



EU Network of
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Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

[A Study of National Policies](#)

Austria

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Investing in children:

Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

A Study of National Policies

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COUNTRY REPORT - AUSTRIA

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1. Summary¹

It is fair to say that child-poverty and children's well-being in Austrian politics is not regarded as a specific and distinct problem that needs to be dealt with on its own. Children's well-being and children's rights are more or less treated as a residual issue, or, to be more precise, children are often treated as a group that is affected by policies originally targeted at other groups. The policies affecting children's well-being are often decided for other purposes than meeting the interests of children in the first place. The first phenomenon, for example, holds for questions of access to health services, regarding housing, or when children benefit from measures of ALMP, allowing their parents to find a job. A related phenomenon applies to debates about institutional childcare, where much more priority is given to improvements in access to institutional childcare that would allow for a higher activity rate of parents (which is desirable from a national economic perspective), than to possible personal (and not instant material) gains for children. These are much more rarely addressed. In a similar way, it appears that problems within the educational system are not in the first instance framed as problems for children, but rather as the cause for later problems for the national economy or for overall societal integration of people with a migration background, which may lead to tensions between different groups within the population.

The policy competencies that potentially concern child-poverty and child well-being are to a large degree fragmented in Austria. They are divided between different ministries at the level of the federal state on the one hand and the federal provinces on the other. The actual policy measures directly or indirectly dealing with child-poverty look like a collection of decisions taken (or not taken) in a large number of different policy areas by a considerable number of different political players. These decisions do not always follow a common understanding of children's well-being, nor is the topic as such high on the agenda in all cases. Against this background, concepts such as a children's rights approach, the mainstreaming of children's policies and rights, evidence based policy approaches, pro-proactive mutual co-ordination between relevant policy areas and players are extremely rare in the Austrian context of children's well-being and poverty. What prevails is incremental adaptation according to the logics of and interests present within the different policy areas.

Outcomes in terms of material well-being of children are rather favourable in Austria from an international comparative point of view. However, specific subgroups show a very high incidence of being at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This holds in particular for children living in households where members have a migrant background or and for children raised by single parents.

Monetary transfers to families reduce material child-poverty to a very large degree in Austria. Here, the most important single instrument is the rather generous universal family allowance. Deficits and challenges especially exist regarding institutional childcare and in the education system, which shows a very strong heritage of educational attainment (and – according to PISA – overall sub-optimal outcomes). One other major challenge is the rather high negative impact of parenthood on employment of women, which is even stronger in households with a migrant background. Regarding housing and living environments the situation for a long time appeared to be rather favourable in Austria (and it still is from an international comparative point of view). However, recently housing-cost overburdening has been

¹ Readers should note that the drafting of this report was completed in September 2013 thus it does not include an analysis of data or policy developments that became available after this date.

growing substantially, and this is especially a problem for children of single parents and for children with two or more siblings. The health system appears to work rather well, but information on the effects of social stratification on health conditions etc. is extremely limited, especially concerning children. A related situation applies for family support and alternative care, where sound information on the quality and impact of alternative care administered by the federal provinces is largely missing.

To strengthen the approach to governance it would be necessary to start with the government making an encompassing assessment of children's well-being and child poverty in Austria. In a second step reforms in terms of institutional settings and content of policies could be debated and decided on the basis of this assessment, leading to an integrated strategy² to improve children's well-being and to reduce child poverty in Austria.

² As urged in the Commission Recommendation "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage" of 20 February 2013 (2013/112/EU) (see European Commission 2013, 6).

2. Assessment of overall approach and governance³

2.1. Child-poverty and child well-being in Austria: a brief overview

The rate of children (at the age < 18) being at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion is rather low in Austria from an international comparative perspective. In 2011 it amounted to 19.2%, and within the EU only the Nordic countries (SE, DK, FI) and Slovenia as well as the Netherlands showed a lower rate (see Chart 1). However, when the rate of children being at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion is compared to the respective rate of the total population, then Austria's position is less favourable (see Chart 2). A related phenomenon applies when looking at the at-risk-of poverty rates alone (see Charts 3 and 4) and even more for the indicator of severe material deprivation, children in Austria being much over-represented in the overall population affected by this problem (see Charts 5 and 6). Their rate of severe material deprivation is more than 1.4 times higher than the overall rate of severe material deprivation. Of all the EU Member States, only Belgium shows a similar disproportionality of children being affected by severe material deprivation.

Table 1 below shows the respective situation in Austria according to more differentiated age cohorts. What becomes evident here is that being at risk-of-poverty and severe material deprivation is especially widespread in the age-group from 0 to 5 years and as well (to somewhat lesser degree) in the age-group from 6 to 9 years. Then the respective figures decrease stepwise, reaching the at-average level of the total population (or, in case of severe material deprivation, an even lower level) in the age cohort 15 to 17. Interestingly, the rate of persons living in households with very low or no work intensity (as defined in the EU2020 target⁴) remains at about the same level of 6 to 7% for all age-groups.

Table 2 below presents some information on important socio-demographic characteristics of children (at the age 0 to 15 years) in Austria, being affected by being at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion. Many of them live in larger cities, and here especially in the capital city Vienna, whereas child-poverty appears to be a less frequent phenomenon in smaller municipalities.

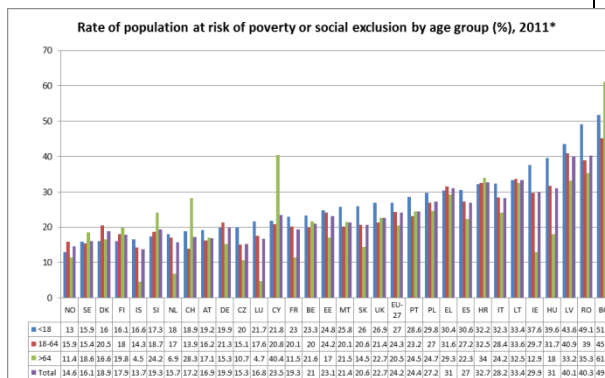
Children without Austrian citizenship (at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion-rate: 45%) are much more likely to be affected by the relevant problems than children with Austrian citizenship (at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion-rate: 45%). Still, the clear majority (71%) of all children being at risk-of-poverty or facing social exclusion are Austrian citizens.

More than two thirds of all children being at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion live in multi-person households with at least two children, whereby the respective rate of affectedness in multi-person households with at least three children (30%) is even surpassed by the respective rate in single-parent households (46%). 20% of all children being at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion live in single-parent households.

³ Readers should note that the drafting of this report was completed in September 2013 thus it does not include an analysis of data or policy developments that became available after this date.

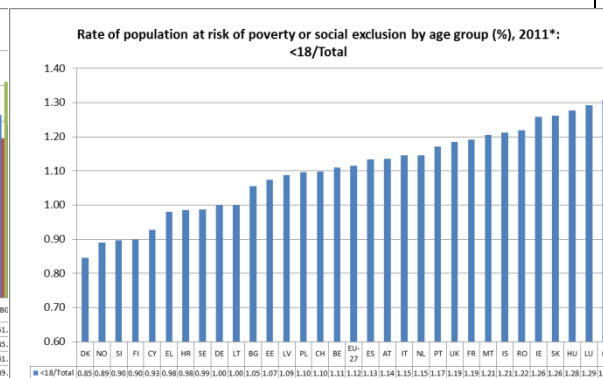
⁴ No or very low work-intensity is defined as a work intensity of less than 20% of all household members at working age.

Chart 1



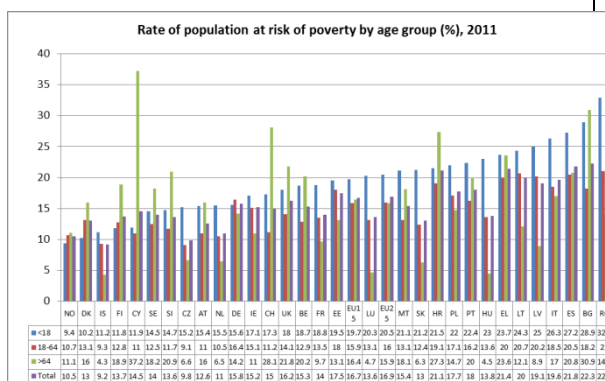
Source: Eurostat (online data code : ilc_peps01); Statistics in Focus 4/2013; http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-13-004/EN/KS-SF-13-004-EN.PDF
* EU-27 Eurostat estimation, IE data is for 2010

Chart 2



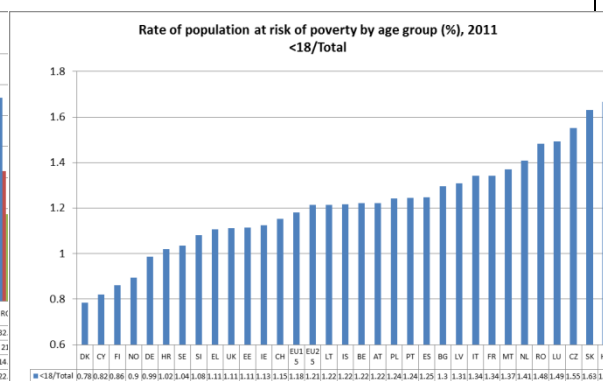
Source: Eurostat (online data code : ilc_peps01); Statistics in Focus 4/2013; http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-13-004/EN/KS-SF-13-004-EN.PDF & own calculations
* EU-27 Eurostat estimation, IE data is for 2010

Chart 3



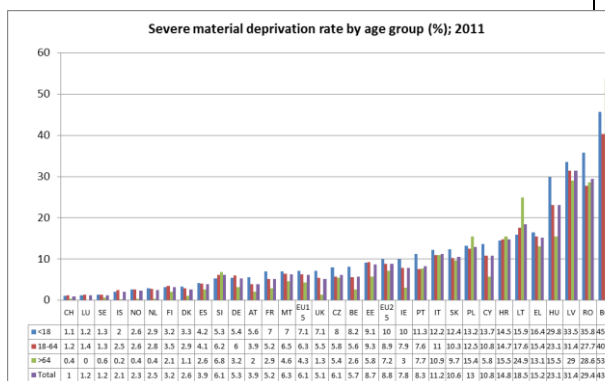
Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC [ilc_li02]

Chart 4



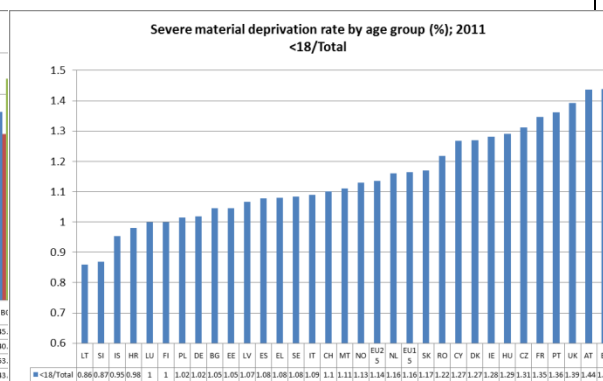
Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC [ilc_li02] & own calculations

Chart 5



Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC [ilc_mddd11]

Chart 6



Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC [ilc_mddd11] & own calculations

As may be expected, the risk of being affected by low income and/or material deprivation decreases with the employment-intensity of the household. In case of an employment intensity of over 85%, the share of children being at-risk-of poverty or facing social exclusion decreases to 5%, whereas it amounts to 19% in case of medium employment intensity (>20% and <85%). 60% of the children being at-risk-of poverty or facing social exclusion live in households with medium employment intensity (>20% and <85%), 7% in households with high to full employment intensity (>=85%) and 30% in households with low or no employment intensity (<=20%).

