



Austrian Background Report on the OECD Project “Starting Strong”

Secondary analysis prepared by the
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Edited and published by the
Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture
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**For your attention:
Glossary (p 109)
and Contextual Information (p116)!**

Vienna, October 2004

Update see page 130

A word from the Ministry,

This Background Report on early childhood education and care in Austria forms the basis of the OECD's *Thematic Country Review*. The impetus for this project came in 1996 at the ministerial meeting on "*Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All*". In so doing, the education ministers assigned top priority to early childhood education (and its family context), explicitly laying the foundations and expressing their support for lifelong learning. After the conference, the first round of country reviews took place with Australia, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Great Britain and the United States taking part. The final reports showed that the added value of harvesting information from beyond national borders was not only reflected in the fact that it was possible to make comparisons between the participating countries, but also for the OECD to examine the different systems represented as a "critical friend". The countries that did not participate in the first round had a great deal of catching up to do, which was one of the reasons the OECD was motivated to initiate a second round. Austria is one of the nine countries that took part in this review which has enabled comparisons with Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Mexico and Spain. These countries are marked by a wide spectrum of economic, social and political contexts and – based on this – have different views, approaches and implementation models for early childhood education.

The future of the knowledge society begins in early childhood; the educational consequences of this acknowledged fact represent a to-do list for every one of the stakeholders. This is where the foundation for lifelong learning for building a (future) knowledge society, as well as for creating a society which ensures equal opportunities and social cohesion, is laid.

Comprehensive empirical findings have been lacking in Austria for providing the necessary basis for making appropriate educational or political decisions, findings that are available in other countries that have participated in the STARTING STRONG project to date. Now, Austria is taking part in an evaluation of its domestic ECEC policies (ECEC: early childhood education and care) by experts from the OECD. However, due to the fact that competences in this field are spread over different levels and branches of government (the day-care system itself is a matter for the federal provinces, while kindergarten pedagogogue training comes under the heading of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture), it is unclear which government agency has "overall competence" for this issue.

The Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture has, however, declared its willingness to assume the responsibility for heading and carrying out this project for Austria, as early childhood education and care is an educational issue of national interest. The federal provinces have provided funding, and experts from many different institutions, organizations and agencies have lent their co-operation. The data from secondary analyses and facts on day-care for children under the age of six in Austria were prepared by the Austrian Institute for Youth Research (Vienna) by answering a set catalogue of questions.

All project partners, decision-makers and interested parties, as well as the OECD's own project head Dr. John BENNETT, were linked together on a continual basis via an electronic project management platform.

This Background Report takes a look at the situation of young children from every angle, from birth until the commencement of primary school (family, institutions, policies), in terms of quantity (day-care availability, time, etc.) and quality (the facilities, teaching and care). For this reason, only a systemic approach was possible, with the issues "legal regulations", "staff" (qualifications), "educational content and its implementation", "family involvement and support" and "funding" receiving particular attention.

The Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture expects benefits to be realized for the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care. The basic findings will be made available for use in developing curricula, and the providers of continuing education in the field "early childhood education and care" will be able to identify practice-relevant educational goals. By addressing structured questions,

- Comparisons will be possible with other participating countries,
- The OECD can provide an overview of how it views and assesses the Austrian situation,
- Impetus for discussing joint social responsibility for early childhood education will be given and
- Further challenges will be identified with respect to all of the actors in early childhood education and care in Austria.

Without a doubt the continued work on improving educational quality in day-care facilities represents a key factor for long-term successful learning. In its Education Policy Analysis 2002, the OECD emphasized that educational policy increasingly encompasses the "entire spectrum of learning" and that "scientific research and assessments were necessary for the long-term continued development of high-quality programmes in early childhood education and care." With the joint action illustrated in this Background Report, the significance of early childhood education and care has been given due recognition for its role in promoting social equity and paving the way for lifelong learning.

This edition has been updated with the latest data from two new publications by Statistics Austria: the Child Day Care Statistics 2003/04 and the call for action for "Future Requirements for Child Care Institutions". The call for action was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection and published in August 2004. These data were not available for the authors at the time this report was completed. Minor discrepancies in data among Austrian provinces cannot be shown in detail. Therefore, every Austrian province will have the opportunity to comment on the OECD results. These comments will be added to the report as a supplement.

On behalf of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture:
Maria Dippelreiter
Head of project

A word from the authors

The Austrian Institute for Youth Research was commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture to draw up the Austrian Background Report for the OECD project "Starting Strong". The task was to compile and analyse data and facts based on secondary analyses on early childhood education and care for children under the age of six years in Austria by answering a predefined catalogue of questions.

This Background Report is primarily based on Austrian literature from this field (including grey literature), data from Statistics Austria, Internet research and previous work done by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (the ministry's own database), as well as on information gleaned from numerous discussions with experts and political decision-makers.

We would like to thank all of our partners who provided us with information for our report in a constructive and non-bureaucratic manner. In particular we would like to recognise the willing co-operation on the part of Statistics Austria, the Austrian Federation of Parent-Toddler Groups and the Austrian Federation of Childminders' Associations, as well as valuable discussions with individuals from the federal provinces and other experts.

The authors endeavoured to incorporate the findings and experience from their previous research activities in this Background Report and to paint an accurate picture of the situation of early childhood education and care in Austria. Unfortunately, there were no data or research findings available for a small number of questions, which are as follows:

- The issue of the orientation of the legal framework (child-oriented, institution-oriented, parent-oriented, needs-oriented);
- The legal situation of early childhood education and care as compared to other social institutions,
- Long-term studies on the impacts of early childhood education and care, research on the cost-benefit factor.

The Austrian Institute for Youth Research would also like to thank the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture for commissioning it with the research and is convinced that this Background Report will serve as a valuable basis for future discussions and decisions that affect early childhood education and care in Austria.

On behalf of the Austrian Institute for Youth Research

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Introduction

This Background Report was drawn up within the framework of this project on the basis of an OECD questionnaire and provides an overview of early childhood education and care and its environment in Austria. Included in this Background Report are all programmes offered by the Austrian educational system aimed at supporting and promoting both children from birth up to the age of six (i.e. until they commence compulsory schooling) as well as their parents. This report examines Early education and care provided by crèches, kindergartens, parent-child groups and childminders. While after-school day-care centres also offer Early education and care, these institutions are especially geared towards school-aged children in Austria and are not included in this report. This also applies to the *Vorschule*, a pre-school grade, as it accepts children who are of school age but are not yet ready to attend school, and are therefore only touched on briefly.

This report was drawn up on the basis of secondary analyses, meaning that already available data were presented and reinterpreted in new contexts. Where data were unavailable, it was only possible to point out that data were either completely lacking or were still in the process of being collected. As a result this Background Report also serves to highlight the lack of available data in certain areas.

The Austrian Early education and care system is a matter for Austria's nine federal provinces. Each province has its own Kindergarten Law. As the goal of this report is to provide an overview of the national day-care system, importance was placed on highlighting commonalities between each of the provincial systems, despite their differences, for the purposes of drawing a picture of Early education and care in Austria as a whole. Differences between the provinces will be addressed primarily where they are particularly worthy of note, for instance differences in the Early education and care quotas from province to province.

Early childhood education and care is a profession traditionally dominated by women. The percentage of men in this field is very small, and very few changes have taken place. An effort was made to include the male caregivers who do work in this field linguistically in this Background Report as reflected by the use of the proper terminology, etc. in the sections referring specifically to either men or women.

This Background Report is divided into nine chapters, largely in keeping with the format of the OECD's questionnaire.

The first section – more comprehensive than the others – gives an introduction to the Austrian day-care system, embedding it in its social-political context. In addition to a short outline of the historical development of the day-care system in Austria, the effects of demographic and social changes on Early education and care are analysed and the role of the child and the parents in Austrian society are also discussed, as are family policies and their instruments, among others. In viewing the situation from this additional perspective, the intention was to paint a picture of the day-care environment in Austria, as well as to demonstrate how social changes have also had an impact on institutional early education and care, both in terms of quantity and quality.

The subsequent chapters (2-7) deal with key areas of Austria's early education and care system – quality and assessment, utilisation, staff, content and implementation, involvement of the parents and funding – whereby special attention was given to taking forms of early education and care in to account that are less wide-spread than kindergartens, by far the most common form of day-care in Austria.

Against the backdrop of the information presented in this report, the final section is intended to give a final assessment of Austria's early education and care system and to outline perspectives for developing the system further in the future.

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1. Definitions and Background

The following chapter provides an initial overview of the Austrian early education and care system, focusing on the following points:

- How institutional early education and care came to be established in Austria
- Analysis of the role of the child and an analysis of parenthood
- Societal developments and political initiatives in institutional early education and care
- Current day-care issues
- Forms of day-care
- Legal competence

1.1. The Beginnings of Institutional Early education and care in Austria

The beginnings of institutional care and education of small children in Austria is closely linked with changes in the family structure that took place at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. When women first began entering the workforce as a result of the Industrial Revolution, children were largely left to look after themselves, which led to an increase in child neglect and delinquency. Due to social necessity, the first public institutions for taking in and caring for children, such as foundling homes and orphanages for infants and very small children, were created. (Austria's first orphanage was founded in 1742, its first foundling home in 1784.) The purpose of these measures was primarily to curb delinquency and to put the (older) children to work as cheap labour (cf. Haas 1995, 14ff.). In addition, there were also private early education and care providers, such as nannies, bonnes and governesses employed by bourgeois and aristocratic families (cf. Eurydice database, 3).

1.1.1. Nurseries and Kindergarten

Real institutional day-care did not begin until 1828 until the opening of the first "Kinderbewahranstalt", a nursery for caring for children of the working class. Further nurseries were founded in the subsequent years by parish associations and based on private initiatives, and began to expand starting in the mid-19th century. These nurseries were established for economic, social and religious reasons, namely to prevent the boys and girls from neglect and delinquency and to outfit them with skills enabling them to subsequently earn an independent living. The children in the nurseries received not only instruction, but were also taught obedience and piety (cf. Haas 1995, 36). Nurseries for infants (crèches) began to be established in Austria in 1849.

The first Fröbel-style kindergarten was founded in Vienna in 1863, with three more following in the next two years (cf. Eurydice database, 3). Fröbel kindergartens were conceived primarily as an educational institution for the purposes of fostering children's intellectual growth and development. It was geared mainly to bourgeois families, sustaining the social gap in early education and care. Nurseries were designed for children from the lower strata of society, while educational kindergartens were for children from more privileged families. (cf. Eurydice, 4).

1.1.2. Legal Framework and Reorientation

In 1872 Austria decided - as one of the first countries in the world - to establish a legal framework for the kindergarten system and in so doing publicly acknowledged this form of early education and care. The ministerial ordinance outlined provisions on establishing, organising, directing, educationally supervising and architecturally designing the kindergartens, as well as training staff, and remained in essence the prevailing legal framework for the next 90 years. Guidelines governing the training of staff were passed, and the first training kindergarten was set up at the state teacher's college in Graz. The ordinance also required that the nurseries be gradually made into kindergartens so that the later were no longer reserved exclusively for well-off families.

In addition to religious and private day-care facility providers, an increasing number of municipalities began establishing kindergartens; between 1875 and 1912 the number of kindergartens leapt from 31 to 548 (cf. Eurydice database, 4). So-called "Volkskindergärten" ("people's kindergartens") featuring extended opening hours and requiring lower contributions from parents were also set up, giving children from working-class families easier access to kindergartens.

The first "Bildungsanstalt für Kindergärtnerinnen in Österreich" (Institute for Kindergarten pedagogue Training in Austria) opened its doors in 1868; initially the curriculum focused entirely on early childhood education and care. Not until a ministerial decree was passed in 1872 was the curriculum modified to include both general education and vocational training.

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century saw a shift in the practice of early childhood education and care toward making the child the central focus of pedagogical thought and action (cf. Haas 1995, 157). Children were given access to educational toys and games that were appropriate to their age and level of development, and in the 1920s, Austrian kindergartens increasingly began applying Montessorian theories

1.1.3. Stagnation and Regression

During the period of the authoritarian Corporate State (1934-1938)¹ and primarily during the subsequent National Socialist regime (1938-1945), there was little room for socialist ideals, democratic educational objectives and psychoanalytical approaches. During National Socialism, the kindergartens were used to fashion children into supporters of the regime, as well as future mothers and soldiers, with particular emphasis on physical fitness. The kindergarten system created under the Nazi welfare system was expanded under National Socialism, and many kindergartens were set up in companies or factories (cf. Eurydice database, 6 / Haas 1995, 158).

¹ Or even beginning with the self-dissolution of the Parliament in 1933 and the beginning of "austrofascism" (cf. Tálos 1984).

1.1.4. Rebuilding and Renewal

In the first few years after the end of World War II, kindergartens and crèches often substituted as family for the children and, accordingly, were very widely utilised. Buildings that had been destroyed were quickly rebuilt. During this phase discussions centred on qualitative improvements in early childhood education and care; however, new regulations in school legislation would not be passed until 1962. Competencies were reallocated; the kindergarten system was placed in the context of the educational system and declared a matter for the provinces. Training for kindergartens and framework provisions for defining hiring qualifications were made a federal matter (cf. Eurydice database, 6). Training was extended from three to four years, and new objectives and responsibilities of future kindergarten educators (preparing the children to attend school with methods suited for small children, promoting all aspects of the child's personality) were defined.

In the post-war era, special needs kindergartens and parent-toddler groups were set up for disabled and so-called problem children (cf. Haas 1995, 159).

After the student protests in 1968 had ebbed, early education and care cooperatives, i.e. parent-toddler groups, emerged in Austria aimed at creating an alternative to public kindergartens. They were conceived of as self-help groups and drew on several educational principles, for instance that children should be seen as persons in their own right (cf. Eurydice database, 6f.).

The childminder system arose in the 1970s. After scattered associations had been established, the childminder model began to spread throughout Austria (cf. Austrian Federation of Foster Parents', Adoptive Parents' and Childminders' Associations 2004, 4).

In 1985 the four-year course at the "Institutes for Kindergarten pedagogue Training" was extended by one year and the training college was renamed "Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care"; taking the school-leaving examination giving access to university studies is required for graduation.

Institutional day-care is increasingly common nowadays – even for children of non-gainfully employed mothers – despite the decreasing number of children born in Austria. Increased utilisation, chiefly among children under three years of age, is a part of the comprehensive process of social change-in-progress. Former nurseries have been remade into institutions with an important social-educational function which are highly relevant for the development and implementation of contemporary family policy (cf. Haas 1995, 160).

1.2. The Concept of Childhood and the Role of the Parents

1.2.1. The Concept of Childhood

The concept of childhood has evolved over the course of history. In the past, psychology, education and socialization research have defined children as "individuals to-be", in other words incomplete

"future adults". However, the child was not usually the focus of attention, but rather the grown-up individual that he or she will become one day. Therefore, childhood was seen as a situation or condition characterized by a lack or deficiency. It was considered a period of transition that was to be overcome and whose purpose was to turn unsocialised individuals into "orderly" members of society. This narrower view – also reflected in educational measures – used primarily the child's future adult existence as a guideline and built its theoretical and practical principles around this approach. The objective was to take something that was "unfinished" and "complete" it, or in other words to promote the process of growth and "becoming" accordingly. This is clearly illustrated in the specific (legal) situation of children in Austria:

- "Protecting children" has been deemed more important than their autonomy; as a result more leeway is given toward excluding children from certain areas of society rather than including them based on their need for protection.
- The "benefit of the child", representing a central focus of the administration of the law by the courts, was largely undefined and almost exclusively determined by adults.
- The legal status of the child was characterised by a heavy emphasis on the family and the fathers. Parents were there to provide comprehensive care and upbringing for their children and remained their legal guardian and representative vis-à-vis the outside world. This all-encompassing responsibility on the part of the parents for their children also meant that parents had all-encompassing power over them as well.

However, a paradigm shift has been taking place. Children are now seen as persons in their own right, as subjects, in other words as fully-fledged members of society. Current problems involving children, their needs, desires and interests have moved into the spotlight. In principle, children should reserve the right to decide for themselves what is good and right for them. The UN "Convention on the Rights of the Child" adopted by consensus by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989, provided an important impetus for discussion on these issues in Austria, although the Austrian parliament did not ratify the convention until 1992. The document can essentially be summarized in three concepts: protection, provision and participation. The protection of children and the allocation of resources for children are implemented relatively well by Austria's children's policies in practice. However, as far as participation opportunities for children are concerned, there is work to be done. Participatory rights for children and adolescents appear to be least compatible with Austria legislation. The structural discrimination is worst especially in those areas that are so vitally important for developing children, such as family and school, but also in other areas, such as politics and business.

More and more adherents of the children's rights movement and chiefly childhood researchers have come to view children as persons in their own right in society who are capable of making decisions for themselves and act in their own best interests. They point out that children, unlike adults, rarely have the independent resources they need in order to have a say in society and, most importantly, in their own future and to make changes accordingly. As a result, the experts argue in favour of a culture of participation and co-determination in all areas of life that are important for

children. Individual developments in political and legal spheres illustrate that children have been acknowledged as persons in their own right (cf. Kromer 1996 and 1999).

1.2.2. The Role of the Parents

In Austria, the classic patterns of the division of labour between the sexes remain wide-spread. Gainful employment among women has increased over the last few decades. (Currently 37.5% of women are employed full-time, while 20.1% are employed part-time, according to Statistics Austria, June 4, 2004.) Women's increased participation in the workforce has not seen a corresponding rise in the numbers of men taking on household and family duties. Women still perform the majority of housework and are still chiefly responsible for early education and care. Approximately 75% of early education and care is done by women. This fundamental division of labour continues to exist even when both partners are gainfully employed.

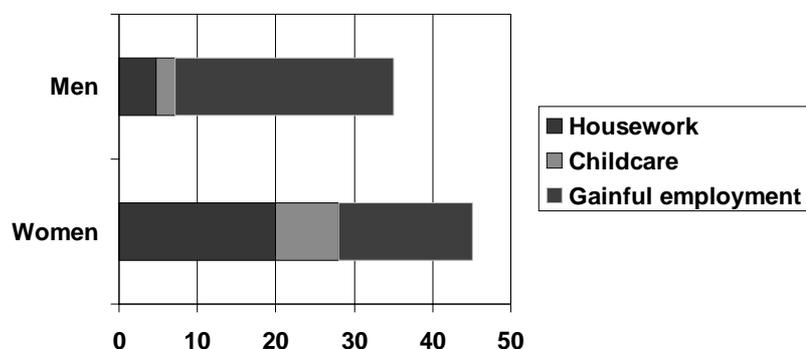
Men's attitudes seem to be evolving somewhat in terms of sharing the household and early education and care duties more equally; however, the situation on the ground is quite different. Men who have a negative opinion on the traditional gender-specific division of domestic labour do not help out around the house any more than men who favour a traditional division of labour. Since the mid-1990s no fundamental changes in the pattern of the division of domestic labour have taken place. However, more often younger couples tend to share household and early education and care duties more equally (cf. Statistics Austria, *Running the Household 2003*, 15ff., Novy/Adam. 1998, 14ff., Kromer 1998, 15ff.).

In practice the division of domestic labour between men and women is reflected in the average amount of working hours a week between the sexes². Women work an average of 45.2 hours a week in time spent in gainful employment, on household chores and on early education and care. Men, on the other hand, worked a total of only 35.1 hours a week. Only one-fifth of their entire work output was dedicated to housework and early education and care. (cf. Statistics Austria, *Running the Household 2002* 14ff.).

² The figures in the micro-census refer to men and women over the age of 18; this includes gainfully and non-gainfully employed persons. Among the gainfully employed, time spent on housework and early education and care amounted to 46.1 per cent of women's average 64-hour total workweek and to 15.4 per cent of men's average 48.4 hour total workweek.

Chart 1.1.:

Average weekly working hours among men and women)



Source: Statistics Austria 2003

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1.3. Impact of Societal Change on Early Childhood Care

Demographic and societal changes have had repercussions on the early education and care situation. The following section outlines the most important changes that have taken place: population development, changes in family life, the increased number of gainfully employed women, the shift in values and immigration in Austria, and illustrates how they have impacted early education and care and what new challenges they present to day-care facilities.

1.3.1. Population Development

Somewhat more than eight million people live in Austria today. The population development in Austria is progressing analogous to the rest of Western and Central Europe: The number of children is decreasing, while the number of elderly is increasing. Over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries Austria has gone from being a society with a birth surplus and a young population to a society with low birth rates, (The average number of children per woman came to 1.4 in 2002.) a surplus in the death rate and an aging population. In 2002 there were 1,339,902 children and adolescents under the age of 15 in Austria, corresponding to 16.6% of the entire population. According to forecasts from Statistics Austria, this percentage will continue to fall, coming to 12.2% by 2050 (cf. www.statistik.gv.at).

This demographic development has triggered some profound changes in the family structure. Over the last few decades, the number of families with three or more children has decreased dramatically, while the number of one or two-children families is on the rise (48% of Austrian

families have only one child). This means that more and more children grow up without siblings and the family is losing ground as a forum for social learning. As a result, day-care facilities are taking on increasing importance in this regard in particular; they are being transformed into places where social contact takes place and relationships are formed (cf. Kytir, Münz 1999, 118ff.).

1.3.2. Changes in Our Way of Life

It is not just the size of the family that has changed, but also parents' way of life, which in turn affects their children.

The traditional nuclear family, consisting of a biological father, a biological mother and one or more children, remains predominant in Austria. However, there is evidence that the make-up of families and adult partnerships is undergoing change as well. In Austria it is just as common for couples to start a family without being married as it is for couples to wait until marriage to have their first child, depriving the institution of marriage of its hegemonic position. Other forms of cohabitation involving adults and children are accepted by society (one-parent families, patchwork families and cohabitating, common law partnerships).

Our increased freedom to create family bonds as we see fit is also reflected in our freedom to break these bonds. Marriage and family can no longer be understood as permanent social relationships in this context. Divorces in 2002 affected just under 18,000 minors, of which just under 5,000 were under the age of six (cf. www.statistik.gv.at).

The number of single parents has risen in the last few years, coming to 19% in 2001, with the number of step-families increasing as well (cf. Statistics Austria 2000/2001, p 9f).

The changing way of life in many families has meant that day-care facilities are now faced with new challenges and must now adapt to the needs of today's families and the diversity in the make-up of the family.

Parents finding themselves in difficult situations often seek support from early education and care institutions and contact with other parents. As such, the kindergarten embodies not only a place for education and care of children, but also a centre for communication and advice for parents.

1.3.3. Women in the Workforce

see update

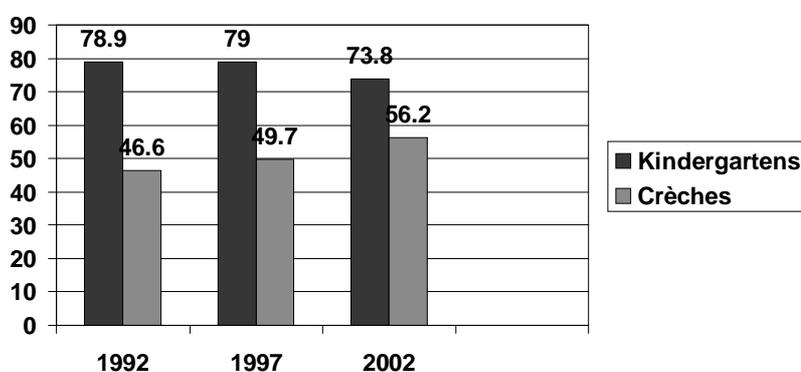
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Profound changes in the status have women have also taken place. Equipped with better qualifications and training (compared to previous generations), women in general usually pursue a career, albeit with a few interruptions, and are as a result increasingly less economically dependent on their husbands or partners. In the last few years, the number of women in the workforce has climbed, and already over 30% of all children under the age of six have a mother who is gainfully employed (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Education and care 2002/03).

Women's involvement in the labour market and the minimal to non-existent willingness on the part of men to participate to an appropriate degree in the care and raising of their sons and daughters have resulted in the problem of providing day-care for children who are not yet old enough to attend school. Consequently, day-care facilities have taken on an important role in making it possible to combine family and professional life. Nearly all three to five-year-old children whose mothers work for a living attend kindergarten (98%). In contrast, not even one out of seven children under the age of two whose mothers are gainfully employed are entrusted to a day-care facility (cf. Statistics Austria. Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03).

Chart 1.2.:

Percentage of Children in Crèches and Kindergartens with Gainfully Employed Mothers



Source: Statistics Austria

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Women's increased presence in the labour market and the resulting rise in demand for institutional early education and care go hand in hand with calls to extend opening hours for day-care facilities and make them more flexible. The majority of parents are calling for opening hours of day-care facilities to correspond more closely with normal working hours, and with those of single-parent families in particular (cf. Hartmann 1996, 83).

1.3.4. Changes in Our Value System

Growing opportunities for educations, higher average household incomes and a rising geographic, as well as social mobility all lead to a loosening of affiliations with traditional groups and certain strata of society. "Milieus" are created that are defined less on the basis of material status than on the basis of education, lifestyle and values. Today these are referred to as "plural communities of lifestyle and values" increasingly characterised by economical principles. Changes in parent's values systems, for example in how they raise their children and what objectives they have in mind for their children's education, have become unmistakably noticeable as an outcrop of this societal transformation. Since the end of the 1960s, parents have been applying a more liberal hand to the

upbringing of their children, as evidenced in their less authoritarian style. Today, increased importance is placed on raising children to have a sense of responsibility and autonomy (cf. Kromer 1998, 54). In contrast, ideals, such as obedience, submitting to a pre-defined set of rules, taking the needs of others into account and fitting in, have seen a decline. Naturally, this impacts on how parents raise their children on a specific day-to-day basis.

Kindergarten educators are there to help every child establish his or her own individual value system. However, they must refrain from imposing their own values on their charges, but should accept their values and merely show them that different values exist (cf. Hartmann 1996, 84f.).

1.3.5. Immigration and Integration

Due to a large influx of immigration to Austria since the mid-1950s, Austria's population is becoming increasingly more heterogeneous. Austria has taken in refugees and asylum-seekers from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and foreign workers have come to Austria as result of recruitment efforts from 1962 to 1974. Since the mid-1980s, the expatriate population has reached a considerable size by either family members from abroad joining their family members in Austria or by the formation of new families. As a consequence of the rising percentage of foreign and bi-national marriages, a growing number of children born in Austria, today one-fifth, have at least one non-Austrian parent (cf. Kytir / Münz 1999, 127ff.). This also entails additional challenges for day-care facilities. They have the additional task of helping to integrate the children into Austrian society. It has become necessary to raise children interculturally and in an atmosphere geared toward overcoming language and communication difficulties. Children should be guaranteed linguistic and socio-cultural integration from the start. Giving children from different countries and cultural backgrounds the opportunity to come together can help reduce and prevent xenophobia and intolerance (cf. Hartmann 1996, 84).

In summary, these societal developments have meant that it is no longer a matter of course that today's children come from a traditional nuclear family, that parents, due to their jobs, often do not have a great deal of time to spend on early education and care, let alone supervise their children all day long, and much more. As a result, changes have taken root in the field of early childhood education and care, as well as the definition of new challenges for educators. Oftentimes they have to take on additional responsibilities in order to strike a balance with parental upbringing and are confronted with new challenges with regard to integration and language acquisition.

1.4. Family Policy Situation in Austria

The family takes on many different constellations, and the concept of family has undergone a profound transformation in the last few years and decades. This has created a host of different kinds of partnerships and various relationships between the generations. The legal sphere is now taking a wide range of different types of family constellations into account. Political decisions will have to be made concerning just how to deal with this plurality and whether or not an attempt will be made to regulate emerging family constellations by law, thereby defining them as the forerunners of future families. As regards family policy, Austria has varying (party) political

approaches. The governing coalition parties ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) and the FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party) tend to view the family more as an institution, while the SPÖ (Social Democratic Party of Austria) focuses more on the many existing family constellations and their social situation, placing family policies more in the realm of the realm of labour issues (cf. Rosenberger 1999, 771ff.).

Family policies define the framework in which families in our society live. This is done by using various instruments:

The "Familienlastenausgleichsfonds" (Family Burden Equalisation Fund, or FLAF), a federal aid fund for families with children, is the most important instrument in Austria. Its aim is to cushion the economic disadvantages faced by families with children by redistributing resources. The "Familienbeihilfe" (federal family allowance), the "Mutter-Kind-Pass-Bonus" (allowances paid out on the basis of a mother-child card, a transcript of required prenatal and postnatal medical examinations of mother and child), parental leave benefits and early education and care benefits are paid out from the FLAF. (More detailed information on federal aid for families is given under 3.1.) International "days" and "years" also play an important role in Austrian familial policies, as they promote increased political action in this sphere. The 1994 "Year of the Family" led to an increased focus on parental education; efforts were made to improve the mother-child card and the Austrian Institute for Family Studies was founded (cf. Richter 1999, 790f.). And this year, the ten-year anniversary of the International Year of the Family, further reforms are planned: working groups have been set up to develop sustainable perspectives on particular issues of relevance to the family.

