

International Organization for Migration

Country Office for Austria



Editorial

When we look at the reactions from civil society and private persons in Austria to the current inflows of migrants and refugees, they range from overwhelming support and solidarity to anti-migrant sentiments which echo discrimination tendencies in the population. Both sides are present and shape an approach between a welcoming culture towards migrants and refugees as well as fears of “foreign infiltration”. Which of these sides will be dominant in the future remains to be seen!

With a rising number of asylum seekers in Europe and Austria and the so-called “refugee crisis”, also the integration of recognized refugees and persons under subsidiary protection comes into the picture as a challenge to be managed in the near future. In this respect, the Austrian government in their retreat from September this year declared that an extra 75 million euros will be spent on integration issues and an extra 70 million will be available for measures relating to labour market access and policy.

The focus of activities lies with offering German courses, establishing mobile teams to support integration in schools, youth coaching and cultural orientation, recognizing qualifications, conducting competence checks and introducing an integration year for refugees to fuel voluntary engagement. In addition to these initiatives, housing as well as dealing with possible traumatization constitute two of the main challenges in Austria at present.

To support the integration efforts of recognized refugees and persons under subsidiary protection, it is also important that receiving communities have a willingness and understanding towards newcomers. Some IOM projects have shown that municipalities are rather open towards the topic and that municipalities whose employees have received intercultural trainings show more eagerness for cooperation.

This will be a main topic of the IOM Country Office for Austria in the years to come.

National EMN Conference: Irregular Migration and Return in the EU and Austria

The IOM Country Office for Austria held its annual national European Migration Network conference on the topic of “Irregular Migration and Return in the EU and Austria” on 21 September 2015. The conference brought together researchers, government officials, representatives of the European Commission, and a number of individuals from the wider public in order to discuss the topic of irregular migration and return from different perspectives. There were presentations about the latest research findings on migration routes to the European Union and factors influencing individual migrant destination choices. Furthermore, the options available to, and role of, the European Union relating to the successful management of current challenges in the field of migration and asylum were examined, and experiences from some European countries were shared. Moreover, the latest EMN study about the dissemination of information on voluntary return among persons who are not in contact with the authorities was presented.

A report on the conference, as well as the presentations of the speakers, can be found here: <http://www.emn.at/en/events/emn-events>

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Katerina Kratzmann,
Head of Office

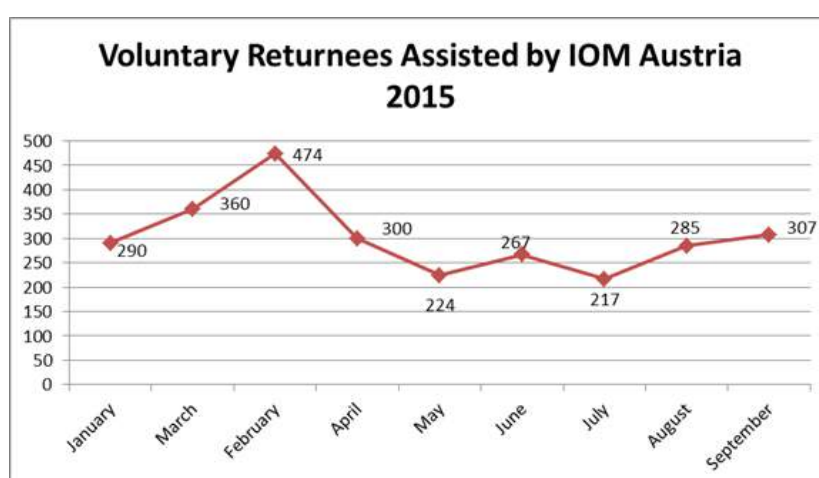


Head of EMN

IOM's General Humanitarian Return Programme – assisting migrants in need to return home

Although public attention is currently focusing on the number of migrants arriving in Austria, there is always a group of migrants who wishes to return home to their countries of origin. Migrants who are unable or unwilling to stay in Austria but lack the means to go home can be assisted in their voluntary return. In the framework of the “General Humanitarian Return Programme”, IOM Austria offers logistical assistance for the voluntary return of migrants in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and public authorities.

While the numbers of persons assisted by IOM have dropped in the previous year from 2,896 in 2013 to 2,299 in 2014, 2015 sees an important rise in figures: Until the end of September 2015 alone, already 2,724 persons have been assisted in their voluntary return from Austria, as below figures show. The main countries of return include Kosovo (966 returnees), the Russian Federation (287 returnees), Serbia (210 returnees), Iraq (171 returnees) and China (118 returnees).



Assessment of the family situation of unaccompanied minors wishing to return voluntarily from Austria

Unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) constitute a significant group of asylum seekers in Austria. While most of the UMC want to stay in Austria, a very small group among them expresses the wish to return back to their country of origin. However, their return poses a number of challenges to all involved parties, including the minors, their families, the Child and Youth Welfare institutions as well as to IOM.

Bearing in mind that the best interest principle should be given primary consideration in all matters related to minors, IOM can only support the voluntary return of a UMC if a legal guardian who is ready to receive and take care of the child has been identified in the country of return, and if a careful best interest determination has been carried out by the minor's legal guardian in Austria.

In order to be able to take an informed decision on whether an UMC's return is in his/her best interest, first-hand information on the situation in the country of origin is needed; the family and the socio-economic situation have to be assessed in order to ascertain that the family environment can secure the child's safety, wellbeing and development and exclude, to the extent possible, any risks of abuse.

