

**Arno Haslberger, Karl Zehetner**

**The attractiveness of  
Vienna for qualified  
international labour  
(expatriates)**

# The attractiveness of Vienna for qualified international labour (expatriates)

A research project conducted by Webster University Vienna with financial support from the Press and Information Service of the City of Vienna and the Vienna Business Agency

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Objectives of the study

Vienna, the capital city of Austria, geographically and culturally near the new EU Member States and home to several UN organisations, is the place of work for international managers, experts and administrative staff of international companies and organisations as well as for international artists, musicians, scientists and journalists. These members of the international qualified workforce, who are here temporarily or in some cases permanently, contribute to the affluence of Vienna and increase the economic, scientific and cultural competitiveness of the city and of Austria as a whole. The impressions they gather during their stay quite possibly have more of an effect on the reputation of Vienna and Austria abroad than promotional brochures and image campaigns.

The presence of qualified international managers and professionals significantly increases the competitiveness of a city as a business location, making them a valuable resource worth courting. It is therefore of interest to find out how attractive Vienna is for them, and also to ask about the reasons why. The information gathered can be used as a basis for devising ways of further enhancing the city's attractiveness. Also, a survey of international persons living in Vienna can provide insight into differences between self-perception and perception by others of the city and make it easier to understand the reasons behind sometimes surprisingly diverging assessments of Vienna or Austria.

## 1.2. Methodology

### 1.2.1. Key research questions

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How attractive is Vienna as a working and living location for highly qualified international managers and professionals, and how can Vienna enhance its attractiveness?
2. What influence does working in Vienna have on the careers of qualified international workers?
3. To what extent do qualified international workers feel accepted and at home in Vienna?

### 1.2.2. Web-based questionnaire

To answer these questions, we conducted a quantitative study. The questionnaire used for this purpose was divided into three parts:

The questions for the first part (on the attractiveness of Vienna) were developed by the authors of the study together with leading members of the Vienna Business Agency and the Press and Information Service of the City of Vienna (MA53). The questions concerned the participants' expectations before coming to Vienna and their assessment of the city after arrival.

The questions for the second part (on the impact of working in Vienna on career prospects) were designed to correspond closely to those used in a parallel study on the attractiveness of London for qualified international labour (Dickmann and Mills,

2005)<sup>1</sup> and are based on the concept of career capital developed by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994).<sup>2</sup> This approach allows direct comparisons of the strengths and weaknesses of the two cities different career aspects.

The questions for the third part (on demography and German language skills) are commonly used standard questions.

The questionnaire was posted on the Internet between October 2007 and February 2008. In addition to the multiple-choice questions designed for quantitative evaluation, the questionnaire offered respondents the opportunity to make written comments, thus providing a further source of data. More than a third of the respondents made use of this possibility. Many felt a great need to communicate their experiences.

### **1.2.3. Target group**

The subjects of this study are well-qualified expatriates. We define expatriates as persons temporarily or permanently residing in another country without intending to become citizens of that country. For the purposes of the study, persons are considered well-qualified if they hold a post-secondary (professional) or academic degree and/or a professional post that usually requires post-secondary education or many years of professional experience.

The questionnaire was directed at expatriates who have come to Vienna for reasons of work or education. In order to be able to target this group as precisely as possible, we contacted appropriate institutions and organisations. Several institutions (e.g. the American Chamber of Commerce) provided us with the e-mail addresses of their members or informed their members about the study directly. Others mentioned the study in their staff publications (e.g. the International Atomic Energy Agency in its electronic newsletter for staff members, the Austro-Arab Chamber of Commerce in its newsletter for members or the Vienna Service Office for employees of UN organisations and their families in its newsletter.) The international students and alumni of Webster University Vienna were informed of the study by e-mail. This university has a particularly high proportion of international students (approx. 75%).

## **1.3. Participants**

We received a total of 329 completed questionnaires. The demographic data show that we were successful in reaching the target group:

- Approx. 90% of the respondents have university degree.
- Approx. 50% are managers, the other half are professionals, administrative staff and students (the latter comprise just over 5% of the participants).
- A total of 56 nationalities are represented. Two hundred and thirty-one respondents named their country of origin. Of these, 20% are from the USA, seven per cent from the UK, six per cent from Australia, four per cent from Canada and around three per cent from France, South Africa, Germany and Japan respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Dickmann and T. Mills, *Report for Think London on the Impact of London on International Careers of Overseas Individuals* (London, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> R. DeFillippi and M. Arthur, „The boundaryless career: a competency-based perspective“ in: *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15/4 (1994), pp. 307-324.

- About one quarter of the respondents are employed in international organisations (e.g. UN bodies); the other three quarters are distributed over many parts of the secondary and tertiary sectors.
- Eighty per cent of the respondents are here with their spouses or partners, 43% live with their children in Vienna.
- The gender split is even (51% men).
- Persons in the 30 to 50 year old age bracket account for around 60%.
- Over 90% have lived in Vienna for more than a year.

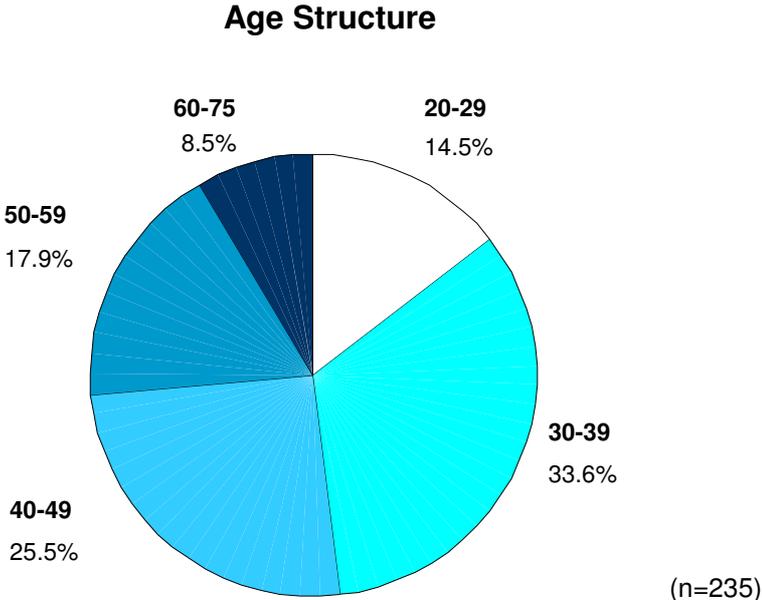


Figure 1: Age structure

### How long have you lived in Vienna so far?

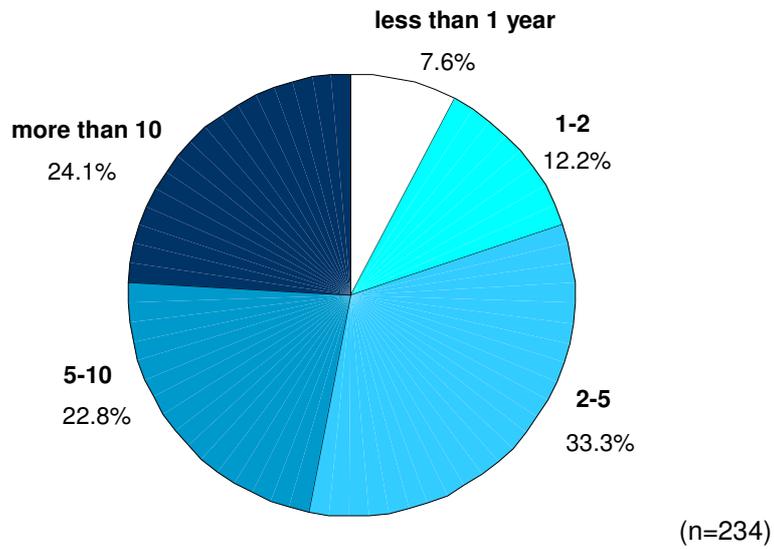


Figure 2: Length of stay in Vienna

### Country of citizenship

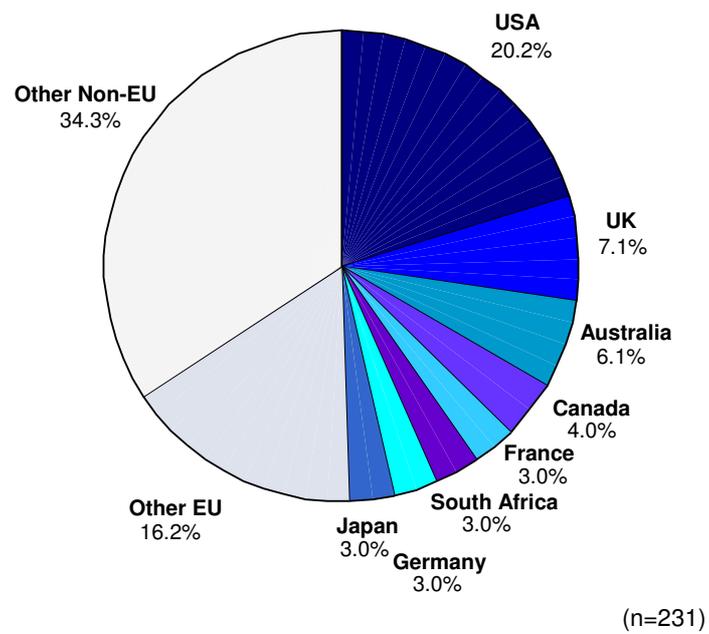


Figure 3: Country of citizenship

The participants in the study were asked about their German language skills. On a scale from 1 (“not at all”) to 5 (“like a native speaker”), around half of the respondents placed themselves in one of the two upper categories for reading, speaking and understanding, respectively. Respondents’ assessment of their writing ability is markedly lower: only ca. 30% give themselves one of the two top marks here. The importance of German language skills for living in Vienna is rated as being very high: 46% consider them to be “extremely important”.

