

REPAIR PROJECT

AUSTRIA

ABDI'S STORY



Abdi* and his family fled conflict together in 2015 but became separated and it was not until five years later that they were able to be reunited in Austria. Although frustrated by the length of time the family reunification took, the family were delighted to be together again. However, adjusting to their new lives has been hampered by the lack of provision for their eldest son's special needs.

I arrived in Austria in 2015 after fleeing conflict in Yemen and have been living here for seven years. My family – my wife and two children – were only able to join me in 2021, by which time we had been apart for five years. We all left Yemen at the same time, but they went to Jordan where they stayed waiting until we could be reunited.

**name has been changed.*

According to Austrian law, anyone with subsidiary protection, like myself, has to wait for three-years before becoming eligible for family reunification. For applicants to be successful, they also have to meet specific criteria, including income, housing, and insurance requirements.

In my family's case, after waiting three years to apply, it then took more than two further years for the application to be processed and for us to be reunited.

When I arrived in Austria, I was put into an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. I was there for two years while my case was decided. It was a very difficult place to be, especially for so long, with so much uncertainty, but ultimately I was granted subsidiary protection.

In Austria life was difficult – I had to find work, learn German and find a place to live. Meanwhile, things were even tougher for the rest of my family in Jordan. One of my two sons has a severe disability, and requires constant assistance, even with basic tasks like going to the toilet. My wife had to do everything for him while they were in Jordan, and this really took a toll on her.

It was an immensely stressful period for the whole family, and I couldn't be there to help. When I was



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AUSTRIAN RED CROSS

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Online Toolkit



Online Report

given subsidiary protection and then allowed to apply for family reunification I wanted to visit my family, but getting a visa was impossible. On top of everything, the demands of the family reunification application really compounded all the stress we were already under, and I fell ill. The Red Cross did everything to support us during the whole process. I am so grateful for their help.

We were all so happy when my family finally arrived in Austria and we could be together, but there were and are still so many challenges.

Even after two years we have not been able to find a place in a school able to cater to my son's needs, and we are also still waiting for suitable housing. Where we live now it is a constant struggle to maneuver his wheelchair.

We also had problems with our asylum claims. Initially, our disabled son's application was rejected. We appealed the decision and he's now been granted subsidiary protection, but that only lasts for a year and then we have to apply for a renewal.

Because at the moment I am the only one in the family who speaks good German, there is so much I have to take responsibility for to help my family, from helping with hospital visits, to trying to find school places. Sometimes I feel helpless.

My wife and I feel so guilty for not being able to provide the right accommodation and education for our son - finding a place for my him is our most urgent need. Various non-governmental organizations have been doing their best to help, but they can't do everything. I was hoping the government could help connect us with schools or organizations that support adults with disabilities, but this hasn't really worked out.

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We were all so happy when my family finally arrived in Austria and we could be together, but there were and are still so many challenges.

Despite the difficulties, we do like Austria. Our younger son is 19 and enjoying school, he wants to become a pharmacist. We recognise and are grateful for all the support we have received.

That vulnerable families like ours have to wait such long time to be reunited is not right. We had to wait such a long time, and all the time the process was going on my family was left without any support. And even though the process took so long, there was still no provision for our son's special needs when he arrived.

His disability was not a secret, it was not a surprise for authorities when he arrived in Austria, they knew he was coming and they knew what his needs are, but nothing was put in place to prepare for them. It is unfair that he, and us as a family, is now paying the price for other people's lack of planning. He remains at home all day, stuck in a house that is not suitable for his needs. It is bad for him and it is bad for us, and considerations for this should really have been in place before he arrived.

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