

MirreM Data Collection – Country Context

AUSTRIA

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Instructions:

Reflecting on your deskwork and fieldwork, please provide a brief snapshot (1 – 3 pages in total) of the overall picture of irregular migration data in your country. For each question, please address stocks, flows and indicators (or indicate N/A).

Questions:

1. What is your overall assessment of the quality of irregular migration data in your country? (this summary is already provided in the Austrian country profile)

The extent to which the indicators collected can be used to estimate the irregular population is difficult to assess at the moment. In principle, relevant indicators with various problem situations are published by the ministries (administrative data) and represent interesting starting points to a certain extent. In many respects, it is problematic that categories are combined (e.g. inland and border apprehensions, please see further explanations in the subsequent text referring to the different datasets) and that they often do not refer to persons, but for example to apprehensions.

Relevant statistical indicators are largely published annually by federal governmental institutions, such as the Federal Ministry of Interior (BMI) (the asylum statistics since 2002), the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA) (the annual key figures since 2014, bi-annual figures are published every second year, since 2023 a quarterly report is available), the Federal Criminal Police Office (the police crime statistics since 2013; and the reports on migrant smuggling since 2003 and trafficking in human beings since 2014). The data from governmental institutions are thus also the sources for directly or indirectly topic-related publications by (I)NGOs and academia. To a limited extent, figures on “tolerated” migrants (in German: geduldete Migranten) are also available through parliamentary inquiries, but data sources often lack more comprehensive information that would allow for quality assessment, such as calculation methods, inclusion and exclusion criteria, information on double counting, etc.

Regarding irregular flows, the Federal Criminal Police Office makes situation reports on migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings available online on an annual basis. In the report 2022, a basic distinction is made between “smuggled persons” and “persons who have entered or are staying unlawfully”. The second category includes foreigners who have been found to be present within the country's territory after crossing the national border without the assistance of a smuggler and without possessing the necessary documents. It also includes individuals who have been denied entry at the border or who have been issued an entry or residency ban. Additionally, it encompasses persons who were granted entry but have since become subject to deportation due to their illegal stay. Furthermore, it includes

individuals who were employed in Austria without possessing the appropriate residence permit and those who have been apprehended or attempted to enter the country in defiance of an existing entry or residency ban (BMI II / Bundeskriminalamt, 2023).

The data reflect the apprehensions of persons according to these two categories (a third category is smugglers) and differentiate between age group, nationality, gender, and place of apprehension (province and district). The aggregation of the above mentioned subgroups of persons under the category "persons who have entered or are staying unlawfully" is questionable, since apprehension figures do not allow to distinguish between apprehensions of persons with longer residence in Austria - and border apprehensions, while presumably also counting repeat apprehensions of the same persons. Regarding the development of apprehensions of persons at border crossings in Austria between 2013 and 2022, the years 2015 and 2022 stand out with a far above-average number of apprehensions. While in the other years the numbers are just above (only 2016) or below 50,000 apprehensions, in these years there were more than 94,000 apprehensions (2015) and just below 109,000 apprehensions (2022). Focusing on recent trends, the categories smugglers, smuggled persons and persons who have entered or are staying unlawfully saw a massive increase from 2021 to 2022 as well as a change in the most represented nationalities. The largest increase in absolute numbers compared to 2021 was from India (2021: 1,505, 2022: 19,275), followed by Afghanistan (2021: 6,306, 2022: 21,017), Tunisia (2021: 598, 2022: 11,351), and Morocco (2021: 1,799, 2022: 8,425). The surge in numbers of persons from certain countries of origin also reflect the lifting of visa requirements in Serbia, which had introduced visa-free entry for Indian (2017 until January 1, 2023) and Tunisian (until Nov 2022) citizens (BMI, 2022; BMI II / Bundeskriminalamt, 2023).

Another important source of data are the asylum statistics, which are also published by the Ministry of Interior on a monthly and annual basis. Similar to the trends in apprehensions, also in the case of asylum applications, besides the peak in 2015 and 2016, since 2022 again a massive increase can be observed. With regard to Austria's policy focus on voluntary return and forced removal and prevention of irregular migration, the BMI statistics on expulsions and deportations are published on a monthly and annual basis (Ministry of Interior, n.d.-b) as well as the BFA figures on voluntary return and forced departures (incl. Dublin transfers) should also be mentioned (Ministry of Interior, n.d.-a). A comprehensive analysis of the data of the Federal Criminal Police Office is part of Workpackages 4 and 5 of the MIrreM project.

2. How is irregular migration data generally used in policy making?

In principle, various data on asylum and irregular migration are used by the various ministries for the purpose of strategic planning and the development as well as evaluation of measures. The federal provinces also receive relevant data from the ministries, e.g. in order to plan measures within the framework of basic services. In workshops and interviews, cooperation was often described positively, although with the repeated comment that the room for maneuver (e.g., in accessing and using data on (irregular) migration) is limited. Moreover, in terms of data protection and the associated requirements for authorities, data may only be collected for defined administrative purposes.

In terms of political and societal discourse in Austria, the asylum system, rejected asylum seekers and irregular migration are often discussed together and interwoven. The mixing of these issues is problematic in many respects.

3. How did you go about the data collection process?

The desk research showed that there are hardly any estimates available, and publications generally refer to data published by the ministries. On this basis, the focus was shifted to the reports and data sets published by the responsible agencies.

4. Were there any specific difficulties you experienced during this process? How did you address them?

The data collection process focused primarily on indicators, as estimates are available only to a very limited extent (see comments under point 7). Challenges arose in the first place from the fact that although data are published by the relevant ministries in particular, these are usually only available as pdf files and the data therefore had to be transferred to Excel in a cumbersome manner. Access to the various data sets in other formats was only possible to a limited extent (upon request). In addition, different data, which are not published as part of reports, were only available via parliamentary inquiries and therefore a high effort was required to compile them. In many cases, the explanations of the methods and quality of the data were also limited.

5. What were the main gaps in the evidence base (i.e., unmet user needs) that emerged during your data collection process?

Please see answer to question 1, question 3 and question 7.

6. Were there any meetings with producers or users of irregular migration estimates and indicators that you were unable to secure, but sense that endeavouring to do so in future may be worthwhile? If so, please provide contact information for this person/entity and explain why you think such detail would be helpful.

A total of two meetings with experts have taken place to clarify various uncertainties. The extent to which these experts are available as contact points still needs to be clarified. In principle, there are e-mail addresses for inquiries about police crime statistics, EUROSTAT data (Statistics Austria) and asylum application data (also Statistics Austria). The workshop with the data experts is planned for September 20 in Vienna.

7. Please point to an example of good practice estimating irregular migration and/or making use of estimates of irregular migration in policy-making that you came across. Why did you select this example?

Apart from the Clandestino estimate, there is only an estimate for a single year (namely 2015) published in the report of the Migration Council ("Migrationsrat") estimating the irregular migrant population at between 95,000 and 254,000 persons (Migration Council,

2018, p. 20), presumably using the methodology developed for Austria by the Clandestino project. However, considering the exceptional migration dynamics in the year 2015 and the methodological limitation of the Clandestino multiplier method (impossibility to factor in duration of stay) the estimate is likely to provide a massively inflated figure as the high numbers of migrants transiting Austria during 2015 will have had a major impact on those apprehended and recorded as 'illegally' staying crime suspects.