



Mapping of social orientation: the case of Austria

Author: European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy Graz

January 2018

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List of abbreviations

AIF – Austrian Integration Fund (Translation of Österreichischer Integrationsfonds)
AMS – Arbeitsmarktservice (Public Employment Service)
BM.I – Bundesministerium für Inneres (Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior)
DAF – Deutsch als Fremdsprache (German as foreign language)
DAZ – Deutsch als Zweitsprache (German as second language)
EU – European Union
IOM – International Organisation for Migration
MA – Magistratsabteilung (Municipal Department)
NGO – Non Government Organisation
ÖIF – Österreichischer Integrationsfonds
TCN – Third country nationals
UNHCR – United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNO – United Nations Organisation

Introduction

Social orientation encompasses (parts of) courses, modules and other initiatives in which non-nationals are taught basic civic knowledge of the host society. Social orientation is an issue that needs to be considered with an open mind due to its different forms and formats: it can be state-led or NGO-led, which can lead to a vast scope of activities.¹ In this sense, additional language courses in which beneficiaries might also be educated about such topics, also fall under the heading of social orientation. Group discussions in which non-nationals discuss amongst each other or with members of the host society, or other informative gatherings are included in our project.

The Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, ÖIF), a fund of the Republic of Austria, located at the Federal Ministry of Integration and External Affairs, oversees integration services on a national level and offers value courses through its Integration Centres.

I.1 Value courses (workshops)

In autumn 2015, as a result of the refugee flows, the Austrian Parliament decided to establish value and orientation courses for refugees and subsidiary protection status holders and to offer them via the ÖIF. The aim of these courses is to offer social orientation and information about the rules of life in Austria to those, who have a “different cultural background”. The expert council of the ÖIF in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has thus developed curricula for social orientation and value courses, which provide an overview about the most important fundamental values in Austria, like laicism or gender equality.

In December 2015, the ÖIF launched the pilot operation of these workshops on social orientation. They have been evaluated in order to secure their quality and adapt them. In the beginning of 2016, the courses have been implemented nationwide in regular operations.²

I.2 Language courses (Startpaket Deutsch)

Parallel to these offers, the government decided to promote the “Startpaket Deutsch & Integration”, in the frame of which the Federal Ministry of Interior, the Federal Ministry of Integration and the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs together developed a coordinated language support strategy. This strategy consists of:

- Additional literacy and language courses in level A1 and literacy (provided by the Federal Ministry of the Interior) for asylum seekers in primary care with a high probability to remain in the country;
- Language courses in level A1 (provided by the Federal Ministry for Integration and operated by the ÖIF) for protection status holders;
- Language courses in level A2 (provided by the Federal Ministry for Social affairs in collaboration with the Public Employment Agency (*Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS*) for protection status holders.³

¹ Working definition of social orientation as elaborated by the project team.

² Austrian Integration Fund, [Annual Report 2015](#), Vienna 2016, p. 29.

³ Austrian Integration Fund, [Annual Report 2016](#), Vienna 2017, p. 26.

I.3 Implementation of social orientation and inclusion into language courses

The following chronology will show in which way the value courses have been implemented nationwide and integrated into German language courses.⁴

- Beginning of 2016: the ÖIF concludes general agreements with several Austrian provinces, aiming a nationwide coverage of value and orientation courses (*Werte- und Orientierungskurse*).
- April 2016: the ÖIF concludes an general agreement with the AMS on the integration of value and orientation courses in the AMS-services for protection status holders, who are registered as unemployed at the AMS.
- June 2016: opening of value and orientation courses for asylum seekers and offering them in reception centers.
- September 2016: development of a separate curriculum for adolescents aged between 15 and 18 years and adapting of the value and orientation courses along the needs of unaccompanied minors.
- September 2016: it was decided that basic value and orientation courses should be integrated in the frame of the “*Startpaket Deutsch und Integration*”. The ÖIF has thus developed a new curriculum, which needs to be applied in all A1 level language courses provided by the ÖIF and also by external course providers commissioned by the ÖIF. Additionally, the ÖIF provides workshops for German language trainers on methods of teaching values in language courses.
- Summer 2016: offering in-depth workshops on values by the ÖIF themselves (not by external organisations) in the Integration Centres of the ÖIF in the Austrian provinces.⁵