Since September 2015, IOM Austria offers legal guardians of UMC in Austria the possibility to conduct a family assessment in the minors' country of origin. IOM can collect current information on the minor's family, their socio-economic situation and living conditions as well as access to education and health care. A family assessment can only be carried out at the request of a legal guardian and the minor and its results remain confidential. In case voluntary return is in the best interest of the child, IOM can arrange the UMC's return in accordance with IOM standards.

“Long Day of Flight”: IOM Country Office for Austria participated

On 25 September 2015, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) for the fourth time organized a diverse program throughout Austria in order to raise awareness on topics such as asylum and integration. The IOM Country Office for Austria participated in this event by conducting a workshop on myths about migration, integration and asylum in a Viennese school.

Especially in times of high influx of refugees as we have witnessed during the last months, the IOM Country Office for Austria considers it a very important task to inform the people residing in Austria and raise their awareness about facts and accurate definitions on migration, asylum and integration, starting with its youngest members. In this framework we took the opportunity to deconstruct myths from the media and discuss their implications.

The workshop was conceptualized in a very interactive way in the form of a quiz and thus triggered vivid discussions among the school children. We are looking forward to participating again in 2016 and would also like to thank UNHCR Austria for enabling such fruitful discussions in diverse events on this very important day!



Intercultural Events in the frame of CulTrain – our cooperation with youngCaritas Vienna

Since 2013, the CulTrain team has been conducting intercultural events together with [youngCaritas Vienna](#), an NGO organizing events for youth volunteers on various political and social issues. We have conducted a wide range of events, including dance workshops, crafting, discussions, debates and even a treasure hunt. The aim of this cooperation is to bring young people from different countries together in order to facilitate contact between the beneficiaries and Austrian youth.

We asked the team of youngCaritas Vienna to describe their experience. This is what they said:

“The events conducted together with CulTrain influenced the program of the youngCaritas Vienna in a sustainable way. These events enabled young people from different backgrounds to get to know each other on an equal footing. The setting for these encounters is always easy going, in a very relaxed atmosphere. While during the very first few minutes of every encounter participants are somewhat shy, also due to language barriers, shortly afterwards they always manage to focus on mutual goals and similarities. We are always impressed by how contact among youth is established with the greatest of ease, especially once a common goal (such as choreography or the decoration of a poster) is defined. Challenges such as assumed cultural differences do not seem to bother them, neither during nor after these encounters – we can all learn a lot from them.

The current situation in Austria demands for more projects like CulTrain. An idea might be to bring young refugees who have already lived in Austria for a while together with newcomers and Austrian youth. We (and our volunteers) are looking forward to organizing many more events together with the CulTrain team!”

We are happy to continue our great cooperation with youngCaritas in the frame of the project „CulTrain – Cultural Orientation Trainings for Young Refugees“, which started its fourth project cycle in July 2015 and is going to continue until December 2016.



EMN Cluster Meeting on Optimising EMN Research

The Austrian National Contact Point of the European Migration Network organized an internal cluster meeting on optimising EMN Research by improving the National Reports. The meeting took place on 22 September 2015, and representatives of the EMN National Contact Points from 12 different EU Member States participated.

During this working meeting, the participants discussed how to optimize the quality of national EMN studies. A tour de table revealed interesting insights in best practice examples of the different National Contact Points (NCPs) on their modalities of publishing the respective national reports of the EMN studies. The practices vary between publishing the information in the format of the initial common template, or drafting a stand-alone product adopted to the national context, up to different forms of summaries and short reports including the main results of the study. Common suggestions for ways forward were agreed upon, which will be presented at the next NCP Meeting in Brussels.

The second part focused on ways of optimising the quality of national contributions. After a reflection on the methodology engaged by the NCPs to conduct research and on their respective quality control mechanisms, also the possibilities to ensure quality in terms of reliability and comparability of data and statistics were discussed. The meeting concluded with formulated suggestions for ways forward.

EMN Studies

The IOM Country Office for Austria recently published a study on "Dissemination of Information on Voluntary Return within Austria: How to reach irregular Migrants not in contact with the Authorities" conducted in the framework of the European Migration Network.

The study found that Austria currently has no legal provisions governing the dissemination of information on voluntary return that specifically relate to irregular migrants. However, the requirement to inform aliens of a departure obligation in course of a return decision is specified in the law, and there are legal regulations of a broader scope that address voluntary return and in particular return counselling and return assistance. In Austria, specifications as to how information on voluntary return is to be disseminated and which information in detail is to be passed on are not provided by the state. Several actors involved in this area demand the development of guidelines for general minimum quality standards for return counselling. Due to the specific characteristics of irregular migration, the actual number of irregular migrants in Austria cannot be determined, nor are current estimates available. Research into the relevant actors involved in disseminating information on voluntary return revealed that both state actors as well as other actors contribute in a major way to disseminating information in Austria. The study revealed that a variety of tools are already being used to disseminate information on voluntary return, such as flyers, brochures and websites. Several of the actors mentioned word of mouth as important tool for disseminating information. The study also shows that no monitoring or evaluations are carried out that specifically target the issue of the usefulness of the information received prior to return.

All studies, reports, synthesis reports and informs are available for download at www.emn.at.

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REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA
FEDERAL MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Country Office for Austria
Nibelungengasse 13/4
1010 Vienna, Austria
Tel: +43.1.585 33 22
Fax: +43.1.585 33 22 30
Email: iomvienna@iom.int
www.iomvienna.at

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Headquarters
17, Route des Morillons
1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland
Tel: +41.22.717 9111
Fax: +41.22.798 6150
Email: hq@iom.int
www.iom.int