The rate of children being at-risk-of poverty or facing social exclusion is especially high in the case of social transfers being the main source of income of the household (77%).

Child poverty is a phenomenon especially frequent in families with a migration background. If at least one member of the household is not an Austrian citizen, the rate of children being at-risk-of poverty or facing social exclusion amounts to 42% (instead of 20% among the total population), and in case that at least one member is a naturalised Austrian citizen (without households with at least one member not being an Austrian citizen) to 38%. On the whole, about 55% of all children at the age 0-15 being at risk of poverty and social exclusion live in households with a migration background. One other very important risk-factor is long-term unemployment, which applies to 30% of all households with children at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion.

Having a look at severe material deprivation alone, probably addressing the most pressing and imminent social problems covered within the EU-2020 target, it becomes evident that especially three specific groups of children face a very high risk of being affected. These are children in households with long-term unemployment (with a rate of 25%), children of single parents (with a rate of 19%) and children in households where at least one household member is not an Austrian citizen (with a rate of 18%). 62% of all children at the age 0-16 affected by severe material deprivation live in households with at least one member not being an Austrian citizen, 29% are children of single parents and 39% live in households with long-term unemployment. Evidently, the high risk of these three groups of being affected by severe material deprivation is at the same time associated with high rates of children of these groups living in households with no or very low work intensity.

Table 1: Austria: EU-2020 Target Group according to age groups; 2011

	Total			18 years and over			0 to 17 years			0 to 5 years			6 to 9 years			10 to 14 years			15 to 17 years		
	in 1,0 00	Rat e %	Sha re %	in 1,0 00	Rat e %	Sha re %	in 1,0 00	Rat e %	Sha re %	in 1,0 00	Rat e %	Sha re %	in 1,0 00	Rat e %	Sha re %	in 1,0 00	Rat e %	Sha re %	in 1,0 00	Rat e %	Sha re %
Part of the Target Group Europe 2020																					
At risk of poverty or social exclusion	1,4 07	17	100	1,1 14	16	79	293	19	21	106	21	8	69	23	5	77	19	5	41	14	3
of which at risk of poverty	105 1	13	100	817	12	78	234	15	22	81	16	8	57	19	5	68	16	6	29	10	3
of which in household with now/low work intensity	519	6	100	417	6	80	102	7	20	38	7	7	21	7	4	24	6	5	19	7	4
of which with severe material deprivation	325	4	100	239	4	74	86	6	26	33	6	10	21	7	6	19	4	6	13	4	4
Not Part of the Target Group Europe 2020	6,9 09	83	100	5,6 77	84	82	123 2	81	18	405	79	6	237	77	3	340	82	5	249	86	4

Source: EU-SILC 2012; Statistik Austria/BMASK (2013a) & own calculations; numbers in italics derive from very low numbers of cases; in case of less than 50 cases in the marginal distribution or less than 20 cases per cell italic letters are used. Data going ahead with a marginal distribution <20 are not presented.

Table 2: Being at risk of poverty or social exclusion of children (in the age 0 to 15 years); 2011

	Total	at risk of poverty or social exclusion			at risk of poverty			severe material deprivation			in household with no/very low work intensity		
	in 1,000	in 1,000	share in %	rate in %	in 1,000	share in %	rate in %	in 1,000	share in %	rate in %	in 1,000	share in %	rate in %
Total	1,318	265	100	20	216	100	16	77	100	6	87	100	7
municipal size													
Vienna	261	99	37	38	74	34	28	53	69	20	43	50	16
Other municipalities > 100,000 inhab.	118	31	12	27	28	13	24	5	7	5	3	4	3
municipalities >10.000 and <=100.000 inhab.	207	42	16	20	35	16	17	11	14	5	14	16	7
municipalities <=10.000 inhab.	732	93	35	13	79	37	11	8	10	1	26	30	4
Citizenship													
Austria	1,147	188	71	16	147	68	13	52	67	5	57	66	5
not Austria	171	77	29	45	69	32	40	25	33	15	30	34	17
households with children (without pensions)													
total	1,314	264	100	20	215	100	16	77	100	6	86	100	7
single-parent-households	116	53	20	46	36	17	31	23	29	19	28	33	24
multi-person household + 1 child	283	25	9	9	16	7	6	4	5	1	9	10	3
multi-person household + 2 children	546	75	28	14	64	30	12	17	22	3	9	11	2
multi-person household + min. 3 children	368	111	42	30	99	46	27	34	44	9	40	47	11
employment intensity of the household													
(reference year: 2010)													
no/very low employment intensity: <=20%	87	87	33	100	63	29	72	36	47	41	87	100	100
medium employment intensity: >20% and <85%	855	158	60	19	137	63	16	36	47	4	0	0	0
high employment intensity: >=85%	376	20	7	5	16	8	4	-5	6	1	0	0	0
main source of income													
dependent employment	946	95	36	10	75	35	8	26	34	3	0	0	0
self employment	156	22	8	14	22	10	14	0	0	0	0	0	0
social transfers	181	138	52	77	113	52	63	50	65	28	81	93	45
pensions	20	4	1	20	4	2	20	0	0	0	1	1	3
other private income	16	6	2	34	2	1	11	1	2	8	5	6	32
in risk-households													
with long-term unemployment	116	81	30	69	70	32	60	30	39	25	53	61	45
Social transfers main source of income (without long-term unemployed)	112	76	29	68	59	27	53	24	31	21	28	32	25
with household member without Austrian citizenship	268	112	42	42	93	43	35	47	62	18	48	55	18
with naturalised citizen in household (excl. with member without Austrian citizenship)	90	34	13	38	31	14	34	5	7	6	9	11	10
with disability (regarding person in employment age)	88	35	13	39	22	10	25	12	16	14	16	19	19

Source: EU-SILC 2012; Statistik Austria/BMASK (2013b) & own calculations; numbers in italics derive from very low numbers of cases; in case of less than 50 cases in the marginal distribution or less than 20 cases per cell italic letters are used. Data going ahead with a marginal distribution <20 are not presented.

The here presented brief overview only covers the material aspects of child well-being. Of course, other aspects that could be addressed upon are e.g. health and educational issues, behaviour and risks or housing issues. The recent UNICEF report on "Child well-being in rich countries" (UNICEF 2013) addresses all these dimensions according to some basic quantitative indicators from an international comparative point of view. According to this assessment, Austria performs rather well regarding material well-being (rank 7 out of 29 countries) but only mediocre regarding housing issues (rank 12) and behaviour and risks (teenage fertility, smoking, drinking alcohol etc.; rank 17). Regarding health and safety issues (rank 26) and education (rank 23), the assessment by UNICEF indicates an even more problematic situation for the case of Austria.

Regarding health and safety, Austria performs about average for most indicators but then gets down-rated especially due to one specific indicator, pointing towards an unfavourable performance (according to the interpretation by Unicef). The very low ranking of Austria regarding health and safety is at first instance caused by a comparatively low immunisation rate. Here, it should be stressed that standard immunisation of children is in principle available free of charge in Austria, but that a rising number of parents decide not to have their children immunised at an early age, due to possible adverse effects of vaccinations.

Regarding education, the results for Austria according to Unicef are especially problematic regarding the comparatively low share of youngsters taking part in further education (% of children aged 15 to 19 in education) and concerning rather unfavourable PISA test results at the age of 15. Whereas the latter point evidently indicates problems connected to school- and, most likely as well, prep-school education, the first one may be less problematic. It is inter alia caused by the very strong Austrian apprenticeship system, with the large numbers youngsters taking part in these schemes not being counted as "in education" by OECD/Unicef but as "in employment".

2.2. The overall approach and governance

The Commission Recommendation "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage" of 20 February 2013 (2013/112/EU) (see European Commission 2013) defines several horizontal principles, according to which national approaches to tackle child-poverty and to increase child-wellbeing should be organised. These principles are:

- Tackle child poverty and social exclusion through integrated strategies that go beyond ensuring children's material security [...].
- Address child poverty and social exclusion from a children's rights approach [...].
- Always take the child's best interests as a primary consideration and recognise children as independent rights-holders [...].
- Maintain an appropriate balance between universal policies, aimed at promoting the well-being of all children, and targeted approaches, aimed at supporting the most disadvantaged.
- Ensure a focus on children who face an increased risk due to multiple disadvantages [...].
- Sustain investment in children and families, allowing for policy continuity and long-term planning; assess how policy reforms affect the most disadvantaged and take steps to mitigate any adverse effects.

Integrated multi-dimensional strategies

It is fair to say that child-poverty and children's well-being is almost not dealt with by Austrian politics as a specific and distinct problem.

