁰ Please see graphic representations in Appendix 3

³¹ Austrian Federal Government 2011a

³² Austrian National Council 16th March 2016

³³ NCA - Coordinating Authority for NQR

points), which will also be responsible for advising educational institutions during the application procedure, amongst others. All completed classifications will be visible in the NQF register.³⁴

It is planned to classify all formal qualifications (schools, vocational training) by the end of 2018. By 2020, all curricula pertaining to the formal education system will have been adapted to learning outcomes. Non-formal qualifications will probably require more time. Informally acquired competences will be able to be acknowledged as part of training or qualifications via formal validation procedures.

With regard to the group of educationally deprived people as a whole, the legal provision regarding compulsory education up to the age of 18 will be of great significance. Besides the duty of the person entitled to bring up a child to fulfil that obligation, the federal government, provinces and municipalities will need to create sufficient opportunities for young people who are not partaking in any kind of training or education. Unfortunately, unaccompanied minor refugees are excluded from those activities if they are still asylum seekers.

RECOGNITION PRACTICE

ESTABLISHING THE EQUIVALENCE OF QUALIFICATIONS ACQUIRED ABROAD AND NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Introduction

As already mentioned, it should be noted that in Austria there is no expressly uniform regulation governing the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad. Depending on the desired recognition, different federal and provincial laws as well as various institutions all play a crucial role in the recognition process.

The establishment of equality is input-oriented and is based on the comparability of curricula. Varying acts of recognition apply to different sectors of the Austrian state education and qualification system Fig. 1 represents an overview of the Austrian education system, which should facilitate the classification of various different levels of recognition.

While in Austria the recognition of secondary school leaving certificates is known as "*Nostrifikation*", the recognition of university degrees is known as "*Nostrifizierung*", both of which are translated into English as nostrification. In the dual vocational training system, the recognition of apprenticeship diplomas is known as "equivalence".

Characteristically, Austria has a lot of so-called regulated professions that require specific qualifications. These, too, have their own procedures of recognition.

Besides the possibility of gaining complete recognition, the applicant may wish to apply for the recognition of specific qualifications without having achieved a final qualification. This is especially common in universities, be it that parts of the qualifications are recognised, or that permission to attend a university admission course or to partake in the preliminary university (in German,

³⁴ Mayr and Tritscher-Archan, Sabine 2016, 6f.

Vorstudienlehrgang) course is granted. It is also possible to apply for recognition of qualifications for an apprenticeship diploma.

Because of the large number of confusing recognition procedures and bodies, it was decided at the end of June 2012 to create service points and introduce further measures for the recognition valuation of qualifications gained abroad. Their tasks are summarised as follows:

“Recognition counselling is a specialised expert advisory service that aims to recognise/valuate qualifications that have been acquired abroad. It forms an interface between employment market policy-related, educational, professional and career advisory services. However, the actual recognition/valuation process is dealt with by the (lawfully) responsible institutions and authorities.”³⁵

In reality though, the Austrian labour market is still very focussed on which formal qualifications people are able to present³⁶:

- Collective agreements are often still based on qualifications in the education system.
- These qualifications are especially significant for employment in the public sector.
- Potential employers are very sceptical towards qualifications acquired abroad.

Formal recognition of qualifications³⁷

The most important forms of formal recognition of qualifications gained abroad with regard to practising a profession are as follows:

1. **Equivalence of apprenticeship diplomas:** Qualifications acquired abroad in the course of attending school and/or through working can be recognised as equivalent to an Austrian apprenticeship diploma.
2. **Nostrification of foreign certificates:** Nostrification of foreign certificates is based on a comparison of a person’s schooling abroad and their completed examinations with the latest Austrian curricula.
3. **Nostrification of university degrees:** Nostrification denotes the recognition of a foreign university degree as equivalent to a national university degree, i.e. a bachelor’s or master’s degree, diploma or doctoral degree.
4. **Recognition of regulated professions:** This is a very complex area which would involve a more detailed description. In Austria, there is a whole array of regulated professions with a wealth of accompanying recognition procedures. Unfortunately, the new recognition law does not simplify matters.

Valuation of qualifications

A valuation is neither comparable to a formal recognition, nor does it replace it. It can only serve as an orientation aid for the employer and Austrian Public Employment Service. As both N. Bichl and G. Biffl have already stated, this could act as a meaningful option to formal recognition.³⁸

Regrettably, it has only been elaborated to the full for university degrees. ENIC NARIC Austria recommends an evaluation of academic diplomas that contains the following:

- 1) “Institution - declaration of foreign educational institution that has awarded the diploma
- 2) Possession of foreign university degree

³⁵ Bichl 2016

³⁶ Bichl 2015

³⁷ Bichl 2015, 2-4

³⁸ Bichl 2015, 4 and Biffl et al. 2012, 28f.

3) Basic gradation (basic comparison with Austria).³⁹

One could perhaps regard the Qualification Pass introduced by the Austrian Public Employment Service in Vienna as a step towards opening up wider possibilities of valuating qualifications.

