

Austria

Population: 8.17 m. **Fertility rate:** 1.39. **GDP per capita:** USD 28 900. **Children under 6 years:** 487 000.

Female labour force participation: 63.5% of women (15-64) participate, 29.6% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 3.7%) (OECD in *Figures*, 2004).

Labour force participation rate of women with a child under 6 years: 30% (Statistics Austria 2002/03).

Maternity and parental leave: 16 weeks of maternity leave paid at 100% of earnings. 3 years with funded benefit.

Average duration of parental leave: Not available.

Compulsory school age: 6 years.

Social expenditure: 26% GDP Child poverty rate: 10.2% GDP (UNICEF, 2005) after taxes and transfers (OECD average is 11.2%).

Funding of pre-primary educational services: 0.55% of GDP, 9% of education budget with 14% of education enrolments.

Funding of services for children under 3: Not available but very low. Less than 10% of children in licensed services.

Unit cost per child is USD 6 169 (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005).

Average costs to parents: 20% maximum of service costs.

Legal entitlement to a free service: 5 years, but places in kindergarten are generally available from 3 years.

Major service types and duration: *Tagesmütter* or family day care; some few *Krippen* (crèches – in Vienna mainly) provide centre-based care for children 0-3, available for approx. 10 hours per day; *Kindergartens* provide programmes for 3- to 6-year-olds with over half of the centres offering all-day programmes; *Hort* are after-school day care centres (OSP), generally open before and after school – at 7:00 and up to 18:00; *Kindergruppen* (parent-toddler and playgroups – mainly in West Austria) are organised by parents as private initiatives, mostly offering a half-day (playgroups) or a full-day (parent-toddler groups) programme; *mixed age day care facilities* run as full-day kindergartens: in this type of service, children under the age of 3 may make up to a maximum one-third of the children.

Rate of access to regulated services: Children 0-3 years: 8.9%. Children 3-6 years: 80%. OSP for children 6-12 years: not available.

Designation and qualifications of key staff: *Kindergartenpädagoginnen* or kindergarten pedagogues are the main staff in kindergartens, while in crèches and *Hort*, *Erzieherinnen* are the majority staff. Over 60% of staff in both kindergartens and crèches have a professional diploma.

Child-staff ratios: Family day care: 3.4 children per caregiver and 5 children maximum per group; *Krippen*: 8.7 children per staff, and on average 12 children/group; *Kindergarten*: 16 children per adult and on average, 20 children/group, but a maximum group size of 25-28 children is permitted, unless young children under 3 are present; mixed age facilities: 13.6 children per pedagogue. In *Kindergruppen* organised by parents, the average ratio is 6.5 children per adult, and 15 children per group.

Maximum group size: The maximum group size allowed is 28 children (in most provinces 25 children per group), but in fact, the average group size practised in 2002 was 21 children per group, with 16 children per kindergarten educator (Background Report for Austria, 2004).

Auspices

Austria is a federal country composed of nine provinces or *Bundesländer*, each with its own parliament and government. Because of its federal nature and Constitution, full responsibility for social welfare and early education and care is devolved to each province. Within the context of social partnership and the social economy, the allocation of public responsibilities is further governed by the principle of subsidiarity, namely, that societal tasks are best undertaken by the smallest possible social unit, which, in the case of infants and toddlers is deemed to be the family. Care by the family is interpreted in most of Austria as requiring a traditional division of labour on gender lines with the majority of mothers taking leave from work to care for children, or – if the option is available – to combine part-time care and part-time work. Family and social policy provides fiscal incentives (such as the Child Care Benefit) during this period to encourage the second family earner to remain at home to rear young children. For these reasons, the demand for crèches and other child care services has remained weak, with these services catering for less than 10% of young children on a full-time basis.

The Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations defines the framework that governs maternal, infant and youth welfare. A fundamental aspect of the work of this department is to maintain and strengthen the family influence in child-rearing and to create a framework for child development within this direction. The “child minder” system and child care services for young children are overseen by this department. The Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture is the competent authority for creating the legal foundation for kindergarten, issuing ordinances such as uniform frameworks, and allocating resources for the training of kindergarten pedagogues, both pre-service and in-service (Background Report for Austria, 2004).

De facto, the provincial (*Länder*) governments have full responsibility for the organisation and funding of ECEC services. The provincial governments set regulatory and funding frameworks that guide the planning and provision of ECEC services. The actual administration of ECEC within the different *Länder* may be through education or other child and youth ministries, or distributed across ministries. The Austrian system, therefore, is complex and highly decentralised.