Higher on the agenda is "family policies" in the broader sense, where respective issues are often reduced to the question of a) financial well-being of families (but not with a focus on "poor" families alone but as well to what is called the "middle class") and b) opportunities to combine employment and "family duties". This policy area is subject to substantial ideological differences between major political players concerning the desirable characteristics of familial organisation of everyday life and especially concerning gainful employment of mothers. This means that in Austria there is no clear cut and integrated multi-dimensional strategy regarding child-poverty and child well-being. Given the above mentioned ideological differences, it appears that Austria even lacks a common or at least widely accepted norm for child well-being, which

would be a precondition for a clear-cut strategic approach in this area. Children are affected by a large number of different measures of different policy areas, like different schemes of social benefits, different social services, education policy, labour market policy and labour relations etc. However, decision making in these policy areas is only scarcely explicitly geared towards the aims of reducing child-poverty and increasing child-well-being.

The children's rights approach, mainstreaming of children's policies and rights and synergies between relevant policy areas and players

The lack of a clear-cut and integrated strategy implies that children's well-being and children's rights in Austria are more or less treated as a residual. Or, to be more precise, children are often treated as a group as well affected by policies originally targeted at other groups. At the same time policies affecting children's well-being are often decided for other purposes than meeting the interests of children at first instance. The first phenomenon e.g. holds for questions of access to health services, regarding housing, or when children benefit from measures of ALMP, allowing their parents to find a job. A related situation applies for debates about institutional childcare, where it is much more on the agenda that improvements in this area would allow for a higher activity rate of parents (which is desirable from a national economic perspective), whereas possible personal (and not instant material) gains of children from access to institutional childcare are much more rarely addressed. In a similar way, it appears that problems within the educational system are not at first instance framed as problems for children, but again predominantly as cause for later problems for the national economy or for general challenges deriving from "integration deficits" of people with a migration background. Some political actors may not agree to this kind of distinction. But it makes a difference if topics of child-poverty and child well-being are framed as problems "on their own", or if they are at first instance treated as a problem of "second order", then possibly leading to "first order" problems in other areas (which may as well be caused by other factors). In such a setting, it is very unlikely that an integrated and multi-dimensional strategy explicitly dealing with the interests of children gets expedited. And this is exactly the case in Austria.

At the same time competencies which potentially concern child-poverty and child well-being are to a large degree fragmented in Austria. This holds regarding different ministries at the level of the federal state on the one hand side, and the federal provinces on the other. At the level of the federal state, respective issues are in principle part of the competency of the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth. But at the same time competencies regarding social protection, employment, education, health, or the integration of people with a migration background are divided between other ministries. This would mean that the Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth would have to co-ordinate the other relevant institutions in a pro-active way. Of course, given the above mentioned fragmentation of competencies, this only could be done by different instruments of so-called "soft governance". However, it appears that the commitment of this ministry regarding problems of child-poverty is generally rather limited. For example, when searching its website for the term "child poverty" ("*Kinderarmut*"), only three results get delivered.⁵

Institutional childcare facilities, parts of the housing-agenda and services for the homeless, minimum income schemes incl. respective personalised and family support as well as many issues of alternative care fall within the competence of the federal provinces (and partly as well of the municipalities). In these areas some attempts have been made for common planning via so-called 15a-agreements between the

⁵ On the contrary, e.g. the term "business location" (*Wirtschaftsstandort*) delivers the maximum number of hints possible with this internal search service (50).

federal state and the federal provinces (e.g. regarding minimum income schemes and all-day-care at schools).⁶ But in terms policy output overall fragmentation and differentiation of different qualities of services and different benefit levels prevails. This is a general phenomenon in the mentioned policy areas, but it even more holds for questions of child-poverty and child well-being, as in this area not even a common framework of targets or goals exists.

So, in a nutshell, the policy area of measures directly or indirectly dealing with child-poverty resembles a sum of decisions taken (or not taken) in a large number of different policy areas by a considerable number of different political players. These decisions do not follow a common understanding of children's well-being, nor is the topic as such on the agenda to a wide degree. On this background, a children's right approach, mainstreaming of children's policies and rights, evidence based approaches pro-proactive mutual co-ordination between relevant policy areas and players is extremely rare in the context of children's well-being and poverty. What prevails is incremental adaptation according to the logics of and interests present within the relevant single policy areas.

Involvement of relevant stakeholders and children

As sketched out above, child-poverty and children's well-being in Austria is scarcely dealt with in sense of a distinct social problem. For that reason it is difficult to give an overview on the involvement of relevant stakeholders and children in respective processes of policy-making. As a general principle, decision making within the different strands of social policy is not only dominated by the political parties in government, but as well (and often even more) by the peak layers of interest organisations of job-holders and employers. Hereby, the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) and the Chambers of Labour (*Arbeiterkammern*) on the one hand side, and the Economic Chamber (*Wirtschaftskammer*) and the Association of Industry (*Industriellenvereinigung*) on the other hand enjoy privileged access to respective processes of decision making and very often reforms in the areas of labour law, social policy and active labour market policies derive from a compromise between these institutions. Within this neo-corporatist model of decision-making child-poverty and child-wellbeing has never been a top issue. The same holds for policy areas where other political players, like the federal provinces (for example regarding childcare facilities and minimum income schemes), health insurance providers (in health policy) or teacher's trade unions (in education policy) are additional dominant political players. Overall, the different relevant policy areas are subject to path-dependent power structures, but where children's well-being has never been one of the top and explicit strategic goals of the respective dominating political institutions or players. For other organisations like NGOs etc., dealing with the interests of children more explicitly, it is very difficult to gain substantial political influence in the different political arenas concerned. Concern direct involvement of children instruments like "children's parliaments" etc. exist in a number of municipalities, but are not very widespread. Apart of this, children are sometimes on an ad-hoc basis invited for example to take part in planning of public space, but such procedures do not appear to be very widespread.

⁶ 15a-agreements are agreements between the federal state and the federal provinces according to §15a of the Austrian Constitutional Act. Such agreements define a common understanding on specific issues, but they are not legally enforceable as no sanctions are foreseen for the case that a contracting party does not fulfil its obligations.

Balance between universal policies and targeted approaches

As sketched out in chapters 3 and 4 below, policies child-poverty and child-wellbeing in Austria are – across the board – more of universal than of targeted character, however with a number of instruments of the later type existing as well. To assess if and to what degree this approach is “balanced”, a more detailed examination would be necessary, which is beyond the scope of this report. Yet, it would evidently be problematic to shift towards a more targeted approach regarding main policy components like family benefits or childcare facilities. International comparative assessments show that targeted measures (applying instruments of means-testing etc.) often come along with low benefit levels or low quality of social services, and that retrenchment is more likely in the case of targeted instruments than with universal ones (see e.g. Nelson 2007 for a discussion). Still, the measures in place should be monitored more closely regarding the question if they really reach the most vulnerable groups, and if *additional* more targeted measures would be necessary to improve their situation.

Evidence based approaches and evaluation of the impact of policies introduced in response to the crisis

As child-poverty and child-wellbeing is more treated as a kind of “second order” problem in Austria up to now, deriving from a number of other challenges, and not as a distinct problem “per se”, no strong culture exists in Austria to implement evidence based approaches explicitly focusing on child well-being, or to evaluate policies with an emphasis on child-poverty. Reforms are assessed from a more general perspective, for example in education policy evaluating overall outcomes in terms of abilities in reading and mathematics etc., or concerning reforms of benefit systems regarding at-risk-of poverty rates according to different family compositions. Again, children’s broader needs and problems are generally dealt with in a rather indirect way only within existing aims for evidence based policy making and for evaluation of measures decided. What would be necessary here is a new culture of always taking into account children’s interests and problems in a more explicit way.

Recommendation for improvements

To strengthen the approach of governance it would be necessary to start with an encompassing assessment of children’s well-being and child poverty in Austria. This, in a second step, could lead to a common or at least widely accepted understanding of child-wellbeing which is largely missing at the moment. Then, in a third step reforms in terms of institutional settings and content of policies could be debated and decided, leading to an integrated strategy to improve children’s well-being and to reduce child poverty in Austria.

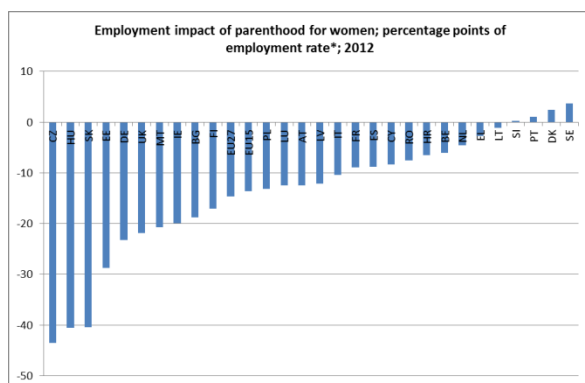
3. Access to adequate resources

3.1. Policies to support parents’ participation in the labour market, especially those at a distance from the labour market and in households at particular risk

As already sketched above (Chapter 2.1), the material well-being of children and the problems of being at-risk-of-poverty and of severe material deprivation are to a substantial degree linked to the question of the employment intensity of the respective household. Out of the 265,000 children at the age 0-15, facing being at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion, 87,000 live in households with no or very low employment intensity, 158,000 in households of medium employment intensity (>20% and <85%), and “only” 20,000 in households with high or full employment intensity. One proxy used in international comparative analysis to measure the effect of childhood on

employment is the difference of the employment rate of women aged 20-49 having a child at the age of 0 to 6 to women of the same age group without children (European Employment Strategy = EES indicator 18.A5). In Austria the respective effect amounts to 12.5 percentage points and is somewhat smaller than the average of the EU-27 (14.7 percentage points). However, it is considerably higher than in the best performing EU Member States. This indicates that in Austria there still exist substantial problems regarding parents' participation in the labour market.

Chart 7



Source: Eurostat LFS [lfst_hheredch] & own calculations

* The difference in percentage points in employment rates (age group 20-49) with presence of at least one child aged 0-6 and without the presence of any children.

And in fact, “the combination of employment and family duties” is a long-standing issue in Austrian politics. Hereby especially the question of accessibility and affordability of *institutional childcare* has increasingly been on the agenda over the past two decades or so. This has been caused by the fact that deficits regarding childcare facilities for children at prep-school age (and here especially at the age below 4 years and regarding full-time care) are a long-standing problem in Austria (see e.g. Fink 2012a; Annex chart 5 to 7). Hereby it should be mentioned that the competency for child-care facilities for children at prep-school age is with the federal provinces and municipalities at first instance.

