

The long wait for asylum: Conditions and experiences of waiting for asylum-seeking children in Austria

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1. Aim & Research Question

- Research interest: Exploring the waiting conditions and experiences of asylum-seeking children in Austria and make policy recommendations for child-centered policies

- Research questions:

How are waiting conditions and experiences shaped by various factors such as the length of the asylum process, family, housing conditions, school, etc.?

→ Evaluation of these conditions against the background of a child-centered approach

2. Methods

- **Secondary analysis of legal and policy measures**
 - since the ‚long summer of migration‘ in 2015 in Austria
 - **Fieldwork with asylum-seeking children (age 7 to 18)**
 - who live together with their families
 - in two different basic services accommodations in Vienna (Austria)
- Participant observation, interviews, informal conversations, visual displays analysis

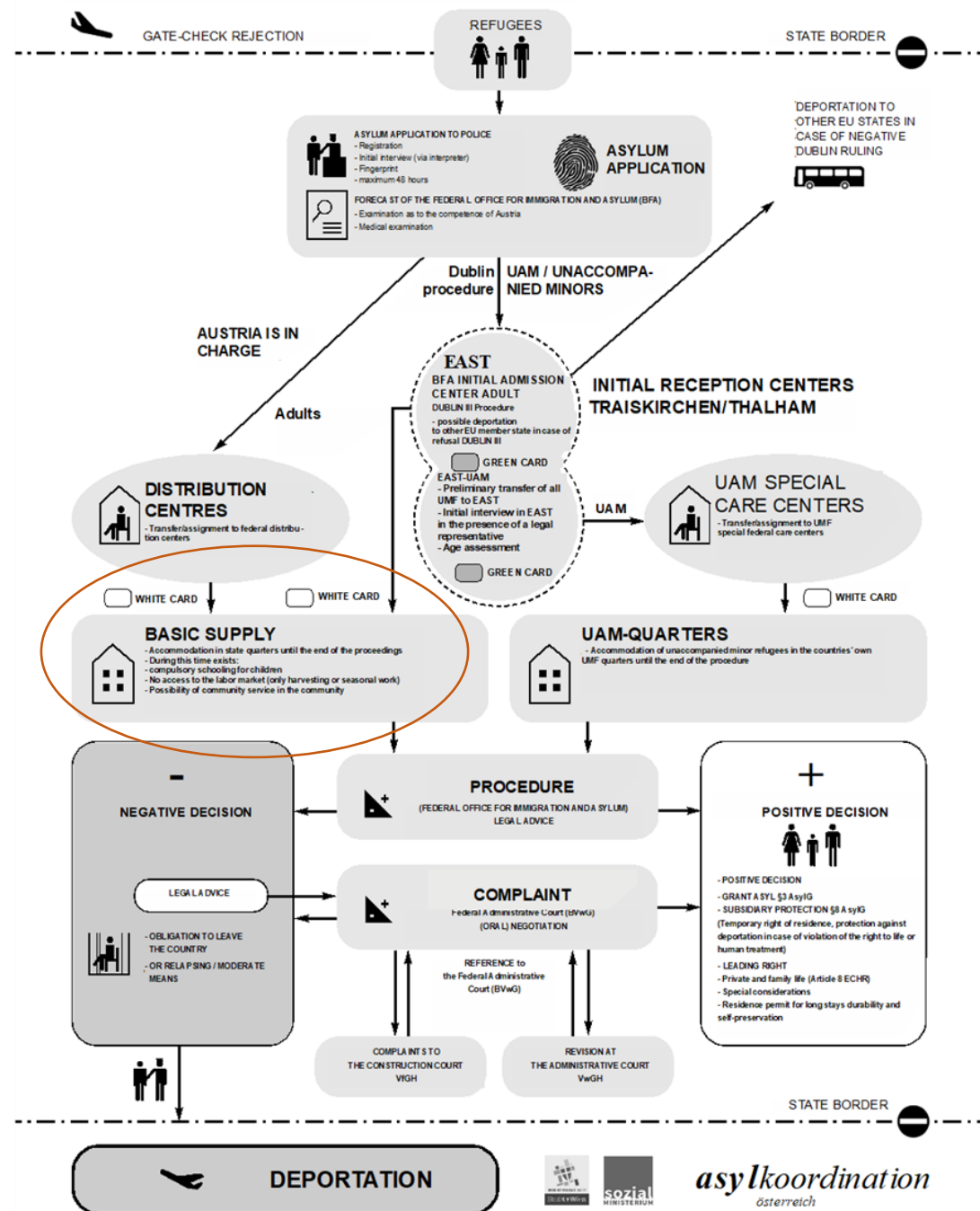
3. Asylum System in Austria

Quality and duration of asylum procedures vary considerably in Europe

→ Austria has with fifteen (but also with six) months one of the highest waiting periods (Netzwerk für Kinderrechte 2019)

