

MONITORING PERCEPTIONS OF PEOPLE SERVED BY THE RED CROSS IN AUSTRIA AND THEIR FIELD STAFF



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CASE STUDY: RESTORING FAMILY LINKS

DEPARTMENT

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INTERNATIONAL



FEDERATION



AUSTRIAN RED CROSS



GROUND TRUTH
SOLUTIONS



Introduction

In February 2017 the Austrian Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) partnered with Ground Truth Solutions on a project to regularly gather views of field staff and people served in Austria by the Red Cross' Restoring Family Links (RFL) department.

Ground Truth Solutions, the IFRC and the Austrian Red Cross developed a feedback mechanism to track and analyse the views of both staff and those assisted by the Red Cross, allowing the programme to adapt to evolving needs. This was particularly important because, at the time of the project's inception, Austrian migration laws were in flux, thus complicating the efforts of the Red Cross in general, while frustrating migrants' understanding of the family reunification process. The effects of this also carried over onto staff, increasing the risk of secondary trauma and burnout.

In response, the Austrian Red Cross implemented an iterative and systematic feedback mechanism based on Ground Truth Solutions' Constituent Voice™ methodology. This enabled the RFL department to improve services and team management by integrating feedback from affected people and staff into the design and delivery of services. Ensuring that the Austrian Red Cross could continue deploying this feedback mechanism was a key deliverable of this collaboration. Thus, Ground Truth Solutions continues to support the Austrian Red Cross in developing their capacity to continue collecting actionable data independently.

Design

During a two-day workshop in March 2017, the Austrian Red Cross, the IFRC, and Ground Truth Solutions designed a survey instrument based on the RFL programme's theory of change that explains how their services are meant to contribute to positive changes in people's lives. Team leaders from each Austrian province provided insight into their regional RFL departments, staff, and respective caseloads. Better understanding existing data collection processes and the information needs of RFL departments enabled workshop participants to identify information gaps and develop the right questions for actionable feedback collection – both from staff and from those in need.

The light-touch client* and staff survey instruments developed during the workshop covers the following topics and questions:

- **The quality and relevance of services:** Do migrant families understand the family reunification procedure? Do staff feel they can provide people with the information they need? What are the Red Cross clients' informational demands and how would they like to receive information?
- **The quality of relationships between the Red Cross and RFL clients:** Would the RFL department's clients recommend the services to others? Are clients satisfied with how they are receiving information? Do clients feel that their counsellor is doing their best to help them? Are clients comfortable discussing their problems with staff and do they feel treated respectfully? Do clients and staff feel affected people are being treated equally?
- **The perception of impact enabled by RFL services:** Do counselling services help clients better understand the family reunification process? Do staff feel their counselling helps clients better understand their situation? Do staff members feel they are able to their job effectively?
- **The extent to which services were perceived to empower clients:** Do staff and clients feel the opinions of clients are taken into account? Do clients know how to lodge complaints and make suggestions?

* The term "client" is used throughout this case study to refer to refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants that are currently or have in the past been served by the Austrian Red Cross.



- **Staff workload and procedural efficacy:** Do staff feel they have the appropriate means to document clients' opinions, wishes, and suggestions? Are they satisfied with the frequency of meetings and are work-related challenges discussed? Do staff members regularly go beyond their stress limits? Are staff complaints and suggestions taken into account?

The staff survey instrument, originally designed to be administered on a monthly basis, systematically tracks the perceptions of staff to identify emerging issues and improve team efficiency and collaboration. By mirroring some questions from the client survey instrument, it also assesses relevance, quality, and effectiveness of the RFL programme. This also allowed for comparing the findings of the two surveys on these issues and building more comprehensive evidence on programme performance.

Collect

Once tested and tweaked, the surveys were administered to staff and clients at regional RFL departments in all nine Austrian provinces as well as at Austrian Red Cross headquarters in Vienna. The staff survey was conducted in late April 2017 in German and English via SurveyGizmo and targeted 74 individuals working in family reunification and tracing at the Austrian Red Cross. Forty-eight staff members completed the survey that comprised 13 open and closed questions.