This has led to a situation where the accessibility of such services varies to a very large degree when comparing the nine federal provinces to each other. The situation has to some degree improved during the past two decades, but irrespective of the rising share of children in institutional childcare, deficits are still evident. For children at the age of under two years, this holds especially for the federal provinces of Upper Austria, Styria, Salzburg and Carinthia, but to lesser degree also for all the other federal provinces. Other evident problems are the accessibility of full-time care, the flexibility of opening hours and childcare during school holidays, where again huge differences exist when the nine federal provinces are compared to each other (see Fink 2012 for a detailed assessment).

These points address the general accessibility of childcare facilities and show a huge variation across federal provinces, with Vienna standing out as the federal province with by far the most encompassing offers regarding childcare facilities. Of course, accessibility is not only a question of the general features of the respective schemes. At the same time it is important that the systems in place do not discriminate in terms of financial resources, i.e. that access is as well guaranteed for households with low income. Unfortunately, no detailed assessments are available on this point at the time of writing.

Fink (2012b) gives a brief overview on the respective regulations. They again show a considerable differentiation across federal provinces, with Vienna being the only

federal province where childcare up to the age of 6 years is free of charge, whereas in the other federal provinces co-payments by the parents are the norm.⁷ Only in lower Austria child day-care is also free of charge, however only at the age between 2.5 and 6 years. Co-payments by parents often get applied in a socially adjusted way or means-tested public subsidies are available. Once again the respective regulations show considerable heterogeneity, and in number of federal provinces no uniform model exists, due to different schemes in different municipalities (e.g. in Carinthia and Vorarlberg). Co-payments may reach a substantial level, even in cases where family income is not very high. To give an example: In the case of the federal province of Styria, for a family with two children at the age of 3 and 4 and 7-8 hours daily childcare and a net monthly income of EUR 1.750 the monthly co-payment would amount to EUR 130.4 or ca. 7.5% of the net monthly income. Unfortunately, no detailed assessments are available for the case of Austria regarding in which way the different financing models and levels of co-payment affect the decisions of parents to use institutional childcare (or not). In other words: we do not know much about the broader social effects of the different models in place, which as well holds for the question of the respective incentives and disincentives regarding participation in gainful employment.

What is, however, evident is the more general structural problems of the Austrian childcare system which come along with adverse effects on social inclusion. The above described gaps in public institutional childcare (regarding general availability, opening hours, closing times during holidays etc.) lead to a situation where a) full time employment (or even part-time employment with long hours) appears not to be possible for both parents or single parents or where b) childcare has to be organised individually by private means. However, the latter is often only an option for those being better off in financial terms, leading to a situation where a lack in childcare facilities can cause a vicious circle of low work intensity, low income and low future career prospects.

Over the past decade the national government has repeatedly started some initiatives to generate incentives for the federal provinces and the municipalities to improve pre-school institutional childcare. These incentives usually were of the type of co-financing the establishment of new childcare-places (the current programme, with a budget of 15 million EUR per year, will end in 2014, and it is unclear if it will be prolonged). However, the respective effects were limited, with many municipalities and federal provinces being reluctant to expand respective facilities, due to subsequent operating costs.

One other initiative is the one of expanding *all-day school care*, with the target of increasing the number of places to 160,000 by 2016 (instead of 105,000 places in 2011). However, according to estimations this will probably not cover the demand (see Bacher/Beham 2012), reaching a coverage rate of approx. 50% of all schools and 20% of all pupils at the age 6 to 14. At so-called "*Horte*", run by federal provinces and municipalities and offering day-care for children at school-age in the afternoon, a total of about 50,000 places is available. So, in total, the plan is to reach a number of ca. 210,000 places of all-day care for children at school-age by 2015, which means a coverage rate of approx. 25%.⁸ In summer 2013 plans were announced to increase places of all-day school care to 200,000 in 2018/2019. Together with places available

⁷ However, it should be mentioned that since 2009, according to an agreement between the federal state and the federal provinces, 20 hours of weekly institutional childcare are free of charge as from the age of five (so-called cost-free last year of kindergarten). Furthermore, as from 2010, children are – in principle – obliged to attend kindergarten in the last year before school enrolment.

⁸ See <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/ministerium/vp/2013/20130613.xml>

at the "Horte", the coverage rate will then reach approx. 37%. As with institutional childcare for children at the age below 6, the availability of all-day care for children at school age varies to a very large degree between the federal provinces (Bacher/Beham 2012).⁹ Such differences will remain to a substantial degree, irrespective of the above mentioned programme of increasing the overall number of places available in all-day school care. This is caused by the fact that there is no overall plan concerning where and to what degree respective places should be expanded. Both the federal provinces and the federal state have their own definitions of the need for additional places for the schools that they are responsible for. Given the situation of fragmented competencies for different types of schools, a substantial convergence of respective offers, available in the different federal provinces, is very unlikely.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that all-day school care and also care during afternoons at so-called "Horte" is in principle not free of charge for parents. Here, as with institutional child-care at the age below 6, co-payments by parents are common. These co-payments are not centrally determined but again fall within the responsibility of the respective school providers, i.e. the federal state, the different federal provinces and in some cases private institutions. At the time of writing no detailed assessment of the level and the social implications of these co-payments appears to be available.

But again, an example can be given. At schools run by the federal state the co-payment (*Betreuungsbeitrag*) for all-day school care currently amounts to EUR 88 per month, plus a payment for school lunch, to be determined by the respective school itself. Reliefs from the co-payment of EUR 88 are possible according to a means-test, taking into account the actual income of the respective household. Table 3 lists the respective income limits and the respective amounts of relief from paying the *Betreuungsbeitrag*. What becomes evident is that a 100% relief is only possible in case of (for Austrian standards) rather low actual income. Furthermore, the respective applications have to be handed in directly at the school where the child is enrolled, which may lead to high non-take-up due to social shame etc. Sound empirical evidence for the latter is missing, as on this issue no detailed assessments have been carried in Austria for the time being. However, according to anecdotal evidence reported to the author from teachers and social NGOs, this is a widespread phenomenon. Parents then refuse letting their children take part in all-day school care, or, in some cases, pay the full co-payment although they would be eligible to a relief.

⁹ For a brief overview and the validity of data provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture see as well: <http://oesterreich.orf.at/stories/2578982/> and <http://derstandard.at/1363708039373/Aepfel-und-Birnen-und-der-Ganztagschul-Vergleich>

Table 3: Relief from co-payments for all-day school care ("Betreuungsbeitrag") in % according to yearly net income

Yearly income in EUR	Relief per month in %
up to 11,222.99	100
from 11,223 to 12,626.99	90
from 12,627 to 13,889.99	80
from 13,890 to 15,011.99	70
from 15,012 to 15,993.99	60
from 15,994 to 16,881.99	50
from 16,882 to 17,676.99	40
from 17,677 to 18,378.99	30
from 18,379 to 18,986.99	20
from 18,987 to 19,500	10

Source: Verordnung der Bundesministerin für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, mit der die Verordnung über Beiträge für Schülerheime und ganztägige Schulformen geändert wird; BGBl. II Nr. 218/2007; http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=BgblAuth&Dokumentnummer=BGB LA_2007_II_218

In the field of *active labour market policies (ALMP)*, the Austrian public employment service (AMS) offers a wide range of services aiming to support reintegration into the labour market after parental leave and supporting parents with their job search. It appears to be fair to say that respective offers are of a wide variety, including job-orientation, re-qualification and other different forms of counselling and support. For women specific measures and courses are available, for example the PES-course "come-back for women" ("*Wiedereinstieg für Frauen*"), offered by specific "Women's-Counselling-Offices" ("*Frauenberatungsstellen*") and "Women's-Career-Offices" ("*Frauenberufszentren*") of the PES.¹⁰ Specific programmes are as well available for parents with a migration background and language problems. On the whole, from an international comparative perspective, funds available for ALMP-measures are rather high now in Austria, after a considerable expansion since the mid-1990s.

One more problematic area is that of *promoting quality and inclusive employment and a working environment that enables parents to balance their work and parenting roles* on an equal footing. Respective problems – inter alia – become visible by a substantial segmentation and segregation of the Austrian labour market, coming along with – when compared to the other EU-member states – one of the highest concentrations of part-time employment of women and one of the highest gender-pay gaps (see e.g. Fink 2012b for an overview). A related phenomenon is evident regarding parental leave, which again shows a very high concentration of women, with men much less commonly using this opportunity, and when they do so, for a much shorter time than women.¹¹

¹⁰ See <http://www.ams.at/sfa/22383.html> for an overview.

¹¹ The issue of how to measure the participation of fathers in parental leave has repeatedly been subject of political debates in Austria, see e.g. <http://diestandard.at/1375626169422/Vaeterbeteiligung-Eine-Frage-der-Auslegung>. The Federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ) presents data on the participation of men in obtaining childcare allowance ("*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*") according to the share of men receiving childcare allowance in all individual completed cases of childcare allowance (i.e. with the maximum period for receiving benefits reached) per year of birth. According to this definition the share of men in recipients of childcare allowance recently amounted to between 11.78% and 30.43%, depending on the different models of childcare allowance chosen by the benefit recipients (see: <http://www.bmwfj.gv.at/Familie/FinanzielleUnterstuetzungen/Kinderbetreuungsgeld/Docume>

with men very rarely using this opportunity. The latter is true irrespective of the fact that fathers after parental leave currently do not face adverse effects on their career (see Reidl/Schiffbänker 2013 for a detailed assessment). For women the effects are much more problematic. For them, who usually are in parental leave much longer than men, the re-integration into the labour market appears to be much more difficult, if they find a job they often end up in part-time employment only and often they have to accept a substantial reduction of earnings from gainful employment (see Riesenfelder 2013 for a detailed assessment).

This leads to a kind of vicious circle, where labour market segmentation and segregation, which is anyhow a substantial phenomenon in Austria, gets reinforced by long career breaks affecting mostly women. Such a development is kind of pre-programmed due to the lack of institutional childcare, which is again part of the legacy of the so-called male breadwinner model, which for a long time dominated the overall perception of "sound" family structures in Austria.

