

I am Refugee



Location

Vienna

Country

Austria

Short summarizing description

Imagine having to leave your home and embarking on a long journey that leads you into a new country. Instead of experiencing confusion, anger or fear, you have a personal guide by your side that provides you with all necessary information for becoming a valuable member of this new society. Welcome to www.iamrefugee.at - the multilingual (German, English, Arabic, DariFarsi), user-central online integration guide to Austria created by a team of local volunteers wishing to simplify the path towards personal success in their country. It provides refugees with cultural background information and contact points that will help in their integration process. The platform divides the path towards integration into 8 steps and provides answers to 3 questions: What can I do in order to integrate myself in Austrian society? How can I do that i.e. which organisations help me? Why is this integrative step important for my life in Austria? This is supported by embedded, self-produced video tutorials.

Key Terms

integration, empowerment, refugees

Context and background, Which problems/challenges does your measure try to solve/cope with?

The team behind I am Refugee is convinced that successful integration is dependent on clear communication and transparency of the most important integration steps, so that refugees are empowered to walk the path towards integrations themselves. If these aspects are not given (as was the case in Austria), this chaos leads refugees to feeling frustration, fear, depression and anger. Many refugees believe that no integration measures can be taken whilst waiting for asylum - I am Refugee now shows them that this time should be used well in order to prepare for future life in Austria. Furthermore, the chaos in the integration landscape also leads refugees to asking advice within their own refugee communities, thus receiving a lot of false information and creating a parallel society.

Which are the key objectives of your measure?

Equality in opportunity amongst natives and immigrants by providing know-how about Austria and its system. Equality of opportunity amongst refugees, as many asylum quarters are in the midst of the Austrian countryside, far away from the next village, where integration becomes a difficult task. Only an online platform can reach every corner of Austria and try to also help those where integration is more difficult. Transparency and structure: an 8-step-guide through the integration landscape turns integration into a tangible, reachable goal.

Who are the main target groups and beneficiaries of your measure?

www.iamrefugee.at is aimed at every refugee starting from the first day in Austria. No matter what educational or language level, the website helps with embedded, multilingual video tutorials, pictures and simple language. The content was created in cooperation with the target group and focuses on cultural differences in terms of usability. Naturally, Austrian citizens, NGOs and governmental institutions working with refugees are also an important target group.

Which actions have already been implemented and which results have been achieved so far?

The website is up and running since February, translated from German into English, Arabic and Dari Farsi since May and is continuously tested and updated in order to meet the needs of its target group. So far, the website has reached about 10,500 users with 90,000 page impressions, an average session duration of 3:22 mins and ca. 6 pages being visited on average. The bounce rate is at 42%. 34% of users are returning visitors, meaning that these persons are highly interested in the website's content and are probably benefiting from it. Their average session duration is longer (5:21 mins) and they visit 8 pages on average. For example Mohammed from Somalia now knows that it is not normal to make friends in the streets, but instead joined a kickboxing club. Parsa from Afghanistan now knows how to learn German outside of the classroom and what to do if the waiting list for a free course is too long.

Which were the main problems and challenges you were/are facing when implementing the project and how did/do you (try to) overcome them?

The main challenge was breaking down the complexity of the integration landscape into 8 simple steps and identifying the relevant players and contact points from the point of view of a refugee arriving in Austria. Working with refugees on a daily basis for over a year, the team tested the most important questions, problems and solutions with refugees. The second challenge was how to reach refugees in this complex environment. Firstly, by using partner organisations and secondly, working together with Facebook page admins that had more than 20,000 users.

Link to website

<https://iamrefugee.at>

Starting date

2017-02-14

Duration

10

Regional scale

4 - national

Other involved partners

The Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) mentions the integration platform I am Refugee in every integration course and every consultation session with refugees. Since 2017, it is the national law that every refugee has to visit ÖIF.