1.4.1. Compatibility of Work and Family: Political Initiatives

The compatibility of work and family is one of the central issues in discussions centring on family policies. A series of legal regulation introduced since the 1990s (1990 "Familienpaket" (Family Package), 1992/93 "Gleichbehandlungspaket" ("Equality Package) attempted in particular to increase the compatibility of work and family and to ensure a more just distribution of housework and early education and care duties between the sexes. Maternity regulations were improved, options for choosing and arranging parental leave and part-time work in the initial one and a half to four years of a new child's life were expanded and the legal foundations for part-time work were also improved (cf. Gisser 2003, 21).

In connection with the compatibility of work and family, institutional early education and care taken of a key role, and parents', and in particular mothers', opportunities for pursuing gainful employment are largely dependent the availability of early education and care services. Initiatives taken by the provinces and municipalities to expand these services and federal funding have resulted in the creation of additional places in day-care facilities in the last few years and the extension of their opening hours. From 1997 to 2000 a total of € 87.2 million in federal funding was additionally earmarked for the expansion of day-care facilities to meet the current need.

The introduction of the early education and care benefit, aimed at giving parents more freedom in choosing between obtaining early education and care and pursuing gainful employment, has, however, shown a reversed effect. So far, women have withdrawn from gainful employment for longer periods of time. The percentage of women who opted to pursue gainful employment before their child reached 2 ¼ years of age dropped from 54% to 35% (cf. Lutz 2003).

1.4.2. Promoting Father Participation

Women are predominately responsible for early education and care. The traditional division of household and early education and care duties has seen minimal change. Nonetheless, more and more fathers seem to be willing to take on increased responsibility for early education and care.

Interest on the part of fathers to take parental leave is on the rise; the introduction of a paternity month is under discussion. Specifically, the debate is focusing on enabling fathers to assume more responsibility for caring for and looking after their children.

Since 1990 fathers in Austria have been eligible for receiving paid parental leave. Since then a number of legal changes have been made in this area:

- In 1996, new parents were able to take advantage of the full two years of parental leave on the condition that at least three months of the entire leave period were taken by the father of the child.
- In 2000 fathers became eligible for receiving a parental leave benefit. Previously it had been contingent on whether the mother was eligible (having worked the minimum period of time for eligibility). Replacing the parental leave benefit with the early education and care benefit increased the number of eligible recipients. Recipients are no longer required to have worked a minimum period of time in order to be considered eligible, and the limits for earning additional income have been raised.

The number of men claiming parental leave and/or the early education and care benefit has slowly but steadily risen since 1990. However, these legal amendments have not been shown to have had any noticeable influence on this increase (cf. Strobl/ Hausegger 2003). In January 2004 the percentage of men taking parental leave came to 2.5% overall and to 4.2% in Vienna (according to information from the Central Association of Austrian Social Insurance Authorities, March 18, 2004). More and more men have come to see early education and care as enriching their lives; remarkably 54% of men are of the opinion that men should also provide nursing care (cf. Zulehner 2003, 88f.).

1.5. Current Issues and Objectives in Early education and care

The following issues are currently at the centre of the on-going debate surrounding early childhood education and care in connection with institutional early education and care.

1.5.1. Fostering Gifted Children Early On

Having recognised that the future of the “knowledge society” begins before children commence compulsory schooling, Austria, like other countries, places great importance on fostering gifted children in their early years.

Fostering gifted children and researching giftedness and talent are in a way viewed as key indicators for the quality of a school system and should not only be seen as instruments for promoting intelligence, but also a broader spectrum of skills as well. Giftedness is not only equated with a high, or higher, degree of intelligence; more important is rather combining this intellect with other factors, such as creativity, involvement with others and social skills. Giftedness is therefore comprehensive and cannot be understood as a one-dimensional attribute.

The goal is not to wait until boys and girls start school to begin fostering their intellectual talents, but rather in their pre-school years, especially while in kindergarten. It is particularly during early childhood and their pre-school years that the key foundation for future developments is laid and developed. However, it is important to note that sending children to school too early should be avoided.

The Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture takes on-going action in the context of training future kindergarten pedagogues at the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care aimed at instructing future educators on “(highly) gifted children” (according to Ms. Maria Dippelreiter, June 2004, see also

http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/10939/Vorschule_Hochbegabung.pdf):

Action	Objective	Implementation
Providing information on seminars or lectures for teachers at the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care	Disseminating information on relevant seminars or lectures	On a continual basis
Publishing a reader for teachers at Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care and for those in the profession who are interested, etc.	Knowledge sharing; incl. providing information on the project management platform	700 copies sent out to date; can also be viewed online (see above); a great deal of interest
Establishing an electronic project management platform “highly gifted children – early childhood education”	Knowledge sharing, exchange (forums), encouraging participants to send in their own contributions	On a continual basis; many have already accessed it and continue to do so; authorisation for accessing the database is being granted regularly
Holding continuing education seminars nationwide for teachers at the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care	Knowledge sharing; offering the opportunity to meet experts from organisations/institutions; exchange of information	Planned for October 2005

Austrian kindergarten laws all stress that children's development should be fostered without using school-like teaching methods (according to Dr. Köhler, February 24, 2004).

1.5.2. Group Makeup in Early education and care Institutions

see update page 4

Yet another current issue under discussion in the field of early childhood education and care is group constellation. Currently the trend is toward a greater mixing of ages, or so-called "family groups": three, four and five-year-olds are all together in one group with emphasis on capitalising on teaching social learning within the group. This affects on how the kindergarten is run in terms of educational content and organisation, and this approach is also taught during the kindergarten pedagogue training course (according to Ms. Dippelreiter, March 2002). At present, Austria has some 250 day-care facilities that are explicitly instructed to mix different ages within the groups (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare (Day-Care Facilities) 2002/03.). In addition, parent-toddler groups have had mixed-age groups since their conception.

1.5.3. Gender-Sensitive Education

Kindergarten pedagogues often cite treating all of the children in the kindergarten equally as one of their prime educational goals. What is meant is equal treatment of both boys and girls. As gender roles are established as early as early childhood, efforts must be made to ensure equity for girls and boys in their pre-school years. The aim of gender-sensitive education is to expand girls' and boys' sphere of activity. Opening up a realm of opportunities to children allows them to acquire as large a spectrum of skills and abilities as possible. In Austria several initiatives concerning this issue have been launched in the last few years:

- Since the mid 1990s individual kindergarten pedagogues in Vienna have begun dealing with the issue of "gender-sensitive education". At the 1997 conference on education, gender-specific early childhood education was discussed among the community of experts in this field. For the first time, the field of kindergarten teaching was represented equally alongside the areas "school" and "leisure time".
- In 1998 the Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs participated in the EU project "Gleichheit teilen – Partageons l'Égalité" (Let's Share Equality) (cf. Federal Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs 1999). In the autumn of the same year, a programme was drawn up for implementing gender-specific teaching in early childhood education in Austria's day-care facilities.
- In 1999 a special kindergarten located in Vienna's 15th district (the fun&care day-care centre) was set up with a particular focus on gender sensitivity. Due to the overwhelming success of this model project – the assessment produced thoroughly positive results – plans are underway to apply this concept to other day-care facilities and concentrate on other key issues in gender-sensitive teaching (cf. Orner 2003). For several years now, day-care facility providers have been offering additional training opportunities centred on "girls and boys in kindergarten" (cf. Schneider 1999, 14).

1.5.4. Interculturality

Due to the evolving economic, political, cultural, social and demographic situation in Europe, the issue of bilingualism and even multilingualism has been increasingly debated in the last few years, including the key issue of bringing children up to be bilingual or multilingual (cf. Seher 2002,62).

In its political platform, even the Austrian federal government has defined intercultural kindergarten education focusing on promoting language acquisition as an important goal (cf. Dippelreiter 2002, 5).

Programmes promoting language acquisition among children are intended to guarantee the linguistic and socio-cultural integration of children who are not native speakers of German. Here, day-care facilities play a very important role. Children entering kindergarten who speak a language other than German as their mother tongue should be educated in both German as well and in their native language. Special focus is given to having the children learn German in an intercultural context. The natural acquisition of a second language should be fostered in play without allowing the development of the children's mother tongue to suffer. Multilingualism represents enrichment for all children (cf. Buttaroni, et. al. 2002, 15ff.).

Hand in hand with the discussion on bilingualism and multilingualism, new attention is being given to foreign language acquisition in kindergarten. Language skills are taking on increasing significance during education and training, as well as in terms of "educational value". Parents and others have expressed their desire for children to begin learning foreign languages as early as kindergarten. More and more day-care facilities are offering children the opportunity to learn additional foreign languages (primarily English and the languages of immigrants to Austria) (cf. Seher 2002, 62).

1.6. Age of Children in Day-Care facilities and Age of Children Starting School

Early education and care in Austria is provided for boys and girls primarily aged three to five. In comparison, the percentage of children under three years of age in day-care facilities is small. Even six-year-olds, provided that they are not yet able to attend school, may take advantage of day-care facilities such as kindergarten; however, the number of six-year-olds has clearly fallen due to the existence of pre-school institutions associated with primary school (see 1.6.2).

1.6.1. Early education and care Quotas

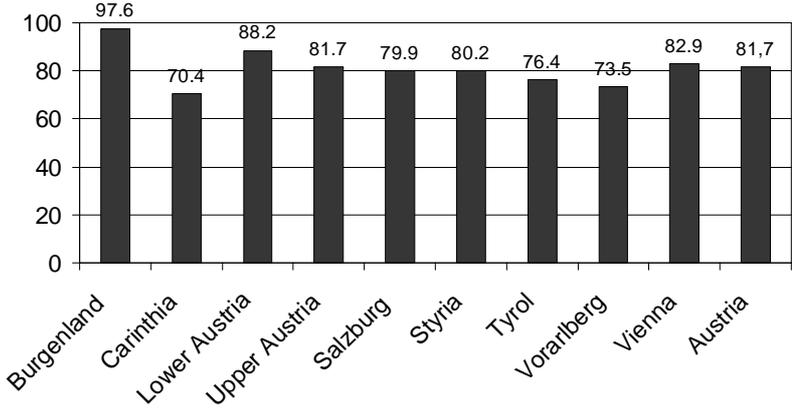
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Currently there are 487,000 boys and girls under the age of six living in Austria, of which 225,574 attend some kind of day-care facility. Nationwide a total of 81.6% of all three-year-olds, 88.4% of all four-year-olds and 93.6% of all five-year-olds are in institutional early education and care (cf. Statistics Austria: Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03.).

As this chart shows, in a comparison of Austria’s provinces, Burgenland has the most three to five-year-old children (97.6%) in early education and care. Carinthia (70.4%) and Vorarlberg (73.5%) had the lowest percentages.

Chart 1.3.:

Percentage of 3-5-year-old Children in Institutional Childcare as Compared between the Provinces



Source: Statistics Austria

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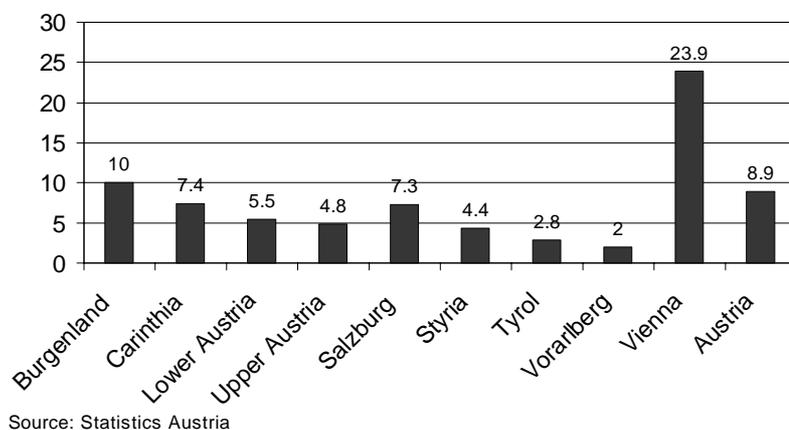
Early education and care outside the family for children under three years of age is a very seldom occurrence in Austria. In this age group, only 22,800 children are either in a crèche, with a childminder or in another similar kind of facility; this corresponds to a early education and care quota of 8.9% (compared to the three to five-year-olds with 81.7%). In a European comparison, Austria comes in the bottom third (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03. Vienna, 31).

At 23.9%, Vienna has by far the highest early education and care quota for children under three, followed by Burgenland with 10%. The provinces of Vorarlberg (2%) and Tyrol (2.8%) had the lowest percentages of children in this age group in day-care facilities (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03.)

Chart 1.4.:

see update page 6

Childcare Quota for Children under Three Years of Age as Compared between the Provinces



Source: Statistics Austria

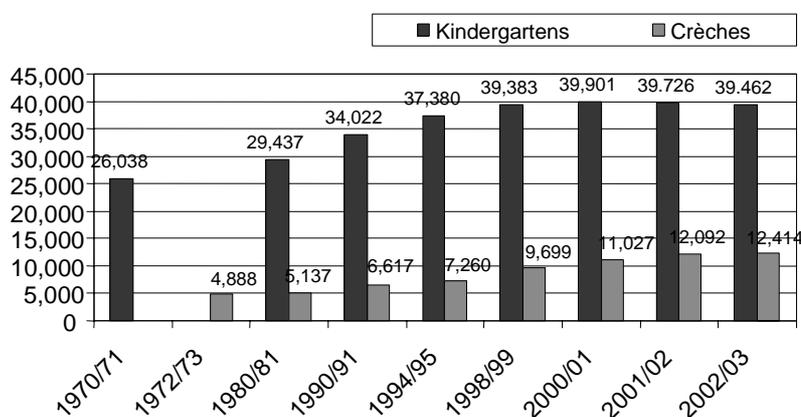
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There is growing demand for institutional early education and care for children under three years of age. In spite of the drop in the number of children, the number of children under three in day-care facilities has clearly risen, while remaining constant over the last few years for three to five-year-olds (see also section 3.3. on the day-care facilities available in Austria).

Chart 1.5.:

see update page 7

Number of Children in Kindergartens and Crèches as Compared over Time



Source: Statistics Austria

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In Austria six-year-old boys and girls are also in institutional early education and care. For this group, the early education and care quota comes to 12.9%. These are children who have not yet begun attending school.

1.6.2. Compulsory Schooling and Age for Beginning School

Schooling is compulsory for all children living in Austria on a permanent basis. In Austria, children begin attending school at six years of age. The qualifying date is August 31 of the year in which the child has completed his or her sixth year. Schooling is mandatory by law beginning on September 1 (the start of the school year in Austria) of that same year. It is possible for so-called "Dispenskinder" (children who celebrate their sixth birthday between September 1 and December 31) to be accepted to school early. For these children, the parents must submit an application requesting this, and the child must be ready to begin school. Every child is evaluated according to his or her readiness to begin school upon beginning school. Upon request the child can be presented personally to the head of the school, and/or an expert medical opinion from the school doctor can be obtained. Children who have reached the age for compulsory schooling but are not yet ready for beginning school are admitted to the pre-school grade. The possibility of repeating a year and enrolling children in school early creates a wide range of ages in the class (cf. Riefler 2003, 40).

1.6.3. Thoughts on the Commencement of Compulsory Schooling

Regulations focusing on a qualifying date are always problematic. From a pedagogical point of view it would be desirable for children to experience a seamless transition from their pre-school to their schooling years. Various approaches to solving this problem have been discussed in Austria in the

last few years. The proposal of having compulsory schooling commence the week beginning after the child's sixth birthday is doomed to failure from the start for a variety of reasons, including differing political competences and the resulting administrative paperwork. Another model favours admitting children to school according to calendar year. While this would eliminate the unequal treatment of the "Dispenskind" that exists by law, it would at the same time result in many children entering school earlier than others. The consequence of this would be an increase in the number of children requiring additional attention (cf. Riefler 2003, 41f.).

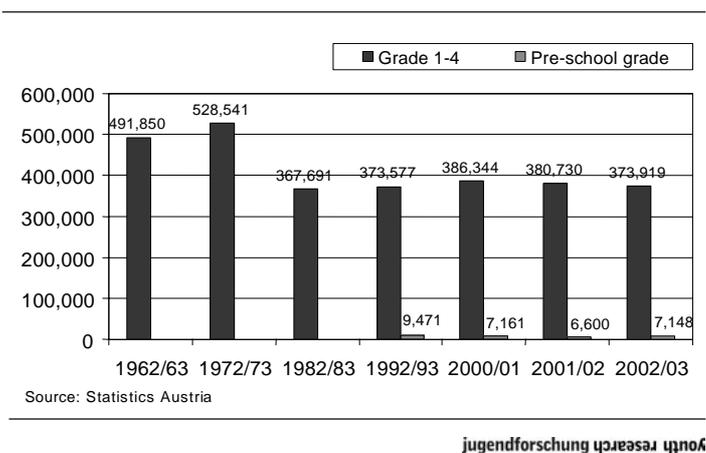
The majority of parents do not wish to send their children to school earlier. Parents in general tend to keep their children back if they are slightly older, by just a few weeks or months, than the legally defined age for the commencement of compulsory schooling. The chief reason for this is the discussion on school stress, as it is assumed that older children will be better equipped to handle the stress of school. Another factor may also be that parents are placing more importance on giving their children a "childhood with more play-time marred by as few outside demands as possible" (cf. Riefler 2003, 42).

1.6.4. Figures on the Commencement of Schooling

In the 2002/2003 school years, 373,919 boys and girls attended elementary school (grades one through four), the lowest number in nine years. Due to dropping birth-rates since the 1990s, there were a total of 92,489 new first-graders throughout Austria, 1,180 less than the previous year (-1.3%). The percentage of foreign grade school children rose from 5% in the 1989/1990 school year to 12% for the 2002/2003 school year. The pre-school grade which children who are of age for compulsory schooling but are not yet ready to begin their schooling enter was attended by 7,148 boys and girls (cf. Statistics Austria (ed.): The Austrian School System 2002/03).

Chart 1.6.:

Elementary School Students as Compared over Time



1.7. Types of Day-Care: An Overview

see update page 8

The types of institutional early education and care in Austria differ primarily according to the age of the children. Institutions, such as crèches, kindergartens and parent-toddler groups, are available for boys and girls from birth to the age of six, supplemented by the services of playgroups and childminders.

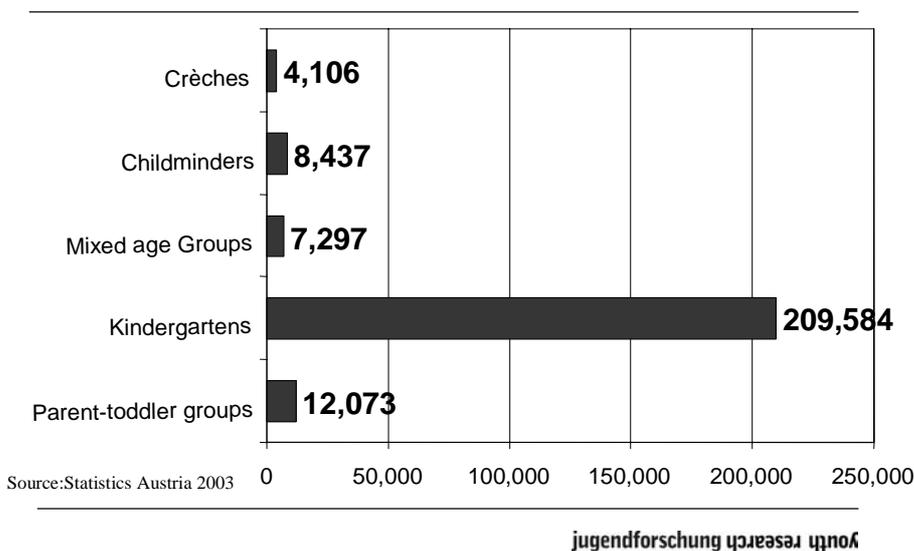
Approximately 70% of all day-care facilities are operated by local authorities (primarily by municipalities). In addition, parishes, family organizations, non-profit associations, companies and private persons also operate day-care facilities.

The number of children per group in crèches and kindergartens has fallen in the last few years in every province. While there were on average 14 children per a crèche group in 1997, this number dropped to 12.4 children per group in 2002. There were 20.7 children per kindergarten group in 2002, compared to 22.3 children in 1997. (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03 and Schattovits 1999, 544ff.). Parent-toddler groups and childminders principally feature small group sizes and focus on the individual needs of each child. Childminders supervise a maximum of five children at one time, while there are five to ten children per group in parent-toddler groups.

The following chart indicates how many children were enrolled in which type of day-care facility in 2000. It is evident that the kindergarten is by far the most widespread form of day-care, accounting for 86.7% of all children in institutional early education and care. The remaining 13.3% are distributed over crèches (5%), childminders (3.5%), mixed age institutions (3.1%) and parent-toddler groups (1.7%).

Chart 1.7.:

Children in Dy-Care Facilities



1.7.1. Crèches

see update page 9

Crèches provide day-care for children under three. They are specially geared toward meeting the needs of infants and toddlers and are based on a close cooperation with the parents. Crèche groups are very small, with the average number per crèche staff member coming to 8.7, with the maximum group size coming to 10 children per crèche staff member (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03).

As crèches primarily cater to working parents, they are generally operated all day. In 2002, 74% of mothers of children in crèches worked, and in the past few years this percentage has risen to just under 80%. Currently 12,073 children are in one of Austria's 707 crèches (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare 2003, 11).

1.7.2. Kindergartens

see update page 10

Kindergarten provides educationally valuable early education and care for children from three years of age until they commence compulsory schooling. The objective of kindergarten day-care is to foster and promote children's physical, mental and emotional development. With a total of 4,654 institutions supervising 209,584 children, the kindergarten is by far Austria's most common form of day-care.

As a pre-school educational institution, kindergartens enjoy widespread acceptance among Austrian society. For this reason, a host of children whose parent(s) are not employed attend kindergarten. Only slightly more than half of all kindergartens offer all-day opening hours with no break at midday (58.9%) However, there are considerable differences from province to province as regards

opening hours. In Vienna, nearly all kindergartens are operated all day with no midday break, while in Tyrol and Vorarlberg only 13.8% and 7%, respectively, are.

This confronts parents with a vastly varying situation, and in particular mothers whose opportunities for gainful employment may be limited due to kindergarten opening hours.

Table 1.1.: Kindergartens listed according to opening hours in percent

Provinces	All-day with no midday break	All-day with break	Half-day
Burgenland	71.9	15.1	13.0
Carinthia	64.3	0.8	34.9
Lower Austria	68.1	31.7	0.2
Upper Austria	70.2	6.8	23.0
Salzburg	63.2	4.3	32.5
Styria	32.3	3.2	64.5
Tyrol	13.8	57.2	29.0
Vorarlberg	7.0	76.3	16.7
Vienna	98.0	-	2.0
Total	58.9	18.9	22.2

Source: Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03

The maximum allowable group size is between 25 and 28 children per group depending on the province. In 2002 there were approximately 21 children per group on average and 16 children per kindergarten educator (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03). For special needs children there are kindergartens that concentrate on specific areas and provide medical and psychological care.

Special Needs Kindergartens

In special needs kindergartens children are cared for by specially trained "special education kindergarten pedagogues". Targeted programmes for promoting these special needs children and providing them with therapy are specially designed to encourage the development of these children. Fundamentally, the same general principles of human learning apply to the education and promotion of these children; however, the teaching methods are specially modified to fit the appropriate phase of development.

Integration Groups

Integrative early education and care and education means mixing disabled and non-disabled children together. The objective of integration groups is to integrate special needs children into traditional kindergartens and to avoid promoting a segregated environment for special needs children. This opens up a great opportunity primarily in children's pre-school years for children to

develop fewer prejudices towards the disabled and practice social learning. However, there is no legal entitlement to integrative early education and care. Kindergarten pedagogues and special needs kindergarten pedagogues work together in integration groups which, as a rule, are made up of 12 to 15 children, of which three to five have been medically evaluated as special needs children pursuant to the Austrian Law on Persons with Disabilities.

1.7.3. Mixed Age Day-Care Facilities

see update page 11

As previously mentioned, facilities that provide early education and care for children from birth until they commence compulsory schooling in mixed age groups are gaining in importance in Austria. On the one hand, they offer an alternative to the age-homogenous early education and care of infants and toddlers and of three to six-year-olds provided by crèches and kindergartens, respectively. On the other hand they also represent a response to the sinking number of children and the increased need for early education and care for children under the age of three (cf. Hover-Reisner 2003, 106). The age structure in the groups is predefined: children under three years of age may make up maximum one-third of the children in the group. The 250 such institutions that exist in Austria provide day-care for 7,297 children. The staff-child ratio comes to 1:13.6. The mixed age facilities are predominantly (65.2%) run all day with no break (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03).

1.7.4. Childminders

Women who work as childminders (some provinces also have male childminders), regularly provide day-care in their homes for up to five children maximum. As the groups are very small – the average staff-child ratio comes to 1:3.4 – the childminders are able to focus on each individual child and his or her personal needs. The needs of the parents are also taken into account as well (flexibility with regards to working hours, special requests). The educational objectives and developmental possibilities offered to children supervised by a childminder are rooted more in dealing with everyday life situations rather than in specific educational programmes. Here, early education and care hours are generally more flexible than in crèches and kindergartens.

Childminders established themselves as early education and care providers in Austria in the 1970s. After an initial phase which saw the formation of scattered associations, this early education and care model gained in popularity. In the last few years in particular, the significance of childminders has experienced a clear rise, as on one hand the number of children requiring early education and care has climbed and on the other hand qualifications for childminders have also improved. The one formal prerequisite childminders must meet is obtaining a day-care license from the competent district administrative authority. Day-care facility providers also impose additional requirements, such as obligatory initial and further training (cf. Austrian Federation of Foster Parents', Adoptive Parents' and Childminders' Associations 2004, 3) in order to ensure proper quality. In 2003, a total of 8,437 children were in the care of 2,480 childminders in Austria, predominantly on a half-day basis.

The majority of boys and girls (46%) were between zero and three years old (information from the Austrian Federation of Foster Parents', Adoptive Parents' and Childminders' Associations, June 2, 2004, not including the childminders recommended by the Österreichisches Hilfswerk³).

1.7.5. Parent-Toddler Groups and Playgroups

Parent-toddler groups and playgroups⁴ are set up and run on the basis of independent initiatives and key cooperation from the parents. Due to the structure of the association, the caregivers and the parents work closely together, thereby guaranteeing a family-like environment. In the parent-toddler groups the parents take on organisational, as well as educational responsibilities.

The first parent-toddler group came into being after the student protests in 1968 and differed from kindergartens from the beginning, as parents took on educational responsibilities. Although ideologies, such as "proletarian upbringing marked by class struggle" or "compensatory upbringing" (cf. Eurydice database, 7f.) initially characterised parent-toddler groups, today the focus is on partnership and equality between children and adults.

In 2003 there were 318 parent-toddler groups and playgroups⁵ throughout Austria run by 189 associations. Most of the groups were located in Tyrol (92) and Vorarlberg (88), followed by Carinthia (39) and Vienna (38). The groups are made up of a maximum of 15 children of mixed ages. The child to caregiver ratio, depending on the children's ages and individual needs, is between four and ten children per caregiver; the average comes to 6.5:1.

As the parent-toddler groups are run by parents, the opening hours meet the needs of the family. 50% of the parent-toddler groups are open six to nine hours daily; one-fourth were open less than six hours, and one-fourth were open longer than nine hours. Playgroups are, unlike parent-toddler groups, generally characterised by shorter opening hours. In 2003 they were open for 9.4 hours on average. The majority of the children in parent-toddler groups or playgroups (56.1%) spend only a half a day in care, while 37.2% are there for the whole day. The length of time the children spend in parent-toddler groups and playgroups varies widely from province to province. In Vienna the largest number of children by far (84.7%) is in full-day care, while in Tyrol (69.5%) and Vorarlberg (96.9%) half-day care is most common. The large majority of the children in parent-toddler groups and playgroups are under the age of three.

³ In terms of organisation, childminders are divided into two large groups. The first group is with so-called private day-care facility providers, which are principally organisations within the federation. Here, the childminders are employed with full insurance benefits. The second group receives assistance with recommendations, but work as new independent contractors. The Hilfswerk primarily should be pointed out in this context as it supervises around one thousand childminders in Lower Austria and Salzburg in this way. More detailed information on the childminders sponsored by the Hilfswerk cannot be given here.

⁴ Playgroups only exist in Tyrol and Vorarlberg.

⁵ Like the childminders, not all parent-toddler groups are organised via the federation. The data given here apply only to those parent-toddler groups and playgroups which are organised through the Federation of Austrian Parent-Toddler Groups.

1.8. Political Competencies and Co-operation

The kindergarten system in Austria is a matter for the provinces in terms of legislation and execution. The so-called training kindergartens are an exception to this rule which are run on the federal level and are part of the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care, and give kindergarten educators to-be practical experience. Each of Austria's nine provinces has its own kindergarten laws which regulate, among other things, the different types of day-care facilities and their responsibilities, their external and internal organisation and staff issues, whereby the provincial laws are in agreement on the essential points in spite of different wording.

The Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture is competent for developing and implementing the training curriculum at the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care. This includes competence for:

- creating the legal foundation (e.g. Law on School Organisation, Law on School Instruction),
- issuing ordinances, such as uniform framework curricula and examination regulations,
- allocating the budgetary and staff resources for the training course,
- initiating and planning the continued training of educators at the institutes for early childhood education and care.

After kindergartens, the majority of parent-toddler groups and childminders are regulated within the framework of the Youth Welfare Laws, and in Vienna and Salzburg under the Day-Care Law (cf. Schattovits 1999, 534).