Austria case: Multi-level analysis (supranational, federal, provinces) required

- “Basic supply law” (federal government), “Basic Services Agreement” and “Vienna basic service act” (province)
- People receive e.g. health insurance, counseling and transport costs to authorities are covered (plus 21 Euros per day + 40 Euro pocket money per month)
- No access to the labor market
- Until the age of 15, children and adolescents attend regular schools
- Travel costs to school are paid and school materials are provided (Grundversorgungsinfo Wien 2020)



4. Child-centered Policies

Children as right holders → important to problematize migrant children's well-being and participation

Needs to be considered (Gornik 2020):

- a. Knowledge obtained in line with child-centered approach
- b. Empathizes children's current well-being
- c. Participating and involvement of children in policy development
- d. Participation of children in wider social contexts
- e. Principles of child-centered education

5. Experiences of asylum-seeking children while waiting for asylum in Austria

Based on the interviews and the terms mentioned, it becomes clear that the asylum-seeking children are embedded in different institutions/organizations:

- Family (e.g. sister, family, father, mother)
- Basic services accommodation (e.g. apartment, friends in the basic services accommodation)
- School (teacher, school friends, summer school, learning German)

6. Family

- A passport is important for "*going to our country and see our people and then come back*" (K3) → Asylum-seekers are not allowed to travel; they are not issued "convention passports" or "foreign passports" (BMI)
- Family reunification, which in itself takes a long time, is made even more difficult by the circumstance of the lack of asylum status → Netzwerk Kinderrechte Österreich (2019) highlights that the family reunification process should be more benevolent, humane and expeditious in Austria (46-47)
- Parents cannot work because the Austrian government has imposed a work ban against supranational agreements (European Parliament 2018) + Integration measures, such as language courses or education and training measures, are not offered for asylum-seekers (ÖIF 2020: 51)

→ **Children suffer because they miss family members and when their parents are not well**

7. Basic Services Accommodation

- Children referred to the small space; they wish for a house for their family: “So it has many rooms and everything so nice (..) And four rooms for sleeping, so three for my sister, my two brothers with everything“ (K4) → UNHCR calls for the introduction of uniform nationwide quality standards (UNHCR 2013: 5-6)
- Marginalization/segregation of asylum-seekers → The accommodation can be classified as a waiting zone outside society in the sense that they remain provisionally housed in marginal zones (Agier 2002: 337)
- House rules highlight the disciplinization of asylum-seekers → contrary to their usual autonomy, they now repeatedly find themselves in situations where they have to ask for permission (Goffman 2016: 45)
- No standards for how many social workers should be employed per asylum-seeker, and there is no specification of what qualifications they should have (Christ et al. 2019: 35)
- “So there are neighbors who (...) say: Shit foreigners, for example” (K6) → immigrants labeled as ‘others’ (Regierungsprogramm 2017-2022); policies that protect from racism are not in place

→ Children suffer from the conditions of stay, the absence of autonomy, possibilities to socially participate and discrimination

8. School

- Interviewees pointed out that they have problems following lessons because of their lack of German, which leads to anxiety (K2/K3) → precarity is produced by an educational policy characterized by the introduction of disciplinary measures such as separate German language support classes
- "We just want to be alone. To study in peace and so" (K6) → children lack a quiet environment to study for school
- Asylum-seekers living in a basic services accommodation receive 40€ pocket money and a maximum of 200€ per school year for school materials for school children (Grundversorgungsinfo 2020) → Tutoring, which is necessary for some children, is difficult to finance with this amount

→ **Children suffer from inadequate inclusive measures and socio-economic support**

9. Policy Recommendations and Conclusions

"What is your biggest wish?" - "That we get a passport so that we can stay" (K3) → In general: shortening the waiting time

- **Family**
 - Strengthen possibilities to be in contact/unify with family members
 - Psychosocial support
 - Opportunities for (social) participation (e.g. access to work)
- **Basic Services Accomodation**
 - More unified standards (e.g. space)
 - Standards/training for social workers
- **School**
 - Integration measures that adress well-being
 - More (financial) learning support
 - Taking into account the precarious situation in which the children live (especially during the Corona pandemic)

10. Literature

Gornik, Barbara (2020): „The Principles of Child-Centred Migrant Integration Policy: Conclusions from the Literature“. *Annales. Series Historia et Sociologia* (30–4):531–42. Grundversorgungsinfo Wien, 2020

Grundversorgungsgesetz 2005

Network for Children's Rights 2019

Wiener Grundversorgungsgesetz



Thank you for your attention! 😊