VALIDATION OF COMPETENCES

It is safe to say that, basically, Austria possesses a comprehensive system of recognising non-formal or informally acquired qualifications. This distinguishes us from France and many other English-speaking countries. "However, some practices exist which contain or apply certain elements or principles of this approach"⁴⁰. Schneeberger, Schlögl and Neubauer distinguish the following when describing these practices:

- "Acquisition of certificates/authorisations of the formal education system (formal, type 1)
- Acquisition of certificates without any equivalent in the formal education system (summative, type 2)
- Procedure to establish and validate informal learning (formative, type 3)⁴¹

Type 1 Formal validation

This term denotes validations of non-formal or informally acquired competences. This procedure enables certificates to be recognised as equal to formal qualifications. Important forms of formal validation are as follows:

- External school leaving examination: This provides the same authorisations as the secondary school leaving examination taken at a grammar school.
- External university entrance examination (*Berufsreifeprüfung*): This provides limited entrance to universities, universities of applied sciences and colleges, and is classified as a secondary school leaving examination on the public employees' salary scale.
- University Entrance Qualification Exams: enable access to a specific study programme, but changing to a different study programme is subject to tougher restrictions.
- External compulsory school leaving certificate: Completion of compulsory school education is a prerequisite for many continuing education courses in Austria and is, therefore, crucial.
- External apprenticeship diploma examination: enables holders to complete dual vocational training if it is possible to validate their competences in a specific profession.
- There are several possibilities of formally validating competences within the broad range of regulated and non-regulated professions in Austria, e.g. taking a Master Craftsman's Certificate, acquiring the "Ing." title and many others. To name all of them would go beyond the scope of this report owing to the complexity of their legal context.

³⁹ Bichl 2015, 2

⁴⁰ Schneeberger et al. 2007, 69

⁴¹ Schneeberger et al. 2007, 70

Type 2: Summative validations

These are understood as procedures that lead to the acquisition of certificates that do not provide direct access to the formal education system, for example, language certificates.

Type 3: Summative validations

Formative procedures establish, document and evaluate competences without leading to a certification procedure. A typical example of this type of validation are competence portfolios.

PERCEPTION AND VALUATION OF THE SITUATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIFFERENT EXPERTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

In this section, I would like to address some of the issues that have been considered problematic in interviews or in the publications presented here.

THE MANY DIFFERENT PLAYERS AND THEIR LACK OF A JOINT STRATEGY

Since many different institutions have a certain say in these matters and competences are divided between the federal state, provinces and municipalities, it is not only quite difficult for applicants to gain access to validation of competences, but it also involves lengthy negotiations to make any changes at all in this area. The following example illustrates what I mean: To render any change to the education system up to the apprenticeship diploma examination stage not only involves inviting representatives of the Chamber of Labour and Austrian Economic Chambers, the governing political parties as well as the relevant educational institution to negotiations, but also requires separate negotiations in each federal province. And this is only one example amongst many. There are lots of other quite similar cases. Unfortunately, this complex structure greatly hampers any change and adaptation to new circumstances - at the expense of better qualified immigrants and refugees who then opt to leave our country.⁴²

Moreover, there is no uniform integration strategy in place that would help educationally deprived people to gain access to education and the labour market. The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection and the Federal Ministry of Education develop and fund concepts and projects that are by no means coherent. This regrettable situation is further aggravated by the federal structure of Austria and various different ideological backgrounds of the players involved. Furthermore, it is reflected in the way in which refugees are treated. Specific regional interests or interests of professional associations are increasingly impeding coherent and comprehensive solutions. This lack of strategic alignment and conception of measures has been criticised by various interviewees. For example: both FH Joanneum (University of Applied Sciences) and Graz University of Technology invited people with higher qualifications to participate in a language course, giving them the possibility of commencing or continuing their studies at those institutions afterwards. Unfortunately, those helpful measures were undermined by the fact that several participants from that group were suddenly moved away from Graz, which meant that they could not afford to pay for travel costs, which would have enabled them to carry on with their education.

⁴² Take, for example, certified doctors from Syria. They are likely to move on to Germany or Sweden, because those countries allow them to work in their profession much quicker. All this is happening despite an expected lack of doctors in Austria.

It is really frustrating, especially for us at uniT, to see that, although there may be an adequate offer of educational projects at hand, nobody feels responsible for travel expenses. Often, it is up to the initiative and skill of voluntary persons and the organisations involved to find the right solutions.

Lack of an overall strategy is also reflected in the structure of collaboration between NGOs and other institutions. Each takes over different tasks in caring for the target group, many of which are not always explicitly linked to assignments that are sufficiently clearly defined and supplementary to other measures. The intrinsic logics of these organisations have to be networked more closely and connected in tedious negotiation processes.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VOLUNTARY WORK AND RELATIONS

It is evident that caring for refugees would not work without voluntary initiatives. These are important - and we can also assume that a certain form of mentoring and voluntary support would be and, indeed, is undoubtedly advantageous for other groups of educationally deprived people as well. As recent history has shown, some people will always be prepared to take responsibility for others. It is crucial, therefore, that we support those people, financially, ideally and with expert advice. Amongst many other obstacles, it should be noted that voluntary helpers cannot claim any travel costs for work involving the care of refugees⁴³, that they are frequently met with hostility at institutions and authorities and that collaboration with NGOs is becoming increasingly difficult. On the other hand, NGOs and other institutions are complaining about the "overly involved" and "very demanding" attitude of voluntary helpers, their paternalistic or maternalistic approach to work with refugees and their lack of professionalism. A certain amount of networking and minimum of exchange between institutions, NGOs and voluntary workers would be desirable here - as well as support structures for voluntary workers - not only in relation to financial aspects, but also with regard to reflection on their work and help with emerging questions and problems of those they are caring for.

A LONG AND TEDIOUS PROCESS

Catching up with education is becoming more difficult for the over-twenties group of educationally deprived people. This is one of the reasons for introducing compulsory education up to the age of 18. Austria is faced with large numbers of young refugees who have recently entered the country. However, since it takes so long to establish their status of residence, they are excluded from most possibilities (1 year and longer). Furthermore, the present policy excludes asylum seekers from the employment market. Only when such persons are entitled to a minimum income will they also be of interest for the public employment service and for measures offered by the Austrian Public Employment Service. Demands to loosen regulations, for instance, to enable young asylum seekers to commence an apprenticeship in shortage occupations, have been more or less rejected because it is feared that easy access to the labour market would trigger a new influx of migrants.⁴⁴ Delays and difficulties during lengthy competence recognition procedures of the better educated amongst that group of refugees also lead to demotivation and loss of qualifications. It would be more prudent to

⁴³ According to Ms Doro Blancke. Zeier 23rd June 2016

⁴⁴ According to the representative of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection in an interview with Servus TV Talk.

establish the competences of those people before awarding their residence status, in order to enable them to get to know the Austrian education system and focus on possible educational careers.

