



## Migration profile

### Austria

#### A. Executive Summary

Austria is a Federal Parliamentary Republic located in central Europe. After becoming the headquarters of the large Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867, Austria turned into a small republic as a consequence of its defeat during World War I. It was annexed by Nazi Germany in 1938, and its political status remained unclear until it achieved independence in 1955.<sup>i</sup> Austria joined the European Union in 1995 and the Schengen area in 1997.<sup>ii</sup>

In 2022, there were 1,587,251 foreigners living in Austria, mainly coming from Eastern and Central European countries: Germany, Romania, Serbia, Turkey, Bosnia, and Croatia.<sup>iii</sup> So far, in 2023, 154,212 new immigrants have arrived, an increase of 13.1% compared to 2020.<sup>iv</sup> Irregular migration is a common trend, especially for transit migrants arriving from Asian countries and trying to enter the European Union, crossing Austria, on their way to Germany.<sup>v</sup>

Emigration is not a relevant phenomenon in Austria. According to the Federal Ministry, 587,620 citizens live abroad, mainly in Germany, Switzerland, the USA, the UK, and Australia.<sup>vi</sup> The National Statistical Institute, however, in 2021 recorded only 101,714 emigrants abroad.<sup>vii</sup>

In 2022, 26,664,700 persons with refugee status and 108,781 new asylum applications were registered in Austria. The leading countries of origin were Afghanistan, India, Syria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Pakistan.<sup>viii</sup> The government has recently passed a law on asylum to limit the transit of refugees, enabling the possibility to return asylum seekers to another transit country if the person's life is not at risk.<sup>ix</sup> Ukrainians are increasingly arriving in Austria since the outbreak of war with Russia.<sup>x</sup> Finally, in 2021, 56 internal displacements were recorded in Austria caused by floods.<sup>xi</sup>

The Austrian economy is recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic decline. In 2020, the most important sectors of its economy were industry (21.4%), wholesale and retail trade, transport, accommodation and food service activities (20.4%), public administration, defence, education, healthcare, and social work services (18.6%).<sup>xii xiii</sup>

In 2021 Austria's GDP amounted to US\$ 480,368,403,890,<sup>xiv</sup> with an annual growth rate of 4.6% after experiencing a decrease of -6.5% in 2020 due mainly to the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>xv</sup> In 2021 Foreign Investment (FDI) net inflows represented 2.6% of the country's GDP.<sup>xvi</sup> Furthermore, the inflation rate in 2022 was 2.8%, with a 1.4% increase compared to the previous year.<sup>xvii</sup>

## B. Country Profile

### I. Basic Information

Austria is a landlocked country sharing borders with Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. The Alps and the Danube River characterise the country's geography.<sup>xxviii</sup> It is a Federation made up of nine states. Each of them has a parliament (*Landtag*), a government (*Landesregierung*), and a head of the regional government (*Landeshauptmann/frau*).<sup>xix</sup>

Austria covers a territory of 83,879 sq. km,<sup>xx</sup> and has a population of 9,106,126.<sup>xxi</sup> Vienna is the capital and largest city.<sup>xxii</sup> About 250 different languages are spoken in Austria, but German is the official language. The other most spoken languages are Turkish, Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Croatian, Romanian, Polish, and other minority languages.<sup>xxiii</sup> There are 16 religious communities legally recognised.<sup>xxiv</sup> The most practised is the Catholic faith, followed by Evangelical, Orthodox, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism.<sup>xxv</sup> Austrians are the major ethnic group, followed by Turks and Germans.<sup>xxvi</sup> Minority groups include Burgenland Croats, Slovenes, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, and Roma.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### II. International and Internal Migration

According to official Austrian statistics, in 2021 154,212 migrants arrived in the country (with a 13.1% increase in comparison to 2020).<sup>xxviii</sup> On January 1, 2022 there were 1,587,251 foreigners living in the Republic of Austria (17.1% of the country's population).<sup>xxix</sup> The two leading countries of origin were EU member states, with 217,000 Germans (13.67% of the migrant stock) and 138,000 Romanians (8.69%). Moreover, there were 122,000 Serbians, 118,000 Turkish, 97,000 Bosnians, and 95,000 Croatians. Overall, there is a considerable number of Eastern and Central European people residing in the country.<sup>xxx</sup>

