



MIGRANTS REFUGEES

Migration Profile

AUSTRIA

Executive summary

Austria is a federal parliamentary republic located in central Europe that entered the European Union in 1995. With a per capita GDP of USD 53,481.76 (of which 71% is the tertiary sector) and an HDI of 0.908, it ranks as one of the richest European countries. Austria hosts a significant number of migrants on its territory: 1.8 million (19.9% of the population) in 2019. Immigration exceeds emigration, which is mainly a matter of return migration; the difference in 2018 was 35,301 persons (146,856 migrants versus 111,555 emigrants). Austria has seen a decrease in the number of asylum seekers compared to other categories of migrants. In fact, in 2018, there were 13,756 applications for international protection (44% less than in 2017, when there had already been a 41.5% decrease), while there were 12,511 in 2019. Most of these applicants were from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Iran, Iraq and the Russian Federation, and only 2.8% were unaccompanied minors. Those migrating to Austria are mainly students and adults seeking employment; they come mainly from Romania, Germany, Hungary, Croatia and Bulgaria, and Vienna continues to be the main destination.

While it is true that the number of asylum seekers is decreasing year on year, the number of immigrants held in detention centres in Vordernberg and Vienna is increasing: from 2015 to 2018, the annual number of detainees in Austria has more than tripled from 1,436 to 5,252. Along with the high numbers of detentions, the use of five dedicated detention facilities reflects the policy preference of the Austrian Minister of the Interior for the return and removal of asylum seekers from the country.

Regarding migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, the key elements of the Austrian are the Aliens Police Act 2005 and the Settlement and Residence Act. With regard to the fight against human trafficking, Article 104a of the Penal Code defines trafficking related to sexual and labour exploitation as crimes. The Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2018-2020) highlighted refugees and unaccompanied minors as the categories most at risk. Further awareness-raising and training have been identified as needs for the staff of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, the Federal Administrative Court and the reception and detention centres, in view of the various challenges.

Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Austria is a federal parliamentary republic located in Central Europe comprised of nine states. Its capital is Vienna. Austria borders Switzerland and Liechtenstein to the west, Slovenia to the south-east, Italy to the south, Hungary to the east, Slovakia to the north-east and, finally, Germany and the Czech Republic to the north. Landlocked, the country has a land area of 83,879 km², and is mainly mountainous with an Alpine climate.

Its population of 8,993,886 inhabitants (2020) has a growth rate of 0.42%, a life expectancy of 82 years and an uneven distribution over the territory: with a density of 109 per km², about one fifth of the total population is concentrated in the urban area of Vienna, while other cities are small and barely reach 200,000 inhabitants. Austria entered the European Union in 1995. It has been a member of the United Nations since 1955. The country has a GDP per capita of USD 53,481.76 (71% of which is made up of the tertiary sector) and an HDI of 0.908, ranking it as one of the richest European countries, with very high standard of living.

Austria is ethnically composed of 80% Austrians, 2.6% Germans, 1.9% Bosnians, 1.8% Turks, 1.6% Serbs, 1.3% Romanians and 10% others (2018). Of these, the Turks represent a constantly growing group, with a population in Austria of about 350,000 inhabitants. These groups are also reflected in the most widely used languages in the country. The official language is Austrian German, which is very similar to the German used in Germany, spoken by 88.8% of people; German is followed by Turkish (spoken by 2.3% of the population), Serbian (2.2%) and Croatian (1.3%).

The predominant religion is Roman Catholic Christianity, although over the years the percentage of those who declare themselves believers is progressively decreasing. In 2018, 57% of the population declared themselves Catholic, 8.7% Orthodox, 7.9% Muslim, 3.3% Evangelical Christians and 23.1% did not declare or express anything else. There are about 180,000 members of the Orthodox Church (mainly Serbs), more than 20,000 Jehovah's Witnesses and about 8,100 Jews.

II. International and internal migration

Austria hosts a significant number of migrants on its territory: 1.8 million (19.9% of the population) in 2019. Most of these come from European Union countries (794,800) while there are 532,400 from the former Yugoslavia, 269,800 from Turkey, 106,800 from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, and 318,400 from other countries. Vienna hosts the largest number of migrants, with Romania currently the country of origin for the largest number of "new" Viennese, followed immediately by Germans and Austrians from other parts of the country who have moved to the capital.