The number of educationally deprived young people who do not belong to the group of refugees, although many are bound to have an immigrant background, is difficult to establish, since most are neither entitled to minimum income nor attend any educational institution. Frequently, those youngsters remain unemployed for longer periods of time, which naturally has negative effects on their future vocational and educational careers. We truly hope that the newly introduced compulsory education until the age of 18 will help to establish the status of those people mentioned above. This has not been possible up to now due to the fact that the relevant organisations - schools, government, various public employment services - are not allowed to exchange data.

INDIVIDUALISATION OF SUPPORT - NETWORKING MEASURES

Having said that, it follows that educationally deprived persons require an individualised approach. Many measures geared towards dropouts tend to fail because they represent a continuation of negative school experience. In such cases, more creative and individualised approaches are better suited to foster participation in education and work. This also applies to refugees and immigrants whose existing competences need to be established and utilised. Certification of completed education is often ignored because it is assumed useless; hence, those people are employed beneath their actual level of education. On the other hand, a certain number of people in that group are unrealistic as to their professional chances and educational possibilities in Austria. We hope to overcome that problem by focussing more on their personal hopes and aspirations regarding employment and their future in Austria.

Individualised support, however, should not lead to a lack of obligation towards measures that have already been agreed and implemented. To that end, those organisations and institutions offering support will have to network more intensively, i.e. concentrate more effectively on case management. A first step towards achieving that goal would be to document the steps and agreements made so far. Databases could be of great help in that respect.

LOW THRESHOLD OFFERS

Educationally deprived persons will not have easy access to appropriate education offerings owing to a lack of information and/or biographically constructed inhibition levels.

ENHANCED UTILISATION OF MEDIA

Computer-based training courses could be augmented and become part of the educational strategy - particularly with regard to learning languages - possibly with the help of special dictionaries for professions.

GOOD PRACTICE

In the following, we present a number of approaches that would provide solutions to recognising non-formal and informal competences and thus support the educationally underprivileged group of persons. In our selection of projects, we pay special attention to projects that focus more on people with immigrant backgrounds and refugees. Of course, this list is by no means exhaustive.

UNIVERSITIES

Recommendations made by the Austrian University Conference

In 2015, the Austrian University Conference passed several recommendations⁴⁵ with the aim of easing access of non-traditional groups of students to university. These include educationally deprived persons - amongst them people with immigrant background - as well as people with chronic disorders and those who care for family members.⁴⁶ To that end, it is intended to provide access for those possessing informally acquired knowledge. Besides counselling and providing individual support, online self-assessments and preparatory courses enabling people to catch up with parts of the required knowledge will be amongst the possible measures towards achieving that goal.⁴⁷ Those who are not directly involved can still not clearly discern as to how far these recommendations should be implemented, but it is clear that the "More" project for refugees is a step in the right direction.

More

"More" is an initiative of Universities Austria. This initiative, which was launched in summer 2015, is based on German models. It is all about creating a link to university to allow refugees to study more easily. All 21 universities in Austria are currently participating.⁴⁸ "More" has already been presented by the European Commission as a model of good practice.

More offers courses, amongst others, to provide orientation and improve language knowledge. The aim is to allow refugees to continue their studies as quickly as possible. In Graz, Graz University of Technology and University of Graz jointly offer language courses (Treffpunkt Sprachen - Centre for Language, Plurilingualism and Didactics) - from B1/1 upwards. It is not intended to offer specific courses for refugees, but rather to integrate them into courses with Erasmus students. Comparisons with exclusively-for-refugees courses show that integrative courses are better for integration and learning. Moreover, courses are offered in which refugees without a university entrance qualification can participate and successfully complete. Courses held in English are ideal for that purpose. Later on, these courses could be recognised as part of a study programme. In general, endeavours are underway to ease admission requirements for those refugees possessing no documents at all. That means such persons will not have to prove their student status in their home countries like other students from certain third countries. But they will have to provide evidence that they have passed their secondary school leaving examination. Evidence of equivalence of secondary school leaving examinations, however, will not be required if a person's student status in their home country can be proven. Moreover, certification of secondary school leaving examination is not subject to nostrification.

⁴⁵ Austrian University Conference 2015

⁴⁶ Austrian University Conference 2015, 5

⁴⁷ Austrian University Conference 2015, 6

⁴⁸ Universities Austria 2015

Activities offered by "More" represent a low-threshold offer that goes beyond the usual course offerings, promoting intercultural communications and integration.⁴⁹ Similarly, Graz University of Technology's "Welcome Center" also welcomes and attends to the needs of refugees wishing to continue their studies. Moreover, reduced prices for meals at the Mensa and sports activities have been granted. The Austrian National Union of Students has also installed a buddy system to offer mentoring and coaching to refugees.

MORE perspectives is an offer available to refugees with an academic education. This platform connects refugee scientists and artists to members of Austrian universities. It creates networks and research and lecture possibilities.

FH Joanneum - University of Applied Sciences

In response to the "More" initiative at our universities, the association of all Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences (FHK) also discussed the refugee issue in September 2015. Although a few initiatives were launched by degree courses, none of the Universities of Applied Sciences had installed a central coordination centre at this point.