The Austrian national mapping analyses first the functioning of these courses, which are implemented nationwide and compulsory for all refugees and third country nationals with residence permit. The mapping was however further extended to initiatives taken at the local level, either stemming from the municipality or from NGOs, which are provided on a voluntary basis.

I. Legal and institutional framework

1. Legal framework of social orientation

As stated in the introduction, since September 2016, basic value and social orientation issues have been included in German language courses level A1 and A2. The following information thus only formally refers to the language courses, of which basic value and social orientation is an integral part (see below).

The legal obligation to participate in language courses differs between asylum seekers, protection status holders and third country nationals, who are migrants with a residence permit: while asylum seekers are not obliged to participate in language courses, protection status holders and third country nationals with a residence permit are.

⁴ Austrian Integration Fund, [Annual Report 2016](#), Vienna 2017, p. 30.

⁵ Austrian Integration Fund, [Annual Report 2016](#), Vienna 2017, p. 30.

The integration act (*Integrationsgesetz*), which was amended in June 2017, oblige **refugees and subsidiary protection status holders** who have been granted protection status after 31 December 2014 and who are aged 15 and older, to participate and successfully complete these courses.⁶

Other **third country nationals**, who have residence permit in Austria, are also obliged to attend and pass these courses within two years after being awarded with residence permit. This is regulated by the integration agreement under the integration act.⁷ Since October 2017, they are additionally obliged to pass an exam, testing their knowledge about the Austrian values and order of society.⁸

According to asylum law (*Asylgesetz*),⁹ **asylum seekers**, who have applied for international protection after 31 March 2017, who are eligible to an asylum procedure and who are likely to get it granted,¹⁰ have access to these courses, as long as they are older than 15 years.

The integration year act (*Integrationsjahresgesetz*)¹¹ regulates measures to foster the integration of refugees and asylum seekers, who are likely to get asylum granted, into the Austrian labour market and educational system. Such measures are e.g. skill assessment, job training and language courses including social orientation issues. Asylum seekers, who have German language skills level A1 and who are able to work, have access to these supporting measures (which go beyond language courses) and are also obliged to make use of them.

- **Impact on legal situation/status**

For asylum seekers, there is no impact (either positive or negative) if they attend language courses or not. Participating in these courses has no impact on their legal status, the asylum procedure works separately from this. However, if those **asylum seekers**, who are in the system of primary care (*Grundversorgung*), do not participate in language courses without comprehensible reasons, the authority, which is in charge for offering them primary care, will be informed. There is no official information available on what happens after the authority has been informed.

According to the integration act, **protection status holders** have to sign an “integration agreement”, in which they declare to accept the Austrian values and their cooperation and participation in integration measures, among others social orientation courses. This is regulated under § 6 of the Integration Act.¹² Since October 2017, they are additionally obliged to pass an exam, testing their knowledge about the Austrian values and order of society.¹³

Protection status holders, who receive social welfare payments (which is usually the case) are sanctioned for not-participating with a reduction of these payments. The regional authorities, who are in charge of social welfare, are responsible also for the execution of this regulation.¹⁴

Third country nationals with residence permit are obliged to take and successfully complete the ÖIF language courses within two years after the residence permit has been granted. This is regulated in the Integration Agreement (*Integrationsvereinbarung*), which they are obliged to sign (similarly to protection status holders). §23 of the Regulation

⁶ Austria, [BGBl. I Nr. 68/2017](#) (09.06.2017).

⁷ Austria, BGBl. I Nr. 75/2017 (01 September 2017 for protection status holders and 01 January 2018 for asylum seekers, according to § 11).

