

REPAIR PROJECT

AUSTRIA

SAM'S STORY



Sam and his twin brother were separated from their mother and sister when they were just 12 years old. It was more than three years before they were reunited together in Vienna, but delays in the reunification process mean Sam missed out on mainstream education.

I was born and raised in Tehran. In October 2018 my twin brother and I arrived in Vienna, joining our mother and sister, Sepideh, who had been here since 2014.

After my mum and sister left Tehran, my twin brother and I lived with our father for a year, until he left to go to Germany. After that we lived with our grandmother, our mum's mother. Life was difficult. Me and my brother were only 12 when my mother left, just children. At that age you need to be with your mother.

I thought we would be together in a year, but it turned out to be much longer. We began the reunification process when I was about 13 and we didn't arrive in Vienna until I was 16. The whole process took more than three years. It was really hard growing up without my mum.

Waiting such a long time, always waiting for news, was really difficult. There were times when it took almost a year to receive any information from the authorities. You wonder what's going to happen, and the uncertainty is even harder when you're a child. Without your mum you feel lost, like you've been abandoned, even though it's not the truth.

My mother was not responsible for the delays, they weren't her fault, but I couldn't help feeling that way sometimes. Because I was still a child, I wasn't told a lot. I knew there were issues, but the details were a mystery to me.

When me and my brother were 14, my dad left Iran. In Tehran, a father's permission is necessary for a child to attend school, so we didn't go to school for around a year until we were 15, when we could legally decide for ourselves whether to go to school or not.



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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

The first thing when we arrived in Vienna was just to be with the family. That provided the strength I needed to carry on.

At the moment I am living with my mother and my twin brother. Altogether here in Vienna we are three siblings. Our older sister Sepideh – who lives in her own place – then me and my twin. Our oldest brother lives in Germany with our dad, but they often visit us here in Austria.

The worst thing when I came to Austria was not being able to go to school. I learned German at home. It was important to be occupied, to do something worthwhile, and keep moving forward.

We started the family reunification process when I was 13, but because it took so long, I was nearly 17 when I arrived in Austria – too old to join a ‘normal’ school. When I found out I couldn’t go to school I was so upset, I was asking myself how my life was going to be without an education.

If the reunification process hadn’t taken so long, I could have gone to school like any normal teenager. But because we had been waiting three years, and I was now nearly 17, mainstream school was no longer an option.

I attended German language classes, but I wasn’t able to resume my full studies until I was 19 when I started going to evening school. I’ve successfully completed two years at the evening school and have another two years to go. It’s good to be able to complete my studies, but it does feel like I’ve been held back and missed out.

School isn’t just about learning, it’s about making friends, and being an active part of the community. Because I couldn’t go to school when I first arrived, I missed that opportunity to make friends, which made everything harder. Thankfully, I now have the evening school and I can speak German too which makes things much easier.

I love German. It’s so beautiful, the grammar, the pronunciation, and I was able to learn really quickly. I also did an integration course and got some financial support from the state which was important at the beginning before I was able to work.

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What I like best in Austria is going to school, and the freedom we have. I’ve always been very open to everything, and here I can live my life to the full. Here I can be me, everyone can be how they want to be. I really like that. It feels so free, that’s just the way it is. You live your life and let others live theirs. That’s just so beautiful.

After I graduate from evening school, I want to study psychology. Perhaps one day, I could work as a psychologist for the Red Cross.

It’s essential to have a voice and be able to influence decisions that impact your life. At the moment I can’t vote which makes me feel a bit excluded, so I want to look into applying for citizenship.

But I have learned life doesn’t always go according to plan, so we’ll see, it’s important to be able to make a new plan if things change.

Considering children’s ages and reducing the length of time reunification takes is vital. A key part of that is reducing the bureaucracy and ensuring that authorities consistently follow up on people’s cases.

Arriving in a new country, a new culture, a new language is difficult, but being here and facing those difficulties was so much better than the three years of waiting and uncertainty before I arrived.

Administrative delays and bureaucracy should never be allowed to impact children’s lives as much as they do. If I had arrived sooner and had been able to continue my education I would have completed school and I could be at university by now.

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