In recent years especially the Federal Minister for Women and the Civil Service, Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek, has started a number of initiatives to improve the situation of women on the labour market. However, regarding women affairs, this Ministry, being part of the Federal Chancellery, has very limited resources and competencies. For this reason the respective measures are at first instance of the type of "soft governance" only, like information campaigns, a "wage calculator" giving information on "usual" wages in different jobs, the regulation that job offers have now to enclose some information on the wage that may be expected or the obligation for larger companies to inform their employees about the wage structure of the company on a yearly basis. All these measures are likely to have positive effects on the quality of women's employment, and for this reason also on the material situation of children. However, they are unlikely to reduce the numerous problems coming along with the aim to balance work and parental roles in the short run.

To deal with them in a more pro-active way¹², more emphasis would have to be given to the upgrading of institutional childcare. Here, as sketched above, some measures

[nts/Statistik%20Väterbeteiligung/Väterbeteiligung%20anhand%20abgeschlossener%20Fälle%20-%20Betrachtungszeitraum%20Kalenderjahr%20-%20Stand%20April%202013%20-%20Homepage.pdf](#)). However, these data is not weighted according to the length of the period receiving benefits (with women usually staying much longer in parental leave than men). When looking at monthly data, a different picture evolves. In December 2012 only 4.3% of all persons obtaining childcare allowance were men, and since 2009 the share of men in all persons receiving childcare allowance shows a slightly falling tendency according to monthly data (December 2009: 4.7%; December 2010: 4.54%; December 2011: 4.33%) (see: http://www.statistik.at/web_de/static/kinderbetreuungsgeldbezieherinnen_und_-bezieher_nach_geschlecht_2008_bis_2_058447.xlsx).

¹² Some other examples of measures exist concerning this problem issue, but evidently they up to now have not been sufficient to deal with the challenges evident in this policy area. Attempts worth mentioning are e.g.: the right for parents to switch to part-time employment – under specific circumstances (introduced in 2004; see: <https://www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/content/224/Seite.2240004.html>); counselling regarding the reconciliation of work and family and promotion of innovative childcare facilities by the Familie & Beruf Management GmbH (an agency founded in 2006 by the Federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth - BMWFJ) (see <http://www.familieundberuf.at/home/>); a programmatic statement signed in 2012 by the Federal Minister for Economy, Family and Youth and the presidents of the social partner's umbrella organisations on the reconciliation of work and family (*Charta Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf*; see: <https://www.bmwfj.gv.at/Familie/VereinbarkeitVonFamilieUndBeruf/Documents/Charta%20-%20Homepage.pdf>).

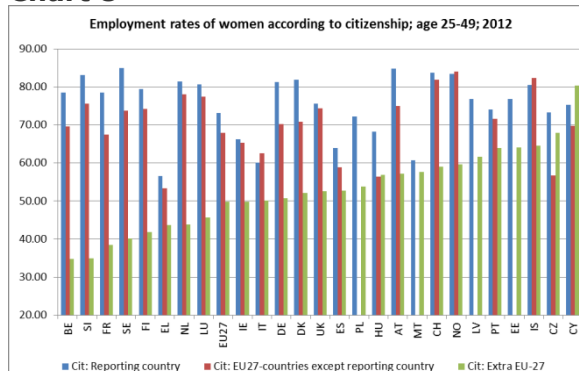
have been taken in recent years. But they still appear to be insufficient, given the large respective deficits in some federal provinces.

One other more specific and substantial problem is the employment intensity of households where one or more family members have a migration background. Especially the employment rate of women with a migration background is very low, which – inter alia – leads to comparatively high rates of impoverishment and social exclusion of children living in such households (see above). Chart 8 to 11 provide data on employment rates according to citizenship. They show that it is a widespread phenomenon in most EU Member States that women with citizenship extra EU-27 show a much lower employment rate than women with citizenship of the reporting country. A related phenomenon exists for men in most EU Member States, however with a much lower difference between different types of nationality.

From an international comparative perspective Austria is neither a best nor a worst performer regarding these employment gaps. At the same time the relative performance of Austria (when compared to other countries) is better in the case of men than in the case of women.

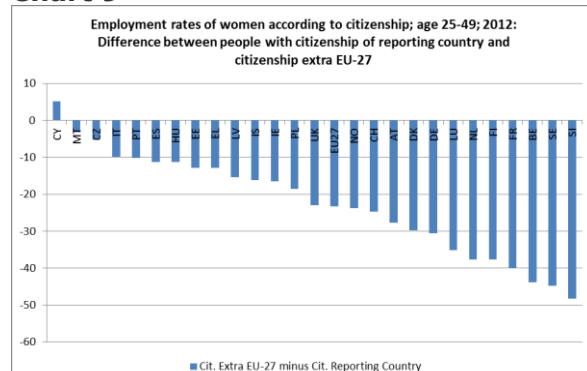
On the whole this means that a considerable challenge exists in the case of Austria to increase the employment rate of women with a migration background, which appears to be, amongst others, one important factor for the reduction of child-poverty.

Chart 8



Source: Eurostat LFS [Ifsa_ergan]; not all Member States covered due to unreliable data in missing cases.

Chart 9



Source: Eurostat LFS [Ifsa_ergan] & own calculations; not all Member States covered due to unreliable data in missing cases.

Chart 10



Source: Eurostat LFS [Ifsa_ergan]; not all Member States covered due to unreliable data in missing cases.

Chart 11



Source: Eurostat LFS [Ifsa_ergan] & own calculations; not all Member States covered due to unreliable data in missing cases.

The Austrian National Action Plan for Integration, presented in 2010, mentions that employment of women and girls with a migration background should be encouraged. However, it is fair to say that this point did not turn out to be in the focus of

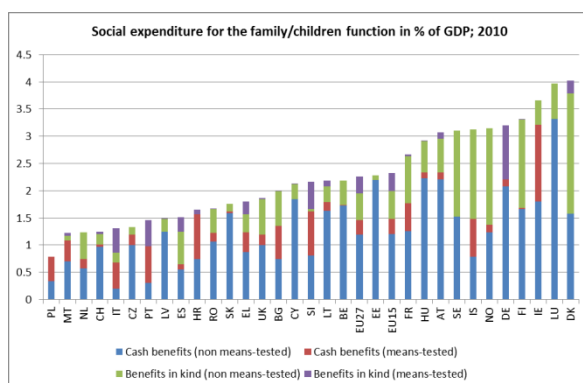
respective strategies and measures. The emphasis of political debates (and partly of measures decided) has much more been on general questions of improving educational outcomes of children with a migration background and their German language skills. When compared with these topics, the more specific causes of low employment rates of women with a migration background and possible strategies to deal with this phenomenon have as much as not been on the agenda.

3.2. Policies to provide adequate living standards through an optimal combination of cash and benefits in kind

Social protection expenditure for the family/children function is comparatively high in Austria from an international comparative perspective (see Chart 12). In 2010 it amounted to ca. 3.1% of GDP (EU-27: 2.25%; EU-15: 2.3%). Furthermore, the bulk of respective outlays is for cash benefits, most of which are not means tested, with the rather generous universal family benefits being the most important single transfer in this policy area. When compared to cash benefits and as well compared to a number of EU Member States (especially the Nordic countries), the expenses for benefits in kind dedicated to families and children are comparatively low in Austria.

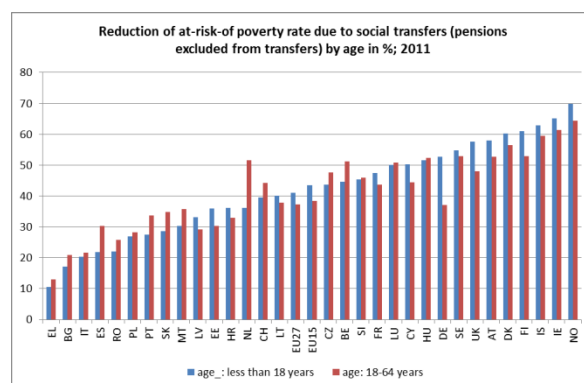
Social transfers (including all social transfers except pensions) reduce the at-risk-of poverty rate of children (at the age 0-17) by nearly 60%. A higher impact only exists in three EU Member States, namely Denmark, Finland and Ireland (see Chart 13). Chart 14 shows the relation between the level of social spending in % of GDP for the families/children function and the reduction of the at-risk-of-poverty rate due to all social transfers (except pensions) for children at the age 0-17. As one would expect, there is a tendency that the reduction of the at-risk-of-poverty rate is the higher the higher the level of social spending dedicated to children/families. However, some countries show a higher (e.g. the UK) and some a lower (e.g. Greece) level of poverty reduction than would be expected against the background of the level of respective spending. However, these results per se do not provide a clear picture of the efficiency of the respective schemes in place, as a reduction of the at-risk-of-poverty level may as well take place due to social transfers which are not counted as part of the families/children function (e.g. unemployment benefits or benefits from minimum income schemes etc.).

Chart 12



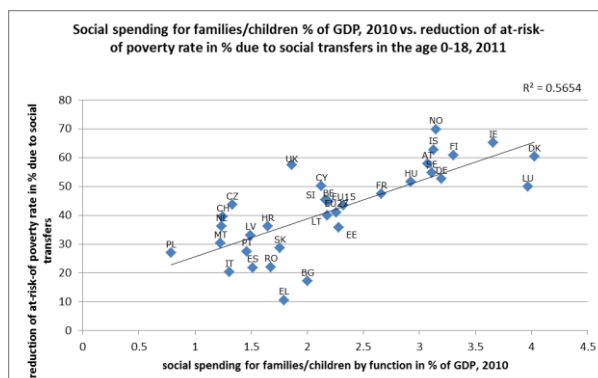
Source: Eurostat Database [spr_exp_ffa]

Chart 13



Source: Eurostat EU-SILC [ilc_li02], [ilc_li10] & own calculations

Chart 14



Source: Eurostat Database [spr_exp_ffa], Eurostat EU-SILC [ilc_li02], [ilc_li10] & own calculations

To get a more clear-cut picture of the actual effects of different benefit schemes for families and children, one has to have a look at more detailed data. Table 4 and table 5 present data on the impact of different strands of the social protection system on the at-risk-of-poverty rate, according to different socio-demographic attributes of households. What becomes evident here is an immense impact of family benefits and cash benefits on households with children in the context of education. In multi-person households with children the respective impact amounts to between 8 and 23 percentage points, depending on the number of children present. In single parent households the at-risk-of-poverty rate without respective benefits would amount to 43%, when receiving benefits it turns out to be 24%. The latter is still a high share (same as with multi-person households with 3+ children: 26%), but the respective benefits again have a high impact of 19 percentage points. When looking at the presence of children of different age, it becomes evident that benefits dedicated at families and children especially reduce the at-risk-of-poverty rates of households with young children (at the age up to 6 years). Here, family cash benefits (*Familienbeihilfe*) and parental leave benefits (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*) compensate to a considerable degree for lower income deriving from lower employment rates of parents.¹³

One other point is that family benefits appear to be an important source of income for families where one or more household members have a migration background (see Table 5). Without family benefits and cash benefits in the context of education, 48% of households with a member having citizenship other than EU/EFTA would have an equivalised income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Family benefits reduce the respective level to 28%.