Irregular migration is also common in Austria, causing major institutional concerns (even though most of them are just crossing Austria on their way to Germany). These irregular transit migrants are mainly coming from Asian countries, like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.<sup>xxxi</sup> They get to Austria arriving from other Central and (South)Eastern European countries, using them as a transit point in their long migration routes.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The economic sectors where most immigrants are employed are accommodation and food, care services, and agriculture.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The care sector, specifically, is mostly made up of Central and Eastern European women, many of whom face abusive conditions such as low wages, excessively long working days, often lacking adequate resting time, barriers in accessing social security, racism, and harassment.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Similar abusive practices have been detected against migrants working in agriculture.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Internal migration is also quite extensive in Austria. In 2021, there were 782,995 instances of residence changes within the national borders.<sup>xxxvi</sup> However, a significant percentage of people are involved in a very short-range migration: around half of these displacements take place at an intra-municipal level.<sup>xxxvii xxxviii</sup> When it implies a change of municipality, internal migration in Austria still seems to take place within a relatively short distance. Every city swaps people mostly with rural or semi-rural areas close to them, with the exception of certain influential towns like Graz or Klagenfurt, which attract people from further regions.<sup>xxxix</sup> This short-distance rural-to-urban migration has been quite common, inasmuch to produce

population decline in certain rural areas of the country affected mostly by crises involving the manufacturing business.<sup>xl</sup>

### III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Austria is considered mainly a destination and transit country for migration. Consequently, not many reports nor official data are currently available regarding emigrant profiles or migration push factors in the country.<sup>xli</sup> According to the Federal Ministry, there are currently 587,620 fellow Austrians living abroad. Most of them reside in Germany (256,000). Other destination countries are Switzerland (67,000), the USA (38,000), the United Kingdom (36,900), Australia (20,000), Israel (15,500), Spain (12,000), Brasile, and Argentina (10,000 each).<sup>xlii</sup>

Nevertheless, Statistics Austria, the National Statistical Institute, in 2021 recorded 101,714 emigrants moving abroad. Since 2011, there has been an increase in migratory flows, when 93,914 emigrants were registered. In 2020, Austria experienced an increase of 5.6% in emigration (with 96,278 emigrants).<sup>xliii</sup> In 2019, the OECD recorded that the leading destination countries for Austrians were Germany, Switzerland, Turkey, Japan, and the Netherlands.<sup>xliv</sup>

Germany has recently extended border checks at crossing points from Austria for six months, to counteract the rise of emigrant arrivals via the Western Balkans route, which remains the most active migratory route into the European Union. Due to the high number of irregular crossings through this route, governments are thus introducing new measures to contain irregular migration.<sup>xlv</sup>

The Austrian government provides information through different websites to nationals living abroad.<sup>xlvi</sup> There are currently 101 Austrian professional representations abroad through embassies, consulates, and other dedicated offices. They support citizens abroad, protect their rights, and represent their interests. The Austrian government also gives emigrants the right to vote abroad, by filling out an online application to be included in the European electoral register.<sup>xlvii</sup>

### IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

In 2022, 26,664,700 persons with refugee status<sup>xlviii</sup> and 108,781 new asylum applications were registered in Austria.<sup>xlix</sup> Combined with previous asylum applications still pending, a total of 4,910,889 were recorded at the end of the year.<sup>l</sup> The leading countries of origin for asylum seekers were Afghanistan (22%), India (17.92%), Syria (17.60%), Tunisia (11.64%), Morocco (7.78%), and Pakistan (7.02%).<sup>li</sup> Ukrainians have been increasingly arriving in Austria since the war outbreak with Russia. At the beginning of 2022, there were 13,000 of them, and by April 1, there were already almost 53,000.<sup>lii</sup> Since March 2022, the Austrian government has implemented temporary protection measures for Ukrainians fleeing the war, allowing them to stay and register in the country.<sup>liii</sup> Therefore, Ukrainians can freely enter Austria and access basic services such as emergency shelters.<sup>liv</sup> The Austrian government provides them with basic social support (*Grundversorgung*), which includes housing, basic care, health insurance, and education.<sup>lv</sup> It also gives them an identification card (*Ausweis für Vertriebene*) valid until March 2024,<sup>lvi</sup> allowing them to have access to the labour market.<sup>lvii</sup>

People coming from these countries are fleeing armed conflicts and poverty. The presence of Tunisians and Indians in Austria is also very strong because, in previous years, these foreigners did not need a visa to travel to Serbia, and from there to reach anywhere in Europe.<sup>lviii</sup> However, in 2023 a visa restriction was introduced to get to Serbia, aiming to limit irregular flows of asylum seekers and simultaneously curb human trafficking.<sup>lix</sup>

