

# **D2.1. NATIONAL REPORT ON POLICIES THAT PROMOTE GENDER EMPOWERMENT**

## **RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH**



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# The ReIncluGen Project

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## Deliverable

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# National report on policies that promote gender empowerment

**Focus:** The report should focus on the general situation of women and women migrants. Supply general info concerning the national policy context.

**Timeframe:** from 2010 till today – add earlier developments adequate to national context

**Geographic unit/unit of analyses:** focus on national policies, but with relevant regional or local variations adequate to national context

**Instructions:** Please write a general overview of max. 2 pages (approx. 700 words) per heading (e.g.2.1.1, 2.1.2. for each of them no more than 2 pages). Focus on providing a general overview and specify some particularities that are relevant for your country if needed.

# 1. GENERAL CONTEXT

## 1.1 Definition of gender empowerment and inclusion (in policy documents)

Gender empowerment in Austria follows the definitions of international and EU policy documents. The main focus is on gender equality (e.g. in education, the labour market, leadership positions and pay) as well as the protection and support of women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the most comprehensive international legal document guaranteeing gender equality. The first four articles of CEDAW have constitutional status in Austria (B-VG), which was ratified in 1982. The Austrian Constitution (B-VG) explicitly provides for equal rights for men and women and prohibits discrimination based on sex (Art. 7). In addition, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, is a programme for the empowerment of women. It commits 189 countries to promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights in all spheres of society. Also relevant to gender equality is the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which contains a catalogue of fundamental and human rights that have been in force since 1953. The ECHR also has constitutional status in Austria. In addition, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states that the European Union aims to reduce social exclusion and discrimination, promote social justice and protection, equality between men and women, solidarity between generations and the protection of children's rights.

Various EU directives adopted at national level, such as the Directive on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment between men and women in matters of employment and occupation and the Revised Framework Agreement on Parental Leave, aim to promote gender equality in the workplace. In addition, Austria as a federal state has implemented several national laws as well as local regulations in the 9 federal states to promote gender equality in education, employment and political representation. The current composition of the Federal Ministries BMBWF (Education, Research, Science), BMSGPK (Social Affairs, Health, Consumer Protection), BML (Agriculture, Regional Economy and Water), BMAW (Labour and Economy) and BMK (Environment, Mobility, Innovation, Technology) are the political bodies working to reduce national and regional gender segregation in the areas of education, employment, health, research and social affairs.

## **1.2 Main stakeholders of gender empowerment and inclusion policy**

In Austria, due to the federal structure, gender empowerment and inclusion policies are led and implemented by different actors at different levels. Until its reorganisation in 2022 and integration into the Federal Chancellery, the Federal Ministry for Women, Family and Youth was responsible for the development and implementation of policies, programmes and projects to address gender inequalities. The task force works closely with other ministry departments and stakeholders such as the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO), the largest and most influential business association in Austria. The Chamber runs various programmes and initiatives aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship, networking opportunities and leadership development (chapter 2).

Various government-funded women's organisations also play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality, women's rights and empowerment, raising awareness of gender-based discrimination and violence, and lobbying for legislative reforms to promote gender equality and women's rights. (Chapter 9) In addition, national and regional trade unions (ÖGB) are key actors in promoting gender equality in the workplace. They work to close the pay gap and promote opportunities for women, as well as transparency of earnings and the inclusion of gender-sensitive policies in collective bargaining agreements. (Ch.2)

Local governments also contribute to promoting gender equality and empowering women in their communities and local structures. They implement policies and initiatives that address gender inequalities in areas such as education, health care and social services as an extension of national policies, with room for deviation due to the federal system. Finally, civil society organizations (CSOs) play an important role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. They work to raise awareness of gender-based discrimination and violence, and provide support, counselling and services to women who have experienced gender-based injustice, violence or discrimination. The many active CSOs range greatly in size, focus and agenda. (Ch.9)

## **1.3 Embeddedness of gender empowerment in local and national context**

Gender empowerment is embedded in Austria's legal framework at both national and local levels. The country has strong laws and policies to promote gender equality, such as the Federal Act on the Implementation of Equality between Women and Men. The Act prohibits gender discrimination and requires public and private institutions to promote gender equality in their activities.

At the local level, many cities have adopted gender mainstreaming strategies to ensure that a gender perspective is integrated into all decision-making processes. Vienna, for example, has established a Department for Gender Equality and Diversity to promote gender-sensitive policies and practices.

Austria also has a growing representation of women in politics, with women holding around 37% of seats in the National Council. In addition, Austria has made significant progress in reducing the gender pay gap from 23.5% to 18.8% between 2011 and 2021

([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/SDG\\_05\\_20/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/SDG_05_20/default/table?lang=en)) and increasing women's access to education and employment opportunities.

However, challenges remain. Discourses on tackling gender-based violence, serious inequalities in reproductive and care work, unequal access to stereotypical labour markets, drastic gaps in the pension system and improving the representation of women in higher social and economic positions are fairly present in the political sphere.

#### **1.4 Role of international declarations, documents, and policies**

International declarations and policies play a significant role in shaping gender empowerment, women's rights, and policy in Austria. Austria is a signatory to several international agreements and conventions that provide a framework for gender equality policies. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) outlines the principles of equalisation and prohibits all forms of discrimination against women. Austria has also ratified the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which outlines a comprehensive framework for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. The Istanbul convention against violence against women and domestic violence has also been ratified. Austrian Federal follow EU directives on equal treatment of men and women in employment and occupation.

At the national level, Austria has implemented several policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality, which are in line with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, such as the Austrian Federal Act on Gender Equality (B-GIBG), which prohibits discrimination based on gender and promotes gender mainstreaming in all policy areas. Austria also has a National Action Plan for Gender Equality (GEP), defining specific objectives and measures to promote gender equality in various areas, including education, employment, health, migration, and social security. As of 2022, Gender Equality Plans also form a mandatory part in public bodies, higher education and research departments, demanding ongoing education and work on guidelines for implementation.

#### **1.5 Trends in civil society**

Austria's civil society has been working actively in promoting gender empowerment, gender equality, and policy on women. There has been a growing awareness of gender issues in the country over the last decade, and many organizations have been established to advocate for women's rights and gender equality. Overall, civil society initiatives play a vital role in promoting gender empowerment and equality in Austria and they range from small grassroots organizations to large NGOs and advocacy groups. Some

notable civil society initiatives in Austria include the Austrian Women's Shelter Network<sup>1</sup>, the Platform 20000 Women<sup>2</sup>, and the Women's Advisory Council<sup>3</sup>. (Ch. 9.3)

The Austrian Women's Shelter Network provides shelter and support to women and children who are victims of domestic violence. This network consists of over 60 women's shelters across Austria, which provide temporary accommodation, counselling, and legal advice to women in need.

The Platform 20000 Women is a network of women who advocate for the advancement of women in politics and business. The group seeks to increase the number of women in leadership positions, advocate in high intensity discourses of gender issues and improve gender equality in the workplace.

Finally, the Women's Advisory Council is a governmental advisory board that works to promote gender equality and empower women in Austria. The council advises the government on policy issues related to women's rights and advocates for women's participation in decision-making processes.