⁸ [Modul 1](#).

⁹ Austria, BGBl. I Nr. 145/2017 (11 January 2018)

¹⁰ Assessment of likeliness builds on experience (Die Feststellung einer hohen Bleibewahrscheinlichkeit basiert auf Erfahrungswerten) (§ 68. Abs. 1 Asylgesetz).

¹¹ Austria, BGBl. I Nr. 75/2017 (01 September 2017 for protection status holders and 01 January 2018 for asylum seekers, according to § 11).

¹² Austria, [BGBl. I Nr. 68/2017](#) (09.06.2017).

¹³ [Modul 1](#).

¹⁴ [„Austrian Integration Fund“](#), last modified January 11, 2009.

of the Integration Agreement regulate sanctions in case of not taking the courses: those who have not accomplished module 1 (which is German language skills at level A2 and knowledge about values and societal order¹⁵) of the Integration agreement for reasons that are attributable to themselves, have to pay an administrative penalty of up to € 500 or can be detained for up to 2 weeks. Fraud at the exam can lead to an administrative penalty of €500-5.000 or detention of up to 6 weeks.

2. Course/module providers

The obligatory language courses for refugees and third country nationals with residence permit are organised in the frame of sequential modules. These modules are offered by different providers.

The **Austrian Integration Fund** (*Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, ÖIF*) is in charge of providing language courses at level A1 and contracts mainly private sector providers for those.

Members of the target group, who are able to work and who have passed level A1, have access to further courses (language level A2 and measures to foster their integration into the labour market). They are registered at the **Public Employment Service** (*Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS*) and are within the target of the Integration Year Act.¹⁶ The Integration Year Act (*Integrationsjahresgesetz*) regulates their obligations: all international protection status holders, who are employable but unemployed, are obliged to participate in a standardised integration programme, which is specialised on labour market integration. These measures consist of German language course on level A2, in-depth social orientation workshops and other measures, that are related to labour market integration, i.e. skill assessment, job trainings, job orientation courses. The AMS coordinates these courses. A2 German course lessons focus on work-related vocabulary, occupations (in demand) and the labour market. The “Integration Year” also contains value and social orientation courses in cooperation with the ÖIF.¹⁷

At the **local level**, several **public authorities** and **NGOs** offer additional courses and services to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, which are relevant for their social orientation too: participation is voluntary.

- **Authorities and other public entities on national level**

According to § 4 of the Integration Act, the Federal Ministry of Integration is responsible for offering A1 level German courses, which touch also upon issues of social integration. The **Austrian Integration Fund** (ÖIF)¹⁸ is in charge with handling these obligatory language courses. The ÖIF is a partner of the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs along with many responsible authorities on integration and migration in Austria. The fund runs integration centres located throughout Austria offering information and counselling services. The ÖIF focuses its activity on

- Recognised refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, and third-country nationals;
- People with a migratory background;
- Institutions, organizations and key communicators in integration, social affairs and education;
- Austrian society.

¹⁵ [Integrationsvereinbarung 2017](#).

¹⁶ Austria, [BGBl. I Nr. 75/2017](#) (01.09.2017 for protection status holders and 01.01.2018 for asylum seekers, according to § 11).

¹⁷ Austria, [BGBl. I Nr. 75/2017](#) (01 September 2017 for protection status holders and 01 January 2018 for asylum seekers, according to § 11).

¹⁸ The ÖIF was founded in 1960 by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR and the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BM.I) under the name United Nations Refugee Fund (Flüchtlingsfonds der Vereinten Nationen). The Hungarian crisis in 1956 and the resulting wave of refugees made it clear that Austria needs an appropriate institutional framework to support refugees. Following its separation from the Federal Ministry of the Interior in 1991, the year 2002 was a milestone in the history of the ÖIF. At that point, the service profile of the ÖIF was expanded, and since then the ÖIF shares responsibility for implementing the Integration Agreement.

Within this framework, the ÖIF handles German tests across Austria and evaluates German integration courses to ensure consistent quality.