Austria has become a transit country in order to reach the rest of Europe<sup>lx</sup> because all of its neighbouring countries are Schengen-associated states and members of the European Union.<sup>lxi</sup> In 2015, Austria received nearly 90,000 asylum applications. Because of this new development, Austria passed a law on asylum so that only people whose lives would be at risk in a neighbouring country could present the applications. If they do not meet these requirements, according to the law, asylum seekers, who transit through an EU country determined to be safe on their way to their destination country, can be returned to the country of transit to apply for refugee status.<sup>lxii</sup> Austria also built a fence on the border with Slovakia,<sup>lxiii</sup> <sup>lxiv</sup> and one of the main border crossings between Hungary, Slovenia, and Austria is Burgenland.<sup>lxv</sup>

Austrian law recognises refugee and asylum seeker status, and the government has put in place a system to protect refugees.<sup>lxvi</sup> <sup>lxvii</sup> This application must be made in person at any police station or with any police officer.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Applicants are taken to an initial reception centre, if it is suspected that Austria is not responsible for their application or to clarify their identity. All unaccompanied minors are also transferred to a reception centre. If the process has a positive result, a Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA) allows the asylum seeker to travel to a centre run by the federal government (a distribution centre), free of charge.<sup>lxix</sup>

As part of the admission procedure, the government provides a basic level of care to foreigners in need of assistance and protection. Basic needs include accommodation, care, support (provided at reception and distribution centres), food, access to healthcare services, education, clothing allowances, and school supplies. Providing basic care to asylum seekers becomes then the responsibility of a specific province as soon as the asylum application is accepted. For these applicants a residence restriction applies, meaning that asylum seekers cannot move their main or habitual residence to a province other than the one providing them with basic care.<sup>lxx</sup>

Asylum seekers can only move within the district of the reception centre processing their initial application. Furthermore, they have the right to work three months after the asylum application has been filed. They need to obtain a work permit, which their potential employer must request. Without a work permit, applicants are eligible for temporary jobs, low-paid community service work, or vocational training in sectors that require additional apprenticeships.<sup>lxxi</sup>

In 2021, 56 internal displacements were also recorded in Austria and were all caused by floods.<sup>lxxii</sup>

## V. Victims of Human Trafficking

The Republic of Austria is a signatory to all relevant international legal instruments to combat human trafficking. Due to its geographical location at the centre of Europe, it is a transit and destination country for human trafficking. In general terms, victims come from less affluent EU or third countries. Poor and uneducated children are especially vulnerable to trafficking.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Austria is Tier 1 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report. Women and girls from Austria, Eastern European countries, Southeast Asia, China, Nigeria, and South America are the usual victims of sex trafficking in the country. More than 95% of identified victims are foreign women subjected to sex trafficking. Nevertheless, an increasing number of men are also identified as trafficking victims. For instance, many Nigerian victims arrive in the country as asylum seekers. Sex trafficking is mostly concentrated in urban areas, in places like massage parlours and brothels. Victims are recruited through developed networks offering fraudulent employment opportunities in restaurants and domestic services, as well as online advertisements. Men and women coming from Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and China are also exploited in forced labour in restaurants, construction, agriculture, health care, domestic service and transportation. Likewise, seasonal migrant workers are especially vulnerable to labour trafficking, particularly during the harvest season. Children, mainly Romani girls, are exploited in criminal activities. In general, unaccompanied children are vulnerable to trafficking.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

In 2021, the government conducted 61 investigations involving 94 suspects of human trafficking. It prosecuted 3 defendants and continued 7 ongoing prosecutions. Courts convicted 5 traffickers under Article 104a of the Criminal Code (criminalising human trafficking). It also prosecuted 16 defendants and convicted 7 of them under Article 217 related to transnational prostitution. In June 2021, Austrian law enforcement arrested 7 suspected traffickers and identified 22 victims during Europol-led police operations focused on labour exploitation.<sup>lxxv</sup>

In 2021, a government-funded NGO reported providing services to 334 female victims and their children. While the majority of victims were foreign nationals, the government also identified 42 Austrian victims this year. NGOs also provided shelter, medical and psychological care, German language classes, and legal assistance to victims. The Austrian government trained law enforcement, border control, labour inspectors, as well as diplomatic, consular, and judicial personnel on human trafficking issues. It also adopted the 2021-2023 National Action Plan in July 2021 and organised public awareness events and programs for civil society, international organisations, and members of the diplomatic and consular corps. In March 2022, it started a prevention campaign targeting Ukrainian refugees.

