

Evaluation of the MORE Initiative of Austrian Universities

With the MORE initiative, uniko has created access opportunities for asylum-seekers and refugees to 21 Austrian public universities. After five semesters, the initiative has now been evaluated as to the achievement of its main objectives (orientation and social integration at universities, transfer to degree programs).

The evaluation consists of several parts: First, the enrollment data of participants in MORE courses were used to assess socio-demographic details. Furthermore, the duration of participation in the MORE program and participants' ability to successfully transition to degree studies or preliminary study programs was investigated. Two surveys were conducted to, on the one hand, collect data on the goals and experiences of MORE coordinators at the universities¹. In parallel, a survey of MORE students was conducted in the framework of a research internship at the University of Linz². The purpose of these two surveys was to determine which offerings of the MORE program were utilized by students, how satisfied they were with the program, and what kind of contribution the program could and can make in terms of the integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

What is MORE? Admission and Structure

The MORE program is aimed at persons who were forced to flee their countries of origin, regardless of whether they are still awaiting their asylum decisions or have already been recognized as refugees. Admission to the MORE program requires proof of the right of residence in Austria. The program offers orientation regarding a possible course of studies and assistance

¹ The survey was conducted by Nadine Shovakar via an online questionnaire; the presented results refer to the answers of 17 universities.

² The study was conducted in the framework of the "Empirical Research Internship" course at the Johannes Kepler University of Linz by B.A. students of sociology under the direction of Robert Moosbrugger and Dimitri Prandner during the 2017/2018 academic year.

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with academic integration. MORE students may be able to later enroll in a degree program or to continue one.

Along with the right of residence requirement, universities have developed individualized admissions procedures for the MORE program. At five universities, proof of a general qualification to study, i.e. an equivalent to the Austrian *Matura*, is required to participate in MORE courses. Other ways to determine eligibility to participate in the courses include admissions interviews (8 universities), language tests (1), and the personal consent of instructors (1) or of refugee accommodation supervisors (1). Some universities combine several of these procedures. Participants in the MORE program are registered as non-degree (*außerordentlich*) students, and data about their gender, age, and citizenship are collected.

Universities admit MORE students to selected university courses or enable participation in courses and events offered by the specific university (MORE courses). In addition, there are offerings for asylum-seeking/refugee graduates (MORE Perspectives) as well as more open formats that encourage inter-cultural communication and integration (MORE Activities).

Objectives of the Universities

With the MORE program, universities pursue both general objectives in terms of orientation and the promotion of integration as well as specific ones such as language acquisition and preparation for studies. Asked on location about the goals connected with the MORE program, coordinators at the universities responded as follows:

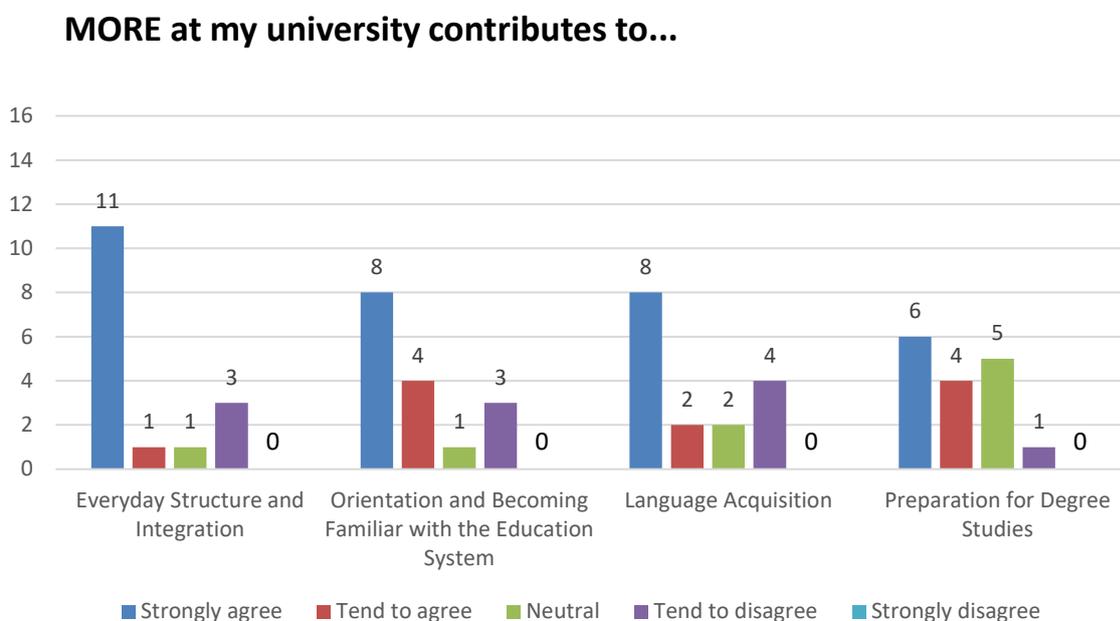


Figure 1: Objectives of the MORE Programme of Universities, 16 answers

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Integration and structure in everyday situations is viewed as a priority objective by 11 of the 16 universities, followed by introduction to the Austrian education system and language acquisition. Ten universities strongly agree or tend to agree that the MORE program contributes to preparation for degree studies. From this, it follows that both the general objectives of the MORE program (orientation and the promotion of integration) as well as specific ones (language acquisition/preparation for degree studies) are achieved according to the majority of MORE coordinators at the universities.

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Part 1) MORE-STUDENTS: Socio-Demographic Aspects and Course of Studies

Data: The present analyses refer to MORE participation over the course of five semesters, from winter semester 2015/16 to (and including) winter semester 2017/18. This means that in the cumulative data on the five semesters, the students who participated in the MORE program for more than one semester appear more often. For this reason – and as far as possible – the data for all five semesters are listed. When appropriate, degree students at public universities have been added as a comparison group.

The average MORE student is 26 years old, male, and originates from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, or Iran. He experiences an Austrian university for the first time via the MORE program and presumably stays in the latter for several semesters.

Gender

In contrast to degree students enrolled during the winter semester 2017/18, who as a majority were female (53%) (Source: University statistics – BMBWF), MORE students are predominantly male. The proportion of women rose from 8% at the beginning of the program to roughly 12%; yet still, almost nine out of ten MORE students are men.

Non-degree MORE Studies according to Gender, Time Series					
Semester	Gender				Sum Total
	Male		Female		
Winter Semester 2015/16	606	91.27%	58	8.73%	664
Summer Semester 2016	988	89.33%	118	10.67%	1106
Winter Semester 2016/17	736	86.08%	119	13.92%	855
Summer Semester 2017	635	86.16%	102	13.84%	737
Winter Semester 2017/18	520	87.39%	75	12.61%	595
Total	3,485	88.07%	472	11.93%	3957
Change 2015-2017	-86	-14.19%	17	29.31%	-69

Table 1: MORE studies according to gender, time series; Source: University statistics – BMBWF

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Citizenship

The vast majority of MORE students originate from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. A further 10% come from Iran.

Countries		Total	
		Sum Total	Percentage
1	Syria, Arab Republic	1,067	27.0%
2	Afghanistan	965	24.4%
3	Iraq	722	18.2%
4	Iran, Islamic Republic	413	10.4%
5	Somalia	169	4.3%
6	Stateless	115	2.9%
7	Pakistan	83	2.1%
8	Nigeria	51	1.3%
9	Ukraine	42	1.1%
10	Egypt	34	0.9%

Table 2: MORE studies according to citizenship, accumulated in 5 semesters,

Source: University statistics - BMBWF

It is interesting to note that over the course of the five semesters surveyed, the number of Syrian students continuously fell from about 1/3 to around 1/6 of the total, whereas that of Afghani students rose in roughly the same proportion.

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Transfers

During the surveyed period, one out of 20 MORE students successfully moved from the MORE program into degree studies or preliminary study programs. If the rising trend in transfers continues, it is to be expected that in future semesters, an increasing proportion of MORE students will begin degree studies or preliminary study programs.