**How well do you ... German?**

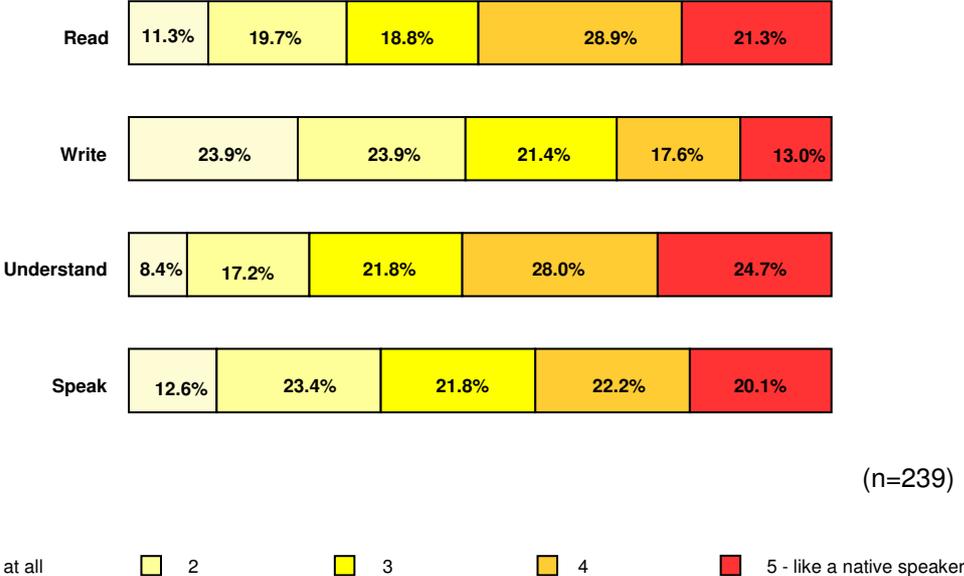


Figure 4: Language skills

**How important is knowledge of German for life in Vienna?**

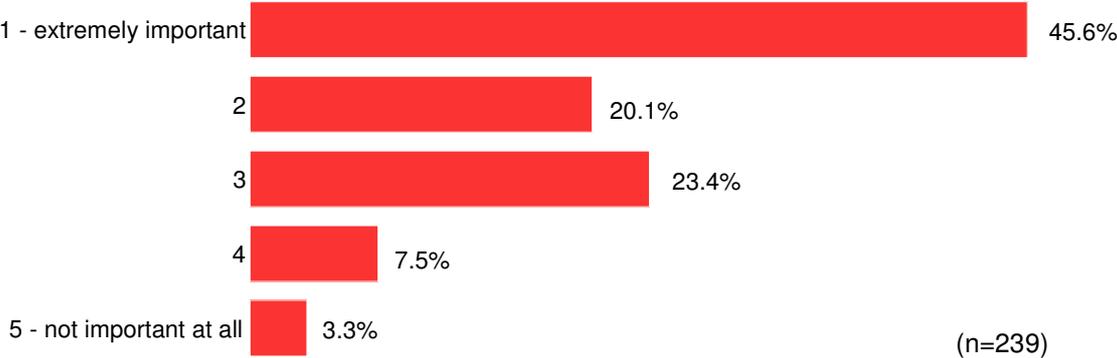


Figure 5: Significance of German language skills for life in Vienna

## 2. Quality of living and infrastructure

Vienna is seen as a city with a very high quality of living. “Security” and “prosperity”, in particular, are adjectives that almost all respondents attribute to the city. Satisfaction with the infrastructure is remarkable: more than 90% rate public transportation, airports, telephone services and Internet access as being good to very good.

Comparative studies conducted over the past years describe Vienna as a city with a high quality of living, and the city consistently ranks high in international comparisons. According to the Mercer Consulting Group (*Quality of Living Survey 2008*), Vienna has the highest quality of living of all capital cities of the European Union. Out of 215 cities worldwide, Vienna ranks second. It is not surprising, therefore, that qualified expatriates living in Vienna share this positive view.

### 2.1. Quality of living: a high level of satisfaction

Seventy-five per cent of the participants in the study give the city a positive rating for quality of living. “Personal safety”, a feature that contributed to Vienna’s good placement in the Mercer 2008 study, is rated by 99% as being good; 69% even give top marks. Ninety per cent find that the adjective “prosperity” also applies.

**Of the following adjective pairs please check the number that most closely reflects your view of Vienna:**

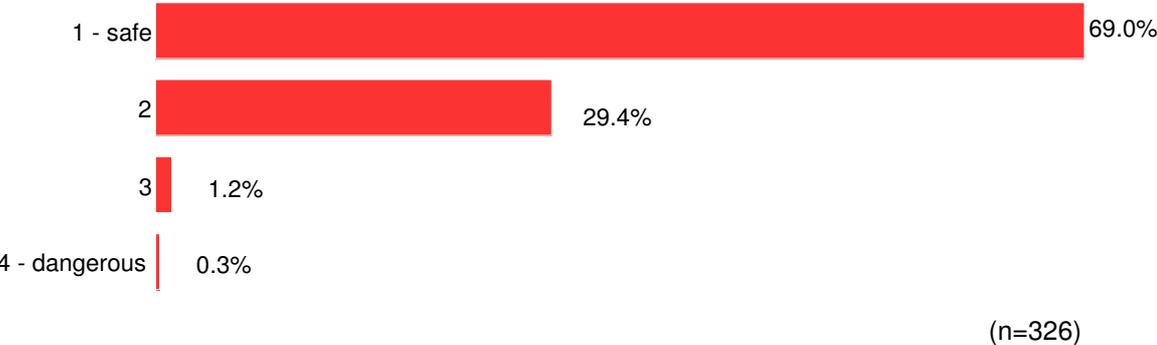


Figure 6: Personal safety

**Of the following adjective pairs please check the number that most closely reflects your view of Vienna:**

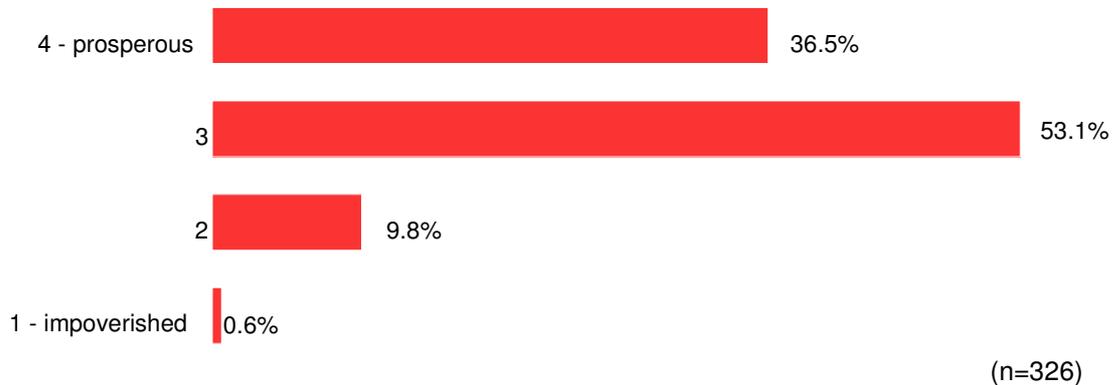


Figure 7: Prosperity

The other adjectives attributed to the city are not surprising, either. For 79%, Vienna is a traditional city and for 83% a conservative one. Seventy-nine per cent consider Vienna to be an expensive (26% even call it a very expensive) city.

Culture and restaurants also get a positive rating from 90% of the respondents; 84% rate sports positively.

Interestingly, respondents had higher expectations than actual experiences of Vienna as an arts and music centre. Still, the level of satisfaction remains very high. Before arriving, 81% considered Vienna to be a centre for the arts and culture, as opposed to 75% after having lived here. For Vienna as a musical centre, the value has dropped from 83% to 76%.

## **2.2. Infrastructure: Vienna gets top marks on several counts**

Ninety-five per cent of the respondents give public transportation a positive rating. Around three quarters are satisfied with the airport and with telephone services, respectively. Two thirds also consider Internet access to be good. There is less satisfaction with road traffic (51%), and only 30% are satisfied with TV services.

