 CHILDHOOD IN AUSTRIA: CASH AND CARE, TIME AND SPACE, CHILDREN’S NEEDS, AND PUBLIC POLICIES  
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Preface

This report is the result of a collaborative effort of four authors interested in childhood and social policies, representing four different institutions. The work was initiated, but not funded, by the European Cooperation Programme in the field of Scientific and Technical Research (COST), more precisely in the frame of COST Action A 19 ‘Children’s Welfare’.

Since there was no extra-funding for this report, we had predominantly to rely on available studies and data. As far as possible, we were aiming at using the most recent data available, however, between the final draft submitted in summer 2003 and the printing new studies may have appeared, which could not be considered any more.

We refrained from including any general substantive statement in this preface. We leave it to the reader to draw conclusions from the material presented in this report as well as to develop a comparative perspective by confronting it with other national reports contained in this volume.

On the whole, we enjoyed writing this report, and we do hope, readers will enjoy reading it.

The national and European context

History, politics and government

While 1000 years of Austrian history, from the 10th to the beginning of the 20th century may be described in terms of rise and growth of an empire, the last 90 years turned out to be extremely turbulent for Austria and her people. After the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1918, when modern Austria
became just one of the successor states, the problem was not only managing a
transition from a great empire into a small state, but finding a new national
identity for that state at all.

While the First Republic (from 1918 to 1938) was marked by a most
stimulating cultural life in particular in the capital of Vienna, it turned out to be
a failure economically and politically: economic depression, inflation, un-
employment, political polarisation, the installation of an authoritarian Austro-
Fascist regime (from 1933 to 1938), a Civil war (between Social Democrats and
Conservatives) in February 1934, a growing illegal Nazi party and an attempted
Nazi putsch in June 1934, and finally, occupation by Nazi Germany in March
1938, are just a few events characterising this period.

Only towards the end of the First Republic, the Austrian national question
had been addressed in a new way in an article by Alfred Klahr (1994), who laid
the theoretical foundations of the Austrian nation, as distinct from the German
nation. His ideas inspired the Austrian liberation and independence movement
in the years of the Nazi occupation (1938-45); they grew in the years after the
Second World War and became finally the official doctrine of the Second
Republic. It is partly due to this new Austrian identity, that the Second republic,
unlike the First one, did develop into a success story, in particular after 1955,
the year of the State Treaty and definite departure of the Allied Forces, who had
divided the country and its capital Vienna into 4 sectors (like in Germany) in
1945.

A balance between military neutrality on one hand and a clear profile as a
Western European democracy on the other, allowed the country, largely sur-
rounded by Socialist countries, to peacefully survive major conflicts during the
period of the cold war, as the Hungarian and Czechoslovak crises in 1956 and
1968 respectively. Only in 1995, after the Central-Eastern European revolu-
tions, Austria (together with Sweden and Finland) has become a member of the
European Union; but only with the EU enlargement 2004, borders which had
been created after the First World War disappear, and from a geopolitical view,
Austria returns from the periphery to the centre of Europe.

Austria is a parliamentary democracy with some presidential and plebiscitary
features. The basis of the Second republic is laid out in the federal constitution
of 1920, which is to a great extent the work of Hans Kelsen, as well as in the
Austrian State Treaty and the law on permanent neutrality, both adopted in 1955
when Austria regained its full sovereignty.

The Nationalrat (national council) and the Bundesrat (federal council), the
two houses of the Austrian parliament, are the country’s main legislative bodies.
The Nationalrat is elected for a four year term by proportional representation on
the basis of equal, direct, secret and personal suffrage for adult citizens. It
approves federal legislation and any newly formed government. At present four
The federal government is headed by the chancellor, who, along with the vice-chancellor and the cabinet ministers, conducts the government affairs. From 1945 to 1970 Austria had Christian-democrat chancellors, while from 1970 to 2000 social-democrats. Therefore we may conclude that firstly, the period after the second world war up to the end of the 20th century was characterised by relative stability, the average time of service of a chancellor being around 7 years, and that secondly, the evolution of political majorities and governments was not determined primarily by the idea of alternation, but by rather long periods of Christian-democrat (25 years) and social-democrat (30 years) hegemony. The formation of a centre-right government in 2000 was amply registered not only in Austria, but also internationally. Elections in 2002 brought an overwhelming victory for the Christian-democrats, while the right freedom party was defeated. A new centre-right government was formed in 2003.

Austria is composed by nine federal provinces or states, which have legislative and administrative competences in all matters not explicitly reserved for federal legislation. In addition to the federal and provincial levels, there are approximately 100 political districts, in which both federal and provincial governments are running district offices within the frame of their competences; and last, but not least, there are some 2000 autonomous municipalities of quite different area and population, ranging from a few hundred inhabitants only to the 1.6 million inhabitants of the federal capital Vienna.

**Economy and welfare state**

While Austria was a latecomer in joining the EU, she took part in the introduction of the new European currency right from the beginning. Economically, the country is in a good situation in both absolute and relative terms. Per capita GDP is high, approximately 10 per cent above EU level. The general public debt is high, but not higher than EU average; inflation is low, at EU average approximately; and unemployment is low, fairly below EU average.

With a view to the labour market, the EU/Eurostat 2002 report on The Social Situation indicates the following figures for the year 2000 (figures in brackets refer to the whole of the EU): 3.2% (7.0) male and 4.4% (9.7) female unemployment; 0.9% (3.1) male and 1.2% (4.5) female long-term unemployment (12 months or more); 4.8% (14.9) male and 5.8% (17.6) female youth unemployment (15-24 years); and 2.2% (7.7) male and 3.0% (7.9) female youth long-term unemployment (6 months or more). Surprisingly for a modern economy like the Austrian, 13.4% of the workforce are still employed in the
agricultural sector (this is the second highest share after Greece), while 25.0% are employed in industry and 61.5% in the services.

The foundations of the Austrian welfare state were laid in the late 19th century by a conservative government, and social protection – like in Germany – is predominantly employment centred and insurance based. In other words the Austrian welfare state fits quite well the criteria of the conservative model according to Esping-Andersen (1990). In 1999 28.6% of the GDP (27.6 for the EU) was spent for social protection. Per capita expenditures, however, were 16% above the EU level. 47.4% (46.0) of total expenditures were allocated to old age and survivors benefits; 35.4% (34.9) to sickness, health and disability; 5.4% (6.8) to unemployment; 10.3% (8.5) to family and children; and 1.6% (3.8) to housing and social exclusion.

Total expenditure on health corresponds with 8.0% of GDP more or less to the EU average of 8.2%. Infant mortality rate per 1000 life births was in 2000 4.8 (4.9); life expectancy at birth in 1999 74.4 (74.6) years for males and 80.9 (80.9) for females; disability-free life expectancy at birth for 1996 is 62 (63) years for males and 66 (66) for females. The number of persons killed in road accidents per million inhabitants is in Austria with 120 considerably higher than in the EU at large (with 108).

Demography

Austria covers an area of 84,000 square kilometres; while two thirds of the area – due to the Alpine profile of the country – are not adequate for settlement, the remaining part, mainly the basins and valleys, is rather densely populated. With 8 million inhabitants Austria held place 11 among 15 EUropean countries (behind Sweden and before Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Luxembourg); but along with the accession of a number of smaller countries in 2004, Austria moves upwards in the direction of the median population among the 25 EUropean nations.

More than nine per cent of the total population are non-Austrian citizens; in Vienna the percentage of non-Austrians is well above 16%. With eight per cent Austria has the highest percentage of non-EU nationals among the 15 EU countries. Persons from Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), Turkey as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina represent 60% of non-EU nationals in Austria. The percentage of children under 15 years living in non-Austrian (both EU and non-EU) households is above 14%.

During the last 50 years, total population has been increasing steadily and significantly from 7 to 8 millions, while in the forthcoming 50 years it is predicted to remain rather stable at slightly above 8 millions. However, like in other economically advanced countries, this overall trend concerning the total
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population does not reflect the development of the child population. On the contrary, while total population has increased between 1971 and 2000, in the same period of time the child population (all persons below 15 years) dropped in (absolute and) relative terms from 24 to 17%. This means, that there was a remarkable shift in the age composition of the total population from the young to the old population, a trend foreseen to continue also in forthcoming years and decades.

This shift, usually referred to as ageing of society, is the result of both increasing life expectancy and declining fertility rates. From the early 1960s to 2000 the absolute number of births dropped from 130,000 to below 80,000. In the same period of time the total fertility rate dropped by more than 50% from 2,78 to 1,34. However, the general decline of fertility rate needs some more detailed consideration. In Figure 1, total fertility is broken down to age specific fertility for 5 five-year brackets from 15 and 40 years. First of all, the general trend of declining fertility is reflected also in a decrease of fertility for all age brackets from 1961 to 2000. From 1981 to 2000 we can, however, observe an ongoing decrease for women aged below 30, an increase instead however for those aged 30 and above. This leads to a shift of the order of age specific fertility rates, with the bracket 25–30 replacing the bracket 20–25 as the most fertile age span. This is reflected also in a steadily increasing average fertility age, reaching 28.1 years (27 years at the first birth) in 1999.

**Figure 1.** Births to 1000 women / 5 age groups / 1951-2001.

![Births to 1000 women / 5 age groups / 1951-2001](image)

Today, in Austria childhood is above all family childhood in the sense that children are born and grow up in some kind of family, while substitute care is the rare exception to this rule (around one per cent). As to children and family forms, the traditional family with 2 married parents is with 73.6% still a predominant family form, followed by lone-parent families with 22.5% and co-habiting couples with 3.9%. Although legal discrimination of children born out of wedlock was abolished in the 1970s, this group is still accounted for in national statistics. While the number of births in general was declining between 1975 and 2000, the number of births given out of wedlock increased until 1996, and from then on remained more or less constant at a relatively high level. Consequently, the percentage of births given out of wedlock increased from 18% in 1980 to 31% in 2000. In 2001 one out of 3 babies was born out of wedlock. Remarkable variations are to be noted between the Austrian provinces ranging from 21.3% (Burgenland) to 43.1% (Carinthia).

Impact on childhood

While the UN Convention on the rights of the child introduces the concept of identity mainly as individual property, collective identity matters for children,
too. Austrian childhood since the 1970s has differed from that in the 1930s not only because of improved standards of living, but also because a collective Austrian identity containing a firm belief in the future of this country had emerged, which was appropriate to promote also security and solidarity between different generations. Besides this fundamental national consensus, there was enough room for political conflict, concerning childhood, family and women’s policies. Hegemonial periods of government at large coincide also with hegemonial dominance in political discourses on childhood. This will be shown in the last section of the report.

An analogous observation may be made with a view to federalism. It is an important element of the Austrian constitution in general, but it has a particular relevance for childhood and childhood policies, too. Financial transfers, in particular the universalistic child benefits, are legislated and administered by the federation. Day care instead, is legislated by the provinces, however, actually provided by the local municipalities; only the education of kindergarten teachers is a federal matter. Child and youth welfare is regulated in 10 laws, a federal law dealing with some basic matters and nine provincial laws. As to children’s ombudswork, there are again 10 different child commissioners in Austria, namely a federal one, which is institutionally rather weak, and nine provincial ones, some of them institutionally quite strong.

Economically Austria is outperforming at the EUropean level: in particular per capita GDP and unemployment figures are much better than EU average. The share of public expenditures for families and children with a view to total expenditures for social protection are slightly above EU average. However, in spite of these generally good economic conditions, Austria does have a child poverty problem, as will be shown in the section on the ‘generational income distribution’.

As to the age composition of the population, there are hardly any differences as compared with the situation in the EU as a whole.

**Family: the impact of new adult lifestyles on children**

Social developments (i.e. the ageing of society, the process of individualisation and specialisation, the cultural liberalisation, economic, technical, scientific changes and many more) have undoubtedly changed private living conditions of Austrian families over the past decades. Families have to re-arrange their daily routines and their interrelationships.

Principal characteristics of these changes and their effects on children’s lives are:
**Decreasing birth rates**

Most children are born and grow up in some kind of family. Despite decreasing birth rates, the majority of children still has got brothers and sisters, but fewer than in the 1960ies. Apart from the under-5-year-olds, only every eighth child is an only child. Just 15% of the 10 to 14 year old children and 19% of children aged 15 to 19 live in families with three or more siblings. The number of children having three or more siblings has been decreasing continually.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>no siblings</th>
<th>at least 1 sibling</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4+ siblings</th>
<th>average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Kytir et al. 2002b, based on microcensus-data, 2001.*

Because of broken relationships, divorces and differences in age between siblings, not all ‘family members’ live necessarily in the same household. About one fourth of the 5 to 15 year-olds grow up without siblings (Kytir et al., 2002b).

We assume that the trend of declining birth rates, also caused by the sinking percentage of potential mothers (women at an age where they are able to give birth to a child), will continue up to 2010, even if the average birth rates should rise again.