MORE Transfers, Summer Semester 2016 to Winter Semester 2017								
Transfers/Semester	SuSe 2016	WiSe 2016/17	SuSe 2017	WiSe 2017/18	Gender			
					Female		Male	
Transfers to Degree Studies	2	17	28	60	12	20%	48	80%
Transfers to Non-Degree Studies	12	20	44	52	11	21%	41	79%
Total	14	37	72	112	23	21%	89	79%
Increase	14	23	35	40				

Table 3: Transfers to studies, Source: University statistics - BMBWF

Up to and including winter semester 2017/18, 68 MORE students transferred to degree studies. Of them, 60 persons were still studying during winter semester 2017/18. Additionally, 52 former MORE students were attending a preliminary study program³.

As can be observed from the quantitative continuous rise from one semester to the next, more and more former MORE students begin degree studies each semester. This is due to the fact that achieving an appropriate language level and, where necessary, passing qualification exams for specific majors/subjects, requires a few semesters of preparation. Thus, it can be inferred that in future semesters, an even greater number of MORE students will begin degree studies.

³ Source: BMBWF, Section IV/9 Department b (University statistics)

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Fields of Study

University statistics provide information as to the fields of study preferred by MORE students who have transferred to degree studies. The most popular fields of study of these students are listed in the following table (Table 4).

It is remarkable that former MORE students enroll almost exclusively in economic and technical fields. Of the 68 students, four have enrolled in diploma studies, 42 in a bachelor's studies, and 22 in master's studies.

	Field of Study	Women		Men		Total
	Total	11.0		56.7		67.7
1	Civil Engineering	0	0.0%	12	100.0%	12
2	Pharmacy	3	50.0%	2	50.0%	5
3	Computer Sciences	0	0.0%	5	100.0%	5
4	English and American Studies ⁴	0	0.0%	4,7	100.0%	4,7
5	Management	1	33.3%	3	66.7%	4
6	Technical Mathematics	1	33.3%	3	66.7%	4
7	Architecture	1	50.0%	2	50.0%	3
8	Fine Arts	0	0.0%	3	100.0%	3
9	Mechanical Engineering	0	0.0%	3	100.0%	3
10	Commercial Law	1	100.0%	1	0.0%	2

Table 4: Fields of study of former MORE students according to gender;
Source: University statistics - BMBWF

⁴ The decimal value here results from the fact that one person enrolled in a teaching certificate program offered in cooperation with a PH [?].

Part 2) Survey of MORE Students

Data Collection Design

The population that forms the basis of the study consists of all persons who have participated in MORE since the beginning of the program (winter semester 2015/16). Data collection for the recruitment of survey participants occurred via online questionnaires (CAOI) and via paper questionnaires (P&P). The online questionnaire was distributed by coordinators at respective university locations where MORE is implemented to former and current MORE participants via e-mail. Data collection via paper questionnaires was conducted in German language courses in which MORE students participated during summer semester 2018. In terms of total data, n=124 persons.

Who was Surveyed?

The average age of respondents was 28. Twenty-five percent of survey participants were female. The most common countries of origin were Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Respondents possessed a formally high level of education:

- More than half of the participants completed a course of studies in their country of origin. According to respondents, roughly half of these completed degrees – and hence a quarter of the total sample – were recognized in Austria.
- Thirty-seven percent of respondents reported having attained their certificates of access to higher education in their countries of origin. According to respondents' self-reporting, 40% of these certificates – approximately 15% of the total sample – were recognized in Austria as qualifications for access to higher education.

At the time of the survey, the **asylum status** of the respondents remained to a great extent unresolved:

- Almost two thirds of respondents were still awaiting decisions as to their asylum status.
- Roughly a quarter of survey participants had received a positive decision regarding their asylum status or enjoyed subsidiary protection.
- About 10% had received a negative decision regarding their asylum status.

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How did Respondents Become Aware of MORE?

To a large extent, respondents were made aware of MORE by their friends (approximately 2/3 of valid answers). In addition, personnel at (support and advisory) organizations were relevant information-providers.

Which MORE Programs were Utilized?

More than 85% of respondents enrolled in the language courses offered by MORE. The remaining MORE programs were utilized by a sixth to a fifth of respondents, whereby roughly 45% participated in two or more offered programs. Active offerings, such as sports courses or MORE Activities⁵, and/or the MORE Buddy System, were utilized by around a fifth of participants. Courses on scientific topics or art were attended by roughly a sixth of respondents.