After appointing coordinators at the Joanneum, three areas of action dealing with the question of refugees were defined.⁵⁰

1. Specific help for certain target groups:
 -) Refugees with an existing university degree
 -) Refugees that have already commenced their studies
 -) Refugees who have passed a secondary school leaving examination
2. First aid for the most urgent issues - but this field of action has become obsolete following the decline of refugee influx.
3. Raising public awareness: This was achieved in a lecture series held by the study course for social work. Typically, the attempt to raise awareness in the public is largely limited to those who are already familiar with the subject.
 -) As a concrete measure, it was decided to offer existing German language courses for foreign students to refugees as well. Prerequisite for attending the course is provision of evidence that the applicant has already commenced studies in his or her home country. However, it is not intended to open new courses for refugees, but rather to fill gaps in existing courses. Hence, exchange students, regular students with an immigrant background and refugees all attend the same course. This mix has proved to be successful. Besides offering refugees more motivation and normality, it enables them to take part in the social programme for foreign students (football, intercultural evenings, etc.).

⁴⁹ Universities Austria 2015

⁵⁰ Zeier 7th June 2016

Problems

Both initiatives face similar problems in their concrete work and implementation. On the one hand, problems and obstacles are caused by red tape and insufficiently considered measures. Often, participants of the programme are suddenly moved elsewhere and their participation in the course is dependent on being able to meet travel expenses, which the participants certainly cannot afford, and which nobody else is willing to pay.

The organisation of establishing attendant asylum seekers and recognised refugees is totally insufficient and there is no really valid establishment of their educational status in place. It is not clear who could and should be encouraged to attend these programmes. In addition, one gets the impression that those working with the refugees cannot cope with the situation.

Austrian bureaucracy - not the least at universities - is currently insurmountable for the target group. Refugees are barely in a position to understand procedures of individual recognition, registration and admission procedures without the support of Austrian mentors.

Unfortunately, these initiatives are only able to offer limited support. Existing resources are not boosted to meet the needs in question and universities have to make do with existing space and courses.

Different kinds of admission procedures present a major obstacle. Since they focus chiefly on language ability, people whose mother tongue is other than German are in an extremely disadvantageous position that does not necessarily reflect their academic abilities.

VIENNA QUALIFICATION PLAN

This qualification plan means that Vienna can now focus even more strongly on enhancing existing support offers to persons with low formal qualifications and to improve the coordination of phases of employment and unemployment to gain higher qualifications. Attendants of progressive and modular educational courses are guided step by step towards attaining formal qualifications either during phases of employment or periods of unemployment. Furthermore, recognition procedures of non-formal and informally acquired vocational competences as well as of educational qualifications acquired abroad are planned to be simplified. This measure is offered to all educationally deprived groups.⁵¹

The main tools of this plan⁵² are as follows:

1. Vienna Qualification Pass
2. Competence with system
3. Recognition system of non-formal and informally acquired competences
4. Workplace-related qualification and higher qualification of unskilled workers
5. Measures to raise awareness and provide information and motivation

⁵¹ Adam 2014, 3

⁵² Adam 2014, 4f.

Ad 1) Vienna Qualification Pass

The Vienna Qualification Pass addresses residents of Vienna who currently possess no vocational qualifications and immigrants whose date of immigration dates back to a maximum of 10 years prior and who possess qualifications gained abroad that are not recognised by companies in Austria, providing they wish to complete vocational training on an intermediate educational level (apprenticeship diploma exam or comparable school qualifications).⁵³

"The Vienna Qualification Pass is based on a vocational development target. It classifies existing parts of training or education and internships, or periods of practice, in a logical sequence. Furthermore, it keeps record of all missing steps required to achieve the envisaged vocational qualification."⁵⁴

The Vienna Qualification Pass is planned to be used in all educational and vocational institutions in Vienna. "All vocationally-related partial qualifications and periods of practice (...) shall be systematically recorded in the Qualification Pass. Already recorded partial qualifications form the foundation for planning successive steps towards higher qualifications."⁵⁵ The primary target of this measure is to help people to achieve their apprenticeship diploma. The provider of the database (WAFF) guarantees that all entries in this database are correct and a reliable source of information, which is an additional advantage. These entries also provide an incontestable basis for advisors at the Austrian Public Employment Service.

This pass allows people to plan their educational and vocational careers individually. It is, therefore, not always easy to provide appropriate continuing education offers. The greater the number of persons established in the database and the denser the network of educational offers is - i.e. on a nationwide basis, also outside of Vienna - the easier it is to provide an appropriate range of offers. Perhaps it would help to use e-learning methods more actively - a method which often fails to be realised due to current organisational requirements such as having to document presence - in order to get more funded courses.

Around 500 Qualification Passes were issued by June 2016.⁵⁶

Ad 2) Competence with system

This modular continuing education system gives educationally deprived and unemployed people a chance to systematically obtain higher qualifications. First and foremost, it is intended to help those people to achieve an apprenticeship diploma by using repeated terms of unemployment to gain higher qualifications. That way, one thousand people managed to attain an apprenticeship diploma in eight available professions in 2013.

Ad 3) Gaining higher qualifications at or near the workplace

⁵³ Hausegger 2014, 3

⁵⁴ Hausegger 2014, 3

⁵⁵ Adam 2014, 4

⁵⁶ Zeier 14th June 2016

Similar offers to 2) are also available for educationally deprived employees. They are offered by the Austrian Public Employment Service in co-operation with firms.