With integration centres in several state capitals as well as mobile Welcome Desks in towns, the ÖIF assists immigrants throughout Austria with their integration process by providing counselling and information.¹⁹

The Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection is responsible for offering German courses level A2 for employable members of the target groups.²⁰

- Private sector providers, **mandated by the state**

According to §1 of the Regulation on the Integration Agreement (Integrationsvereinbarungsverordnung),²¹ private sector providers (including NGOs) can be certified by the ÖIF and then commissioned by the Fund for providing German language courses (including social orientation issues).

These course providers have to apply for certification, which is then valid for 3 years (and can be renewed afterwards). They have to fulfill certain requirements, e.g. being an institution for adult education or having an at least 5 years' experience in counselling migrants and supporting them in learning German. Organisations, which meet these criteria, are official ÖIF-course carrier organisations. According to §1 (3) of the Regulation on the Integration Agreement, private sector providers are obliged to follow the framework curriculum of German language courses as defined by the ÖIF, which contains social orientation issues. Currently, there are 385 certified private sector providers, mandated by the state (ÖIF) in the whole Austrian area.²²

- Private sector providers, **not mandated by the state**

Private sector providers of voluntary courses and services for the social orientation are not mandated by the state. However, they work in close cooperation with public authorities, from which they usually also receive funding.

A good practice in this regard is the project **"Weichenstellwerk"** in Graz, which is run by a NGO and funded by the City of Graz.²³ Volunteers with teaching experience offer German language courses mainly to asylum seekers and those, who have restricted access to (cost-free) language courses. The services are not reduced to language courses but rather offer basic education (literacy training), learning aid for unaccompanied minors, and workshops on issues like democracy and the rule of law in cooperation with the police. Getting in contact with the police not only helps removing prejudices and build trust on both sides, but also enables the police officers with skills to better deal with refugees. These workshops deal with the following issues:

- How is the rule of law built up in Austria and explaining the concept of the separation of power;
- The role of the police in a democratic constitutional state;
- Core values of a constitutional state and the charter of fundamental rights;
- The value of equal treatment regarding origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation;
- Concept and main duties of authorities and dealing with authorities.

The course language is German, interpretation to Arabic and Dari/Farsi is available. Apart from this, the Weichenstellwerk also offers leisure activities between asylum seekers, protection status holders and members of the host society, e.g. hiking or ice-skating.²⁴

¹⁹ „Austrian Integration Fund“, last modified January 11, 2018,

²⁰ Austria, BGBl. I Nr. 75/2017 (01 September 2017 for protection status holders and 01 January 2018 for asylum seekers, according to § 11).

²¹ Austria / BGBl. II Nr. 242/2017.

²² „Austrian Integration Fund“, last accessed January 19, 2018.

²³ „Weichenstellwerk“, last accessed January 19, 2018.

²⁴ Robert Bösigler, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2018.

- **Requirements towards the professional qualification of providers' experts**

The ÖIF has the following qualification requirements for the staff, working for certified ÖIF-course providers. These requirements are regulated in the Regulation of the Integration Agreement (*Integrationsvereinbarungsverordnung*):²⁵

- German language as mother tongue or German language skills on level C1;
- teaching experience of at least 450 teaching units (45 minutes each) in the area of German as foreign language or German as second language in adult education.

Additional voluntary services at the local or at NGO level do not have such strict requirements on the trainers. However, voluntary teachers and trainers also need to be qualified: an advanced teacher training (studies), at least some experience in teaching German as a foreign language and in working in an intercultural environment are criteria for the selection of voluntary teachers.²⁶

- Authorities on regional/municipal level;

Several authorities on regional and municipal level offer additional courses, counselling and trainings for the target group. These are offered independently from the obligatory language courses, as mentioned above.

There is a variety of counselling services, trainings and coaching for asylum seekers, international protection status holders and third country nationals. There is no obligation to participate in them, but incentives (e.g. vouchers for language courses) are in place. Some of these measures are addressed in this section as they can be perceived as good practices for the social orientation of migrants in Austria.