## How would you rate Vienna on INFRASTRUCTURE?

### Public Transportation

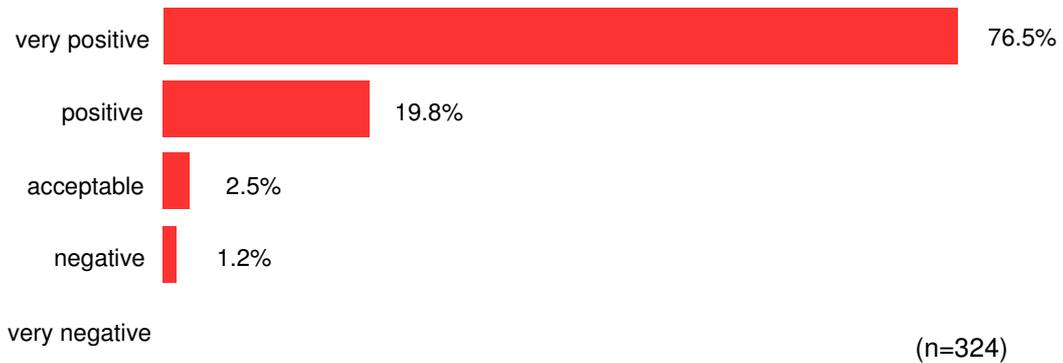


Figure 8: Satisfaction with public transportation

### Road traffic

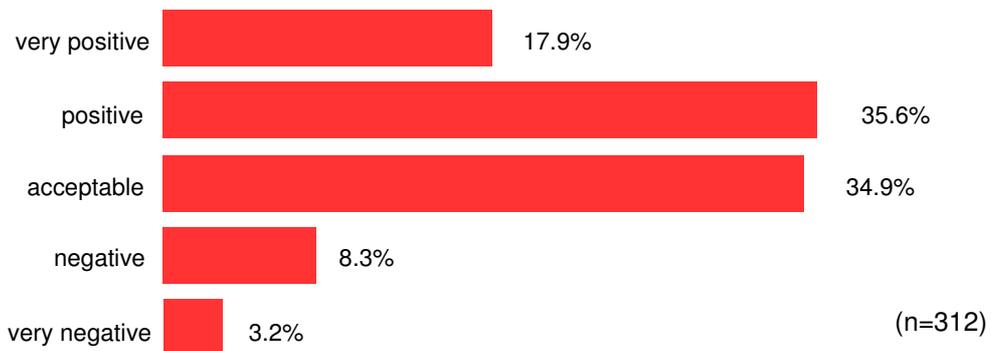


Figure 9: Satisfaction with road traffic

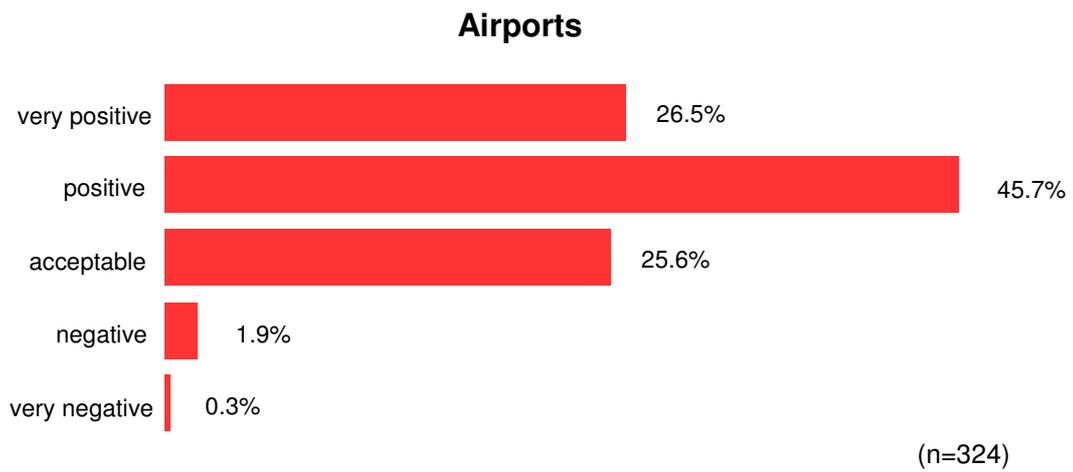


Figure 10: Satisfaction with the airport

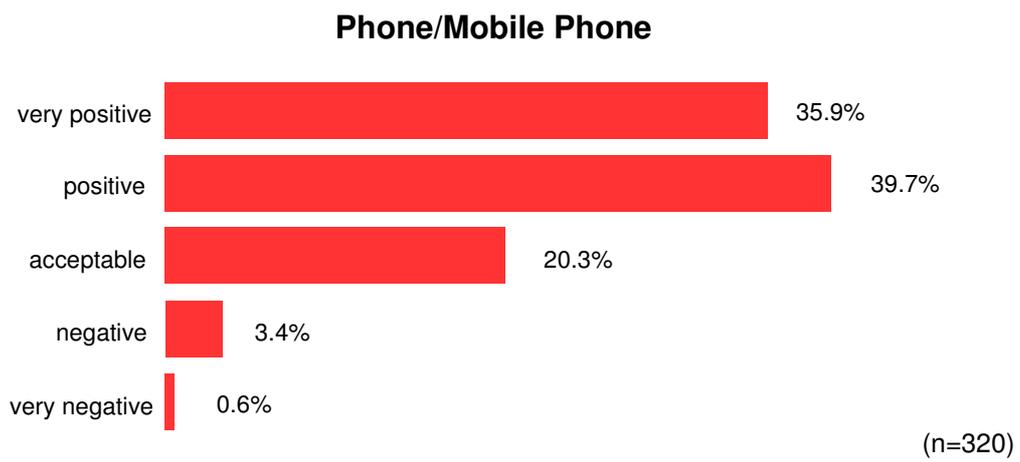


Figure 11: Satisfaction with telephone services

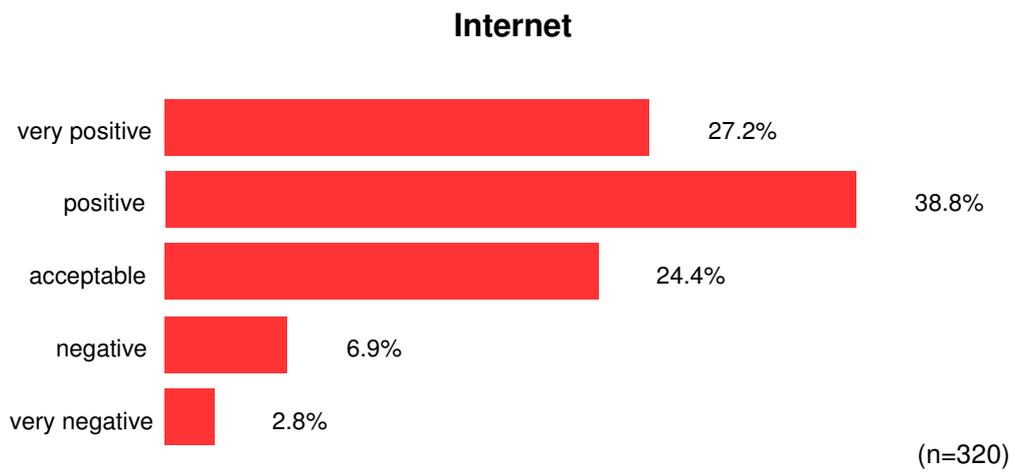


Figure 12: Satisfaction with internet services

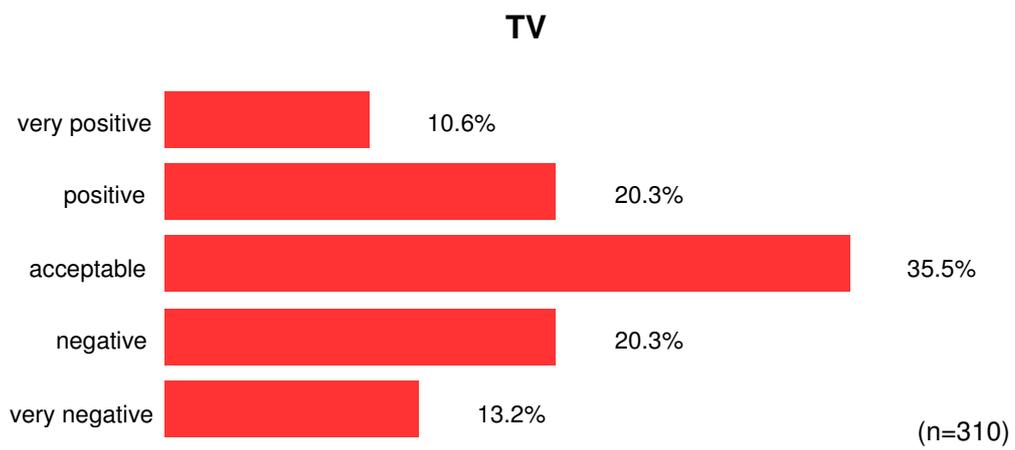


Figure 13: Satisfaction with TV services

### 3. Vienna's schools and universities

**Expatriates living in Vienna find (international) schools and universities to be good. Only 7% are dissatisfied with schools, and 14% are dissatisfied with universities.**

Persons who come to Vienna from abroad to work often bring their families. Eighty per cent of the participants in the study are in Vienna with their spouse or partner. Forty-three per cent live in Vienna with their children. In order to be attractive for this target group of expatriates, Vienna needs to offer them schools and universities that are considered as good as or better than the schools and universities in their home countries.

Two-hundred and thirty-two persons provided feedback on the international schools in Vienna. Out of these, 70% give them a positive or very positive rating. Twenty-three per cent consider them acceptable. Only seven per cent consider them to be insufficient.

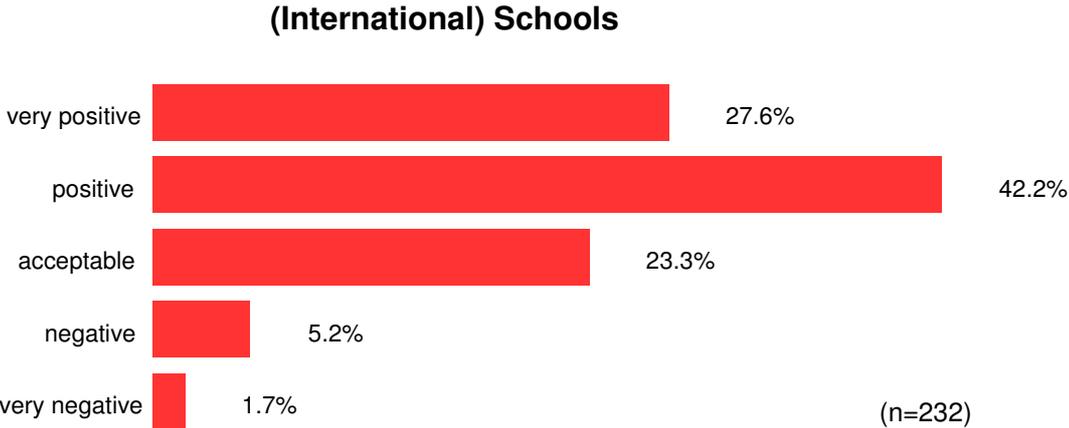


Figure 14: Satisfaction with (international) schools

The quality of universities is rated by 61% as being good to very good. Fourteen per cent consider it unsatisfactory.

