

AUSTRIA

HIGHLIGHTS



REPAIR

Family Reunification offers a safe route for families separated by conflict and instability to join their loved ones. Although straight-forward in concept, families often struggle with legal, administrative and logistical obstacles.

Since 2022, the three-year Reunification Pathways for Integration (REPAIR) project has offered practical support to families for Family Reunification, at the same time including, listening to, and learning from them to understand how the system can better meet families' needs.

REPAIR IN AUSTRIA

As a REPAIR partner, Austrian Red Cross (ARC) engaged diaspora communities and people with lived experience to co-produce guidance and tools on Family Reunification, while also providing direct support before, during and after reunification.

ACHIEVEMENTS

ARC achievements during the REPAIR project include:

- **Helping** more than 100 families - more than 480 family members - to reunite through reunification and post-arrival assistance.
- **Interviewing** more than 130 reunited family members from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia to understand their experiences and identify challenges and opportunities.
- **Establishing** cooperation with six diaspora organisations representing the three largest communities accessing family reunification support with ARC.
- **Building** capacity and sharing learning internally and externally to support and improve Family Reunification into the future, including through 25 stakeholder events.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Under REPAIR, ARC conducted a participatory needs assessment of the family reunification process. Including and involving people under international protection and their families in the assessment, ARC sought evidence for how services could be improved.

Following interviews, focus groups, and consultations with key stakeholders, ARC discussed findings with diaspora organizations representing Syrian, Afghan and Somali communities; the three main countries of origin of people accessing ARC family reunification services.

Together with representatives of diaspora communities, ARC developed recommendations for each stage of the family reunification journey.

Pre-departure

1. **Financial Issues** Family reunification is often a huge financial burden due to travel, living expenses, documentation and administration costs.

We recommend that authorities:

- Support sponsors to find jobs – identify priority needs for employment e.g. language, skills, certification of qualifications, CV writing, job hunting etc. and engage with partner organisations to meet these.
- Encourage and provide practical advice for family members in country of destination to save money – be open about likely costs and offer financial literacy courses.
- Allow flexibility in income requirements for family reunification, and provision of state support e.g. housing.



This project is funded
by the European Union



AUSTRIAN RED CROSS

To find out more about the achievements and findings of the REPAIR project – read our online report, and access our online toolkit using the QR Codes.



Online Toolkit



Online Report

- 2. Overly Restrictive Regulations** Legal requirements present insurmountable hurdles for many families e.g. income requirements too high to be fulfilled, definition of nuclear family overly restrictive, three-year waiting period for people with subsidiary protection often prevents reunification with children.

We recommend that authorities:

- Adapt income requirements for family reunification, especially for larger families.
- Use the Child Welfare Directive to establish criteria and define the nuclear family.
- Accept children in subsidiary protection cases who become adults whilst waiting for family reunification.

- 3. Language and Understanding** Complexity of the process is exacerbated by language barriers, particularly during appointments and when making applications at embassies.

We recommend that authorities:

- Provide native-speaker interpreters at embassies.
- Assign interpreters skilled in relevant dialects.
- Support access to learning German as early as possible, including in countries of origin or transit.

- 4. Access to information** Multiple factors – language barriers, lack of information, or not knowing where it can be found – mean families often lack access to information about the family reunification process.

We recommend that authorities and organisations supporting families through the reunification process work together to:

- Produce videos in appropriate languages explaining the phases of the procedure and share them on relevant platforms.
- Develop a “case tracking” programme or App demonstrating the steps of the procedure and track “where is my case now?,” “what comes next?”

Journey

- 5. Exit-Entry challenges** Departure from countries of residence, and any crossing of international borders, can be dangerous for families, especially for women and children travelling alone. Risks need to be recognised and mitigation measures adopted.

We recommend that authorities and organisations supporting families through the reunification process work together to:

- Wherever possible, ensure support to accompany family members to and from airports to protect against harassment or fraud.

Post-Arrival

- 6. Access to Information** Accessing basic information and support can be complicated and confusing for newly reunified families adjusting to their new lives.

We recommend that authorities and organisations supporting families through the reunification process work together to:

- Produce introductory videos such as “First steps in Austria” / “Accessing State support”. Develop a handbook on first steps, important addresses, and procedures in relevant languages.
- Conduct seminars and workshops together with diaspora organisations.

- 7. Accompaniment** Reunited family members may feel overwhelmed, lost, or alone as they try to find their way in a new country. Support can be offered through simple measures.

We recommend that authorities and organisations supporting families through the reunification process:

- Provide professional accompaniment support during the first few weeks.
- Offer individual Psycho-Social-Support.
- Establish a Buddying programme with trained volunteers.

Led by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in partnership with the Austrian, British, French, and Slovenian National Red Cross Societies, the REPAIR project is co-funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).



CONTACT

Austrian Red Cross

Restoring Family Links

Repair@roteskreuz.at

<https://www.roteskreuz.at/ich-brauche-hilfe/repair>