The **START WIEN**²⁷ is a start coaching service offered by Municipal Department 17 - Integration and Diversity (MA 17) for all new inhabitants of Vienna who receive their 'confirmation of registration (*Anmeldebescheinigung*)' as EU citizens or receive their 'residence card (*Aufenthaltskarte*)' as third-country nationals and family members of EU citizens having received a certificate of registration for the purpose of family member (*Familienangehörige/-r*), employee (*ArbeitnehmerIn*) or self-employed (*Selbstständige/-r*) in the last two years. Employees of MA 17, who speak the target groups' native languages, assist them in finding their way around Vienna. At the start coaching-appointment they will receive a so called "Vienna education booklet". This is a booklet where all the language courses, information events, counselling services, and education and further training programmes that they have attended are recorded. The education booklet contains vouchers from the City of Vienna for German Integration Courses. It also allows them to attend information events on various useful topics. At the start coaching, users will:

- receive the Vienna education booklet and the Vienna language vouchers worth € 150;
- discuss what next steps should be;
- get help with finding a suitable German Integration Course;
- learn how the voucher system works and what the information modules are;
- get recommendations for counselling centres (finding a job, getting your qualifications recognised, etc.);
- discuss basic questions (registering child for school, compulsory schooling, etc.);
- receive information on a variety of other relevant topics.

The services are offered cost-free for the users.

²⁵ Austria / [BGBl. II Nr. 242/2017](#).

²⁶ Robert Bösigler, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2018.

²⁷ ["START Wien"](#), last accessed: January 12, 2018.

II. Audience

1. Coverage of social orientation courses, by category of non-nationals

The concept for social orientation courses was developed in 2015 and implemented nationwide in 2016. According to the annual report of the ÖIF, the coverage of social orientation courses increased in the course of the year 2016, but there is no data on the coverage of social orientation courses by category of non-nationals at national level. There is only data on the total number of courses provided, as well as on the number of participants. These data are not disaggregated along categories of non-nationals, only along their countries of origin. In 2016, 1,100 social orientation courses took place nation-wide with more than 14,000 participants. 42% of all participants are from Syria, 32% are from Afghanistan, 10% from Iraq, 6% from Iran and 2% from Somalia.²⁸

Furthermore, in 2016, 204 workshops on more in-depth social orientation issues took place with 2,418 attendants. Out of these, 1,270 participated in workshops on work and occupation, 728 in workshops on culture and society, 158 in workshops on environment and neighborhood, 131 on women's issues and 131 on health issues.²⁹

A NGO study on the coverage of social orientation courses among asylum seekers describe the coverage of asylum seekers with courses per Austrian province. The best ranking (highest coverage of asylum seekers in social orientation courses) is for Tyrol, Vienna, Salzburg and Styria; the worst for Burgenland, Upper Austria and Lower Austria. The range of coverage of asylum seekers with social orientation courses is high, starting from 25% out of all asylum seekers in Burgenland to 86% in Tyrol. Apart from this, there are differences in the intensity of teaching for asylum seekers, ranging from one hour per week to 20 hours per week.³⁰

2. Initiatives targeted at specific non-national groups

In September 2016, the social orientation courses of the ÖIF have been modified for juveniles, aged between 15 and 18 years in the frame of a newly developed curriculum. The curriculum is adapted to the needs particularly of unaccompanied minors.³¹

The *Weichenstellwerk* (mentioned above) offers specialised learning aid courses to unaccompanied minors, who are in compulsory school age. These courses are voluntary and cost-free and mainly consist of education aids, which are aimed at supporting them in completing compulsory school, particularly in: mathematics (training offered in German and Farsi), English, Biology, History and Geography.³²

The START Wien (mentioned above) offers specific cost-free modules for refugees in their languages, such as Arabic, Farsi/Dari, Paschtu and Somali. Participation in these information modules is voluntary for asylum seekers and refugees. Child care is partly available while these modules are attended. The modules provide information about life in Vienna, particularly on: the Austrian healthcare system, pregnancy, parental leave, the Austrian education system, social welfare matters, matters of asylum law, co-habiting in Vienna, societal rules. There exist specific modules for adolescents,

²⁸ Austrian Integration Fund. [Annual Report 2016](#), Vienna 2017, p. 30f.