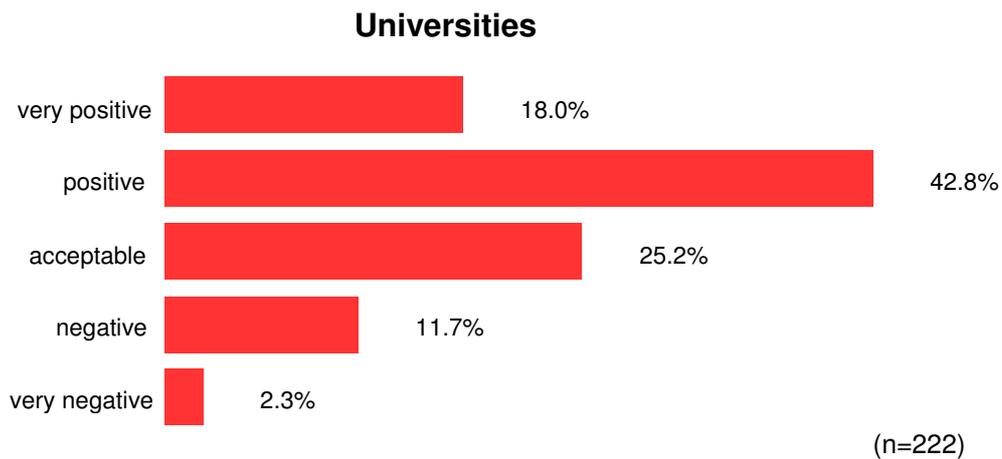


Figure 15: Satisfaction with universities

Out of the persons concerned (216 respondents), 21% are unhappy with education in their children's mother tongue. Slightly more than twice as many (45%) find it to be satisfactory.

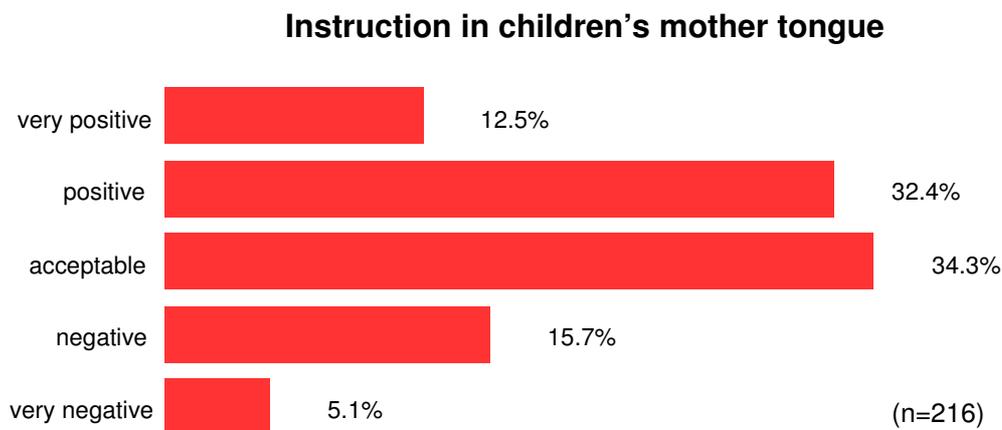


Figure 16: Satisfaction with education in the mother tongue

## 4. Public services

**The quality and accessibility of the healthcare system contribute to the attractiveness of Vienna: almost all respondents are satisfied with it, and a clear majority give medical services a positive rating.**

The mediocre rating given to public services is due essentially to bureaucratic red tape. The results suggest that the source of frustration lies in a combination of two factors. On the one hand, administrative personnel are perceived to lack an international perspective and foreign language skills. On the other hand, there is dissatisfaction with the way in which the law pertaining to foreigners is currently being applied.

With respect to public services such as medical care, public administration and expatriate services, the questionnaire asked about both quality and ease of use.

### 4.1. Medical services: satisfactory to good

Sixty-three per cent are satisfied with the quality of medical services, and 54% find medical services easy to use.

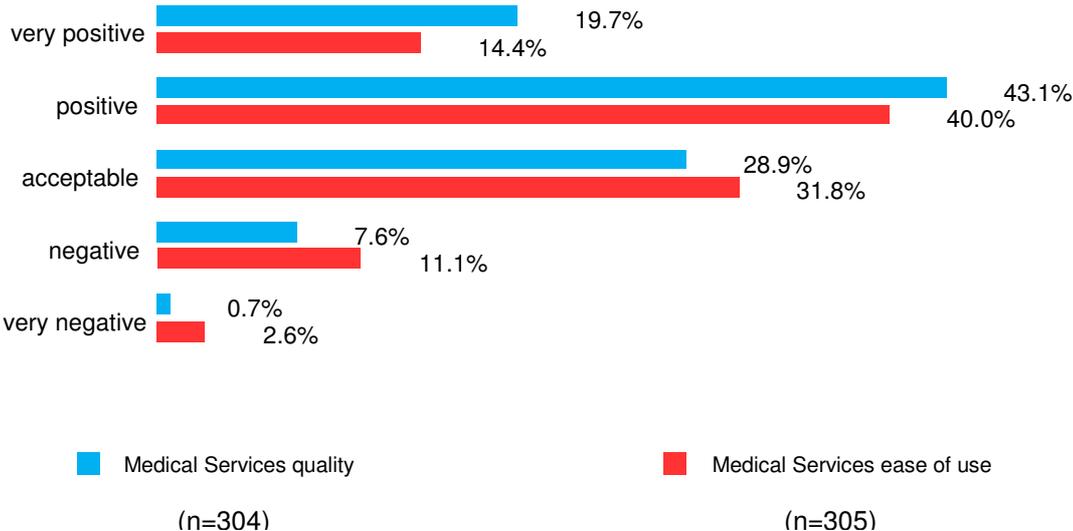


Figure 17: Quality and accessibility of medical services

### 4.2. Public administration: acceptable, somewhat bureaucratic

Only 35% are satisfied with the quality of public administration and only 29% consider them easy to use. Respondents' qualitative comments suggest that some foreign managers and professionals assume English to be something like a second official language.

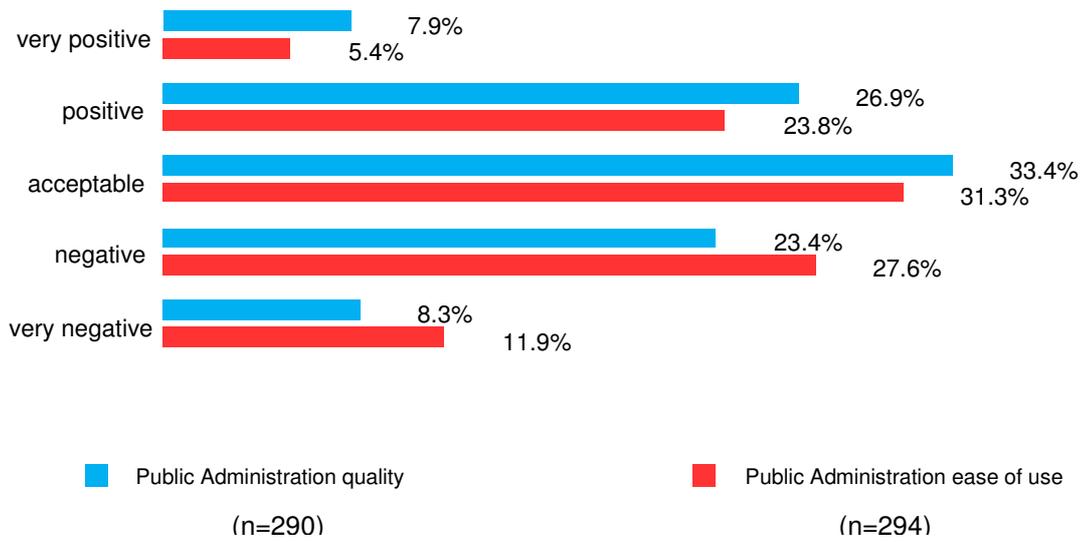


Figure 18: Quality and accessibility of public administration

The ratings for expatriate services are similar to those for public administration: 36% are satisfied with their quality, 34% with their ease of use.

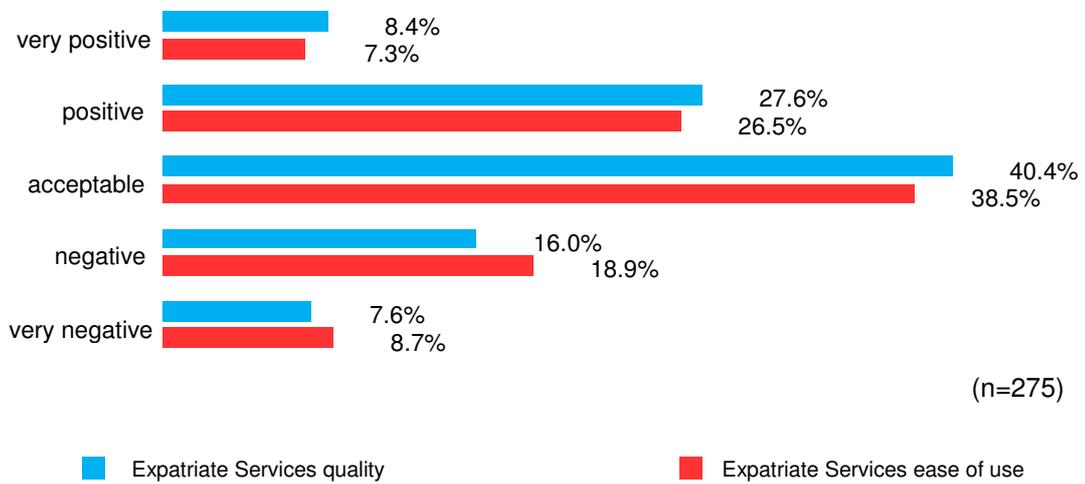


Figure 19: Quality and accessibility of expatriate services

# 5. Vienna as a business location: underestimated abroad

**The message that Vienna is a business centre for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and an international congress centre with a first-class infrastructure is obviously not being communicated as clearly as it should be. The present study provides a credible basis for the promotion of Vienna in this regard.** Vienna has an excellent image as a culture and music metropolis that can hardly be improved upon. It may well be, however, that this overshadows Vienna's other qualities.

