

Join In a Job! – Key parts of the process

5. Initial assessment

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Initial assessment is an instrument used during the first meeting between a counsellor and a young person. In this part of the book, we are going to describe initial assessment and how to use it. First, we will focus on its target group and goals. Then, we will explain the four parts of the process – gathering personal data, the main questions, the need for action and the action plan. At the end of the chapter, we will provide a description of the framework conditions under which initial assessment should be carried out, as well as its general position within *the Join In a Job!* method.

5.1. Goals and target group of initial assessment

The main *goal* of initial assessment is assessing how intensive the support should be in order to allow the young immigrants to achieve successful professional integration into the labour market.

There are two levels of need for support: no or little need for support and a moderate or large need for support. *No or little need for support* means young people can access the labour market but they only need support while looking for a job and applying for it. *Moderate or large need for support* means there are difficulties or obstacles in some areas of life (see chapter 1.2).

The target group of initial assessment includes young immigrants who visit a counselling centre for the first time, regardless of the level of counselling difficulties.

5.2. Personal data / explanation of the task – part I

Initial assessment is implemented the very first time a counsellor and a client meet to have a session. In social work, this conversation is called the “initial session”. Although the initial session and initial assessment are similar, especially as far as their functions are concerned, these terms cannot be used interchangeably, because initial assessment is in fact different from the initial session. The most important difference lies in the outline of the conversation. During the initial session, it is the client who decides on the issues to be discussed and the course of the discussion (see Kähler 2000).

Explanation of the task / assigning thematic areas

The first question asked during the initial assessment process, (“What’s the problem you want to talk about?”), is an open question that, just like in the case of the initial session, encourages the client to talk freely about his or her personal difficulties and problems. Although clients may speak freely, they are encouraged to try to express their current expectations towards counselling in a brief manner. This question helps the counsellors to explain their task. All thematic areas that clients incorporate in this answer will be dealt with by the counsellors. In

this way, counsellors become aware of thematic areas they should take into account during the second part of initial assessment.

Gathering personal data

Having explained the task, the counsellor gathers some basic data from the client:

- name
- address / contact details
- sex
- date and place of birth
- marital status and number of children
- citizenship

The last question concerning citizenship is particularly important in the case of young immigrants. Depending on their citizenship, young people have free access to the labour market and freedom of settlement, or they have to obtain a work permit and a residence permit (see Hafelekar 2006). More information concerning documents and the legal status of young people will be given in the second part of initial assessment, entitled “Documents and legal aspects”.

It is worth mentioning that this data may be gathered at any point of the initial contact. Sometimes no data is gathered during the initial contact, as counselling at that time should be as “non-invasive” as possible and young people who are “afraid of the advice” should not be discouraged.

5.3. Main questions – Part II

The “proper” initial assessment consists of nine thematic areas (terms “thematic area” and “life areas” are used interchangeably):

- Documents and legal aspects
- Housing situation
- Education and skills
- Immigration / life in Austria
- Work
- Financial situation
- Health
- Social relations
- Aid schemes and institutions

The above nine areas are put in form of a mind-map, with the young person’s name in the centre. Questions concerning each of the thematic areas may be asked or formulated in any manner. It seems advisable to ask questions in a casual manner, as this way it may be easier to take into account the young person’s language level. In the next part, we will take a closer look at each of the thematic areas present in initial assessment:

Documents and legal aspects

Legal aspects of residence and working in Austria are explained to young people without Austrian citizenship. They are told what the most important things concerning access to labour market and residence permit are.

Housing situation

This question concerns young people's housing situation. The answer to this question provides information about resources these young people have at their disposal. If their housing situation is not secure, there may be some potential risk.

Education and skills

As the main goal of the *Join In* project is integration of young immigrants into the labour market, this area is discussed in a very detailed manner. Their education and professional training in Austria and/or their country of origin, taking part in aid schemes and additional qualifications are compared to their wishes concerning the job they would like to take up. Questions concerning their dream job and knowledge of the German language show the real assessment of young people's current situation.

Immigration / life in Austria

The fourth area concerns the possible influence of the young people's immigrant background on their future integration into the labour market. The answer to that question shows how important their parents' culture is for them and whether they obey its customs. Together with "Documents and legal aspects" area, this part has been added for the young immigrants target group.

Work

Questions concerning professional experience show how long young people remain unemployed, excluding studying or performing unpaid activities at home. The areas "Work" and "Education and Skills" give information about formal aspects of young people's education.

Financial situation

Questions concerning young people's financial situation (including debts) help to assess their financial security and show resources that provide them with financial security.