²⁹ Austrian Integration Fund. [Annual Report 2016](#), Vienna 2017, p. 30f.

³⁰ SOS Mitmensch (2017), *Deutschkurse für Asylsuchende – Ein Bundesländervergleich Recherche von SOS Mitmensch für den Zeitraum Oktober 2016 – Jänner 2017. (inklusive Update für Vorarlberg und das Burgenland)*

³¹ Austrian Integration Fund. [Annual Report 2016](#), Vienna 2017, p. 30f.

³² Robert Bösiger, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2018.

dealing with issues like addiction prevention, sexuality, contraception, leisure offers, gender roles, violence, racism, youth protection.³³

III. Courses/modules' characteristics

- **Length**

According to §5 (1) of the Regulation on the Integration Agreement (*Integrationsvereinbarungsverordnung*) the language course for level A2 encompasses in total 300 teaching units of 45 minutes each. 12-16 teaching units per week are recommended by the ÖIF.³⁴

The commissioned private sector course providers usually offer the social orientation courses in the frame of 8 hours per day.

The voluntary workshops on more in-depth social orientation issues³⁵ have a length of 1 to 2 days each of 2 to 4 hours.³⁶

- **Format**

A2 level language courses usually take place during the day (as the target group is usually unemployed) and in person. However, the course providers themselves are free to decide on the concrete format.

The voluntary in-depth advanced workshops on values and orientation issues are offered in the Integration Centres of the ÖIF and some of them are offered in the morning, others in the afternoon. All courses are offered in person.

The maximum number of participants in the basic social orientation courses (language level A2) is 16 persons.

- **Language**

The course language is German. For those, who have very little German language knowledge, interpreters are available. Interpreters cover the most common languages of the target groups (which are Arabic, Farsi/ Dari, English and Russian). Also the teaching materials are available in simple German and in Arabic, Farsi/Dari, Paschtu, English and Russian.³⁷ The A1 German language courses build on a brochure called "co-existence in Austria". It is available in the same languages.³⁸

- **Content**

A working group of the independent expert council on integration (*unabhängiger Expertenrat für Integration*) developed the concept for the social value and orientation courses. The aim of the courses is to reflect societal values, conventions, rules and collective knowledge, rights and duties while learning the German language.³⁹ It also aims at discussing these issues as central part of teaching German language, which was implemented in 2016.⁴⁰

The in-depth workshops, offered by the ÖIF in its integration centres, deepen the knowledge on issues addressed in the basic courses. These workshops are open to all target groups (asylum seekers, protection status holders, other types of third country nationals, EU citizens) and accessible cost-free; participation is voluntary. These in-depth courses deal with

³³ „START Vienna, Information modules for refugees and asylum seekers“, last accessed January 12, 2018.

³⁴ [Annex A – Rahmencurriculum für Deutschkurse mit Werte- und Orientierungswissen auf A2-Niveau.](#)

³⁵ Which are offered by the ÖIF in the integration centres.

³⁶ [Austrian Integration Fund.](#)

³⁷ [Sprachportal des Österreichischen Integrationsfonds](#)“, last modified January 11, 2018.

³⁸ [Co-existence in Austria.](#)

³⁹ [Austria materials for GFL and GSL classes.](#)

⁴⁰ [Annex A – Rahmencurriculum für Deutschkurse mit Werte- und Orientierungswissen auf A2-Niveau.](#)

issues, like employment, labour market, health, women, environment or neighbourhood. These services have been provided since May 2016 in cooperation with central actors, like the Public Employment Service.