On the whole, the by far most important social benefit granted towards families and children is the universal and non-means tested family allowance (*Familienbeihilfe*; see Table 6 below for benefit levels). This is a rather cost-intensive scheme, but it has the advantage of rather low administration costs, and it does not come along with social stigmatisation.

In this report it is impossible to provide a more detailed assessment of the whole variety of cash and in-kind benefits available for families and children, given the

¹³ Overall spending for family cash benefits amounted to 3,138.31 million EUR in 2012, spending for parental leave benefits to 1,061.88 million EUR. These are, together with the tax credit for children (*Kinderabsetzbetrag*, with costs amounting to 1,281.70 million EUR in 2012) the most important types of cash benefits towards families.

multitude of benefits available and the as well partly existing fragmentation of these systems, e.g. coming along with different benefit levels within the minimum income schemes, administered by the nine federal provinces (see Fink 2012b for an overview). To assess all of them in more detail would simply be beyond the scope of this report, given the limited resources of time and space. An overview on the different benefits available can be found here:
<http://onlinerechner.haude.at/BMF/Familienrechner/bmf-bl.html>

Table 4: At-risk-of-poverty rates before and after social transfers according to household composition (2010/2011)

Type of household	Number of persons in 1,000	At-risk-of poverty rate							
		After pensions and other social transfers	before...						
			Pension s and other social transfer s	Old-age pensions and surviving dependants' pensions	Other social transfers (except of pensions)	Family benefits and cash benefits in context of education	Benefits from unemplo yment insuranc e	Cash benefits within the health system	Social assistan ce and housing benefits
in %									
Total	8,316	13	44	32	25	20	16	15	13
Household s with pension benefits	1,530	13	96	95	16	14	15	15	14
Single men	128	13	97	97	13	13	13	13	13
Single women	304	26	99	99	28	26	27	26	28
Multi-person household	1,097	10	95	94	13	10	12	12	10
Household s without pension benefits	6,786	12	32	17	27	21	16	15	13
Single men	432	23	33	23	33	23	28	26	24
Single women	459	26	51	45	34	27	30	29	29
Multi-person household without children	1,963	7	22	12	16	8	11	12	8
Household with children	3,931	12	34	16	31	26	16	13	13
Single-parents households	267	24	53	26	50	43	30	25	30
Multi-person household with 1 child	1,440	5	22	9	18	13	9	7	6
Multi-person household with 2 children	1,498	10	34	14	30	25	13	11	11
Multi-person household with 3+ children	727	26	53	29	50	49	28	27	27
Househol ds with youngest child in the age...									
up to 3 years	1,125	15	48	18	45	43	19	15	16
4 to 6 years	618	21	43	24	40	37	24	22	22
older than 6 years	2,242	8	27	14	20	15	12	10	9

Source: EU-SILC 2011; Statistik Austria/BMASK (2013b, 89).

Table 5: At-risk-of-poverty rates before and after social transfers for selected risk groups (2009/2010)

Type of household	Numb er of pers ons in 1,000	At-risk-of poverty rate							
		After pensions and other social transfers	before...						
			Pension s and other social transfer s	Old-age pensions and surviving dependants' pensions	Other social transfers (except of pensions)	Family benefits and cash benefits in context of education	Benefits from unemplo yment insuranc e	Cash benefits within the health system	Social assistan ce and housing benefits
in %									
Total	8,316	13	44	32	25	20	16	15	13
Households with...									
Disability (in working-age)	707	20	62	34	50	28	31	32	21
Unemployment									
Short-term < 6 months	937	13	43	19	36	25	22	16	14
Long-term ≥ 12 months	624	39	74	49	67	49	58	42	43
Member with citizenship other than EU/EFTA	914	28	60	33	56	48	36	30	30
Naturalised citizen	348	25	60	36	48	37	36	27	28

Source: EU-SILC 2011; Statistik Austria/BMASK (2013b, 91).

Concerning actual developments of the by far most important benefit scheme for families, the universal family allowances (*Familienbeihilfe*), plans for a possible future reform were announced in spring 2013.¹⁴ However, the current government postponed this reform to 2014, i.e. to the time after the national elections to be held in September 2014, and it is unclear if this reform will then actually be decided.

Table 6 gives an overview on the cornerstones of the announced reform. It is planned to increase universal family benefits per child and multiple child supplements. At the same time the child tax refund (*Kinderabsetzbetrag*) within the income tax scheme shall be abolished.

¹⁴ See e.g. <http://derstandard.at/1371169859575/Hoehere-Familienbeihilfe-nach-der-Wahl---Kritik-an-Regierung>

Table 6: The announced reform of family allowances and child tax refund (eventually to be decided in 2014)

Family benefits and child tax refund per month according to age of age of child	Currently			After reform	Total change in %
	Family benefit	Child tax refund	Sum	Family benefit (child tax refund abolished)	
up to 3 years	105.4	58.4	163.8	180	+10%
3 to 9 years	112.7	58.4	171.1	180	+5%
10 to 18 years	130.9	58.4	189.3	200	+6%
19 years and over	152.7	58.4	211.1	220	+4%
Multiple child supplements					
Two children	12.8			15	+17%
Three children	47.8			75	+57%
As from 4 children	97.8			240	+145%
Supplement for a disabled child					
	138.3			150	+8,5%
School Start Bonus					
	100 per child per year			0	-100%

This reform is not very likely to have an overall and very substantial positive impact on child poverty. Evidently, families with three or more children would benefit from the reform, whereas for the others there would be only minor changes. As the child tax refund is even granted to people who do not pay income tax due to low income (as a negative tax), the reform does as well not specifically favour parents with low income from gainful employment.

3.3. Two most urgent areas of policy improvement

The two most urgent areas of policy improvement in this area appear to be:

- Improving the accessibility and quality of institutional childcare to raise parents' opportunities to participate in the labour market.
- Developing a strategy to increase the labour market participation of women with a migration background, especially for people coming from non-EU/EFTA countries. This strategy could enclose different measures, like awareness raising, counselling, re-qualification etc. Such measures already exist to some degree in Austria, but they would have to be expanded considerably to deal with the problem of low activity rates of women with a migration background (especially from non-EU/EFTA countries).

4. Access to affordable quality services

4.1. Early childhood education and care

In the past few years the topic of early childhood education and care increasingly attracted attention in political and public debates.

It is especially two topics or problem areas which dominate these debates.

The first one is the evident lack of institutional childcare, especially for children at the age below ca. 3 years and the huge differences of the availability of institutional childcare between federal provinces and – sometimes – municipalities. Also part of this problem stream is the evident lack of all-day childcare in many federal provinces, the problem of very limited and low flexibility of opening hours and long holiday breaks with no public institutional childcare available (see Fink 2012b for a respective assessment incl. data on the respective situation in the different federal provinces). The respective deficits are repeatedly addressed upon by different political actors, but up to now no large-scale and clear cut reform programme has been decided on the issue. One of the reasons for this situation is that institutional childcare – in principle – falls within the competency of the federal provinces and the municipalities. This fact is repeatedly stressed by political actors of the federal state in debates about the accessibility and affordability of institutional childcare. At the same time some of the federal province argue that there is no additional demand in their area, even if their systems are not well established when compared to some of the other federal provinces. Up to now, the federal states have followed the strategy to offer the federal states some positive incentives to enhance their systems of institutional childcare, at first instance via co-financing the start-up costs of new childcare places (however with rather limited funds, currently amounting to a total of EUR 15 million per year). It appears that federal provinces and municipalities are often reluctant to enhance their systems, irrespectively of start-up costs being co-funded by the federal states, as successive operating costs have to be covered by themselves.

In spring 2013, together with the plans for a reform of the family benefit, the current government announced that in the future 150 million EUR per year should be made available by the federal state for measures to increase the availability and quality of institutional childcare facilities, especially for children at the age of up to 3 years.¹⁵ However, as national elections will take place in September 2013, it is completely unclear if this reform will take place. Furthermore, no details have been announced regarding the question of how these additional funds should actually be used in more detail.

A second topic that has increasingly attracted public attention in recent years is the role childhood education should and could play regarding basic competencies, especially concerning German language skills. These discussions (at least implicitly) at first instance focused on language skills of children with a migration background, taking it widely for granted that children without a migration background have no problems in this respect. One measure decided in this context (implemented as from 2010) was to make attending the “last year in kindergarten” (as from the age of 5) “obligatory”. Children – in principle – must now take part in institutional childcare for at least 16 hours per week. Furthermore, the first 20 weekly hours of institutional childcare as from the age of 5 (“last year in kindergarten”) are now free of charge in all federal provinces, irrespectively of the actual income of the parents. This reform derives from an agreement between the federal state and the federal provinces, and

¹⁵ See e.g. <http://derstandard.at/1371169814966/Regierung-offenbar-ueber-hoehere-Familienbeihilfe-einig>

the main argument for it was that this way the language skills of all future pupils could be raised to a minimum level, preventing or at least alleviating problems in later primary education. Parents who do not want their children to attend Kindergarten can, under specific circumstances, get an exemption from the obligation to enrol their child with a Kindergarten. Parents who refuse to enrol their child without a good reason (allowing for an exemption) may be fined up to a sum of 220 EUR.