The "#MeToo" movement and recently present discourses of sexism in academia and theatre businesses had a considerable impact on the country, leading to a greater overall public awareness of sexual harassment and assault, and an increased demand for accountability and action, civil and political alike. However, there are still challenges to be addressed, including the underrepresentation of women in political decision-making and high academia as well as the persistence of gender stereotypes in society. In recent years, there has been a big focus on the "gender pay gap" and several initiatives have been launched to address it. There has also been progress in increasing women's representation in leadership positions, both in the public and private sectors, although far from level of true equalisation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the disproportionate impact on women, particularly in terms of job losses and increased care responsibilities. Overall, while progress is being made, there is still much work to be done in several areas to achieve true gender equality, greater sensibilisation to various forms of violence and to further intersectional gender empowerment in Austrian civil society.

## 1.6 Situation concerning migration

Austria is an important destination and transit country for migrants from Eastern and South Eastern Europe, as well as from Turkey, other middle Eastern country, and the Ukraine. Therefore, social and political issues of migration and women with migration background are significantly present, with more than 20% of the population having a migration background and about half of the migrant population being women, facing various challenges in terms of integration and structural discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser AÖF. URL: [<https://www.a oef.at/>]; (04.23).

<sup>2</sup> 20000Frauen: URL: [<http://www.20000frauen.at/>]; (04.23).

<sup>3</sup> BÖFV/NWC. URL: [<http://www.ncwaustria.org/>]; (04.23).



Migrant women are often more vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty due to the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class in multiple forms of political, cultural, and labour discrimination. They face considerable obstacles in accessing education, healthcare, employment, and housing. Language and cultural barriers can further hinder their integration into Austrian society. Despite the challenges, many women with migration background play an essential role in Austria's economy and social fabric. They contribute to the workforce, provide essential care services for children and elderly relatives, and engage in community activities (cf. Federal Chancellery 2020).

Austria has developed policies and initiatives on a political and civil level, aimed at promoting the integration of women with migration background, including language and integration courses, measures to address discrimination and racism, and support for migrant women's organizations. The country also ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and has adopted several national action plans for gender equality and migrant integration.

However, migrant women's rights and well-being are still not fully recognized or protected. Reports of discrimination, violence, and exploitation against women with migration background, especially those in vulnerable situations such as refugees and undocumented migrants, are still prevalent. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the challenges especially faced by migrant women, including job loss and increased risk of domestic violence.

## **2. LABOUR MARKET POLICY**

### **2.1 Legal context**

With the adoption of the Federal Act on Equal Treatment of Women and Men (B-GIBG 1993) thirty years ago, and its predecessor from 1979, which focused primarily on the wage regulation of women and men (GIBG 1979), the general basis of the legal framework for non-discrimination and equal treatment in the working environment, as well as the corresponding outlines in continuing education and gender-specific professional functions, has long been formally established in Austria. Since the original edition of 1993, several additions and adaptations have been made, especially in the version of 2004, and entries such as language-based equal treatment and the formal distinction between general and sexual harassment have been added (cf. RIS B-GIBG 2023). On the institutional side, the Federal Chancellery has an Equal Treatment Commission, which is composed of professional representatives from the relevant ministries, experienced staff from the fields of federal, social and labour law, as well as representatives of the public service and the trade unions involved. In general, the commission's task is to provide free and confidential legal advice and counselling in cases of ethical, religious, age or sexual discrimination, gender discrimination and violation of the rules for the advancement of women in all working environments. The explicit mention and strong involvement of non-governmental actors and civil representatives of women's interests in the relevant processes is essential for the processes in practice and extends the legal distribution of task forces and appointed agents in this regard. (cf. B-GIBG 2023 §23/23a./26).

Due to the federal national organisation, there are nine regional adaptations of individual equal treatment and anti-discrimination laws, resulting in currently 16 different legal texts as listed by the Ombudswoman, probably due to the different scope and separation of municipal equal treatment law in some provinces.

### **2.2 Practices and implementation**

According to the current agenda of the Federal Chancellery with regard to the overall challenges for gender equality in the labour market, Austria has one of the highest gender pay gaps within the EU., despite the significant decrease over the last decade from 23.5% in 2011 to 18.8% in 2021 (Eurostat). In a recent national NGO report on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the gender pay gap in 2018 was 22% of the hourly wage differential (cf. KLA 2018:15). Furthermore, women were over-represented in low-income sectors at 23.1%, which is directly related to part-time employment, which has increased as women's employment has grown in recent decades. In order to address the underlying issues of economic independence and the resulting financial insecurity in later life due to problematic low pension coverage (overall gender pension gap 41%), the current policy agenda has implemented strategies such as the promotion of women in leadership and management positions and the improvement of pay and conditions in the care, health and social sectors,

with the 2022 Care Reform being the latest undertaking in the current period. This was brought to the fore by women's struggles during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Income transparency measures include mandatory income reporting for companies of a certain size in the private sector, a wage calculator tool with an average of the gender gap for sectors, and a toolbox of good practices for adapting further equalisation measures following the income report. Joint support for the production, analysis and communication of the pay reports is provided by the Women and Equal Opportunities Section of the Austrian Chamber of Labour (AK), the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman and the Women's Section of the Austrian Trade Union Federation (OeGB).

The LEA Foundation ("Let's Empower Austria"), established in 2022, aims to promote economic autonomy and equality between women and men, with strong support from the national government. In addition, several business initiatives, and the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO) offer various programmes for female entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship, leadership and the working environment. Another initiative launched by the Ministry of Climate Protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology is "FemTech". This is a tailor-made funding programme that supports women in starting a career in research and promotes gender equality in applied research as well as gender equality within research projects.

### **2.3 Political discourse**

Despite the formal measures and policy strategies presented, the public debates on real equality for women in the national labour market highlight various aspects and issues that remain to be addressed. Areas such as the remaining gender pay gap, professional activity, and women in leadership positions, professionalisation and unemployment, retirement age and pension inequalities, and reconciling work and care are highlighted. Part-time work by women is identified as a high risk to their financial security and independence in later life, with significant differences in childcare responsibilities as a cause of part-time work. In the extreme case of part-time work for adults with children under 15, the gap is clearly visible, with 72.8% of women and only 6.8% of men working part-time (Statistik Austria 2021; cf. Statistik Austria 2018:30ff.).

Furthermore, the specific demands of national civil society organisations (KLA 2018:15) include various aspects that are not sufficiently addressed, such as the coverage of all-day childcare, the actual implementation of wage transparency and binding linkage with measures against inequalities, a minimum living wage and the reorganisation of family support. Furthermore, gender sensitivity is emphasised as a fundamental principle of all pedagogical training and there is a general increase in gender sensitivity in vocational and educational guidance. Finally, access to the labour market for women with migration background and to the labour market for women with a higher level of education in general, where the

tendency is for men to occupy higher positions, is still the subject of civil and political debate (cf. KLA 2018; cf. Geisberger 2020).

### **3. EDUCATION POLICY**

#### **3.1 Legal context**

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the Austrian federal government has committed itself in several ministerial resolutions to the sustainable implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy in all policy areas. Gender mainstreaming aims at gender equality and requires the consideration of gender aspects also in the field of school and education policy. Gender mainstreaming in schools means the integration of the gender perspective in all areas of learning and teaching, in the organisation of schools and in the actions of all those involved, in order to enable gender-fair learning.