- **Payment**

The obligatory basic language courses are not offered for free. However, third country nationals, who sign the Integration Agreement, have access to co-payments by the state. These co-payments are available in the frame of:

- A voucher for alphabetisation courses (up to 100% and 375 Euro at maximum refunded in case of successful passing).
- A voucher for A1 German language course (up to 50% and 750 Euro at maximum refunded in case of successful passing).
- A voucher for A2 German language course (up to 50% and 750 Euro at maximum refunded in case of successful passing).⁴¹

As a rule, the course attendees have to pay for the courses in advance, they get a voucher, which is valid only a certain time. After successful passing of the course, they can redeem their voucher and get the costs refunded (up to 50% in case of language courses containing social orientation).⁴²

The exam can be taken directly at the ÖIF and its provincial integration centres. The standardised price for the exam at the ÖIF is €130 per participant. The exam can also be taken directly at the private sector organisations. Here, the prices are not standardised and depend on each institute.

- **Exam**

The German language exam includes questions on social orientation, e.g. A1-level⁴³ includes questions on issues like: public healthcare insurance, gender equality, education and language, religion or family issues. The questions are formulated like statements and the participants have to select the right option, e.g. "My health insurance card is: a) only for me; b) for me and my family; c) for me and my friends." Or: "In Austria, women and men are allowed to learn all occupations, they want: a) true; b) false."⁴⁴

The A2 level exam also contains questions on social orientation. These questions are formulated in a similar style to those for level A1, but – self-evidently – they are more complex. Examples are: "In case a person becomes unemployed, s/he may receive money from the state. Who pays for this? a) the EU; b) the UN; c) employed persons, who pay taxes." This question belongs to the category "work and economy" and is targeted towards responsibility for maintaining the social system according to the principle of solidarity. Another example question dealing with these values too is: "The state is able to pay for public schools, because the state receives taxes and fees from persons, who are employed. a) true; b) false."⁴⁵

Since October 2017, the target group has to prove knowledge about the fundamental values of the legal and societal order.⁴⁶

- **Means to certify non-nationals' participation in the courses**

The ÖIF has standardised course certificates for all graduates.

⁴¹ [Antworten.](#)

⁴² [Was ist die Integrationsvereinbarung?](#)

⁴³ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.

⁴⁴ [Beispielfragen zur Testung des Werte- und Orientierungswissens Niveaustufe A1.](#)

⁴⁵ [Beispielfragen zur Testung des Werte- und Orientierungswissens Niveaustufe B1.](#)

⁴⁶ [Modul 1.](#)

IV. Content of courses

1. Aims of the courses

The integration concept of the ÖIF assumes being acquainted with the values and rules of living together in Austria as important precondition for successful integration of refugees and migrants, next to language skills and employment. The ÖIF offers information on values to refugees and migrants via different channels: via the German language courses, in the frame of in-depth workshops on certain issues or through separate orientation courses. German language courses on level A2 include value and orientation issues explicitly aiming at fostering the understanding and also the reflection of the course content. This means that – according to the concept of social orientation courses – knowledge on values and social orientation should not be just stated and learned. It should rather be made subject of discussion and reflection, whereby the refugees and migrants should be enabled to actively participate in the societal, cultural and economic life in Austria. The course participants should be supported in orientation in the Austrian daily life, its occupational structures and societal values.⁴⁷

2. Themes covered⁴⁸

The fundamental values of the Austrian constitution are central parts of the value and social orientation courses. Concrete issues are: gender equality, human dignity and democratic principles. Apart from that, the courses provide basic knowledge on the requirements for living together in Austria, such as the importance of German language skills and education for integration.