**Maternal employment**

Children today do not only have ‘older’ mothers, but very often also economically active ones. On the other hand, only about half of the kindergartens are open all day and primary school finishes at lunch-time as well. Therefore, there are new challenges for children, parents and child care institutions.

As a consequence, an increasing number of children have to spend their afternoons all by themselves. In a representative survey in the ’90s 13% of the children questioned mentioned that there was no one to look after them in the afternoons (in single-parent families this situation goes for a fifth of the children). Besides the family form, also the employment status of mothers is of crucial importance as to whether 10-year-olds are looked after by an institution or by their own families. Only seven per cent of children whose mothers are not
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employed, 12% of those whose mothers are part-time employed, and 21% of the 10-year-olds with a full-time employed mother are not looked after by anyone in the afternoon (Wilk and Beham, 1994: 104).

Following empirical studies, children don’t appear to be bothered by their mothers’ employment as long as they have got the impression that their mothers do still spend enough time with them. According to a survey among 10-year-old children, this is the case if the mother is working part-time rather than full-time (Beham and Wilk, 1998; Wilk and Beham, 1994).

Instability of parenthood

The number of children (under the age of 19) that are affected by their parents’ divorce increased from 13,500 children in 1990 to 19,000 children in 2001. The likelihood of a parental divorce before the child gets 19 years old is 23.5% (Kytir et al., 2002a). This results in a larger group of children – but still a minority – growing up in changing family forms.

Despite the rising rate of separations and divorces almost every child grows up in some kind of family. More than nine out of ten children in Austria do live together with at least one parent. It is believed that during the next decades the number of children living with only one parent will rise considerably, though the majority of children will still grow up with both parents.

Table 2. Number of Children by Family Structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>children total in 1000</th>
<th>children with married parents in %</th>
<th>cohabiting parents</th>
<th>single parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2,615.6</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>2,590.0</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2,455.6</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,360.6</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2,274.4</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>2,153.2</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>2,098.1</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Separations and divorces cause severe changes for the children. This almost always implicates that children spend less time with the parent living separated from them (especially during the week). Several Austrian studies (e.g. Beham and Wilk, 1998; Haller, 1996; Wilk and Bacher, 1994; Wilk, 1998; Zartler et
al., 2002, forthcoming) say that ‘parenthood from a distance’ turns out to be difficult if there is a lack of common everyday experiences.

Ageing of society

The higher life expectancy implies an increasing number of generations living at the same time. About 96% of the children and adolescents under the age of 15 years still have got their grandparents, in 30% of the cases there is also at least one great-grandparent alive (the share drops from 42% of the under 4-year-olds to 19% of the 10 to 14 year-olds). About a fifth of the children with their grandparents still alive, share a household with them (Kytir et al., 2002b).

But even if they do not live together, in many cases there is a strong relationship, a strong bond, between them. Grandparents are often very important to the children when it comes to spare time activities or simply to conversation. Especially for children who live in cities and have got no siblings, grandparents play an important role as playmates during their first years.

Social changes and their impact on children’s time management

Time is more and more becoming a very rare and valuable resource. Family activities have to be planned and organized more consciously these days. How much time mothers and fathers spend together with their children correlates with many different factors. The number of working hours plays an important role, and in case of parental divorce or separation whether they share a household with the child or not (cf. Bucher 2001, Wilk and Beham, 1994). Most children affected by parental divorce would want to spend more time together with their non-custodial fathers, but the fathers often are unable or unwilling to dedicate more time to their children. During the past few years a lot of measures have been taken in Austria to provide possibilities to keep children’s relationships with both parents alive. According to the Parents and Child Amendment Act in 2001, there are more possibilities for shared custody. Children have a right to personal contact with their parents, minor children above the age of 14 years have got the right to file an application for a visiting arrangement on their own (i.e. without their legal representative), and the possibility for accompanied visits has been set (Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations, 2002).

However, not only children of divorced parents complain about their fathers’ lack of time, also children living with both parents do: fathers spend too little time with them during the week, and they hardly find the time for family activities since they are too committed to their jobs (Wilk and Beham, 1994). The time together with the family is mainly used for conversation, followed by family activities (playing, eating together and watching TV are considered as
very important) and family vacations (Beham et al., 1997; Bucher, 2001; Wilk and Beham, 1994). Playing with their parents is part of the common family activities for just 40% of the 10-year-olds, for the 13-year-olds this rate even drops to 10% (Bucher, 2001).

The changes in family and society do not just affect the amount of time families spend together, but also the amount of freedom for decisions given to the children. The majority of Austria’s children feel that they are taken seriously within their families (cf. Kromer, 1995) and are satisfied with the decisions they are allowed to take. A UNICEF survey among children and adolescents (aged nine to 17) shows that two thirds of Austria’s youth feel that their opinions are considered when decisions about themselves are taken (UNICEF, 2001). A quarter of the youths questioned wanted to have more individual room for decisions about the way they spend their spare time.

**Generational income distribution and redistribution**

In this section we will mainly deal with generational distributive justice with a view to income. The first part will be dedicated to child poverty and the generational distribution of net income (after taxes and transfers); in the second part the most relevant transfers will be introduced and analysed.

**Generational income distribution and child poverty**

Like in other countries, the (explicit or implicit) debate on the generational income distribution and child poverty in Austria started at the turn from the 1980s to the 1990s. This was caused by both national and international developments, such as the presentation of the Austrian Family Report 1989 (Gisser et al., 1989), the adoption of the UN Convention and its implementation in Austria (Rauch-Kallat and Pichler, 1994), as well as the international project ‘Childhood as a Social Phenomenon’ (Bardy et al., 1990-92; Qvortrup et al., 1994; Wintersberger, 1994).

Although the Family Report 1989 had rather a family than a child focus, it was clear that economic disadvantages for families with children could be reinterpreted easily as disadvantages for children as compared to the adult population. This holds in particular for the economic dimension and the section on the economic situation of families (Badelt, 1989) as contained in the report.

The first more explicit article on generational poverty in Austria was published in 1994 (Steiner and Wolf, 1994). As to child poverty and generational comparison, the findings may be summarised as follows: On the whole almost one (out of eight) million Austrians were poor. In a generational per-
Childhood in Ageing Societies

This phenomenon concerned 270,000 children below 15, 550,000 adults between 15 and 65 and 130,000 adults above 65. This corresponded to a gender-rational poverty risk of 21% for children as against nine per cent or 11% for adults in working age or senior citizens respectively. According to household type and family form, out of 270,000 poor children nine per cent were living in a lone-parent family, 16% in a one-child, 40% in a two-children, and 35% in a three-or-more-children household. According to the economic and social position of the head of the household 50% of poor children had a worker, 25% an employee or civil servant, 11% a farmer, seven per cent a self-employed, and six per cent a retired person as head of the household. Remarkable was the positive correlation between poverty and number of children in a household: it was four per cent for a childless couple, seven per cent for a couple with one child, 18% for a couple with two, and 36% for a couple with three or more children. Relevant was also the distinction according to the number of earners in the household. In households with one child, the child poverty risk was 10% for one-income and two per cent for two-income households; for two-children households the respective percentages were five per cent and 28%, while for households with three or more children they were 20% and 46%. The poverty risk of children in a female-headed lone parent family was three times as high as compared with only children living with two parents, while that of children from unemployed households was five times as high.

A more recent Unicef study (Bradbury and Jäntti, 1999) compares child poverty levels in 25 industrialised countries, among them 13 EU countries including also Austria. The data source is Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), for Austria 1987. Poverty lines are defined by 50% of national median income (for relative) and US poverty line (for absolute poverty rates). The equivalence scale is defined by $e = \{(\text{nr.of adults} + (\text{nr.of children} \times 0.7))^{0.85}\}$, a formula which – though differing considerably in its appearance – produces rather similar outcomes with a view to the old OECD scale. According to this study, Austrian child poverty levels are not alarming in a cross-country comparison. As to relative child poverty, only five countries are better, namely the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden and Norway); as to absolute child poverty, seven nations are better, namely Luxembourg, Switzerland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Taiwan and Denmark). But also in a generational perspective, the relative poverty risk for children (5,6) – though higher than for the total population (4,8) as well as for the elderly population (5,5) – does not show similarly great deviations as in the study by Steiner and Wolf (1994).

The Report on the Social Situation in the EU 2001 (European Commission/Eurostat, 2001) compares poverty rates between gender and age groups as well as between the 15 member countries. Poverty rates are defined, however, by using the modified OECD scale for equivilisation of per capita incomes as well as a poverty line of 60% of the national median. Data source is the European
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Community Household Panel ECHP 1996. In this report poverty rates for Austria (total, male and female population as well as different age groups) are well below poverty rates for the EU. This statement includes also age specific poverty rates for the young population <16 (16% for Austria, while 20% for the EU), and the elderly population >65 (17% for Austria, while again 20% for the EU). The interesting phenomenon in this connection is, however, the inter-generational comparison for Austria: 16:17 in favour of the young population, which means that according to this report, in Austria elderly persons would be more likely to be poor than children. In relation to the first study reported in this section (Steiner and Wolf, 1994) this would mean a major shift of generational poverty, it is however unclear to which extent this improvement with a view to child poverty is due to improvements in the monetary transfer system for families with children on one hand, and to changed measuring instruments (e.g. a flatter equivalence scale) on the other.

A most recent analysis of income data in Austria allowing for comparison between (demographically and socio-economically) different household types (Bauer and Klotz, 2002) is based on micro census data 1999 and 2000 and uses the modified OECD scale for equivalisation. From comparing median income levels with a view to different household types the following assertions may be derived: (1) Median incomes are generally digressive with a view to the number of children in a household. (2) Incomes are – generally as well as for classes defined by number of children – lower in one-parent than in households with 2 or more adults. (3) Incomes are – generally as well as for classes defined by number of children – lower in one- than in dual-earner households. (4). Taking the overall median income of €17.080 per year as reference, attention should be paid to lone-parent families with 2 or more children (€11.700) as well as with one child (€12.070); to one-earner households with 3 or more children (€11.840), with 2 children (€12.730) and with 1 child (€15.110); as well as to dual-earner households with 3 or more children (€15.610).

An analysis of expenditures of different household types (Kronsteiner, 2002) is based on the same micro census data (1999/2000), but uses for equivalisation the official scale of Statistics Austria, applying the same parameters for adults as the old OECD scale, however varying the weight of children with increasing age. By smoothing the different weights for children under 18 and assuming constant cohorts throughout the years, the difference would not be significant with a view to the old OECD scale (0,51 for a child instead of 0,5). While – in analogy to equivalence income – also equivalence expenditures decrease with increasing number of children in a household, equivalence expenditures are relatively insensitive with a view to the socio-economic criterion of the number of employed persons in the household (one- or dual-earner households).


**Figure 3.** Net income per person among couples with 0, 1, 2 or 3+ child(ren) / 1 or 2 earners. 1999.

In Figure 3 the same official equivalence scale of Statistics Austria is used for calculating net incomes of couples with different demographic and economic characteristics for 1999. Assertions 1) and 3) above are being confirmed.

After submission of the final draft of this report, the results of a new study on the costs of children in Austria (Guger et al., 2003) have been made available. The authors distinguish between direct (expenditures by or for children) and indirect costs (opportunity costs, in particular income foregone), and arrive at the conclusion that indirect costs generally exceed direct costs. As to household patterns, the authors pay attention to the number of adults (one or two+) and children (0, 1, 2, 3+), however, they do not consider the number of incomes (one or two income/s). The study confirms that generally the purchasing power of households with children is lower than of households without children; that it decreases with the number of children in a household; and that it is lower in households with one adult only than in households with two or more adults. The authors find out also, that children’s costs vary considerably with the age of a child. Based on econometric analysis, the authors estimate an empirical Austrian equivalence scale which they compare to the existing normative scales; and according to these estimates, the empirical Austrian scale rather corresponds to the EU (or modified OECD scale) than to the (old) OECD scale. There is not sufficient time to evaluate the results of this study from a child-research centred perspective, we keep however some
reservations with a view to the empirical equivalence scale as the correct reflection of children's real needs and costs. It might well be that the age variations of children’s costs referred to above are partly due to the limited negotiation power of younger children, and that the empirical scale in such way is based on a systematic underestimation of the costs of younger children as compared to teenagers as well as of children in general as compared to adults at large.

**Child-relevant monetary transfer payments**

Incomes considered in the previous section are net incomes after taxes and transfers. In the following section we will focus on child and family centred transfers and tax regulations in Austria (Kammer für Arbeiter und Angestellte, 2002). In principle we see in this context four potential objectives/functions of financial transfers, all of them being relevant for family and childhood policies in Austria, too:

1. direct child benefits which may be interpreted as basic income for minors who usually do not have an income of their own (although legally a parent, but not the child is beneficiary);
2. tax reductions aiming at horizontal distributive justice, i.e. tax credits or allowances reducing the tax burden of adults with economically dependent children;
3. financial compensation for income foregone, because parents, usually mothers, interrupt their occupational career for taking care of a small child;
4. financial compensation for informal activities of social or collective utility, in particular care for small children by parents, mostly mothers.