Since the introduction of performance-based budgeting in 2013, the Austrian federal ministries have further developed gender equality goals, with a focus on closing the gender gap in MINT (mathematics, engineering, natural sciences and technology) and EHW (education, health and welfare). The various federal ministries BMBWF (Education, Research and Science), BMSGPK (Social, Health, Care, Consumer Protection), BML (Agriculture, Regional Economy and Water), BMAW (Labour and Economy) and BMK (Environment, Mobility, Innovation, Technology) aim to reduce gender segregation in various broad areas such as education, employment, social services and research. In education, the policy 'Reflexive Gender Pedagogy and Equality', which builds on the 1995 policy 'Education for the Equality of Women and Men', was last published on 31 October 2018. It aims to expand opportunities beyond gender stereotypes in schools by providing a framework and evidence base for discussion and pedagogical practice. Teachers, principals and administrators are responsible for implementing the policy at the regional level.

#### **3.2 Practices and implementation (local, regional, national)**

An important milestone in reducing gender segregation in subject selection was achieved by combining the elective subjects of textiles and technical work in grade 5 through the amendment to the School Organisation Act of 24 April 2012 (section 21b) and the School Amendment Act 2016 (Federal Law Gazette I no. 56/2016). This enables both boys and girls to acquire basic knowledge in both areas and is intended to counteract gender-stereotyped selection processes at a very early stage.

The IBOBB concept of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the compulsory subject "Career Orientation" for grades 7 and 8 explicitly include gender-reflective training and career guidance. Ongoing in-school training and parental involvement also play a crucial role in reducing gender segregation at the local level. In addition, training courses for careers advisors and coordinators at

teacher training colleges include a compulsory module on gender and diversity issues to broaden the perspectives in the training of future teachers.

Reducing horizontal gender segregation in higher education is therefore a key objective of the strategy for the social dimension in higher education in order to increase the proportion of female and male students in each field of higher education. According to national statistics (Geisberger 2020), women have made significant progress in terms of educational attainment. In 2016, 19% of women aged 25-64 had a university degree, higher than the 16% of men with the same qualification. However, in 2017, only 3.4% of employed women held managerial positions, compared to 7.9% of men. Even with the same or higher level of education, women were less likely to hold managerial positions and often only held mid-level jobs. For example, among employees with secondary technical and vocational education, significantly more women (57%) than men (29%) hold only middle-level positions. Similarly, among those with tertiary education, women (24%) are more likely to be in middle management than men (12%), while significantly more men (20%) than women (7%) are in managerial positions.

### **3.3 Political discourse**

Early school leaving and educational poverty remain relevant issues for gender equality policies in education, especially for young women with a migrant background. For this group, the risk of dropping out of school is almost three times higher than average (Geisberger 2020). 29% of girls aged 15-24 with a migration background have at most compulsory schooling and are not enrolled in further education (compared to 11% in: Statistik Austria: Educational Career Monitoring 2012). There is an obvious lack of further studies on the causes of the high drop-out rate among girls with a migration background. Therefore, there is also a lack of empirical evidence for targeted measures to reduce possible reasons for dropping out. However, it is assumed that social background, educational inheritance and gender roles have a stronger influence on the at-risk group of women from a migrant background than is generally discussed for school drop-outs. Gender roles, pregnancy, lack of family support and bullying are said to determine the dropout rates of women, while for men, conflicts, punishment, exclusion and special educational needs are more often cited as reasons for dropping out (cf. KLA 2018). Studies on the influence of social background suggest that girls coming from families with a lower socio economic status and lower levels of education have lower chances of upward mobility than boys. Nevertheless, Heilemann (2021) points out that for the period under review, the rate of Austrian men and women completing upper secondary and post-secondary education is relatively similar, while for women from third countries it is slightly higher than for their male counterparts, 24% compared to 20% (cf. Heilemann 2018:12). With regard to the issues of general and equal access, the promotion of women's educational choices in STEM professions and the persistent inequality in the pathways to stereotypical careers still persist and urgently require further research and policy attention (cf. KLA 2018).

## 4. HEALTH POLICY

### 4.1 Legal context

There are several laws in Austria that protect and promote women's health. The most important ones are listed below. The Equal Treatment Act ("Gleichbehandlungsgesetz", GIBG) prohibits discrimination based on sex and gender. This includes among other things, access to health care and medical services. The Maternity Protection Act ("Mutterschutzgesetz", MSchG) protects pregnant women and mothers from workplace hazards. Among other things, it regulates maternity leave and protection against dismissal during pregnancy and breastfeeding. The Reproductive Medicine Act ("Fortpflanzungsmedizingesetz", FmedG) regulates the medical options for fulfilling the desire to have a child and the handling of embryos and oocytes.

### 4.2 Practices and implementation (local, regional, national)

Austria has implemented various measures to address women's health issues such as breast and cervical cancer screening, contraception, pregnancy screening, mother-child programmes, and reproductive health measures.

The Austrian Cancer Prevention Act (Krebsvorsorgegesetz) provides for free mammography screening for women aged 45 to 69 years and PAP smear tests for women aged 25 to 65 years as part of free preventive medical check-ups. However, one of the barriers is the limited availability of information in several languages on the official health care portals (ÖGK).<sup>4</sup>

In addition, Austria has established women's health centres, to provide women with information, counselling, and medical services related to reproductive and sexual health. These centres also provide psychosocial support, legal advice, and social services for women who have experienced violence or discrimination. Specifically for women with migration background, Austria has implemented several measures to improve their access to health care, including translation and interpreting services, and cultural mediators in health care settings. The Austrian Integration Act (Integrationsgesetz) requires that all migrants, including migrant women, receive orientation and integration courses that include information on the Austrian health care system.

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<sup>4</sup> Österreichische Gesundheitskasse ÖGK: Frauen- und Gendergesundheit. URL: [https://www.gesundheitskasse.at/cdscontent/?contenthttps://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Frauen--und-Gendergesundheit.htmltid=10007.878943&portal=oegkportal]; (04.23).

Regarding health during pregnancy and in the early stages of life, the “Mother and Child Pass” (“Mutter-Kind-Pass”)<sup>5</sup> programme in Austria provides a health check-up system for pregnant women and children up to the age of five as well as comprehensible information on legal measures concerning parental leave and financial benefits. (cf. BMSGPK 2020). The Breastfeeding Initiative in the Policy of the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs (BMSGPK)<sup>6</sup> aims to promote and support breastfeeding as the optimal way to feed infants. The initiative includes measures such as education and counselling for expectant parents (BMSGPK 2021a), support for breastfeeding in public places, provision of lactation rooms in workplaces, and policies to promote maternity leave and flexible working arrangements. However, the information is only available in German, which excludes migrant women with limited language skills.

