

PROBLEMATIC

Alcohol is the most popular narcotic and addictive-substance in Austria.

In Austria the consume of alcoholic substances is not forbideen, one can buy alcohol in the supermarket, in bars, restaurants and so on.

Alcohol addiction with it's physical, psychological and social consequences is one of the biggest health- and social political problem.

Effects: relaxing, sociable, sedative effects; leads to a higher self-esteem, to the losing of control, of concentration and of reaction.

Risks and dangers: prolonged use can be difficult to stop (physical and psychological addiction). Acute dangers: alcohol intoxication because of an overdose. Long term effects: digestive-system disorders (e.g. cirrhosis of the liver), damaged central and peripheral nervous systems, blackouts, hallucinations and extreme tremors may occur.

Cannabis/Hashish/Marijuana usually is being smoked.

Effects: Cannabis intensifies the feelings of the user. Users feel relaxed and lose their inhibitions.

The effect depends on the drug effect, the individual (psychological) situation of the consumer and on environmental circumstances.

Risks and dangers: increasing risk of lung cancer, psychological addiction after a long use, decreased concentration, drive and ambition.

In Austria cannabis is among the forbidden psychoactive substances. Dealing, possession and consume of cannabis (even in small units) is punishable.

SUBSTANCES

Opiates are opium, morphine, methadone and heroin. They usually are being smoked, sniffed or injected. Opiates are also components of soothing medicines, which only should be subscribed by doctors because of their high addiction-risk.

Effects: in the beginning euphoria, analgesia, more self-confidence, indifference for demands and problems; calming, sleep inducing and soothing effects.

Risks and dangers: Stupor, coma, and respiratory depression, risk of HIV and hepatitis through sharing needles. Addiction of opiates may develop very quickly.

In Austria opiates are forbidden drugs. Dealing, possession and consumption of opiates is punishable!

Some refugees may not view the use of opium as risky. But in Austria all opiates are considered to be hard drugs and the penalties for dealing in opiates are very heavy.

Opium is not easy to obtain in Austria, because it is not so customary as it is perhaps in other countries. As a consequence, opium-addicts in Austria often turn to heroin (which is even more intensive and addictive than opium), and also change from smoking to injecting, which is even more hazardous for health.

Medicines: A broad variety is freely available in Austria's pharmacies. Other medicines may only be obtained with a doctor's prescription, because they might do harm if used incorrectly.

The following medicines might be harmful without a doctor's prescription: sleeping pills and tranquillizers (benzodiazepines) - *for example valium* -, or medicines against pain. One should not take them for a long time because one can become addicted to them very easily.



INSTITUT FÜR SOZIAL- UND GESUNDHEITSPSYCHOLOGIE

**THIS BROCHURE IS ESPECIALLY FOR
ASYLUM SEEKERS AND FOR PEOPLE
CARING FOR REFUGEES LOOKING FOR
INFORMATIONS ABOUT ALCOHOL,
MEDICINES AND ILLEGAL DRUGS**



**THE LAWS AND SOCIAL CONVENTIONS
IN AUSTRIA CONCERNING DRUGS MAY
BE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE
IN THE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN !**

In case of drug problems please contact:

WHY THIS FOLDER?

Asylum seekers or refugees in Austria have to deal with a broad variety of problems, for example including a long asylum-procedure, a lack of legal work - factors which force refugees to stay inactive, passive and in a waiting position.

Very often asylum seekers have to live under inadequate housing-conditions, concentrated in refugee-care-centers, in refugee-homes or private lodgings without a proper personal privacy.

Furthermore many asylum seekers feel to be treated badly, to be discriminated or not accepted by the Austrian authorities or by parts of the Austrian population.

Compared to all this the problem of the misuse of drugs, especially illegal substances and alcohol, may not seem so relevant.

But such a misuse - besides the dangerous health-related problems - can also influence the above described problems in a negative way and even intensify them.

A misuse of drugs for example may lead to a dismissal from federal care or from refugee-centers or to the loss of refugee-care in general, or to conflicts with the police/the law; and in the worst case to having to leave Austria.

Therefore it is in the own interest of asylum seekers and refugees to inform themselves or to be informed about the dangers of drug-use and to be aware of the consequences drug use or misuse may have.

WHAT DOES "MISUSE OF DRUGS" MEAN?

People all over the world drink alcohol, smoke tobacco and take drugs. They like the taste, or want to be sociable at social and cultural events, or they just want to relax. In some cases, for example in the case of the use of medicines with a sedative effect, people hope to forget their problems, even if only for a little while.

But there are **dangers** inherent in such use.

To limit those dangers, many countries have drawn up laws and regulations.

In most countries it is strictly prohibited to sell or take drugs. Most countries in Europe do, however, permit the use of alcohol and tobacco.

We are talking about a **misuse of substances** when:

- the use of the substance leads again and again to a breakdown of the performance of duties (in job, school or family);
- substances are used in situations where consume may cause a physical injury;
- there are problems with the law in connection with the substance-use;
- the substance-use is continued although there are constant social and interpersonal problems, which are caused and intensified by the substance.



ADDICTION HAS 3 DIMENSIONS :

1. **Psychological Addiction:** One can become *psychologically addicted* to any substance affecting the consciousness (psychoactive substances). That means that one always has an intense craving to take the substance to feel good and to forget about problems. One takes the substance for a longer time than planned and cannot imagine life without it. The longing for that drug is so strong that it breaks through the given social rules. If the substance isn't used anymore, a feeling of restlessness, anxiousness and irritation appears.
2. **Physical Addiction:** In the case of some substances (alcohol, opiates and certain medicines), the body will need increasingly larger amounts to achieve the same effect or the effect with the same amount is reduced. For example, someone who came to Austria three years ago might have started off drinking two beers every day. That made him feel good, but now he needs five beers every day to get the same feeling. That is the beginning of a *physical addiction*. Anyone who has a serious physical addiction to a substance and who wants to reduce or stop the use will suffer withdrawal symptoms and become ill.
3. **Social Addiction:** Drug use very often takes place in social space and gains symbolic and communicative meanings for each individual or a group. These meanings for many consumers cause strong incentives to continue with the substance.