The most important financial transfer in Austria is family allowance (Familienbeihilfe), a universal benefit given to resident families with children. Young adults under 26 who are in education (e.g. university students) also benefit from this scheme. The benefit level depends on both birth order and age of the child. In addition, a tax credit for children (Kinderabsetzbetrag) of €50.90 is paid monthly for each child with permanent residence in Austria. This tax credit was introduced and stepwise increased after rulings by the Constitutional Court. It is therefore necessary to mention it as a transfer in its own right. Organisationally it is generally paid together with the family allowance explained before. Therefore we may add child tax credit (Kinderabsetzbetrag) to family allowance (Familienbeihilfe), and we arrive at Table 3:
Table 3. Total child benefit: family allowance + tax credit (a month in €).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 to &lt; 4 years</th>
<th>4 to &lt;10 years</th>
<th>10 to &lt;19</th>
<th>19 to &lt;26</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; child</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; child</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; and further children each</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Low-income families with 3 or more children get an additional allowance of €36,40 per month for the third and any further child. For children with disabilities a supplement of €138.00 is granted per month. Furthermore a tax credit of €364 a year is available to couples (with or without dependent children) if one partner is not gainfully employed as well as to lone parents, i.e. lone mothers or fathers with at least one dependent child.

In addition to direct child benefits and tax credits, Austrian social security regulations foresee also transfers for compensating income losses caused by parenthood. A strictly gendered transfer is the maternity benefit (Wochengeld), which is granted to working mothers 8 weeks before expected and 8 weeks after delivery. It is legally forbidden to employ a person in this period. On the basis of a medical certificate, maternity leave may begin earlier; in case of early or Caesarean delivery as well as delivery of twins, the maternity leave period after delivery will be extended to 12 weeks. Maternity leave benefit corresponds to the net income received previously.

After the end of maternity leave, till 2001, parental leave benefit (Karenzgeld) was paid to employees, both mothers and fathers, who took time off work to look after a child. 52 contributory weeks to unemployment insurance within the last two years were required (for mothers aged under 25 years only 16 weeks of employment + 4 weeks maternity leave). If only one parent (usually the mother) took parental leave, maximum duration was 18 months. The duration was extended to 24 months, if also the partner (usually the father) was willing and able to take parental leave. The parental leave account could be handled quite flexibly: two alternations were permitted between parents; for 31 days max. both parents could receive parental leave benefit; also half days could be deducted from the account, if employers provided part-time employment. The level of payment was €410 a month, + €29 for each dependent child, the newborn child excluded. For the income of a parent taking parental leave benefit there was a strict earning limit of €296 per month, while the income of the other parent was irrelevant.

As of January 2002, the former parental leave benefit was substituted by a universal childcare allowance (Kinderbetreuungsgeld). This allowance of €436
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per month, which may be paid to all resident parents of a child under 3 years, does not depend on previous employment at all. It may rather be interpreted as compensation for a service of collective or social utility (childcare) rather than for income foregone. While the amount of the financial benefit was increased only slightly with a view to the former parental leave benefit, its duration was extended considerably from 18 to 30 months, or from 24 to 36 months respectively. As in the case of parental leave benefit, only the income of the parent receiving the allowance counts, however, the limit for additional income has been increased: while before the reform a recipient of the old parental leave benefit (usually the mother) was allowed to earn only up to €296 per month, with the introduction of the new childcare allowance this limit has been increased to €1,050 per month. Subsequent to this change, the percentage of mothers who had an additional income from employment between €296 and €1,050 per month has risen from three per cent before the reform to 17% in November 2003.

The transformation of parental leave benefit into childcare allowance decided and implemented by the Centre-Right government was in the beginning strongly opposed by the (Social democrat and Green) opposition parties. However, for a great majority of families the new regulations are advantageous. This holds in particular for mothers with low-income jobs, who – provided that alternative (formal or informal) childcare is available – may continue to work and receive childcare allowance in addition to their salary. Although it may still be premature to assess the final outcome of this reform, a first study initiated by the Chamber of Labour has come to the following preliminary conclusions (as of November 2003) (Bundeskammer für Arbeiter und Angestellte, 2004): (1) The number of parents (predominantly mothers) included in this programme has risen from app. 80.000 to app. 150.000. (2) Simultaneously a number of other, mostly means-tested programmes could be abolished. (3) Employment levels among receivers of parental leave allowance have risen, and there is also a trend from employment below the marginal earnings threshold towards more regular (probably part-time) employment. (4) There seem to be problems with a view to the transition from parental leave to work: unemployment rates of mothers have risen. (5) There is hardly any improvement concerning fathers’ involvement in this programme. (6) The slight increase of childcare allowance (compared to previous parental leave allowance) has been compensated by inflation meanwhile.

With the exception of tax credits, all financial transfers mentioned are financed (exclusively or predominantly) from the Family Allowance Fund or Familienlastenausgleichsfonds (in literal translation: family burden equalisation fund). This fund finances or subsidises also other policies and services for families with dependent children (school books and transportation, preventive medical care, child support etc.). In addition there are also other benefits made
available to families with children by provincial and local authorities, for instance subsidised childcare and housing.

Obviously child benefit packages differ widely between (and even within) nations. Cross-national comparison is difficult, because due to national, regional and local regulations, criteria for in- or exclusion of families also differ widely. However, a comparison of child benefit packages between 22 economically advanced countries (Bradshaw and Finch, 2002; Wintersberger and Wörister, 2003) sees Austria (before Luxembourg and Finland) among the leading nations with a view to child-related financial transfer payments.

Conclusion
Like any other economically advanced nation, Austria has a child poverty problem, too. On the whole, overall economic prosperity and social integration as well as a quite comprehensive system of monetary transfers to families with dependent children have contributed to keeping this problem at a fairly modest level in a cross-national perspective. All relevant studies agree, that the risk of child poverty is predominantly connected with demographic (number of children/ lone motherhood) as well as socio-economic (number of incomes in a household) criteria. With a view to statistics making poverty appear rather an old-age than a childhood phenomenon in Austria, the authors have doubts with a view to the equivalence scales used.

Day care and care gaps – services for children or working parents?

Services form a vast area, which may be structured along various criteria. One may functionally distinguish between childcare, education, health and social services etc. One may list services along the public/private divide or the provision by the statutory, voluntary and/or market sectors. Yet another approach may depart from the distinction between formal and informal services, or from the flow of monetary and non-monetary resources (e.g. time given and received). General information on services is scarce; in addition it is difficult to provide a generational break down, that is to indicate children’s share of a certain type of service. Only services, which are exclusively reserved to children, may be allocated clearly. This section is on childcare services, a most relevant sector among services for children at large, and one exclusively dedicated to children.

Day care is provided by day care centres and schools, which are the main service institutions for children in modern society. At present, around 90% of
children attend formal day care institutions for two, and around 60% for three years, while 100% attend school for at least nine years. Public expenditures on day care and schools, impressive as they may be, should not generate the idea that day care functions are mainly taken care by those institutions. According to Art 18 UN Convention, childcare is primarily a parental responsibility, and hence institutional day care to be seen in a complementary position with a view to parental care. And indeed, the most relevant care resource for children are parents, usually mothers (and other relatives). We will, therefore include some information on parental employment patterns.

Depending on age, there is also a great deal of self care as well as care by siblings and other children, but we do not know much about this. For historical reasons formal childcare institutions and schools are not primarily child centred at all. Quite often childcare institutions are seen as services to working parents (mothers) rather than to children themselves; and schools as teachers’ rather than children’s work environment. The generation of public budgets and official statistics is guided by prevailing discourses and ideologies, and therefore we cannot account for what children give and take in schools and day care centres.

**Day care institutions**

Today, approximately 270,000 children are in formal day care (schools not included), 70,000 more than 20 years ago (despite a decreasing total child population. Increases were most remarkable in the middle of the 1980s and between 1992 and 1997 (Figure 4).

The age distribution of children in formal day care is shown in Figure 5. It confirms the relevance of formal day care for children aged 3, 4 and 5 in institutions, referred to as kindergarten. As for smaller children, there are also formal day care institutions, referred to as crèches or day nurseries, however, their relevance is insignificant for children aged 0, and rather limited for those aged one and two. Extra-familiar day-care institutions for children below three years are the exception to the rule in Austria: less than six per cent of children are registered. Eight out of ten mothers who send their children to crèches are employed, one sixth of them part-time. There are regional differences: in some provinces crèches are reserved for children of employed mothers only. The share of foreign children is 15%. 17% of children in crèches live in single parent families. 96% of crèches are open all-day, and 79% of the children actually spend their whole day there. These children, but also a major part of the so-called ‘half-day-children’, have lunch in the crèche (Statistics Austria, 2002a: 107ff.). The average group size was reduced from 14.2 children per group in 1996/1997 to 12.5 children in 2001/2002 (Statistics Austria, 2002a: 9).
The number of children cared for by some kind of extra-familiar institution rises substantially when they reach kindergarten age (three years). The institution kindergarten has two main functions: daycare on the one, and pre-school education on the other hand. However, kindergartens are completely independent from the school system; they are regulated by the nine provinces and organised by local authorities, voluntary organisations, private companies or, exceptionally, by parents’ cooperatives.

Four out of ten children enrolled spend half of the day at kindergarten; eight out of ten up to a maximum of 30 hours a week, which is an average of 6 hours a day. Children of employed mothers stay 1-2 hours more per day than their peers with non-employed mothers (cf. Charlotte-Bühler-Institut, 1994; Duller, 2000). Half of the mothers of kindergarten children are employed, 56% part-time, that is 28% of all mothers (Statistics Austria, 2002a).

The opening hours (or the daily duration of children’s stay at kindergarten) are not always compatible with the mothers’ (parents’) working hours. However, improvements are registered with a view to opening hours: a number of part-time institutions, functioning only in the morning, have been transformed into full-time (i.e. morning and afternoon) kindergartens. In 2001/02 58% of kindergartens operated full-time, i.e. morning and afternoon, 22% mornings

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**Figure 4.** Children in daycare centres / 1980-2002.

*Source: Statistics Austria, 2002a.*
only, while the remaining 20% operated mornings and afternoons, but were closed over lunchtime.

Furthermore, the fact that many children – in addition to the kindergarten – are regularly looked after by their grandparents, nannies or by other persons in charge, is not only due to the opening hours, but also to the traditional attitudes of parents and kindergarten teachers as well as the actual frame conditions. The majority of teachers believe that, under the given circumstances, 3-year old children should not stay more than 4 hours and 4- to 5-year olds not more than 6 hours a day at the kindergarten (e.g. Charlotte-Bühler-Institut, 1994).

Though the main purpose of school is pedagogical, there is also an implicit childcare dimension. Originally school attendance was restricted to the morning hours; afterwards children were expected to have a meal at home, and to do their homework on their own in the afternoon. While this time regime is still prevailing in primary school, in secondary school – due to curricular enlargements more and more afternoon hours are meanwhile occupied by school lessons, but the availability of school lunch is still rather the exception than the rule. Therefore, day care remains a problem also for school children, and a minority of them is registered in official after school programmes and clubs (in Austria referred to as ‘Hort’). The percentage of children is decreasing along with age from 12% for primary ones to insignificant levels for teenagers at lower secondary level. Again we have to raise the question about care resources of the majority of children in primary school age (six to nine years).

Figure 5. Children in day care depending on age (%), 2000.

Source: Statistics Austria, Arbeiterkammer Wien, own calculations.
Since matters of daycare are regulated predominantly by the provinces, it might be interesting to have a look at the regional distribution of services. Figure 5 confronts coverage by day care institutions in Vienna with Austrian average. We notice first of all a remarkable difference concerning attendance of crèches for children aged one and two years. In 2000 in Vienna, around 25% of one-year old and 50% of two-year old children were cared for in a crèche. Also with a view to afternoon care for children in primary school age the percentage of children covered in Vienna is considerably higher than for Austria at large. For explaining these differences we can only speculate: Vienna, as capital province, is an urban area without a rural hinterland; culturally, it is in the East of the country; and politically, Vienna has been a social democrat domain since world war one. Some of the differences in day care may be explained by a mixture of the mentioned (and other) characteristics of Vienna. With a view to children aged three years, at the national average around 50% attend a kindergarten. By disaggregating the data for each province, we find out that in the Eastern provinces coverage is actually almost universal or rather high, while in some Western provinces it is very or rather low. Four and five year old children instead, are usually registered in a kindergarten, either full- or half-day, throughout all the nine provinces of Austria. Provinces differ considerably also with a view to opening hour regimes: Vienna is running exclusively full-time institutions (with a few exceptions), while other provinces are characterised by a mix of regimes; in the Western provinces of Tyrol and Vorarlberg, most kindergartens close over lunchtime.