Styria and Burgenland have no parent-toddler groups as defined by the Federation of Austrian Parent-Toddler Groups. In Burgenland, no legal foundation exists for parent-toddler groups which are therefore prohibited. In Styria, parent-toddler groups are permitted as private kindergartens pursuant to the Kindergarten Law, which means, among other things, that only trained kindergarten or after-school day-care centre teachers may work in parent-toddler groups in Styria.

Building codes are also very comprehensive and cost-intensive, making it impossible for parents' initiatives to meet them (according to the Federation of Austrian Parent-Toddler Groups (BÖE), May 11, 2004).

1.8.1. Cooperation between Authorities (Institutions and Ministries) Competent for Providing Early education and care with Selected Examples

The core responsibilities for the competent authorities are summarised in the following section:

- The Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations is responsible for defining the legal youth welfare framework. Youth welfare responsibilities encompass all measures concerning maternal, infant and youth welfare that serve the best interests of the child. The childminder system, as well as early education and care for small children, is partially regulated by the Youth Welfare Law. The main points of this legislation include strengthening the family's influence on child-

rearing and creating the framework for the best possible development for children and adolescents.

- The Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture is the competent authority for training kindergarten educators (see 1.8), thereby laying the foundation for national quality standards.
- The federal provinces are the competent authority for regulating the kindergarten and after-school day-care system (i.e. in terms of legislation and execution). For day-care facilities, the early education and care and day-care legislation and ordinances regulate the responsibilities of the institution in question and licensing criteria, e.g. facility size and equipment, group size and caregiver qualifications.

Co-operation takes place when these responsibilities overlap:

- A commission focusing on designing day-care outside of the family to meet current needs was set up on the basis of a joint decision taken by the federal government (Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations, Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, Federal Ministry for Health and Women's Affairs) and the provinces in November 2003 at the Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations. The objective of the commission was to draw up a catalogue of measures by the summer of 2004 addressing the new early education and care situation, regional peculiarities and flexible working hours in a targeted way and taking current needs into account, and outlining new perspective in early education and care on the basis of best practice models. The commission was made up of representatives from the federal government (Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations, Federal Ministry for Health and Women's Affairs, Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture), the federal provinces, the Association of Austrian Cities and Towns, the social partners and family organizations.
- The federal ministry competent for teacher training has invited the federal provinces to provide their input concerning the development of a new curriculum for the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care. The early childhood experts from the federal provinces are contributing information on current demands from the professional field which will be taken into account when the curricula are drawn up. Representatives from the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture are invited to attend the annual "Conference for Kindergarten Inspectors and Education Experts" for the purposes of sharing information and experience (according to Ms. Dippelreiter, May 18, 2004).

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2. Quality and Assessment

Today, many voices are calling for an increase in the number of day-care facilities for social policy reasons; however, it is just as important to ensure educational and early education and care quality (cf. Hartmann 1996, 191). Quality assurance and improvement takes on particular significance in connection with the challenge of making early childhood education and care the basis for life-long learning and laying the groundwork for equity and social cohesion. In Austria day-care facilities have a two-pronged responsibility to provide early education and care (this function is foremost especially in facilities catering to very young children) on one hand, and on the other hand to provide pre-school education. All of Austria's day-care facilities endeavour to meet these responsibilities to the best of their abilities.

This section will outline the approaches that exist in Austria concerning the quality of domestic day-care facility and take a look at the following issues in particular:

- Changing the definition of quality
- Differing perspectives on quality education and early education and care and
- Educational guidelines and their implementation.

Quality assessment, in other words the evaluation and collection of data on early childhood education and care in general, represents yet another focal point. For this reason, the data collected in the field of early education and care on which this Background Report is largely based will be presented.

2.1. Evolving Concepts of Quality

The concept of quality is subject to change. Quality objectives must be discussed and re-evaluated on a continual basis in order to keep up with current demands. Over the last few decades there have been various approaches and cultural traditions that have impacted our concept of quality. In the 1950s, quality was understood to mean "warmth" and "care". In the 1960s and 1970s early education and care began to focus on fostering children's cognitive development. In the 1980s and 1990s, a broader definition of quality began to take root, and even today our concept of quality remains largely unchanged: quality is an objective that involves the entire child and, in addition to cognitive stimulation, includes the preoccupation with children's health and safety, as well as offering them social and emotional support. Day-care facilities are there to provide children with an environment in which they can explore their world and are fostered in a variety of different ways. High-quality day-care takes into account children's physical, emotional and intellectual well-being and provides for the best possible development of their abilities and talents.

2.2. Various Interpretations of Quality

The quality of the day-care facilities depends on the objectives, functions and interests of the involved parties. In addition to the interests of the children, the day-care facility providers, the parents and the educators with their educational ideas and needs also influence these objectives.

From the children's perspective it can be stated that "high-quality day-care facilities should contribute to providing boys and girls with the following basic rights:

- Leading a healthy life
- Freedom of opinion
- Valuing their own personality
- Dignity and independence
- Self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning
- A balanced environment for both education and early education and care
- Sociability, friendship and working together with others
- Cultural differences and diversity, as well as
- A sense of belonging to a family and
- Happiness"

(cf. Hartmann 1996, 17).

When assessing the quality of day-care facilities, parents have varying perspectives. This is attributable to parents' wide range of lifestyles; the type of early education and care, how much it costs, earning a living by holding down a job and various ideas involving education and upbringing and desires for their children to be fostered as much as possible, to name a few, all play a part as well. In practice, the question of compatibility between the facility's opening hours and parents' working hours, as well as the opportunities for their children to grow and develop are mainly the key quality criteria when selecting a day-care facility (cf. Hartmann 1996, 17). Among experts, such as educators, inspectors and scholars, interest in giving children as many opportunities to grow and develop as possible take top priority.

Providing children with attention, opportunities to come into contact with other children and adults and a stimulating environment are intended to guarantee this. The needs of the children, respect and loving care form the basis of the early education and care provided by the day-care facility. The concept of quality from educators' point of view is concerned with the interests of their own profession and includes the desire for satisfactory working conditions, appreciation for the work they perform and the quality of their workplace, whereby conflicts of perspective may arise. For example, the objective of promoting gainful employment among mothers requires longer opening hours, which in turn runs counter to the interests of educators with children of their own.

However, for day-care facility providers, the implementation of their view of the world and conceptual perspectives remains foremost. Economic factors also play a part in providing early education and care services.

Some of these differing concepts are only indirectly related to what can be defined as educational quality. Educational quality places the point of view and the interests of the child, as perceived

vicariously, in the centre, making them the benchmark for kindergarten quality. The interests and the perspectives of the child take top priority among the various concepts of quality.

Quality Standards for Austrian Kindergartens and Crèches⁶

Based on scientific findings and on a comparison with childcare institutions within the EU, the Charlotte-Bühler-Institut has prepared quality standards for Austrian kindergartens. Recommendations for assuring and optimising quality have been issued for many fields education.

Group Size and Staff-Child Ratio

Hartmann and Stoll (2004) recommend the following standards for kindergarten groups with children aged 3 to 6 years:

Minimum standard:

A maximum of 20 children per group: 14 to 20 three-year-olds, 16 to 20 four- and five-year-olds. One trained kindergarten pedagogue and one kindergarten assistant per group, for three-year-olds the ratio is 5 to 10 children per pedagogue and/or assistant and 7 to 10 for four- and five-year-olds; in the early and later parts of the day and at lunchtime the staff-child ratio is 1:5.

Quality optimisation:

Step-by-step reduction of group size to 15 children in full-day childcare.

Two trained kindergarten pedagogues per group, temporary assistance from additional persons (pedagogically trained assistant, trainee, parents, etc.); no merging of groups in the afternoon and at marginal times.

Minimum standards regarding the staff-child ratio for various age groups (Charlotte-Bühler-Institut 2003)

Age of children	Staff-child ratio
Children under 1 year of age	1:4
Children from 1 to 2 years of age	1:6
Children from 2 to 3 years of age	1:8
Children from 3 to 4 years of age	1:10
Children from 4 years up to school enrolment	1:12
School-aged children	1:12

⁶ by: Charlotte- Bühler-Institut, Vienna

Indoor and Outdoor Space Requirements for Children

Minimum standard

Extension of the group room by one to two external play areas

Permanently accessible areas within or outside the group room to which the children can retire; additional equipment of other parts of the room with cushions, blankets and mattresses

One movement room for two groups which can be used by the children most of the time; generous activity areas within and outside the group room

Outdoors play area belonging to the kindergarten with an area of at least 500 m², divided into various sections (sand, grass, play equipment, water, bushes, hard pavement, ...)

Quality optimisation

The children can use the entire kindergarten area as a space for living, exploring and learning.

Comfortable hiding places for relaxation and for individual activities requiring concentration which are not under the regular supervision of adults

One movement room per group with a direct connection to the group room; can be used at all times; all children are free to choose from additional movement-related activities

Nature-oriented, diversified and creativity-enhancing design of the garden; daily outdoor activities for full-day childcare groups

Staff Qualifications

Minimum standard

Targeted, regional development of Institutes and Colleges for Early Childhood Education and Care in order to prevent applicants who have successfully passed a qualifying examination from being turned away; measures to increase the percentage of job entrants

Systematic qualification of the heads of kindergarten for management tasks, relevant opportunities for continuing education according to the latest scientific findings

Quality optimisation

Raising the educational level to the EU standard, i.e. education starts after completion of secondary stage II

Shifting of decision-making authority to the kindergarten head; more autonomy for the individual kindergarten

Continuing Education

Minimum standard

The statutorily required continuing education seminars are offered and attended; a collection of technical literature and materials is available at the kindergarten

One kindergarten assistant is hired for each group

Quality optimisation

Promotion and support of continuing education by granting leave from work and reimbursement of costs; more continuing education seminars are offered than statutorily required; exchange of relevant materials among staff

Continuing education in pedagogy for kindergarten assistants in order to be able to involve them more actively into childcare tasks

The lower threshold is 2 days per year per pedagogical staff member (Charlotte-Bühler-Institut 2003).

Preparation and Supervision of Pedagogical Work

Minimum standard

Adequate organisational and structural framework conditions; at least 20% of the working time as "childfree" preparation time; opportunities for reflection and supervision of pedagogical work, assistance from expert advisors

Quality optimisation

Measures to increase job satisfaction of the kindergarten pedagogues; supervision as part of the working time

Literature:

Charlotte-Bühler-Institut (2003). Entwicklung eines Feststellungsverfahrens zur pädagogischen Qualität in österreichischen Kindergärten und Kinderkrippen. Final Report. Unpublished script. Vienna: Charlotte-Bühler-Institut.

Hartmann, Waltraut & Stoll, M. (2004). Mehr Qualität für Kinder. Qualitätsstandards und Zukunftsperspektiven für den Kindergarten. Vienna öbv & hpt.

2.3. Quality Guidelines and Quality Assessment

As early education and care in Austria is regulated by legislation on the federal provincial level, no national quality standards exist aside from those concerning the training of kindergarten pedagogues. The provisions written into the provincial laws form the basis of high-quality day-care facilities. These provisions create a framework for quality assurance, primarily by stipulating the responsibilities of these facilities, as well as their structural guidelines, and are geared towards the children and their level of development. However, the laws do not always reflect the educational ideal. In terms of group size and staff-child ratio there is still much room for improvement from an educational point of view.

The demand that each group have two trained kindergarten pedagogues, for example, has been realized by very few facilities. The maximum group size allowable by law of 25 to 28 children per group exceeds by far the pedagogic recommendation of only 15 children to a group (according to Ms. Stoll, April 21, 2004).

In addition to the legal guidelines, educational recommendations, current results from research and demands arising from practice also set quality standards for day-care facilities.

On the basis of research results and close co-operation with kindergarten departments in the provincial governments and with on-the-job educators, quality standards have been defined for day-care facilities for the purposes of making the concept of quality quantifiable. In Austria, the Charlotte-Bühler-Institut has come up with minimum standards and recommendations for optimising kindergartens and has inspired the improvement of "educational quality in kindergarten" by introducing a new transactional action approach (cf. Stern 2003, 7). Educational minimum standards serve to assure quality and were conceived as an orientational aid for practice. In addition, they are intended to serve as an argumentative tool in the political debate on cost-cutting in education. The objective of the recommendations for optimising quality is to incorporate societal changes and new scientific findings in the teaching methods (cf. Hartmann 1996, 191).

The Charlotte-Bühler-Institut's concept of quality reflects the classification system created by W. Tietze, professor of education in Berlin. According to Tietze, the institution's quality can be assessed on three levels (cf. Gaberz 2003, 14):

- in the relationships and social interaction present between the children themselves and between the children and the educators, as well as the facility's educational programme/plan (= procedural quality)
- in the framework conditions, such as the group and room size, the equipment and the level of training of the caregiver (= structural quality)
- in the pedagogical concepts of the educators and their values, as well as how they see the child (= orientational quality)

The indicators for quality assessment can be assigned to these three levels. Group size, the staff-child ratio, the facilities, the educator's training level, preparation time and co-operation from the parents, to name a few, are important quality indicators.

The objectives corresponding to the recommendation of the early education and care network of the European Commission are considered guidelines for most facilities today:

"Children's autonomy and positive self-image; social development in inter-child and child-adult relationships, including larger social groups; basic exposure to religious and ethical values; enthusiasm for learning as a basis for lifelong interest in knowledge acquisition; language understanding and usage in a multi-cultural context, cognitive stimulus for mathematics, natural sciences, engineering and environment; creative activities for developing musical and artistic skills, exercise, role playing with different forms of expression; motor skills and abilities using the body and movement; basic health-promoting attitudes" (Stern 2003, 7).

Laying down quality standards enables educators to assess and improve the structural framework of the institution and the educational services they offer.

2.3.1. Age-Specific Quality Standards and Other Differences

It is important to kindergarten pedagogues, kindergarten heads and kindergarten inspectors that all children benefit from high-quality early education and care and to make it possible to assess quality. Quality assessment is possible in the following areas (cf. Hartmann/Stoll 1996, p 207ff, presented in a more comprehensive and nuanced manner):

- Structural and organisational conditions (availability and accessibility of enrolment in kindergartens, kindergarten opening hours, regulation of holidays, group size and constellation, staff;)
- Facilities and equipment (room situation, décor, possibilities for relaxation and taking a time-out, room for movement, outdoor play areas, equipment including learning and play materials)
- Care and supervision of the children (safety and health; welcoming and good-bye rituals, the early and later parts of the day, mealtimes, the rest and/or nap times, bodily hygiene),
- Kindergarten and entering school (transitions),
- Education and upbringing (overall educational and upbringing concept, alternative pedagogical concepts, social experience, intercultural upbringing, integration of special needs children, attitude towards education),
- Working with the parents (cooperating with parents, kindergarten as a „family centre“, linking the kindergarten and its environment).

These standards are adapted to suit the age of the children and differ accordingly. High-quality early education and care must take the developmental process of the children into account. Day-care offered by crèches differs greatly from the care of three to five-year-olds in kindergarten. Differing standards apply to younger children than to older children as regards group size as well. Crèches pay special attention to the initial phase for paving the way for the gradual development of a bonded relationship with the caregiver (cf. Hover-Reisner 2003). In much the same way,

different standards must apply in the day-care facilities for special needs children and for children who spend long hours there, such as introducing smaller groups.

2.3.2. Regional and Province-Specific Differences in Quality Standards

Standards can vary from province to province or from location to location (e.g. with regard to structural and organizational conditions), and/or additional standards can be created. For day-care facilities located in socially difficult areas or in areas with a high percentage of children who do not speak German natively, for example, additional quality criteria exist (see 1.5.4).

A kindergarten's areas of speciality are not least dependent on the pedagogical orientation and training of the educators or on the day-care facility providers. For example, many institutions make cross-group activities a priority, while others specialize in fostering mathematical skills (according to Ms. Stoll, April 21, 2004).

2.4. Political Strategies for Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement

In order to provide children with high-quality early education and care and to foster their personal development in a positive way, the parties involved must:

- Discuss quality criteria:

Political action for ensuring and improving quality primarily entails issuing clear framework conditions and/or guidelines for providing and supervising early education and care. The provincial legislation requires parents to get involved in a targeted and qualified manner (e.g. parents' evenings are required by law). Direct co-operation between the province, the municipalities and other day-care facility providers, as well as contacts between the competent politicians and the responsible persons (organized in the context of regular meetings, etc.) in order to exchange information directly are also aimed at ensuring and improving the quality of Austria's early education and care institutions.

- Broaden their expertise on an on-going basis (by studying the literature, further training); be willing to exchange information and reflect on objectives; cooperate with parents, caregivers, childminders, kindergarten pedagogues, schools (teachers, etc.) and to take advantage of expert assistance from outside (e.g. supervision):

Appropriate action is then taken by the day-care facility providers (and is in part required by the provincial laws).

2.4.1. Licensing and Inspection of Kindergartens and Crèches

Like other institutions, kindergartens and crèches must also meet certain legal requirements. The provincial laws require, among other things, appropriately trained staff, building standards and appropriate equipment. These criteria are even more comprehensive for kindergartens and crèches than for those facilities that are not regulated by the kindergarten laws.

Austrian early education and care institutions are supervised by the provincial government or, in Vienna, by the competent city administration department (*Magistrat*). They are visited by inspectors at regular intervals (on average once a year, but occasionally more often). Many provinces have special areas they focus on when spot-checking particular kindergartens. The kindergartens are also inspected if there is a specific cause to do so, such as complaints from parents. The inspector is the primary contact person to whom any quality shortcomings should be reported.

The inspectors are to be granted access to the building and to the operational records (lists of children, staff lists, inventory, etc.).

If an inspection turns up any problems, the municipality, institutional provider or superior agency is notified in writing, resulting in the initiation of the necessary improvements and remedies.

On an educational level, a number of possible improvements can be made, depending on the problem, such as seminars for further training, supervision, staff or other changes. There is no separate training for the inspecting officials. The supervisory body must meet the following professional criteria, having:

- Completed training as a certified kindergarten and after-school childcare facility educator
- Passed the examination required for heading a kindergarten
- Had years of professional experience
- Completed further training seminars or additional training in conflict management or leadership, for example.

Even then, however, there are differences between the provinces. Similarly, the responsibilities of the inspectors are defined differently from province to province. For example, in Lower Austria, quality is not only reviewed by inspectors, but also by several competent agencies. The supervisory department performs regular inspections, building inspections are carried out, and education consultants contribute their expertise. However, in Burgenland, there currently⁷ is only one inspector in charge of carrying out all quality inspections (including the building standards).

2.4.2. Licensing of Parent-Toddler Groups and Childminders

Childminders provide day-care services within the scope of their families. They prepare their own meals, create their own play and exercise programmes and provide their own materials for play. Here, it is possible to address the individual needs of the child. In most cases the opening hours are more flexible than in crèches, kindergartens or parent-toddler groups. Childminders require a day-care licence from the competent district administration authorities. The province of Tyrol is an exception to the rule, requiring no licensing for parent-toddler groups (according to information from the BÖE, May 11, 2004).

⁷ - Author's note: Date of research: June 2004

Licences for the establishment and use of day-care facilities are regulated by the Youth Welfare Law, and in several provinces by the Day-Care Law. The licence regulates the number of children a childminder may supervise. Important factors are the childminder's family situation and the space available in the home for early education and care. In principle, licensing is not dependent on proof of early education and care qualifications. The provincial associations, however, require the childminders they recommend to have completed training (cf. Denk, Schattovits 1995, 49). Early education and care activities at childminders or in parent-toddler groups are inspected at random intervals after licensing.

2.5. Quality Inspection in Day-Care Facilities

The last large-scale study on quality assessment was carried out in 1994 by the Charlotte-Bühler-Institut. The outcome of the study conducted throughout Austria led to an intense look being taken at the issue of quality and day-care outside the home, in particular as provided by kindergarten pedagogues. Since then studies have examined sections of the kindergarten system; however, there have been no attempts since to examine the situation as it exists throughout Austria (according to Ms. Stoll, April 21, 2004).

It can be assumed that much has changed since then; societal developments (immigration, etc.) alone have given rise to new challenges. In this light, it would not make sense to use the results from the 1994 study as a basis for the further development of the kindergarten system today.

Quality inspections today are carried out primarily by individual day-care facility providers who, after having studied the literature or consulted institutions, develop their own methods for assessing quality. The *Wiener Kinderfreunde* in Vienna is a prime example for quality assurance in kindergartens, as they inspect their groups regularly in accordance with international and scientific standards. As the first large-scale day-care facility providers in Austria, they perform quality inspections by representative sample in their kindergarten groups. The quality assessment is carried out on the basis of the scientifically recognized Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS); the average results were in the upper middle range and serve as a basis for developing early education and care quality further (cf. Hartmann, W./ Tietze, W.: KES. Pädagogische Qualität in Kindergärten, 2003, 1ff.).

An annual report published by Statistics Austria (day-care statistics report) studies sections of structural quality, indicating, among other things, the average group size per province. However, data such as this cannot take the place of quality assessment.

The following section presents the data from the day-care statistics report and other collected data offering important information on day-care in Austria.

2.6. Data Collected on Early education and care in Austria

2.6.1. Statistics Austria's Day-Care Statistics Report

Since 1972 Statistics Austria has been collecting data annually on day-care facilities throughout Austria. The uniform data collection forms are filled out by all crèches, kindergartens, after-school day-care facilities, mixed age day-care facilities and all other types of day-care facilities and submitted to Statistics Austria for processing via the competent inspectorate of the provincial governments. Information is collected on the day-care facilities (providers, opening hours, facilities, equipment, whether lunch is served, medical care, possibilities for using a playground area), on the children (length of stay, disabilities, age, employment of the mother, whether they eat lunch there, nationality) and on the staff (employment relationship, marital status, level of education/training, age, scope of employment). The statistics on day-care facilities primarily serve as a basis for decisions that affect early childhood education and care. The results are made available to the statistical offices of the provincial governments and the inspectorates for local administrative purposes (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03. Vienna 21f.).

2.6.2. Special Data Collection in the Context of Statistics Austria's Micro-census

In a micro-census carried out in 2002, like in 1995, including a special programme entitled "Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care".

In addition to household management and the care of persons in needs of special care and assistance, the micro-census also focuses on day-care, also collecting data on the lack of available day-care and other reasons for not taking advantage of day-care facilities.

2.6.3. Statistics on Childminders and Parent-Toddler Groups

Statistics Austria has no uniform statistics on childminders and parent-toddler groups. The data are collected by the individual federations, but do not include all early education and care institutions, but only those who are members of the provincial associations.

The provincial associations of childminders document the scope of early education and care on a continual basis, as the remuneration for childminders and the parent contribution depends on the scope of care.

The Federation of Austrian Parent-Toddler Groups has collected data on parent-toddler groups organised via the provincial associations annually since 1995 using a questionnaire that is filled out by the groups. Until the mid-1990s data provided by the provincial associations served as the basis for statistical evaluations.

The objectives of collecting the data are: “determining the location of the parent-toddler groups and playgroups in each of the federal provinces, how the different framework conditions impacts on these institutions (legislation and funding) compared among the provinces, identifying the needs and current situation of the parent-toddler groups and playgroups, current situation and needs assessment for initial and continued training programmes as the basis for planning BÖE training courses, statistical material for public relations work and funding agencies, documentation and development progress” (Naderer, 2000, 2).

2.7. Currently Available Data

Studies that provide an overview of the average quality of day-care facilities are lacking, as are chiefly data on the socio-economic background of the children in care and on other factors that could present an impediment to access to early education and care. These data are particularly of importance if equal access of all children to institutional early education and care is to be promoted.

In addition, it must be reiterated that the available data on childminders and parent-toddler groups are incomplete, as not all of these institutions are organised via the provincial associations.

It can be assumed that the institutions not included in these studies are structured differently, as they are not required to meet the specific criteria demanded by the provincial association (e.g. requiring childminders to complete a full training course).

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3. Day-Care and Funding: Who Utilises Day-Care?

The following chapter is intended to give an overview on family subsidies in Austria. Direct monetary allowances paid to parents, in addition to the allocation of (subsidised) institutional day-care, is one method for supporting parents and promoting the utilisation of day-care facilities. Monetary allowances paid to parents predominate for children under the age of two, while support for two to four-year-olds takes the shape of both monetary allowances and subsidised institutional early education and care, and four to six-year-olds primarily benefit from subsidised day-care which is chiefly funded by the provinces and the municipalities (cf. Schattovits 1999, 534).

In addition, in this chapter an overview of supply and demand for day-care facilities is given and the question of whether certain sections of the population have more difficulty gaining access to institutional early education and care is addressed.

In Austria parents are not legally entitled to institutional early education and care. While politically many are calling for parents to have the right to a spot in a day-care facility, these demands "lack specific wording and analysis of the impacts on the early education and care sector, as well as sufficient attention paid to family policy criteria, namely a political consensus on a general age for children to begin early education and care outside the family" (M. Thenner / S. Ohnmacht 2000, 53). In the province of Salzburg, working groups are currently discussing the fundamental further development of the early education and care system, including the issue of granting parents the right to institutional early education and care.

3.1. Family Subsidies

In Austria there are various types of financial funding available for families and children. The criteria for obtaining the funding depend of the type of subsidies.

- General subsidies: These include the family allowance; parents are entitled to receive this subsidy for children that belong to their household or for whom they predominantly pay child support.
- Income-related subsidies: One example of this is the early education and care benefit; all children (including foster and adopted children) who were born on or after January 1, 2002 qualifies. The criteria: a claim for receiving the family allowance, a shared household with the child, mother-child card examinations, additional annual income not exceeding € 14,600.
- Subsidies dependent on the parents' gainful employment (parental leave benefit as an outgoing model) or on special needs (family allowances provided by the federal provinces).

3.1.1. Legal Protection of Expectant and Nursing Mothers

During the period of legal protection of expectant and nursing mothers, which begins eight weeks before the expected date of birth and ends eight weeks after birth (or 12 weeks for premature births, multiple births or birth by Caesarean section), women in salaried employment are prohibited from working. During this period they are entitled to a weekly allowance which is based of the

average income from the last three months and represents a 100% substitution of income. This legal protection regulation makes a limited interruption of employment without financial loss possible and is laid down in the Law on the Legal Protection of Expectant and Nursing Mothers.

Other legal regulations apply to provincial and municipal employees, as well as to farmers, but correspond in substance to the Law on the Legal Protection of Expectant and Nursing Mothers. Women in salaried employment are protected from being dismissed or laid off from their jobs upon notifying their employer of their pregnancy (cf. www.help.gv.at).

3.1.2. Family Allowance

Parents are entitled to the family allowance regardless of their profession and income. In Austria the family allowance represents the most important type of family subsidy quantitatively speaking (cf. Gisser 2003, 23). Entitlement applies in general to underage children and for children of age who are pursuing occupational or professional training until their 26th birthday. The family allowance is graded according to the age and the number of children. Families with three or more children receive an additional multiple child allowance of € 36.40 in order to counteract the dangers of impoverishment faced by multiple-child families. The multiple child allowance is, however, dependent on the family's income (ceiling in 2001: € 38,720 gross annually) (cf. Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations 2002, 101f.).

3.1.3. Early education and care Benefit and Parental Leave Benefit

As the Early education and care Benefit Law was passed in July 2001, currently different regulations apply in Austria. Which regulation applies depends on whether the child was born before or after January 1, 2002.

For births after 2002, the early education and care benefit replaces the parental leave benefit; all parents, in other words not just those who were in salaried employment before birth, are entitled to the early education and care benefit. The parental leave benefit has therefore become a soon-to-be discontinued subsidy model. The family policy approach behind the early education and care benefit is the "recognition and partial compensation for the early education and care and education provided by parents". The early education and care benefit comes to € 436 per month. Low-income parents and low-income single parents may receive an additional allowance of approximately € 181 per month. The early education and care benefit is paid out until the child reaches a maximum of 30 months and can be extended to 36 months if both parents share in early education and care duties. However, parental leave under labour law can be taken until the child reaches 24 months maximum (even if both parents split early education and care duties); in other words, parents are entitled to return to their jobs only up until their child's second birthday (cf. Flor/ Moritz 2003, 12f.).

For births before January 1, 2002, the parental leave benefit will continue to be paid out. Parental leave is a provision under labour law, which means that only salaried employees are entitled to take parental leave. The parental leave benefit is a subsidy paid out from unemployment insurance. When the early education and care benefit was introduced, a transition regulation was created and efforts were taken to adjust the parental leave benefit and the part-time work benefit (half the amount of parental leave benefit for self-employed parents and parents in salaried employment) to the amount, duration and level of additional earned income allowed for the early education and care benefit.

Since then, the parental leave benefit amounts to, like the early education and care benefit, approximately € 436 per month (cf. Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations 2002, 103). The legal provisions for parental leave for mothers in salaried employment are laid down in the Law on the Legal Protection of Expectant and Nursing Mothers and for fathers in salaried employment in the Law on Parental Leave for Fathers (cf. www.help.gv.at and Flor/ Moritz 2003, 12f.).

3.1.4. Early education and care Subsidy

Early education and care subsidy is graded and depends on gross (family) income and the ensuing cost of early education and care. This subsidy is distributed by the Public Employment Service to those parents who require institutional early education and care for their child because they wish to “take up work or participate in a measures relevant to labour market policies (e.g. a course)” or because “their economic situation has essentially worsened in spite of gainful employment, fundamental changes in their working hours necessitate a new type of early education and care or day-care facility or the current caregiver is unable to continue providing early education and care” (cf. www.help.gv.at).