Health

These questions concern health limitations that may influence the choice of job (e.g. addictions, disability).

Social relations

This thematic area aims at assessing whether young people are on their own, or if they have someone from their society that they can rely on. The answer to these questions helps to find out if they have some sort of a social relationships network, and, if so, to what degree.

Aid schemes and institutions

The last area discussed during initial assessment concerns getting help from other counselling centres or aid schemes or institutions. This question should be explained in a detailed manner so that previous consultations can be taken into account. Young people should not be referred to a counselling centre they have already visited.

Questions concerning any of thematic areas should not be too detailed. The very name of this process ("initial assessment") suggests that this is not an in-depth procedure. That is why only basic questions should be asked. During the first meeting, it is very important to assess whether there are any problems in the thematic areas in question and also if there are any resources that may be useful. As mentioned before, initial assessment is a screening process,

or, according to Cronbach and Gleser (1957, in: Häcker 1994), a sequential strategy. Therefore, it can be said that initial assessment provides the first explanation and allows them to make the decision of whether a client should undergo intense assessment. It helps to avoid situations in which each and every client undergoes the whole assessment procedure.

5.4. The need for action - part III

The second and third parts are used simultaneously. In the third part, all nine thematic areas are mentioned, just like in part two. There is some space next to each thematic area so that the counsellor may take notes, e.g. additional information given by the client or ambiguities spotted by the counsellor. The first three parts (part I “Gathering personal data”, part II “Initial assessment” and part III “The need for action”) serve as a basis that allows the counsellor to create an action plan (part IV) together with his or her client.

5.5. Action plan - part IV

The action plan (part IV) is divided into two parts, i.e. a list of priorities and actions / resources. A conclusion of the discussion is necessary before the list of priorities can be prepared. It is necessary to avoid interpretation. After the conclusion, a young person can again present his or her vision of his or her situation. Different points of view can also be discussed. Counsellors should be aware of the fact that the better they get to know the young person’s cultural background, the better they will be able to understand him or her. It provides a better understanding of a particular young person’s point of view (see Handschuk/Klawe 2006). If the counsellor and the young person are unanimous in the way they perceive the client’s position, the young person’s point of view should be similar to ones that appeared at the very beginning of the task (at the beginning of initial assessment process). If there are discrepancies between the problems that made the young person visit the counselling centre and the problems that were diagnosed, the reason for this should be found. The question that arises is why some young people mention other problems than those they actually want to discuss.

List of priorities and actions / resources

If there are no more discrepancies, the counsellor and the young person try to create together a list of priorities, beginning with the most urgent matters. Ways of dealing with those matters are drawn up together with the young person, and the counsellor should provide his or her professional knowledge. Actions should be formulated in a way that would allow the young person to take responsibility for them. It is important to consider what activities the young person may be entrusted with, as it could be really easy to overburden him or her, which could lead to a failure.

Dimension of the need for support

Having created the list of priorities, a counsellor decides what level of support a young person may need. Based on that, further cooperation is established or a date of a final consultation is set. This discussion, concerning further steps that will allow integration into the labour market, is based on the “4 steps to a job” brochure (see Hafelekar 2006).

In the case of moderate or large need for support, thematic areas that need to be discussed during intense assessment. are marked on a special list. When a young person is referred to

another institution, its name should be written down. Creation of action plan ends the initial assessment process.

5.6. Function of initial assessment

Initial assessment has many important functions. The following functions are based on the initial session functions (see Kähler 2000):

Building trust

Fine/Glasser (1996) perceive building trust as the main function of the initial session between a counsellor and a young person. It involves the counsellor's readiness and ability to listen to the client and accept his or her points of view, without trying to change them. It does not have to mean personal agreement, but assuring the client that he or she may present his situation without being censored.

Although initial assessment involves some pre-drawn up questions, building trust is of tremendous importance. It is up to the counsellor to create a friendly atmosphere, e.g. by asking the young person to take off his or her jacket, proposing something to drink and allowing him or her to talk freely. The client should have access to notes the counsellor takes during the meeting, as it ensures transparency. Creating an action plan together aims at strengthening the trust that has been created before.

Providing an outline of the situation

Initial assessment provides the initial outline of the young person's situation. It is about creating perspectives to develop common goals. The action plan should be put in a way that allows a common assessment of actions. The result is that clients have to keep to particular actions instead of referring to abstract goals.

Clients' trust in themselves

From the very beginning, clients should be aware that they trust themselves. To achieve this, strengths and resources should be also discussed, not only weaknesses, which are often more visible.