While online data collection worked well for the staff survey, traditional collection options were deemed more appropriate for the client survey due to internet access constraints and varying degrees of computer literacy. In May 2017, 181 RFL clients were interviewed either face-to-face (56%) or by phone (44%) – a sample that constitutes approximately 10% of the total number of clients of the Austrian Red Cross' RFL department in 2016 (1,807). The sample included both former (27%) and current (73%) clients. The inclusion of current and former RFL clients not only increased statistical power, but also ensured that the voices of those no longer a part of the programme were heard. To reduce courtesy bias, the team decided that each client would be interviewed by a Red Cross staff member unaffiliated with the client.

Analyse

For both surveys instruments, SurveyGizmo was piloted not only as a data collection channel, but also as an analysis tool. A real-time report with key findings could be generated with the click of a button using a built-in SurveyGizmo feature, making it possible for Ground Truth Solutions to provide the Austrian Red Cross with real-time updates during data collection. More advanced analysis was then conducted by Ground Truth Solutions after the complete data set was downloaded as an Excel file from the platform.

For the client survey, interviews were recorded with pen and paper or entered directly into SurveyGizmo on a mobile device while conducting the survey. Once completed, the information was downloaded and analysed by Ground Truth Solutions. Simple visual reports based on main findings that emerged from each survey instrument were shared with the Austrian Red Cross. In both cases, comprehensive reports on the results to each individual question, including relevant demographic breakdowns, were developed and shared.

In addition to the reports, Ground Truth Solutions developed an Excel tool to analyse incoming data tailored to the informational needs of the Austrian Red Cross. This will help the Austrian Red Cross make use of and integrate the feedback mechanism on their own.



Dialogue

The survey findings of both the client and staff survey were discussed by the Austrian Red Cross and Ground Truth Solutions during a dissemination presentation in May 2017 and at a Red Cross retreat the following month. This “sense-making” phase is crucial as it combines Ground Truth Solutions’ findings and analyses with the accumulated knowledge and expertise of staff members. It provided the RFL team with an opportunity to discuss and interpret results that struck them as surprising, predictable, and even conflicting, while developing appropriate course corrections to improve the delivery of services.

Course corrections based on survey findings

The survey revealed that over a third of the clients interviewed felt they did not understand the Austrian family reunification procedure.

Client survey - understanding the procedure

Do you understand the procedure for your family reunification in Austria?

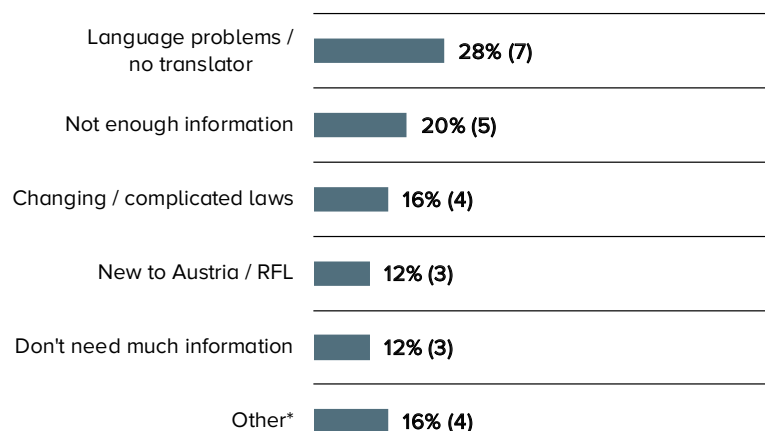


(values in %)

Mean: 3.2



When asked why, most indicated having difficulties understanding the language, the lack of an interpreter, or simply not having enough information. In response to these findings, the Red Cross was able to increase the opening hours of its facilities and boosted the language capacities of the RFL department. As a result, clients were given more face-to-face time with counsellors who were increasingly able to provide them with information in their mother tongue, contributing to a much better understanding of the procedures. In dialogue sessions, RFL staff also identified a shortage of interpreters at certain counselling centres and requested more language assistance. Ideally, interpreters would be present during counselling sessions involving clients that are not fluent in German. However, as this course correction measure has budgetary implications, it will require management support to be implemented.