The distribution of early education and care subsidy hinges on the monthly gross income of the subsidy applicant, or in the case of married couples or common-law partnerships, on joint household gross income (cf. www.help.gv.at).

3.1.5. Family Allowance Supplements Distributed by the Federal Provinces

All subsidies described above are distributed by the Austrian federal government. In addition to federal funding, the federal provinces also provide family subsidies which can be obtained by families with small children. The subsidy amount is calculated with respect to household income and number of children (the scale is a weighted according to per capita income). Provincial family allowance supplements are also distributed according to social criteria. The subsidies differ with respect to amount, duration and relevant income limits from province to province; the maximum subsidy amount comes to between € 62 and € 436 per month (cf. Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations 2002, 107).

3.1.6. Right to Part-Time Work

Parents' right to part-time work was passed in 2004 and gives parents the right to reduce their workweek up until their child's seventh birthday, or alternatively until the child commences schooling at a later date. The criteria are that the salaried parent has to have worked with their current employer for at least three years and the company in question has to have at least 20 salaried employees. However, if no agreement can be reached on the framework provisions of part-time work, the parent must take his or her case to the Court for Labour and Social Matters. In principle, the employer may refuse parents' right to part-time work if a corresponding regulation is not feasible on business management grounds.

Due to the above mentioned restrictions, only a limited number of parents can actually claim their right to part-time work. According to Statistics Austria, last year 48.2% of all employees worked in companies with less than 20 employees, which means that approximately half of all parents cannot assert their right to part-time work at all. Due to the criteria requiring parents to have worked with their current employer for three years, up to two-thirds of women and more than half of men are thereby barred from exercising this option (cf. <http://www.oeeoaaab.at/startframe/news/neuerungen/teilzeit.html>).

3.1.7. Tax Breaks for Families

Due to the limited economic capabilities of persons with dependent children, Austria has provisions for tax breaks for families.

Parents are entitled to a tax deductible for each child for which they receive a family allowance. The amount of the deductible is the same for each child (€ 50.90 per month).

Parents qualify for a child support deductible if they are required by law to pay child support for a child that does not live in the same household. The deductible comes to € 25.50 per month for the first child, € 38.20 for the second and € 50.90 for each subsequent child.

The single parent deductible comes to € 364 annually.

In addition, certain special expenses and extraordinary burdens, such as the costs of illness and costs of early education and care necessitated by the single parent's gainful employment, is also tax deductible (cf. Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations 2002, 106f.).

3.1.8. Mother-Child Card

The objective of the mother-child card is to motivate expectant mother and mothers with small children to go for important medical checkups. The main purpose of the medical examinations is the early detection of health risks for mothers, as well as developmental disorders and illness among children.

The mother-child card medial examination programme includes five prenatal checkups and five paediatric examinations during the infant's first year. Subsequently, additional checkups for the child at two, three four, and since 2002, at five can be carried out. In 2001/2002 the mother-child

card bonus of € 145.40 was distributed from the Family Burden Equalisation Fund after the child's first birthday and all of the prenatal and paediatric medical checkups required by the mother-child card were completed (cf. Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations 2002, 105).

3.2. Assistance for Parents with Disabled Children

In addition to the subsidies and assistance available for families with children, Austria also has a relatively well developed system for providing social security to parents of disabled children (higher family allowance, long-term care benefit, provincial laws on disabled persons).

Within the context of the family allowance there are special provisions for parents of severely disabled children. They are entitled to a supplement of € 131 per month and € 138.30 after the child's third birthday in addition to the normal family allowance amount corresponding to the age of the child) (cf. Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations 2002, 102).

In addition there are many institutions offering assistance for disabled persons. Family counselling centres focus, for example, on providing counselling services for parents with disabled children.

Self-help groups can assist parents of disabled children actively cope with their situation and contribute to the integration of the children. The parent's association "Integration:Österreich" (Integration:Austria) has launched its pioneering further training project "Eltern beraten Eltern" (Parents Counselling Parents) which supports parents in coming to terms with their situation and in learning to participate responsibly in their child's development in a significant way. In general, when counselling parents it is key to perceive them less as victims of their existential situation, but rather as active partners in a socio-political development process which "includes the planning and setting up of integrative measures of services to relieve the burden of families and their integration into kindergartens, school, vocational training, work and living" (Öfner, Schönwiese 1999, 363).

3.3. Institutional Early education and care: Supply and Demand

3.3.1. Supply of Day-Care facilities and Number of Children in Early education and care

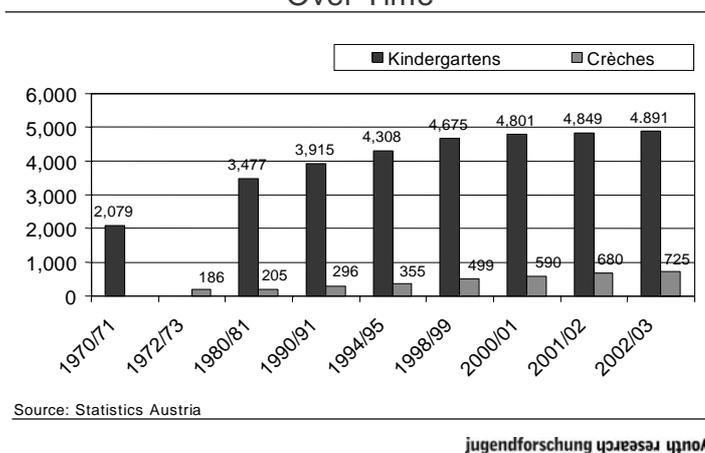
In the last few years the availability of day-care facilities has successively risen. In 2003 there were a total of 8,412 day-care facilities (including childminders). The number of kindergartens rose by more than 14% as compared to 1992 to 4,657 in 2003. The number of crèches (currently numbering 707) has more than doubled in the last ten years. Mixed age day-care facilities, recorded separately only since 1997, have nearly quadrupled since. In 2002 a total of 267,565 children attended a kindergarten, crèche or an after-school early education and care centre. The number children in kindergarten jumped since the beginning of the 1990s, reaching its apex in 1998 (217,945 children) and has dropped off since (currently: 209,584). This is due to the drop in the birth-rates. Crèches (currently 12,073 children) and mixed aged groups (7,328) have experienced a constant rise in the number of children of the last ten years (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare 2002/03, p.11).

The chart below shows the number of kindergartens and crèches since the beginning of the 1970s. As the mixed age day-care facilities⁸ are included in the statistics, the result is an annual increase in the number of crèches and kindergartens.

⁸ Included under "Kindergartens" are also the mixed age facilities having predominately children of kindergarten age (3-6); included among the "Crèches" are the mixed age facilities having predominantly children of crèche age (1-3).

Chart 3.1.:

Number of Kindergartens and Crèches as Compared Over Time



In addition to kindergartens and crèches, childminders and parent-toddler groups also provide early education and care services. In 2003 a total of 2,480 provided day-care for 8,437; 4,106 boys and girls were in 318 parent-toddler groups and playgroups (cf. Austrian Federation of Foster Parents', Adoptive Parents' and Childminders' Associations 2003, 9 and according to information from the BÖE, June 2, 2004).

3.3.2. The Desire for Additional Early education and care

In the context of its micro-census, Statistics Austria collected data on the need for day-care outside the family. The special micro-census carried out in September 2002 centred on "Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care". The available data provide an important supplement to the statistical findings on unpaid work, as well as early education and care outside the family as collected in the framework of the micro-census in 1995.

Parents were asked whether they would like to have (additional) early education and care for their children in a day-care facility⁹.

For the 488,100 children under the age of six, the majority of parents or guardians needed either none or no additional early education and care outside the family (as of 2002). Nonetheless the need for institutional early education and care goes unmet: for 42,900 boys and girls (8.8% of children) one of more kinds of early education and care is lacking. Of these children 22,300 were already in a facility; for 20,700 the issue was basic early education and care. To date these children had not attended a day-care facility.

For children between the ages of zero and three (232,300) the deficit as related to what is currently available is the largest. Of these children, currently 22,800 are in institutional early education and care; however, for 17,500 children some 26,000 places are still in demand: 13,500 additional spots in crèches, 6,000 in parent-toddler groups or playgroups, 4,900 with childminders

⁹ - Author's note: As there are different types of early education and care (mornings, afternoons or by the hours), each child may need more than one spot in a day-care facility.

and 1,600 in other types of facilities. Some 14,700 children are currently without institutional early education and care outside the family. If a place for them could be found in an appropriate facility, the early education and care quota in the age group under three would jump from 9.8%¹⁰ at present to 16.1%.

For children in the age group three to six years of age (255,900) the parents of 25,400 children indicated their desire for additional early education and care 28,700 times¹¹. Of these children, 19,500 were already in some kind of institutional early education and care; 6,000 children were without any kind of institutional early education and care. If a place for them could be found in an institution, the early education and care quota would rise from 73.3% at present to 75,7% (cf. Statistics Austria: Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care, Micro-census September 2002/03, 38f).

Repercussions of the Lack of Early education and care on the Possibilities for Gainful Employment among Young Mothers and Fathers

Single mothers (and a few single fathers) are primarily the ones affected by the shortage of institutional early education and care. The unmet need for early education and care impedes their access to gainful employment. Mothers cannot work and remain marginalised from the labour market. The situation is similar for mothers whose children attend institutional early education and care that fails to meet their needs. The institutions often have opening hours that in some cases make even part-time work for mothers difficult to impossible. Comprehensive early education and care, on the other hand, would increase the opportunities for women to pursue a career. A study carried out by the Austrian Chamber of Labour, 24,950 women (of which 10,950 are mothers of children under the age of six) would like to enter the labour market. At the same time, a comprehensive early education and care system outside the family would also create new jobs (approximately 12,700) for caregivers (cf. Alteneider/ Kalmar/ Prammer-Waldhör 2003).

Based on a decision taken in November 2003, a commission on day-care outside the family aimed at meeting current demand was set up at the Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection with the aim of closing existing gaps in the early education and care system and improving the present network of day-care facilities. Needs assessments and forecasts are to be drawn up in each province for the next ten years, as is an implementation schedule that addresses the new early education and care situation, regional characteristics and flexibility in working hours in a targeted way that takes present needs into account" (Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection 2004, 2).

¹⁰ Due to the difference in the data collection method (micro-census), the early education and care quotas differ from those cited in the first chapter (1.6) which are based on day-care statistics report.

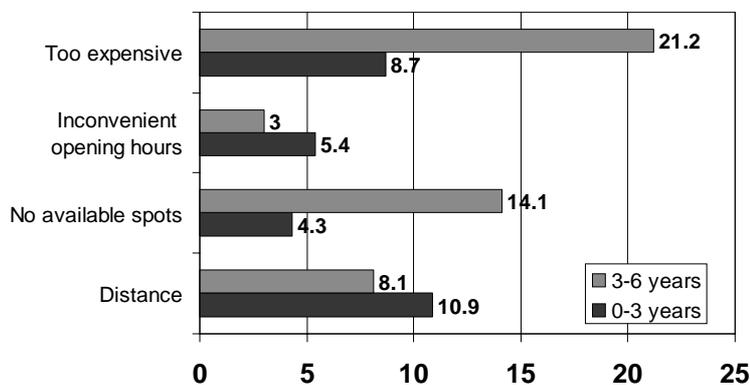
¹¹ - Author's note: Some parents indicated several possibilities for early education and care or day-care facilities (morning, afternoon early education and care (multiple answers)).

Reasons for Not Taking Advantage of Institutional Early education and care

The following chart shows the reasons parents fail to take advantage of institutional early education and care. The majority of parents whose children are not in a day-care facility (87.4%) have indicated that day-care was "not necessary". However, if one takes a look at the external reasons for not taking advantage of institutional early education and care, it becomes clear the difficulties and impediments the parents face who do wish to place their children in day-care. Parents with resources within the family (day-care is "not necessary") are therefore not included in the chart.

Chart 3.2.:

External Reasons for Parents Not to Take Advantage of Day-Care Facilities (in Percent)



Source: Statistics Austria 2003

jugendforschung research youth

3.4. Sections of the Population that Take Advantage of Day-Care Facilities

It can be assumed that certain sections of the population (e.g. low-income groups) find access to day-care difficult. Information from these groups/sections of the population on how frequently they take advantage of institutional early education and care is either completely unavailable or difficult to interpret due to the kind of data collected to date (according to experts). Data on the financial situation or the native language of these children who are in day-care is in the process of being collected and is therefore unavailable. There is only precise data on regional differences in the utilisation of day-care facilities. The following information is based on the above-mentioned micro-census carried out by Statistics Austria (2003) and information provided by the parents as to why they have not taken advantage of institutional early education and care in spite of their interest in doing so.

3.4.1. Location of Residence

Utilisation of institutional early education and care in Austria differs from region to region. Basically it can be stated that considerably more children attend day-care institutions in urban population centres than in rural areas (this applies primarily to institutions for children under the age of three). Accordingly, the percentage of children in day-care in Vienna is the highest (46.6% of children under the age of six). In Vienna 23.9% of children under the age of three are in day-care, compared to just 2.3% in Vorarlberg and 2.8% in Tyrol (cf. Statistics Austria, Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care, micro-census September 2002/03).

In 3,800 cases, parents interested in day-care outside the family indicated the poor accessibility of the kindergarten (10.1%) as the reason for not taking advantage of institutional early education and care. In other words, there was no suitable day-care facility within a reasonable distance. This problem is cited with relative frequency in Vorarlberg, followed by Carinthia and Tyrol in second place. A total of 15.3% of parents whose children are in a public kindergarten or crèche are dissatisfied with its accessibility, compared to 12.7% of parents whose children attend a private kindergarten or crèche. Parents whose children are cared for by a childminder cite this problem most often, with 37.9% of parents dissatisfied with early education and care accessibility.

3.4.2. Low-Income Families

Yet another reason why parents who are interested in institutional early education and care¹² fail to utilise this possibility is that the institutions are too expensive. In 4,500 cases, parents (12%) said that the parent contribution was too high, citing this as a reason for not taking advantage of institutional early education and care. This affects single parents the most. This problem was cited with relative frequency in Vienna, but this problem is also somewhat significant in Lower¹³ and Upper Austria, as well as in Styria (cf. Statistics Austria, Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care, micro-census 2002/03.).

This reason for not utilising day-care facilities due to lack of financial resources is an indication that low-income families may have difficulty gaining access to day-care. Grading parent contributions according to income could help reduce or even eliminate impediments such as these. Information on what measures would help low-income families take increased advantage of day-care possibilities is not available. Just as little information is available on the fundamental question of whether low-income families utilise institutional early education and care less than other families. The data on income situation has not been included in the statistics recorded by Statistics Austria on day-care to date. Information on their access to day-care are based solely on personal experience or on the data on parents' failure to take advantage of institutional early education and care indicated above.

¹² - Here "institutional early education and care" is not restricted solely to the institution "kindergarten".

¹³ Author's note: In Lower Austria, kindergarten attendance is free of charge only in the morning; contributions are to be paid for kindergarten care in the afternoon.

3.4.3. Immigrant Families

Children from immigrant families are also a group cited in the context of political and public discussion whose utilisation of early childhood education facilities requires special promotion.

The objective is to guarantee their linguistic and socio-cultural integration from the beginning. However, what has been pushed to the background in the discussion on their utilisation of institutional early education and care is the fact that the early education and care quota for foreign children is not usually lower than for Austrian children.

Based on the data available the following difficulties arise for immigrant families in utilising institutional early education and care:

On one hand, children are recorded statistically only according to nationality; in other words, children who have a migrant background, have a native language other than German and hold Austrian citizenship are not recorded separately. The question of linguistic and cultural integration arises for these children as well. On the other hand, the current data do not reflect precise information on the utilisation of day-care facilities by foreign children. However, one trend can be seen, namely that, defying general assumptions, foreign children utilise institutional early education and care less.

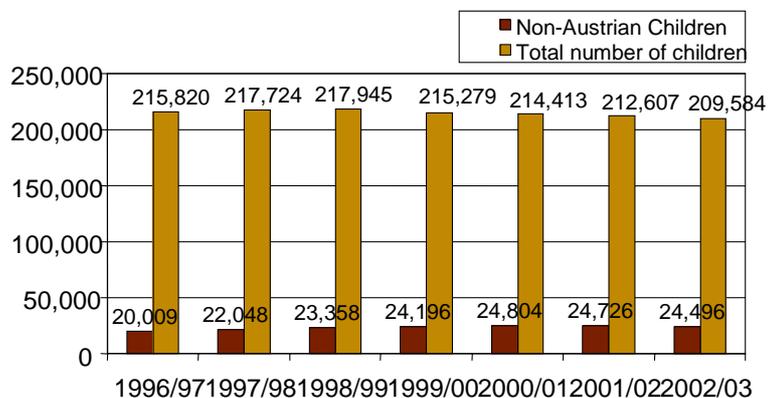
In 2002 24,496 non-Austrian boys and girls attended kindergarten in Austria, corresponding to 11.6% of all kindergarten children. Compared to the rest of Austria, the majority of foreign children are in kindergarten in Vienna; 23.6% of kindergarten children in Vienna do not hold Austrian citizenship (a total of 7,056 in absolute figures)¹⁴ (cf. Statistics Austria, 2003).

There are currently 28,533 foreign children living Austria between the ages of three and five years of age. If one were to assume that only children from this age group attended kindergarten (in practice, many six-year-olds are also still in kindergarten), the day-care quota would increase from 82.5% for Austrian children to 85.8% in total, keeping in mind also that these figures take only kindergarten children into account.

¹⁴ Vienna is the province with the highest percentage of foreigners. Just under 30% of all children holding citizenship other than Austrian live in Vienna.

Chart 3.3.:

Children in Kindergarten According to Nationality



Source: Statistics Austria

3.4.4. Children with Disabilities

The following data are available for the early education and care quota for children with disabilities: a total of 2.7% children in Austria (13,400) between the ages of zero and six had “long-term health problems” (Statistics Austria, Micro-census); a total of 7,772 (1.6% of all children) are limited in going about their daily life at least to a certain degree. According to the statistics on day-care facilities (Statistics Austria: Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03.) 10,537 children with disabilities¹⁵ were in institutional early education and care, corresponding to 78.6% of children with long-term health problems.

As “disability” is measured differently, however, in our two sources (day-care statistics report and the micro-census), the percentage data presents problems. The micro-census (asking about long-term health problems) likely considers more children disabled due to its broader definition of disability than the day-care statistics report. Counting only those children who are limited in going about their daily lives as disabled leads to the contradictory result that more disabled children are in day-care facilities than there are children with disabilities.

In principle, based on these calculations it can be stated that children with disabilities have a relatively high early education and care quota.

4. Day-Care Staff⁶⁹

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4.1.1. Kindergarten and Crèche Staff 69

¹⁵ The statistics on day-care facilities include children with physical disabilities, auditory and/or visual disabilities, mental disabilities and multiple disabilities that are watched over a period of more than 6 months

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4. Day-Care Staff

The following chapter will present a more detailed picture of the staff working in day-care facilities, highlighting their various functions, responsibilities and training situation, as well as juxtaposing their professional status and the public opinion of their profession.

4.1. Responsibilities and Various Functions among Staff

The responsibilities of the day-care staff working in institutional early education and care are situated on many different levels. In addition to the educational work they perform with the children, their cooperation with the parents, as a team and on an institutional level (day-care facility providers) is gaining in importance. In order to better tackle these responsibilities, the staff must be able to draw on a broad spectrum of skills and acquired abilities. Increasingly pre-school teachers are expected to be competent in conducting meetings, communications training, conflict and stress management, public relations and quality management. The requirements for future early childhood educators are on three levels: the educational, human resources/leadership and organizational levels (cf. Hanifl 1999, 36).

Moreover, pre-school teachers are confronted with increased expectations from society and from parents. This is attributable to the changes in the family structure – single parents, both parents are gainfully employed, no caregiver available within the family (grandparents, etc.). On the other hand, parents have become more demanding, tending to view kindergarten increasingly as an educational institution.

4.1.1. Kindergarten and Crèche Staff

Kindergarten staff work together in a team with many different responsibilities. All kindergarten pedagogues must be qualified as having:

- Diploma exam
- Secondary school-leaving exam and diploma exam

Kindergarten assistants may work at kindergartens with or without training.

The following section presents a more detailed description of the function of kindergarten staff:

Group kindergarten pedagogues are responsible for leading the kindergarten group from an educational point of view. It is their job to direct the group in accordance with the level of development of the children and to foster their continued development. Furthermore they are responsible for encouraging the parents to co-operate and become involved in the goings-on at the kindergarten.

Special needs kindergarten pedagogues can work in many different kindergartens or groups within a kindergarten. Basically, they have the same responsibilities as regular kindergarten pedagogues;

however, their further training allows them to assume additional responsibilities. For instance, special needs kindergarten pedagogues work with children with developmental problems or disabilities, creating and implementing individual programmes to promote their development. The kindergarten head has additional management duties, namely the responsibility for admitting children to the kindergarten and assigning them to a group, drawing up the schedule for the staff, creating an educational programme and conducting the meetings with the parents.

Kindergarten assistants support kindergarten pedagogues in meeting their responsibilities and perform specific domestic duties (cf. Luhn 2003).

Like in kindergartens, the staff in parent-toddler groups also have functions, such as head of the group, group caregiver and assistants who also perform educational duties.

Of Austrian kindergarten staff, 60.4% are graduates of the Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care, while 4% have completed another kind of educational training and 33.1% work as assistants. The situation in the crèches is similar; 60.2% are graduates of the Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care, while 12.2% have completed another kind of educational training and 25.2% work as assistants. The majority of the caregivers (73.6% in kindergartens and 81.7% in crèches) are employed full-time (cf. Statistics Austria, Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care. Micro-census September 2002/03.).

The profession "kindergarten educator" has traditionally been dominated by women. There have been minimal changes in increase the percentage of men in this profession. In Austria's kindergartens, 0.8% out of 25,638 employees (194) were men in 2003, in crèches, with a total of 3,128 employees, the percentage of men also came to 0.8%. 97.3% of students at the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care are women, while 2.7% are men (cf. Statistics Austria: Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care. Micro-census 2002/03). Increased educational policy action would be necessary in order to motivate more men to take up professions in education; including addressing and rethinking the social status, the level of qualifications and remuneration of these professions (cf. Stöttinger 2001, 46).

4.1.2. Childminders and Parent-Toddler Group Staff

Not unlike staff in kindergartens, childminders have to take into account the age-specific and individual needs of the children they supervise.

The day-care facility providers for childminders require initial and continued training for childminders. Accordingly, according to the Austrian federation all childminders have completed a relevant training course, eliminating the possibility of unqualified childminders. (This applies to those who are organised via the provincial associations.)

The legal framework for parent-toddler groups in almost every province stipulates that the caregivers have the relevant educational qualifications, which can be acquired in tandem with work. Some provinces require staff to attend continuing education seminars.

In 2003, of the caregivers working in parent-toddler groups, 25.4% were attending or had completed the BÖE training course¹⁶, 22.1% had graduated from the Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care and 38% had completed another kind of educational training. The remaining caregivers (14.4%) had no educational training. Compared to other day-care facilities, the percentage of men (4.6%) in parent-toddler groups is very high (cf. BÖE 2004, 12).

4.2. Training Early Childhood Educators

4.2.1. Basic Training

Basic training for pre-school teachers is offered almost exclusively by the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care. These schools fulfil two educational purposes:

- Imparting students with qualifications to help them meet their early education and care and educational responsibilities later on in their professional life
- (In the case of a secondary school-leaving certificate exam or diploma exam) to qualify students for attending university.

This training programme qualifies graduates to work in kindergartens, crèches and parent-toddler groups and as childminders. In Austria there are 29 Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care, 16 of which are publicly run and 13 private. The public institutions are free of charge. In 2003 7,968 students attended Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2.7% of which were young men. (cf. Statistics Austria: Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care. Micro-census 2002/03).

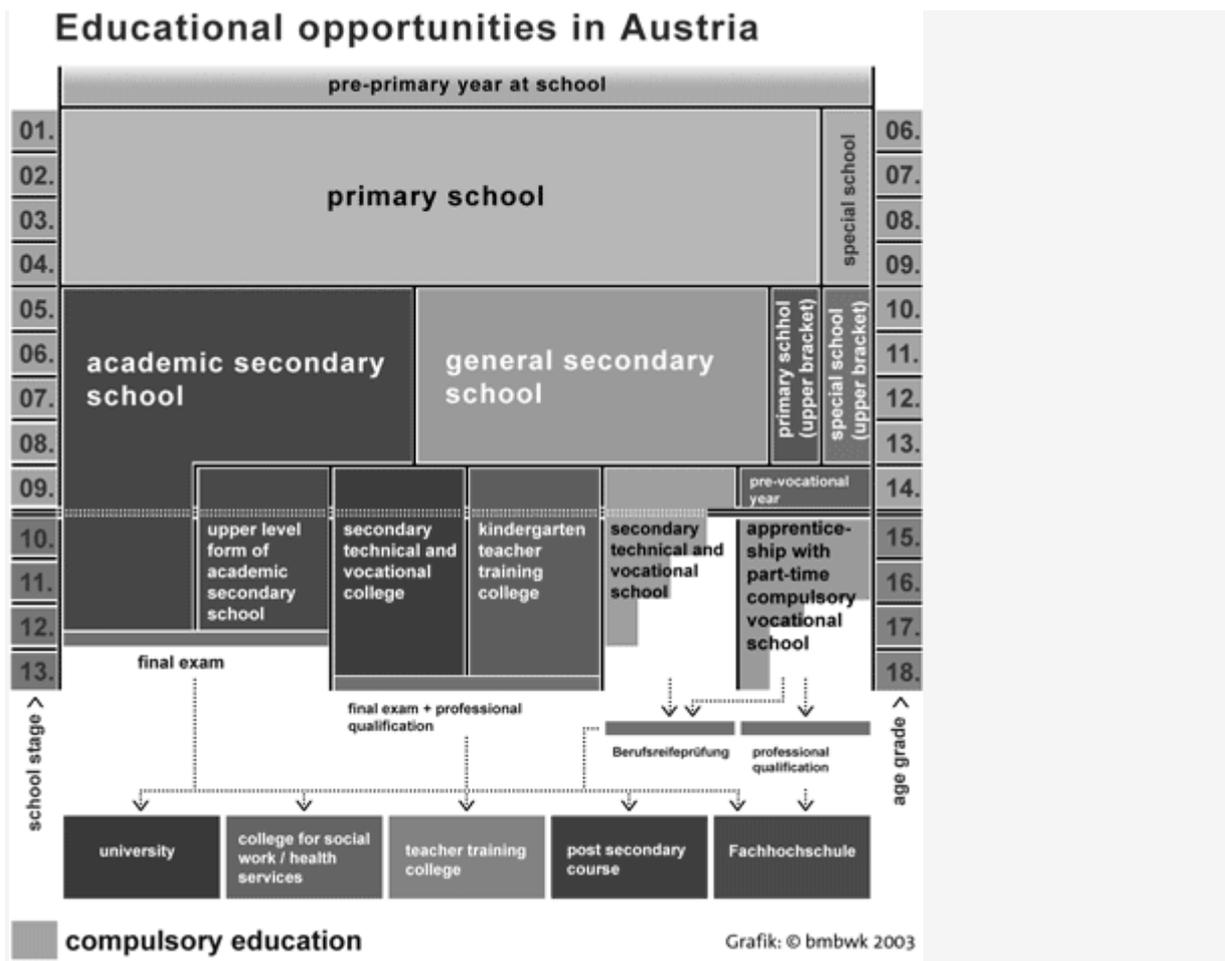
There was some relevant public relations work done to increase the percentage of men in education profession (information campaign: "*Bildung ist Frauen- und Männersache*" "Education Professions are for Men and Women" launched by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture).

The kindergarten pedagogue training course offered at the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care is a secondary level II programme. The course takes five years to complete. Under the Law on School Organisation, Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care do not count as vocational schools, but are listed among the "higher institutions for teacher training". The teachers' academies also belong to this category which train teachers for primary schools, *Hauptschulen* (regular secondary schools) and *Sonderschulen* (special needs schools). Unlike the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care, teachers' academies are post-secondary institutions. Since the 1994/1995 school year, students who have either already obtained their secondary school-leaving certificate or those having passed one of two exams (*Studienberechtigungsprüfung* or *Berufsreifepprüfung*) for university admission can complete a four-semester college programme at the Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care, where students graduate with a diploma qualifying them to work as trained kindergarten pedagogues (cf. Stöttinger 2001, 80). For working

¹⁶ A more detailed description of the BÖE training course can be found under 4.2.5 Training of Childminders and Staff in Parent-Toddler Groups

students, the programme is also offered in tandem with work with instruction given in the afternoons or evenings. This lengthens the duration of the training programme to six to eight semesters. This additional programme is not classified as post-secondary education either, but is equated with secondary level II. A diploma from this college programme and the secondary school-leaving and diploma exam certificate (diploma exam) entitle the holder to work as a certified kindergarten educator; the five-year Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care also administers the secondary school-leaving examination giving access to university studies.