Context

Labour force rates: In 2003, 63.5% of women participated in the Austrian labour force. 29.6% of women are in part-time employment compared to 3.7% of men (OECD in *Figures*, 2004).

Parental leave: Parents may take up to 3 years supported parental leave, if both parents take at least 6 months. Most fathers do not use this entitlement, reducing the leave in those families to 30 months, and since 1996 to 24 months. Mothers receive 16 weeks maternity leave, required to be taken before and after the child's birth. A cash benefit that replaces full wages is paid for this period. There is protection from dismissal during long parental leave (up to two years), and for up to four weeks after returning to former positions. Parental leave payments (EUR 426/month if income is less than EUR 14 600/year, until the child's third birthday) are funded under a family benefit scheme, enabling students, unemployed parents and parents not in the workforce wishing to care for a child full-time to obtain the leave. A generous Child Benefit is also paid to low-income families for 30 months – or to 36 months if both parents claim. Parents can also take paid, job-protected leave to care for a sick or a handicapped child under the age of 12. There are questions about women's labour market participation after parental leave. The effect of these accumulated benefits is twofold: they reduce effectively family and child poverty and simultaneously, provide an incentive for women – particularly in low-income families – to withdraw from the labour market for two or three years after the birth of a child.

Access and provision

Types of institutional ECEC differ primarily according to age of the children. *Krippen* (public crèches), kindergartens and parent-toddler groups are, in principle, available to 0- to 6-year-olds. Non-centre based services are also provided by child minders and *kinderguppen* (playgroups). Approximately 70% of all ECEC facilities are operated by local authorities, the remainder being offered by parishes, non-profit association, companies and private persons (Background Report for Austria, 2004).

Kindergarten is the most widespread service available, accounting for 86.7% of all children in institutional care settings. The remaining 13.3% are distributed across *krippen* (crèches) (5%); child minders (3.5%); mixed age facilities (3.1%); and parent-toddler groups (1.7%). Less than 9% of children below the age of 3 years access the available services.

Mixed-age facilities have developed in response to lower demand, given diminishing numbers of young children in Austria. A maximum of one-third of the children in these facilities may be in the 0-3 age range. Most of these facilities operate full day. The new mixed age grouping from 2 to 6 years led to a stronger focus on team work among pedagogues and the use of their natural strengths. This opportunity brought about by a declining birth rate – although threatening the viability of some kindergartens – is encouraging stronger investment in present institutions to increase the level of child care and out-of-school provision available to children.

Parent-toddler groups are independent initiatives where parents and caregivers work closely together in family-like environments, parents taking on both organisational and educational responsibilities. As parent-toddler groups are run by parents, the operating hours meeting the needs of local families, about half of such groups open 6-9 hours per day. The length of time children spend in the group during a day varies widely from province to province, with half-day services in west Austria and full-day services being more common in Vienna and the east.

0-3 years: Approximately 80% of mothers of children in crèche are in the paid workforce (Statistics Austria, 2002/03), of whom 29.6% are in part-time employment (male part-time is 3.7%). Child minders, either accredited or unregulated, provide the majority of

extra-domestic care available for this age. In 2003, approximately 8 500 children were in the care of 2 500 child minders, predominantly on a half-day basis. *Krippen* (crèches) provide centre-based care for children 0-3 years, but few children access this service (approximately 8.9%). Parent-toddler group programmes are the main form of service to children in this age span, offering support for a few hours per day to a full-day (9-10 hours), depending on the province and locality.

3-6 years: Kindergartens provide programmes for children from three years to compulsory school age (at 6 years). Widespread acceptance of kindergarten programmes ensures most children (approximately 80%) attend, irrespective of the labour force participation of parents. As children move through this age span, a pre-primary school programme (*vorschulstufe*) is available at primary schools for children of compulsory school age who are deemed not mature enough for the first grade of primary school. Depending on local parental demand, this programme operates as a class of 10-20 children or as a group less than 10. More than half the kindergartens offer all-day operating hours with no break at midday, although widespread variation exists from province to province (Background Report for Austria, 2004).

Attention to children with diverse needs

Children with disabilities: Special needs kindergartens, operated by “special education kindergarten teachers”, provide programmes promoting children and providing therapy. Children may also be served in through “integration groups”, whereby children with special needs are included in mainstream kindergartens. In general integration groups contain 15 children, 3-5 of whom may have been medically evaluated to having special needs. However, there is no legal entitlement to inclusive child care and there is insufficient data available to document the level of access, need, or support to children with disabilities in either child care or kindergarten. In consequence, levels of access for these children differ widely across the provinces. Proactive federal involvement is lacking in this and other important fields.

