

Refugee, Asylum-seeker, and Migrant Perceptions in Austria

Over the past six months Ground Truth Solutions, under the aegis of the Mixed Migration Platform, interviewed some 667 refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants in Austria to gauge their perceptions of humanitarian assistance and the overall response within Austria. This provides the opportunity to tailor the services and support to their concrete needs.

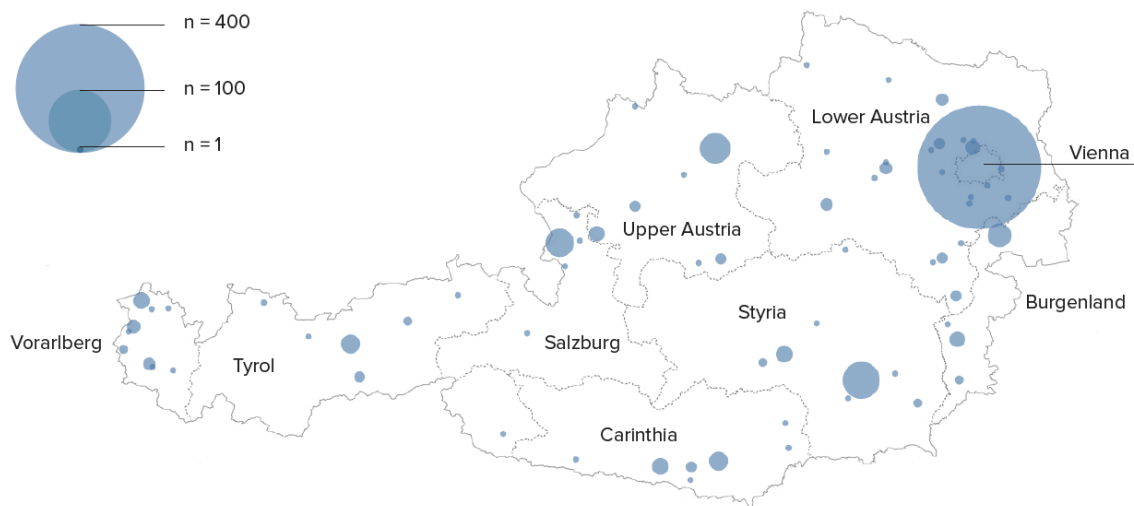


Figure 1. Map of Austria displaying the location and frequency of interviews

Between March and August 2017, face-to-face interviews were conducted in Vienna, while those living in other Austrian states were contacted by telephone. A series of focus group discussions were also held in Vienna in July to delve deeper into findings from the first round of interviews. Below are some of the key findings from the data.

Integration

Respondents generally feel welcome in Austria and treated with respect by the Austrian authorities and aid providers. Most people also feel safe in Austria and their place of residence. Nevertheless, not all agreed about the level of social support, with Afghans being least positive. In fact, throughout the surveys Afghan respondents tend to be less positive than Syrians and Iraqis, citing fears of being denied asylum in Austria and of potential deportation. For those living in rural and underserved areas of Austria, the scarcity of social interactions is compounded by a more general frustration with not being able to find work, while many express a desire for more interaction with locals.

Information

In general, survey participants do not feel well-informed about the services and support available to them. Whether in Vienna or in other states, respondents request more information about the asylum procedure, education opportunities, and labour market integration. Focus group discussions and open-ended questions reveal that respondents consider language barriers and a lack of employment opportunities as key obstacles to better understanding their situation and opportunities. The discussions also revealed that participants rely on other acquaintances for relevant information, and suggest implementing a more systematic way of providing information upon arrival to facilitate the transition to a new country and culture.

Language

Language, especially the quality, availability, and frequency of language classes, is an issue that surfaced across a number of questions in all three rounds of data collection. When asked to identify their most important needs, respondents most often cite German language classes, followed by employment and education opportunities. Moreover, focus group participants revealed a feeling of helplessness, especially in the public sphere, caused by language barriers. The two most commonly identified means for feeling more socially supported in Austria are a better command of German and more contact with locals – a clear indication of the perceived importance of language for successful integration. Finally, most respondents who feel they are able to spend their time usefully, do so by learning German.

Professional advice and feedback mechanisms

Across Austria, just over half of those surveyed have received professional advice about their asylum process, while awareness of complaints mechanisms is very limited. Respondents in Vienna are more positive in their appraisal of professional legal advice than those living elsewhere. It should be noted, however, that the proportion of Afghans – those most likely to be denied asylum in Austria – is lower among respondents from Vienna than those living in other states, which could account for the difference. Amongst those who have not yet been advised on their asylum process, most indicate not knowing who or where to ask for such services.

For more information about Ground Truth’s work in Austria, please visit our website at <http://groundtruthsolutions.org/our-work/countries/austria/> or contact us at info@groundtruthsolutions.org.