When discussing the risks and opportunities of extra-familiar child-care in Austria, during the last few years quality standards of institutions have been referred to amply (cf. Hartmann and Stoll, 1996). There are initiatives for guaranteeing high quality child-care services, e.g. development of organisations, mechanisms, indicators and check lists for quality assessment of daycare institutions: the size of groups and rooms, the equipment and the qualifications of childcare workers are considered as main quality issues. An analysis of the average group size (which is settled differently from province to province) and the average size of group rooms shows that between two and three square metres of space are available for each child. As to the size of the rooms, kindergartens in rural areas are better equipped than those in central urban areas (e.g. Charlotte Bühler Institut, 1994; Wetzel et al., 1997). Playrooms and outdoor facilities are fundamental for kindergartens, too: with some exceptions, every kindergarten has got its own playground or at least one in the close neighbourhood. About a third of the kindergartens lack areas for children to retreat temporarily (some kind of ‘cuddle-corners’), something experts consider to be rather important, especially for younger children (cf. Charlotte-Bühler-Institut, 1994).
Most kindergartens have a clear time structure for daily routines. This structure offers some kind of rhythm and orientation to each individual child and to the whole group, but it does, of course, limit children’s freedom of action. Two thirds of the kindergartens, which are open all day, have fixed bedtimes after lunch, at least for the younger children. Mostly there are also fixed times for meals; only in less than three per cent of the kindergartens children are allowed to eat whenever they feel hungry (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 1994).

Parental employment patterns

According to Art 18 UN Convention, institutional day care is to be seen in a complementary position with a view to parental care. In addition, we have noted that official childcare institutions cover only a minor part of the potential childcare demand in Austria. This holds in particular for children below 3 years and for those in primary school age; but also for children in kindergarten age there exist a number of care gaps. We will therefore take a look at the availability of parents by studying parental employment patterns. It is well known (and will be confirmed by the Austrian case), that parental care is almost exclusively maternal care. However, we do not have a politically correct and linguistically clear solution to the problem. Therefore we will be pluralistic and refer to mothers and maternal care as well as to parents and parental care. Whenever we refer to mothers or maternal care this should not be misunderstood as normative statement concerning the gender division of labour. Whenever we refer to parents and parental care, we are doing this in full awareness of the real gender distribution with a view to childcare.

Total employment rates for persons between 25 and 54 years have risen over time from below 70% in the 1950s to below 80% in 2000. This aggregate rate is however the result of a slowly converging development of male and female employment rates: namely a stagnation or minor decrease of male employment from around 95% in the 1960s and 1970s to below 90% in 2000, and an increase of female employment from below 50% in 1955 to above 70% in 2000.
From Figure 6 we learn that – by taking part-time employment rate as the key indicator — there is hardly any correlation between male employment and the presence of children in the family. For females instead there is. While for males the part-time employment rate is three per cent only and for females without children it is 11%, for females with children it is 52%. Therefore, with a view to the ratio between full-time and part-time employment, the main divide is obviously not a mere gender division, but between men at large and women without children on one hand, and mothers on the other. Even if among the three per cent of male part-time employees fathers were over represented, on the whole this phenomenon would be of rather restricted relevance as compared with the total childcare demand in a macro social perspective. However, it seems that men working part-time are predominantly students or pensioners. Therefore, the further analysis of parental employment will be restricted to mothers only.

As to regional variations, we note first of all a higher percentage of mothers in full-time employment in the capital province of Vienna: in 2000 35% of mothers with children below 15. In addition to that there are differences between the Western provinces Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Upper Austria and Salzburg (neighbouring South Germany and/or Switzerland) with full-time employment rates below 20%, and the Eastern and Southern provinces Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria and Styria with full-time employment rates above 20%.
For the whole of Austria, in the period from 1995 to 2002 the full-time employment rate for mothers with children under 15 has been rather constant at the level of app. 23%, while the part-time employment rate has steadily increased from 19% in 1995 to 31% in 2002 (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Full- and part-time employed mothers (with children under 15) 1995-2002 (%).

Source: Statistics Austria (Microcensus), own calculations.

Figure 8. Full- and part-time employed mothers 1996-2002 by number of children (%).

Source: Statistics Austria (Mikrocensus), own calculations.
If we distinguish by the number of children of mothers employed, all full-time employment rates have been rather constant during the last years, while all part-time employment rates have increased, be it for mothers of one, two or three and more child(ren). Full-time employment rates differ considerably between mothers of one child only, mothers of two children and mothers of three and more children. Part-time rates differ also between mothers of two children and mothers of 3 and more children, however there is hardly any difference between mothers of one child and mothers of two children (Figure 8).

Employment patterns of mothers vary also in relation to the age of the youngest child. While only 30% of mothers with a child below 3 are employed at all, for mothers with a child aged at least three this rate is 66% and more. For mothers with a child in kindergarten age (3-5) or compulsory school age (6-14) the predominant type of employment is part-time, while for mothers with a child 15-18 it is full-time (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Employment of women by age of youngest child 2000 (%).

The majority of children under three years is cared for by their mothers, and childcare facilities for this age group hardly exist, except for Vienna. Therefore, mothers who are employed, often need help by other persons like grandmothers etc. In 2000, while about 60.000 mothers with child(ren) under three years were employed, only about 15.000 children in this age were registered in day care centres or cared by childminders (Tagesmutter). For one group of employed mothers it is however easier to combine childcare with employment: the self-employed. They are over represented among mothers (especially with very young children), and underrepresented among women without child(ren).
Maternity and parental leave regulations instead are rather generous in Austria. While maternity leave applies to a clearly limited pre-, peri- and postnatal period, and is therefore restricted to mothers only, parental leave legislation is formulated gender-neutrally. That means, in principle fathers are entitled to take parental leave, too. However, as in the case of part-time work, acceptance by fathers, though steadily increasing, is still very low. Therefore, in reality parental leave is a right for mothers to take leave of absence to care for a small child during a restricted period of time, and to receive as financial compensation a public childcare allowance of €436 per month.

In recent legislation come into force in the beginning of 2002, these rights, which originally were restricted to employees only, were extended to all resident parents. Also the duration was extended to a maximum of 36 months, provided also the father takes a leave of absence for at least 6 months; otherwise the maximum duration would be 30 months only. In addition the income limits for beneficiaries were increased significantly with this reform (see Section on income). Subsequent to this change regular employment of mothers with children below 3 years has increased considerably.

Finally, in a gender perspective there may be added that, while mothers take almost exclusively the task of caring for children (who are prospective contributors to the public pension scheme) this is not sufficiently acknowledged in pension regulations. On the contrary: female pensions decrease with the number of children raised; and in 2000, four out of 10 women did not have an old-age pension of their own.

**Gaps between childcare system and labour market: a pressing political problem**

The interaction between the labour market, the childcare and education system (in Austria practically two separate systems), and families is rather complex. Adaptations of the childcare and education system with a view to changes in the labour market and subsequent changes for families are sometimes reluctant or insufficient. Therefore contradictions, tensions and gaps emerge. The family as the weakest, but most flexible system has to smooth out the tensions and frictions between labour market and childcare system.

While a transformation of families has taken place from the bourgeois nuclear (father breadwinner, mother homemaker) family to the dual earner family, the childcare and education system still preserves traits matching with previous, but mismatching with the current family formations. On the one hand the labour market requires flexible workforce, on the other hand there are rigidities and gaps in the childcare system. This holds countrywide for day care for children of age 1 and 2 (only some progress was made in Vienna); for some
provinces also for children of age 3, 4 and 5 with a view to care during lunch time and in the afternoon; and countrywide for primary students also with a view to school lunch and afternoon care.

Within the family it is the mothers (sometimes assisted by grandmothers) and the children themselves who have to adjust their wishes and expectations to the restricted options available, if at all, in reality. The majority of mothers exploits the existing parental leave scheme which allows them to take a leave of absence for 24 months (labour law) and to get childcare allowance for 30 months (childcare allowance act), while only a minority of mothers of children under three is employed. The majority of mothers with children of age three and above is employed, but predominantly part-time.

It is not easy to distinguish clearly between causes and effects. Is the prevalence of family conservative views an obstacle for developing the childcare system? Is the scarcity of day-care facilities only supply or also demand determined? Are generous parental leave regulations promoting conservative attitudes, or do people’s conservative attitudes force politicians to produce such generous regulations?

While mothers and women have succeeded at least in getting acknowledged as stakeholders in the childcare discourse, children themselves are still denied such position. It will be a major challenge to transform schools and day care centres into services for children, to recognise children as clients and stakeholders as well as to make them participate, and finally to acknowledge also their role as active contributors and useful members of the society.

In conclusion, while Austria is quite advanced concerning monetary transfers for families with children, this is not the case with a view to childcare. There may be a few countries in the EU which are similar or even worse, however, as the last report of the European Commission Network on Childcare (1996) demonstrated, the majority of countries was more advanced then. Even if some years have elapsed, and some progress has been achieved in this respect since then, this has not changed fundamentally Austria’s position within Europe with a view to childcare services and policies.
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The relation of childhood to time and space

Scholarisation of childhood: children in and after school

Children in schools
At the age of six years children change from kindergarten to primary school. 387,000 children (aged six to ten) were educated in our primary schools in the schoolyear 2001/2002 (this was the lowest number since 1996 and is a consequence of the low birth rates of the '90s). In the school year 2000/01, 131,355 children with mother tongues other than German were attending Austrian schools (11%). This group of pupils was particularly well-represented in schools providing compulsory general education (96,557). The Austrian education system provides some measures to facilitate the educational integration of these children. Pupils who have difficulty following in class due to insufficient German-language skills are admitted as extraordinary pupils for a maximum period of twelve months and usually placed in a class corresponding to their age-group. The head teacher and deputy heads may authorise the extraordinary status for a further twelve months if necessary. During this one to two-year period the pupils’ language difficulties are taken into account when assessing their performance. In Austria pupils with a mother tongue other than German who attend a school providing compulsory general education may also receive up to nine school years of special remedial tuition in German, for which there is also a separate curriculum. In addition, ‘supplementary instruction in the mother tongue’ is provided to preserve the cultural identity of pupils with a mother tongue other than German, and school textbooks and teaching materials in the mother tongue are currently being prepared and made available to schools (Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations, 2002).

In a primary school class the average number of children is twenty. Seven out of ten of the 10 to 14-year-old children attend a general secondary school (Hauptschule), the others attend academic secondary schools (AHS). Again there is a striking difference throughout the Austrian provinces. In Vienna the share of children attending academic secondary schools is about 50%, which is far above the Austrian average (of 30%) (Statistics Austria, 2002b).

The 1990s showed a marked improvement in the education level attained by young people in Austria. The young no longer enter the labour market immediately after compulsory schooling to the same extent as in the past; only about 12% in contrast to 16% in the late 1980s. The proportion of 16-year-olds choosing higher education instead of medium upper-secondary education is greater than a decade ago. About 42% of today’s young have a baccalaureate (‘Matura’), in contrast to 31% in the late 1980s, and slightly more than half of all baccalaureates are awarded by vocational colleges. However, the rising
number of baccalaureates, i.e. of young people eligible for university education without prior entrance examinations, does not automatically translate into an equivalent rise in the number of students entering universities. This is because about 75% of youth graduating with a baccalaureate from a vocational college enter the labour market immediately, while about 75% of those with a general education baccalaureate take the university path. The rising educational attainment level of youth has failed to bring about a marked reduction in gender segmentation of upper-secondary or higher education (Biffl, 2002: 377ff.).

During the school-year, children and young people spend a large amount of their time at school or on homework (Eder, 1995), as Table 4 shows. Schools do offer a tight time pattern. There is no flexibility concerning the start or the end of lessons. Spare time and breaks are exactly fixed.

Table 4. Time Spent in School or on Work Connected to School (per week in hours:minutes).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lessons</th>
<th>Time for going to school and back home</th>
<th>Time for homework</th>
<th>Weekly time amount total</th>
<th>Dispersion</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10 year olds</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Primary School)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5:50</td>
<td>6:55</td>
<td>37:45</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11 to 14 year olds</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>General Secondary School (HS)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7:23</td>
<td>8:42</td>
<td>49:05</td>
<td>43:45 – 54:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15 to 18/19 year olds</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


At the age of 10 years the weekly amount of time spent on school or on work connected to school almost equals the average time an adult spends on his or her employment.
According to their own estimates, it takes most children at primary school between 30 and 120 minutes every day to do their homework. The majority of those who attend general secondary school or academic secondary school first stage (the 10 to 14 year olds) spend between 30 and 180 minutes a day on their homework. Children attending an academic secondary school do spend more time on homework than their peers at general secondary schools (Eder, 1995, Spiel et al. 2002). Surveys on the time spent on homework, learning and preparing for examinations have shown striking gender differences. Girls spend more time on learning and homework than boys do (cf. Eder, 1995; Spiel and Wagner, 2000). According to Spiel and Wagner (2000) one reason for that might be that girls are more afraid of examinations and that they might do more work compensating for a lower self-confidence.