In 2021, the Federal Crime Office operated a 24-hour trafficking hotline available in multiple languages that received 650 calls and emails, leading to many investigations and the identification of different victims. In addition, the government provided funding for projects combating human trafficking in different countries in Europe and Africa, as well as Cambodia and Nicaragua. It signed an agreement with Israel on combating cybercrime. Due to the increase in forced labour cases, the 2021-2023 NAP prioritised combating forced labour in supply chains.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

## VI. National Legal Framework

Citizenship in Austria is described in the 1985 Federal Law Citizenship Act. The latest 2021 amendment further extended the legal possibility for the de-nationalisation of Austrians convicted of terrorist offences.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

The 2005 Settlement and Residence Act defines different categories of residence permits, as well as the requirements and procedures to obtain them. In 2020, amendments were included to specifically promote qualified immigration and to further streamline the so-called voluntary departure of migrants without the right to stay.<sup>lxxviii</sup> The Recognition and Assessment Act was enacted in 2016 to regulate the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad.<sup>lxxix</sup> A special Integration Act (the Integration Agreement) was introduced in 2017 for the mandatory integration programme aimed at newcomers. The integration law also established a similar integration programme for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.<sup>lxxx</sup>

The Federal Law on asylum is included in the 2005 Asylum Act.<sup>lxxxi</sup> Thanks to the reform in May 2019, the provision of support and legal advice to asylum seekers has been reorganised.<sup>lxxxii</sup> The Federal Law Gazette I No. 221/2022, amending the 1985 Citizenship Act, the Settlement and Residence Act, the BFA Procedure Act and the 2005 Asylum Act, determine the acquisition and loss of Austrian citizenship, authorities and procedures.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Article 104a of the Criminal Code criminalised sex trafficking and labour trafficking.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Austria ratified the ILO Forced Labour Convention in 1930 and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention in 1957.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Austria signed and ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

Austria ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1954 and its 1967 Protocol in 1973. It also ratified the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons in 2008, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in 1974.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

## VII. Main Actors

### *State*

The Federal Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the security, national borders, and the organisation of Federal Police's operations. Personal status matters, such as naming rights and citizenship, are also considered their area of concern.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

The Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA) is an Austrian authority directly subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior, which began operations on January 1, 2014. The main tasks of the BFA include the implementation of first-instance asylum and alien law procedures (apart from criminal proceedings and visa matters) and the granting of residence permits for reasons worthy of consideration.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The Federal Chancellery is responsible for integration and is also Austria's representative at the European Integration Network. At the local level, municipalities organise or support integration activities, such as intercultural events and language classes.<sup>xc</sup>

The responsibility for border control and entry management into the national territory is assigned to the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs.<sup>xc</sup> The Austrian

Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking, which is headed by the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, is in charge of coordinating and strengthening measures in Austria against human trafficking.<sup>xcii</sup> The Task Force involves representatives from all competent ministries, representatives of federal provinces, relevant research institutions and NGOs.<sup>xciii</sup>

The Federal Crime Office's human trafficking and smuggling service led the government's efforts to investigate trafficking crimes and coordinated joint investigations with foreign law enforcement when necessary.<sup>xciv</sup> The 2021–2023 National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings was published in June 2021. The key elements are strengthening (inter)national cooperation, prevention through the provision of information, awareness-raising, victim protection and prosecution of perpetrators, monitoring and research measures.<sup>xcv</sup>

### *International Organisations*

UNHCR works to ensure that the legal framework and the practice of asylum procedures are in line with the specifications of the Geneva Refugee Convention. This means protecting refugees from being sent back to a country where they are threatened with persecution (non-refoulement principle).<sup>xcvi</sup> In Austria, UNHCR influences legislative processes and supports language acquisition, the recognition of their working and educational qualifications, and their integration. The acquisition of the country's citizenship is the culmination of this process, as for most refugees in Europe, including those in Austria, integration is the most sensitive long-term solution for refugee protection processes. In addition, UNHCR cooperates with other organisations to establish a long-term resettlement program in Austria.<sup>xcvii</sup>

IOM in Austria promotes the integration of migrants into host communities by managing their expectations and providing information about their rights and responsibilities, the country's culture and customs, and information about education, healthcare, and employment. In addition, IOM supports the integration of vulnerable groups by aiding the development of family-based care for unaccompanied and separated migrant children, and by building the capacity of actors engaged in such reception programs to ensure the best care-quality for these children and youth, including their education, language acquisition, and socio-developmental opportunities. The Counter-Trafficking Unit is currently implementing a project on child protection that offers professional training to various actors dealing with migrant children, aiming to sensitise first responders to the topic of child trafficking. In the framework of the "General Humanitarian Return Programme", IOM Austria offers logistical assistance for the voluntary return of migrants.<sup>xcviii</sup>

UNICEF in Austria targets more intensive and operational activities on all sides of the borders to identify and punish child exploiters. UNICEF advocates for prevention campaigns at the borders and more police training in Austria to identify victims and treat them as such.<sup>xcix</sup>