During initial assessment, young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions:

- *Explanation of task:* Young people wonder why they have come for advice.
- *Presentation of the problem by the counsellor:* Young people do not agree with the counsellor when they think the counsellor has misunderstood something. The counsellor may also point out any discrepancies. Counsellors should be aware of the fact that people from different cultures are particularly sensitive, due to them being a minority. It means that rejection causes them to treat everything very personally (see Handschuk/Klawe 2006). Therefore, a counsellor should be very careful when opposing such persons.
- *Creating a list of priorities / looking for ways to solve the problem:* young people are encouraged to put their difficulties in order of their importance. They are also told to think of possible solutions to the problems.

Explaining competence

When the scale of need for support is assessed, the question is what should be done next. Initial assessment helps to avoid mistakes in assessing one's position.

5.7. Setting and amount of time

Single setting

Initial assessment has been created for individual counselling; therefore, it should not be used in a group setting. Young people should present their difficulties and come up with preliminary ideas to solve them together with a counsellor. Building trust is most important at that point.

Important persons in initial assessment

Basically, initial assessment takes place between a counsellor and a young person. It means the presence of parents or other important persons is not necessary. If parents or other persons insist on being present during counselling, or if the young person insists on the presence of parents or other persons during the first consultation, initial assessment should be carried out in their presence.

The room

The arrangement of the consultation room is also very important. As mentioned before, initial assessment is about building trust. It works best in well-organised and tidy rooms. If possible, there should be no phones that could interrupt the process.

Language level

Initial assessment was created in German, as its main goal is integration into the labour market. That is why knowledge of the German language is of utmost importance. If initial assessment cannot be performed in German, there should be a translator in the counselling centre or the young person should be referred to a counselling centre that can carry out the counselling process in his or her language.

Voluntarily

Some young people are “referred” or encouraged to visit a counselling centre by third parties, mainly by other institutions. At first, it makes them reluctant and defensive. The course of discussion is influenced by the degree of independence of the young person’s decision. In the case of young people who approach the centre voluntarily, it is obvious they really want to change their situation, whereas in the case of people “referred” to the centre, a counsellor needs to spend more time building relations with them before he or she can start the counselling process.

Anonymity

Young people should be granted anonymity. When referring a person to another counselling centre, he or she should be given his or her Initial assessment form or decide whether data gathered during Initial assessment should be passed to the that place. Information cannot be given to third parties without the young person’s consent. If a young person wishes to have an information meeting, Initial assessment should be carried out without writing down any data.

Amount of time

As a rule, initial assessment lasts for an hour. The time limit does not have to be strictly obeyed, though, as it is in the case of hourly sessions. If young people wish to elaborate when asked about their reasons for visiting the centre, they should be allowed to do so. Initial assessment is an important meeting and it should be used to build a base for future working relations.

5.8. Connection with the general process

Initial assessment is at the very beginning of the *Join In!* method. It deals with a lot of issues, which is why it is useful in counselling institutions dealing with different aspects of counselling. Depending on the aspect, a counselling centre may deal with one or several problems in an in-depth manner.

A complete initial assessment helps to assess the young person's situation. It is important to decide together what the effects should be. The next steps are then determined to ensure the ability to cope with results-oriented requirements.

Limited need for support

In the case of people with limited need for support, it is also necessary to discuss all areas of life so that obstacles not related to integration into the labour market can be got rid of. If it turns out that a young person needs help preparing documents necessary to apply for a job or does not know effective ways of looking for a job, he or she is invited for another advisory meeting or referred to another institution. In the case of another meeting, young people receive advice and information on how to look and apply for a job, based on the "4 steps to a job" brochure (see chapter 8). It means young people receive support and information, and can be referred to, for example, the Labour Office.

Moderate and big need for support

As we have mentioned before, the all-important aspects of life of a young person are discussed during the first session in the initial assessment. Thanks to a prearranged session scheme, no area is neglected. It is very important not to neglect any of the areas. Many people who come for advice are unemployed, but that is not their biggest problem. The problem may be a place to live, drugs, or debts. Unemployment may be the least important problem they have to face. Of course, it can be assumed that these problems are correlated. The level of their correlation may be assessed during the intense assessment, when all problematic areas are discussed in detail. Intense assessment is also carried out if the young people's problems are only related to the labour market. It involves young people who have moderate or large need for support. After intense assessment, a decision is made concerning further actions. A detailed description of intense assessment is included in the next chapter (see chapter 7).

We have also given an example of assessment in practice.

Initial assessment may be obtained from the attached CD-ROM. In order to ensure proper use, we have also included a checklist that can be found on the CR-ROM.