Ad 4) Raising awareness

It is becoming ever more important to make educationally deprived people aware of the necessity of gaining educational and vocational qualifications such as school leaving certificates and apprenticeship diplomas, and the significance of lifelong learning. Clear statistical evidence has arisen indicating that educational qualifications are existentially crucial and also allow people to share prosperity. However, we still need to dispel certain opposition and fears on the part of those concerned. The process of lifelong learning should be made doable for people. We should accompany them along that road.

Furthermore, this target group does not have sufficient knowledge of how the Austrian education system works and what it has to offer. Many of them think that there is a huge gap between unskilled workers and people with university degrees, which means that the intermediate education system is not sufficiently well known.⁵⁷

VIENNA SYSTEM OF RECOGNITION - COMPETENCE CHECK FOR REFUGEES

Vienna system of recognition

This measure was introduced to help overcome the problem of refugees' and immigrants' frequent inability to provide evidence of their competences. In the course of an assessment, it is attempted to ascertain what exactly a person is capable of. These competences are then *certified* by a vocational training school, which also establishes what other qualifications, if any, a person would need to gain an apprenticeship diploma. This procedure applies to four professions at the moment.

Candidates can take courses and examinations carried out by certified bodies, thus avoiding having to take a theoretical exam for the apprenticeship diploma, which is a considerable obstacle for people whose mother tongue is other than German, but not just for that group of people alone. This possibility, however, exists for three professions only at present. It has worked well up to now, as people coming from these bodies have always achieved the best results in practical examinations. It was very difficult to convince the Austrian social partners that this system would work and to bring them on board. Representatives of employees and employers alike are staunch defenders of the status quo and do not wish to change the system in any way.

Competence check for refugees

Those concerned are advised and supported further after clarifying their competences in a combination of biographical analysis and practical work. It is aimed to initiate equivalence and nostrification procedures whenever necessary and desirable. Those people are also granted financial means to enable them to carry out competence checks in firms and vocational training schools. Any existing competences are also recorded in the Qualification Pass.

⁵⁷ Zeier 8th September 2016b

Vienna College for Young People

In addition to the measures described above, the Vienna Public Employment Service has been running a college for young people since 2012. The College was designed to offer “modular educational programmes for young adult immigrants, asylum seekers, persons who are entitled to asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status between 15 and 21 years of age”.⁵⁸ It offers courses for 1000 participants “to give them access to the regular school and education system or to a profession”⁵⁹.

These young adults are admitted after going through a certain clearing phase in which their level of education and motivation is established. Core modules offered include German language and basic education as well as social and pedagogical support; in addition to that, a range of special modules tailored to individual needs and knowledge is available.

A network consisting of nine partner organisations offers courses for 1000 people at two locations. The modular educational programme helps young people and young adults to find their footing in the regular school system.

DU KANNST WAS (YOU HAVE TALENTS)

“Du kannst was” (You have talents) is an Upper Austrian project partnership under the leadership of the Federal Chamber of Labour Upper Austria. It aims to help less qualified persons to gain an apprenticeship diploma, but it also helps those who have already acquired a diploma for a profession that is no longer sought after on the market and have subsequently changed their professional field, to acquire completely new officially recognised qualifications. Support is also offered to immigrants who have acquired qualifications in their home countries which are not recognised in Austria.⁶⁰

This is carried out in four steps:

- 1) Initial interview with an educational advisor to provide information and orientation.
- 2) Existing knowledge, capabilities and skills are established in a competence establishment procedure. This is done in a procedure of self-assessment (“self-assessment path”) accompanied by experts from the apprenticeship department. Proof of competences is provided based on concrete examples from the field of practice. Finally, the completed portfolios are appraised by examiners from the apprenticeship department, i.e. the reality of self-assessment is checked (“initial qualification check”) and accordingly recognised. Any further required qualifications are based on those findings.⁶¹
- 3) Missing knowledge or skills are caught up with in appropriate training courses that are offered by various different adult education facilities.
- 4) In a second qualification check, the apprenticeship department issues an apprenticeship diploma after checking your successful completion of the training programme.

⁵⁸ WuK 2016

⁵⁹ WuK 2016, 2016

⁶⁰ Federal Chamber of Labour 2016

⁶¹ According to E. Schildberger Waltenberger 2016

All those who have finished their programme emphasize how positive their experience has been, including the apprenticeship department. All concerns that this model gives away apprenticeship diplomas have thus been refuted.⁶²

THE INTEGRATION PATH OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STYRIA

Since July 2016, Public Employment Service Styria has attempted to improve those people's integration into the labour market who are entitled to asylum, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status and people with immigrant backgrounds by means of the so-called integration path.

This path features various crossroads offering choices of which way to go. In detail:⁶³:

- Individual counselling to start with
- Initial establishment of all data and competences related to the labour market.
- Allocation to the approving body responsible for the recognition of qualifications gained abroad - clarification of required additional qualifications
- Close co-operation with FAB (production school) in order to establish the existence of practical skills insofar as professional experience has been gained in the country of origin. Those concerned then undertake further qualification, i.e. chiefly to achieve an apprenticeship diploma, depending on which competences have been ascertained.
- Application counselling: Compilation of application documents, application training, offers of assistance for job or internship seekers.

Training Centre Fohnsdorf SzF)⁶⁴

Fohnsdorf Training Centre is a major element amongst all measures in the area of training and catching up with apprenticeship diplomas in Styria. This Centre offers the best possible individualised qualification measures within the scope of its existing resources. The ultimate objective of all these measures is to integrate people into the labour market.

⁶² Waltenberger 2016

⁶³ Appendix 2 includes a graphic representation of the path.

