

Austria

Weichenstellwerk - Sprach- und Lebensschule

Locations	Graz
Level of implementation	Local
Name(s) of implementing institutions Partners/Supporters	Association Gemeinsam Sicher (safe together) Municipality of Graz and one of its Holding Companies (monetary funds and premises)
Main idea behind it, initial situation (why?)	Initially, there was a lot of presence of Afghan and Syrian asylum seekers in a park in Graz. The people in the neighbourhood felt insecure. The police and a closely located church figured out together how to offer them meaningful alternatives to staying in the park. Church and police decided to offer them cost free German language courses. The courses were provided by volunteer teachers. A security approach was the initial idea behind this measure: the local population should be calmed down and the asylum seekers should have a meaningful task. The small grassroots-initiative soon become bigger and is now funded and supported by the City of Graz.
Objective (what for?)	Creation of low threshold accessible education and occupation services for the target group
Description of practice (what?)	<p>The service consists of three components: language training, workshops, and leisure time activities.</p> <p>Workshops: uniformed police officers offer workshops on human rights. They consist of input on equal treatment, criminal law, protection against violence. Afterwards, the participants may pose questions. The atmosphere is very comfortable and the participants talk openly. Workshops take 45 minutes and are offered every second month. Sometimes, after these workshops members of the target group dare to report criminal offences that had happened to them, as meetings have a strong trust-building effect.</p> <p>Language training: student teachers voluntarily offer language training, where issues of antidiscrimination, xenophobia and racism are addressed too. Student teachers understand their language training in a holistic manner and offer counselling, advice and referrals to the target group on demand.</p> <p>German language courses, which are part of the mandatory “Startpaket Deutsch” and coordinated by the Austrian Integration Funds, are offered in the</p>

	<p>Weichenstellwerk too. However, they are offered to a much smaller degree than the voluntary courses. E.g. in 2017, there were 120 participants in the volunteer courses and 7 participants in the mandatory courses.</p> <p>Leisure time activities: workshops on arts, music, sports events, hiking, cooking and the like are organised.</p>
Managed/driven by	Civil society, police, church, municipal government
Time-frame (start/end/ongoing)	<p>Start: 2014</p> <p>Ongoing: funding is provided on a yearly basis</p>
Stand-alone initiative or incorporated into other initiatives?	<p>Stand alone</p> <p>Incorporated into other initiatives, namely: Association Gemeinsam sicher</p>
Main target group (nationals, non-nationals - types)	Asylum seekers
Promotion	<p>oral, online,</p> <p>languages: German, Dari, Farsi, Arab</p>
Information provided on legal, practical and procedural aspects of protection against racism/hatred and discrimination	Yes
Methods of language/content teaching	Input, workshops, discussion
Accessibility:	<p>Costs: none</p> <p>Obligatory: no</p> <p>Eligibility criteria: adult, asylum seeker</p>
Budget, sources of financing	City of Graz, Holding Graz (offers its premises for free)
Sources and references (hyperlink(s))	https://gemeinsamsichergraz.at/weichenstellwerk/

Is impact assessment foreseen?	An evaluation is not feasible given the resources and the size of the staff / infrastructure, but would be necessary, as the initiative is funded by the public.
Which actors of host communities are included?	Civic engagement, structural involvement of the police and the support by a diversity of political actors are among the success factors of the initiative. The police are involved via the workshops, German language teachers (language school and leisure time activities) are involved too. The involvement of further actors of host society is aspired, but currently not feasible. The workshops and leisure time activities are open to the participants of the mandatory language courses too.
Degree of inclusion:	voluntary
How can racism and xenophobia be countered through this activity?	<p>The way the German language courses are offered to the target group counteracts racism and xenophobia. They are offered low threshold and participation is voluntary. Thus, the services attract members of the target group, who are curious and open for integration into the host society. The respectful interactions between the German language teachers, the office staff and the target group are a strong signal against racism and xenophobia. The fact that German language is taught by volunteers of the host society and the teaching is accompanied by collective leisure time activities and counselling, shows the target group, that they are counselled, supported and the host society cares about them. Translators are part of the Weichenstellwerk team. They support the target group by counselling and explaining them official letters or doctoral assessments. Moreover, they intermediate in case of rental fraud, etc. This way, asylum seekers can see that they are welcome in Austria.</p> <p>The structural embedding of the police into the service is another important element of counteracting racism and xenophobia. Uniformed police officers come and explain the criminal justice system, the rights of the target group and the obligations of the police to them. This way, asylum seekers realise that the police is a service provider too and they may get a positive image of officers. Thus, a trust-building process is initiated for both sides – the police and the asylum seekers. The police signals: in case you have problems, you may come to us and it is our duty to help you. The police workshops already led to the subsequent reporting of crime.</p> <p>Information about anti-discrimination bodies and counselling centres for persons, who are affected by racism and discrimination, is available in the premises of the Weichenstellwerk. In case members of the target group are affected by racism or discrimination, they turn to the language teachers and receive counselling on what to do or are referred to the responsible bodies.</p>

<p>How can the impact of this practice be measured/made measurable?</p>	<p>Reporting to the funding body takes place every third month and mainly includes quantitative indicators, such as the number of participants, the numbers of activities. However, there is no impact assessment.</p>
<p>Elements of sustainability</p>	<p>The volunteer German language teachers are mainly students of educational studies. The voluntary German language teaching hours are eligible for the mandatory internship in these studies. Furthermore, teachers, who do additional training in German as foreign language or German as second language, may get credits for their mandatory internship. Through this work the volunteers obtain competences and experiences, which are important for their later careers. They may act later as important players in the educational system. As teachers to be, they are unlikely to have reservations towards pupils from the target group as they know how to deal with them. They furthermore may share their knowledge and experiences within their networks.</p> <p>The target group itself has the possibility to get in touch with members of the local population to which particularly asylum seekers have limited access. They have the possibility to get to know open-minded Austrians, who have a positive attitude towards asylum seekers. This way, they can see that the Austrian population is diverse and not only reluctant towards refugees.</p>
<p>Elements of transferability</p>	<p>The project is transferable, because the civic engagement is large enough in every city. Having a university or the possibility to study teaching or pedagogics (with mandatory internships) in the city is no precondition. In Austrian rural areas, volunteers teach German even if there is no University in place. However, civic engagement needs to be structured and institutionalised. A paid person, who does all administration and organisation tasks, is needed indeed. Furthermore, an association is needed to apply for funds and to offer premises.</p> <p>A community policing approach within the local police is also needed. At least parts of the police are needed to be open and engaged in prevention and achieving competencies in dealing with the target group. Ideally, the local police should aim at building up key contacts from the target group.</p>