Chart 4.2:



(cf. <http://www.bmbwk.gv.at>)

In addition to its objective of qualifying its students to work as a trained kindergarten pedagogue, kindergarten pedagogue training at a higher institution for teacher training also has the responsibility to make them eligible for university studies. For that reason, students complete their kindergarten pedagogue training by taking the secondary school-leaving examination giving access to university studies which enables them to pursue other fields of study as well. This puts an end to the "educational dead-end" faced by those who had previously completed only the four-year training programme. This reform was passed in 1982 in the amendment to the Law on School Organisation,

and the transition to the new system took place in the 1985/1986 school year (cf. Stöttinger 2001, 81).

4.2.2. Overview of the Curriculum at the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care

The kindergarten pedagogue training course is a federal matter. This means that the training programme and the framework curriculum is the same for every province. This uniform curriculum helps ensure high-quality early education and care in Austrian day-care facilities. The institutes for early childhood education and care are also permitted make certain changes to the curriculum autonomously from school to school.

In principle, 40% of the curriculum consists of general education subjects, approximately 33% of educational, practical and didactical subjects and about 25% of artistic and creative content.

Students are exposed to weekly practical experience days and a total of seven weeks of en bloc practical experience in various kindergartens. Practical experience in the kindergarten enables kindergarten pedagogues-in-training to familiarise themselves with their future profession. The students organise and plan the kindergarten daily routine and assume responsibilities in dealing with the parents (cf. Prinz-Kugler 1998, 50). The subject "early childhood education and care for special needs children" helps students to recognise atypical developments and to make it easier for kindergarten pedagogues to integrate disabled children into the kindergarten. The number of weekly hours devoted to this subject does not allow students to delve into this topic in detail; however, after graduation they can explore the field of early childhood education and care for special needs children further by completing a module for early childhood education and care for special needs children (cf. Stöttinger 2001, 102). This module finishes with a "diploma exam for early childhood education and care for special needs children".

Within the five-year training course, students can obtain the following additional qualifications at the same time:

- Qualification as an educator at after-school childcare centres or
- Qualification for infant and toddler education (for working with children under three years of age).

The curriculum for the advanced course in early childhood education and care contains almost exclusively those subjects of study for acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary for professional qualification and for teaching experience. The subjects taught in the advanced course correspond to the vocational subjects taught in the five-year course.

4.2.3. Curriculum Changes

A new curriculum is being drawn up to ensure that the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care provide training that corresponds to our modern times. This new curriculum is to be implemented in the 2004/2005 school year progressively, in other words beginning with the first year of new entrants, and focuses on the following areas:

- Introducing new, more contemporary school subjects (e.g. computers and media)
- Providing intensified instruction in key qualifications to ensure more professional flexibility (such as communication, presentation and team skills)
- Achieving a balance between general education and vocational instruction
- Increasingly applying modern information and communication technologies in all subjects
- Modifying each school's ability to make autonomous curriculum decisions.

The objective of this new curriculum is to give kindergarten pedagogues training that is more in line with modern society taking into account overall societal developments and the impacts of European integration. The training course is also to instruct students in management skills and key qualifications enabling graduates to work in other professions as well and making them eligible for attending university (cf. www.bmbwk.gv.at/schulen/recht/erk/Schulrecht_Entwurf_eine11230.xml).

4.2.4. Training for Caregivers in Crèches

In Austria, graduates from the Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care (as mentioned above) are also principally qualified to work in crèches. However, the curricula are geared towards specially training expert caregivers for supervising three to six-year-olds. Since 1999 70% of the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care have included in a trial period an "additional module in infant and toddler education" requiring 13 weekly hours in total during the regular kindergarten pedagogue training programme. Previously, students were only able to select "practical experience in infant and toddler education" as an elective (cf. Hover-Reisner 2003, 22). The curriculum content from this trial programme is to be included in the new curriculum reform.

4.2.5. Training for Childminders and Staff in Parent-Toddler Groups

In addition to the kindergarten pedagogue training course at an Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care, it is also possible for childminders to complete a basic training programme for childminders. Due to the myriad of provisions governing childminders in each federal province, the scope of the programme is not uniform. Nevertheless, the following areas are included in all of the training modules:

Personal development and communication, developmental psychology and pedagogy, practical experience with children in all areas of education, special didactics of day-care, household

management, first-aid and accident prevention, organisational and legal basics" (Austrian Federation of Foster Parents', Adoptive Parents' and Childminders' Associations 2004, 5).

Caregivers looking to work in a parent-toddler group can complete the two-year training programme in the BÖE training course. The programme is offered in tandem with work and graduates receive a certificate from the BÖE. The training course essentially provides institution on the following areas: developmental theory, psychology and pedagogy, practical experience with children, as well as communication and organisation (cf. www.kindergruppen.at).

4.3. Working in Early Childhood Education and Care

4.3.1. Career Opportunities

A study on the opportunities for employment and careers for graduates of the Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care examined, among other things, how the graduates are employed. The study revealed that a large majority of graduates (some 60%) are employed in areas that were related or corresponded to their training. Around one-fifth opted to take advantage of the possibility of beginning university studies after completing their kindergarten pedagogue training (cf. Blumberger, W. / Watzinger, M. Linz 2000, 96). Accordingly, most of the graduates began to work in this field at approximately 19 years of age; most of those leaving the profession did so within the first ten years (according to the ÖDKH, May 22, 2004).

4.3.2. Possibilities for Advancement

In the field of early childhood education, there are very few opportunities for professional advancement and development. New opportunities have opened up to graduates with the five-year course terminating in the acquisition of the secondary school-leaving certificate giving access to university studies; however, there is little outlook for upward mobility within the profession. In a questionnaire conducted in 2000, 52.7% of graduates indicated that they were either rather dissatisfied or dissatisfied with their possibilities for advancement (cf. Blumberger / Watzinger 2000, 79). The classic advancement opportunities still include:

- Assuming the position as kindergarten head
- Working as a kindergarten pedagogue in the kindergartens where kindergarten pedagogue trainees gain practical experience in the context of their course
- Teaching in the subject "didactics and everyday practice in kindergartens" at an Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care or
- Working as a kindergarten inspector after meeting certain criteria (cf. Stöttinger 2001, 63ff.).

In addition to these classic possibilities for advancement, the Public Employment Service also names in its brochure on the professional future of kindergarten pedagogues a myriad of training modules as "opportunities for advancement", such as university modules (social management, supervision, organisational consulting, public relations), modules (early childhood education for

special needs children, educational and adolescent counsellor, introduction to working with disabled person), modules and universities. The available programmes for relevant further training possibilities in this profession and beyond are many.

4.3.3. Continuing Education

Almost every federal province requires continuing education for kindergarten pedagogues; however, the time kindergarten educators are obliged to devote to further education annually varies from province to province and fluctuate between three to five days a year.

Continuing education seminars are offered

- a) By the continuing education offices in the competent agencies of the provincial governments
- b) By the kindergarten facility providers (e.g. Caritas, municipalities, dioceses) or
- c) Teacher's training institutes.

Funding is provided and the organiser as a rule; participants may also be required to pay a fee.

The reasoning behind the requirements for continuing education is that the initial school and professional education is insufficient for spanning an entire professional career, especially as the societal conditions in which children grow up are undergoing constant change. The objective of continuing education is to supplement, expand and update kindergarten pedagogues' professional qualifications. Continuing education is intended to motivate kindergarten pedagogues to take stock of and meet the expectations they have of themselves and those others have of them, as well as to learn about the latest developments and trends. Professional continuing education for kindergarten pedagogues is seen by Austrian kindergarten inspectors and/or experts in this field in their discussions as:

- "Measures for establishing, assuring and developing quality for guaranteeing a high-level of professional standards in day-care facilities:
- Continuing education enabling teachers to adapt to new issues and topical developments in communicating theory and practice;
- Providing motivation and impetus for meeting the various demands of the individual educators and caregivers" (Schmuck 2003, 22-23).

4.4. Professional Qualifications and Remuneration

4.4.1. Guidelines for Professional Qualifications

While a uniform description of professional qualifications for kindergarten pedagogues does not exist, some of the various day-care facility providers have drawn up guidelines reflecting their political orientation. In addition, several employers also demand special qualifications in job vacancy advertisements outlining a specific job description. Currently the course of kindergarten

pedagogue training principally defines the professional qualifications required upon graduation or those required for admittance to an Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care (e.g. social skills, musical talent, language and creativity) (according to the ÖDKH, May 22, 2004).

The Public Employment Service Austria has drawn up a professional job description outlining the suitability requirements for becoming a kindergarten pedagogue which also define the guidelines for the professional qualifications: the love of children, understanding for and sensitivity to children's psyche, the ability to grasp ideas quickly, patience, social and communication skills and self-control. Furthermore, handicraft skills, design talent and creativity, knowledge of home economics and musical talent are also important qualifications for kindergarten pedagogues to have. The increase importance of parental involvement in early childhood education also requires kindergarten educators to demonstrate the ability and a willingness to reach a consensus, as well as be capable of asserting themselves (cf. Stöttinger 2001, 78).

Several day-care facility providers for childminders have drawn up a similar description of professional qualifications. In order to guarantee early education and care quality, childminders are required to meet the following requirements: obligation to participate in initial and continuing education, physical and mental resilience, stable life situation, social skills and willingness to engage in introspection, enjoyment in living and working with others, working and playing with children, non-violent principles in early education and care, openness to various family compositions and principles for raising children, acceptance for all persons living in the household" (Austrian Federation of Foster Parents', Adoptive Parents' and Childminders' Associations 2004, 5).

4.4.2. Remuneration

As the kindergarten system is a matter for the federal provinces, the remuneration of kindergarten pedagogues is laid down in the provincial laws. However, remuneration varies only marginally from province to province. Several federal provinces have a separate employment and remuneration law for kindergarten educators whose provisions are oriented towards those for school teachers. The municipal civil servants law of the relevant province determines the amount of remuneration paid to caregivers in municipal kindergartens and for the majority of kindergarten pedagogues in private institutions (cf. Stöttinger 2001, 76).

Kindergarten pedagogues' salaries are generally about 20% lower than those of compulsory school teachers, but vary from province to province. The gross starting salaries fluctuate between 16,844 Austrian schillings (€ 1,224)¹⁷ and 18,586 Austrian schillings (€ 1,351)¹⁸, while most of the provinces pay kindergarten pedagogues bonuses (for years of employment and for assuming administrative duties). After 20 years of employment, the gross salary paid by most of the provinces (with the exception of Salzburg) approximately doubles, coming to 22,556 Austrian schillings (€ 1,639)¹⁹ and € 2,683²⁰ (cf. www.oedkh.at).

¹⁷ in Lower Austria (in 2001)

¹⁸ in Burgenland (in 2001)

¹⁹ in Salzburg (in 2001)

²⁰ in Styria (in 2002)

Teachers with training in early childhood education and care for special needs children earn minimally more than regular kindergarten pedagogues despite their additional qualifications (Stöttinger 2001, 76).

The professional representation of kindergarten pedagogues on the political landscape used to be organised within the context of teachers' organizations. The establishment of the Austrian Federation for Kindergarten and After-School Childcare Centre Educators (ÖDKH) in 1994 was a first step towards strengthening the profession and improved their negotiating position on the professional-political level. The ÖDKH is a non-profit association created from the merger of the professional kindergarten and after-school childcare centre educators groups in each province (with the exception of Vorarlberg; efforts are being made to establish professional contacts in this province). The ÖDKH's goal is to draw up positions, develop strategies and back their regional and national implementation in Austria (cf. www.oedkh.at).

The guidelines for the remuneration of childminders and caregivers who work in parent-toddler groups are the same throughout Austria. A so-called minimum wage exists which is renegotiated on an annual basis between the union and the Ministry for Social Security and Generations. Since 2004 there has been a collective bargaining agreement for childminders and staff in parent-toddler groups and private day-care facilities. However, this agreement is not binding. In particular for childminders it must be taken into account that the salary guidelines only apply to an employer-employee relationship. In 2003 73% of childminders were employed full-time. (This applies to those childminders and centres who are not organized via the Österreichische Hilfswerk cf. Austrian Federation of Foster Parents', Adoptive Parents' and Childminders' Associations 2004, 9). The minimum salary for kindergarten pedagogues working in private day-care facility comes to € 1,523 (in 2004) in the first two years of employment; after 20 years, it rises to € 1,855. Caregivers working in parent-toddler groups receive 75% of this amount, which increases to 85% after completing the BÖE training course. If they, like kindergarten pedagogues in private day-care facilities, are also graduates of the Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care (or a comparable institution), their salary is equal.

childminders receive a monthly salary for each child they supervise of € 319 (childminders who have completed relevant training are entitled to a 20% bonus) (according to the Austrian Federation of Foster Parents', Adoptive Parents' and Childminders' Associations, Mai 2004).

4.5. Public Recognition

The public image of educators who work in the field of early childhood education and care is changing very slowly in Austria. In spite of the growing demands placed on early childhood education, there is still very little recognition from society, as evidenced by the lack of acceptance for educators in society in general and the inadequate remuneration of their work. The term "*Tante*" (literally "aunt") widely used in Austria is perceived by many early childhood educators as deprecating who see it as an impediment to professional recognition for their work.

According to experts, more money by far is spent on education for school-aged children than for pre-school education, while pre-school years are generally perceived as private child-rearing

responsibilities (cf. Der Standard, February 13, 2004, 2), or as illustrated by the table “Federal Educational Spending from 1995 to 2001” (drawn up on the basis on the annually questionnaire submitted to UNESCO/OECD on educational funding, updated by STATISTICS AUSTRIA as regards the data on public education spending in Austria):

Table 4.5 Educational Funding according to ISCED Level

Year	ISCED 0	ISCED 1	ISCED 2	ISCED 3	ISCED 4	ISCED 5B	ISCED 5A/6	ISCED 9
	Pre-primary education	Primary education levels 1 - 4	Lower secondary education levels 5 - 8	Upper secondary education levels 9 and higher	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	Non-university tertiary level	University tertiary level	(n.a.)
1995	719.7	2,244.7	2,609.9	2,288.1	83.6	190.2	2,233.6	236.0
1996	771.1	2,198.9	2,712.1	2,338.2	76.5	201.3	2,253.7	173.4
1997	795.1	2,235.2	2,667.8	2,371.4	77.8	194.8	2,255.3	146.1
1998	882.6	2,304.5	2,702.1	2,482.1	105.8	189.1	2,290.9	144.3
1999	850.4	2,400.8	2,956.6	2,517.8	91.2	198.2	2,431.0	155.6
2000	957.6	2,341.7	3,039.8	2,635.3	96.4	201.6	2,467.5	171.4
2001	921.1	2,414.8	2,946.7	2,611.6	97.4	176.0	2,730.8	396.9

(Statistics Austria, http://www.statistik.at/fachbereich_03/bildung_tab4.shtml)

However, the image of the kindergarten teaching profession is evolving together with the growing expectations of kindergarten educators. The new professional description “kindergarten educator” is gradually taking hold in kindergartens²¹ (cf. Hanifl 1999, 38).

A study analysing the image of kindergarten pedagogues (cf. Chisté 1999) shows that kindergarten educators are very dissatisfied with the image of their profession. They see the image as poor and would like to have more recognition and appreciation for their profession, more freedom to make their own decisions in everyday activities, improved working conditions and more efficient public relations efforts. Parents and politicians, however, view the image of kindergarten pedagogues considerably more positively, but they are unaware of the occupational strain kindergarten educators are under in their daily work.

The fact that kindergarten pedagogues see themselves as considerably more intelligent, more competent and better qualified than parents or politicians do is an indication that public opinion does not give them their due respect or appreciation.

All in all it can be stated that kindergarten pedagogues are recognised as skilled employees. The objective must be to better inform the public of their qualifications, the scope of their training and

²¹ - Author's note: This trend was taken into account with the consistent use of the term “kindergarten teacher” or “educator” in this text.

primarily the structural framework conditions that limit their professional activities (cf. Wieser 1999, 75 and Chisté 1999, 124ff.).

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5. Day-Care Curricula and Manner of Implementation

This section presents a closer look at the various institutions and their educational approaches. Also included in this analysis are the transition phases in kindergarten (beginning phase upon entering the kindergarten and transition to elementary school) and what is required for them to happen smoothly.

5.1. Curriculum and Philosophy behind the Various Day-Care Facilities

The responsibilities of day-care facilities (in particular kindergartens and crèches) are laid down in the provincial laws; however, these objectives only offer a rough guide and not curriculum in the true sense of the word. There is no compulsory nationwide “teaching plan” for day-care facilities. A group of experts from the field draw up a comprehensive representation of educational objectives for day-care facilities under the direction of the Charlotte Bühler-Institut für praxisorientierte Kleinkindforschung (cf. Eurydice database).

The focus of the educational efforts in day-care facilities in Austria is on the individual needs, interests and actions of the children, on fostering their physical, mental and psychological development and on giving all boys and girls the same opportunities for development. The goal of the day-care facilities is to provide the children with an environment that enables them to discover and explore their world. The children’s development is fostered in a holistic and playful way, and school-like frontal teaching is to be avoided. The day-care facilities aim to educate the children in ethical, religious and social values in agreement with the parents’ wishes.

The daily work in the day-care facilities reflects educational principles. There are day-care facilities that focus on particular educational approaches (e.g. Steiner, Montessori, Freinet, Piaget, Wild); however, fundamentally, these various concepts are taught during the kindergarten pedagogue training course and integrated in the educational curriculum of the day-care facilities (cf. Eurydice database).

In spite of the similarities, differences do exist between the different kinds of institutions providing early education and care outside the family. The different types of day-care facilities are based on differing concepts and areas of focus in educating and caring for the children.

5.1.1. Kindergartens

The laws in the nine federal provinces provide the legal foundation for the kindergarten and crèche system. Although the wording of the legislation differs, the laws agree on essential points.

“The kindergarten laws (...) define the kindergarten as an educational and day-care facility for three to six-year-old children and emphasize its educational purpose:

- Kindergarten in Austria is regarded as a facility that supplements and supports early education and care as provided by the family, but cannot replace it.
- The kindergarten’s responsibility is to foster children holistically and comprehensively by offering a varied programme of play and activities for which the children and their development represent the benchmark.
- The kindergarten also relieves the burden on working, and primarily single parents in their concern about who is to supervise their children when they cannot.
- The kindergarten opens up a rich and varied world of discovery and experience to children in their pre-school years, preparing them at the same time (while eschewing any kind of school-like instruction) to attend school.

The kindergarten meets its responsibilities chiefly by the educational effect it has provided by the community of children any by promoting individual and voluntary learning in play. The kindergarten also endeavours to identify and react to societal developments while taking the needs of the children into account.” (Charlotte Bühler-Institut 1994, 19, quoted according to Stöttinger 2001, 13)

In addition to the general objectives regular kindergartens have, special needs kindergartens are also responsible for fostering the development of children with special developmental needs in accordance with special needs education principles. HP kindergartens and integration groups also work together with therapists to pursue suitable therapeutic goals.

Children with special needs in Austrian kindergartens (Source Statistics Austria):

Name of institution	children with special needs	children without special needs	total
“Kindergarten”	3.767	176.392	180.159
“Integration group”	2.161	15.145	17.266
“Special needs group”	553	580	1.133
“training kindergartens”	6	1.192	1.198

5.1.2. Crèches

Crèches provide early education and care for children under the age of three. The objective of these facilities is to promote the children’s social, emotional, motor and cognitive development taking into account the children’s individual personality.

5.1.3. Childminders

Childminders differ from other day-care facilities in that they provide early education and care in their own homes for a small group of boys and girls in a family-like atmosphere. Thanks to the small number of children, childminders can devote more attention to the individual child and his or her personal needs. Their goal is to create a positive environment suitable to the age of the children they supervise.

5.1.4. Parent-Toddler Groups

Parent-toddler groups differ greatly from kindergartens from the start in their educational approach. Among other things, parent-toddler groups are based on Rousseau's ideal of a natural upbringing, reformist and humanist educational principles. In the 1980s the Austrian parent-toddler group movement developed its own educational programme, referred to as a so-called "anderer Umgang", or "different approach". This approach incorporates "the children's right to have a say in and influence their environment and daily routine and parents' refusal to raise their children by pushing them in a certain direction (...), a lack of hierarchy in the caregiver team and a partnership-like relationship between parents and the caregiver" (Naderer, Vienna 2000, 3).

5.2. Transitions: Family – Kindergarten – School

Transitions, or moving from a familiar environment to a new and unfamiliar one, always bring a new set of challenges. Children must let the familiar go, reorient themselves and enter into new relationships. In order to ease these transitions – from the family to kindergarten and from kindergarten to school – the goal is to ensure continuity and prepare the children for change slowly. To do this, children should be handled with care and according to their individual personality; their needs, capabilities and difficulties, as well as their family situation should be especially taken into account. Exchanging information and cooperating with both the parents and the child's future school ensure that the gap between these different worlds is narrowed.

5.2.1. From the Family to Kindergarten

Starting kindergarten should be done as gently as possible. For this reason, it is common for the kindergarten to invite the family for an in-depth meeting. Often children can become familiar with the kindergarten before actually beginning on an "open house day". It takes between three to five weeks for children to get accustomed to the kindergarten (or even longer for younger children). It is customary for children not to spend more than a few hours per day in the first few weeks of kindergarten, which is then gradually increased in the subsequent weeks. How long this takes depends on the age and personality of each individual child. The aim is for children to slowly adjust to the group and familiarise themselves with the daily routine. Children are able to let go of their parents and acclimate themselves to their new environment even more smoothly, the more stable

and secure the parent-child relationship is. Should difficulties arise for children in becoming familiar with their new environment, it helps to slowly increase the distance between the child and the parent who has brought him or her to the kindergarten. In the beginning, parents should also have the possibility of staying with their child (cf. Hartmann 1996, 162f.).

However, in practice, it is not infrequent that children are forced to acclimate themselves too quickly in the daily routine of the day-care facility (cf. Freiberger 2003, 8).

5.2.2. From Kindergarten to School

Experts are in agreement that day-care facilities must not anticipate school learning, but rather should endeavour to provide a comprehensive and fundamental preparation for attending school by fostering all of the child's capabilities and overall personality, in particular his or her enthusiasm for learning and abilities for processing information. Preparing children for attending school does not happen just in the last year of kindergarten by having them complete a few worksheets, but is integrated in the entire educational programme. It is up to the kindergartens to ease children's transition to kindergarten in order to prevent feelings of insecurity.

In this context, close cooperation between school and kindergarten is very important. Each institution must be given an insight into the work of the other. In kindergarten, children should be given the possibility for getting to know their future teachers and classrooms. The transition to school and the changes it entails should be a positive experience for children to avoid diminishing their enthusiasm for learning. Initial instruction at school should introduce the children to the school, as well as familiarise them with the daily routine, play and the frequent natural learning methods. Cooperating between the parents and the kindergarten is essential for making the child's school start as smooth as possible.

However, in practice, there is only a moderate willingness to cooperate between the institutions, in addition to administrative impediments. In urban areas in particular kindergarten and school teachers are still perceived differently by the public (cf. Riefler 2003, 110).

5.2.3. Improving Continuity from Kindergarten to School

Making starting school flexible and attentive to children's needs is among the most important educational policy issues and challenges of the future. The transition between kindergarten and school is marked by a great deal of insecurity, including the issue whether or not the child is "ready" for school. Starting school has been shown to be an important interface for children's further scholastic development. In order to ease the transition, address children's various needs and give children a good start to their school career, the school entrance phase was revamped for the 1999/2000 school year.

Forming the basis for this was the realisation that nearly one out of five elementary school students have problems in school in their first two years which usually results in the children in question being moved back a year. The current practice of moving the children back to a pre-school grade is interpreted by the child as a failure and a disappointment. Only then can the child be fostered individually. However, as pre-school aged children often have developmental spurts, it

is important to give them time and to avoid weeding some out too soon. The notion of "school readiness" and the necessity of identifying "school readiness" by examining the children must therefore be questioned.

The essential characteristics of the reform include admitting all children of school age to level 1. There is no moving children back or keeping them from attending school, and transferring children who may or may not be ready to attend school to pre-school grades must be done with sensitivity or even avoided altogether. This means that children who require additional attention do not lose a year. Children have more time to learn to cope with the new responsibilities school imposes on them. They can spend up to three years in level 1 should they so require. These proposals make the entire starting school phase more flexible and focused on the children's needs. Each child is fostered from the beginning by centring on his or her individual personality and needs. Different learning methods, such as open and project-oriented learning, should liven up instruction and make it more stimulating (cf. Ecker 2003 and Riefler 2003).

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6. Involvement of Parents and Education of Parents

This chapter deals with involving parents in institutional early education and care and the expectations that parents have of institutional early education and care. The discussion here will show, beyond the scope of parental involvement in the day-care facility, what parental education and counselling looks like in Austria and what status it enjoys.

Early education and care outside the family is no replacement for early education and care provided by the parents, nor does it seek to. Day-care facilities are intended to support and supplement the parents' efforts to raise and care for their children. The provincial laws provide for the facilities to work as closely with parents as possible in order to ensure continuity in early education and care on the part of the parents. Parental involvement, in other words communication and cooperation between parents and caregivers, is an enrichment for day-to-day early education and care for everyone involved. The closeness to their parents offers children favourable opportunities for development, and adults a valuable opportunity to meet, communicate and learn. A mutual exchange of information is of fundamental importance for building a successful relationship between the kindergarten pedagogue and the parents. It should be possible for all parents to participate actively and have a say in the goings-on of the kindergarten.

6.1. Involving the Parents in Early education and care

The parents are encouraged to become involved in the early education and care institution in a myriad of different ways, i.e. by meeting the educators everyday or in the context of specifically organised events. All of the provinces have made it obligatory to hold at least one parents' night or open house per year. The purpose of parents' nights is not just to discuss organisational issues, but to fundamentally provide parents and kindergarten pedagogues with the opportunity to meet and exchange information. The teachers can give the parents more information on the kindergarten's educational objectives, while parents have the chance to talk about their child and how s/he is developing. In addition to parents' nights, parents are also invited to participate in organising parties, projects, family excursions and other activities. Almost all parents have meetings with their child's kindergarten pedagogue; these meetings are both arranged by appointment and regularly take place spontaneously in the form of informal daily contact when the children are dropped off or picked up from kindergarten. Parents are also kept up-to-date via parents' letters and information bulletin boards (cf. Hartmann 1996 and Wieser 1999).

Compared to kindergartens and to other day-care facilities, parents' involvement plays an even greater role in parent-toddler groups, as these are established and run with the help of the parents. Parents' involvement in parent-toddler groups ranges from cooking and cleaning to performing payroll duties and public relations work. They are also actively involved in organising and designing the facilities.

6.2. Parents' Expectations of Day-Care Facilities

For many parents, a day-care facility such as kindergarten is the first educational institution which with them, together with their child, come into contact. The teachers there represent in this case for many children their first socialisation experience outside the family. The parents as well come into contact with professional caregivers for the first time to whom they entrust their child. Parents have manifold expectations of the day-care facility; they want their child's development to be fostered as much as possible and often have different ideas on how to educate and raise children.

Parental involvement in day-care facility fluctuates in practice back and forth between parents who primarily require a service for themselves and their children and parents who would like to become actively involved in planning the kindergarten's educational activities. There is no data on which factors influence parents' participation. (It could be assumed that income, educational level or ethnic background could play a part.) In principle it can be stated that parents who are very much aware of their role as parents have clear ideas about what they want caregivers to do and be. They demand to have more of a say and be more involved, as well as expect the teachers/caregivers to act according to their ideas of how children should be raised and educated. Due to changing family structures, many parents also feel overwhelmed by their role as parents and in their uncertainty expect the day-care facility to offer them support. By the same token, teachers often function as immediate counsellors/dispenser of advice for mothers and/or fathers who are facing difficult family situations; the expectation is also that the educators take on more responsibility for raising their children. Single parents are often so focused on ensuring the material survival of their family that there is little time left for raising and educating their children; these responsibilities are therefore delegated to the day-care facility (cf. Wieser 1999, 89ff.).

Parents' gainful employment is also associated with their expectations vis-à-vis the day-care facility concerning its opening hours. In times of increased work flexibility, 15% of parents criticise the rigid opening hours and too long/extensive closure during school holidays.

One third of parents who are dissatisfied with the public kindergartens and crèches their children attend, cite the sufficient care for each child in the institutions of early education and care as the reason for the dissatisfaction. Parents whose children are in private kindergartens or crèches are less critical (22%) of the quality of early education and care; parents with children in parent-toddler groups are entirely satisfied with the quality of early education and care (cf. Statistics Austria: Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care September 2002/03, 36ff.).

6.3. Education of Parents and Family Counselling

While involving the parents in the day-care facility focuses on specific educational objectives and challenges of the institutions in question, the education of parents encompasses a much broader spectrum. Its objective is to raise awareness for parents' responsibilities in raising and educating their children and to motivate parents to engage in a process of reflection and learning.

Institutional parental education has been offered in Austria for many years by various day-care facility providers (provinces, municipalities, family organisation, self-help associations) and private persons, as well as in adult education centres, counselling centres, parent-child centre, educational centres, schools, etc. on a federal, provincial and regional level.

This mainly takes the form of lectures where parents have the opportunity to ask questions, discuss issues and (depending on the number of participants) exchange information. Seminars are limited to a smaller number of participants and offer not only information, but also the opportunity for self-reflection, and individual and group activities.

