



Vielmehr für Alle! – Verein für Bildung,

Wohnen und Teilhabe

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<http://www.fluechtlinge-willkommen.at/>

## **Refugees Welcome Austria**

Asylum seekers have a hard time finding housing opportunities, even people granted asylum or temporary stay fare no better, and have much difficulty finding housing privately. Isolation and spatial segregation pose a severe hindrance to the process of integration and hence produce social disequilibrium. In order to prevent a situation of mutual distrust and exclusion, our project „Refugees Welcome“ brings together refugees/asylum seekers and flatshares that have available living space. Our aim is to facilitate sustainable and participatory integration through low-threshold cohabitation. By drawing refugees into the midst of our society we create spaces for communication and shared experiences, foster social networks, eliminate prejudice and facilitate familiarity with the German language. This is how active living together in a shared flat effectively integrates new citizens into our society.

Our volunteers help a lot with the matching of refugees and flatmates. They pay particular attention to a broad area of common interests. Follow-up meetings and support ensure a long-lasting flatshare.

### How does the platform work?

Flatshares or families who have a free room, as well as refugees who are looking for one, can register on the platform [www.fluechtlinge-willkommen.at](http://www.fluechtlinge-willkommen.at).

We get in touch with both parties and get all the relevant information regarding the room as well as the current living situation. Furthermore, we try to match flatshares with refugees who share the same interests and have similar lifestyles to ensure long-term living arrangements. Regarding the financing of the room rent, micro-donations are particularly promising and, drawn from experience, are simple and successful.

In addition, many of our applicants are recognized refugees and can thus afford the rent for a room in a shared flat; they still have a hard time competing against local students in the current housing market.

After our employees have found a suitable candidate for the room, the room-seeking refugee and a volunteer visit the flatshare. We thus act as intermediaries and establish contact between people with refugee backgrounds and Austrian society. After a successful matching, we stay in contact with the new flatshare through the psychosocial follow-up care.

#### What's new about „Refugees Welcome“?

The key difference between “Refugees Welcome” and other housing initiatives is the focus on shared living space between people with and without a refugee background. By accommodating refugees in private housing, such as in (student) flatshares or with families, we not only provide housing, but also create a new home. This will facilitate integration and participation for asylum seekers in Austrian society, who then have access to a network that can help them in other aspects of their lives, i.e. with learning German, with their paperwork and in finding a job. At the same time, their local roommates come in contact with matters of migration, refugee and asylum politics.

#### Current status:

At the end of January 2017, two years after the start of the project in Austria, 366 refugees have found a new home through our platform. In Vienna, 20 volunteers help with the matching of flats. “Refugees Welcome operates throughout Austria, with coordinators for all 9 federal states and about 50 volunteers in total

In addition to our classic concept, we launched the "housing-working sessions" (WoWo) in autumn of 2016, which takes place twice a week. Here, volunteers meet with apartment-seeking refugees, write an application text together and contact flatshares who advertise their vacant rooms on popular ad websites focused on housing. Thus, the project is no longer dependent on registrations on the website and is simultaneously empowering refugees in their independent search for a room.

The psychosocial support, which is offered to all the flatshares should insure long term living arrangements. The psychological support helps with personal stress as well as problems that rise through the new living arrangement. However, we do try to prevent potential conflicts within the matching process.

In case a refugee has to move out of a flat, we offer consultation and support the person in the search for accommodation. Together with the refugee, we discuss different forms of accommodation and chose the best option. In the next step, we answer ads on websites offering rooms as well as get in touch with other social organisations which offer accommodation.

Every two months, all flatshares, which were created through our platform, can share their experiences at an informal get-together. This creates a community of "Refugees Welcome"-flats. We provide food and drinks.

Our volunteers have the opportunity to take part in further training programs through our organization. We offer three different workshops: "Introduction to Asylum Law", "Refugees & Trauma" and "Anti-Racist Skills".