Children from low-income families: Data are not collected on children from disadvantaged groups. The Background Report for Austria (2004) recognises the gap in information and the “fundamental lack of scientific studies” in this area.

Ethnic and bilingual children: In 2001, approximately 45% of non-Austrian residents in the country were nationals from former Yugoslavia and 17.5% were Turkish nationals. Other groups included Germans (10.5%), Poles (2.1%), and Romanians (2.5%), Czechs (1.9%) and Hungarians (1.8%). Approximately 11% of the children in kindergarten are immigrants, having mothers whose mother-tongue is a language other than German (Background Report for Austria, 2004). An overall plan for the support of these children is not in place.

Quality

Licensing and regulatory regimes: Provincial laws specify building standards, equipment for the programmes and the required training for staff. These requirements are more comprehensive for kindergartens and crèches than for facilities not regulated by kindergarten laws. Child care institutions are visited by inspectors, on average, once per year. Non-routine inspections may also occur if parents complain about a service. Inspectors may access the building and review operational records, acting as primary assessors of quality and indicate quality shortcomings. If problems are apparent, the agency receives written notification from the municipality and must initiate necessary

improvements. However, differences among the provinces result in some inspectors being responsible for very large numbers of services and all aspects of inspection, including building standards (Background Report for Austria, 2004). Except in one province, child minders (operating from their homes) require a day care licence from the competent district administration authority. The licences prescribe the number of children a child minder may supervise. These child care programmes, and the activities of parent-toddler groups, are inspected at random intervals after licensing.

Funding: Since 1970, municipalities have provided the greatest share of funding towards ECEC services in Austria: 60-70% of costs are taken in charge by municipal budgets; 15-25% by the *Bundesländer* governments, and some 15-20% (including child care) is provided by parental fees, with again a fairly wide variation across provinces (OECD, *Babies and Bosses*, 2003), e.g. kindergartens in Lower Austria do not charge parental fees for the morning session, but parents contribute to lunch and the afternoon session. A usual form of funding is for the municipality to pay the salaries of qualified kindergarten educators. As a rule, facilities run by for-profit providers do not receive any financial support. Facilities maintained by recognised non-profit associations, parent groups and church organisations receive municipal subsidies under certain conditions. Expenditure on pre-primary institutions (kindergartens for children 3-6 years) as a percentage of GDP is 0.55% of GDP, which corresponds to 9% of the education budget for 14% of education enrolments. 76.2% of this expenditure came from public sources and 23.8% from private sources including 11.6% household expenditure. Generous family benefit payments, home care credits (called in Austria a Child Care Benefit) and long parental leaves are in place, leading to lesser service demand and availability, especially for children 0-3 years.

Staffing: Kindergarten and crèche groups are staffed by kindergarten pedagogues (60.4% of staff) and some 30% of *Erzieherinnen* (care assistants). Approximately 25% of the assistants are trained pedagogues. The remaining 10% of staff have completed different training or may have none. Kindergarten directors are responsible for admitting children, assigning them to groups, scheduling staff, creating the educational programme and conducting meetings with parents. Child minders and parent-toddler group staff, like staff in kindergartens, are normally trained, and must take into account age-specific and individual child needs.

Training requirements: Kindergarten pedagogues (*Kindergartenpädagoginnen*) receive a 5-year training in *Bildungsanstalten für Kindergartenpädagogik* at 24 ECEC Training Institutes or *Fachschulen* (secondary education level) across Austria. To work in kindergarten or crèche, candidates must have demonstrated success in the Diploma exam and secondary school leaving examination (matriculation). Kindergarten pedagogues generally work in kindergartens with children, 3-6 years. They may also work – often in positions of direction – in crèches for children 0-3 years, but the majority of staff in crèches are *Erzieherinnen* (educators, social pedagogues) who are trained in *Bildungsanstalten für Sozialpädagogik*. *Erzieherinnen* work essentially in crèches, kindergartens *Hort* (leisure centres or classes for children), which children attend in the afternoon to do their home work and spent some leisure-time. *Erzieherinnen* also work with adolescents, and they are trained to the same level as *Kindergartenpädagoginnen* but in 6 special schools for social educators in Austria. *Erzieherinnen* working in crèches have taken special modules to prepare them for work with infants and toddlers. *Special needs kindergarten pedagogues* have additional training, enabling them to work with children deemed to have developmental problems, or disabilities. *Kindergarten* assistants may work at kindergartens or crèches without training, but many

kindergartens employ *Erzieherinnen*. In principle, child minders must also be trained in Austria. Child minders linked to the Austrian Federation of Child Minders complete a relevant, short training course, but training requirements differ widely across provinces. Training ranges from 30 hours in Lower Austria to 468 hours with a professional examination in Styria.