⁶⁴ Zeier 6th October

How the centre works:

- J A selection procedure ensures that the right people participate. Participants need to fill in an application form, partake in an application interview with structured guidelines and a competence check. It is ascertained as to whether the participant possesses sufficient cognitive abilities for the planned qualification measure. Should the candidate be unable to present formally recognised competences, any existing informally acquired competences are established, subsequently shortening or lengthening the following course of education.
- J Who is admitted? The following criteria are important:
 - you have to know what career you want to pursue
 - you need to be highly motivated
 - your personal situation should reflect your ambition (lifestyle, mobility, etc.)Not everyone is necessarily chosen. 60 from 100 applicants are directly admitted as soon as a place becomes vacant. Of those, 17 have to take a qualifying test, which is passed by 60%. 23% are turned down.
- J After admittance, an individual training plan is developed and contractually laid down. This professional / specialised training programme is accompanied by supplementary measures; each participant has their own supervisor for support and assistance, whenever necessary - during training and when applying for a job.
- J Qualification measures are offered in five competence areas: metalworking, electrical engineering, woodworking and construction engineering, tourism and office.
- J The modules work within an internally differentiated individualised instruction course with a primarily hands on approach and which attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Each supervisor is in charge of several participants in various different modules. 350 participants in Fohnsdorf, 40 in Fürstenfeld. One group consists of 8 to 12 participants with 4 to 5 different levels of knowledge which are individually accounted for in these modules.
- J Dropout rate: Qualification courses last from one week up to one and a half years. The dropout rate naturally depends on that, too. The overall rate is under 10%.
- J Placements: The placement quota is well above 50%.
- J The accompanying model is essential for the dropout rate. Depending on the length of the training course, supervisors will be in charge of ten to twenty participants. Integral parts of supervision are the initial interview, permanent checks on presence and achievement, appraisal interviews in the middle of the training course, or whenever the participant wishes an interview, especially when it is feared that problems may have arisen in the programme

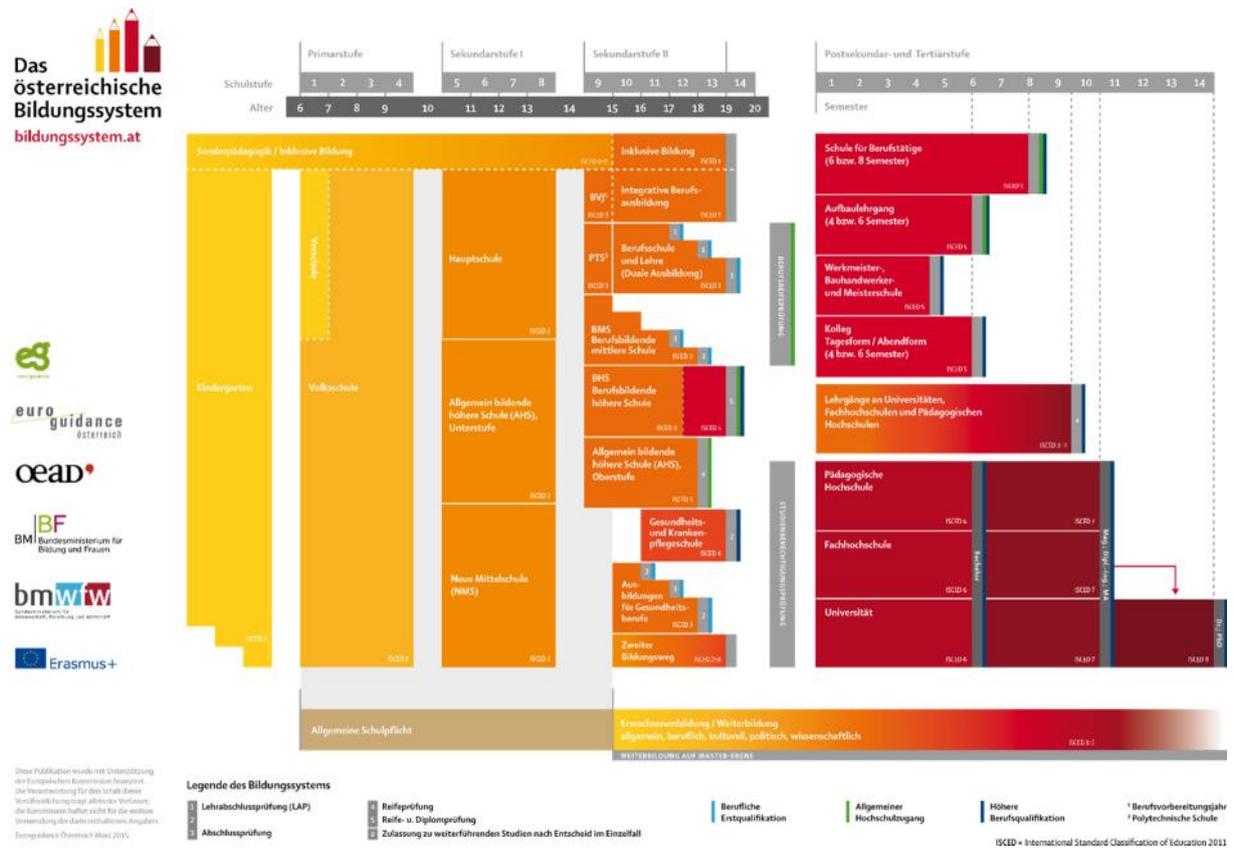
or the application procedure, and the final interview.

Problems – difficulties:

- J Diversity of participants is a permanent challenge. Participants also live at the SzF centre.
Above all, “baggage from the past” can cause problems.
- J Some people cannot cope with being responsible for their learning achievements. Some of them want frontal instruction - but, luckily, this is seldom.