* "Other" includes having difficulties understanding due to a lack of education and not needing to understand because a family member does.



Even though almost 70% of staff members felt that the frequency of meetings to discuss daily challenges was “just right,” far fewer actually discussed these challenges regularly during meetings.

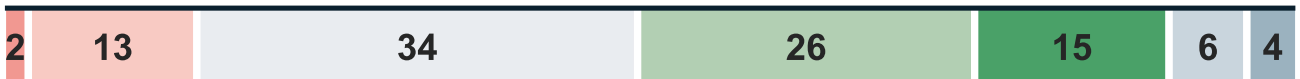
Staff survey - participation in meetings

Do you talk about work related challenges in these meetings?

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Always
- Don't know
- Do not want to answer

(values in %)

Mean: 3.4



Furthermore, only half of those surveyed said they often engage in informal staff discussions among their colleagues about challenges faced at work. Of those who did not, more than a third expressed interest in speaking with colleagues on a more regular basis. Acting on these findings, the Austrian Red Cross increased the frequency of team meetings and, more importantly, introduced training sessions for peer support among team members. This is particularly important to counteract stress, as a third of staff members report that they sometimes or often go beyond their stress limits at work.

Client survey - effectiveness of counselling

Does counselling at the Red Cross help you better understand the procedure for your family reunification in Austria?

- 1 = Not at all
- 2 = Not very much
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Mostly yes
- 5 = Very much

(values in %)

Mean: 4.3



Staff survey - effectiveness of counselling

Do you feel the counselling at the RFL department helps people better understand their situation?

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Always
- Don't know
- Do not want to answer

(values in %)

Mean: 4.2



Other findings were less clear cut. For example, the surveys revealed that staff felt able to provide clients with the information they needed even though current and former clients said they did not understand the family reunification procedure. The findings suggested that, while the information exists in various languages, clients are unable to access it. A solution was then developed during the dialogue session that involved the creation of a centralised database through which clients have access to all relevant sources of information about family reunification in Austria.



Results

With the support of Ground Truth Solutions, the RFL department of the Austrian Red Cross was able to gain insight into the perceptions of both staff members and clients in an effort to improve their delivery of services. The department developed a series of measures to improve programme outcomes and features that had been identified in the surveys. However, as a result of an increasing caseload and changing family reunification regulations in Austria, the Austrian Red Cross decided not to continue collecting data on a monthly basis. It was decided that monthly interviews would not give the department enough time to act on findings and exceeded its capacity to process the information. While these constraints also prevented a planned round of data collection toward the end of 2017, the Austrian Red Cross is currently working on an implementation plan for 2018 for a regular feedback mechanism.

In order to support the Austrian Red Cross and other National Societies in their endeavour to collect and act on client and staff feedback, Ground Truth Solutions and the IFRC developed a guide on establishing and managing systematic feedback mechanisms based on the Constituent Voice™ methodology. With a focus on migration programmes and operations, but applicable to all other types of Red Cross and Red Crescent programming, this guide details the five steps of the feedback cycle and provides a selection of tools and templates to aid in the collection, analysis, and incorporation of feedback in ongoing programme management.

More information on this project is available on Ground Truth Solutions' website, <http://groundtruthsolutions.org/our-work/developing-feedback-mechanisms-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers/>

For more information on the IFRC's Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) initiatives and available resources, visit the the IFRC's CEA website, <http://www.ifrc.org/cea>

A collection of CEA case studies on the IFRC's operations is also available on their website, <http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document/2017-community-engagement-accountability-good-practices-around-world/>