The Red Cross Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation – ACCORD provides independently and neutrally researched information on the countries of origin of asylum seekers to contribute to fair and efficient procedures for determining international protection needs.<sup>c</sup>

### *NGOs and Other Organisations*

OMEGA is an association based in the city of Graz. It focuses on providing different types of care services and support to people belonging to vulnerable groups, including refugees and asylum-seekers. They offer their services in different languages in order to accommodate the special needs of those populations. They devote most of their efforts to issues of mental and physical health, and services that foster integration in areas like education. To this aim, they host initiatives like the OMEGA school, where they teach migrants (aged 18 to 29) subjects like language, basic education, and professional orientation.<sup>ci</sup>

Refugees for Refugees (R4R) is a refugee-run NGO founded in Austria in 2015. It is made up of 150 members whose aim is to support themselves and offer assistance to others with the same refugee background. Their primary goal is to enhance integration through community bonding and access to culture. They organise activities like sports events and visits to museums, by strengthening mutual bonds and establishing support networks, as well as coming into contact with the host culture.<sup>cii</sup>

*Hemayat* is another local Austrian NGO based in the city of Vienna that focuses on giving support to refugee children and adults who are torture or war survivors. They give them free-of-charge mental health protection services, with the support of interpreters that help both professionals and recent migrants to be able to fully understand each other. It has been growing since its beginning in 1995, and as of 2022 they were able to care for 1,441 people.<sup>ciii</sup>

The Protestant-inspired *Diakonie Österreich* is responsible for assisting refugees arriving in Austria and providing them with legal advice, medical care, and accommodation. *Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst* provides direct assistance to migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.<sup>civ</sup>

*Asyl in der Kirche* is the umbrella organisation of the church asylum movement. It focuses on protecting refugees in “church asylum” from deportation, if there are proven doubts about a safe return. The Ecumenical Coordination of *Asyl in der Kirche*, in 2022 had 314 active sanctuaries hosting 508 people, of whom 112 were children. 294 of the church’s sanctuaries were so-called Dublin cases. These refugees have to be redirected to the first country of entry into the EU to apply for asylum and are, therefore, at risk of deportation while in Austria.<sup>cv</sup>

### *The Catholic Church*

The Catholic Church in Austria has taken a keen interest in migration and has always spoken out against the construction of the border fence to stop migration, which goes against the spirit of the Gospel and Pope Francis’ message to Europe.<sup>cvi cvii</sup> The Austrian bishops have urged the federal government to join them in addressing the tragic fate of refugees within Europe. They also call on political leaders to show solidarity and humanity by accepting families from European refugee camps whose asylum status has been recognised. They also send this message to the rest of Europe, asking European political leaders for just solutions and solidarity.<sup>cviii</sup>

The Austrian Bishops’ Conference is part of the Commission of Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), which brought together bishops from the Middle East, Southern and Western Europe, and Catholic experts working on the ground to discuss the migration phenomenon.<sup>cix</sup> The refugee situation in Europe concerns COMECE, and integrating migrants and asylum seekers has also been challenging.<sup>cx</sup> COMECE is assisted in this mission by a Migration and Asylum Working Group.<sup>cxii</sup>



Caritas works with refugees and people in transit by providing shelter, care, legal advice, and social counselling. It has also set up several projects focused on assisting refugees in their integration into Austrian society, such as the Learn Coffee project, a humanitarian admission and integration support programme for Syrian refugees, which is run together with Caritas Diakonie and the Red Cross. Through this programme, they offer counsel to refugees from Syria admitted to Austria as part of the resettlement programme. The Asylum Lawyers Network Project aims to provide legal protection for all asylum seekers in Austria. The MIND (Migration Interconnectedness Development) programme aims to increase the awareness of civil society and institutions about the link between migration and development through awareness-raising campaigns that also encourage institutions to invest in migrants and refugees.<sup>cxii</sup> Caritas also aids migrants, including assistance in finding work and housing, educational measures, and counselling for migrants.<sup>cxiii</sup>

The Jesuit Refugee Service advocates for the rights of refugees and offers counselling, language courses, and theatre to help asylum seekers better integrate into Austrian society. JRS also launched the “Locugee Project” where local students and refugees live together with a Jesuit. The projects aim to foster social and cultural exchange and inter-religious dialogue.<sup>cxiv</sup>

The Jesuit congregation has also developed the *Asyl in der Kirche*,<sup>cxv</sup> a parish association in Salzburg that helps rejected migrants receive humanitarian residence and integrate into Austrian society through language learning and professional engagement.<sup>cxvi</sup>

**March 2023**

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