	Language Courses	Topical Offerings	Active Offerings	Buddy System	n
Participation (%)	85 % ⁶	15 %	21 %	21 %	124

Table 5: Participation in MORE offerings; Source: Survey of MORE participants

In addition, the analysis shows that the topical range of the program was seen as an advantage to respondents, since half of them reported having utilized more than one type of offering⁷ (cf. Table 6).

	Language Courses Only	Two Offerings	Three or More	Not Specified	n
Participation (%)	52 % ⁸	35 %	10 %	3 %	124

Table 6: Parallel participation in MORE offerings; Source: Survey of MORE participants

⁵ MORE Activities is an umbrella term for offerings that, at their core, aim at common activities and go beyond university programs. These offerings vary from university to university and range from lectures and panel discussions to exhibitions, concerts, etc.

⁶ Rounded up to full percentages. Legend: Topical offerings are courses/presentations/events in the fields of the arts and sciences; Active offerings are sports courses or MORE Activities.

⁷ That 52% of the sample reported participating only in language courses is partly due to the mode of questioning, since personal questioning took place during language courses and therefore other course types are potentially under-represented.

⁸ Rounded up to full percentages.

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How many Courses did MORE Students Successfully Complete?

More than two thirds of respondents reported having successfully completed at least one course. About a sixth of respondents successfully completed more than three courses in the framework of the MORE program.

Just over 50% of the 124 surveyed MORE students completed between one and three courses in the framework of the MORE program⁹. Seventeen percent successfully completed four or more courses. Only 2% reported having failed to complete a single course. The remaining 32% of students provided no information as to course completion.

Number of Completed Courses	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
None	2	1.6 %	1.6 %
One	20	16.1 %	17.7 %
Two	31	25.0 %	42.7 %
Three	17	13.7 %	56.4 %
More than Three (4 to 11)	21	16.9 %	73.5 %
Not Specified	33	26.6%	100.0 %

Table 7: Number of completed courses; Source: Survey of MORE participants

Even if it is assumed that persons who did not specify an answer also failed to complete a course, the resulting dropout rate is less than 30%¹⁰. In average, 2.8 courses per participant were successfully completed.

⁹ 16,1+25,0+13,7=54,8

¹⁰ 26,6+1,6=28,2%.

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How did Participants rate the MORE Program?

In general, MORE was rated very positively (an average of 8.37 on a scale of one to ten). The following points were rated especially highly:

- Acquisition of language skills in the framework of MORE
- Qualifications for further education
- Course contents in general

Requests for improvements focused largely on an expansion of MORE offerings (more of them or more of those already on offer).

Does MORE Contribute to Integration?

MORE achieves its inherent goals of integration insofar as integration at the university level per se already occurs through its implementation. MORE's presence at educational institutions and its exchange with academic personnel ensure this.

As has been made evident above, MORE is understood by responding participants as a "springboard" or "stepping stone" to further studies, be they university degree, non-degree, or other studies. As a result, among MORE participants:

- Thirty persons (24% of respondents) have managed to complete a transition to another university course of studies;
- Thirty further persons (also 24% of respondents) reported being in the process of completing another course of studies; and
- 27 persons (22% of respondents) have successfully gained a foothold in the labor market; 18 of them (15%) have regular employment.

The majority of respondents reported that their own circle of friends was expanded through their participation in MORE. The majority of new friends made were not limited to other asylum-seekers and refugees, but also included Austrians. Participants tend to have an optimistic view of their futures, ascribe self-efficacy to themselves, and almost unanimously report their wish to remain in Austria.

Based on sociological theories of migration and integration¹¹, a distinction between four types of integration can be made:

- **Multiple integration:** refers to social integration in both the society of origin and the host society.

¹¹ For an overview, see: Hans, S. (2016) "Theorien der Integration von Migranten – Stand und Entwicklung." (P. 23-50) in: H.U. Brinkmann und M. Sauer (eds.), *Einwanderungsgesellschaft Deutschland* (Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden 2016). This classification can also be found in: Esser, H. (2001) "Integration und ethnische Schichtung." *Arbeitspapiere–Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung*, 2001(40). Accessed on 8.12.2017: <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/publications/wp/wp-40.pdf>.