Although the training of both *Kindergartenpädagoginnen* and *Erzieherinnen* is of high quality in the *Fachschulen*, concern is expressed about the level of training – which, at secondary upper level, is among the lowest in Europe. Current demands on the profession, e.g. the greater diversity of children, higher education expectations of parents, and the need to promote equality of opportunity for women in work – all suggest that kindergarten pedagogues need a tertiary-level, professional education, which, in turn, would lead also to higher quality standards in services.

Work conditions: Graduates from the specialised *Fachschulen* are approximately 19 years of age when they begin their professional career, and most who leave the profession do so in the first 10 years (Background Report for Austria, 2004). There are few opportunities for professional advancement and development although attention to assuring acquisition of the secondary school leaving certificate suggests some improvement.

Child-staff ratios: On average, there are 12 children per group in crèche settings and 20 children per group in kindergartens (Background Report for Austria, 2004). The maximum group size allowed in kindergarten is between 25-28 children. In *Krippen*, crèches for children under 3 of age, the average ratio practised 8.7 children per trained staff member, not an outstanding ratio by international standards (Statistics Austria, *Kindergartens and After-School Child care, 2002/03*). Parent-toddler groups comprise 5-10 children, and child minders generally supervise a maximum of 5 children at any one time, the average child-adult ratio being 3.4:1. Mixed age facilities generally have a staff-child ratio of 13 or 14:1, with no more than a third of the children being under 3.

A 2004 study by the Charlotte Bühler Institute expresses concern about ratios. According to this study, the actual group sizes in Austrian kindergartens were near 25 children in two thirds of the groups and reached 28 or more children in 19% of the groups. Large groups with 28 or more children are found in those provinces, where special derogations for exceeding the legally determined group sizes are used in many instances. Kindergarten groups in village municipalities are typically smaller than those in cities.

With regard to staff structure, data are also available from the aforementioned study. Of the kindergarten teachers, 69% lead a group jointly with a non-qualified helper, and 14% of the kindergarten teachers lead a group completely alone. Only 7% of kindergarten teachers lead a paired group with a comparably qualified colleague, and only 3% of the kindergarten teachers are supported by a helper in addition to the paired group. In this study an overall teacher-child ratio of 1:23 was calculated. Only groups that were led by two qualified teachers jointly (therefore only 10% of all Austrian kindergarten groups), show a favourable care ratio of 1:12.

Curriculum and pedagogy: A strong social pedagogic tradition is in place supported by good buildings and outdoor spaces. There is a concern about space per child, recently regulated to 3 m² per child. Favourable (in practice) child-staff ratios support the curriculum and a policy emphasis on the holistic development of young children forms a key framework for activity. Pedagogues well-trained in the practical/aesthetic skills of kindergarten work operate in stable staff teams.

Monitoring, evaluation and research: Programmes in kindergartens and krippen are monitored by municipal inspectors, although the scale of duties and number of centres in the jurisdiction of each inspector is great. Data collected at federal level (by Statistics Austria) on providers, opening hours, facilities, child access, and staff provide the basis for decisions affecting ECEC services. No uniform statistics are available on child minders and parent-toddler groups. Data pertaining to children with additional needs are not readily available at federal level.

Parent and community involvement: Traditional views of the role of mothers and fathers in child-rearing prevail, whereby women take on the majority of responsibility for the care and education of children. Parents are expected to cooperate with kindergarten staff and become involved in activities related to the kindergarten.