In Austria, only 13% of the school children, compared to 33% of Italian school children, are of the opinion that the amount of time they need for learning is very high (OECD 2001). One reason for the different evaluation of this matter could be the fact that in contrast to Italy, Austrian school children spend more time at school. In the current political dispute, a reduction of school lessons is being discussed by referring to international standards.

These days, more and more children spend a lot of time on education, and therefore large parts of their childhood are closely connected with their school- and training-lives (Eder and Kränzl-Nagl, 1998). What type of school children attend or whether they do extra studies after compulsory school, does not only correspond with a child’s abilities, but is still closely connected with the parents’ status of education (OECD, 2001). While only a quarter of the children whose mothers finished compulsory school, attend secondary academic schools, 80% of those whose mothers have an academic degree do so (Eder, 2001: 100).

School is a vital working and living space for children. The majority of children, as representative surveys have shown, is satisfied with the equipment in their classrooms. Regarding the functional equipment (e.g. size of chairs), six out of ten school children consider their classrooms as comfortable or very comfortable. About 30% of the school children complain about noise (from outside the classroom) and 40% complain about insufficient heating at school (Eder, 1995).

How important children consider education and schooling varies with the type of school they attend (Zentner, 2001: 99). Children attending technical and vocational colleges consider their education as more important than their peers at secondary academic schools. The majority of school children are highly satisfied with the quality of school (cf. Eder, 1995; Zentner, 2001: 107). In relation to the tuition seven out of ten children are satisfied. For Austrian pupils good teaching means that lessons are methodologically diversified and that they get the chance to design parts of the lessons themselves. Most of the demands of
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the UN Convention concerning children’s influence and participation in school are fulfilled in the Austrian school law.

Pupils are involved in various ways. Since the school year 1997/98 provision has been made for grades 5 to 8 to elect a class representative who may participate in the meetings of the school partnership bodies in a consultative capacity. This extension of the system of pupils’ representation means a step towards further democratization of the education system. The Pupils’ Representation Act (Schülervertretungsgesetz) also stipulates that regional and national pupils’ representations are to be established in Austria. Each Federal Province has its own Province Pupils’ Advisory Board, and there is also a Federal Pupils’ Advisory Board for the country as a whole (Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations 2002). In spite of the democratization of the education system, some children long for a better implementation at school itself (Eder, 1995; 1996, Zentner, 2001). Most children agree on the fact that the actual ways of participation should be widened. Three out of ten consider their actual subjective influence at school as rather little (Eder, 1998).

Spare time, in the sense of real free time, is time which remains beyond school and time spent in day care institutions. The following section shows how children spend this time.

Children after school

Leisure time is an important part of children’s lifeworlds and is – in their own perception – to a high degree connected with facets of self-determination (‘being free of duties’, ‘having the right to do what I want’, ‘not being forced to do what parents or teachers want’) (Fessel and GfK, 1996: 21ff). The extent of time that children have on their own disposition depends on their other tasks, above all connected with school. Pupils have less leisure time than other adolescents, and the amount of pupils’ spare time decreased over the past 20 years (Brunmayr, 1997: 72; Dornmayr and Nemeth, 1996: 76). Nevertheless, there is evidence that Austrian children have enough time for leisure activities (Fessel and GfK, 1995a, 1995b and 1996; IMAS, 2000, Kränzl-Nagl, 1997 and 1998; Kromer, 1995 and 2001; Wilk and Bacher, 1994). A recent survey shows that almost every second 10-year-old child (46%) says he/she has enough leisure time, and only six per cent never have enough leisure time (Bucher 2001: 160). Children experience one of the greatest degrees of happiness during leisure time activities, and the extent of leisure time is – among other factors – connected with children’s well-being (Bucher, 2001).

Children use their leisure time rather actively and perform a huge variety of indoor and outdoor activities. Amongst the most popular ones are outdoor sports activities (playing at the playground, cycling, swimming, playing football or tennis, ...). Other preferred activities are media consumption (TV, video),
computers, music, and social contacts with friends. Several studies reveal gender- and age-related differences.

As there are few general patterns, the spatial characteristics of children’s leisure time are difficult to describe for Austria. In general, children spend a big part of their leisure time outdoors, with girls staying at home more often than boys. The survey ‘Childhood in Austria’ (Wilk and Bacher, 1994) indicates that 10 year old children perform more than half of their most preferred activities (54%) outdoors. 38% of their preferred activities are indoor activities in private rooms (their homes or their friends’ homes), and eight per cent of activities can be performed both indoors and outdoors. Other data show that children play outdoors for 55 minutes daily in winter and 2,5 hours in summer (Sigl and Weber, 2002). These trends are confirmed by data for other age groups (Brunmayr, 1997: 82ff; Dornmayr and Nemeth, 1995: 110ff). Regional factors have an influence on the spatial dimensions of leisure time: Children in cities tend to perform more indoor activities, whereas children living in rural areas spend more time outdoors (e.g. Bucher, 2001). Nevertheless, from their parents’ view, Austrian children are more restricted in their possibilities to play freely outdoors compared to their parents’ childhood (Sigl and Weber, 2002) – as there are no studies on the development of children’s outdoor activities over the past decades, no indication can be made on whether this amount has been declining, stable or decreasing.

Informal meeting places and public areas such as cafés, public swimming pools, playgrounds, sportfields or shopping centres are much more important than institutionalised ones, and for young people one of the least attractive places to spend their leisure time are institutionalised youth centres (Brunmayr, 1997; Dornmayr and Nemeth, 1995).

The survey ‘Childhood in Austria’ (Wilk and Bacher, 1994) supports the thesis that 10-year-old children have only few opportunities to decide actively on their leisure time schedules, and that leisure time needs to be planned and organised. Another study on 6-10-year-old children illustrates that leisure time seems to be divided into two parts: about one half of the children experiences exact time patterns imposed by their parents (mostly mothers). The other half of the children has no fixed time schedules; they can decide upon their activities freely (Fessel and GfK, 1996). The older children are, the smaller is their satisfaction with their time schedules, the time budgets available for certain activities, and the possibilities to manage and organise their time budgets themselves. The children experience their parents’ involvement into the planning of time schedules as too extensive and as a reduction of their own liberty and sovereignty.

Different studies reveal a certain dissatisfaction among children and adolescents concerning their possibilities in leisure time, also because they experience a lack of possibilities to participate in the planning of this important
life sphere: 36% of children aged 9-13 would like to be consulted by the local government concerning qualitative and quantitative improvement of leisure activities, and a third of the children wishes the Government would improve matters of culture/sports/spare time (UNICEF, 2001: 42). The infrastructure for leisure time activities needs to be ameliorated above all in rural areas, where adolescents feel particularly restricted and complain that they don’t have enough space to meet, public transport etc. Their most urgent wish is to have spaces that are not defined, organised and controlled by adults (Brunmayr, 1997; Dornmayr and Nemeth, 1995, 1996). Other important requirements are an improvement of the mobility infrastructure (public transport), and money – e.g. almost half of the adolescents in Upper Austria (43%) say that they don’t have enough money to spend their leisure time the way they would like to.

Although children and youth organisations have a great tradition in Austria, there is a decreasing interest of children and young people to join them and to spend their free time within the framework of institutionalised leisure offers. Commercial offers instead which seem to provide more ‘adventure’ and can be chosen more flexibly, increasingly attract children and adolescents (BMUJF, 1999: 52; Kromer, 1995). In the beginning and middle of the 1990s, about two thirds of children/adolescents are organised in youth associations or groups (Wilk and Bacher, 1994; Dornmayr and Nemeth, 1996). The most recent available data show that only 38% (aged 9-17) are organised in some kind of group, and that there is a significant gender difference: whereas almost every second boy is organised (46%), this rate is less than a third for girls (29%). In terms of regional characteristics, joining a youth group is more common in rural areas (46%) than in urban areas (32%) (UNICEF, 2001: 42). Sports clubs are the most favoured organisations, especially among boys (Kromer, 2001; UNICEF, 2001).

A great number of all leisure time activities takes place with other people, and social contacts with friends are an important component of children’s own definition of leisure time (BMUJF, 1999: 54; Dornmayr and Nemeth, 1995, 1996; Fessel and GfK, 1996: 22; Kromer, 1995; Nagl and Kirchler, 1994). Over the past ten years, the importance of friendship has increased among young people (ÖIJ, 2001). The latest available data show that 57% of children aged 6-15 like to meet friends in their leisure time – followed by TV consumption (52%) and spending their spare time with the parents (50%) (Gmeiner, 2003). As underlined in the UNICEF opinion survey (2001), relationships within peer groups are warm and respectful, and the children’s friends are usually well accepted by their parents.

With rising age, more and more time is spent with peers (BMUJF, 1999: 57). About half of the 10-year-old children meet their friends every day, another 30% see them several times a week (Nagl and Kirchler, 1994: 302). Contacts with friends usually are more frequent on weekdays than on weekends, as this is
a time being traditionally reserved for family activities. The thesis that it is more difficult for children in urban areas to keep in touch with their friends than for children in rural areas cannot be confirmed for Austria (Nagl and Kirchler, 1994: 301).

The most important place for getting in contact with other children is the school (85%), as well as the neighbourhood (57%) (Nagl and Kirchler, 1994; see also Kern et al., 1994; Kromer, 1995). A high percentage of children meet their friends at home or at their friends’ homes (79%), other important places are playgrounds (35%), nature (31%) other outdoor places (17%) and child leisure institutions (25%). The places where children meet are dependent on the spatial characteristics of their living area: children in urban regions often meet at playgrounds, whereas children living in small villages meet up in nature. Children’s friendships usually do not demand a high degree of mobility: The vast majority of children (87%) live within a short distance from their friends’ homes and can reach them on foot or by bike, nine out of ten children say that meeting their friends is never or rarely complicated (Nagl and Kirchler, 1994).

**Children and the market: critical and economical consumers**

Children are, as well as adults, exposed to advertisements of our consumption society. According to opinion polls, the majority of children and adolescents consider shopping as fun, and they try to satisfy their consumption wishes as soon as possible. Though ‘saving up’ still is of high value, the will to make long-term savings is decreasing. In 1991 52% of the 7 to 15-year-old children still agreed that they would not mind saving money in the long run in order to buy something rather expensive; in 2000 only 41% (IMAS, 2000) went along with this opinion. On the other hand, the fact that three out of four of the 14 to 24-year-old children and young people would rather not buy a good than apply for a loan to afford it, proves that young people are not only conditioned on consumption (Ulram, 1999: 10). How many of the remaining quarter, who would raise a loan for an acquisition, are in debts is hard to tell due to the lack of empirical data.

First of all it is a matter of fact that only a minority of 13% of the 7 to 15-year-olds are employed and earn their own money. These 13% consist of quite equally large groups of part time and full time employees (UNICEF, 2001). In Austria, child labour is generally inadmissible, hence children under 15 should not be used for work of any type. Numerous national laws guarantee the protection of children and young people from economic exploitation, e.g. the Federal Law on the Employment of Children and Adolescents of 1987.

Even though only very few children earn money, they are in funds, as they get pocket money and money as gifts by relatives and parents. Eight out of ten
children get pocket money. The average amount in the year 2000 was 18.6 Euro per month (IMAS, 2000). The main income of children and youths are extra payments (at birthdays, for good marks, ...). Two out of three get such gifts with an average amount of about 32 Euro a month.

Not only are children allowed to dispose of their own money (Kromer, 1995; Ulram, 1999), they are also included in their parents’ consumption decisions when it comes to sweets, lemonades or to their clothing and shoes. Between 30% and 40% advise their parents when sporting goods, CDs or video games for the family are to be bought.

Though most children are quite free to decide what to do with their money, they save up some of it. The majority of adolescents consider themselves as operating economically (Ulram, 1999). Saving money still is important for both parents and children. When it comes to the point how much money children are allowed to withdraw from their bank account, only 17% of them were allowed to dispose of their bank accounts freely (in 2000 the average amount for the 7 to 15-year-old children was 741 Euro a year). As a matter of fact, the freedom of decision goes along with the age of the child: While only five per cent of the 7 to 9-year-olds were allowed to handle their money matters the way they wanted themselves, 35% of the 13 to 15-year-olds were allowed to do so. Children from larger towns are more likely to handle their money matters autonomously (IMAS, 2000).

Summing up, one can say that childhood these days is doubtlessly closely connected to consumption. But at the same time children do learn to be more critical consumers and not to blindly follow every latest craze.

**Public space: protection or attraction**

In Austria, youth protection acts regulate children’s access to public space, participation in public events, and premises prohibited for children and adolescents. As youth protection is a matter of the Länder, there are nine youth protection laws in Austria which differ quite much in their content. For example, while in Styria 15-year-old persons have the right to stay at generally accessible places until 9 p.m., the same right applies for five-year-old children in Salzburg (BMUJF, 1999).

Austrian children experience their local environment as quite safe: 58% judge the security to walk around in their living area as ‘very safe’, and 35% as ‘rather safe’ (together 93%) (UNICEF, 2001: 93). These results are confirmed by other studies (Bacher, 1998; Bucher 2001).

