

Austria – A Counselling Service for the Validation of Formal Qualifications (Middle/higher Professional Qualifications)

Institution	A Counselling Service for the Validation of Formal Qualifications (Middle/higher Professional Qualifications), referred to as “the counselling service” in this document
Interviewed Person	“Arbeitsmarktpolitische Beraterin und Betreuerin”, counsellor for the labor market/ how to access the labour market and measures to take – with a special focus on “Anerkennung”/“Nostrifizierung” – recognition.
Interviewer	IG - DUK

I – Preparation

The counselling service gives advice to people who are officially registered as unemployed at the Austrian public job center (“AMS”) and are looking for recognition of their middle or higher professional qualification (which could also be of academic nature, eg. medical degrees).

II - Awareness

The Austrian public job center advises persons to have their prior formal qualification recognized and sends them to the counselling service, which is helping and counselling during the process of “Nostrifizierung”, other forms of formal recognition and additional formal requirements needed for being able to work in a certain middle or higher profession. “Nostrifizierung” is only available for a few academic degrees, e.g. medical degrees, qualifications in nursing, etc.

People who are interested in the recognition of prior learning usually hear about the possibility of counselling at the counselling service through the public job center (AMS), but this counselling service was established six years ago, the word has spread in different ethnic communities that counselling there can help when looking for recognition of their prior academic degrees in Austria. A necessary prerequisite always is, no matter how they heard from the counselling service, that people are officially registered as unemployed, otherwise no counselling could be provided.

People looking for counselling usually know about their competences and skills and have high expectations about how they could use them in Austria. These high expectations often don't meet reality. Aspects like cultural differences, differences in job descriptions between their home country and Austria and required German language skills are often not included into their assumptions of how they could integrate in Austrian Higher Education, Austrian labour market or Austrian society in general.

Most of the counselling service's customers are usually quite well informed in terms of which courses or further education measures they need.

Ethnic communities and peer groups (Whats-app-groups, facebook groups, etc) are very important for the counselling service's customers. They provide a lot of information, but the

load of information very often confusing and a lot of points are unclear, as the process of “Nostrifizierung” is quite complex.

Among peers and in the ethnic communities, “Nostrifizierung” has an important reputation as it is influencing social status.

III - Starting up

“Nostrifizierung” is usually rather content-centred, based on the comparison of curricula and checking content knowledge, but the exact procedure is depending on the discipline.

The “Nostrifizierung” or recognition of an academic degree usually requires about 20 appointments for counselling and two years all until completion of the recognition process.

The recognition candidates have high expectation of recognition processes. They believe the process will be fast, easy and their practical skills are taken into account. In reality it is quite the opposite: it needs a lot of endurance to go through a recognition process. Recognition candidates hope to improve their social status through having their formal qualification recognized. They hope that they can soon work in the profession, for which they need the recognition process and academic degree to be allowed to work.

IV – Documentation and support

For the recognition process, a translated academic record (transcript, curriculum – which documents exactly are necessary are depending on the discipline, translated in English or German), residence registration and a birth certificate need to be submitted. For being able to work in a profession also other requirements have to be fulfilled. In the case of medical doctors, they have to be registered at the chamber for medical doctors; otherwise they are not allowed to work as a doctor in Austria. This requires further exams in German language. Also a certificate of good standing is necessary. The counselling service advises refugees and migrants from the start of the recognition process until being allowed to work in the desired profession.

Most people have all documents for the recognition process, they are also very proud of their academic records, but very often a proof for professional experience is missing.

The counselling service supports refugees/migrants through organising courses to prepare students for exams during the recognition process, especially German courses for specialised

language in the field of recognition. The counselling service is closely cooperating with course providers.

Furthermore they support refugees/migrants also in finding financial funding for the recognition process.

V - Assessment

During the interview the assessment for the recognition of medical studies was discussed more in detail. “Stichprobentest”, which is an initial exam to check whether a person, striving for the recognition of prior medical studies, knows the study field’s content. After the exam it is decided which exams the student needs to re-take in Austrian Higher Education. The exam is standardized. Students usually learn for the test, not necessarily for developing their professional skills.

“Stichprobentest” consists of multiple-choice questions and is in German language. It usually takes several hours to take. Students just have one chance to take the test, if they don’t perform well, they have to re-take more exams in the fields they have failed in the “Stichprobentest”.

VI – Impact

A month after the “Stichprobentest”, the validation candidates, who are striving for the recognition of their prior medical studies, get feedback about which parts they have passed and which not and also which further exams they have to take based on the exam results. Students have the right to check how the test was corrected.

Especially refugees/migrants are unhappy with the exam if they took it too early, without sufficient German language skills or content knowledge. They usually have to re-take many further exams as a result. Also the fact that practical skills are not assessed is often criticized.

SPECIAL SECTION ONLY FOR VALIDATION PROFESSIONALS

In the case your case study concerns a validation professional, please complete also the two sections below.

VIII – Job profile and training needs

The interviewee is consulting refugees/migrants but not assessing in the recognition process. Consultants at the counselling service are usually experienced in consulting and case management. They often have a background in social work or pedagogics and need to have in-depth knowledge in bureaucratic procedures of the recognition process.

At the counselling service, they provide many training programs for further education of counselling staff, especially regarding communication, counselling competence, reflection of professional performances, etc.

IX – policy context

The policy context is influencing their work strongly, as the counselling service is funded by the city of Vienna.