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- **Assimilation:** integration occurs only within the host society; connections to one's own group are dissolved/abandoned.
- **Segmentation:** refers to the opposite of assimilation; migrants keep to themselves.
- **Marginalization:** integration occurs neither in the host society nor in the society of origin.

Based on the self-reported assessments of participants, it is possible to provide a broad sketch of MORE's contribution to social integration. Almost 90% of respondents reported that their circle of friends was expanded through their participation in MORE. And the vast majority of MORE students did not keep to themselves; contacts with autochthonous persons also resulted. Hence, a form of *multiple integration* is clearly at the foreground here:

- Forty-six percent of respondents expanded their circle of friends through their participation in MORE. New contacts included not only other asylum-seekers/refugees, but also Austrians. (*multiple integration*)
- A further 17% expanded their circle of friends primarily with Austrians (*assimilation*); and
- Twenty-four percent expanded their circle of friends mainly with other asylum-seekers/refugees (*segmentation*).
- Roughly 13% were unable to expand their circle of friends through their participation in MORE (*marginalization*).

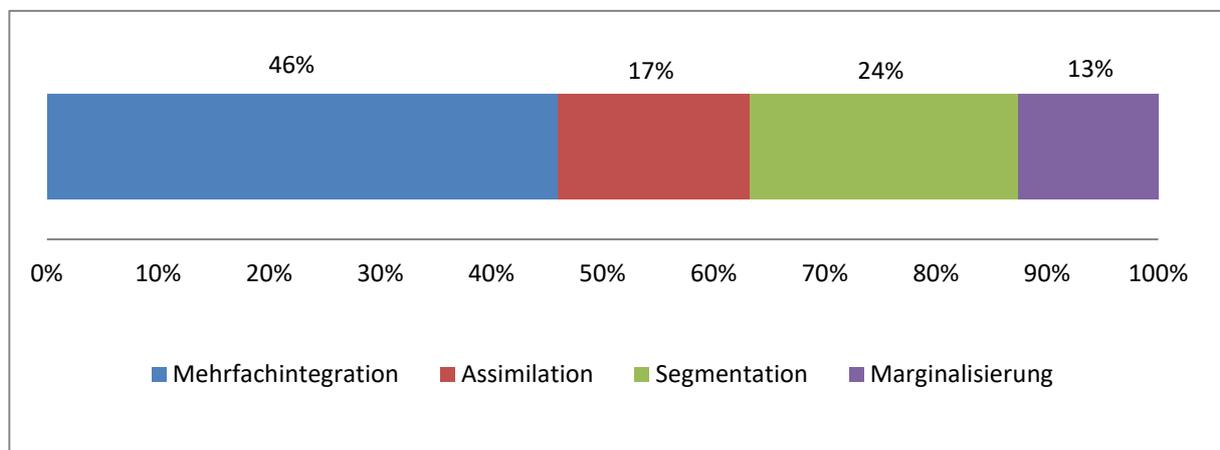


Figure 3: Contribution to social integration according to type; Source: Survey of MORE participants¹²

¹² Multiple Integration - Assimilation – Segmentation - Marginalization

Conclusion

With the MORE program, Austrian public universities very quickly established a point of access for asylum-seekers/refugees in Austria. According to the socio-demographic data, the program satisfied the intentions of universities, namely to enable asylum-seekers/refugees rapid access with a minimum of bureaucratic hurdles. The MORE program has been utilized by over 2,500 persons.

In the meantime, the program has grown out of its infancy and evolved into various forms in accordance with the conditions of respective universities. As a whole, experiences of both MORE students and universities have been vastly positive and underline the purpose of the program both in terms of its general objectives (orientation and promotion of integration) and its specific goals, such as language acquisition and preparation for a course of studies.

MORE students profit from the program not only academically (achieving a very high level of German language skills, access to other university programs and studies), but also personally, through successful integration, including gaining many new friendships with Austrian and international students; and parallel to the MORE program, they often gain first experiences in the Austrian labor market, including gainful employment.

Austrian universities experience MORE students as an enrichment: as people whose potential in a narrow sense is further developed to benefit the former as well as the Austrian economy in general.

In regards to the MORE program's sustainability and further development, measures to promote the advancement of women and asylum-seekers'/refugees' transitions to degree studies are recommended.