In 2018, there were 146,856 immigrants and 111,555 emigrants, giving an in-migration balance of 35,301. In addition to these, there were 4,716 Austrian citizens who had left the country and subsequently returned, while 40,017 were foreign citizens registered and settled in the country. Among the leading countries of origin in 2018 were Romania (with an increase of 8,648 people compared to 2017), Germany (up from 6,052), Hungary (+4,614), Croatia (+2,816) and Bulgaria (+2,181). In terms of distribution of these migrants over national territory, Vienna continues to be the main destination (with an increase of 11,592 migrants compared to 2017), followed by Upper Austria (+6,857), Styria (+3,771), Tyrol (+3,587) and Lower Austria (+3,189).

In terms of age, an average of 46% of migrants arriving in Austria are between 15 and 29 years old, 29% between 30 and 44 years old, 11% under 15, another 11% between 45 and 59 and, finally, 4% over 60. Data shows that those migrating are mainly students and adults in search of work. In this respect, Austria introduced the 24-month Red-White-Red Card for skilled migration of qualified workers from outside the EU in 2011. Through this system, migrants can immediately identify whether and with what requirements they can migrate, based on points earned according to qualification, work experience, language skills and possible study opportunities in Austria.

The number of asylum seekers has been decreasing compared to other categories of migrants. In 2018, there were 13,756 applications for international protection, 44% less than in 2017, when there had already been a decrease of 41.5% compared to the previous year. In 2019, there were also 12,511 applications for political asylum, most of them from Afghanistan and Syria, followed by Somalia, Iran, Iraq and the Russian Federation. Applicants for protection are 66% males and 34% females (quite different from the composition for regular migration). The number of unaccompanied foreign minors has also decreased over the years, from 1,352 in 2017 to 390 in 2018, which makes up 2.8% of asylum seekers.

III. Emigration and skilled migration

Many of the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, of which Austria is a member, have low emigration rates. For example, 19,000 Austrian nationals emigrated in 2018, 2.5% less than the previous year. The destination of about half was Germany (50.3%), followed by Switzerland (13.9%) and Turkey (7.3%). Less than a quarter of the migrants leaving the national territory are actually Austrians; most are foreigners, mainly from the former Yugoslavia, Germany and other countries of the European Union. Emigration to Austria is mainly characterized by return migration.

Consequently, remittances received are lower than those sent out of Austria; the amounts represent 0.7% of GDP for remittances received versus 6.6% remittances sent from the country. In addition, according to data provided by Migration Data Portal, only 0.7% of the population states that they intend to leave Austria to move permanently to another country.

IV. Forced migration (IDPs, asylum seekers and refugees)

In 2019, 12,511 new applications for international protection were registered in Austria. Combined with earlier political asylum applications still awaiting a response, there were a total of 27,256 applications at year-end. Among the main countries of origin are Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran, Iraq and the Russian Federation; they were made up (in 2019) of 66.18% men, 33.82% women and 7.7% unaccompanied minors. Of all these applications, 14,741 have received a response, with 6,959 grants of international protection and 7,782 denials.

Internally displaced persons must be added to these figures. According to the latest available data released by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, IDPs were 250 in 2016 but could rise to 6,464: 1,448 caused by earthquakes and 5,016 by floods.

While the number of asylum seekers seems to be decreasing year by year, the number of immigrants held in detention centres in Vordernberg and Vienna is increasing: from 2015 to 2018, the annual number of detainees in Austria had more than tripled from 1,436 to 5,252. Of these, 4,803 were men and 439 women in 2018. Given the increase of 115% from 2016 to 2018, these figures confirm the policies promoted by the Austrian Minister of the Interior that promote the return and removal of asylum seekers from the country. To date (2019), there are five detention facilities for migrants in Austria (Vienna Hernalser Gürtel PAZ, Vienna Rossauer Lände PAZ, Vienna Airport Transit Zone, Vordernberg Detention Centre and Zinnergasse Family Detention Centre), two of which are detention centres under the authority of the Minister of Interior but managed by the State Police. In fact, since they were not set up for the purpose of hosting asylum seekers, their closure has been requested several times. The Vordernberg Detention Centre was the first structure specifically established to receive asylum seekers in the long term (in 2014), with an open-door system and the possibility to receive visits, unlike in the PAZs. Finally, Austria also uses the Vienna airport transit zone, controlled by the border police, for applicants whose applications have been submitted at the airport and go through airport procedures, with the possibility of detention for 6 weeks.

V. Victims of human trafficking

According to the US Department of Homeland Security's 2019 Human Trafficking Report, Austria fully meets the minimum standards required for the elimination of human trafficking. There are ongoing efforts and commitments by the government such as increasing funds for victim support or issuing guidelines for police and prosecutors not to condemn victims for crimes that traffickers have coerced them to commit. Furthermore, every three years the Task Force responsible for creating National Action Plans on the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings (the 5th National Action Plan 2018-2020 is currently being implemented) prepares a report on the implementation of Austrian measures to combat trafficking in human beings for the government and parliament. However, although the penalties range from 6 months to 5 years imprisonment and 10 years if the victims are minors, suspended sentences and light sentences for traffickers persist.