In general, children have various possibilities to spend their time outdoors, as there are large green spaces in Austria, even in big cities. In Vienna for example, almost half of the area is green space (Kindergesundheitsbericht
Wien, 2000), and a special parks and gardens programme for children is offered
in all districts (free of charge). Nevertheless, big public areas which could be
used by children have vanished and were replaced by buildings. Although there
is a tendency to create specialised areas for children (in particular in urban
areas), different studies reveal that children conquer all sorts of public space in
their living environment (Kose and Lička, 1995; Loidl-Reisch, 1992; Sigl and
Weber, 2002; VCÖ, 1995). Informal meeting places and public areas such as
cafés, public swimming pools, playgrounds, sportfields or shopping centres are
much more important than institutionalised ones (Brunmayr, 1997; Dornmayr
and Nemeth, 1995).

As playgrounds are often constructed in a way to attract particularly younger
children, the interest of older children (from 10 onwards) decreases continually
(Bacher, 1997). Therefore, public space and streetlife play a central part in
children’s lives, above all in rural areas: Only about a quarter of all children
who are outdoors at a certain time are on a playground, whereas three quarters
use different public areas for playing, e.g. pavements,1 parking sites, entrance
areas of buildings (like schools), market places or shopping centres (Loidl-
Reisch, 1992; VCÖ, 1995: 17). Children use public space also for playing and
strolling around, and not only as passengers. They do not accept the restrictions
linked to public places, and the rules established by adults, but they use these
places in their very own way. Therefore, it is argued that streets and public
places should be better laid out for children’s requirements in order to improve
their living environment (VCÖ, 1995).

The survey ‘Childhood in Austria’ shows that in their subjective perception,
10-year-old children find the following areas near their living place (Bacher,
1998: 276):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>positive factors</th>
<th>in %</th>
<th>negative factors</th>
<th>in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>forests, fields, meadows</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>busy road with much traffic</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garden</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>too few children</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playground outdoors</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>railing neighbours</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>park</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>too few possibilities to play ball</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public room for hobbies/games</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>no store where I can buy things</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courtyard</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>too few possibilities to cycle</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play street with restricted traffic</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>a noisy factory</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1 Playing on pavements is legally restricted in Austria (Czermak, 1998).
As illustrated in the table above, two thirds of all Austrian children find green spaces in their local environment. About 2 out of 5 children find a playground outdoors or a sports field. Children also make negative experiences: one third says that there is a busy road with much traffic near their home, and about one out of five children has too few possibilities to play outdoors. Although children’s local environment does not always meet their requirements, children rate their living environment as very good (75%) or reasonably good (21%) in terms of possibilities to play.

Children can access their preferred places for games easily (85%) or rather easily (11%), and in general (83%) they are allowed to play at these places without their parents being worried or concerned (Bacher, 1998). The most common times for children to play outdoors are in the afternoon and in the early evening hours (4-7 p.m., in summer also until 9 p.m.) (Loidl-Reisch, 1992: 30).

The most important wishes that children express concerning their access to public space concern public places of their own which can be freely arranged by themselves, without interference by adults. They also demand participation in town planning (Bacher, 1998; Dornmayr and Nemeth, 1996; Gmeiner, 2003; UNICEF, 2001). So far, their requirements are only fulfilled to a very small extent, but there are some efforts in different contexts and communities: for example, children’s right to play has now been enshrined in the residents’ regulations of the Vienna municipal housing complexes (Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations, 2002: 103), and in several cities there are different projects aiming at designing public space according to children’s wishes and needs (e.g. Kinderbüro Graz, 2002; MA 18, 2000; MA 18, 2002).

We can summarise that although Austrian children have various possibilities to use public space and find large green spaces to spend their time outdoors, there is still a lack of space that is not defined, organised and controlled by adults.

**Children and virtual spaces: TV, computer, internet and mobile phones**

Computers, internet, and mobile phones have changed children’s lives over the past years like no other consumer products. Children spend a considerable part of time in virtual space: activities with regard to media consumption and virtual space are among the most popular indoor-activities for children and young people (Kränzl-Nagl, 1998).
Children's use of TV:

Several studies show that watching TV is a very important part of children's leisure time (BMUJF, 1999; Dornmayr and Nemeth, 1995, 1996; Fessel and GfK, 1996; Fiesl et al., 1999; Gmeiner, 2003; IMAS, 2000; Kränzl-Nagl, 1998). On average, Austrian children (aged 7-15) watch TV for 108 minutes daily, this is more than ever before (IMAS, 2000). Recent data show that 46% of children aged 9-13 have their own TV-set (UNICEF, 2001: 73). There is a heavy influence of age: Whereas only 36% of 6- and 7-year-old children like to watch TV, this rate rises to 73% for the 15 year old (Gmeiner, 2003). In general, the degree of TV consumption is higher for boys (BMUJF, 1999: 88; IMAS, 2000).

If children are asked for the reasons to watch TV, items which correspond with pastime and boredom have noticeably high shares: children watch TV because they are bored (73%), because they are alone at home (61%), because of bad weather (68%), or because no one has time for them (41%). Another important reason is obviously that children want to watch programmes they like (69%) (Gunz and Ortmair, 1994). Children’s behaviour is also oriented to the TV habits of other family members (37%) and friends who are on a visit (25%). Qualitative research indicates that TV consumption is above all used as a stopgap, when there are no other (attractive) options or activities available (Kern et al., 1994: 65ff).

Public and scientific concern regarding children’s use of and exposure to television is centred on two problematic areas, namely the extent of TV consumption, and its time position during the day.

Extent of TV consumption

There is serious concern about children who watch TV very extensively. Statistics for Vienna indicate that one third of all 15-year-old children watch TV for at least four hours daily, which might lead to negative consequences for children’s health (Kindergesundheitsbericht Wien, 2000: 290). The survey ‘Childhood in Austria’ underlines for 10-year-old children that there are heavy environmental influences on children’s TV consumption: if the living area provides only few places to play or cycle, the tendency to watch TV extensively (for more than two hours daily) is higher. Children who do have a room of their own watch less TV than children who don’t, as the latter are more exposed to the family’s television habits (Gunz and Ortmair, 1994). The higher children’s satisfaction with their living environment, the lower the extent of TV consumption – as children in higher social classes tend to be more satisfied with the spatial characteristics of their living area, this also implies a close connection with social status and economic variables (Gunz and Ortmair, 1994, Dornmayr and Nemeth 1995). There are also other influencing factors, such as gender (predominantly boys have extensive television habits) and decision structures within the family: children who can decide themselves about the
programmes they watch, spend significantly more time in front of the TV set (Gunz and Ortmaier, 1994).

**TV consumption and time of day**

Times for TV consumption are longer at weekends than during the week (Fessel and GfK, 1996). 57% of children aged 9-13 report that they have the permission to watch TV as much as they want at the weekend, during the week this share is 46% (UNICEF, 2001: 74). Concerning the location of TV consumption time within a day, statistics show the most intensive period in the evening: children start to watch TV at about 5 p.m., with a maximum at 8 p.m., and 39% of children aged 7-15 watch TV also after 8 p.m. (IMAS, 2000) – which implies that they most certainly do not consume children’s programmes. Other data indicate that about two thirds of all 10-year-olds watch TV also after 10 p.m. at least once a week (Gunz and Ortmaier, 1994).

TV consumption is an area of conflict between children and parents. 59% of boys and 54% of girls (aged 11-14) say that they often or sometimes have conflicts on this topic with their parents (Kromer, 1995: 96). The survey ‘Childhood in Austria’ illustrates that there are great discrepancies between children’s and parents’ viewpoints concerning different elements of TV consumption, such as the way how TV consumption is regulated, the content of the programmes children watch, the time of day and extent of TV consumption (Gunz and Ortmaier, 1994). According to a recent study, as many as 68% of the children (aged 9-17) report that they have no parental control over the programmes watched, 15% say that their parents select some of the programmes watched on TV, and only four per cent of children report that their parents decide exactly what they are allowed to watch (UNICEF, 2001).

**Children’s use of computer and internet:**

Austrian children aged 7-15 spend half an hour daily at the computer (IMAS, 2000), which is still a male domain (Gmeiner, 2003; Kindergesundheitsbericht Wien, 2000). The following table shows how adolescents use the computer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>total</th>
<th>boys</th>
<th>girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>computer (work-related)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer (games)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video games</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: BMUJF, 1999: 84, children aged 14-19 (based on data of Fessel and GfK, 1997).*
Recent data for the province of Lower Austria show that computers are predominantly used for playing: 58% of children aged 8-14 play computer games – 70% of the boys and 43% of the girls (Geretschlaeger, 2001). Other studies also indicate gender differences in the use of computer games (Bucher, 2001; IMAS, 2000). Older children (from the age of 15 onwards) lose their strong interest in computer games (BMUJF, 1999: 81).

The share of children who have their own computer has more than doubled between 1996 (23%) and 2000 (53%) (IMAS, 2000). A recent study for the province of Lower Austria shows that 83% of children aged 8-10 and 94% of children aged 11-14 have access to a computer, be it at home or at school (Geretschlaeger, 2001). As the number of children with computer access at home is rather high (about three quarters), other possibilities (internet-cafés, shopping halls etc.) are less important (Geretschlaeger, 2001).

Nevertheless, computer access at school is of particular importance, above all for girls who get in touch with computers more often at school than at home. Boys more often have a computer of their own, and 49% of them use it daily, whereas the corresponding number for girls is only 27% (Geretschlaeger, 2001, see also BMUJF, 1999; Kränzl-Nagl, 1998). In Austria’s schools, the hardware equipment in relation to the number of pupils is very different: in primary schools 18 pupils have to share one computer, in general secondary schools (Hauptschulen) this rate is at 13, and academic secondary schools (AHS) have the worst ratio: there is only one computer for 28 pupils (Schönfelder, 2001). In half of all schools, pupils have to deal with great time restrictions and have no possibility to use the computers independently outside the lessons, during breaks or free periods (Schönfelder, 2001). As children’s access to computers is still limited and uneven, it seems to be of particular importance that children have the possibility to get computer access at schools.

Adolescents are often termed as the ‘internet generation’. This seems to be appropriate for Austria, as in 2000, seven out of ten Austrians aged 14-24 had internet access, in the age group 16-19 this share was even at three quarters – compared to 45% of the total population (Ulram, 2001). Data for younger children show that 47% of children aged 8-10 and 70% of children aged 11-14 have internet access (Geretschlaeger, 2001). The most popular activities are sending emails, chatting and playing games; online-shopping is not common among Austrian children (Geretschlaeger, 2001). Internet activities are still dependent on the parents’ economic possibilities (IMAS, 2000), and there are remarkable gender differences: girls prefer communicative activities (writing emails, chatting), boys rather go for games (Geretschlaeger, 2001; Seibt, 2001). The main places to access virtual space are the home and the school. Children’s access to internet is still uneven, in lower social classes children have less opportunities and only sporadical access to the internet, namely from friends’ homes and internet-cafés. The latter are rarely frequented by middle or upper
class children, as they often have got internet access at home (Ulram, 2001). Data for Lower Austria indicate that 60% of children aged 11-14 have internet access at home, one third even in their own room (Geretschlaeger, 2001). About 95% of all Austrian compulsory schools have internet access. Unfortunately there is no data available on how children use internet at school.

**Children’s use of mobile phones:**

Mobile phones are ‘trendy’, and they are a standard for children and adolescents in Austria. One out of four children between 7 and 15 years has an own mobile phone, and half of the 13-15 year-olds do so (IMAS, 2000). These figures have risen dramatically over the past years, and there is no correlation between social classes and ownership of mobile phones (IMAS, 2000). Mobile phones have important functions for communication with friends (SMS!) and the making of appointments. Children appreciate mobile phones, because they allow them to have direct contact with their friends, without being controlled by parents. On the other hand, they also allow parents and children to get in contact, regardless of time and space (BMUJF, 1999: 80; Heintel and Krainer, 2001).

**Relationship between ‘virtual space’ and ‘real space’:**

In practice, children’s on-line activities are not separate from their off-line worlds; virtual space and real life complement each other: children do similar activities in both worlds and are attracted by the same things, like action, fun and adventure. Children also find role models for their own life in chatrooms, internet sites, and TV programmes, which might help them in constructing an identity (Seibt, 2001). Although children often use virtual space, it’s still their main wish to be with their friends, to have time to play, and to be active in sports (Geretschlaeger, 2001).

Adults express concern about inappropriate content and how to protect children from the dangers of virtual space (Buchegger and Mattern, 2002), although in the views of children there is very few parental control and interest on what they do and how they interact in virtual space. Computer and internet seem to be no matter of communication between parents and children: Data for Lower Austria show that 32% of children aged 8-14 only speak occasionally with their parents about computer or internet, 39% do this less often, and 16% never. Children say that their parents only know partly (32%) about their internet activities, and as few as seven per cent of the children have the impression that their parents are interested in this matter (Geretschlaeger, 2001).