5.9. Initial assessment – first contact. Case study of Basma.

Basma¹ is 19 years old and she comes from Turkey. She has been living in Austria for three years now. Thanks to her father, who has been working and living in Austria for a long time, she has Austrian citizenship. Basma came to Ms Yigitsoy (Verein Multikulturell²) because she would like to become a nursery teacher. Even though the counsellor felt that Basma thinks of her dream as a long-term goal, she showed her how to accomplish it. Then, Ms Yigitsoy proposed initial assessment. She wanted to get to know Basma and put the information about her in order. Basma agreed.

A completed initial assessment form (without personal data) can be seen below.

¹ name has been changed

² (translation) Multicultural Society

What language would you consider your mother tongue?

_____ *Kurdish (talks Turkish very well too)* _____

How would you assess your knowledge of German?

_____ *not very well* _____

Did you finish an education/a professional training in Austria?

- did not finish compulsory school
- special school graduate
- primary school
- lower secondary school, which: _____
- upper secondary school, which: _____
- apprenticeship, which: _____
- master craftsman's certificate
- university/technical college, which: _____

Did you finish an education/a professional training in [country of origin]?

yes no

If „yes“, which: lower secondary school, two years of upper secondary school _____

Did you draw on supportive measures (e.g. public employment services)?

yes no

If „yes“, which: *public employment agency* _____

Did you attend any courses which show that you have special qualifications (spare time and hobbies too)?

yes no

If „yes“, which: _____

What career aspirations do you have?

_____ *Kindergartenteacher* _____

Which documents do you possess?

- passport (valid until: *June 2011* _____)
- birth certificate
- official certificate of conduct (date of issue: _____)
- right of residence (which?: *Austrian citizenship* _____
valid until: _____)
- work permit (which?: *see above* _____
valid until: _____)
- other (e.g. driving license): _____

Have you ever been in trouble with the police?

yes no

If „yes“, which: _____



Documents and legal aspects



Living arrangement



Where do you live?

- without accomodation
- parents
- relatives
- with friends/acquaintance
- owned flat
- hospital treatment order