OECD policy issues

Among the issues for policy attention identified by the OECD review team in 2004 were:

- *The social context, including women's status and family role:* Among the issues discussed under this heading were: current demographic trends; family supports and parental leave (in particular, the effects of the Child Care Benefit package, which favours a male, bread-winner family model and may also send out a signal to the *Bundesländer* governments not to invest in child care services); and women's status and role within Austrian society.
- *Governance and finance:* Among the issues discussed were: a more proactive role for central government (the involvement of a central ministry can bring much needed direction to an ECEC system, including defining common entitlements and requirements; funding, and the promotion of "impulses" or initiatives, which focus the attention of the stakeholders on important current issues); building up critical mass and ECEC expertise in the ministries; and increasing and stabilising the public funding of early childhood (it was felt that a real commitment from the Federal government is needed i) to bring additional resources into early childhood education and care; ii) to bring transparency and consistency into present funding arrangements; iii) to ensure equitable treatment for special needs and at-risk children across the country, and iv) to link funding to improved quality and access, for example, kindergarten hours that better match parents' work days; more transparent pedagogical aims).
- *The challenges of access:* In this field, the following was discussed: the quantitative expansion of ECEC in Austria (in particular for children from 1-3 years, and in poor neighbourhoods); and the appropriate access of children with special or additional educational needs (children with disabilities in Austria do not always have first call on services, and municipalities can be reluctant to take on the extra costs involved, such as extra staff or renovations of kindergarten buildings and classrooms to facilitate access for these children).
- *Strategies to improve quality:* Among the issues discussed under strategies to improve quality were: licensing and regulatory regimes (devolution of powers to the provinces is a positive step towards local democracy and to creating more responsive local services, but it seems excessive to find wide divergences in the regulations in force in different parts of a small country); staffing, training and work conditions (especially the need to review the present training level of the *Kindergärtnerinnen* and to improve significantly

the working conditions of staff and their professional development opportunities – linked to career development); curriculum and pedagogy (a national curriculum framework to clarify common values and objectives for early childhood education and care across Austria; to promote an even level of quality across age groups and regional provision; to facilitate communication between staff, parents, and children; to help guide and support professional staff in their practice; and to ensure pedagogical continuity across the *Länder* and between ECEC and school.); improved data collection, evaluation and research; and parent and community involvement (the need to have a more proactive project towards parents from the kindergartens: children whose parents talk, negotiate and read aloud to them have generally little difficulty in expression, or and later in acquiring early literacy. In high poverty or immigrant areas, early childhood centres are very effective when they function as a hub of interconnected community services for families, and act as a frontline mechanism for child well-being, screening and prevention).

Belgium: French Community

Population: 4.3 million. **Fertility rate:** 1.7. **GDP per capita:** EUR 28 700 (Belgium).

Female labour force participation: 57.3% of women participate, 34.1% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 6.3%).

Labour force participation rate of women with child(ren) under 6 years: 68%.

Maternity and parental leave: 15 weeks of maternity leave paid at c. 80% of earnings; paternity leave of 10 days (3 days paid by employers, 7 days by social security); parental leave of 3 months (6 months part-time) paid at a flat rate; time-credit breaks are possible for all workers.

Average duration of parental leave: Not available.

Compulsory school age: 6 years.

Social expenditure: 27.2% of GDP. **Child poverty rate:** c.10%. For Belgium as a whole, the figure is 7.7% after taxes and transfers (OECD average is 11.2%).

Funding of pre-primary educational services (ISCED Level 0): 5% of GDP.

Unit cost per child in early education: (in USD converted using PPP) USD 4 420 (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005).

Funding of services for children under 3: (for Belgium) 0.6% of GDP; 9% of total education.

Average costs to parents: 0-3 years and OSP: parents contribute a maximum 28% of costs for public services. As fees are based on income, at-risk and low-income families have free access. In general, 10% of places in public services are provided freely to families in need. Children 3-6 years: free to parents from 2.5 years. OSP for children 6-12 years: not available.

Legal entitlement to a free service: From 2.5 years.

Major service types and duration: *Accueil familial* (family day care); *crèche*; *école maternelle* (kindergarten), *service d'accueil extra-scolaire* (OSP).

Rate of access to regulated services: Children 0-3 years: 18%. Children 3-6 years: 100%. OSP for children 6-12 years: 33%.

Professional qualifications of lead staff: In the *crèches*, children's nurses (*puéricultrices*) have a 3-year, post-16 vocational qualification; in the *école maternelle*, teachers (*institutrices*) have a specialised 3-year, tertiary level teaching diploma.

Designation of key staff: In *crèches*, *puéricultrices*; in *écoles maternelles*, *institutrices de maternelles*.

Child-staff ratios: Depends on type of service: family day care 4:1; *crèches* 7:1 (depends on age of child); *école maternelle*: 15:1; OSP for children 6-12 years: 14 children to one trained adult.

Maximum group size: Children 3-6 years: 32 children. OSP for children 6-12 years: centres decide themselves.