Informal parental education, in other words parental education not provided by experts, takes place primarily via the mass media, such as magazines, television, radio and books. In Austria there are a host of educational programmes, such as parents' letters and tips for parents. The Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection publishes, for example, brochures addressed to stepfamilies and single parents.

On the federal level parental education has garnered little attention to date. Since the International Year of the Family in 1994, however, some progress has been seen. An inter-ministerial working group is drawing up standards for subsidies and backs networking. As of January 1, 2000, a legal basis for subsidising and promoting quality parental education projects was created from the Family Burden Equalisation Fund. Non-profit institutions can now receive subsidies upon application, and a corresponding programme for initial and continued training of parental education is also eligible for subsidies (cf. Bericht über die soziale Lage 2002, 12). At the same time federal funding for educating parents has risen significantly from € 0.22 to € 2.2 million (cf. Schattovits 7). The Family Counselling Subsidy Law from 1974 forms the basis for subsidising family counselling. A total of 305 family counselling centres with some 2,000 counsellors are spread over all nine provinces and nearly every single political district. The counselling centres have developed special areas of focus over the years. These range from reaching special target groups to addressing a wide spectrum of topics.) Current counselling topics have evolved to include counselling in "family problems" (relationship difficulties, separation/divorce, couples and family counselling). It has proven effective to have interdisciplinary teams at the family counselling centres, whereby many counsellors would like to see the centres be made into so-called multifunctional centres which consolidate various psycho-social programmes under one roof.

In 2000 federal funding rose considerably from € 0.22 million to € 2.2 million (cf. http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/eoss/downloads/gm_01_austria_schattovits_de.pdf).

In additional federally subsidised projects, all nine provinces also offer parental education programmes organised by the province in close cooperation with private day-care facility providers. Private day-care facility providers' initiatives can also be funded by the provinces as well (cf. Beham 1997, 7). Upper Austria is a good example: A parental education voucher in the amount of € 60 maximum (over a term of three years at € 20 per year) is tied to the so-called early education and care bonus. Parental education events give parents the opportunity to learn about the various developmental phases their child goes through.

The vouchers can only be exchanged for participation in parental education events addressing the issues of relationships between couples and parent-child relationships (cf. <http://www.ooe.gv.at/familie/fam2004/04/index.htm?02.htm>).

Future kindergarten pedagogues are also to be prepared to deal with the topics parental education and family counselling in the context of their teacher training course.

Family Counselling Centres in Austria

In Austria there are over 350 family counselling centres run by various day-care facility providers which are funded under the Family Counselling Subsidy Law. Family counselling centres are located in every district in Austria. In addition to counselling in crisis situations, these centres also provide basic and preventative information. Family counselling mainly focuses on the following topics:

- Raising children, early education and care, school
- Conflicts between couples, communication and distribution of gender roles
- Separation / divorce
- Mental problems
- Domestic violence
- Pregnancy

In most family counselling centres, experts from different fields work together: doctors, social workers, marriage and family counsellors, legal experts, psychologists and teachers/education experts. In principle, family counselling is free of charge (cf. www.familie.bmsg.gv.at).

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7. Funding

This chapter provides an overview of how the Austrian day-care system is funded, how the costs of day-care are divided among the federal government, the provinces and/or the municipalities, private institutions and parents and how spending on this area has changed in the last few years.

7.1. Funding of Day-Care Facilities

Funding for staff and equipment costs is provided by the day-care providers of the day-care facilities. For more than two-thirds of the institutions (68.6%) public local authorities (federal government, provinces, cities and municipalities) are the day-care service providers, among which the lion's share belongs to the cities and municipalities (99%). Half of the private day-care facilities are run by associations, and somewhat more than a third are run by church organizations. Other operators include companies, private citizens and other private providers (cf. Statistics Austria: Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare 2002/03).

Table 7.1.: Kindergartens by Provider

Provider	Number	Percent
Public providers	3,853	68.6%
Private providers	1,761	31.4%
<i>of which associations</i>	<i>833</i>	<i>47.3%</i>
<i>of which church organisations</i>	<i>678</i>	<i>38.5%</i>
<i>of which private citizens</i>	<i>170</i>	<i>9.7%</i>
<i>of which companies</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>2.2%</i>
<i>of which miscellaneous</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>2.3%</i>

Source: Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2003

Considerable differences exist with regard to the contributions made by each province for covering the costs and for operating the crèches and kindergartens, especially for private institutions. Under certain criteria, institutions operated by associations, churches and religious orders may receive subsidies for meeting costs for staff and equipment. These subsidies are distributed either on a discretionary basis or in accordance with the respective provincial laws. Private kindergartens run by other providers receive no public funding as a rule (cf. Statistics Austria Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 1997, 10f.).

7.2. Public Spending

In 2001 public spending on early education and care²² came to just under € 921.1 million, of which 49.3% went for covering staff costs and 20.4% each for equipment costs and transfers to

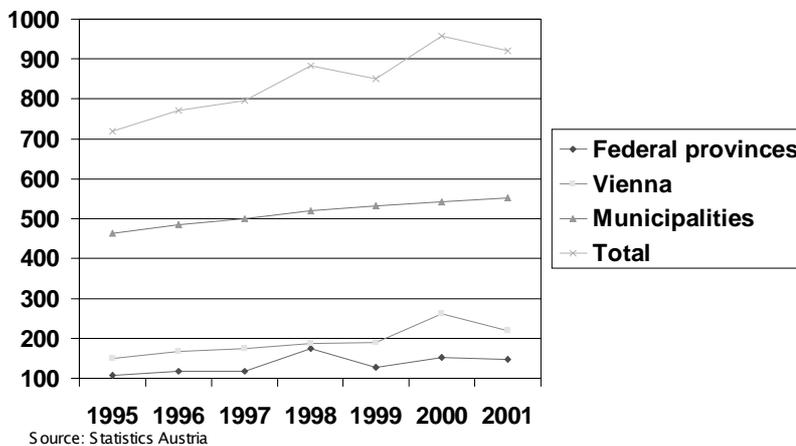
²² The following data applies only to spending on kindergartens (ISCED 0).

municipalities and private households. The province (and municipality) of Vienna accounted for 24% of total spending (€ 220.1 million); the remaining municipalities spent € 552.8 million (60%) on staff, equipment and building investment in 2000. The remaining 16% (€ 148.2 million) was contributed by the federal provinces (excluding Vienna). Provincial spending was largely in the form of transfer payments to municipalities and non-profit private institutions. Education spending in the last few years has risen continuously; the increase came to € 201.4 million between 1995 and 2001 (cf. www.statistik.gv.at).

In 2001 public spending per child amounted to € 4,510.

Chart 7.1.:

Public Spending on Education (in millions of euros)



jugendforschung research youth

Spending by the federal provinces, due to differences in size and early education and care quota, varies widely. The following table should be able to provide a quick overview:

Table 7.2.: Education Spending by the Federal Provinces in 2001 in € 1,000 (for kindergartens)

Federal province	Total education spending	Transfers to public legal entities	Total excl. transfers
Burgenland	9,933	8,635	1,298
Carinthia	16,962	10,800	6,162
Lower Austria	96,225	16,774	79,451
Upper Austria	57,476	34,918	22,558
Salzburg	18,837	9,968	8,869
Styria	45,933	26,717	19,216
Tyrol	17,661	17,513	148
Vorarlberg	11,974	11,900	74
Total from the federal provinces excl. Vienna	285,419	137,224	148,195
Vienna	220,065	-	220,065
Municipalities excl. Vienna	552,801	-	552,801
Total	1,058,285	137,224	921,061

Source: Information provided by Statistics Austria dated June 8, 2004

7.3. Private Spending

Private spending is made up of parent contributions and spending from private institutions. Overall there is no precise data available for private spending; all of the following information is therefore based on estimates and can only be seen as guideline.

The percentage of private spending on early education and care (incl. parent contributions) came to 19.9% in 2001. Like public spending, private spending for elementary school levels has also risen over the last few years: in 1998 private spending came to 2,112.8 million Austrian schillings (€ 153.5 million), compared to 3,265,675 Austrian schillings (€ 237.3 million) in 2001. During this period, private spending soared by a total of 54.6%, while public spending inched up by 4.4% (source Information provided by Statistics Austria dated June 8, 2004).

Spending by parents on early education and care is calculated into the statistics on private spending; in 2001 spending by parents came to 1,546.9 million Austrian schillings (€ 112.4 million), corresponding to 9.4% of educational spending on elementary school levels (source: Statistics Austria, Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care, Micro-census September 2002/03). Many day-care facilities require no contributions from the parents (e.g. for morning early education and care in the province of Lower Austria); however, in the majority of municipalities, parents come up with part of the early education and care costs (mainly graded according to net household income).

Parents of children in institutional early education and care spend an average of € 145 per child in crèches, or € 60 per child in kindergarten. The parent contribution differs as to amount from

municipality to municipality. In Vienna, the parent contribution is by far the highest at € 150, while contributions are lowest on average in Vorarlberg (€ 30), Tyrol (€ 40) and Burgenland (€ 43) (cf: Statistics Austria, Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care, Micro-census September 2002/03).

The following table shows the monthly parent contribution for kindergartens broken down according to federal province. The figures are based on data provided by the provinces to the Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generation and Consumer Protection. In comparison to the figures cited above from Statistics Austria, the figures below reflect a differentiation between half-day and full-day early education and care and whether or not meals and snacks are included.

Table 7.3.: Monthly Parent Contributions for Kindergartens Broken Down According to Federal Province and Scope of Early education and care²³

Federal province	Half-day	Meals/snacks	Full-day	Meals/snacks
Carinthia	€ 68	no	€ 112	yes
Upper Austria	€ 56		€ 70	
Salzburg	€ 77		€ 62	
Styria	€ 70		€ 124	
Tyrol	€ 27	no	€ 109	no
Vorarlberg	€ 142	no	€ 206	no
Vienna	€ 120	no	€ 202	no

Source: Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations 2004

7.4. Funding for Parent-Toddler Groups and Childminders

Parent-toddler groups run by parents are financed by parent contributions, provincial subsidies, subsidies from the Ministry for Families and partially by subsidies from the municipalities and The Public Employment Service. Provincial subsidies differ widely in terms of the guidelines for funding and the amount of available subsidies. As a result, parent contributions vary also as to amount, leading to inequality among children in parent-toddler groups from province to province (cf. Naderer, 2000, 7 and according to the BÖE, June 2, 2004).

In 2003 parents with a child in a parent-toddler groups paid on average € 224 per month for full-day early education and care and € 128 for half-day early education and care. Parents pay above average contributions in Vienna and primarily Lower Austria where the monthly costs for full-day early education and care exceed the national average by 14% and 32% in Vienna and Lower Austria, respectively. With their contributions, parents pay 47.3% of all costs incurred by parent-

²³ The figures indicated here represent average amounts with the exception off Vienna. The parent contribution for Vienna represents the full amount; however, the contribution is graded according to income, i.e. some parents pay a reduced rate. Two federal provinces are not included in the table.

toddler groups and playgroups; in other words, parent contributions account for nearly 50% of the total budget (cf. BÖE 2004, 10).

Like the funding for parent-toddler groups, the regulations concerning financing of childminders vary among Austria's nine provinces. The provinces of Salzburg and Styria both have provincial laws with funding legislation, while Carinthia and Burgenland are currently in the process of writing similar legislation. In Tyrol, Upper Austria, Lower Austria and Vienna, the majority of funding comes from funds from the Public Employment Service, coupled with provincial subsidies. As far as funding from the municipalities is concerned, there is no uniform regulation, and primarily the municipalities are not obliged to assume some of the costs. In Styria, the parent contribution (€ 260 for 40-hour a week early education and care) covers around 40% of the costs, and in Carinthia the ratio is somewhat similar. In Vorarlberg parents pay between € 82 and € 637 depending on the subsidy, compared to between € 116 and € 436 for full-day early education and care in Salzburg (according to the Austrian Federation of Childminder Associations, June 17, 2004).

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8. Conclusions

The objective of this report was to provide an overview of early education and care for children aged zero to six and of their environment in Austria. Using various issues, such as quality assurance and funding, an analysis of the current situation was presented and past developments described. This chapter is intended to highlight briefly once again what was presented in the previous chapters: What is the outlook for the future of the day-care system in Austria? Where are the most important areas for taking political action in this context?

8.1. Compatibility of Work and Family

In summary it can be stated that gainful employment among women has increased over the last few years; currently over 30% of all children under the age of six have a gainfully employed mother.

Compatibility of work and family takes on a key role in Austrian family policy. The last large-scale family policy reform, the introduction of early education and care benefit in place of parental leave benefit, showed signs of lengthening women's exit from the labour market. The introduction of the early education and care benefit also enabled self-employed parents to receive this important type of family assistance. However, the application of the regulation, aimed at allowing greater choice in early education and care and thereby increasing parents', primarily mothers', gainful employment, has had, as already mentioned, the opposite effect.

Promoting compatibility of work and family affects not just mothers. Fathers as well should have the increased possibility in the future of assuming responsibility for providing care for their children.

Making the opening hours of day-care facilities more flexible would constitute an important step towards improved compatibility of work and family. In Vorarlberg and Tyrol, opening hours make gainful employment for both parents either impossible or very difficult.

8.2. Shortage of Available Day-Care

The number of children, in particular those under the age of three, who are in institutional early education and care, has risen over the years, as has the number of day-care facilities. However, not all of those who are interested in placing their children in institutional early education and care can do so. Currently 8.8% of children between the ages of zero and six need (additional) early education and care. It is an important goal of family policy to eliminate this deficit in institutional early education and care. In connection, there is the issue of granting parents the right to institutional early education and care in the future, an issue that is currently under discussion in the province of Salzburg.

8.3. Differences in Legislation

Legislative differences from province to province create problems for parent-toddler groups and childminders in particular due to varying subsidy amounts and subsidy criteria, as well as varying legal requirements for licensing. For example, parent-toddler groups are prohibited by law in Burgenland. However, the regulatory differences in the kindergarten laws which concern remuneration of staff or group size should be examined in the context of the discussion on early education and care quality.

Several years ago an attempt was made to initiate a federal law in order to establish a uniform regulatory framework. A platform representing various day-care facility providers (e.g. *Kinderfreunde*, parent-toddler group associations and childminder organisations) attempted to draw up a petition for draft legislation. The platform has been "put on ice" for political reasons since 2000.

8.4. Social Equity

An important objective is the promotion of social equity. Here, it is especially important to eliminate the impediments disadvantaged groups face in gaining access to institutional early education and care (these impediments cannot be presented on the basis of the currently available data without difficulty) and to specifically support their utilisation of institutional early education and care. In a first step it would be necessary to collect data on disadvantaged groups. In this area there is a fundamental lack of scientific studies and statistical material. Subsequent steps would then entail taking targeted action.

It is also important to provide even more support to children of immigrant families and special needs children. This would entail expanding the early education and care possibilities in institution with an intercultural or special needs focus.

8.5. Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement

There are great challenges for tackling future issues as regards quality as well:

- Day-care facilities gained in importance as key centres of socialisation for children due to societal changes, making quality assurance and improvement in these facilities a key issue. Quality assurance must be seen as the responsibility of social policy and must not be left to individual initiatives.
- The last large-scale study assessing the quality of day-care facilities was carried out ten years ago. Since then there have been no new studies for collecting and analysing data from all of Austria. Currently quality assessments are primarily carried out by the individual day-care facility providers; however, quality and quality assessment should be not only the responsibility of the day-care facility providers, but should also be a fundamental political issue.

- According to experts there is a need to take action as concerns structural quality. Calls for groups to have two certified educators have been implemented in only a few institutions. By the same token, the relatively large number of children per group (especially in kindergartens) does not conform to educational recommendation and weighs down teachers' educational and socialisation efforts.
- The quality of their educational work goes hand in hand with how satisfied caregivers and teachers of small children are with their profession. For this reason, improvements must be made in their working conditions, opportunities for promotion, pay and recognition by society. There is still very little public appreciation/recognition for teachers, a fact that is also reflected in their pay. In order to improve their professional image, the public must be better informed in the future as to teachers' qualifications and working conditions.
- The percentage of men who work as teachers and caregivers for small children is very small and has changed very slightly over the years. In kindergartens and crèches, only 0.8% of caregivers/teachers are men. However, being able to share everyday experiences and activities with male teachers would be a welcome enrichment for young boys and girls especially in early childhood education and care.
- As seen long-term, Austria is faced with the question of adjusting its educational levels to those of other European countries. The educational objective of acquiring the appropriate qualifications and at the same preparing them for post-secondary education presents school students with great challenges.
- Due to new educational perspectives, such as gender-sensitive early childhood teaching methods, intercultural education and mixing different ages together, which are being incorporated more and more in teaching practices, a great deal of change has taken place in the last few years in terms of quality. However, we must emphasise these positive approaches even more so in the future.
- A few federal provinces have begun to discuss issues, such as creative work, the need for day-care facilities and making the opening hours of day-care facility more flexible, with a view towards fundamentally developing the early education and care system further and highlight new perspectives.
- A key issue is also increasingly fostering and promoting children in their early years; moving away from deficit-oriented thinking and more toward fostering each child in a positive and holistic way is an approach for laying the foundation for a future knowledge society as early as children's preschool years.

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8. Glossary

Adoptive Parents' Associations	Non-profit institutions giving advice to adoptive parents; (adoption = the legal process by which the parent/child relationship is created between persons not so related by blood.
(Austrian) Chamber of Labour	All employees, apprentices, persons on maternity (paternity) leave, as well as the unemployed are subject to compulsory membership; civil servants and agricultural workers are exempt. It also represents the interests of retired employees.
additional attention	Attention required by children beyond the usual scope, e.g. in case of physical impairment
additional module in infant and toddler education	Additional in-depth training programme at Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care for working with children under the age of three
adult education centres	Institutions providing continuing education for adults of a general or vocational nature.
after-school day-care centre	After-school education and childcare facilities where homework supervision and assistance are given and leisure-time activities are organised
Association of Austrian Cities and Towns Association of Austrian Cities and Municipalities	Voluntary associations (Association of Municipalities founded in 1947, Association of Cities re-established in 1945) of cities with by-laws of their own or municipalities. They are involved in the review of draft bills/regulations of the Federation and the provinces. They also take part in the negotiations for tax distribution.
autonomously from school to school	Room for manoeuvre in school management provided for by the law, allowing for a variation of general rules (such as changes in the curriculum that can be made autonomously from school to school)
bonnes	Obsolete term (of French origin) for housemaid/female educator in private services
Caritas	International NGO, Catholic aid organisation providing humanitarian aid
Charlotte-Bühler-Institut	Austrian research institute (association) carrying on the work of developmental psychologist Charlotte BÜHLER
child to caregiver ratio or: childcare quota or: staff-child-ratio	Ratio of qualified persons to child in a pre-school institution
childcare benefit	Benefit paid out since January 1, 2002 for: gainful employees, self-employed persons, persons not gainfully employed (housewives, students), persons with insignificant employment and farmers. Non-EEA immigrants are only eligible to claim childcare benefits if they have continuously lived in Austria for a minimum of five years or have been gainfully employed at least for one year within the past two years. If they were self-employed at that time, they are not eligible for childcare benefits.
childcare bonus	Amount paid in several provinces (here: Upper Austria) when certain conditions are met. It is intended to facilitate day-care outside the home and is also a token of appreciation for

	parents providing childcare services themselves.
childcare cooperatives	Form of childcare where parents take on organisational as well as educational responsibilities
childminder	A woman looking after one or more children in her own home, for reward.
childminders	Men/women looking after one or more children, in their own home, for reward.
children who are not yet old enough to attend school pre-school age	Age before children are old enough to attend school
children who are ready to begin their schooling	Children of school age who are expected to be physically and intellectually capable of attending grade 1 are said to be ready to begin their schooling. "Dispenskindergarten" (<i>ibid.</i>) may also be accepted early.
city administration department municipal department	Organisational unit of the administration of a municipality with by-laws of its own. Municipal departments are responsible for individual sectors.
compulsory schooling of school age	Schooling is compulsory for all children at six years of age. It is mandatory by law beginning on September 1 (the start of the school year in Austria) of the year in which the child has completed his or her sixth year.
crèches	A day nursery for children up to the age of three
day-care facility	Collective term for institutions where care and supervision are provided for children during the day
day-care facility provider	In Austria: a local authority, a municipality, a religious community, an association, a business enterprise, another institution or a private person
day-care facility providers	Legal entities responsible for maintaining a kindergarten
Day-Care Law	Provincial law governing the duties and the organisation of childcare institutions
day-care license	Permits/licenses that are required for example by childminders, foster parents to care for children. They are issued by the competent district administrative authority.
dioceses administration of a diocese	Administration headed by a Roman Catholic bishop; carried on like the administration of other administrative authorities.
diploma exam	School-leaving examination at the four-year Institute for Kindergarten Teacher Training qualifying graduates to work
diploma exam	School-leaving examination at the Institute for Kindergarten Teacher Training (college) qualifying graduates to work
Dispenskindergarten	Children who celebrate their sixth birthday between September 1 and December 31 and are accepted to primary school early after being issued an official exemption
district administrative authority	Authority carrying out the duties transferred to it for a certain administrative district (within a province)
Education Experts	Experts who give advice to kindergarten educators in the respective provincial area (see also "inspector")
educational centres	Local centres responsible for the management of continuing education
Equal Treatment Package	Body of laws passed at constitutional level by the Austrian People's Party and Social Democratic Party in 1992, which, among other things, call for an expansion of day-care facilities to meet the current need.
examination regulations	Legal regulations governing the organisation of examinations

	as regards their contents and form
family allowance	Money received regularly by families from the government for children living in the same household or primarily maintained by them.
family allowance supplements	Cash benefits paid by the federal provinces to families
Family Burden-Equalisation Fund	Fund for government subsidies (see also "family allowance") that is exclusively financed by contributions administered by the Federal Ministry for Youth and Family. The Fund finances the two main family policy transfer payments, namely family allowance and childcare benefit. Contributions to the Fund come from all employers payable for all employees in Austria (with the exception of the Federation, the provinces, the larger municipalities and non-profit hospitals). Further contributions to the Fund are also made by the Federation (from income taxes) and the provinces (in the form of duties).
family counselling centres	Counselling centres for families, step-families and single parents receiving federal funds, specifically from the Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection. In most counselling centres there are interdisciplinary teams of experts, such as physicians, social workers, marriage and family counsellors, lawyers, psychologists, educators, etc. Free, anonymous advice is offered on an open-access basis; counsellors are bound by professional discretion.
Family Package	Set of measures that entered into force on July 1, 2004, with retroactive effect as of January 1, 2004. Among other things, a family addition to the sole earner's tax credit was adopted.
federal law framework act/law/statute	Federal Parliament is able to enact framework statutes laying down general guidelines within which the regulation of details must be left to the legislative bodies of the provinces.
federal provinces	In Austria, administrative subdivisions of the federal state, each with its own legislative body (provincial parliament) and administration (provincial government). The interests of Austria's nine provinces are represented at the federal level in the Federal Council, the upper house of parliament. They have the right to adopt provincial constitutions, which may, however, not be in contradiction to the federal constitution. They are vested with many competencies, for example, with the kindergarten system.
foundling homes and orphanages	An institution for abandoned children (foundling home) or for children whose parents are dead (orphanage)
FPÖ	Austrian Freedom Party
framework curricula	Curricula setting out the major education programmes and objectives yet leaving enough room for flexibility and autonomy on the part of the individual school
full-time employment	Employment with a weekly working time of 40 hours
general compulsory schools	The following schools until completion of compulsory schooling: primary school, regular secondary school, polytechnical schools, four-year first stage of general upper-level secondary school
general education	Education that is not aimed at obtaining vocational training
governesses	Obsolete (French) term for a woman teacher/ housemaid employed in a private household

grey literature	All types of literature not available through the normal bookselling channels, including reports, trade literature, translations and ad hoc publications. This type of literature is often published by associations, organisations, etc.
group kindergarten teachers	Kindergarten teachers are responsible for leading a group (homogenous age group, family group) in a kindergarten (sometimes together with a kindergarten assistant). A kindergarten consists of several groups and is managed by the kindergarten head.
in tandem with work	Form of education that makes it possible for students to obtain training and be full-time employed at the same time (organisation of training: courses are mostly blocked together at weekends)
inspector	An official who examines for compliance with regulations, standards, etc. (see also "education experts")
Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care	See chart 4.2: five-year or four-semester training programmes
integrative childcare	Integrative childcare and education means mixing disabled and non-disabled children together.
ISCED	The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was designed by UNESCO in the early 1970's to serve 'as an instrument suitable for assembling, compiling and presenting statistics of education both within individual countries and internationally'.
Kinderbewahranstalten	Forerunner of kindergartens. These nurseries were established for economic, social and religious reasons, namely to prevent the boys and girls from neglect and delinquency and to outfit them with skills enabling them to subsequently earn an independent living.
Kinderfreunde	Association representing family and children interests of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (<i>ibid.</i>)
kindergarten assistants	Persons assisting kindergarten educators in matters of education and/or organisation
kindergarten inspector	See "inspector": an official of the respective provincial government who examines kindergartens for compliance with regulations, standards, etc.
kindergarten law	Provincial law regulating the general tasks as well as the establishment and management of kindergartens
Law on School Instruction	Law governing the internal organisation of education and instruction (substance of teaching and studying) in Austrian schools
Law on School Organisation	Law regulating the organisation of schools in Austria (objectives, structure)
level 1	Education level in the Austrian education system, comprising grade 1 and 2 as well as pre-school (if necessary)
M. Montessori (Montessorian theories)	Education theory going back to Italian physician Dr. Maria Montessori; teaching techniques giving children room and time to grow and to develop their own inner nature.
maternity regulations maternity protection	Maternity protection regulations are aimed at protecting the health of the mother-to-be and that of the child.
matter for the provinces	Legal matter that is under the legislative and/or executive responsibility of the provinces
mother-child card	A booklet handed over to a pregnant woman by her doctor. It

	is a transcript of required prenatal and postnatal medical examinations of mother and child. These examinations are available free of charge and are important preventative measures for mother and child.
nanny nurse nursemaid	See also "bonne" and/or "governess": a girl or woman who is regularly employed to look after someone else's children
Nazi welfare system	In 1932, the NS-Volkswohlfahrt (NSV) was founded in Berlin as a local self-help association. It was the principal institution of the Nazi welfare policy. With its continuously expanding welfare institutions, health programmes and social-welfare initiatives, the NSV made an important contribution to the propagandist self-portrayal of the Nazis.
opening hours	Times during which a kindergarten provides childcare and education.
ÖVP	Austrian People's Party
parental education voucher	Vouchers (here: in the province of Upper Austria) can be exchanged for participation in parental education events at education facilities, parent-child centres, family organisations, public providers and numerous private initiatives.
parental involvement	Communication and cooperation between parents and caregivers, seen as an enrichment for day-to-day childcare for everyone involved.
parental leave	Pursuant to the Maternity Act, parental leave may be agreed with an employer for a maximum period of 24 months after the child's birth; alternatively, three months may be deferred until the child turns seven.
parental leave benefit	Governmental assistance granted to a child's mother and/or father on parental leave (<i>ibid.</i>) who lives or live together in a household with the child and predominantly take care of the child herself/himself.
parents' evenings	Information evenings (usually on certain topics) where parents can learn more about kindergarten
parent-toddler groups	Form of childcare where parents take on organisational as well as educational responsibilities
parishes	A parish is the smallest unit of Church organisation. It may be defined as a township or cluster of townships having its own church (the parish church). A parish has its own priest (=representative of the bishop), who is sometimes assisted by a curate
part-time work	Employment with a weekly working time below the statutory limit
playgroups	Playgroups allow children to play in small groups offering them lots of opportunities to learn through a wide range of fun activities; parents involved in administration
political platform	Programme of the Austrian federal government giving an outline of the government's policies and proposed legislative programme for the parliamentary session.
pre-school grade	Form of organisation of level I (<i>ibid.</i>)
private childcare providers	A woman providing childcare and education in a private household (see obsolete terms "bonnes" and "governesses")
Public Employment Service Austria	Abbreviated in German: AMS. Organisation under public law that used to be part of the Federal Ministry for Labour and

	Social Affairs; set up as a separate unit by the Public Employment Service Act (1994). It offers services relating to the labour market.
public local authorities	Administrative authorities of the federation and/or the provinces
qualification for attending university	-
religious and private day-care facility providers	Religious: funded by religious communities private: non-public (legal) entities
secondary school-leaving exam and diploma exam	Final exam at the five-year Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care giving access to university studies and qualifying students to work as trained kindergarten teachers
social partners	The informal social partnership system of Austria stands for the voluntary co-operation between labour (Federal Chamber of Labour and Austrian Federation of Trade Unions) and management (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and Federation of Austrian Industries)
special needs kindergarten teachers special education kindergarten teachers	Specially trained kindergarten teachers working in kindergartens or parent-toddler groups where only children with special needs are cared for and educated
special needs kindergartens	Kindergartens that are specially designed to encourage the development of children with special needs
special needs kindergartens and parent-toddler groups	Kindergartens or parent-toddler groups where only children with special needs are cared for and educated
SPÖ	Social Democratic Party of Austria
staff and equipment costs	Expenses incurred by the employer for personnel and other costs
state teacher's college	Name of previous training institutions for teachers at primary schools (five-year college)
teachers' academies	Post-secondary training institutions for teachers at primary schools, regular secondary schools, special needs schools and polytechnical schools.
training kindergarten	Kindergarten that is part of an Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care and gives kindergarten educators to-be practical experience.
vocational training	Training for a specific vocation in industry, agriculture or trade
Volkskindergarten	Childcare institutions established under the Nazi welfare system
weekly allowance	Government subsidy for women in salaried employment (starting eight weeks before the expected date of birth)
youth welfare	Collective term for public services for children and young people that are regulated in the Austrian Youth Welfare Law. The principles of youth welfare are regulated uniformly throughout the entire Republic, whereas detailed rules are laid down in the implementing statutes and regulations of the provinces, taking into account regional idiosyncrasies.
Youth Welfare Law	Law that was passed in 1989 (see also "youth welfare"). It is the legal basis for the establishment of ombudsman systems for children and adolescents; led to an increased service-orientation in the sector.

