

Country: Austria

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No. Asylum seekers 2007	No. of persons granted protection	No. of Ngos'/ GOs'/projects offering mental health services	No. of NGOs'/ GOs'/projects working with persons with broken family links	No. of NGOs'/ GOs'/projects working with survivors of torture	No. of NGOs'/ GOs'/ projects working with the elderly and frail
11921	5197	28	1 (Austrian Red cross and regional branches)	7 (of the total 27 which are specialized in this field)	1

Access to health system: Asylum seekers are entitled to health insurance in Austria. Refugees who are working get a health insurance through their employment. In both cases asylum seekers and refugees have the same access to health services as Austrians. However, asylum seekers who committed crimes, can be excluded of the basic provision and hence from health insurance. Refugees who do not work get in case of illness health insurance certificates from the social welfare office, with which they can attend any kind of doctor (also psychiatrists).

Legal Access to mental health care: With the Austrian health insurance asylum seekers and refugees may attend regular psychiatrists or psychotherapist. However the waiting period can be very long, and these services are often not prepared for clients from another cultural/language background.

Systematic assessment of mental health needs: Austrian Asylum Law regulates that victims of torture and traumatised people have to be identified already during the admission procedure in the first arrival centres. If someone is considered to be traumatised or victim of torture he/she does not fall under the Dublin regulation. This assessment is carried out via questionnaire. Every asylum seeker has to undergo this procedure.

Main stakeholders in the asylum system: The main stakeholder are the Office for Federal Asylum (1st level of jurisdiction), "Asylgerichtshof" (Court of justice for asylum- 2nd level of jurisdiction). On the NGO level: Red Cross, Caritas, Diakonie, Asylkoordination.

Country specific features: What drew my attention? In contrast to many other EU countries, asylum seekers are entitled to the regular health insurance in Austria.

Difficulties: Assessment seems good at first glance, however, it is often claimed, that assessors are arbitrary, or overlook PTSD, when symptoms are not explicitly mentioned. Another problem is the access to the public health system which is not adapted to the needs of asylum. Another issue that might impact mental health negatively are the refugee housing centres which are often very remote and far away from larger cities.