It is only after arriving in Vienna that qualified managers and professionals discover that, in addition to quality of living and a rich variety of cultural experiences, Vienna also offers advantages as a business location. In no other category are the differences in perception before and after arrival as marked as in this one.

- Sixty-four per cent of highly qualified expatriates living in Vienna consider the city to be a business centre for CEE; only 33% expected this before arrival.
- Similarly, 64% now see Vienna as an international congress centre, as opposed to 37% before arrival.
- Only 22% see Vienna as high tech centre (14% before arrival).

Did you consider Vienna to be a business center for CEE?

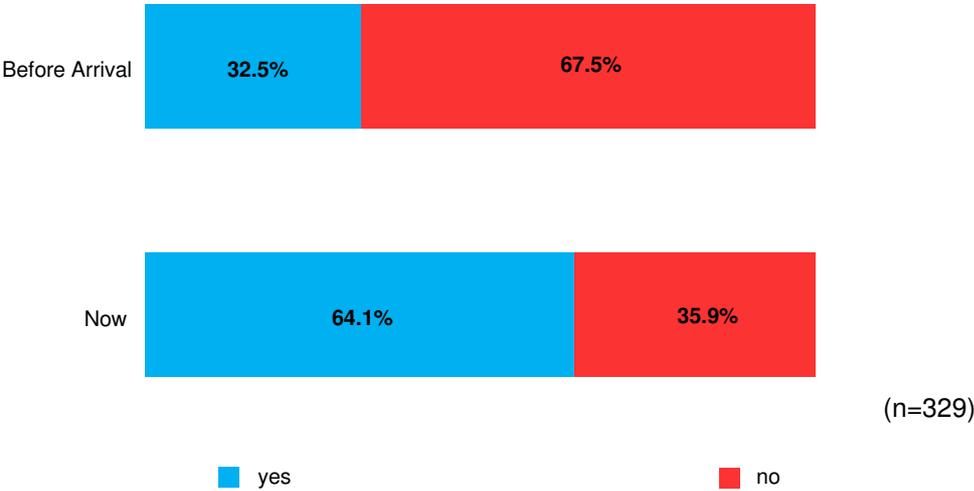


Figure 20: Image of Vienna as a business centre for CEE

**Did you consider Vienna to be an international congress center?**

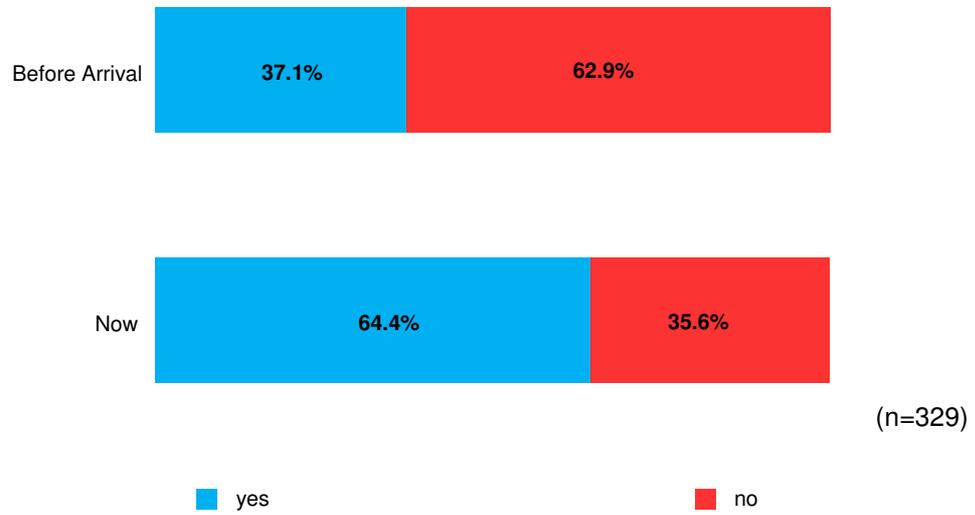


Figure 21: Image of Vienna as a congress centre

**Did you consider Vienna to be a High Tech Center?**

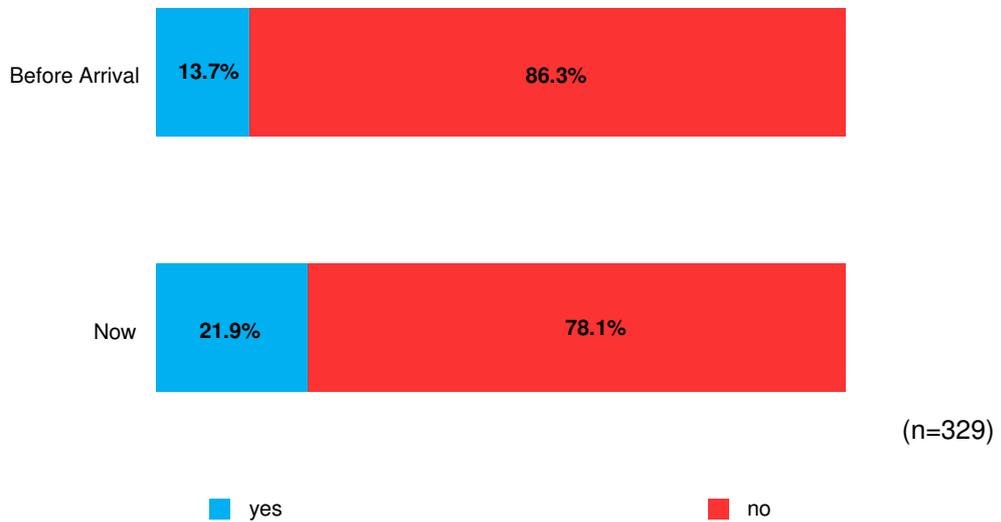


Figure 22: Image of Vienna as a high-tech centre

# 6. Cleanliness and friendliness

**While Vienna is perceived to be a safe city with first-class infrastructure and high quality of living, in which one can advance one's career there are some points of criticism: expatriates see it as dirty, smoky, latently xenophobic. This view is shared by a large portion of respondents and often expanded upon with personal accounts.**

Vienna is perceived to be a safe city with a first-class infrastructure and high quality of living, in which one can advance one's career. The points of criticism are few. However, they are expressed by a large number of respondents and often expanded upon with personal accounts.

## 6.1. Irritation about dirt and cigarette smoke

Often, it is the small daily irritations that accumulate into a lasting impression on persons that have come from abroad to live in a place for a longer period of time. Dirty streets and smoky establishments are two such irritations experienced by expatriates in Vienna.

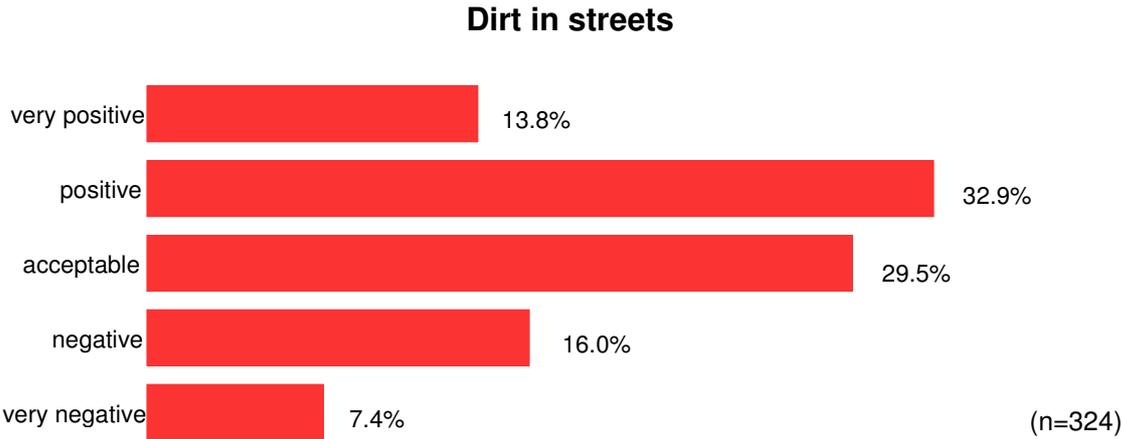


Figure 23: Satisfaction regarding dirt in the streets

The participants in this study perceive Vienna to be a dirty city. Fewer than 50% give the city a positive rating in this regard. Thirty per cent consider the dirt level to be just “acceptable” and nearly one quarter give it a negative rating. Other aspects of the category “environment” are assessed much more positively: 58% consider the noise level to be satisfactory, 60% are satisfied with the air quality and 93% are satisfied with the water quality.