Unfortunately, up to now no comprehensive evaluation exists on the effects and impacts of the "obligatory last Kindergarten year free of charge". The Federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth has only published some basic data on the issue. According to these, the attendance rate within institutional childcare at the age of 5 has increased by ca. 2 percentage points since the "obligatory last Kindergarten year free of charge" was introduced. The share of children whose first language is not German has increased from 23.9% to 26.5%. In the year 2011/2012, in 343 cases children were exempted from the obligation to attend Kindergarten. In most cases (86.5%) the reason given was "home education". And in 2011/2012 308 administrative penal procedures were started against parents refusing their children's obligation to attend the "last Kindergartenjahr".¹⁶ At the same time no sound information is available on the question if and to what degree language skills at the age of school enrolment have improved since the introduction of the "obligatory last Kindergarten year", and also information on other possible effects on social inclusion are missing.

According to anecdotal evidence (communicated to the author of this report by staff of social NGOs, teachers and Kindergarten teachers) this measure is a positive step forward but by no means sufficient. Kindertagesstätten often lack the resources for more concrete training measures; in areas where there live many people with a migration background children at Kindertagesstätten communicate to each other in many languages, but most rarely in German; children may officially be enrolled at the Kindergarten while at the same time actually attending only sporadically.

On the whole, this means that the topic of childcare and childhood education in Austria is an area with many problematic "construction sites". The latter include basic infrastructure, accessibility in terms of opening hours etc., in some federal provinces also affordability, the question of pedagogical quality and also the that of actual attendance of children enrolled (especially regarding the "obligatory last Kindergarten year free of charge"). Recently a debate has started if a second obligatory year of Kindergarten should be introduced for "those who need it" (in terms of language skills etc.).¹⁷ However, it appears to be fair to say that such a measure would not be likely to be very successful as long as the other structural deficits mentioned above are not at least partly solved.

4.2. The educational system

The question of how to reform the Austrian educational system has attracted considerable public and political attention over the past decade in Austria. A door-opener for respective debates were the PISA studies, conducted as from the early 2000s, which showed below average outcomes of the Austrian educational system, especially regarding reading skills (but also results concerning the other two dimensions were, and still are, not very favourable). Apart from general educational

¹⁶ See parliamentary query response by the Minister of Economy, Family and Youth, 23.08.2013: http://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXIV/AB/AB_14944/fname_320883.pdf

¹⁷ See e.g. http://www.integrationsfonds.at/nap/staatssekretaer_kurz_zweites_verpflichtendes_kindergartenjahr/

outcomes, the debate then was extended to other issues, inter alia addressing the reproduction of social stratification via the educational system.

The respective debates - highly controversial as they were - have led to a typical "Austrian Compromise". Hereby, the main issue was if the traditional system of an early selection of pupils, placing them into different educational tracks, should remain to be in place or if the different tracks of lower secondary education should be replaced by a new "common school" for all pupils at the age from 10 to 14. The compromise was that lower secondary academic schools (*Gymnasium Unterstufe*) were to be kept, that lower secondary schools (*Hauptschule*) would be transferred into "new middle schools" (*Neue Mittelschule*) and that lower secondary academic schools and lower secondary schools could decide to merge into new middle schools. The actual outcome was that in fact very few secondary academic schools and lower secondary schools merged, most lower secondary academic schools did not change their status and lower secondary schools were renamed to new middle schools. Yet, regarding the latter it is fair to say that the reform went beyond a pure re-naming only, as the resources - in terms for staff etc. - of new middle schools have been somewhat improved when compared to earlier lower secondary schools.

What in principle remained to be in place is the fact that the Austrian educational system shows a very early selection of pupils into different tracks of education. And this is exactly what these days most experts consider to be the most problematic feature of the Austrian educational system - not only in terms of social exclusion (see e.g. Schlögl 2013 for an overview).

Already the first selection at the age of 10 - based on primary school marks and teacher recommendations - has long-term effects on educational (and labour market) careers, including the probability of having access to tertiary education. Although even before the above mentioned reform graduates from lower secondary schools (*Hauptschulen*) with good marks had the possibility to change to academic secondary school (higher level) (*Gymnasium Oberstufe*) at the age of 14, in practice this happened rather rarely. And although VET colleges (*Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen*) have always to some degree provided an alternative for graduates from lower secondary schools, educational paths between graduates from lower secondary schools and from lower secondary academic schools have remained clearly differentiated. Recently, at the age of 14 only 37% of lower secondary school graduates have changed to educational tracks that lead to a Matura, compared to 92% of graduates from academic secondary schools (lower level) (*Gymnasium Unterstufe*) (for details see Wintersteller 2009, BMUKK 2011).

The repeated selection process at the secondary level - often called educational "choice" - is strongly correlated with the social background of the children and reproduces disadvantages rather than mitigating them (Lassnigg/Vogtenhuber 2009d, Pechar 2010, OECD 2012). Fessler et al. (2012) found that of all European countries and the US, Austria holds the third rank on persistence of educational attainment. In a comparative study based on PISA outcomes Field et al. (2007) similarly find that Austria belongs to those countries where differences between schools (less within schools) are large and to a high degree linked to the socio-economic background of the students and their peers (group effects). Austria is found to have the fifth highest degree of social differentiation in the educational systems of all OECD member states according to PISA outcomes (OECD 2010, OECD 2012). The educational attainment of children is highly determined by the educational level, the occupation and the income of their parents, which limits social mobility between generations in Austria (ample empirical evidence can be found at Lassnigg/Vogtenhuber 2009c; Statistik Austria 2010; Bacher/Tametsberger 2011; Schreiner 2009).

These strong selection effects of the educational system have also been criticised in terms of overall educational outcomes. The PISA studies clearly showed that countries where the educational system reduces the inequality of social backgrounds (usually by comprehensive schooling) have better average outcomes than (mostly German-speaking) countries with high inequality in educational opportunities (Eder 2009).

As mentioned above, the reform replacing the earlier lower secondary schools by the new middle school (a process to be completed in 2015) has not changed the principle of early selection and tracking. This reform has been connected to some increase in resources for new middle schools and a modernisation of pedagogic concepts etc. Still, it is rather questionable if this reform will substantially mitigate one traditional weakness of the Austrian educational system, which is a strong inter-generational heritage of formal qualification, this to a large degree reproducing existing social stratifications.

4.3. The health system

About 99% of the Austrian population are covered by the social health insurance (see as well Fuchs 2009; Habl 2013) which is – in principle – organised as a compulsory insurance for people in gainful employment and for people receiving cash benefits from systems of social protection (like pensions, unemployment benefits or childcare allowance). However, health insurance in Austria goes far beyond the scope of insurance for employed persons and people receiving cash benefits from social insurance since, in addition to the directly insured parties, it also covers dependent members of their families. About one third of those covered by the statutory health insurance are co-insured family members who do not pay contributions of their own (e.g. children, housewives/househusbands). Periods without insurance appear to be a short-time phenomenon in many cases (see for more details Fuchs 2009, 329), and people who are not covered by health insurance may opt in to the system at their own expense (however, some waiting periods may apply here.). Furthermore, for people without insurance but receiving means-tested Social Assistance, the Social Assistance providers used to cover the costs for health care services. Traditional Social Assistance was replaced by the so-called Guaranteed Minimum Income scheme (GMI) as from September 2010, and benefit recipients are now included in normal health insurance. The latter is a positive step, as there is some evidence that the earlier “special” scheme for recipients of Social Assistance came along with social stigmatisation and – in some cases – with below standard health treatment.

Unfortunately, no encompassing and systematic monitoring and evaluation of the Austrian health care system takes place on a regular basis. Although the act on the healthcare reform of 2005 encloses the explicit rule of a bi-annual overall evaluation of the Austrian health system, this rule has actually never been implemented, and respective efforts remain fragmented until today (see OECD 2011a, 105ff.). Assessments based on standard indicators used to compare the impacts and outcomes of health systems from an international comparative point of view come to the conclusion that the Austrian health system – on the whole – works rather well (for similar results dealing with the case of Austria in some more detail see e.g. Habl et al 2010; Habl 2013; Aiginger 2011). The OECD (2011a), having assessed the Austrian health system in some more detail, reports that important outcome indicators, like life expectancy or healthy life years, have improved considerably over the past three decades. Furthermore, the OECD stresses that “all indicators confirm that the degree of equity in accessing services is among the highest in OECD” (ibid., 30). However, the assessment by the OECD does not really go into detail here. It at first instance presents what the OECD calls “the main international indicators of equity in health care”: i) only 2% of the population at the lowest income quintile report any difficulty of access to health services); ii) differences in contracted physician density across

territorial level 2 regions are very small; and iii) differences between women in different wealth quintiles in using cervical and breast cancer screening are very low" (ibid., 86). According to the OECD, the latter applies "despite private payments playing a relatively large role", "thanks to a system of exemptions which helped avoid inability to pay to impeach access" (ibid 86). This interpretation is in line with that presented by Hahl et al. (2010) and Hahl (2013), who also stresses the fact that people with low income are exempted from such co-payments in a number of cases and that the system offers a wide range of standard services available without co-payments (for most parts of the insured population).¹⁸ The OECD reports on survey results as well (e.g. from Eurobarometer), showing that Austria belongs to the group of top performers regarding perceived service access and general satisfaction with the health care system (ibid., 122f.).

More specific evaluations concerning the outcomes for children's health and their access to health services are largely missing. According to UNICEF (2013), Austria performs only mediocre for most of the applied health output indicators for children. This holds for infant mortality rates, low birthweight, as well as child and youth mortality rates. Furthermore, the immunisation rate (for measles, polio and DPT3 for children aged 12 to 23 months) is the lowest of all the countries assessed by UNICEF. The latter applies because a growing number of parents resist having their children immunised at an early age, because they are sceptical about side effects.

Experts on health issues assume that, irrespective of the generally rather good quality of the Austrian health system, health outcomes – like literally in any country – show a considerable degree of social stratification in Austria (see for an overview Hahl 2013). At the same time it is assumed that this also holds for children, e.g. due to the fact that people from poor households often show a tendency to consume less healthy food or to place generally less emphasis on health prevention (see e.g. Dimmel 2013). However, detailed evidence for these questions is largely missing, as no detailed assessments have recently been made about the social stratification of health outcomes at child-age.