Annex: Contextual Information on Austria²⁴
for Readers of the Austrian Background Report
"Starting Strong"

Country and People

Geography



Austria is located in southern Central Europe. Geographically, its territory encompasses both the Eastern Alps (which cover some two thirds of its surface area) and the Danube Region. Austria has a land surface of 83,858 square kilometres (32,369 square miles). Given its location, it has since time immemorial been a cross-roads of travel routes between the major European economic and cultural regions. Austria has common borders with eight other countries: Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

Austria is a federal state consisting of nine independent federal states: Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, Upper Austria, Vienna and Vorarlberg.

Federal State	Area/ km ²	Inhabitants per Thousand	Capitol
Burgenland	3965	278,6	Eisenstadt
Kärnten	9533	561,1	Klagenfurt
Niederösterreich	19174	1549,7	St.Pölten
Oberösterreich	11980	1382	Linz
Salzburg	7154	518,6	Salzburg
Steiermark	16388	1186,3	Graz
Tirol	12648	675,1	Innsbruck
Vorarlberg	2601	351,6	Bregenz
Wien	415	1562,5	Wien
Austria total	83858	8065,5	Wien

²⁴ - The Informations are compiled by Maria DIPPELREITER (BM:BWK) and authorized by http://www.bmaa.gv.at/view.php3?f_id=148&LNG=en&version=uman.at/ (=The Austrian Foreign Ministry)
<http://www.oesterreich.com> (=Institute für Dataprocessing, University of Linz)
http://www.statistik.at/fachbereich_03/beschaefigung_grafik.shtml (Statistik Austria) and by BM.BWK, Dept. II/5: Report on "EURYDICE": Immigrant children

Population

The Austrian population totals 8.032,926 according to the census of 2001, some 98% of whom are German-speaking. The six ethnic groups officially recognised in Austria are concentrated on the east and south of the country. Burgenland is home to Croats and Hungarians, many of whom have migrated to Vienna. Slovenes are found in the Gail, Rosen and Jaun valleys of southern Carinthia and in some villages in the southern part of Styria. Many Czechs and Slovaks live in Vienna and in Lower Austria, particularly in the Marchfeld and Tullnerfeld regions. Romany and Sinti, who were recognized as ethnic groups in 1993, live above all in Burgenland and to some extent in Vienna. The Ethnic Groups Act of 1976 only recognizes indigenous ("autochthonous") ethnic groups, which term applies to those who have lived in Austria for at least three generations and who are Austrian citizens.

The mean life expectancy (for a new-born of 2001) stands at 81.7 years for females and at 75.9 years for males.

Religion

According to the census of 2001 73.6% of the population is Roman Catholic, a further 4.7% Protestant (mainly Augsburg Confession). The number of muslims has increased to 4.2%, due to immigration in the past decade. Some 3.5% of the population belong to another faith, 12 % are non-denominational, and 3.5% provided no information.

The following rights are guaranteed by the State to the legally recognized churches and religious communities:

Public worship.

Right (legal protection of "designations," entitlement to exclusive pastoral responsibility for their members).

Status as public law corporations.

Autonomous organization and administration of their "internal" affairs.

Protection of their institutions, foundations and funds against secularization.

The right to found confessional private schools.

Entitlement to religious instructions in public schools.

According to Austrian law ("law on the religious education of children"), every young person over the age of fourteen can freely choose his or her religion.

Religious education in Austrian schools is not restricted to the Roman Catholic confession: children belonging to smaller churches and religious communities receive religious education in their own confession. Their teachers are paid by the State.

Economy

Since the beginning of 1995 Austria has been a member of the European Union. This step has accelerated the process of economic adjustment initiated when Austria joined the European Economic Area (EEA) in January 1994. Membership of the EU offers Austria the opportunity to enlarge the scope of its integration above and beyond purely economic matters. The challenges that face Austria in the future will be securing the greatest possible congruence of its economic policy with common EU policies, most notably in the fields of trade, agriculture, regional development, taxation and monetary policy.

Austria is in a strong position here, being one of the wealthiest and most stable of the EU member countries. Its economic system, a free market economy with a strong emphasis on social factors favouring the economically less privileged, will be retained in the EU, as will the successful system of Economic and Social Partnership, which has traditionally played an important conciliatory role in the country's wages and price policy.

Having reached the required level of convergence Austria is one of the 11 EU-countries that entered into phase 3 of the Economic- and Monetary Union (EMU) in the beginning of 1999. The

introduction of the Euro banknotes and coins on 1.1.2002 was a milestone in the longtime process of economic convergence and integration. While this entails forgoing the possibility of an independent national monetary and exchange rate policy, at the same time it means that Austria has become a member of the world's second-largest economic area.

Austria is a highly developed industrialised nation with an important service sector. The foremost industries are foodstuffs and luxury commodities, mechanical engineering and steel construction, chemicals and vehicle manufacturing. Within the vehicle sector, the production of engines and transmissions is the most important area, accounting for an export quota in excess of 90%. Austria manufactures some 800,000 engines per annum for many major car manufacturers. In the electronic engineering field, Austria has made a name for itself with the production of customised electronics products like microprocessors and integrated circuits (chips for airbags, ABS braking systems; components for Airbus airliners and for high-speed trains etc.)

The primary sector (agriculture and forestry) accounted for only about 3% of Austria's gross domestic product, while the secondary sector (commodities manufacture, energy, mining) accounted for about 35%, and the tertiary sector (services, banking, public services, commerce, transport, tourism) accounted for about 62% of GDP.

Some 18% of Austria's surface area is covered by farm land, 27% by grassland and 47% by woods and forests. 41% of Austria's total area is suitable for agriculture. 5% of all employed persons in Austria work in agriculture and forestry. With its 20,000 organic farmers, Austria occupies a leading position in this branch of agriculture in Europe.

In the field of raw materials and energy generation Austria can draw on abundant resources. It has deposits of iron ore, non-ferrous metals, important minerals and earths. However, the constant growth of the industrial sector necessitates supplementary imports to an ever increasing degree. This is also true of fuels and energy and of the electricity generating industry. Austria has its own resources of oil and natural gas. Austria is the European Union's number one generator of hydro-electric power.

The predominant feature of Austria's industrial and commercial sectors is its high proportion of medium-size enterprises. Austrian industry covers every branch of manufacture, from basic goods to the labour-intensive production of finished goods. Ever greater importance attaches to plant construction (encompassing the planning, delivery and assembly of turn-key industrial facilities including the requisite operational expertise). This field is strongly export-oriented, as is the electronics sector (e.g. the production of integrated circuits).

Austria's handicrafts are famous throughout the world - most notably fine hand-crafted items, costume jewellery, ceramics and glassware.

One of the areas in the tertiary sector which reports high rates of foreign currency earnings is tourism. In 2003, there were all in all 118 million overnight stays, of which foreign visitors accounted for 86.3 million.

As an export-oriented country, Austria maintains a wide-ranging and highly diverse foreign trade system. It trades with some 150 countries. The countries of the European Union account for some two thirds of Austria's foreign trade.

Since the opening of Eastern Europe in 1989 Austrian exports to this region grew at a significantly higher rate than exports overall. In 2003 Austria's exports to Eastern European countries totalled 14.5 billion Euro, that is compared to only 2.5 billion Euro in 1988. About one third of all Austrian foreign investments are made in the Eastern European countries that are candidates for becoming EU members. In some of these countries up to a tenth of direct foreign investments stem from Austria.

In 2003 the mean unemployment rate in Austria stood at 7.0% (according to national calculation method; 4.3% according to EU-method). Again, the Austrian unemployment rate was remarkably low in international comparison.

Austria's balance of payments shows a permanent deficit in the trade balance, while the services balance (tourism) is generally positive. Recently, Austrian export success led to a noticeable improvement which resulted in a roughly even balance of payments for 2002. In 2003 the balance of payments showed a deficit of 2 billion Euro or 0.9% of the gross domestic product and is therefore still in the "balanced" range of +/- 1% of GDP.

In the world political arena, Austria has established itself as an international place of encounter, as exemplified by the countless summit meetings and international conferences which it has hosted. In the same measure, Austria is assuming increasing importance in the transport sector as a key communications hub between the economic areas of Europe. A factor of growing importance is the European energy transit network (the transport of oil, natural gas and electricity) through Austria. Apart from Austria's accession to the EU, the 'nineties' were, in essence, characterised by the upswing in foreign trade with Eastern European countries. The degree of economic integration in some sectors even exceeds the figures achieved during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In the last decade of the 20th century EU accession and the pressure of globalisation prompted Austria to take important steps towards stepping up its efficiency and modernising its economy. Determination to stay on this path will be of decisive importance. At the beginning of the 21st century, Austria presents itself as a modern, confident EU Member State full of optimism for the future.

The Social Network

Austria provides a comprehensive system of social security and welfare schemes. The network operates at two levels. First, there is the principle of insurance, which provides cover for all gainfully employed persons, and to a large extent for their dependants in cases of sickness, accident, unemployment, parental leave, and pensions, and, secondly, there are public welfare benefits made available by the federal, provincial and municipal authorities to citizens in need, who are not covered by the insurance system.

The social security systems in Austria can be subdivided into the following areas:

- Social insurance schemes, especially health, pensions and unemployment insurance**
- Universal systems, especially family allowances and care provisions**
- Needs-related benefits, especially minimum insurance levels for pensions and social assistance**
- Special systems, especially for war victims**
- Private and semi-private forms of social security, especially private and non-compulsory supplementary insurance**
- Claims under labour law and worker protection measures, including continuing pay in cases of sickness**

The insurance system is financed by social security contributions. These include contributions to pensions, sickness and accident insurance, to unemployment insurance, a supplement to insurance against non-payment in the case of insolvency, the contribution to the family assistance fund (Familienlastenausgleichsfonds – FLAF) and the contribution to housing subsidies. These contributions are calculated as a percentage of remuneration

The Health Service

Austria has blanket coverage with doctors, specialists, out-patients' departments and hospitals. The principle of compulsory insurance combined with the co-insurance of children and non-working partners ensures that practically the entire population has insurance coverage. Furthermore, there are private insurance companies which provide additional benefits (doctor of one's choice, smaller rooms in hospital, etc.). Costs for those without means are borne by the community at large. There are also social services, some state-run, others private or run by churches, whose staff are concerned with alcoholics or drug addicts, with the handicapped and with lonely old people. Medical check-ups for children and young people are available everywhere, particularly in schools. The "mother-child pass" provides strong incentives for parents to have infants regularly examined and inoculated according to a medical timetable. Experts consider that the population is giving more

thought to making provisions for itself, which is why an increasing number of Austrians are making use of medical check-ups paid for by their health insurance.

Education

The "General School Regulations" decreed by Empress Maria Theresa in 1774 laid the cornerstone for Austria's education system. By the nineteenth century the three areas of education - general schools, vocational schools and teacher training colleges - had reached an advanced stage of development. Eight-year compulsory education was introduced in 1869.

In modern-day Austria compulsory schooling lasts nine years. The four-year elementary school (ages 6 to 10) is followed by secondary education (in either a "Hauptschule" or the lower classes of an "allgemein bildende höhere Schule"). Pupils who leave school at fourteen and do not intend to pursue further school education can enrol at a Polytechnical Course which prepares them for working life. Apprentices are required to attend a vocational school.

The upper segment of secondary education is covered by a range of school types: "allgemein bildende höhere Schulen" providing a general education with the emphasis either on the arts or on sciences but also vocational schools at various levels. A school-leaving certificate acquired at one of the above school types entitles the holder to enrol at university.

Austria's school system is governed by uniform regulations nationwide. No fees are charged for attendance at state-run schools. School text books and travel to and from school are largely free of charge. The education policy currently being implemented is seeking to give schools a wider degree of autonomy. This entails upgrading the responsibilities of the school bodies made up of teachers, pupils and parents in all school types. Since the 1994/95 winter term, study courses have been available at specialised colleges. Graduates receive academic degrees.

In determining principles of educational policy for the new century, educational administrators consider major trends such as population growth or socio-political changes such as increased individualisation. Technology and culture have developed in such a way that even small children nowadays have to learn how to cope with the new media. Media education and the use of computers and the Internet are part of the major extensions to the school syllabus.

All Austrian education should be seen in relation to the European educational programme entitled SOCRATES II. Of particular importance are the schooling programme COMENIUS and the GRUNDTVIG programme for further and adult education, as well as the language and technology programmes ATLAS and LINGUA. With the aid of these initiatives, numerous trans-national projects will be tackled.

In the school year 2002/2003 some 1.2 million pupils were taught in 6014 Austrian schools.

Science and Research

In 2002 Austria dedicated an estimated 4.2 billion Euro to research and development. With a rate of about 1.95% (measured against the gross domestic product) Austria is currently average among the OECD countries in regard to research expenditure.

Austria's research policy distinguishes between science-oriented and business-oriented research. Science-oriented research takes place under the auspices of universities and specialised colleges, the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Institutes run by the Ludwig Boltzmann Society, the Higher Technical Training Institutes and other state and private-sector research facilities. Business-oriented research is carried out by Austrian companies and private and state research institutes for whole economic sectors.

Priority objectives of the Federal government in the area of research and technology are the following: Networking with European partners and targeted extension of competence clusters;

extension of funding under programmes by creating national research programmes with thematic focuses, matching current EU programmes or in preparation of the new Framework Programme. Biotechnology and genetic engineering are a major priority research and development field, amongst others. "e-Austria", a specific Austrian programme, emphatically aims at improving qualifications in information technology and telecommunications in a European context (e-Europe). Intensifying the dialogue between science and society will contribute to reducing scepticism towards science; a special programme is being prepared for this purpose.

The focus of Austria's international scientific and technological research co-operation is on the European Union. Another important aspect is the collaboration with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in view of the enlargement of the European Union.

Austria also participates in the activities of the Council of Europe, the European Space Agency (ESA), the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN), the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), OECD and UNESCO.

Austria has currently 19 universities (or college with university status), including the University of Vienna, which was founded in 1365. In the 2003 winter semester 192.408 regular students were registered, according to preliminary statistics. Of these, 32.708 were from abroad, corresponding to a share of 17%.

Sixteen Austrians have been awarded the Nobel Prize. They include Julius Wagner-Jauregg in 1927 (therapy of paralysis), Wolfgang Pauli in 1945 (the "Pauli Principle" in quantum theory), Karl von Frisch and Konrad Lorenz in 1973 (behavioural science), and Friedrich A. von Hayek in 1974 (economics).

Position in the World

At the end of the Cold War, Austria ceased to occupy a peripheral position on the borderline East and West and assumed a location closer to the hub of a larger Europe. While the East-West conflict had been the keynote of European political life up to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of Communism, new forms of partnership are emerging in present-day Europe.

It was against this background that Austria took a number of momentous steps in 1995. On January 1 of that year it joined the European Union (EU) and acquired observer status at the Western European Union (WEU). In the latter half of 1998 it held the Presidency of the EU Council for the first time. In February 1995 Austria accepted the invitation to participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace. These steps were extensions of Austria's long-standing active membership of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). During the year 2000 Austria held the Presidency of this organisation.

The Austrian capital Vienna is one of the permanent seats of the United Nations and hosts the IAEA, the UNIDO and several UN departments. Vienna is also the home of the Secretariat and the Permanent Council of the OSCE. In the past Vienna has frequently been chosen as the venue of key superpower summit meetings and of other important international negotiations. For many years now Austria has made an active contribution to the United Nations' peace-keeping missions. Austria has acquired new and extensive scope for strengthening its position in the world. This is true of the areas of stability, prevention and crisis management, but it also includes international endeavours on behalf of environmental conservation, a field to which Austria attaches supreme importance. In this connection, the nuclear installations erected by Austria's neighbours are of particularly topical interest. Austria supports the creation of a European security system which would further enhance the security of Europe.

Even in the new conditions which now prevail, Austria can continue to foster its tradition of contributing in a spirit of solidarity to the upholding of peace and security.

The Political System

Austria is a democratic republic. Its head of state (the Federal President) and its legislative organs are elected by the populace. Citizens of Austria have been guaranteed basic rights and freedoms (such as freedom of belief and conscience) since 1867. Austria has ratified the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of November 4, 1950. Austria is a federal republic, composed of nine constituent federal states: Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, Upper Austria, Vienna and Vorarlberg. Vienna is also the nation's capital. Federal legislation is enacted by the two chambers of Parliament, the

"Nationalrat" and the "Bundesrat". The latter chamber represents the interests of the federal states. The state diets exercise the legislative power of the federal states. The 183 deputies in the "Nationalrat" are elected by the populace every four years. The members of the state diets are elected by the population of the federal state concerned. The members of the "Bundesrat" - currently 62 - are nominated by the state diets. After the last national parliamentary election on November 24, 2002, the distribution of seats is as follows: 79 Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), 69 Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ), 18 Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), 17 The Greens (Grüne). The supreme federal executive organs are the Federal President and the members of the Federal Government, headed by the Federal Chancellor. The supreme state executive organs are the State Governments, each headed by the State Governor. On October 26, 1955 the "Nationalrat" enacted a federal constitutional law declaring Austria to be a permanently neutral state.

Parliamentary Democracy

Austria is a democratic republic. Its laws proceed from the people. Thus Article 1 of the Federal Constitutional Act

Federal Constitution

The Austrian Federal Constitution was passed by the Constituent National Assembly on October 1, 1920.

The formulation of the Federal Constitution was the work of representatives of the political parties, experts from what was then the State Chancellery, but most notably Professor Hans Kelsen (1881-1973).

The Federal Constitution was amended by the "Nationalrat" on December 7, 1929. The purpose of this amendment was to grant wider powers to the Federal President.

The Constitutional Transition Act passed by the Provisional State Government on May 1, 1945 brought the Federal Constitution back into force with the 1929 amendments. Austria is a federal republic comprised of independent federal states:

- ◆ **Burgenland**
- ◆ **Carinthia**
- ◆ **Lower Austria**
- ◆ **Salzburg Styria**
- ◆ **Tyrol**
- ◆ **Upper Austria**
- ◆ **Vienna**
- ◆ **Vorarlberg**

The territory of the federal republic is made up of the territories of the federal states, constituting a uniform monetary, economic and customs entity.

The federal capital and the seat of the supreme federal authorities is Vienna.

All citizens of Austria are equal before the law. There are no distinctions of birth, gender, status, class or religion.

German is the official language of the Republic of Austria, but specific rights have been accorded by federal law to the recognized linguistic minorities

The colours of the Republic of Austria are red, white and red.

Government and Politics

During the past decades observers both at home and abroad have repeatedly remarked that the Austrian political system shows some distinctive features. The unusual situation of two large, dominant parties on the one hand and the overriding principle of social partnership as a strong social and political factor on the other, for a long time left its mark on the development of the republic. A fundamental consequence is Austria's remarkable political stability and governability today.

Austria, like other countries, has seen political change. Comparison in particular with the early 20th century, but also with the Second Republic, reveals that Austria's political system has a markedly different appearance at the beginning of this century.

The main features of the political system in Austria are summarised in the following chapters.

Political Parties

The Political Parties Act of July 2, 1975 states: The existence and diversity of political parties are key factors in the Republic of Austria's democratic order.

Political parties may be established at will provided that they do not violate federal constitutional law. The activities of political parties may not be subject to specific legal constraints. Four political parties are currently represented in the Austrian Parliament:

Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)

Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ)

Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)

The Greens

Legislation

How are laws made in Austria ? Draft legislation is submitted to the Nationalrat by deputies of the Nationalrat (in the form of tabled motions), by the Bundesrat or by one third of the members of the Bundesrat, or by the Federal Government (in the form of bills).

Draft legislation formulated by the Federal Government (Government bills) must be adopted unanimously by the cabinet.

The draft legislation is provisionally formulated by the Federal Minister concerned and then sent out for review by the federal states and the statutory representative bodies before being approved by the cabinet.

The Federal Minister concerned may modify the draft legislation to take account of changes suggested during the review procedure, but he is not obliged to make these changes.

Other channels of initiating legislation

Draft legislation submitted by members of the Nationalrat is known as a "motion". It does not have to go through the above review procedure.

Draft legislation may also be submitted in the form of a Popular Motion (Volksbegehren). If a Popular Motion receives 100,000 signatures of members of the national electorate or one sixth of the signatures of the electorate in any three federal states, then this motion must be debated by the Nationalrat.

Electoral commissions are established to carry out and supervise parliamentary and presidential elections and to monitor Volksbegehren. These commissions must include voting members recruited from the political parties contesting the election.

The passage of federal legislation

When the Nationalrat enacts legislation, the President of the Nationalrat must immediately notify the Bundesrat thereof.

When a law has passed the Nationalrat, it may be placed on record and published only on condition that the Bundesrat does not lodge an objection and elucidate its grounds for objection.

If the Nationalrat reiterates its passage of the legislation concerned in the presence of at least half of the deputies, the law may be placed on record and published. The Nationalrat's passage of federal financial laws (budget) need not be conveyed to the Bundesrat because the Nationalrat enjoys financial sovereignty.

Any law enacted by the Nationalrat may be made the subject of a national referendum (Volksabstimmung) before it is placed on record if the Nationalrat so decides or if the majority of the members of the Nationalrat vote in favour of so doing.

Any overall modification of the Federal Constitution must be made the subject of a national referendum.

A Federal President may be dismissed by national referendum before expiration of his term of office. The referendum must be held if the Federal Assembly so desires. If the referendum result produces a majority against dismissing the Federal President, this referendum ranks as the re-election of the Federal President, and the Nationalrat will subsequently be dissolved.

In the national referendum, the absolute majority of valid votes cast counts. Constitutional laws or constitutional provisions contained in federal laws can be enacted by the Nationalrat only in the presence of at least half of its deputies and with a two-thirds majority of the votes cast.

The Federal President signs federal legislation to authenticate that it has been enacted in conformity with the Federal Constitution. The Federal Chancellor countersigns each law when it is placed on record. After a law is placed on record, the Federal Chancellor publishes it in the Federal Gazette.

Controlling Bodies

In Austria, the public authorities' financial dealings, legislation and administration are subject to scrutiny by auditing authorities.

Central Auditing Office

The purpose of the Central Auditing Office is to monitor the activities of the federal, state, municipal and other public authorities defined by law.

The Central Auditing Office compiles the Federal Auditors' Report and submits it to Parliament. The Central Auditing Office is directly answerable to Parliament.

The Central Auditing Office is independent of the Federal Government and the State Governments and is subject only to the provisions of the law. Its staff is made up of a President and the requisite full-time and auxiliary employees.

The President of the Central Auditing Office is appointed on the recommendation of the Main Committee of the Nationalrat for a twelve-year term. The President may not be re-elected. Before taking office, the President of the Central Auditing Office is sworn in by the Federal President.

The President of the Central Auditing Office may not be a member of a statutory representative body nor may he or she have belonged to the Federal Government or a State Government within the last four years.

Administrative Control

The administration is subject not only to financial but also to parliamentary control. The two chambers of Parliament are empowered to monitor the activities of the Federal Government, to question members of the Federal Government on all issues pertaining to executive action, to require all relevant information, and to voice their wishes on the implementation of executive powers in the form of parliamentary resolutions.

Legislative Control

At the instigation of the Administrative Court or the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court declares federal or state legislation to be constitutional or not. The Constitutional Court may also examine the constitutionality of state legislation at the instigation of the Federal Government or the constitutionality of federal legislation at the instigation of a State Government

The Austrian Ombudsman Board

The Austrian Ombudsman Board, established in 1977, is an institution to which any person may turn directly if he or she feels wrongly treated by a public administrative authority.

If dealing with such complaints, the Ombudsmen have the unconditional right to inspect the relevant documentation. On completion of their investigations, the Ombudsmen may recommend to the public authority concerned that the subject of the complaint be rectified.

The Ombudsman Board is an independent institution answerable only to the "Nationalrat", to which the Ombudsman Board submits an annual Report.

The Austrian Ombudsman Board is a collegiate body made up of three Ombudsmen. The presidency rotates on an annual basis.

The Ombudsmen are elected by the `Nationalrat` on the basis of nominations by the three largest parliamentary parties. The legislation governing the Ombudsman Board is part of the Federal Constitution.

Jurisdiction

All jurisdiction in Austria proceeds from the Federal Republic.

Verdicts and findings are proclaimed and published in the name of the Republic.

Nobody may be deprived of appearance before a judge as prescribed by law.

Military jurisdiction is suspended except in time of war. The death sentence has been abolished.

Judges are independent in the exercise of their offices. They may be neither dismissed nor transferred.

Proceedings in courts of civil and penal law are verbal and public. The law itself defines exceptions to this principle.

The general public is involved in the process of jurisdiction. In the case of crimes entailing severe penalties - these crimes being designated by law - and in the case of political crimes and offences, a jury passes verdict. In other cases lay assessors are involved in the proceedings if the prescribed sentence exceeds a certain limit defined by the law.

The final court of appeal for civil and criminal proceedings is the Supreme Court.

The judiciary is separate from the executive at every level of jurisdiction.

Supreme Courts

The Supreme Court is the final court of appeal for civil and criminal proceedings.

The Administrative Court deals with cases of alleged legal offences in connection with decisions taken by the administrative authorities.

The Constitutional Court deals with proprietary claims lodged against the federal, state, regional or municipal authorities when these claims cannot be dealt with by normal legal channels nor by an administrative authority. The Constitutional Court also passes verdict in the case of disputed responsibilities between:

courts of law and administrative authorities

the Administrative Court and any other court of law, notably between the Administrative Court and the Constitutional Court itself, or between the regular courts of law and other courts

between the federal states, and between a federal state and the federal authorities.

At the instigation of the Federal Government or a State Government, the Constitutional Court also reaches a finding on whether a legislative or executive act falls within the purview of the federal or the state authorities

Social partnership

Even if, internationally, Austria is not considered to be a special case, there is still widespread agreement on the fact that cooperation and the coordination of interests between the federations is one of this country's distinctive features. The common definition for this type of cooperation is "social partnership".

The federations and chambers work in close contact with one or other of the two political parties, the Austrian People's Party or the Social Democratic Party of Austria. The considerable economic growth and rise in employment and wages during the 1950s and 1960s created a favourable basis for the exchange of economic and socio-political interests. All this contributed to the wide-spread establishment of the Austrian system of social partnership in the 1960s. If the 1970s could be

regarded as its heyday, the 1990s, in particular, have witnessed a change in this system's significance.

Social partnership is neither anchored in the Austrian constitution nor laid down in any specific act. It is rooted in the free will of the players concerned. To a large extent, it is implemented informally and confidentially and is not normally accessible to the general public.

The umbrella federations of the social partners wield great influence as regards political opinion-forming and decision-making. Their co-operation has thus often been criticised as a "secondary government", although the political omnicompetence often attributed to the social partners has, in fact, never existed as such. The co-operation and coordination of interests among the associations and with the government have only ever applied to specific fields of politics, such as income policies and certain aspects of economic and social policies, (e.g. industrial safety regulations, agrarian market legislation, labour market policies and principles of equal treatment). In these areas, during the past decades the social partners have substantially contributed to Austria's economic, social and political stability – evidence of which can be found in economic growth, in the rise of employment, in the expansion of the welfare state and also in the often quoted "social peace".

Several avenues for political decision-making are open to the large national federations. A traditionally used channel is their close relationship with one or the other of the long-standing government parties, i.e. the Social Democratic Party or the Austrian People's Party. In addition, the federations are incorporated, both formally and informally, into the political opinion-forming process of the relevant ministries, as evidenced by their participation in a number of committees, advisory boards and commissions. Even at the parliamentary level, involvement of experts from the federations and chambers is a normal practice.

Austria's accession to the European Union has expanded the federations' scope in that they not only have privileged access to relevant information and documentation. Of even greater importance are their possibilities for influencing the Austrian position in proposing EU legislation. All in all, by comparison with many other countries, this means that the large national federations in Austria have excellent possibilities for shaping the policies relating to their interests. However, social partnership in the true sense of the word goes beyond this: its core task consists of the balancing of opposing interests in the aforementioned political fields through contextual compromises among federations or between the federations and the government.

Since the 1980s, economic, social and political changes have become apparent in Austria, too. Evidence of this lies in reduced economic growth, rising budgetary deficits, increasing competition and unemployment, and an expanding rivalry between the political parties. Against this backdrop, it has not only become more difficult for the federations to align the different interests of their members to a common denominator: reduced turnout in elections to the chambers and the general calling into question of compulsory membership are symptoms of change. In addition, it is not only becoming increasingly difficult, but also rarer, to strike a balance between the federations' interests. Well-known institutions, such as the Paritätische Kommission für Lohn- und Preisfragen (Parity Commission for Wages and Prices), which – particularly in the comments of foreign observers – has been widely recognised as a central institution of the Austrian social partnership, have lost some of their significance. The changes are mainly manifest in the re-weighting of the influence of the players involved in the political decision-making process; the government has gained formative power and influence. In important budgetary, economic and socio-political questions it decides both the procedure and the core contents. Austria's accession to the European Union has reinforced this development. At the same time, however, EU membership also entails a loss of terrain for the federations. Decisions on topics such as agricultural, competition and monetary policies are decided at EU level. Here, the influence of the federations is essentially limited to formulating the Austrian position, which is just one out of 15.