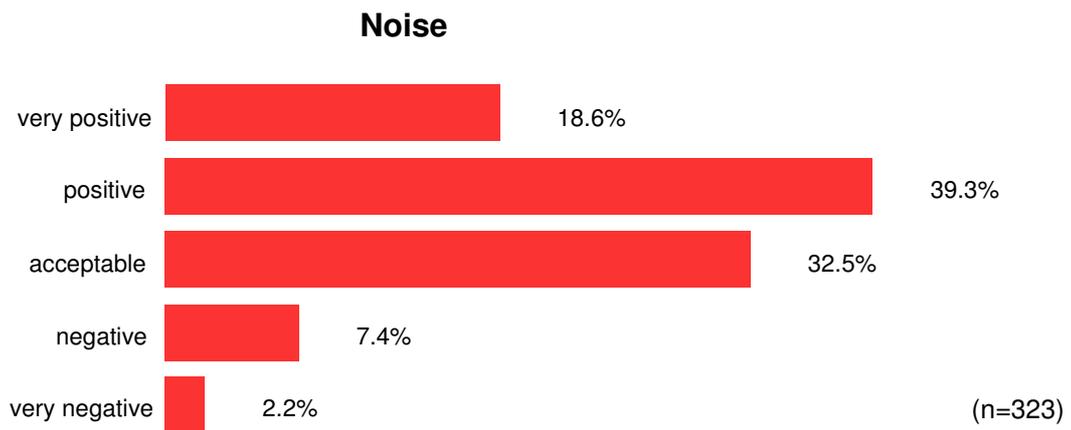


Figure 24: Satisfaction with the noise level

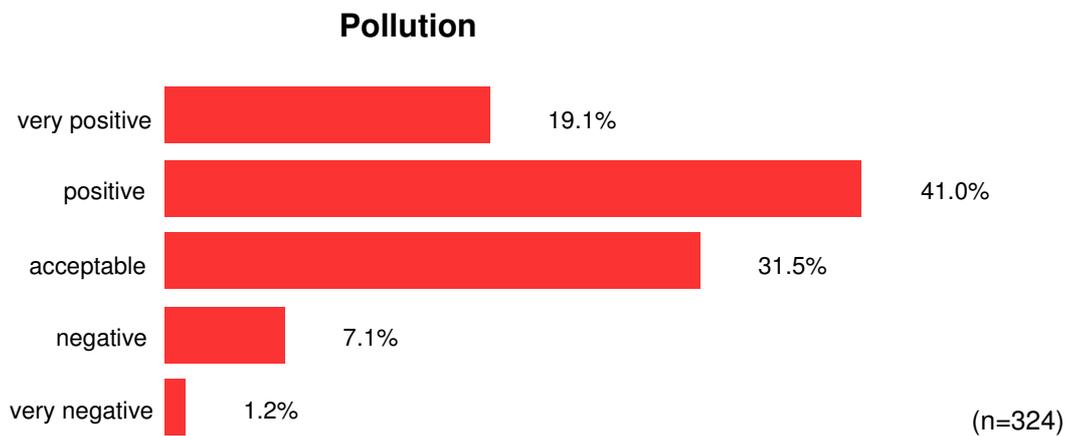


Figure 25: Satisfaction with the air quality

### Water Quality

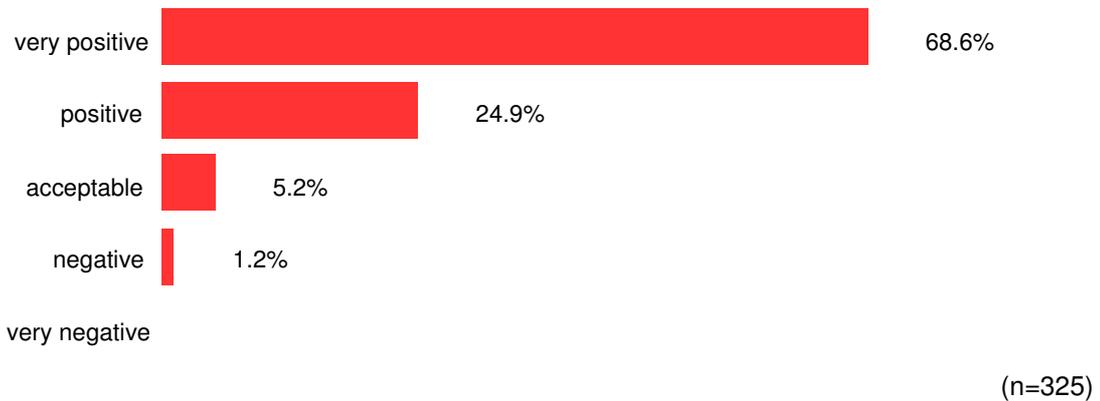


Figure 26: Satisfaction with the water quality

The comments provided by the participants reveal that their critical assessment of the dirt level is due to the dog mess on streets and sidewalks. This also affects how expatriates perceive the indigenous population: the reluctance of dog owners to clean up after their pets is perceived as unusual behaviour. An image emerges of the ordinary Viennese as lethargic and unaccountable.

What long-term guests in Vienna find most annoying is smoky restaurants. This is a point of complaint for 63% of those queried. Only 17% give a positive rating to the rules governing smoking in restaurants.

### Smoke in Restaurants

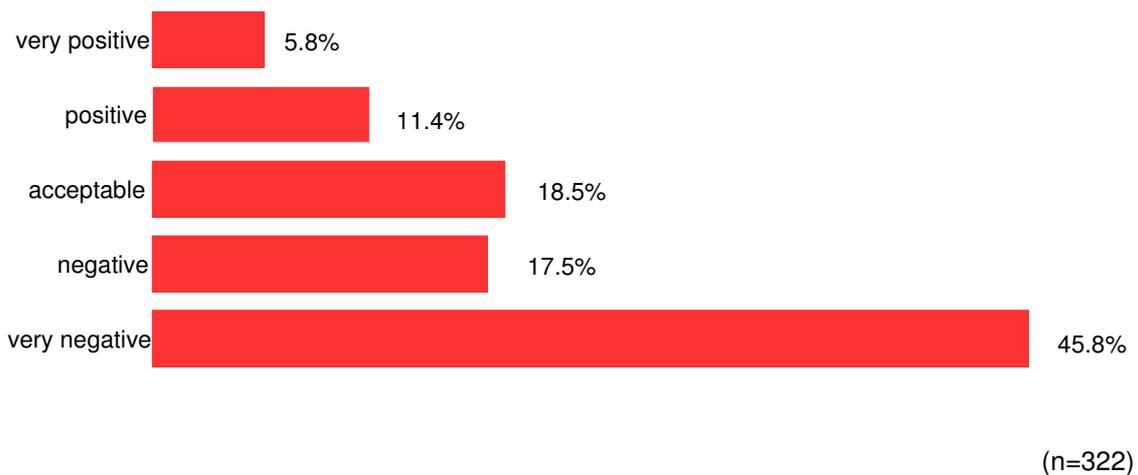


Figure 27: Satisfaction regarding smoking in restaurants

The respondents' qualitative statements betray a widespread opinion that with respect to smoking in general (not only in restaurants), Vienna (or Austria) has

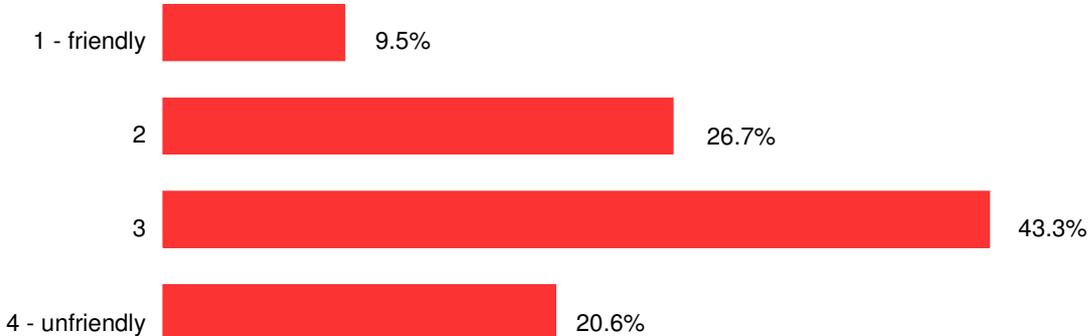
disengaged itself from the international trend to limit smoking: Vienna as a last outpost for smokers.

This trend began in the USA and only reached Europe after several years' delay. Since US Americans, at 20%, comprise the largest national group among the participants in this study (all other nationalities being represented by maximally 5%), it was interesting for us to find out if this group's opinion on this point deviates from that of other nationalities. The comparison shows that there is indeed a slight difference, which, however, is statistically insignificant. (While 73% of US citizens give the Austrian smoking rules a negative rating and, out of these, 57% even rate them very negatively, dissatisfaction among non-Americans, at 63%, is also quite marked.)<sup>3</sup>

### 6.2. Experiences with xenophobia

Vienna is perceived as an unfriendly city by a clear two-thirds majority. The fact that persons who did not grow up in Vienna lack appreciation for the typically deprecatory humour of the Viennese ("Wiener Schmääh"), which some even regard as a cultural heritage to be protected, may explain this experience in part as a misunderstanding. However, the fact that it is not customary in Vienna to excuse oneself for inadvertent jostling or that people think nothing of jumping a queue while avoiding all eye contact is behaviour that for persons from many regions of the world comes as a culture shock that is difficult to overcome.

**Of the following adjective pairs please check the number that most closely reflects your view of Vienna:**



(n=326)

Figure 28: The majority of respondents find Vienna to be an unfriendly city

<sup>3</sup> The value of the relevant correlation coefficient, eta, is 0.097, indicating a minimal influence of nationality on the assessment of smoking in restaurants. Eta is applied in cases where the independent variable – here US or non-US citizenship – is measured nominally and the dependent variable is measured by intervals. An eta of 1.0 would imply a strong correlation, an eta of 0.0 no correlation. Other tests also reveal no statistical correlation. Detailed statistical analyses of responses regarding dirt in the streets produce similar, non-significant results.

In addition to the small, daily annoyances respondents mention personal experiences with xenophobia.

- Sixty-five per cent notice prejudice against foreigners.
- Only slightly more than half feel welcome as a foreigner in Vienna.