At the same time the issue is rather low on the political agenda. What is debated here is a further improvement of health-screenings at child-age, an initiative that has been started pursuing the goal that curricula at schools should enclose at least one hour of sports per day ("*tägliche Turnstunde*"). Furthermore, programmes for more healthy meals at schools have been implemented and intensified.¹⁹

On the whole, currently the most evident deficit regarding the question of child health and poverty/social inclusion is the extremely limited empirical evidence in Austria on these questions. To improve the health system and health prevention in favour of children from lower social strata it would, as a first step, be necessary to examine the respective questions via new empirical research. Then, based on the respective

¹⁸ The Austrian health insurance covers a wide variety of different services, like for example primary health care services provided by contract physicians of the Austrian social health insurance funds, specialised in-patient and out-patient care, emergency care, dental services, prescription medicines, medical devices, ambulance services, preventive and health promotion services including vaccinations or screening examinations and rehabilitation services. Regarding health promotion for children in the age up to 5 months and for their mothers (as well during pregnancy) a special programme of free of charge health services and medical tests exists: the so-called mother-child-passport (*Mutter Kind Pass*) (see e.g.: <https://www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/content/8/Seite.082200.html>).

¹⁹ See e.g. http://www.bmg.gv.at/home/Startseite/aktuelle_Meldungen/Stoeger_Erfolgsgeschichte_der_Initiative_Unser_Schulbuffet_wird_fortgesetzt

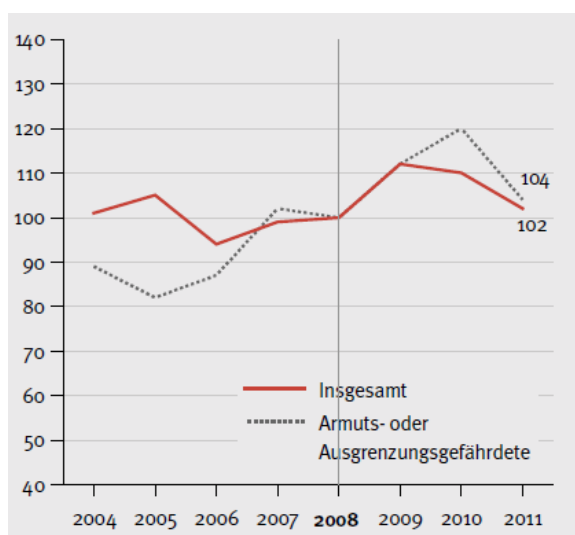
findings, new measures and strategies could be designed to deal with the respective challenges in an evidence-based way.

4.4. Housing and living environment

When compared to many other EU Member States, also the housing conditions for people from lower social strata appeared to be rather favourable in Austria for a long time. This is – inter alia caused by the fact that social housing by the municipalities and dwellings offered by “Limited Profit Housing Associations” (LPHAs) contribute to quite a large share of total housing (in sum about 20%). These housing opportunities are not only available for people and families with very low income but as well for the middle classes, coming along with a rather broad compound of people with different social backgrounds living in the respective dwellings. However, accession costs for such dwellings (especially regarding LPHAs) are quite substantive, which may lead to the partial exclusion of people with low income (see e.g. Fink/Grand 2009b; Perl 2008; Schoibl/Stöger 2013).

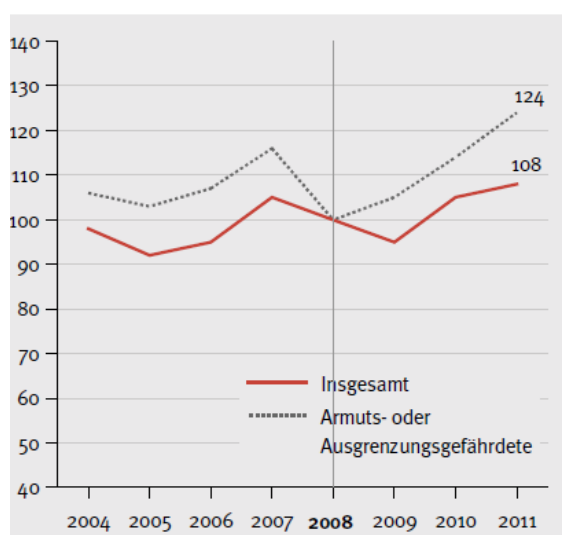
On the whole, as may be expected, people at risk of poverty or social exclusion more often face a problematic housing environment (noise, criminality and/or pollution) than people not at risk of poverty or social exclusion. According to EU-SILC 2011, for the first group this recently applied for a rate of 13.1% per cent, whereas the rate for the total population was 9.5% (Statistik Austria/BMASK 2012a, 103). In the years before 2010 the respective rate increased particularly for people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, but to some lesser degree as well for the total population. In 2011 for both groups the respective rates decreased, but they remained considerably higher for people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, whereas ten years ago (in 2004) there was almost no difference between people at risk of poverty or social exclusion and the average population (see *ibid.* and chart 15 below).

Chart 15: People facing a problematic housing environment (noise, pollution and/or criminality); in %; 2008=100



total
.....people at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion
Source: EU-SILC; Statistik Austria/BMASK (2012a, 103);
Note: in 2008 the share of people facing problematic housing conditions amounted to 9.3% at average of the total population and 12.6% for people at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion.

Chart 16: People facing very high housing costs (housing costs > 25% of yearly income); in %; 2008=100



total
.....people at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion
Source: EU-SILC; Statistik Austria/BMASK (2012a, 104);
Note: in 2008 the share of people facing very high housing costs amounted to 16.8% at average of the total population and 43.2% for people at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion.

So, on the whole, problematic housing environments, even for people at risk of poverty, appear to be of rather small significance in Austria, at least when compared with many other EU Member States. At the same time, and this appears to be more problematic, since 2008 a rising share of people has been confronted with very high expenses for housing (>25% of yearly household income). 18.2% of the overall population have been affected by this problem in 2011, which is the highest level since EU-SILC data have been available. A related development applies for people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with 53.7% of this group facing this phenomenon. Interestingly, households with children do generally not more often face such a housing cost overburden than households without children, as this phenomenon is very often found in one-person households. However, households of single parents (49%) and households with three or more children (21%) show above average rates of being affected (Statistik Austria/BMASK 2012b, 54).

On the whole, housing quality and housing environment remain to be rather favourable in Austria, also for people at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion. This means at the same time that for the time being tendencies towards "ghettoisation" etc. are of minor significance in Austria. However, what is evident is a rising housing cost burden, which becomes increasingly problematic for many people. This phenomenon both applies for the prices of owner-occupied flats and for rented flats, whereas new flats or renovated ones, fresh on the market, are often not subject to price regulation any more. On the other hand, people with "old" rental agreements that were subject to price regulation often pay very low rents. Against this background the range of individual housing costs appears to grow.

Up to recently, the problem of housing costs and homelessness has only sporadically been addressed in national politics. However, given the ever growing costs, some political players tried to put the issue on the agenda during the current elections rally. Outcomes and possible cornerstones of likely future reforms are completely unclear at the time of writing, but a "working group" has been installed at the level of the federal state²⁰ (a typical "Austrian solution" of dealing with problems for which a consensus/compromise is difficult to find).

4.5. Family support and alternative care

Family support and alternative care, incl. measures to prevent the need for alternative care, to the largest part fall within the competencies of the federal provinces and the municipalities. A wide range of respective services is available, but they appear to vary to a large degree between federal provinces. Publicly available information on the exact content, quality and outcomes of the respective services is extremely limited. For this reason it would be dubious to appreciate the actual strengths and weaknesses of these systems in this report. What would be necessary here is a major research project, assessing the different structures and measures in place, to give a closer idea of what is happening inside the "black box" of family support and alternative care. My reluctance to say something about family support and alternative care in this report is as well caused by the fact that it has become known to the public over the past two years or so that physical and sexual abuse in institutional alternative care was a common phenomenon at least up to the 1980s. These past problems are now getting analysed and assessed by different commissions etc. At the same time there appears to be a necessity to assess the systems currently in place, a task that to my knowledge has not been started on a broad basis up to now.

²⁰ <http://derstandard.at/1363706769174/Regierung-setzt-Arbeitsgruppe-ein>

4.6. Two most urgent areas of policy improvement

From my point of view (and also given the limited empirical knowledge of some issues; see sections 4.3. and 4.5. above), the two most urgent areas of policy improvement in this area are:

- Improving accessibility and quality as well as enhancing actual enrolment in institutional childcare and early childhood education to equalise different starting positions of children from different social strata to the largest possible degree.
- Reducing social stratification within the educational system by postponing the selection of pupils to different tracks of education to a later age; preferably via a "school for all" at the age 10-14.

5. Addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the European Semester

Poverty among children and youngsters is mentioned several times in the Austrian 2013 NRP (see NRP 2013). However, it is very narrowly framed there –at first instance as a question of women's participation in gainful employment and in the context of the problem of youth unemployment. Furthermore, the importance to guarantee basic educational skills is mentioned. The respective measures listed are ALMP-measures for women and youngsters at the transition from school to employment, plans to improve childcare facilities and related steps already taken, and the above mentioned reforms (see chapter 4.2) of the educational system.

At the same time no specific targets have been set in Austria for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion (but only for overall poverty and social exclusion). Furthermore, no specific monitoring arrangements exist concerning this topic.

To better integrate the Recommendation into the European Semester at the national level, Member States should be obliged to add an assessment of child-poverty and well-being to their next NRP. In Austria such an assessment would be a vital pre-condition for the development of a national strategy for the improvement of children's well-being and the reduction of child poverty. The major possible obstacle would be – at least in the case of Austria – that the NRP is not a strategic report, which at the same time shows the deficit of almost no analytical content. Furthermore, political commitment to the whole process of the European Semester does not appear to be very high. Against this background, the Austrian NRP is at first instance a more or less well-structured compilation on measures "anyhow decided". In other words: it does not come with any substantial political impact, e.g. in the sense of fostering national political debates on the one or other issue.

6. Mobilising relevant EU financial instruments

During the past financing-period (2007-2013) ESF projects in Austria had an emphasis on youth unemployment, and hereby especially on the transition from school to employment or apprenticeship. This, evidently, is in line with goals of improving children's well-being and reducing child poverty. A number of projects also pursued the goal to improve labour market participation and job-chances of women, some also of elderly people, which is in line with the CSRs for Austria.

Plans for the upcoming programming period are currently debated, and reportedly youth measures will most likely remain to be a focus area.

Given the results of the short assessment of the composition of child-poverty in Austria (see above chapter 2.1), special emphasis could in the future been placed on the goal of enhancing the labour market participation of women with a migration background (especially from non-EU/EFTA countries).

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