All this does not currently mean that the system of social partnership has come to an end. There are also visible signs of continuity. The privileged position of the national federations remains unchanged. In the political decision-making process a balance of interests can still be achieved. However, the influence has lessened. Not the end, but certainly changes and reforms of the social partnership, are currently on the agenda.

Fundamental rights and freedoms

Fundamental rights and freedoms have always been of the utmost importance and continue to be accorded high priority in the Austrian constitution. When the Federal Constitution Law was adopted in 1920, the fundamental rights and freedoms as laid down in 1867 were incorporated and to this day form part of the Austrian constitution. Because the individual political parties represent very different basic values, the democratic republic has not yet succeeded in compiling a modern, comprehensive list of fundamental rights. Most fundamental rights apply not only to Austrian citizens but also to foreigners and stateless persons, i.e. they are basic human rights. Among them are the inviolability of property, individual freedom, the right to fair trial, the right to privacy in the home, the privacy of correspondence, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of faith and conscience and the freedom of science and its teachings.

Within the context of international organisations, particularly the United Nations and the Council of Europe, Austria participates to a high degree in the further development of human rights. The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights has been in force in Austria since 1958; in 1964 it was incorporated entirely into the constitution. It contains, inter alia, the right to life, the prohibition of torture as well as of inhuman and humiliating punishment, the prohibition of forced labour, prohibition of the deportation of Austrian citizens, the freedom to emigrate, respect of private and family life and the right to marry and have a family.

Among the fundamental rights, special political significance is accorded to the protection of minorities, as embodied in the State Treaty of St. Germain (1919) and the State Treaty of Vienna (1955).

Fundamental social rights are laid down in Austria only in a general legal context but are not anchored in the Constitution. These rights are based on the European Social Charter and the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Länder administration

Administration in the Länder (provinces) is the duty of the regional governments, the Landesregierungen.

A regional government is made up of the governor (Landeshauptmann or Landeshauptfrau), his deputies, and other government members (Landesräte).

The governor represents the province.

The governor is sworn in on the Federal Constitution by the Federal President, the other members of the regional government by the governor before taking office.

In matters concerning the province, a governor has no authority over the other government members. On matters of importance to the province, the regional government makes decisions as a collegiate body. As regards indirect federal administration, the Landeshauptmann acts as the administrative authority, bound on the one hand by instructions from the federal ministers, and authorised, on the other, to give instructions to the other government members.

Landtag (Land parliament)

The Landtag exercises the provinces' legislative powers.

The members of the Landtag are elected by all the female and male residents of the state eligible to vote on the basis of an equal, direct, secret and personal ballot.

Legislation of a province must be passed by the Landtag and then certified, countersigned and published in the state gazette by the governor.

In the event that a state law requires the co-operation of federal bodies for its execution, the Federal Government must give its approval.

Immediately after legislation has been passed by the Landtag and before it is published, the governor must notify the Federal Chancellery thereof.

The Federal President is empowered to dissolve any Landtag at the instigation of the Federal Government and with the consent of the `Bundesrat`. This dissolution may, however, be carried out only once on the same grounds.

In the case of Vienna, which is national capital and state at one and the same time, the City Council also serves as the Landtag, the City Senate as the Landesregierung, and the Mayor as the Landeshauptmann/frau.

National definitions and demographic context of immigration

In Austria, the general definition of an 'alien' is anyone who does not have Austrian nationality. [Source: Austrian Aliens Act, BGBl. (Federal Law Gazette) I No. 75/1997, most recently amended by BGBl. I No. 134/2000, Article 1(1).]

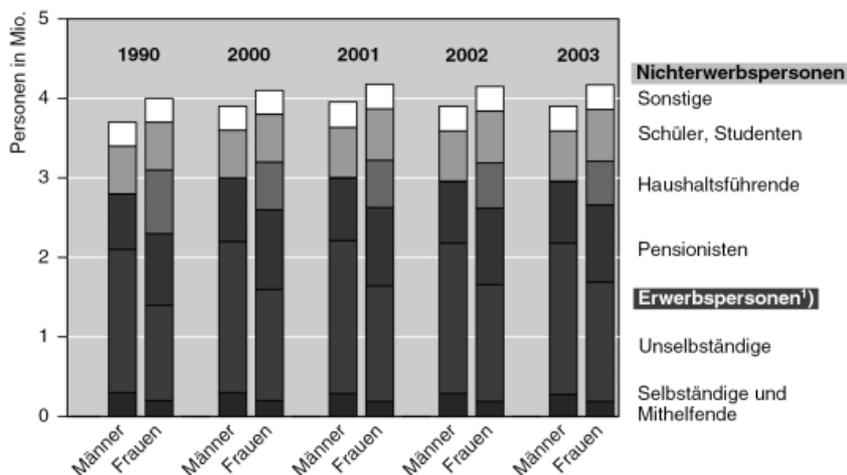
The definition of 'asylum seeker/person applying for asylum' is as follows: An alien is considered to be an asylum seeker from the time he/she submits an application to grant or extend asylum status until the relevant procedure is either finally concluded or abandoned. (Source: 1997 Austrian Asylum Act, BGBl. I No. 76/1997, Article 1).

Children of parents who are not Austrian nationals are not automatically granted Austrian citizenship, even if they are born in Austria, but normally take the citizenship of their parents. Dual citizenship is legally impossible, unless acquired by birth from parents of two different nationalities or in certain other rare cases.

The Austrian Nationality Act 1985 [BGBl. No. 311/1985, most recently amended by BGBl. I No. 124/1998, Article 10 (1)] defines the rules for naturalisation: "Citizenship may be granted to an alien if he or she has maintained his or her principal place of residence in the federal territory for at least ten years without interruption. The provisions of Article 1 Z 1 may be disregarded on the grounds of a special consideration". (Under Article 4 Z 1, birth in the federal territory is seen as a special consideration.)

Austrian Inhabitants, employed (red)/ not employed (blue)

Wohnbevölkerung nach Teilnahme am Erwerbsleben
1990, 2000, 2001, 2002 und 2003
 (nach Lebensunterhaltskonzept)



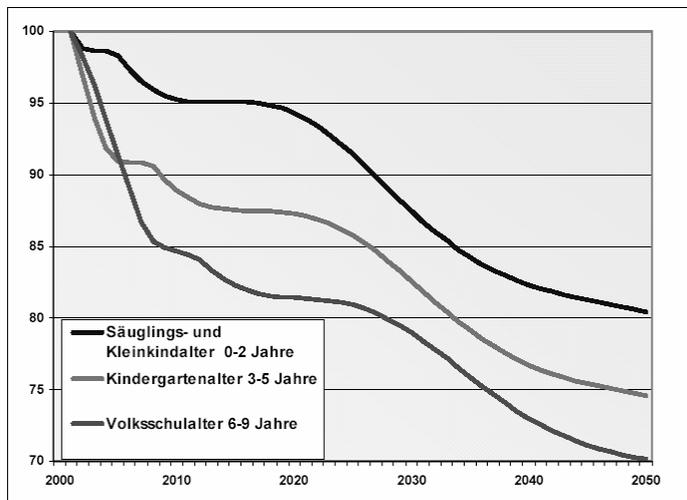
1) Erwerbstätige und Arbeitslose.

National Accounts

Output approach of GDP ¹⁾ , constant prices of 1995, bill. EUR	2001		2002		2003 ²⁾	
	Change in +/- % on previous year					
By industry:						
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	4.4	+0.4	4.7	+5.7	4.6	-4.8
Mining and quarrying	0.6	+5.7	0.6	+3.1	0.6	+2.0
Manufacturing	40.0	+1.4	40.2	+0.5	40.1	-0.2
Electricity, gas and water supply	5.6	+3.6	5.9	+5.3	6.0	+2.6
Construction	13.5	-3.2	13.5	-0.5	13.8	+2.5
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods	24.5	-0.0	24.8	+1.2	25.1	+1.2
Hotels and restaurants	7.2	+3.4	7.4	+2.4	7.5	+1.3
Transport, storage and communication	14.3	+1.3	14.5	+1.5	14.6	+1.0
Financial intermediation	13.6	-1.0	13.6	+0.1	13.6	-0.0
Real estate, renting and business activities	29.0	+5.0	29.6	+2.1	30.0	+1.5
Public administration and defence. compulsory social insurance	10.8	-1.4	10.8	-0.4	10.7	-0.2
Other service activities	25.2	+0.3	25.5	+1.2	25.8	+1.4
Gross value added at basic prices, total	188.7	+1.0	191.0	+1.2	192.5	+0.8
FISIM	-10.9	+4.1	-10.6	-2.7	-10.6	-0.2
Taxes less subsidies on products	20.7	-0.2	20.8	+0.8	20.8	-0.1
Gross domestic product at market prices	198.5	+0.8	201.2	+1.4	202.7	+0.7
1) according to ESA 1995. - 2) WIFO on behalf of Statistics Austria.						

Expansion of the youngest: (http://www.statistik.at/fachbereich_03/hanika.pdf)
(Annual cohort of children)

Entwicklung der Jüngsten



young children:

blue: children aged 0-2 years (it means from birth up to 24 months and does not include 2-year-olds)

green: children aged 3-5 years /from the 3rd birthday on, does not include 5-year-olds)

red: children aged 6-9 years (from the 6th birthday on, does not include 9-year-olds)

Update of the Austrian Background Report on the OECD Project "Starting Strong"

The latest data on early childhood education and child care shown in this update are based on two new publications by Statistics Austria: the "Child Day Care Statistics 2003/04" and the call for action for "Future Requirements for Child Care Institutions". This call for action was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection and published in August 2004. For the first time, data of institutional (crèches, kindergartens, after-school care centres) and non-institutional child care settings (childminders and "afternoon care at school") are included to present the whole range of child care facilities in Austria.

The reference date for the 2003/04 statistics was October 15th, 2003. The term "day-care facility" is used for all institutions such as crèches and kindergartens, after-school care centres and mixed age settings that are open on a regular base throughout the year for at least 4 days and a minimum of 15 hours per week.

In contrast to earlier years, the data for the year 2003/4 does not include those centres that are only open during summer.

The reference day for the classification of age groups is September 1st, 2003. Four age groups are defined as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| (1) 0 – 2 years: | born between Sept. 1 st 2000 and Aug. 31 st 2003 |
| (2) 3 – 5 years: | born between Sept. 1 st 1997 and Aug. 31 st 2000 |
| (3) 6 – 9 years : | born between Sept. 1 st 1993 and Aug. 31 st 1997 |
| (4) 10 – 13 years: | born between Sept. 1 st 1989 and Aug. 31 st 1993. |

The following chart shows the number of children in non-institutional care facilities as compared between the provinces:

Children in non-institutional childcare in 2003

Type of childcare	Age	Burgen-land	Carin-thia	Lower Austria ¹	Upper Austria	Salz-burg	Styria	Tyrol	Vor-arl-berg	Vien-na	Austria Total
day pa-rents	0 – 2	43	193	1.519	412	272	783	236	49	1.133	4.640
	3 – 5	-	120	1.276	454	234	549	366	104	76	3.179
	6 – 9	-	57	1.774	322	190	409	241	84	38	3.115
	10– 13	-	11	404	-	53	127	37	26	13	671
	total	43	381	4.974	1.188	749	1.868	880	263	1.260	11.606
play-group etc.	0 – 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.154	-	33	1.187
	3 – 5	-	-	-	-	-	-	564	-	1.266	1.830
	6 – 9	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	369	372
	10– 13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28	28
	total	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.721	-	1.696	3.417
board-ing school, all-day school, etc.	0 – 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	3 – 5	-	22	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22
	6 – 9	1.178	16	1.678	513	471	2.135	73	-	16.183	22.247
	10– 13	506	2.467	3.106	2.356	910	2.784	537	-	9.627	22.293
	total	1.684	2.505	4.784	2.869	1.381	4.919	610	-	25.810	44.562
Total of non-institut ional child care setting s	0 – 2	43	193	1.519	412	272	783	1.390	49	1.166	5.827
	3 – 5	-	142	1.276	454	234	549	930	104	1.342	5.031
	6 – 9	1.178	73	3.452	835	661	2.544	317	84	16.590	25.734
	10– 13	506	2.478	3.510	2.356	963	2.911	574	26	9.668	22.992
	total	1.727	2.886	9.758	4.057	2.130	6.787	3.211	263	28.766	59.584

¹ Die ausgewiesenen Werte für die Schülerbetreuung in Niederösterreich wurden von der Statistik Austria geschätzt.

Quelle: Statistik Austria, Kindertagesheimstatistik 2003/ Source: Statistics Austria.

Kindertagesheimstatistik 2003/04, p. 30

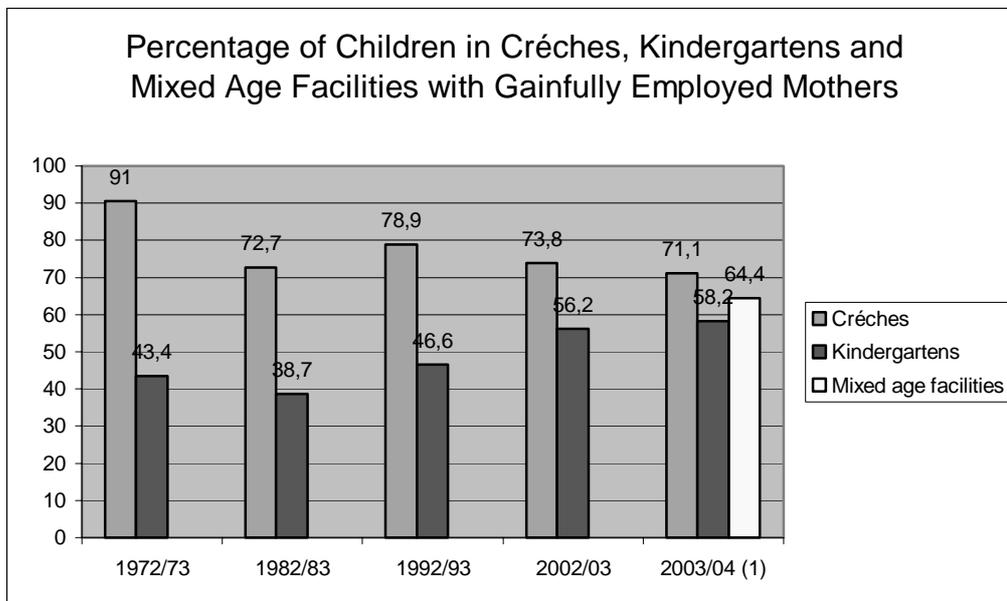
Update of page 22 and 23

1.3.3. Women in the Workforce

...

Women's involvement in the labour market and the minimal to non-existent willingness on the part of men to participate to an appropriate degree in the care and raising of their sons and daughters have resulted in the problem of providing day-care for children who are not yet old enough to attend school. Consequently, day-care facilities have taken on an important role in making it possible to combine family and professional life. Over 93% of all three to five-year-old children whose mothers work for a living attend kindergarten. In contrast; only 13,5% of children under the age of two whose mothers are gainfully employed are entrusted to a day-care facility (cf. Statistics Austria. Tagesheimstatistik, 2003/04, 13 ff).

Chart 1.2.:



(1) Data on employed mothers were not available in Styria

Source: Statistics Austria. Kindertagesheimstatistik 2003/04, p. 64

Women's increased presence in the labour market and the resulting rise in demand for institutional early education and care go hand in hand with calls to extend opening hours for day-care facilities and make them more flexible. The majority of parents are calling for opening hours of day-care facilities to correspond more closely with normal working hours, and with those of single-parent families in particular (cf. Hartmann 1996, 83).

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1.5.2. Group Makeup in Early education and care Institutions

Yet another current issue under discussion in the field of early childhood education and care is group constellation. Currently the trend is toward a greater mixing of ages, or so-called “family groups”: three, four and five-year-olds are all together in one group with emphasis on capitalising on teaching social learning within the group. This affects on how the kindergarten is run in terms of educational content and organisation, and this approach is also taught during the kindergarten pedagogue training course (according to Ms. Dippelreiter, March 2002).

At present, Austria has some 439 day-care facilities that are explicitly instructed to mix different ages within the groups (cf. Source: Statistics Austria. Tagesheimstatistik 2003/04, p. 45). In addition, parent-toddler groups have had mixed-age groups since their conception.

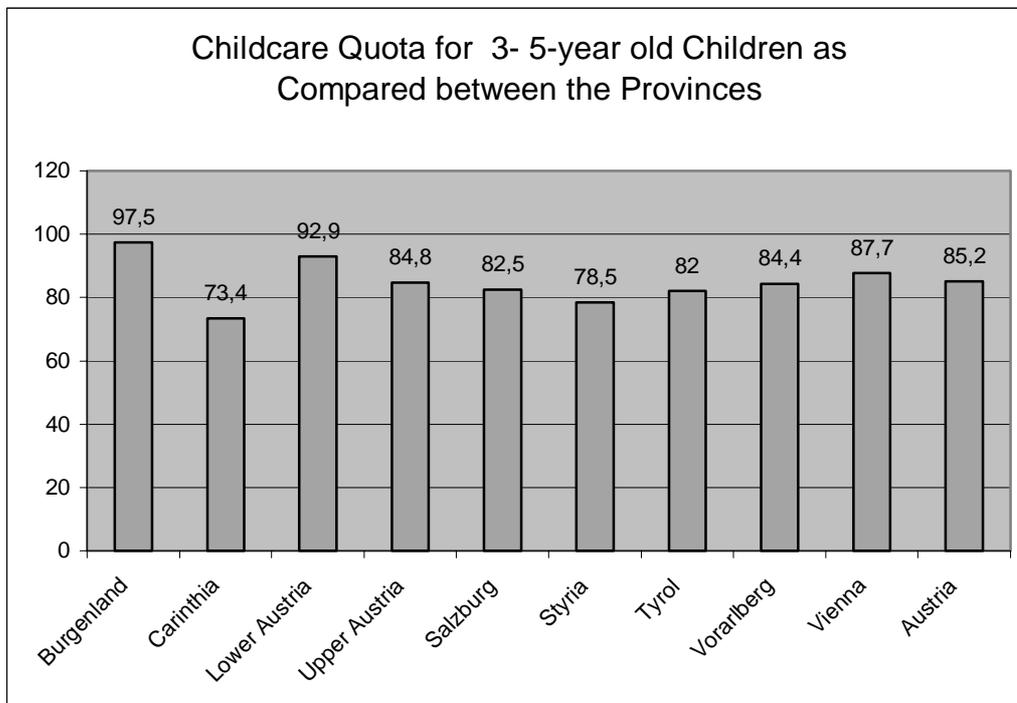
Update of page 30

1.6.1. Early education and care Quotas

Currently there are 490,255 boys and girls under the age of six living in Austria, of which 324,432 attend some kind of day-care facility. Nationwide a total of 11% of all 0-2-year-olds and 85,2% of all 3-5-year-olds are in institutional early education and care (cf. Statistics Austria 2004, Zukünftige Inanspruchnahme von Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen, p.30).

As this chart shows, in a comparison of Austria’s provinces, Burgenland has the most three to five-year-old children (97.5%) in early education and care. Carinthia (73,4%) and Styria (78,5%) have the lowest percentages.

Chart 1.3.:



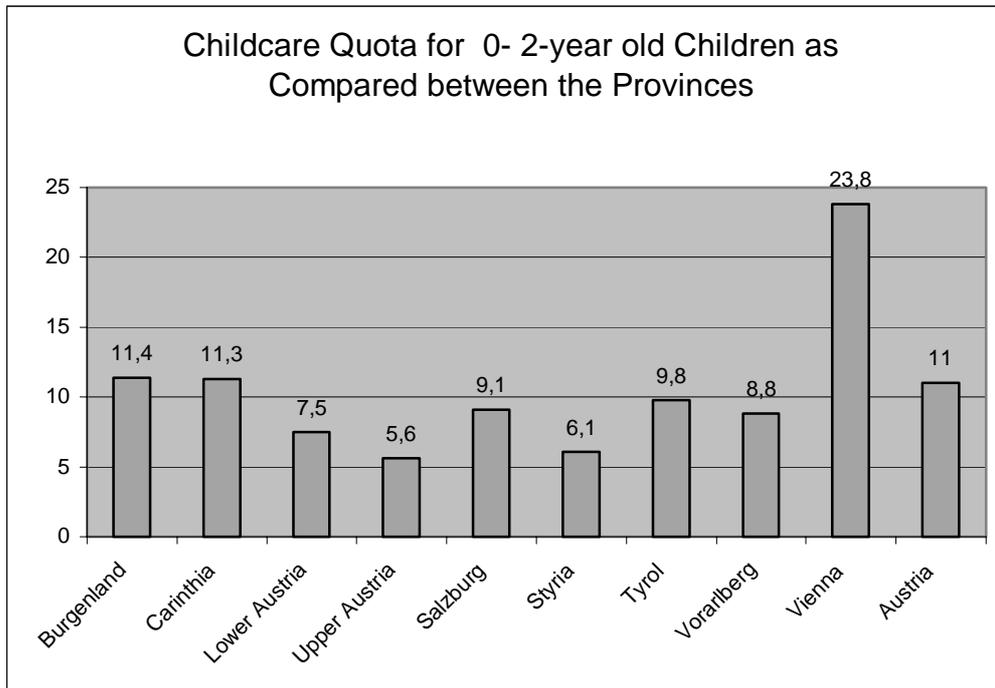
Source: Statistics Austria. Kindertagesheimstatistik 2003/04, p. 30

Institutional early education and care outside the family for children from 0- to 2-years of age is a very seldom occurrence in Austria. In this age group, only 20,022 children are either in a crèche, with a childminder or in another similar kind of facility; this corresponds to a early education and care quota of 8.9% (compared to the three to five-year-olds with 85.2%). In a European comparison, Austria comes in the bottom third (cf. Statistics Austria. Tagesheimstatistik 2003/04, p. 68).

At 23.8%, Vienna has by far the highest early education and care quota for children under three, followed by Burgenland with 11,4% and Carinthia with 11,3%. The provinces of Upper Austria (5,6%), Syria (6,1%) and Lower Austria (7,5%) had the lowest percentages of children in this age group in day-care facilities (cf. Statistics Austria 2004, Zukünftige Inanspruchnahme von Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen, p.30).

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Chart 1.4

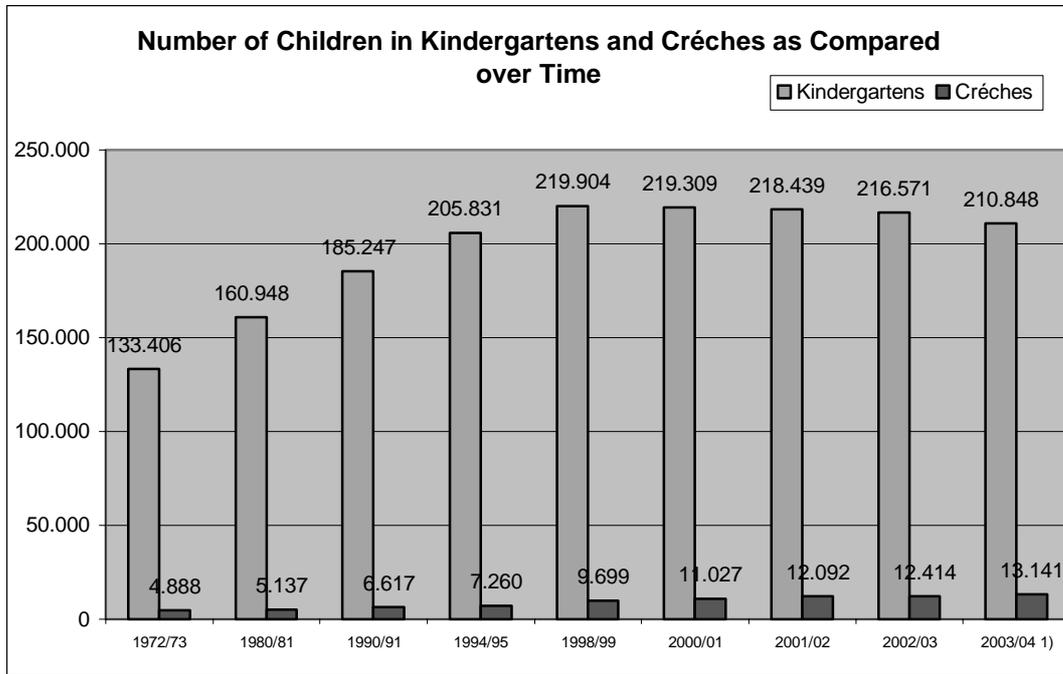


Source: Statistics Austria 2004, Zukünftige Inanspruchnahme von Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen, p.30).

There is growing demand for institutional early education and care for children under three years of age. In spite of the drop in the number of children, the number of children age 0-to 2 years in day-care facilities has clearly risen, while remaining constant over the last few years for three to five-year-olds (see also section 3.3. on the day-care facilities available in Austria).

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Chart 1.5.:



Source: Statistics Austria. Kindertagesheimstatistik 2003/04, p. 27,32

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1 1.7. Types of Day-Care: An Overview

The types of institutional early education and care in Austria differ primarily according to the age of the children. Institutions, such as crèches, kindergartens and parent-toddler groups, are available for boys and girls from birth to the age of six, supplemented by the services of playgroups and childminders.

Approximately 70% of all day-care facilities are operated by local public authorities (primarily by municipalities with 97,5%). In addition, parishes, family organizations, non-profit associations, companies and private persons also operate day-care facilities. More than half of the private stakeholders are non profit associations and little less than a third is run by churches.

Source: Statistics Austria. Kindertagesheimstatistik 2003/04, p. 11.

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1.7.1. Crèches

Crèches provide day-care for children under three. They are specially geared toward meeting the needs of infants and toddlers and are based on a close cooperation with the parents. Crèche groups are very small, with the average number per crèche staff member coming to 8.7, with the maximum group size coming to 10 children per crèche staff member (cf. Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03).

As crèches primarily cater to working parents, they are generally operated all day. In 2002, 74% of mothers of children in crèches worked, and in the past few years this percentage has risen to just under 80%. Currently 12,789 children are in one of Austria's 734 crèches (cf. Statistics Austria. Kindertagesheimstatistik 2003/04, p.45, 55).

Update of pages 35,36**1.7.2. Kindergartens**

Kindergarten provides educationally valuable early education and care for children from three years of age until they commence compulsory schooling. The objective of kindergarten day-care is to foster and promote children’s physical, mental and emotional development. With a total of 4.472 institutions supervising 199.756 children, the kindergarten is by far Austria's most common form of day-care. (cf. Statistics Austria. Kindertagesheimstatistik 2003/04, p.11).

As a pre-school educational institution, kindergartens enjoy widespread acceptance among Austrian society. For this reason, a host of children whose parent(s) are not employed attend kindergarten. 81,1% of all-day kindergartens offer opening hours without a break at midday. However, there are considerable differences from province to province as regards opening hours. In Vienna, nearly all kindergartens are operated all day with no midday break, in Lower Austria 99,8% and in Carinthia 99,5%.

This confronts parents with a vastly varying situation, and in particular mothers whose opportunities for gainful employment may be limited due to kindergarten opening hours.

Table 1.1.: Kindergartens listed according to opening hours in percent

Provinces	Total	All-day Total	All-day without midday break		All-day with break		Half-dav	
			gesamt	%	gesamt	%	gesamt	%
		insgesa mt						
Burgenland	190	164	144	87,8	20	12,2	26	13,7
Carinthia	226	183	182	99,5	1	0,5	43	19,0
Lower Austria	1.016	1006	1004	99,8	2	0,2	10	1,0
Upper Austria	699	581	530	91,2	51	8,8	118	16,9
Salzburg	229	191	184	96,3	3,7	3,7	38	16,6
Styria	682	199	183	92,0	16	8,0	483	70,8
Tyrol	432	360	121	33,6	239	66,4	72	16,7
Vorarlberg	230	188	36	19,1	152	80,9	42	18,3
Vienna	768	755	755	100	-		13	1,7
Total	4.472	3627	3139	81,1	488	13,4	845	18,9

Source: Statistik Austria, Kindertagesheimstatistik 2003/04, 46)

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1.7.3. Mixed Age Day-Care Facilities

As previously mentioned, facilities that provide early education and care for children from birth until they commence compulsory schooling in mixed age groups are gaining in importance in Austria. On the one hand, they offer an alternative to the age-homogenous early education and care of infants and toddlers and of three to six-year-olds provided by crèches and kindergartens, respectively. On the other hand they also represent a response to the sinking number of children and the increased need for early education and care for children under the age of three (cf. Hover-Reisner 2003, 106). The age structure in the groups is predefined: children under three years of age may make up maximum one-third of the children in the group. 439 of those institutions provide day-care for 11.444 children. 298 (66.7%) mixed age facilities are open all day with no break.