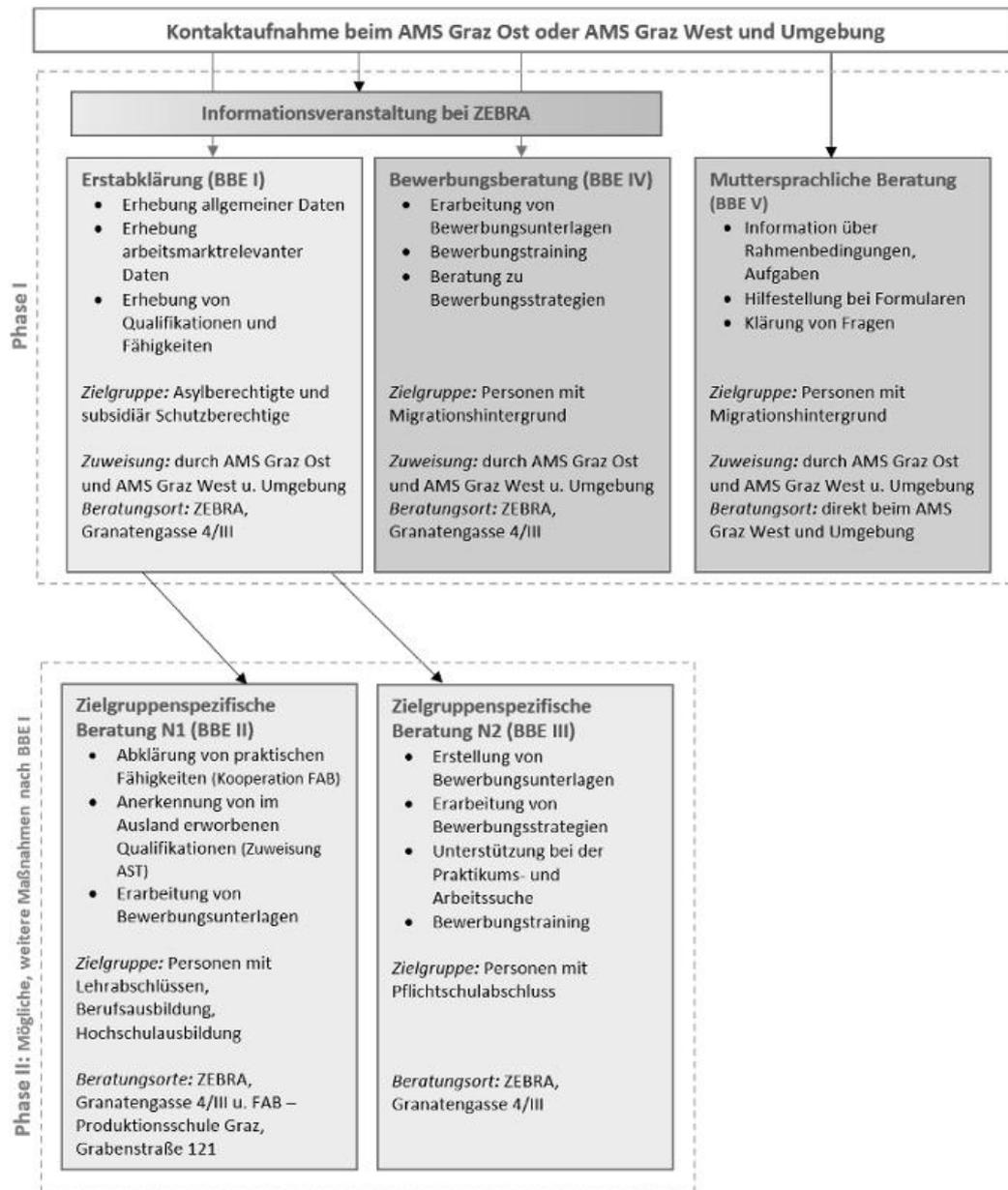
APPENDIX 1: THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN AUSTRIA (FIG. 1)

The following representation illustrates the structure of the Austrian education system.⁶⁵