Contact person

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Category 1, Managing social change

All in all, the website lists 8 steps that are vital for the integration of refugees and vital as a preparation for becoming an active part of the labour market. While waiting to be granted asylum, asylum seekers can already prepare for life in Austria by learning German, doing voluntary work, finding out as much information as they can about life in Austria, catching up on education and making Austrian friends. The second that somebody is granted asylum or subsidiary protection, he or she is also given full access to the labour market and the housing market. Furthermore, the law states that certain integration measures must be taken for which the Austrian Integration Fund is responsible. Each of these 8 steps empowers refugees more and more towards knowing their way within the cultural system of Austria and thus being able to steer their own path towards success.

Category 2: Integrating migrants into the local/,regional labour market

At the end of 2016, about 160,000 persons received asylum and were thus granted access to the labour market. 75% of Syrians and 50% of Afghans are of working age, however, between October 2015 and October 2016 only 7,655 persons registered at the Public Employment Service (AMS), showing that few are being integrated into the labour market. This is a problem as work is the prerequisite for a self-determined, independent, integrated life in Austria. The longer somebody is unemployed, the larger the financial burden on society, influencing the attitude and societal cohesion in a negative manner (as seen in recent political developments). However, it is due to the different cultural systems in Austria and their native countries that many refugees find it difficult to integrate in the labour market. The differences in the job finding processes are laid out transparently and all organisations mentioned that can help in this process.

Category 5, PR impact and awareness raising

Since its launch in February, the website has reached about 10,500 users with 90,000 page impressions, an average session duration of 3:22 mins and 6 pages visited on average. The bounce rate is at 42%. The project has had €0 budget, thus this outreach has only been achieved by word-of-mouth, showing that there is a need and a market for such an overview. 34% of users are returning visitors, meaning that these persons are highly interested in the website's content. Their average session duration is longer (5:21 mins) and they visit 8 pages on average. Furthermore, I am Refugee now has 1,600 likes and followers on Facebook which are a mixture of the general Austrian public and refugees. Over the past 180 days, the Facebook page has had 154,000 page impressions, an outreach of 81,000 and 4,250 interactions. The project was amongst the Top 10 Finalists of the Social Impact Award, thereby receiving much attention by the media and social entrepreneurs.

Category 6, Innovative dimension

One would think that there are enough initiatives for refugees (hundreds of sports, education, language, family, mentoring, job or housing programmes) in Austria. However, it is exactly this large number of initiatives that makes it impossible for refugees to keep an overview. Whether a refugee, NGO or volunteer hears about the relevant initiative is a matter of luck, as there is no central point of contact in Austria that can give an overview. Furthermore, everyone talks of "integration" but nobody knows what that actually means and how it is reached. Thanks to its transparency and structure, the holistic platform www.iamrefugee.at solves all these issues by identifying integration as an 8-step-process. The website is a unique, state-of-the-art, digital information tool that aims at reaching all language and educational levels. All content was created and evaluated together with the target group. In future, there will also be a read-aloud version.

Category 7, Transferability

By analysing Google Analytics, it is easy to identify what part of the target group is interested in which of the integration steps and which of the initiatives supporting the step. We are already working together with clarat.org in Germany in order to use this data so that even better information or certain projects can be provided for refugees. Furthermore, the 8 integration steps are most likely the same in all other European countries. Therefore, the structure behind I am Refugee can be duplicated and blue-printed to other regions or countries. This way, many human and financial resources can be placed in the right projects.

Category 8, Embedment in a comprehensive welcoming strategy

By listing the initiatives that help in each integration step, it is easy to identify the surplus in projects but also the missing projects in the integration landscape. For example, there are more than 20 competing mentoring projects for refugees in Vienna alone – all of which receive governmental funding. However, there are no free computer or Google courses for refugees. This transparency can lead towards initiatives bundling their resources or filling certain gaps in the market. I am Refugee is currently organising meetings regarding certain topics in order to bundle resources and solve relevant problems together with cooperation partners. Furthermore, an entire area on www.iamrefugee.at is aimed at locals wishing to volunteer in the field of integration by providing them with the most important organisations and also topic

areas where help is needed. Thus, volunteering is made much easier and more accessible, thus attracting competent persons.

Further Information



Logo
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