In conclusion, we can state that children’s use of different media is to a high degree connected with facets of time and space, but also with social compo-
Austria

Children use the virtual space to a high degree as a new media of communication. As far as the access to virtual space is concerned, there are still remarkable differences based on social status and gender.

Patterns of children’s mobility: opportunities and risks

Children’s patterns and chances of mobility differ according to their age. Younger children are often brought to the kindergarten by car (74%), and they are always accompanied by an adult, mostly the mother (Sigl and Weber, 2002). Kindergartens usually are in the living area, and it only takes 10-15 minutes to get there for almost all children (98%). In general, children under 6 years of age do half of all their ways in the family car (VCÖ, 1999).

The beginning of school attendance is an opportunity for children to obtain more mobility (Czermak, 1998). Actual data show that schools are usually located in the vicinity of children’s living environment: for 64% of primary school children, the school is within a maximum of 10 minutes walking distance from their homes (Sigl and Weber, 2002). Despite this small distance, every second child (aged 5-10) is attended by an adult, usually the mother, on all ways to and from kindergarten or school (Sigl and Weber, 2002). Also on their leisure time journeys, 70% of children aged 5-10 are accompanied by an adult. The motivation for parents are above all traffic dangers, but 23% also accompany their child because his/her traffic behaviour is too unsecure to leave him/her alone (Sigl and Weber, 2002).

How do children get to and from school? Young school children mostly walk (70% always or most times) and/or are brought there in the family car (54%). Only one third of children aged 5-10 uses public transport for the journey to and from kindergarten or school (Sigl and Weber, 2002), but this share increases for older children up to about one half (Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations, 2002). For leisure time journeys, the car is also an important means of transport: 49% are brought to different activities and afternoon courses, and only 35% walk (Sigl and Weber, 2002). In general, children use the family car for every second journey (to/from school, during leisure time) (Sigl and Weber, 2002). The high number of school kids being transported in the family car on their school ways and leisure journeys (‘parental taxi service’) is a matter of great concern, as this reduces children’s possibilities to learn adequate behaviour as pedestrians or cyclists, which as a consequence makes mobility more dangerous for them. Interestingly, the areas

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2 This study was carried out in the Eastern part of Austria (Vienna, Lower Austria, Burgenland).
with the highest degrees of children’s autonomous mobility also show the best values regarding their traffic safety (VCÖ, 2001).

Cycling to school is only possible for children from 10 years upwards, as unaccompanied cycling on public roads is not allowed for younger children. Between 10 and 12 years of age, children need to pass a cycling examination in order to cycle unaccompanied on public roads. This implies a greater restriction in children’s independent mobility than in other European countries (e.g. Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, Netherlands). About 84% of adolescents (aged 15-19) have a bicycle (KfV, 2000), but the importance of this means of mobility is reduced continually with increasing age.

From 15 years onwards, young people with an adequate licence are allowed to drive motorbikes. Data indicate that 29% of all 15-year-old and 44% of all persons aged 16-17 have a motorbike (KfV, 2000). This seems to be a temporary phenomenon only; motorbikes are replaced by cars as soon as possible: At the age of 18, two third have a driving licence for cars, and more than 50% have a car of their own (KfV, 2000), others often share cars with other family members. Driving licences are issued for a trial period of two years, during which legal regulations on blood alcohol level and tempo limits are stricter. For young people, having a car of their own is connected with independence, flexibility and spontaneity, and they appreciate it very much, while they often regard public means of transport as being too expensive and inconvenient (KfV, 2000, VCÖ, 1999).

The safety of children and adolescents in traffic is a matter of concern, particularly for parents (Czermak, 1998; Sigl and Weber, 2002). The number of children/adolescents being injured in traffic accidents is still relatively high compared to other European countries (Czermak, 1998; VCÖ, 2004), and traffic accidents are still the most frequent cause of death for children and young people in Austria (KfV, 2002a, 2002b, 2003; VCÖ, 2001). About half of all children being injured in traffic are passengers in private cars, although special seats and seatbelts for children are legally required (KfV, 2003). A particular problem are children’s ways to and from school, as the risk to have an accident there is twice as high in Austria than in other European Union countries (VCÖ, 2002). Two out of five parents say that their children have to cross a road with heavy traffic on their way to and from school (Sigl and Weber, 2002). According to current figures on accidents on the way to school there were 499 such accidents in 2002, with 518 children and adolescents (6-15 years of age) being injured and 3 being killed (KfV, 2003), these figures stagnate on a high level (VCÖ, 2001). The accident risk of young motor vehicle drivers is relatively high, e.g. up to seven times higher than in the age group 35-64 years (VCÖ, 1999). 31% of all persons being injured in traffic accidents and 23% of all persons being killed are in the age group 15-24, which is disproportionate to their share in the Austrian population (12%) (KfV, 2003). Compared to all
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accidents, the accident risk is always highest in the youngest age group that starts to take part in a certain mode of mobility and transportation (pedestrians’ highest risk to be injured is at the age of five to nine, cyclists’ highest risk: 10-14, highest risk for motorcyclists: 15-19, highest risk for car drivers: 20-24).

In view of these alarming figures experts emphasise the importance of various measures to make children’s mobility safer (Czermak, 1997, 1998; Kinderbüro Graz, 2001; Hiebinger, 1999; Loidl-Reisch, 1992; Sigl and Weber, 2002; VCÖ, 1995, 1999, 2001). The most important requirements are: adequate traffic behaviour education for children enabling them to practise autonomous mobility and informing them adequately about different possibilities (as the fundamental decision about mobility habits is taken in one’s teens), motivation and sensitisation of parents for matters of traffic behaviour education, but also measures which change the traffic situation instead of encouraging children to deal with it, and steps to make public transport more attractive and available, above all in rural areas where children’s mobility is rather restricted. One of the most important measures would be to take into consideration children’s interests and requirements. Recent data illustrate that children themselves would like to participate in the local governments’ planning with regard to traffic and infrastructure, school buses and traffic regulations (UNICEF, 2001).

Children’s patterns of mobility might change dramatically if their parents divorce. In Austria, the number of children and adolescents affected by their parents’ divorce is continually increasing. In 2001, 46 out of 100 marriages of an average year group were divorced, affecting 18,961 minors. But although an increasing share of children experience a parental break-up, little is known about their travel arrangements related to visiting their absent parents. Since the reform of the Parents and Child Amendment Act in 2001, both parents retain their custody rights after a divorce and do no longer need to apply for joint custody, but may request its revocation. In order to obtain joint custody after a separation or divorce, parents are no longer required to live in a common household with a child. Unfortunately there is no data available on experiences with this new legal situation and its effects on children’s mobility between their parents’ households.

An overall conclusion on children’s mobility must emphasize once again the concern about the high number of children being accompanied by an adult and being transported in cars, which reduces children’s possibilities to learn adequate traffic behaviour and finds its equivalence in the relatively high number of children being injured in traffic accidents in Austria. Measures to make children’s mobility safer must be considered as an urgent demand.

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3 This is the sole exception: the risk for pedestrians to be injured in a traffic accident is as high for children (5-9) as for persons older than 75.
Public expenditures on families and children

Public expenditures on families and children are well above EU average: in 2000, their share of total social expenditures according to ESSPROS-definition (European System of integrated Social Protection Statistics) was 10.6% for Austria, as compared to only 8.2% for the whole of the European Union. Public expenditures on families and children made three per cent of the GDP (EU average: 2.1%); this was place five for Austria in the ‘league table’ of EU countries.

Funding sources

Among the various funding sources and agencies, the most relevant is – with total expenditures of €4.300 million in 2001 – the Familienlastenausgleichsfonds (FLAF; family burden equalisation fund in literal translation). Out of FLAF sources some provisions for families and children are financed directly (such as family allowances and – since 2002 – child care benefits); related expenditures of other agencies are refunded partly or totally (as in the case of the mother-and-child booklet, a medical screening programme for mothers and their babies, combined with financial incentives); and contributions to social insurance agencies are transferred (for securing and/or increasing individual entitlements with a view to unemployment, health, accident and pension insurance).

The FLAF is predominantly (74% in 2002) financed by contributions from employers, who are obliged to transfer 4.5% on the basis of the total sum of salaries and wages. In addition, the government contributes from general budgetary sources; however, since these transfers have been kept nominally constant for a long period of time, their relevance has decreased. Finally, of comparatively minor importance are direct contributions from families (parents) themselves (for instance minor contributions for school books as well as refunds for advanced child support payments).

A relevant part of public family expenditures is covered by the Laender (provinces). They are responsible for the establishment and maintenance of day care centres (total expenditures for 2000: €783 million). While coverage is generally high for children aged 3 to below 6, it is rather low for children below 3 (see Section on ‘daycare’). On the whole, the situation has however improved in the last two decades with a view to both coverage and staffing. The number of children in day care increased by 40% and the number of staff by 100%. In addition, the provinces provide family related social assistance and housing benefits.
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Also social insurance agencies make relevant contributions to the welfare of families and children. These comprise maternity leave benefit (paid by health insurance) and supplements for children in connection with unemployment and sickness benefit as well as with pension. Most relevant is, however, free co-insurance in health insurance of children and married mothers, who are not gainfully employed, and who therefore are not covered by health insurance in their own right. While maternity benefit (and till 2001 also parental leave benefit) is (was) partly refunded by FLAF, children’s supplements and free co-insurance have to be financed exclusively from social insurance contributions (€1.700 million for co-insurance in 2001).

Parental leave periods are relevant for pension insurance, too, and related contributions are transferred directly from FLAF to the responsible pension insurance agency. As a consequence of insufficient provision for old age, in particular for women who had to care for children, survivors pensions are still of major importance. In 2000, expenses for survivors’ pensions were with 2,8% of the GDP the highest among all EU countries (1,3% EU average). These have to be financed by social insurance exclusively.

Parts of the benefits for families are financed from the federal budget at large. This holds for instance for child tax credits, which are paid also as a negative income tax (€1.150 million).

Functional distribution of public family expenditure

According to ESSPROS-definition of family expenditures, which is slightly stricter, two thirds are provided as financial transfers to families with the aim of compensating for the cost of children. Means tested benefits are with five per cent (in 2000) of minor relevance only; they are usually paid in addition to general basic benefits.
Figure 10. Expenditures for families/children 2000/ESSPROS (%).


Distribution over the life cycle
Badelt (1999), who calculated family related public expenditures in a broader way, arrived at total expenditures of €24.400 million (for 1996). This sum comprises also expenditures for education (except adult education), housing and survivors pensions. 74% (€18.700 million) could be allocated to specific periods of the life cycle. Also this overview underlines the great importance of family related expenditures for old age, in particular widows’ pensions as a long-term consequence of childcare responsibilities.

Table 7. Family-related public expenditures: Distribution over the life cycle (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family formation and establishment of new household</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-, peri- and postnatal period</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families with children in preschool age</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families with children in school age</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family related expenditures in old age</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Childhood, family and women's policies: interrelations with political constellations

Since its beginnings after World War Two, Austrian family policy has been quite often a conflictual issue. Although most of the struggles were fought between the Christian and the Social democrats, the map of political tensions in this arena is much more complex than it seems at a first sight. The most relevant instrument of Austrian family policies is the Family Allowance Fund (FLAF). This fund is not to be seen as a juridical entity, like a number of other social insurance agencies in Austria, but rather as an earmarked section of the federal government’s budget, whereby a major part of its funding is coming from employers’ contributions based on salaries and wages of their workers and employees. The focus of this section is on financial transfer systems (i.e. cash benefits) but other dimensions will be considered, too.

Actors

The most powerful actor is obviously the federal government (controlled by the parliament). But within the government there have been frequent disagreements among different ministers, too. In particular in times of budgetary constraints, when contributions to the FLAF fund stagnate or grow, while the number of recipients is on the decrease (due to low fertility rates), a finance minister – even if ideologically committed to Christian democrat family values – may be tempted to divert the surplus for reducing the general budget deficit; whereas a minister of family affairs would have a clear preference for extending and enriching services in his/her domain rather then loosing control of the budget.

The political parties are among the actors, too; at present there are four of them: the Christian democrats (OeVP), the Social democrats (SPOe), the right Freedom Party (FPOe) and the Greens. As mentioned, Austrian family policies have often been dominated by conflicts between Christian and Social democrats, however, also the other two parties interfere with their views on family issues. On the other hand, a number of conflicts between the two main parties are not to be explained by ideological diversities primarily, but rather by their roles as government or opposition parties respectively.

While statutory financial benefits to children and their families are controlled by the federal government, provinces and local authorities are responsible for a major part of additional public programmes relevant for children and families; such as youth welfare and child day-care services for example. Majorities at the level of the provinces do not automatically coincide with the majority at the federal level. Even during long lasting absolute majority Social democrat rule, two thirds of the provinces had a Christian democrat
governor, which meant that left reform projects (which could have found a majority at the federal level easily), lost momentum in the process of necessary consultations with the provincial governments.