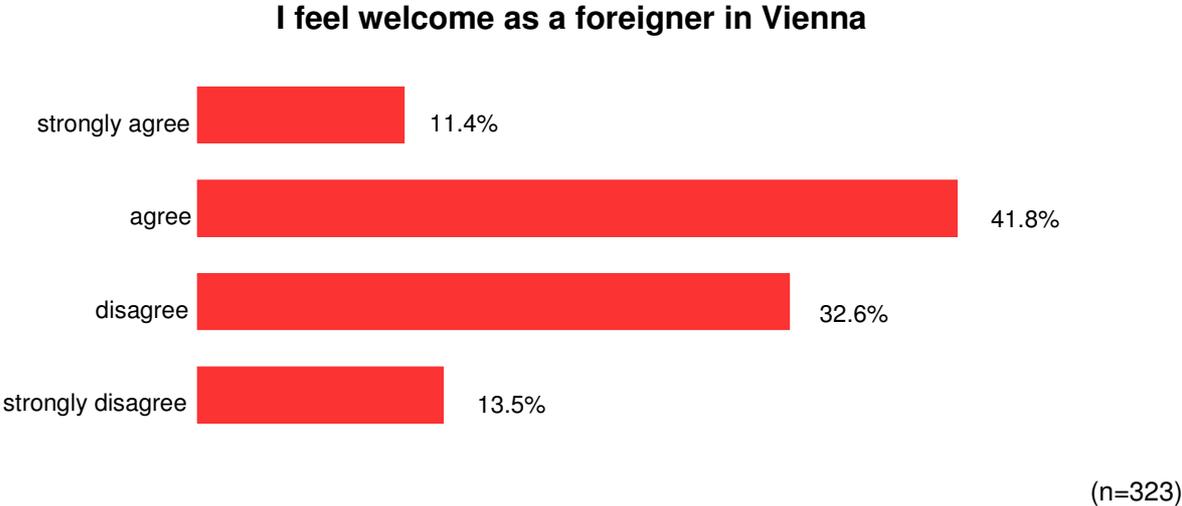


Figure 29: Agreement with “I feel welcome in Vienna”

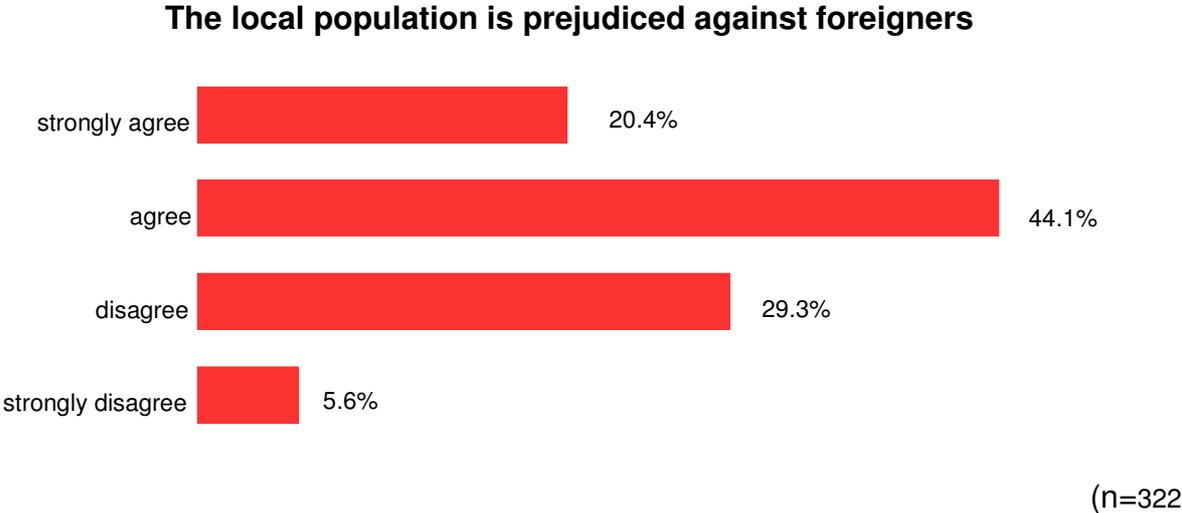


Figure 30: Prejudice against foreigners

It is important to emphasise that most of the respondents are holders of university degrees, have professional positions with a high social status and live under good material conditions. Through their international private and professional contacts, these persons multiply their impressions of Vienna and thereby contribute significantly to shaping the image of Vienna and Austria abroad.



## 7. Impact on expatriates' careers

**With regard to career prospects or increased career opportunities resulting from a stay abroad, Vienna gets a slightly lower rating than the financial metropolis of London. This is compensated by the city's high quality of living. Almost all highly qualified expatriates enjoy living in Vienna.**

The word about Vienna's high quality of living has been effectively spread among expatriates: as the results of this study show, most were already informed about this before arriving. But does working in Vienna also enhance career prospects? This is a consideration that, without a doubt, significantly affects the attractiveness of the city for qualified expatriates.

### 7.1. Why people choose Vienna

What are the factors that encouraged the respondents to choose to come to Vienna? For 73%, it was the job they were offered. The second most important factor was the impact on career prospects (67%). Quality of living factors, such as safety or the Austrian standard of living, played a subordinate role in influencing their decision.

#### When choosing Vienna which of the following factors encourage/discourage your choice?



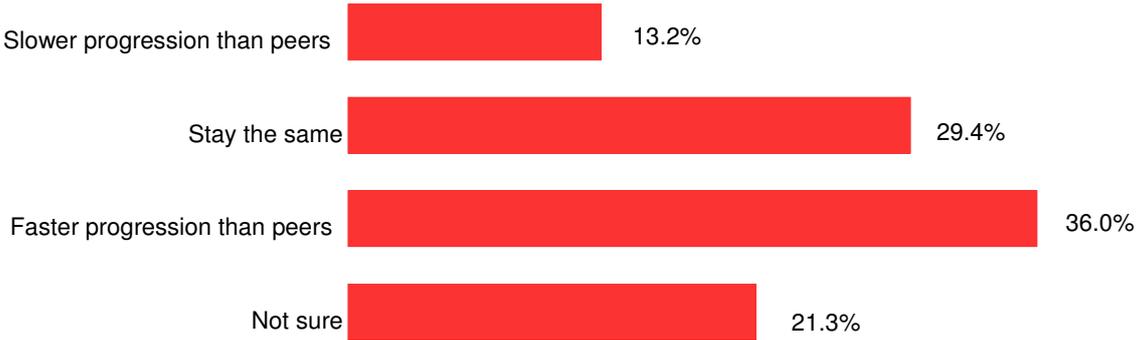
(n=294 bis 296)

Figure 32: Motives for choosing Vienna

## 7.2. Vienna benefits careers

Thirty-six percent indicate that working in Vienna is having a beneficial effect on their career. Thirteen per cent, however, consider themselves to be at a disadvantage in comparison with employees who stayed in their home country. Twenty-nine per cent see no difference and 21% are unsure.

### In principle, how do you think your own career will be impacted by your time in Vienna?

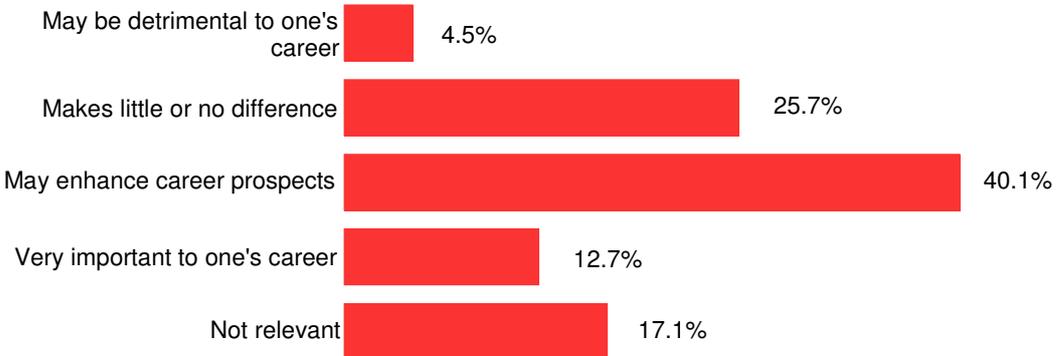


(n=272)

Figure 33: Does working in Vienna benefit one’s career?

The reputation of the city as being beneficial to one’s career is important for the choice to work in Vienna. Fifty-three per cent of the respondents indicate that employees in their company or organisation back home consider working in Vienna as being likely to enhance one’s career prospects. Thirteen per cent even indicate that their colleagues back home perceive it as very important to one’s career.

### How is working in Vienna perceived by employees in your organization in your home country?



(n=292)

Figure 34: Vienna’s reputation for enhancing career prospects

### 7.3. Careers – a direct comparison with London

On several counts, Vienna’s rating approaches that of the financial metropolis of London. Asked if they would recommend Vienna as a city to work in to anyone with the opportunity to do so, 78% answered with a clear “yes”. In a comparable study in London, the corresponding value was 85%. The two studies had identical target groups and the questions in this category.