Every year, around 350 victims of human trafficking are officially identified in Austria. In the last five years, not one Austrian victim has been recorded: traffickers in Austria prey only on foreign victims, mainly from Eastern Europe (and in particular Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary), some from South America and increasingly from Nigeria, China and South Asia. Austria is used as a transit country through which victims are moved to other European countries.

Ninety-five percent of the victims identified on national soil are victims of sexual exploitation. Most are women and children from European countries who were deceived by false promises of job opportunities, often by their husbands, partners or family members. The remaining 5% is labour exploitation and forced begging: of the latter, the main victims are children and/or people with physical disabilities. The number of children assisted by Drehscheibe, the main institution supporting child victims of trafficking, increased sharply between 2014 and 2016, reaching 75 child victims, most of whom were from Eastern Europe. Finally, many refugees fall victim to human trafficking on their way to Austria.

VI. National legal framework

Austria's legal framework for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is primarily based on the Aliens Police Act of 2005, a federal act regulating the operations of the Aliens Police, the issuance of documents for aliens and the granting of entry permits.

There is also the Settlement and Residence Act of 2005. This legislation defines the different categories of residence permits and the requirements and procedures for obtaining them. It has undergone more than twenty amendments, including, for example, an October 2017 amendment with the aim of implementing the European Union Directive 2014/66/EU on intra-corporate transfers, thus introducing two new residence permits for intra-corporate transfers from third countries.

The key legislation in the field of asylum, the Asylum Act of 2005, has undergone more than fifteen amendments. For example, changes in 2017 introduced a power to limit the right to international protection if a threat to national security is declared by the Federal Government and approved by the Executive Commission of the National Council; and extended the duration of the asylum procedure from 6 to 15 months. Also as of 2017, the Integration Agreement legislation allows for a mandatory introduction programme for newcomers, as well as for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

In addition, a further Act amending the Aliens Act was introduced in 2018, touching on economic and legal migration, international protection and citizenship. The changes include authorisation of officials to check asylum seekers' multimedia archives (such as telephones) to verify and determine their travel itinerary, and authorisation to seize limited amounts of money from applicants to be used for expenses related to their reception on the national territory.

Finally, as regards the fight against trafficking in human beings, Article 104a of the Penal Code defines trafficking linked to sexual and labour exploitation as crimes, with sentences ranging from 6 months to 5 years imprisonment for cases involving adult victims and up to 10 years imprisonment for crimes involving minors. In addition, Article 217 concerning transnational prostitution may also be applied to cases of sex trafficking where the trafficker has led a foreign individual to become involved in forced prostitution, with sentences ranging from 1-10 years imprisonment. The Council of Ministers then approved the Fifth Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2018-2020). This Plan highlighted that refugees and unaccompanied minors are the most at risk, and that further training and awareness-raising measures are required for the staff of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, the Federal Administrative Court and reception and detention centres. The Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Reforms and Justice mandated an Intervention Centre for Trafficked Women to provide free legal advice and psychological support to victims during investigative and court proceedings.

VII. Main actors

The State

In Austria, among the government bodies involved in matters concerning the phenomenon of migration and asylum seekers, responsibility rests primarily in the Ministry of Interior with a special department dedicated to this: the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA). This federal department reports directly to the Ministry of the Interior, with a headquarters (Directorate) in Vienna and several regional offices located in several provinces, as well as other organizational units such as the First Reception Centres East, West and Airport. Its responsibilities include the conduct of asylum procedures, granting or refusing international protection, refugee status, subsidiary or humanitarian protection, etc.

The responsibility for the protection of borders and the management of entry into the national territory is assigned to the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church in Austria has been and continues to be particularly interested in the question of migrants and refugees on national territory. Starting with Caritas Austria, a member of Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Europa (whose current president is the director of Caritas Austria, Msgr. Michael Landau), Caritas offers a range of activities supporting asylum seekers in Austria, such as: awareness-raising campaigns about the conditions of international protection seekers and refugees, housing for asylum seekers who are not covered by federal assistance (8,038 beds available), legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees (with 35 counselling centres), integration projects for better coexistence between the local population and immigrants (165 projects) and 10,191 counselling on voluntary return assisted. It has nine organisational units in the Austrian dioceses, more than 15,000 employees and about 40,000

volunteers dedicated to its national and international work. Among the current projects led by Caritas Austria is M.IN.D (Migration Interconnectedness Development), a three-year initiative (from October 2017 to September 2020) funded by the European Commission and based on three fundamental pillars: root causes of migration, host societies and integration processes. The aim of this work is to increase the awareness of civil society and institutions of the link between migration and development through awareness raising campaigns that also urge institutions to invest in migrants and refugees as actors in the development in question.