Education and competencies

Figure 9: Initial assessment, part II/1

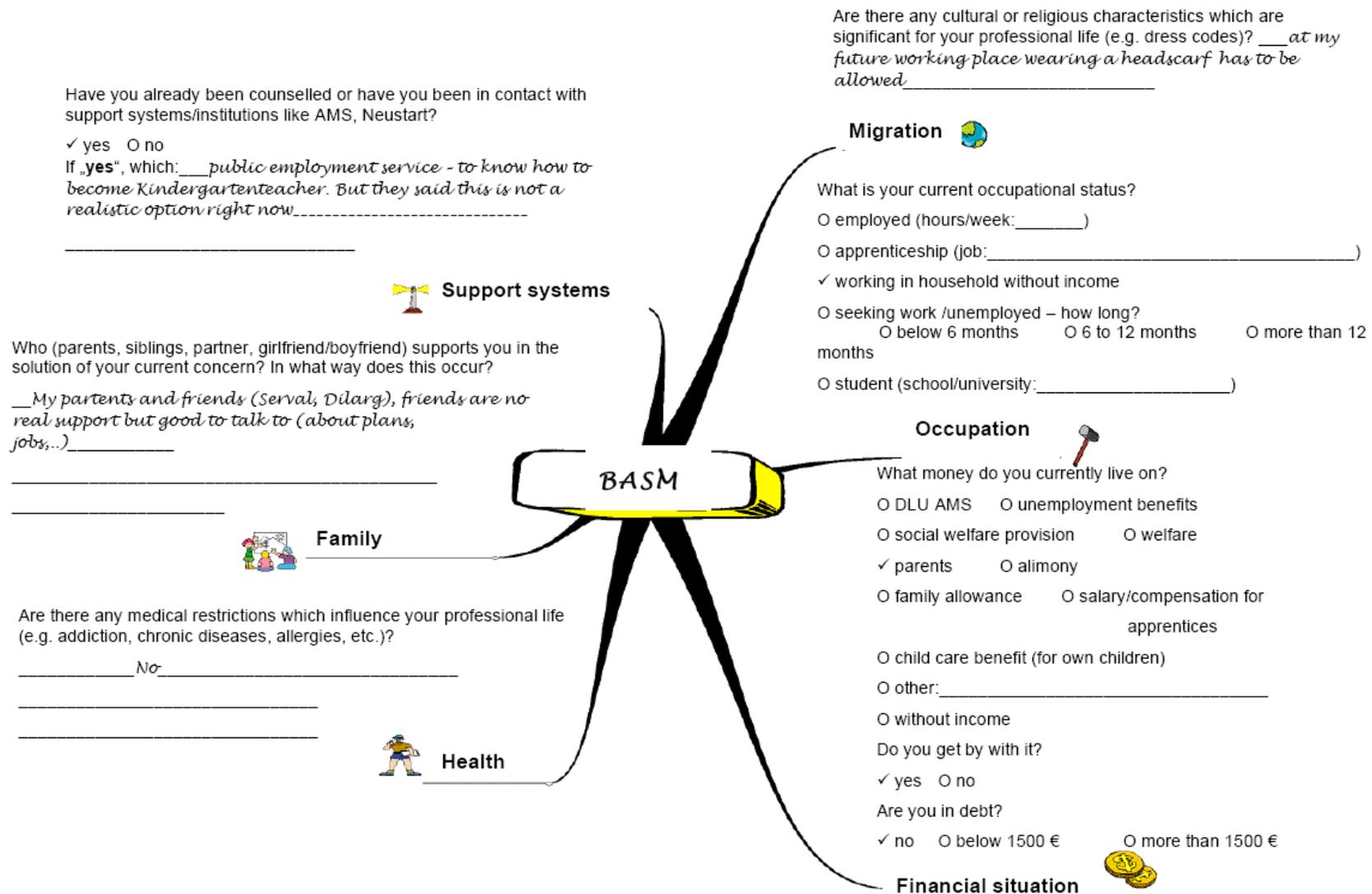


Figure 10: Initial assessment, part II/2

What's necessary for Basma?

Thematic area	Need for actions
Documents and legal aspects	Ü
Housing situation	Ü
Education and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Turkish education – not recognised in Austria - General school in Austria -> several months as a special student; graduation from a post-secondary school - Insufficient knowledge of the German language
Immigration / life in Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She feels inferior, she's not accepted by her teachers and students at school
Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basma's wish to become a nursery teacher is a far-reaching one - She doesn't want to commute
Financial situation	Ü
Health	Ü
Social relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A few good Turkish friends, relatively limited social network as compared to Turkey - Limited support from her parents (her father is the only one in the family who's employed, he's been in Austria for a long time now, whereas her mother and siblings have only been in Austria for three years); her parents don't know much about the education system so they can't help, but they provide her with moral support.
Aid schemes and institutions	Ü

Figure 11: Initial assessment, part III – need for actions

Basma's action plan

List of priorities Which matter is the most urgent and should be taken care of as soon as possible?	Actions / resources What can be done?
<p>1. Improve her knowledge of German</p> <p>2. Find a job that would be an alternative to being a nursery teacher</p> <p>3. Improve her education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look for various language courses - Enrol for one - Find jobs that are similar to a nursery teacher - Start education that will not interfere with her goal of becoming a nursery teacher. - Obtain referral from the Labour Office to undergo training

Which of the thematic areas should be taken into account during intense assessment?	
<input type="checkbox"/> documents and legal aspects <input type="checkbox"/> housing situation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education and skills <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> immigration / life in Austria <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work	<input type="checkbox"/> financial situation <input type="checkbox"/> health <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social relations <input type="checkbox"/> aid schemes and institutions <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____

Referral to:	<p>1. <u>Labour Office</u></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">2. Regular meetings with the counsellor (Verein Multikulturell)</p> <hr/>
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<p>Need for support</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> no or little need for support</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moderate or large need for support</p>
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Figure 12: Initial assessment, part IV – action plan

The answers to the main questions allowed Ms Yigitsoy to draw the conclusions that Basma's "lack of professional comfort" concerning the areas of "Education and skills" and "Work" affects two other areas, i.e. "Immigration / life in Austria" and "Social relations". In Turkey, Basma's achievements at school were praised by her teachers and friends. In Austria, it is completely different. Basma was not able to understand anything in her new class or make any contact with other students. Even though Basma has a few Turkish friends, she thinks her social network is quite limited.

Taking into account Basma's dissatisfaction with her social situation and life in Austria, Ms Yigitsoy decided that the areas "Immigration / life in Austria" and "Social relations" should be discussed with Basma, along with "Education and skills" and "Work". Even though there are resources Basma may make use of (e.g. solid housing situation, no financial problems), Ms Yigitsoy decided she needs moderate or large support to allow her to achieve full integration into the labour market. At the end of the meeting, Ms Yigitsoy suggested another meeting, during which she would like to use intense assessment to assess precisely Basma's need for support.

A complete intense assessment process would be definitely too long to be included in this publication. A detailed help plan for Basma is described in chapter 7.8.