### ***Reproductive health (contraception and abortion rights and access)***

Reproductive health, according to the ICPD (International Conference of Population and Development) Programme of Action, encompasses a state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of conditions or diseases, affecting the reproductive system and its functions. For women, this means free choice of reproductive life and contraception, free choice of family planning and number of children, access to education programmes, access to appropriate health care and counselling, and a life free from sexual coercion. In 2022, WHO also defined improving access to comprehensive abortion care as essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on health and well-being (SDG3) and gender equality (SDG5). Furthermore, care and counselling for women with unintended pregnancies is part of primary health care. More details are discussed in 4.3 below. Accordingly, low-threshold, comprehensive and safe access for girls and women is also required in Austria. Since July 2020, the drug Mifegyne can officially be prescribed by gynaecologists in private practice for women and girls affected by abortion.<sup>7</sup>

In cooperation with health professionals, the Ministry of Health has also compiled information on the sexual and reproductive health of migrant women. There they can find specific information on reproductive health, such as information on culturally specific contact points for psychosocial care for migrant women, specific support for migrant women during pregnancy and childbirth, centres for

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<sup>5</sup> BMSGPK (2023): Mutter-Kind-Pass. URL: [<https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Eltern-und-Kind/Mutter-Kind-Pass.html>]; (04.23).

<sup>6</sup> BMSGPK (2023): Stillen und Beikost. URL: [<https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Eltern-und-Kind/Stillen-und-Beikost.html>]; (04.23).

<sup>7</sup> BMSGPK (2022): Frauengesundheitsbericht 2022. URL: [<https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Frauen--und-Gendergesundheit.html>]

intercultural sexuality education and sex education, contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and facilities on violence and FGM (female genital mutilation).<sup>8</sup>

### ***Free annual medical check-ups (Gesundenvorsorgeuntersuchung)***

In Austria, it is possible to be screened free of charge as part of the annual health medical check-up. This is available to Austrian residents aged 18 and over, who are insured with the Austrian Health Insurance Fund (Österreichische Gesundheitskasse, ÖGK) or another social insurance institution. For persons who are not insured, a replacement document of the e-card is issued by the Social insurance local office based on their address registration, which grants them access to the annual check-up as uninsured persons. For women, this also includes the annual PAP smear test for cervical cancer screening and the breast cancer screening programme.<sup>9</sup>

### **4.3 Political discourse**

This section deals with the political discourse on health policy regarding reproductive health, including birth control and abortion. According to the Women's Health Report of 2022, abortion is still part of the Austrian Criminal Code, but is not punishable by law within the first three months of pregnancy due to the "term solution." However, abortions conducted after this period are only legal under certain conditions. Doctors and health professionals are not required to perform or assist in abortions, except in emergency cases. The cost of the procedure is borne by the patient, which can disproportionately affect women from low socio-economic backgrounds. **Access to abortion is limited and only available in certain regions.** Specifically, public hospitals do not offer the service in the federal states of Burgenland, Tyrol, and Vorarlberg. Abortion in public hospitals is only available in Vienna, Lower Austria and Salzburg<sup>10</sup>. However, since 2020 the drug Mifegyne is available on prescription in private practices, providing additional access to abortion. The Women's Health Action Plan 2018 calls for equal access to health services, including abortion, but the freedom of individual doctors to perform or refuse the procedure remains unaffected.

Hormonal contraceptives, such as the birth control pill, injection, and IUD, are not covered by health insurance in Austria and must be paid for privately, which can be a financial burden for people from low socio-economic backgrounds (ASVG 2023 §120/1; §133/2). While this is due to the argument that

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<sup>8</sup> BMSGPK (2022): Interkultureller Umgang im Kontext mit sexueller und reproduktiver Gesundheit. URL: [https://www.sozialministerium.at/dam/jcr:bad3c533-eab9-4148-a4f2-c0d393d05878/Interkultureller\\_Umgang\\_im\\_Kontext\\_mit\\_sexueller\\_und\\_reproduktiver\\_Gesundheit.pdf](https://www.sozialministerium.at/dam/jcr:bad3c533-eab9-4148-a4f2-c0d393d05878/Interkultureller_Umgang_im_Kontext_mit_sexueller_und_reproduktiver_Gesundheit.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Österreichische Gesundheitskasse: Vorsorgeuntersuchung. <https://www.gesundheitskasse.at/cdscontent/?contentid=10007.878943>

<sup>10</sup>



pregnancy prevention is not a disease and therefore not covered by insurance, there is evidence that covering the costs of long-term hormonal contraception could increase use rates and decrease unwanted pregnancies and potential health risks (Fiala and Parzer 2019).

In 2019 and shortly before the election of the new National Council in Austria, the parties' opinions on contraception and abortion were collected through a questionnaire by the Museum of Contraception and Abortion. Thus, not surprisingly, ÖVP (the Austrian People's Party, conservative) and FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party, right-wing) answered every question in the direction of liberalising abortion and barrier-free access to contraception with a "no". Apart from the ÖVP, all other parties surveyed [SPÖ (Social Democrats), FPÖ, Greens, Neos (liberal), Jetzt (did not make into the National Council)] were in favour of making the IUD or the pill cheaper. The Greens, Neos, SPÖ and Jetzt also advocated free contraceptives for young people and women on low incomes.<sup>11</sup>

Since October 2015, the Department of Social Affairs of the federal state Tyrol, has been providing financial support for abortions and contraceptives through a so-called "Hardship Fund" (HFF). Since October 2018, the Hardship Fund has been divided between two departments: financial support for contraceptives is provided by the Department of Health, and the financial support for abortions is provided by the Social Welfare Department. This "Hardship Fund" has been entrusted to DOWAS for Women as a member of the Action Committee for management and implementation.<sup>12</sup> DOWAS is a CSO, that provides support to homeless and job seeking women. They offer counselling, guidance, assisted living options and livelihood assistance for women, to help them change their life situation.<sup>13</sup>

The resources of this fund are available to all social institutions in Tyrol after the verification of the personal and financial situation of the applicant. In this way, low-income women can obtain funding for an abortion or contraceptives anonymously and with as little red tape as possible.<sup>14</sup>

## **Birth**

A topic that has become increasingly relevant in Austria in recent months is obstetric violence during childbirth. More and more women are daring to talk about it and make their stories public. The World Health Organisation (WHO lists obstetric violence as a global priority issue and includes physical abuse,

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<sup>11</sup> See also: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000109058070/wie-die-parteien-zu-abtreibung-und-verhuetung-steinen>

<sup>12</sup> Aktionskomitee Schwangerschaftsabbruch (2023): Finanzielle Hilfen. URL <https://www.schwangerschaftsabbruch-tirol.at/finanzhilfen.php>

<sup>13</sup> See also "DOWAS für Frauen":

<sup>14</sup> Also, France and Germany have implemented cost-free access to contraceptives for girls and young women, and have seen a decrease in unwanted pregnancies as a result (Fathalla 2020). With an increase in public awareness and availability of contraception, individuals could and should have more control over their reproductive choices and protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases.

humiliation, and verbal abuse. This also includes neglect of the woman giving birth and interventions without consent. However, the issue remains a blind spot for many and is only slowly entering the public discourse. There are no official figures for Austria.<sup>15</sup> A particularly hot topic is the continued use of the “Kristeller” method, which is considered controversial, has been banned in countries such as the UK, and is not recommended by the WHO. The use of controversial techniques to speed up hospital deliveries could be linked to a shortage of medical staff, overcrowded hospitals, and overworked professionals.<sup>16</sup> The issue has yet to fully enter the political discourse, but it has been picked up by the media.