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has been active in Austria since 2015. It works to defend the rights of refugees in the ever-changing European political climate, offering them assistance, language courses and drama groups to help them integrate better into Austrian society. Among its initiatives, there is for example the "locugee" project that has local students and refugees living together with a Jesuit, as a means to foster cultural and social exchange and inter-religious dialogue.

Finally, there are several other Christian organisations involved in the struggle for asylum seekers' rights and in providing them with housing. Diakonie Österreich, of Protestant inspiration, assists refugees arriving in Austria by providing them with legal advice, medical assistance and, above all, accommodation. Language courses help them to create a daily routine, insert themselves in the host community and integrate with civil society. The organisation has various facilities on national soil; in particular, Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst (Refugee Service) is the office responsible for assisting migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Another, the KirchenAsyl (Church Asylum) parish association, is committed to providing assistance primarily to so-called "Dublin cases" – refugees who should be redirected to the first country of entry to the EU to apply for asylum and who are therefore at risk of expulsion while on Austrian soil. The Ecumenical Coordination of KirchenAsyl counts 354 active sanctuaries hosting at least 549 people as of May 2020, of whom about 116 are minors. Four hundred seventeen of the applicants accepted in the sanctuaries are traceable to the Dublin Agreement.

International organizations

The International Organisation for Migration, with its Vienna Regional Office established in 2011, is one of the international organisations working actively in Austria. Its task is to improve the quantity and diversity of programmes and activities at the regional level, to promote new initiatives and to facilitate interstate dialogue and cooperation. IOM is responsible for the implementation of its projects and policies on Austrian territory as well as for the development of regional migration strategies. It collaborates with the United Nations Office in Vienna, one of the four UN headquarters in the world.

Vienna is also home to the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODC), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, OSCE and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

Finally, among the international organizations, a large role is played by the UNHCR in the monitoring of migration and asylum legislation and reception conditions. The UNHCR also plays an important role in political asylum procedures, having a special right of veto on decisions taken by the Federal Asylum Office: the border authorities at Vienna airport require the agreement of the UNHCR to deport an asylum seeker whose application has been denied, so all decisions on the matter must first go through the UNHCR.

Other organisations

There are numerous other organisations, including NGOs, which deal with refugees and asylum seekers as well as with the fight against human trafficking. For example, the LEFO Association, established in 1985 by a Latin American woman living in exile in Austria, deals with sexually-exploited women migrants. It is the only organization in Austria that specializes in providing a wide range of psychological and social counselling and support to migrant women. A similar service is offered to men by the MEN Centre.

The ECPAT Austria network, founded in November 2003 as a specialised agency, is at the forefront of the fight against human trafficking. It became a non-profit organisation working against all forms of sexual exploitation of children in 2006. ECPAT Austria is a national platform consisting of twelve non-governmental organisations active in the fields of children's rights and development cooperation and is part of an international network (ECPAT International) consisting of 112 organisations in 98 countries around the world.

Among the most active NGOs are the Austrian Red Cross, founded in 1880, that has branches in the nine Austrian regions; Asyl in Not (Asylum in Need), an independent NGO that offers refugees legal advice and impartial representation during the asylum process, with a special focus mainly on bureaucratic procedures related to political asylum; SOS Mitmensch, an independent NGO which provides accommodation and assistance to over 500 asylum seekers in Burgenland via its project "Mobile Refugee Advice and Refugee Care"; and Train of Hope, set up in response to the 2015 refugee crisis to help refugees arriving at Austrian rail stations.

Local authorities, NGOs and volunteers actively cooperate through various projects, including the EU-funded CoRE - Centre of Refugee Empowerment, a project to support refugees to settle in Austria and integrate with civil society through innovative solutions and new models of cooperation. The project has shaped its activities around three fundamental pillars: treating refugees in the same way as citizens and transforming them from passive beneficiaries into leading actors in their integration (some refugees are selected for training as mentors who will make the arrival and integration of other refugees easier); helping them to prepare to enter into the Austrian labour market; and, finally, continuing to monitor and analyse the migration and political asylum situations in order to continuously develop new innovative solutions.

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