Key topics of social value and orientation courses

- Principles of living together, like democracy, freedom of opinion, the rule of law;
- Diversity of living together: laicism, voluntary engagement, family life, intercultural encounters;
- Austrian history and geography;
- Value of language and education in Austria including information on the Austrian educational system, compulsory education, traineeships, apprenticeships and the dual education;
- Work and economy including information on the Austrian labour market and equality on the labour market;
- Healthcare system (hospital, general information on the healthcare system, prevention and individual responsibility);
- Housing and rules of a good neighbourhood (ways of living together, waste disposal, resting times, relations with the neighbours);
- Information on the Austrian healthcare system, prevention and emergency.

These contents manifest themselves in the language courses in reading texts, sound samples, dialogues, pictures, phrases – in the vocabulary.⁴⁹

3. Teaching methods

The obligatory courses have the character of seminars and take place in the frame of small groups of 15 participants at maximum. Lectures and discussions alternate with each other; women and men participate in the same courses. The

⁴⁷ [Annex A – Rahmencurriculum Sprachkurse A2.](#)

⁴⁸ [Annex A – Rahmencurriculum Sprachkurse A2.](#)

⁴⁹ [Annex A – Rahmencurriculum Sprachkurse A2 und Annex B – Rahmencurriculum Sprachkurs B1.](#)

curriculum foresees a diversity of teaching methods – particularly against the background of the variety of life realities and experiences of the participants. Basically, teaching is guided by the following principles:

- Democratic teaching style;
- Including the life and experiences of the participants;
- Acknowledging the diversity of learning types;
- Action oriented approach;
- Valuing existing resources.

These principles are also applied in the voluntary courses. Teaching is based on a communicative-pragmatic and intercultural approach. The course providers derive the following teaching principles in addition to the ones applied in the obligatory courses, as named above: promoting autonomy, promoting social competence, teaching on how to learn, promotion of multilingualism. Next to teaching, also counselling and advising to other services in education and leisure take place. These counselling services are available in (German, Farsi, Arabic).⁵⁰

4. Participation of host society in the courses

This is not foreseen in the curriculum of the obligatory ÖIF courses. No data is available, nor information provided on voluntary courses, apart from single measures, such as the workshops with the police in the Weichenstellwerk.⁵¹

Conclusion

Basic social orientation issues are part of the German language courses in level A1 and A2, while more detailed contents in connection with values and social orientation are offered in the frame of blocked 8 hour in-depth workshops. The workshops are offered by the ÖIF itself – in its Provincial branch offices, the Integration Centres, while the language courses are offered by external carrier organisations, which meet certain requirements.

Main issues are: freedom of opinion, gender equality, the functioning of the Austrian healthcare and educational systems and the rule of law.

The legal framework for social orientation differs between asylum seekers, protection status holders and third country nationals, who are migrants. Asylum seekers are not obliged to participate in social orientation and language courses, while protection status holders and third country nationals with a residence permit are. The courses are not cost-free, but the government offers vouchers for half of the costs to migrants, who have successfully passed these courses.

Critics say that the content of these courses euphemise the Austrian culture and values. E.g. it points out that tolerance towards LGBTI people is a core value in Austria, while this is not the reality. The same is valid for gender equality. Further critics state that the courses provide detailed information about the behavioural rules and duties (e.g. shaking hands, being on-time, waste separation, being quiet on Sundays, etc.) to newcomers but do not provide lot information about their rights and how to enforce them. E.g. while the prohibition of gender discrimination plays an important role in the courses, the prohibition of ethnic discrimination does not. Furthermore, the courses do not provide a lot of information on what to do in case of discrimination.⁵²

⁵⁰ Robert Bösigler, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2018.

⁵¹ Robert Bösigler, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2018.

⁵² Sterkl, Maria. [„Integrationskurse: Saufen, Schmusen und andere Werte.“](#) June 26, 2017, last accessed January 15, 2018.

Furthermore, it has been criticised that the curriculum for these social orientation courses implicitly follows a paternalist approach according to which the target group (refugees, third country nationals) would have a deficit in these matters and thus need to be supported. At the same time, the teaching of “Austrian values” and with it the institution in charge of it – the ÖIF – are both dominated by a bourgeois-conservative world view, i.e. the People’s Party.

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