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<sup>15</sup> Dallinger & Opis (2023): Wenn die Geburt zur Gewalterfahrung wird. URL:

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000143998357/wenn-die-geburt-zur-gewalterfahrung-wird>

<sup>16</sup> John (2023): Überlastung, Personalmangel, Kostenexplosion: Was hinter den Nöten der Spitäler steckt. URL:

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000142781701/ueberlastung-personalmangel-kostenexplosion-was-hinter-den-noeten-der-spitaeler-steckt>

## 5. FAMILY POLICY

### 5.1 Legal context

In Austria, family policy is mainly regulated by the Marriage Law Act (EheG 2018) and the Federal Act on Parental Leave (MSchG 1979/2023). The Marriage Law Act regulates matters such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and maintenance obligations. It also sets out the legal framework for adoption and fostering, which is particularly present in the recent legal updates on same-sex marriage, partnership and adoption (VfGH 2019).<sup>17</sup>

Regarding parental leave, the Federal Act on Parental Leave provides for a period of leave of up to two years, which can be taken by either parent or shared between them. During this period, the parent/s is/are entitled to receive a certain amount of financial support per child<sup>18</sup> which is conditioned on permanent residence, partly on maximum income and registered medical checks during pregnancy and the child's early life (Mother-Child-Pass Initiative). According to official sources<sup>19</sup> approved asylum seekers are also entitled to child benefit programmes (cf. KBGG 2/§2).

In addition to these legal frameworks, Austria has implemented various family policies aimed at supporting families with children. For example, there are programmes to support families with childcare, such as subsidies for childcare costs, tax relief for childcare expenses, and programmes for to subsidise home ownership or rental costs.<sup>20</sup>

However, despite the legal and policy framework, families in Austria still face some challenges. For example, the cost of childcare can be prohibitive for many families and the availability of social housing is often limited, especially in rural areas. In addition, there are still concerns about the gendered division of labour within families, with women still taking on most childcare responsibilities and being significantly more likely than men to work only part-time, despite also being able to take childcare leave (cf. Statistik Austria 2018).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Federal Law Act on Partnership (2023): URL:

[<https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20006586>]; (04.23)

<sup>18</sup> Federal Chancellery (2023): Childcare Allowance. URL:

[<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/en/agenda/family/family-benefits/childcare-allowance.html>]; (04.23).

<sup>19</sup> Federal Government (2023): URL:

[[https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie\\_und\\_partnerschaft/geburt/3/2/3/1/Seite.080620.html](https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/geburt/3/2/3/1/Seite.080620.html)]; (04.23).

<sup>20</sup> Federal Government (2023): URL:

[[https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie\\_und\\_partnerschaft/kinderbetreuung.html](https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/kinderbetreuung.html)]; (04.23).

<sup>21</sup> Statistik Austria (2023): [<https://www.statistik.at/statistiken/bevoelkerung-und-soziales/gender-statistiken/vereinbarkeit-von-beruf-und-familie>]; (04.23).

## 5.2 Practices and implementation (local, regional, national)

The Family Policy Advisory Board is under the responsibility of the Federal Chancellery and advises the government on matters related to family policy and the redistribution of family burdens.<sup>22</sup> As a platform of political discourse, the family-policy talks have been instated as a medium of exchange of scientific knowledge and political agendas on matters such as childcare, digital education of families or changing role models.<sup>23</sup> In continuation and also part of the Federal Chancellery's core agenda on family, parental education seminars are offered by the network for Parental Education<sup>24</sup> to help parents acquire knowledge about child development, strengthen their partnership, learn conflict resolution, recognize potential problems, and develop their own parenting strategies. These seminars are organized by non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and family organizations, with funding from the Federal Chancellery Division Family and Youth.<sup>25</sup>

There are also more flexible modes of childcare and dynamic models such as foster grandmother/grandfather concepts for day-to-day attention to children ("Leihoma/Leihopa"). This could be a successful practice serving both the elderly at risk of loneliness or familial isolation, while at the same time supporting young families who do not have grandparents nearby.<sup>26</sup>

### *Maternity/Paternity leave in Austria*

In Austria there is a legal entitlement to parental leave, which means that the employer is not allowed to refuse it. Employees are entitled to parental leave until the day before the child's second birthday and if they are living in the same household with the child. It begins at the end of the protection period after giving birth for the parent who claims the parental leave first. The protection period usually lasts eight weeks, but can also be longer. In the mother's case, maternity leave may also begin after annual or sick leave.

Parental leave has to last at least two months and might also be extended. It can be shared between the parents twice, which means that a total of three parental leave parts are allowed (e.g., first mother, then father and then again mother), with each part lasting at least two months. However, mother and father may not take parental leave for the same child at the same time. Only in the case of the first change

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<sup>22</sup> Federal Chancellery (2023): Familienpolitischer Beirat. URL: [www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/agenda/familie/familienpolitik/familienpolitischer-beirat.html]; (04.23).

<sup>23</sup> Federal Chancellery (2023): Familienpolitische Gespräche. URL: [www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/agenda/familie/familienpolitik/familienpolitische-gespraech.html]; (04.23).

<sup>24</sup> Elternbildung (2023): URL: [https://www.eltern-bildung.at/]; (04.23).

<sup>25</sup> Federal Chancellery (2023): Parental Education. URL: [https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/en/agenda/family/parental-education.html]; (04.23).

<sup>26</sup> Federal Government (2023): Leihomas/Leihopas. URL: [https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie\_und\_partnerschaft/kinderbetreuung/2/Seite.370180.html]; (04.23).

between the parents, an overlap of one month is possible. In this case, the parental leave may only last until the end of the 23<sup>rd</sup> month of the child's life. During maternity leave, mothers and fathers can be marginally employed either with their own employer or with another employer if the compensation in the calendar month does not exceed the marginal earnings threshold (2022: 485.85 euros, 2023: 500.91 euros).<sup>27</sup>

However, although the possibility of paternity leave has existed for more than 30 years, in Austria it is usually the mothers who stay at home after the birth of a child. Only two out of ten fathers interrupt their working life, mostly just for a few months. This is the result of the current re-entry monitoring of the Chamber of Labour in Vienna (Arbeiterkammer Wien). Only two percent of fathers interrupt their employment for three to six months, only one percent for more than six months. Other important findings are: The higher the father's income, the more uncommon it is that they go on paternity leave. If they go, it usually lasts no longer than three months. When the mother earns more, it is more likely that fathers stay at home. There are also sectoral differences. In the social service sector, paternity leave is quite common whereas in the finance and insurance sector the number of men who claim paternity leave is significantly lower. Paternity leave is also more widely distributed in rural areas, which, however, can be linked to the childcare situation in the countryside.<sup>28</sup> Men also do not experience a disadvantage in income when they make use of paternity leave. In many cases they even earn more after their return. Women on the other hand, are longer on maternity leave and part-time employed, which has effects on their salaries and their pension. (see also Ch. 8)

### 5.3 Political discourse

A central issue that has been present in the broader discourse is domestic and public violence against women, be it physical, verbal or rhetorically implicit. The Austrian Criminal Code criminalises practically all forms of violence against women and domestic violence included in the Istanbul Convention (CEDAW). However, there are still procedural deficiencies in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes, which in practice lead to low conviction rates. The lack of a gender-specific understanding of violence against women and domestic violence is partly due to a lack of awareness in the training of prosecutors and judges. Although the four-year vocational training includes some seminars on violence against

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<sup>27</sup> BMAW (2023): Elternkarenz. URL:

[https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/arbeit\\_und\\_pension/elternkarenz\\_und\\_elternteilzeit/Seite.3590007.html#:~:t\\_ext=Arbeitnehmerinnen%20und%20Arbeitnehmer%20haben%20Anspruch,der%20Schutzfrist%20nach%20der%20Geburt](https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/arbeit_und_pension/elternkarenz_und_elternteilzeit/Seite.3590007.html#:~:t_ext=Arbeitnehmerinnen%20und%20Arbeitnehmer%20haben%20Anspruch,der%20Schutzfrist%20nach%20der%20Geburt).