In addition we have to consider also the civil society, the employers, the labour unions, the family, women’s and children’s organisations, the churches, and research institutes. And last, but not least, the Austrian constitutional court interfered several times with opinions and verdicts particularly concerning the question as to whether Austrian income taxation was sufficiently recognising the economic responsibilities of parents vis-à-vis their children. A few times the federal government felt rather embarrassed about the Court’s verdicts, and had to change laws though reluctantly.

Conflict lines

During the political history of the Second Republic controversies concerning family policies arose around several conflict lines. First of all, there were frequent disputes about finding a balance between horizontal and vertical distribution. While vertical distribution refers to the income differences and inequalities between the rich and the poor, horizontal distribution refers to the differences of the standards of living among households belonging to the same income class, however with different numbers of persons, children in particular. To which extent should children’s costs be privatised and/or socialised? Should family benefits be made available also to higher income classes? Should tax reductions be granted as tax allowances or credits? These were some of the questions connected with the debate on vertical and horizontal distribution.

With the strengthening of the feminist movement and the establishment of women’s policies as a new political arena, tensions between family and women’s policies became visible. It was not too difficult for the feminist movement to prove that the then existing family laws and policies were chiefly guided by patriarchal attitudes and traditional bourgeois family ideologies. Therefore they argued for replacing family policies by women’s policies. This radical goal was never achieved, but controversies continued.

In times of economic constraint, universality vs. selectivity became also an issue. Should family benefits be extended to all families or should they be restricted to the needy population only? In practice the result was a mixture of universal benefits combined with a rather complex set of means tested additional benefits for low-income families.

A relatively recent conflict arose with a view to additional financial compensation for parents with children under three. Should this benefit be restricted to parents (usually mothers) who had been gainfully employed before the birth of the child, or should it be extended to all parents (mothers), irrespective of their
employment status. In the first case the benefit would be a financial compensation for income foregone, in the second a child care allowance underlining a social interest in the parental task of caring for small children.

Finding a balance between benefits in cash and benefits in kind is a standing item on the political agenda, too. Should public money be transferred to private households directly, or should it be rather invested in public infrastructure, such as child day-care centres?

Finally, with the implementation of the UN Convention children have become slowly more visible, both socially and politically. Therefore debates concerning family, women’s and childhood policies are more frequent and intense than they used to be. However, it is always advisable to carefully examine whether appeals to the interest of children really indicate an authentic child focus or – as it is often the case – rather a political instrumentalisation of the child issue for other political purposes.

**Chronological evolution**

In this section, we follow the evolution of the current child and family benefit package in Austria; we describe major controversies and their solution, and explain the outcome in relation to shifting ideological and political balances/imbalances and hegemonial constellations.

**Family policy under Christian democrat hegemony**

In this period which started in the aftermath of World War Two and lasted until 1970, there was a clear distinction between social policies taken care of by the Minister of Social Affairs (a Social democrat key position) and financial transfers to families (child allowances and tax reductions) which were under the control of the Minister of Financial Affairs (a Christian democrat key position). Both ministries were relevant for family welfare because not only explicit family oriented but also social legislation contained a number of regulations for the benefit of families with economically dependent wives and/or children. However, for the Minister of Social Affairs the main focus was working class families (only later also farmers and the majority of self-employed were included under social insurance schemes). Measures provided under the control of the Ministry of Finance instead were inspired by traditional family concepts. Tax regulations in particular were to the benefit of traditional bourgeois middle class families with two or more children, because income taxation was in that period not individual but distinguished according to family status, and in addition, children with a middle class background tended to be in education and economic dependence for a much longer period than working class children.
Demographic and family policy considerations in the stricter sense were of equal importance for the introduction of the family allowance fund in the 1950s. The guiding principle of quantitative family policy of that period was contained in the following policy statement: ‘The burden of family maintenance (...) must be balanced between those who carry the burden in the interest of society as a whole and those who do not have such burden but consciously or unconsciously derive benefit from the fact that others do so for them’ (Proceedings of the Austrian Nationalrat VII G.P.). At that time, family allowances were not expressly intended to bring about a vertical distribution of income for the benefit of low-income families, since the objective of providing for the ‘education and maintenance of children in a manner befitting their station’ (Proceedings of the Austrian Nationalrat VII G.P.) was in the foreground, and thus maintained existing differences between social classes (Münz and Wintersberger, 1984).

Social democratic family policy reforms

There have been fundamental changes of this concept since the beginning of the 1970s when Bruno Kreisky became Federal Chancellor and initiated a period of Social democrat rule lasting more or less until the second half of the 1980s. First of all demographic aims of all kinds were rejected by the government, an secondly income redistribution under the family allowance scheme was no longer borne exclusively by childless but also by rich families (Münz and Wintersberger, 1984).

In this period the family allowance fund was transformed incrementally into an instrument for (vertical) fiscal income redistribution for the benefit of lower-income families (Münz, 1982). Flat rate transfer payments replaced tax exemptions assessed on income. In 1977, tax rebates for children were replaced by higher children’s allowances, as a result of which approximately 300,000 low-income households that had previously not been able to benefit from the tax rebates benefited for the first time (Bundesministerium für Finanzen, 1980).

Following the drop in the birth rate between 1963 and 1978 and the consequent fall in the dependency ratio of children between 0 and 15 years, the fact that contributions to the family allowance fund (mainly raised by employers, employees and self-employed persons) were earmarked, resulted in an extremely favourable financing structure for family welfare policies. Therefore, from the mid-1970s the accumulated surpluses were used to expand services, sometimes to a considerable extent (Münz and Wintersberger, 1984).

Further reforms brought measures that provided better opportunities for working and single mothers. A right for mothers to take unpaid parental leave for up to the first birthday of a child combined with a modest financial compensation for low-income families had been introduced stepwise already in the
previous period. In 1974, however this allowance was extended to all working mothers who decided to take parental leave; single mothers and needy families got a 50% increase on this benefit. If fathers refused to pay child support, the family allowance fund also advanced maintenance payments for the children. These reforms indicated the establishment of a women’s policy agenda in connection with the nomination of Johanna Dohnal as Undersecretary and later Minister for Women’s Affairs.

Family policies during Social-/Christian democrat cohabitation

Also this period, lasting from the late 1980s to 2000, was marked by major developments in childhood and family policies, but also by a number of conflicts and complications. While in the first period of Christian democrat hegemony there prevailed a kind of political division of labour, which discouraged the social democrats from interfering too much in quantitative family policies, during the second period of social democrat hegemony they had succeeded in generating an authentic family policy agenda of their own. In 1986, when the social democrats ended the coalition with the Freedom Party and decided to form a coalition government with the Christian democrats, the Ministry for Family Affairs passed under the control of a Christian democrat minister, while women’s affairs stayed with the social democrats. However, unlike in the first period, the social democrats continued to have an interest in family issues, and since the philosophies of the two partners were quite different, controversies were unavoidable. The term cohabitation in the subtitle refers to this difficult relationship.

Positive was the engagement of some of the politicians on each side, negative the mutual mistrust due to different ideological conceptions of family and childhood policies. At some times the positive, at others the negative attitudes prevailed. However there were also other incentives and disincentives: the Austrian Family Report 1990, the ratification of the UN Convention by the Austrian Parliament in the years 1993/94, 2 verdicts of the Constitutional Court concerning family responsibilities and taxation, as well as the International Year of the Family 1994 followed by the establishment of the Austrian Institute of Family Studies are to be mentioned as incentives, while the increasing economic constraints and the structural adjustment programmes for the Austrian welfare state constituted major disincentives and/or obstacles for the further development of family policies.

In this period several increases (and 1 decrease) of family allowances (child benefits) were implemented. In addition to that – after a verdict by the Constitutional Court – a child related tax credit was introduced and – after another verdict – increased considerably. Parental leave allowance was granted for the first time to fathers, too, which was an important step, although it did not
bring about a big change of the gendered reality: on the whole, childcare has remained a maternal responsibility. While in 1990 parental leave and parental leave allowance had been extended to 2 years maximum, in 1996 – due to financial constraints – its duration was restricted to 18 months for mothers, while 24 months were only granted if also the father would go on parental leave for at least 6 months. Although the government tried to interpret this reform as a step towards more gender equity, in reality it was rather a deterioration for mothers who found it difficult to combine work and family, and who therefore would have preferred to have (6 months) longer access to this benefit. Abolished or restricted were some benefits to single mothers, because besides desirable effects to compensate for particular disadvantages of single mothers, also undesirable ones had been registered; actually such benefits sometimes turned out to be disincentives against marriage for young parents.

All in all major advances in family policies were achieved in this period, and family policy was established as a political field of its own (Schattovits, 1999). However, towards the end of this time a dispute broke out concerning a reform project by Martin Bartenstein, then Christian democrat minister responsible for family matters, in which he envisaged to extend parental leave allowance originally restricted to working parents on parental leave to all parents, students and housewives included. The Social democrats were strictly against this extension and during the subsequent campaign for the 1999 general elections the conflict escalated. Ex post one might observe that with a view to family policies the partnership between Social and Christian democrats had disappeared, and the positions represented by the different parties revealed already the contours of new political alliances.

Centre-right childcare and family policies

As of January 2000, the point of departure concerning quantitative family policies was the following: parents with children received a universal child benefit of between 156 and €222 per month and child (depending on age and birth order). In addition to and together with this benefit, also a tax credit of €50,90 per month and child was paid to all parents. Parental leave allowance was granted for 18 (or 24 months) to working parents only. And finally there were a number of other modest means tested benefits, which were granted to needy parents only partly by federal and provincial governments.

With the formation of the first centre-right government in 2000, the responsibility for family affairs passed under a minister from the right Freedom Party. The introduction of a new childcare allowance was one of her first projects. This project shows similarities with both the plans of her Christian democrat predecessor and a model project implemented by Mr. Haider in his capacity of governor in Carinthia. As of January 2002, a childcare allowance of €436 per
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month is granted to all parents with children up to 30 or 36 months (depending on the fathers willingness to share childcare responsibility for at least 6 months). This replaces however the former parental leave allowance as well as the means tested benefits for parents with small children.

While the government sees this reform as a major step in developing social, women’s and family policies, the opposition parties continued to be rather critical about it: they see it as a step back towards a more conservative family ideology and as a strategy to discourage mothers from participating in the labour market. From a more pragmatic and less ideological point of view, one may arrive at somehow different conclusions:

- If we take family allowances, tax credits and parental leave allowances as well as a few specific family benefits altogether, Austria is now under the leading nations in Europe with a view to financial transfers to families with children. This has been confirmed also by a recent comparative study on child benefit packages (Bradshaw and Finch, 2002; Wintersberger and Wörister, 2003).

- Current family policy is conservative: its focus is on providing additional financial transfer payment to parents (mothers) with children up to 30 (or 36) months (instead of creating additional childcare facilities for children of this age). With a view to the development of childcare institutions for children under three years, Austria is definitely not among the advanced nations.

- Current family policy is relatively coherent in the sense that it contains at least one offer for two-parent families with children under three years; namely a financially compensated parental leave of up to 36 months together. For children from three to five years there is sufficient and affordable childcare available in the majority of the Austrian provinces. However, there are also incoherences in the present laws: in labour legislation parental leave as legal entitlement is still limited with the second birthday of the child, while according to social and family welfare legislation, the respective financial benefit of childcare allowance may be received until the child is three years old. In the third year parental leave from the workplace depends entirely on the consent of the employer.

- Compared to previous legislation the present has brought about rather improvements than deteriorations for parents with small children. Those criticising it tend to evaluate the present legislation by confronting it with previous preaching rather than previous practice.
And what about children?

In this section we have been concentrating on family and women’s rather than on children’s or childhood policies. This is not surprising, because – like in most other West European countries – up to the late 1980s children had not been visible on the political map. If children had been addressed at all, it was mostly merely symbolically or for instrumental purposes.

This changed only slowly along with the adoption of the UN Convention in 1989, which coincided with some reforms in the area of youth welfare, such as the abolition of physical punishment as a legitimate method of education. Though the UN Convention contributed to increasing the visibility of children, and thus may have promoted indirectly some of the progress in family, women’s and youth policies achieved during the last years, a true children or childhood focus is still missing.

During and immediately after the ratification of the UN Convention, there were some encouraging signs of childhood policies emerging as an independent political field of its own. In 1994 for instance, the Austrian Parliament unanimously adopted a quite progressive resolution concerning children’s citizenship in Austrian society; in addition, children’s ombudspersons were established in all Austrian provinces; and last, but not least, experiences of children’s informal participation in decisionmaking were on the increase at the municipality level in the 1990s. Recently, some provincial assemblies have passed laws lowering the age of vote for local elections from 18 to 16 years; and finally, after the last Children’s World Summit the government decided to establish a new Young rights Action Plan (YAP) with the aim to further implement the UN Convention as well as the decisions taken at the Summit. However, the full implementation of the UN Children Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the definite elimination of the adultist generational paradigm are challenges still to be faced.

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Childhood in Ageing Societies