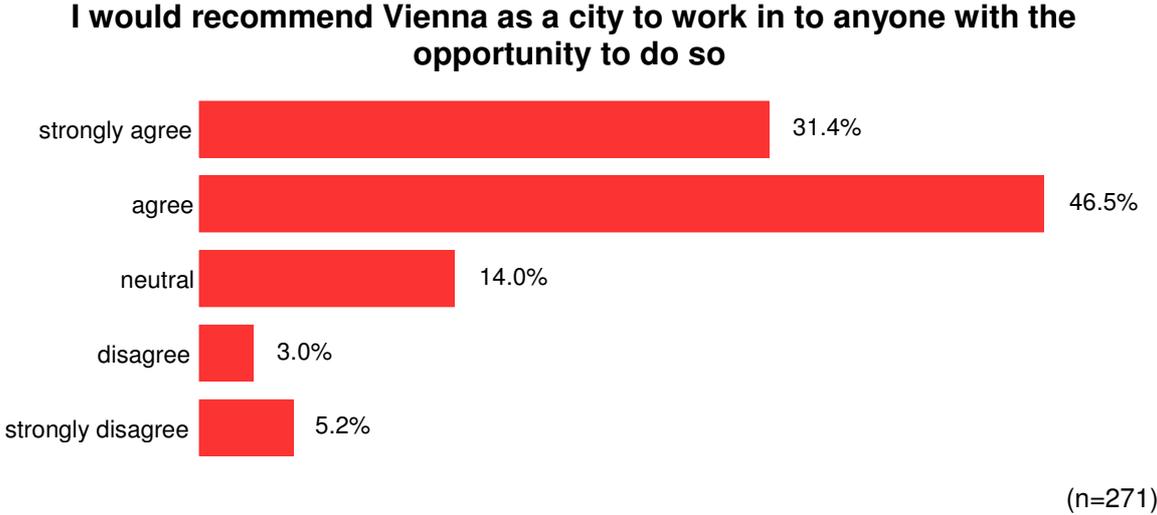


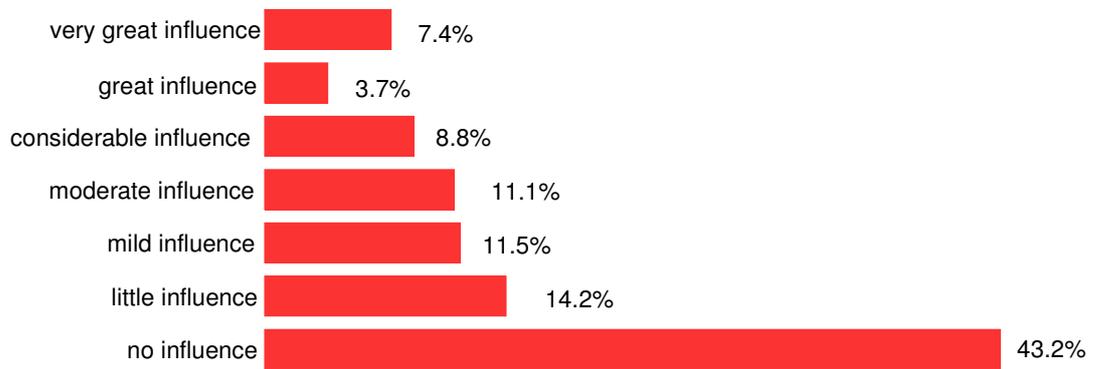
Figure 35: Recommendation to colleagues

The available data also shows that, in direct comparison with London, Vienna scores especially for its quality of living:

- Sixty per cent rate the opportunities for leisure activities to be “world class” (London 55%).
- Eighty-one per cent consider that Vienna provides them with “world class” arts and culture experiences (London: 80%).
- Vienna gets good marks for its high level of safety (61% as opposed to London at 14%).

In the area of business, however, Vienna cannot compete with London. Only 20% of the respondents indicated that Vienna’s reputation as a global centre for business or their area of activity was significant for their decision to come to Vienna. By contrast, this factor was important for two thirds of the London expatriates.

### Reputation of Vienna as a global center for business / my area of activity



(n=296)

Figure 36: Significance of Vienna's reputation as a global centre for business

# 8. Summary and Outlook

Vienna is a very attractive city for expatriates. Ninety-one per cent enjoy being in Vienna, almost 70% would probably move here again (only 9% find this unlikely). Around three quarters are satisfied to very satisfied with their stay.

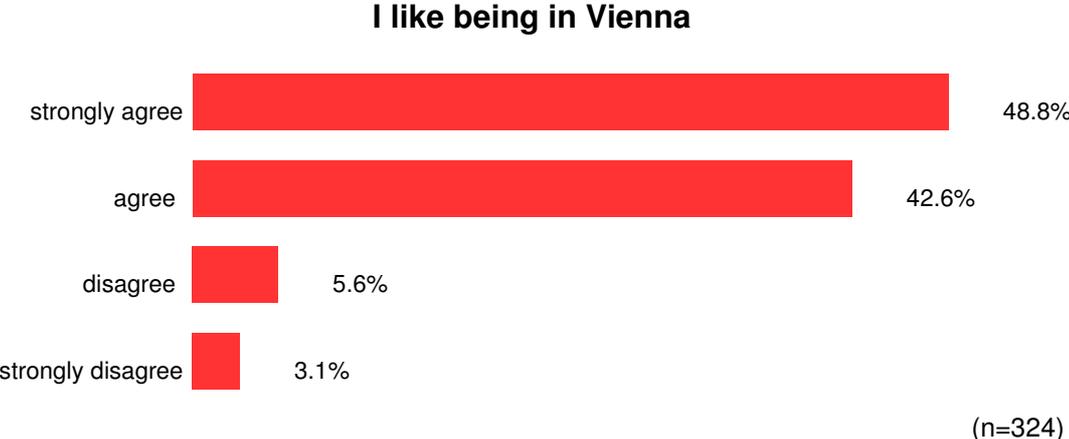


Figure 37: Agreement with “I like being in Vienna”

### Based on what you know now, would you decide again to move to Vienna?

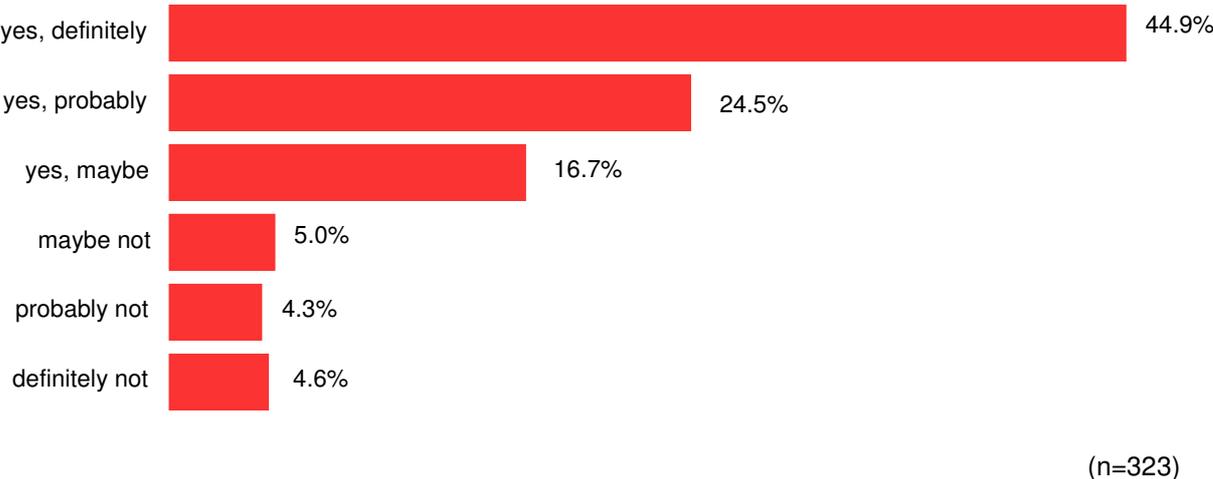
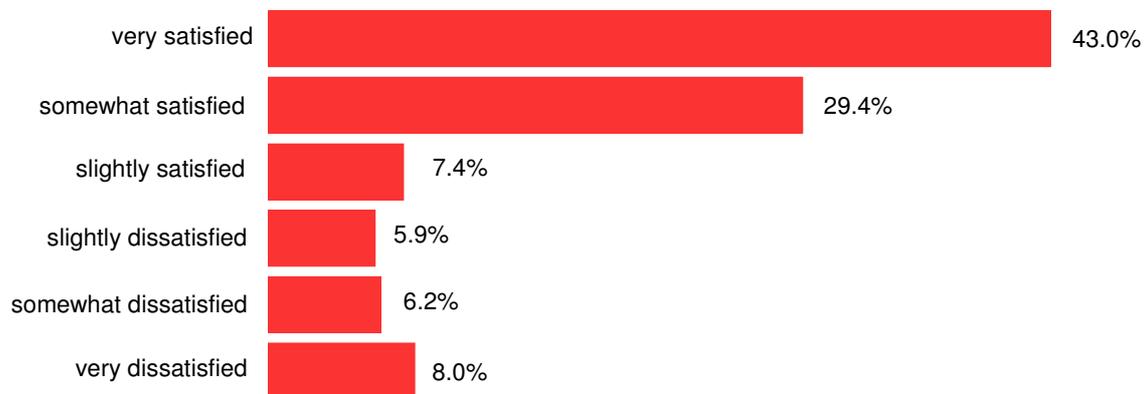


Figure 38: Agreement with “I would decide again to move to Vienna”

## Overall, I am ... with living in Vienna



(n=323)

Figure 39: Agreement with “Overall, I am satisfied with living in Vienna”

Responsible for this high level of satisfaction are, above all, the high quality of living, the high level of personal safety and the infrastructure, which is considered to be first class. Schools and universities and the healthcare system are rated as being good. The respondents were somewhat more critical of the bureaucracy of public administration.

Vienna is underestimated abroad as a business location. Before arriving in the city, only one third of the respondents considered Vienna to be a business centre for CEE or an international congress centre, as opposed to two thirds after arrival. This clearly indicates that Vienna’s attributes as a business location should be communicated more clearly.

Everyday irritations cloud this positive picture. The dirtiness of the streets and the tolerance of smoking, in particular, have a cumulative effect that threatens to mask many of the positive aspects of Vienna.

Vienna is generally experienced as an unfriendly city. What is more, many of the respondents – the majority of which are university-educated, hold positions with a high social status and live in good material conditions – notice a xenophobic attitude, and only one half feel welcome in Vienna. Through their private and professional international contacts, these persons transmit their impressions of Vienna to the world and thereby help shape the international image of Vienna and Austria.

Vienna is not only perceived as a good place to live but also as a good stepping stone for one’s career. The majority of those asked would recommend accepting a professional assignment in Vienna to their colleagues.