<sup>28</sup> Federal Chamber of Labour (2021): Wiedereinstiegsmonitoring Österreich und Bundesländer, 5. Fassung (2020-2021). URL: <https://www.lrsocialresearch.at/sozialforschung/archiv-de/757-Wiedereinstiegsmonitoring+%C3%96sterreich+und+Bundesl%C3%A4nder%2C+5.+Fassung>

women and children, they are not extensive enough to provide a comprehensive understanding of such complex issues as structural inequality, gender bias, stereotyping, and victim trauma (AÖF/IST 2016). Moreover, there appear to be no or insufficient guidelines for dealing with cases of violence against women and children or domestic violence in general. This is particularly alarming according to the Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters (AÖF) because these cases often involve extremely dangerous perpetrators who pose an immediate risk to the health or even the lives of the victims. If not appropriately addressed, this can lead to serious harm for the victims, up to murder as highlighted in the recently very active femicide discourse.<sup>29</sup>

A disproportionately high percentage of cases of violence against women and domestic violence alarmingly end with a diversion for the perpetrators. The only diversion measure that seems applicable there, particularly in the context of domestic violence (which is almost always a repeat offense with a high risk of re-victimization for the victim), is probation combined with probation assistance, with additional instructions for the protection of victims and mandatory attendance of perpetrator programs that are victim-oriented (cf. AÖF 2016). To improve the general situation, it has been recommended by NGO actors that the Ministry issue a decree on the treatment of cases of violence against women by the prosecutor's office as well as expansion of preventive action in working with men, male youths and fathers (ongoing incentives found at the Umbrella organisation for Männer-, Burschen-, und Väterarbeit in Österreich – DMÖ<sup>30</sup>). It should establish clear and binding guidelines on how the prosecutor's office should deal with cases of violence against women and domestic violence, based on the opinions of NGOs that operate specialized support facilities. (AÖF/IST 2016; KLA 2018).

## **6. GENDER REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ELITES**

### **6.1 Legal context**

Austria has adopted various legal measures to promote gender equality and representation in political, economic, and social elites. In terms of political representation, the Federal Act on Equal Treatment (B-GIBG 2023) requires political parties to promote equal participation of women and men in elections and to ensure gender balance in their candidate lists. In the economic and business sphere, Austria has implemented various measures to promote gender equality and representation. The Equality Act (B-GIBG) prohibits discrimination in the workplace, including discrimination based on gender. The Act also

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<sup>29</sup> AÖF (2023): Femicide in Österreich. URL: [<https://www.aof.at/index.php/femicide-in-oesterreich>]; (04.23).

<sup>30</sup> DMÖ (2023) URL: [<https://dmoe-info.at/news/>]; (04.23).

requires companies with more than 150 employees to implement gender mainstreaming measures, including the promotion of equal pay for equal work.

Despite legal measures, gender inequality and underrepresentation of women in political, economic, and social elites remain a persistent issue in Austria as women continue to earn less than men in the workforce and are underrepresented in leadership positions in the public and private sectors. In academia, women are underrepresented in senior positions and face gender-specific obstacles in career advancement (KLA 2018).

## **6.2 Practices and implementation (local, regional, national)**

The Austrian government has set targets to increase the percentage of women on supervisory boards of companies with a stake of 50% or more held by the federal government. By 2013, the government aimed for 25%, rising to 35% by 2018, and then to 40% by 2020. The 2022 Progress Report showed an average federal quota for women in state and state-affiliated companies of 50.5%, with 43 companies meeting or exceeding the 40% quota for women. The government has committed to evaluating the policy annually and reporting progress to the Ministerial Council (Federal Chancellery 2022:16f.).

In the public sector, first special measures were introduced in 1993 to promote women in higher positions and leadership functions. In 2011, the target quota was raised to 50%. The percentage of women in the public sector increased from 38.7% in 2006 to 42.6% in 2020, and the percentage of women in leading positions rose from 15.8% to 32% during the same period. However, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions compared to their overall percentage of all employees in federal leadership positions (ibid.).

Women also still remain significantly underrepresented in decision-making bodies and leadership positions in the national private economic sector. As of 2022, the percentage of women on executive boards and in management positions of the 200 Austrian companies with the highest turnover was 8.9%. In 2016, 28,5% of these companies had no women in executive function or on supervisory boards (AÖF/IST 2016:9). The Act on Equality between Women and Men in Supervisory Boards (GFMA-G 2017) was adopted in June 2017 to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions, aiming for a requirement of at least 30% women and men on supervisory boards of publicly traded companies and companies with more than 1,000 employees. The percentage of women on supervisory boards of publicly traded companies subject to the quota has risen to 35.1% by 2022, but was only 18% for companies not subject to the quota. The overall percentage of women on supervisory boards of all publicly listed companies is 28.8% and on boards 8.2% (cf. Federal Chancellery 2022).

In political representation, there has been significant progress with women occupying 46.7% of federal government representative positions in comparison to 31% according to a report in 2016 (AÖF/IST 2016), and further 41.5% of the National Council, and 41% of the Federal Council in 2022.

In the academic and scientific fields, the Austrian Federal Act on Universities (UG 2009/2021) requires universities to promote gender equality in research and teaching. In 2015, the real quota was drastically low in international comparison, with only 15% of personnel holding a professorship being women (cf. AÖF/IST 2016:10).

### **6.3 Political discourse**

One of the most controversial topics in the discourse on gender representation in Austria has been the continuous use of quotas. While the political agenda argues that quotas are necessary to ensure gender balance in political, economic, and social elites, (see AÖF/IST 2016) critical voices see quotas as discriminatory and argue that they should be based on merit rather than gender (see the analysis of a conservative gender regime in Gresch and Sauer 2015).

It is also argued that cultural and structural barriers are preventing women from achieving truly equal access to and representation in political, economic, and social elites. Multilevel empirical analysis like done in Germany recently could provide a lot of insight into potential for adjustment and structural barriers on a national level in Austria as well (cf. Handschumacher-Knors 2023). Furthermore, the lack of affordable childcare is seen as a barrier to women's participation in the upper management and workforce, while gender stereotypes and biases are seen as barriers to women's participation in politics and academia (AÖF/IST 2016; KLA 2018).

