

AUTHOR

Author	Aleksandra PANEK
Institution	Beratungszentrum für Migranten und Migrantinnen in Wien / Counselling Center for Migrants in Vienna
Country	AUSTRIA

DESCRIPTION

1. The VNIL/VPL practice in your country/institution

- a) Briefly, how does it work? How long has it been operational?
- b) Which are the **strengths and the areas for improvement** of this practice?

a) The Austrian contact points for people who gained professional qualifications abroad (AST) are located by Counselling Center for Migrants in Vienna (incl. AST-coordination), Zemit in Innsbruck, Zebra in Graz and Migrare in Linz. The AST-network was established 2013 to inform migrants about the formal recognition of their prior qualifications, the forms of the adequate utilization of their skills and improvement of integration into the Austrian labour market. Due to the information, counselling and clarification of professional goals, the contact points promote an adequate employment of migrants. After having settled in Austria, migrants are supposed to be reached as soon as possible in order to gain information about the professional possibilities. The activities of AST-network are the result of long-term cooperation with related NGO's, authorities and supporting systems for migrants/refugees.

Austria implemented the Recognition and Assessment Law Act in 2016. This act ensures the right to counselling and the right to assessment of foreign degrees. AST-network provides counselling services according to § 5 of this regulation and is lobbying in favour of further regulations of recognition adaptations, especially the adjustment of degrees from third countries to EU standards (focus on refugees).

The counselling regarding recognition procedures is a specific form of professional advising, gaining the formal equality of foreign diploma, as well as employment appropriate to the prior qualifications. This kind of counselling is an interface between labour market-counselling, education counselling and career guidance. The aimed empowerment through counselling is essential for the improvement of migrants on the labour market.



The offer of AST contact points:

- Counselling on recognition issues - multilingual, free of charge, case-orientated and personal, on every stage of recognition process;
- Clarification of necessity and possibility of formal recognition;
- Cost coverage of certified translations of documents;
- Assistance with the application for assessment and if necessary, assistance during recognition proceedings;
- Assistance on search for “bridging courses” and its financing (in Vienna an Lower Austria supporting by Check In Plus).

There are regional AST-offices in five federal states, which also provide counselling in the neighbouring regions. Contact points are located within solid experienced NGOs for migrants. AST-network is supported by Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection.

The Counselling Center for Migrants in Vienna has also an additional next-step offer for highly educated migrants and refugees in Vienna and Lower Austria - Check In Plus. The targets of Check In Plus as an offer for people with recognition issues are:

- to find specific measures like bridging courses, internships, etc., which are supplementing the individual recognition-process;
- to cover the costs for those (including recognition fees) sourcing the funding of Labour Market Service Vienna;
- to provide assistance and guidance during the recognition process.

Since it launched (2012), Check In Plus supported more than 4,000 academic/professional-qualified migrants (nurses, medical doctors and dentists, other medical professions, lawyers, teachers etc.) by completing their recognition procedure and avoiding deskilled employment.

b) *Strengths*: The cooperation among the internal projects of Counselling Center for Migrants (united forces to support migrants during the entire recognition process) and large amount of regional and national cooperation with NGO's and authorities. Cooperation is essential and caused by no uniform system for recognition and validation of foreign qualifications in Austria. Knowledge and practice, connection of theory and practical use, multidimensional thinking, solution-orientation, pragmatism, connecting the bridging courses and possibilities for practical experiences with the individual needs of the migrants/refugees.

Challenges: no uniform system for recognition and validation in Austria, very different procedures according to professions from different countries of origin meets different regulations in every federal state. Difficulties to gain practical experiences. Professional recognition is often an agreement between the employer and the employee, except in the case of regulated professions (e.g. nurses, doctors of medicine, dental practitioners, physiotherapists, teachers, etc.). The value of non-regulated foreign qualification is determined by the demand on the labour market and requirements of the companies.

Migrants in early stage are not familiar with the rules of Austrian labour market. We assist them in overcoming those issues with further education and raising awareness of the current job market situation. Some overqualified migrants spend years of being trapped in low skilled jobs. The reasons are very diverse: lack of support in job search, family reasons, being a single wage earner or complex processes of qualifications recognition. The hidden potential of their qualification and their need to utilize the capability meets the needs/lacks of Austrian labour market regarding to several professions (IT, medical occupations...).

2. The candidate

- a) Key details of the **candidate** of this case study (if applicable): age, gender, country of origin...
- b) What **qualifications and/or experience** did the candidate bring to the VNIL/VPL process?

a) The profile of the clients acc. to the 2018-statistics of AST-network:

- gender: 38,8% male, 61,2% female;
- Origin: EU/AAE - 38,8%, Non-EU/AAE: 61,2%;
- two biggest groups acc. to age: 41,8% of the clients are 30-39, and 28% 20-29 years old.

b) AST: Any foreign professional qualification above the primary school. Work experience is not crucial for most of the recognition-procedures but will help the candidate during job seeking process. According to our statistics from 2018, 54% of our clients have an university degree, 33% have qualification on secondary level and 10% completed VET.

The clients of Check In Plus have achieved secondary or tertiary qualification.

3. What was the **outcome** of the process? (e.g. access to or credits within a course, part or whole diploma BA/MA, create a job opportunity and/or a social opportunity...)

Since the AST was launched in 2013 we have counselled more than 46,800 migrants Austria-wide (e.g. 2018: 11,800 consultations took place). Check In Plus had 4,000 clients since established. The AST-guidance provides structured pathways for getting learning outcomes validated/recognized and uses verified measures-sets for recognition procedure depending on clients qualifications. We developed a matrix of solutions depending on origin, federal state laws and other factors which determine the recognition in Austria.

4. Impact and sustainability

- a) What was the impact of the process for the candidate? (i.e. further study, a job, etc)
- b) How are the processes and impact sustained and how are they integrated into existing structures and processes?

a) Informing the clients about their possibilities of utilization of their prior achieved qualifications/skills, offering an measured set of further education and financing the additional steps. A job adequate to prior qualifications has a sustainable impact on further career and on the employability of the individual. As a result there are also long-term impacts for the labour market and economy. The process of recognition of foreign qualification in Austria is long but it has a long-term effect, once successful completed.

b) AST-counselling is based on law regulations corresponding to current recognition-law as well as another law regulations according to migrantion-issues.

5. Relevance and Transferability to VINCE:

- a) Are there any aspects of your practice that are adapted to the needs of refugees or people with a migrant background - what makes these aspects special?
- b) Are there any aspects of your practice that could be adapted to these groups of learners? What adaptations would be needed?

a) AST and Check In Plus counselling offer is adressed particularly to refugees and people with migrant-background. AST-network is an initial expert-body in all matters of recognition counselling in Austria and offers guidance in whole recognition process.

b) 23,5% of migrants are employed under their qualification and for comparison 8,8% of Austrians. The daily practice of AST-counselling implies a revision of some recognition-legislations, which we are lobbying for (e.g. labour law, collective work agreement and recognition practice, access to internships). Employing of people who gained qualifications abroad is still linked with the employer's doubt. This has to be overcome by awareness rising. Employment of persons qualified abroad affects positively their long-term labour market integration. It impacts and stabilized the Austrian labour market and economy permanently.