⁶⁵ <http://www.bildungssystem.at>

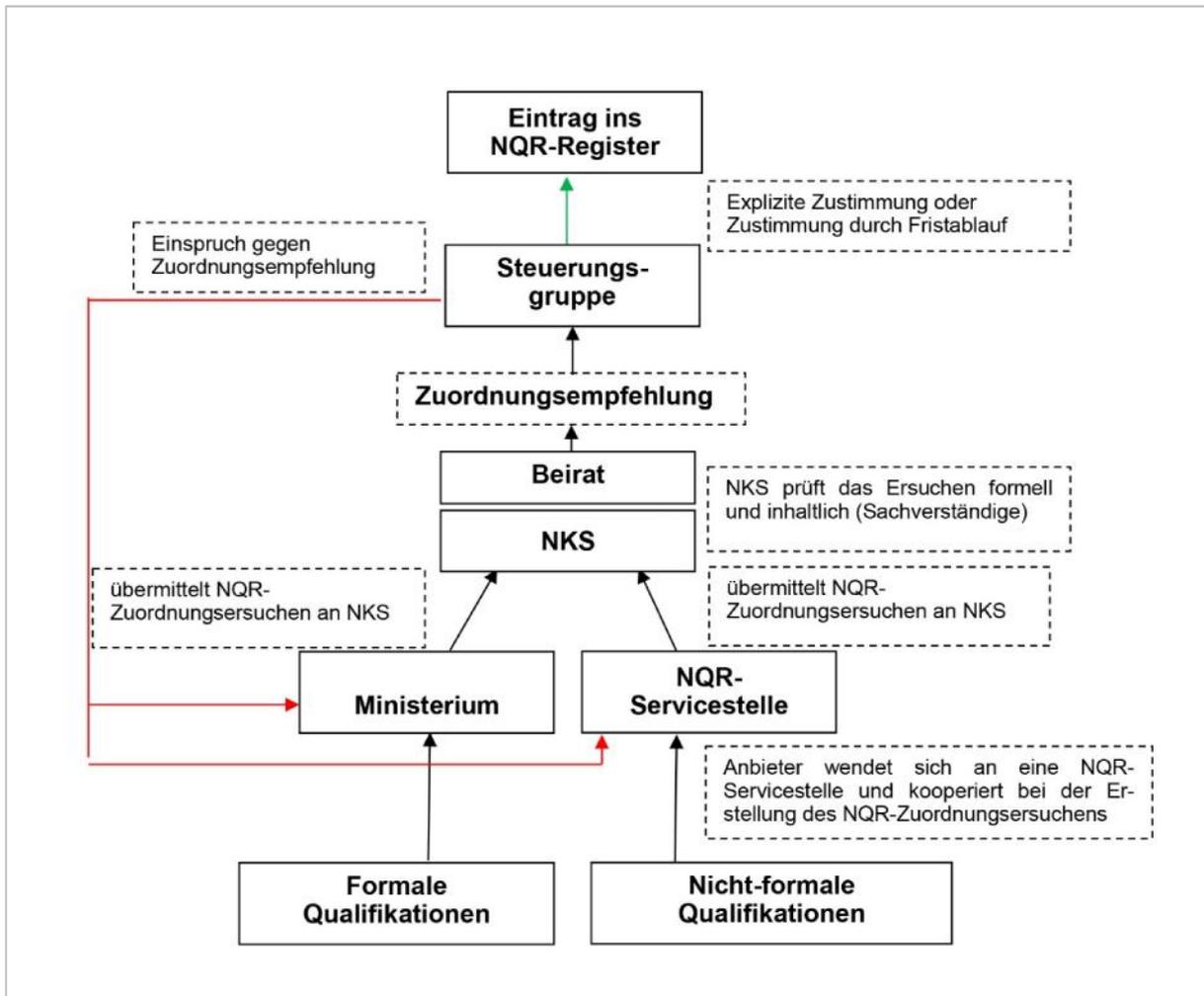
APPENDIX 2: THE INTEGRATION PATH OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STYRIA (FIG.2)⁶⁶



⁶⁶ <https://www.zebra.or.at/cms/cms.php?pageName=6&detailId=22>

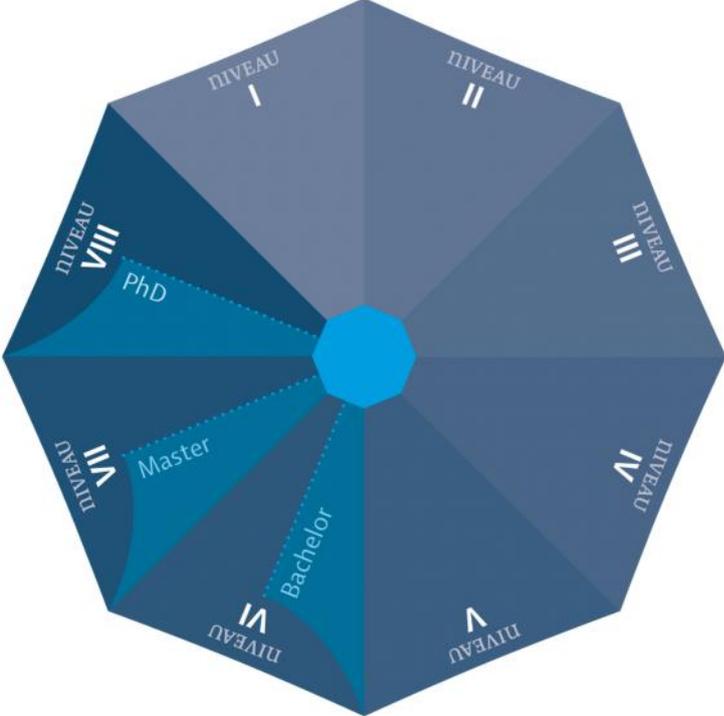
APPENDIX 3: THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Fig.1)⁶⁷: The classification procedure



⁶⁷ NCA - Coordinating Authority for NQR

Fig.2⁶⁸: Levels



⁶⁸ NCA - Coordinating Authority for NQR

APPENDIX IV: OTHER AUSTRIAN ORGANISATIONS + PROJECTS IN THAT AREA

| Organisation | Projects | Webpage | Contact |
|---|--|--|--|
| abz*austria | Competence check vocational integration - focus on women with Farsi as mother tongue | www.abzaustria.at | abzaustria@ abzaustria.at |
| in between | Bib-wiki: I want to establish myself in Austria | www.inbetween.or.at www.bibwiki.at | kontakt@bib-wiki.at |
| Migrare | Competence Kaleidoscope – an Erasmus+ Project | www.migrare.at competence-kaleidoscope.eu | Nermina.imamovic@migrati on.at |
| Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) | Recognition guidelines | www.berufsanerkennung.at www.integrationsfonds.at | berufsanerkennung@integra tionsfonds.at |
| Südwind | Competendo tools for facilitators | www.competendo.net www.suedwind.at | matthias.haberl@suedwind.at |
| Verein Multikulturell | Casebook for Career Guidance Practitioners working with migrants | www.casbollproject.eu www.migration.cc | obo@migration.cc |
| WIAB BFI Vienna Public Employment Service Vienna | Refuskills – Erasmus+ Project | www.wiab.at;www.bfi-wien.at | ziegler@wiab.at ; u.server@bfi.wien |
| ENIC NARIC Austria | | www.naric.at ; www.enic-naric.net | naric@bmwfw.gv.at |
| Solvit | | Ec.europa.eu/solvit; | solvit@bmwfw.gv.at |

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