The lacking political recognition of ways in which matters of gender intersect with other forms of oppression has also been a topic of discourse in Austria. Quota stagnation and underrepresentation of women in political, economic, and social elites seems to not just be a gender issue, but also one of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Gresch and Sauer 2015). The lack of political will to address underlying structures and phenomena in this regard seems to be hindering progress towards a gender balance overall and especially so in economic, and social elites traditionally dominated by men. Critical voices argue that political leaders need to take concrete steps to promote women's representation, such as implementing quotas, increasing funding for women's programs, and creating policies to support women's advancement (cf. Harmanci 2021; KLA 2018; Gresch and Sauer 2015).

## **7. MIGRATION AND MINORITY POLICY**

### **7.1 Legal context**

The main responsibility for integration policy in Austria lies with the Federal Chancellery, and all measures relating to regular migration are based on the Law on Settlement and Residence (NAG). In 2020, the integration agendas were transferred to the Federal Chancellery and are currently managed by the Federal Minister for Women, Family, Youth and Integration. With this transfer, the two agendas of



women's issues and migration have been institutionally closely linked and the federal responsibility for measures on general integration policy, social integration and community integration is linked to the current action plan.

The Federal Chancellery is responsible for matters relating to social integration, the coexistence of people with and without a migration background and the coordination of general integration policy. Although the main responsibility lies with the Federal Chancellery, integration policy in Austria remains a complex issue that spans the responsibilities of several ministries and government-funded institutions as well as non-governmental actors.

The most recent National Integration Act stipulates that all government institutions at the federal, provincial and municipal levels must contribute to a successful integration process by systematically offering integration measures within their own agendas as well as the supposed initiative of migrants in the face of institutional expectations ('Fördern und Fordern' in: Bundeskanzleramt, 2020:144). Heilemann (2021:19f.) argues that the understanding of successful integration focuses mainly on the narrative of "integration through achievement", for example in the acquisition of language skills, education and productive function (Gruber et al. 2016 in: Heilemann 2021:19f.).

SOS Mitmensch, an Austrian NGO that campaigns in the field of human rights, issued an integration report in 2020 that consisted of a review of Austrian integration policies by 28 experts from Academia and civil society. With regard to the beforementioned close link between the two agendas of women's issues and migration, that was institutionalised in 2020, experts from civil society criticise that the equation of women's policy with integration policy also leads to women's policy only being seen from the perspective of integration. This is counterproductive because it promotes generalised images, "othering" and narrows the focus to violence against migrant women instead of compromising all women (SOS Mitmensch 2020: 42).

## **7.2 Practices and implementation (local, regional, national)**

In this context, migrant women are seen as 'drivers of integration' and Austrian integration policy has prioritised the integration of migrant women, with migrant women being defined as a target group in various national action plans and strategies (Federal Chancellery 2020). The current federal government, consisting of the Austrian People's Party and the Austrian Green Party, has emphasised the importance of focusing on women as a general category in integration efforts. However, as Heilemann (2021:21) notes, there is no specific focus on women of third-country origin, but rather first, second and third generation migrant women are lumped together into one defined group. However, the government programme provides for specific integration measures for migrant women, recognising them as "multipliers" of integration and important mediators in the transmission of values. Gender equality and equal rights for men and women are specific goals of integration policy, which require the (formal)

empowerment and promotion of migrant women in their self-determination (Bundeskanzleramt 2020:146), but ultimately leave the practical implementation to the social partners and local institutions. The provinces are particularly important in the context of integration, as each has its own office or department responsible for integration, as well as an integration commissioner and some form of integration model. Integration policy and its implementation has also been institutionalised at the local level in several Austrian cities (cf. Heilemann 2021).

The Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), as the institutional framework of the federal state, is primarily responsible for implementing the measures laid down in the Integration Act. However, various ministry departments and non-governmental organisations complement its efforts to actually implement measures. The coordination and networking of the various stakeholders was institutionalised with the establishment of the Advisory Committee on Integration. This committee consists of one representative each from the federal ministries, the provinces, the Austrian Association of Municipalities and the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns, various social partners, the Austrian Integration Fund, five humanitarian or church organisations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In addition, the Federal Chancellery is advised on integration policy issues of fundamental importance by the Integration Council, which is independent and not bound by instructions from higher authorities. The Council has been in existence since 2010 and is made up of individuals with proven expertise in the field of integration. Its tasks include supporting the implementation of the National Action Plan for Integration and other national integration strategies and developing proposals for measures. It publishes an annual integration report with explicit measurements, and a quarterly microcensus with household samples in the areas of migrant labour, education and housing is published via the Statistics Austria database (STATcube; for analysis until 2019 see Heilemann 2021:15f.).

The role of the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) as the main implementer of the integration act (and subsequently receiving the respective funding) has potentially led to a centralization of integration measures (especially regarding language and value courses, since these are mandatory). This could lead to a long-term reduction in the services offered by NGOs (MATILDE 2020: 38f).

### **7.3 Political discourse**

The political agenda has put forward mandatory measures and structures to prevent traditional gender roles from making it 'more difficult' for women to participate in integration measures (Expert Council for Integration 2018:78). Gender-specific strategies and concrete measures to promote gender equality are in theory an integral part of national integration policies, with gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting issue in all policy measures. The most recent report of the Integration Fund (ÖIF 2023:57) states that the risk of poverty and gender-based ostracism continues to be highest among women born abroad, but that this can be effectively addressed through the payment of social benefits.

The general commitment to the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy seems to systematically reduce the general lack of consideration in public institutions for the differences between migrant men and women in terms of conditions, vulnerable situations and special needs. This is particularly the case in supposedly gender-sensitive asylum and refugee procedures, although there still seem to be wide gender gaps (Heilemann 2021:20; AÖF/IST 2016:124ff.), and the consideration of income level when granting citizenship is also criticised by social actors (KLA 2018:12f.).

Part of the official agenda and constantly present in public and political discourse are various forms of human trafficking, violence and exploitation of migrant women and girls in informal and sexual work as well as in care services (KLA 2018:10f.; Federal Chancellery 2023; Interventionsstelle für Betroffene von Frauenhandel – IBF). Unconditional access to women’s shelters and public social services for migrant women and the promotion of preventive measures are key demands of the civil partners (KLA 2018). The goal of protecting women and girls with migration background from violence or coercion based on family, social, ideological, cultural or religious factors (Heilemann 2021:19f.), is a particular concern that needs to be further addressed by political and civil society initiatives. Suggestions include the introduction of this topic in school and vocational training curricula at various levels and the expansion of budgets for social services and the development of initiatives (cf. AÖF/IST 2016:42ff.; ÖIF 2023).

## 8. OTHER IMPORTANT POLICY AREAS – IF RELEVANT TO NATIONAL OR LOCAL CONTEXT

### 8.1 Welfare policies

#### **Regional disparities: rural areas**

The situation of women in rural areas and agriculture has not significantly improved in the past period. Women are strongly underrepresented in leadership positions in agricultural policy and administration, historically a conservative and male dominated sector. According to KLA's critique, dominant women's farming organisations focus more on cultural and traditional practices rather than critical political issues, creating a system-maintaining environment, contributing little to promote women's empowerment in rural areas. According to a critique in the Shadow report of Klagsverband (KLA 2018), dominant women's farming organisations focus more on cultural and traditional practices rather than critical political issues, creating a system-maintaining environment, contributing little to promote women's empowerment in rural areas. The percentage of women managing farms is decreasing and women are twice as likely as men to work as low-wage farmhands. Women are also strongly disadvantaged in terms of access to land, primarily due to traditional inheritance laws favouring sons. Additionally, there is a lack of gender-disaggregated data on working and property ownership situations in agriculture (cf. KLA 2018).

The collected demands by Klagsverband (KLA 2018) include social security for women in agriculture, such as pension entitlements, marriage contracts, takeover agreements, as well as awareness-raising campaigns on these issues. Measures to improve women's access to land and promote "unconventional" farm forms should be financially and legally supported, such as the provision of non-family farm transfers, equal treatment of farm communities in funding applications, and the lifting of gender segregation in agricultural training schools.

Furthermore, there should be an improvement in the working rights of agricultural (seasonal) workers, including increased control and sanctioning of non-compliance. A fairer distribution of resources between organisations and educational institutions for women in rural areas and agriculture with different thematic focuses should be ensured in future policies. A call was made for Austria to sign and actively support the "International Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas" prepared by NGOs and the UN (KLA 2018).

#### ***Policies for women with handicaps and gender specific sensibilisation to disability***

According to the Women's Action Plan, there are currently 1.7 million people living with a permanent disability in Austria. Especially women with disabilities are exposed to multidimensional discrimination. From a statistical point of view, it can be said that the educational level of women with disability is

significantly lower compared to the level of women without disability. A bit more than half of them have completed a professional formation.

Moreover, the proportion of disabled women in the labour force is significantly lower than that of other disability groups. Disabled women also face a higher risk of poverty than the average population, which is almost twice as high and also significantly higher compared to disabled men. Due to the low employment rate and subsequently low incomes, disabled women also get lower pensions, which is a driver for age poverty.

Women with disabilities live alone far more often than men with disabilities. In the 16-64 age group, 23 percent of women with disabilities live alone, and among those over 65, the proportion is as high as 52 percent. This means that more than half of older women with disabilities are dependent on support from their social environment or from professional service providers. Women with disabilities are particularly at risk of becoming victims of violent attacks. Scientific studies show that disabled women are two to three times more likely to be sexually abused as children or adolescents than the women without disabilities. Studies are also criticising that there are only a few contact and counselling centres in Austria that are predominantly specialised in the target group of women with disabilities who are affected by violence.

The Women's Action Plan highlights that there have been projects to improve the situation of women with disabilities in recent years (such as the publishing of the National Action Plan Disability 2012-2020). However, it also points out that additional initiatives need to be taken to reduce disability-related disadvantages and achieve health equity for women with disabilities.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Forced marriage***

According to Section 1 of the Austrian Marriage Act ("Ehegesetz") marriage for persons is legally allowed if he or she has reached the age of 18 (legal age in Austria). Paragraph 2 and upon request, courts may allow a person, who has completed his or her sixteenth year to marry if the future spouse is already of legal age and the younger person seems to have reached an advanced level of maturity. Nevertheless, Austria recognizes that child marriage is illegal in various international treaties and conventions. Forced marriages, on the other hand are clearly forbidden. This is also anchored in the Austrian Criminal Code (§ 106a StGB). Whoever coerces a person to marry or to establish a registered partnership by force or by dangerous threat or threat of breaking off or withdrawing family contacts is liable to a prison sentence of six months to five years. The reasons for forced marriage are diverse and range from economic

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<sup>31</sup> BMSGPK (2018): Aktionsplan Frauengesundheit. 40 Maßnahmen für die Gesundheit von Frauen in Österreich. Vienna.

pressures, control over young women's sexuality, patriarchal family structures and conservative understandings of gender norms and roles.

Although forced marriage is a criminal act, which is punishable with imprisonment, experts still estimate that around 200 girls and young women are affected by forced marriage in Austria every year. That affects mostly girls, who are living in Austria in the second or third generation and girls who are displaced from their home country to get married to a man in Austria (last status: 2013).<sup>32</sup> Their situation is particularly alarming because they usually do not have any language skills or a high level of education, which makes them vulnerable and decreases their independence.

Young men's or boy's rights are also violated when they are involuntarily married off by their parents. However, their scope of action in this situation is usually greater than that of the girls. Nevertheless, the stigma for male victims to seek support persists and therefore there is dark figure of male victims.

On the 1st of January 2016, the offence of "forced marriage" came into force in Austria. However, according to CSOs like "Orient Express", the mere act of a criminal offence is not sufficient when it comes to protecting girls and women in the private sphere. Some improvements were achieved by the opening of an emergency shelter for girls and young women threatened and affected by forced marriage, as well as the nationwide establishment of the coordination office "Trafficking and Forced Marriage", of the CSO Orient Express (KLA 2018:19). Further demands would be the opening of nationwide emergency shelters and contact points, and more counselling centres. In addition to that, awareness work and trainings is needed for various professional groups, such as judiciary, police, medical staff and school personnel as well as increased prevention and awareness-raising work in schools and in youth work. More detailed data collection and resources for conducting research and studies are also necessary.

## **8.2 Civil society policies**

### ***Stalking***

Since the 2006 "Antistalking Act" in National Criminal Law and further legal improvement until 2013, stalking is considered an offence that can be formally prosecuted, and an interim injunction can be applied for the protection against invasion of privacy. Stalking victims can seek support from the police, Violence Protection Centre/Intervention Centre, or other specialised facilities. Persistent persecution can be countered by criminal law if it interferes with the victim's life to an unacceptable degree (StGB 107a). The offence can be punished by imprisonment of up to one year and stalking victims can also apply for an interim injunction to prohibit personal contact and persecution, contacting via letters or other means, staying in specific places, disclosing personal data and photographs, ordering goods or services, or

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<sup>32</sup> See also "Gewaltinfo.at". URL: [https://www.gewaltinfo.at/themen/2013\\_08/zwangsehen-oesterreich.php](https://www.gewaltinfo.at/themen/2013_08/zwangsehen-oesterreich.php)

inducing third parties to contact the victim. The injunction is valid for a year and can be extended or result in a fine of up to 2500 euros or arrest if violated persistently (cf. Federal Chancellery 2023<sup>33</sup>).

### ***Senior care in Austria***

According to a study which was conducted by the (former) Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection and Gesundheit Österreich GmbH in 2019, (senior) care in Austria is – since around 85 percent of the work is done by women – perceived as female<sup>34</sup>. However, at the time of the study, already a third of women, who were working in the field of care, were 50 years old, meaning that they were going to retire in 10 years' time. Based on the survey from a period in 2017 and taking into account the demographic development and the age distribution of the use of nursing and care in hospitals as well as in the field of long-term care, an additional need of 31.400 care workers is assumed in Austria until the year 2030. This additional need increases to 34.200 persons if it is assumed that informal care will decline and that mobile care and home care will be expanded in the provinces as a reaction to this.

However, due to the fact that a significant number of women are going to retire by 2023 the number of required people working in care might even be higher. It is expected that an additional sum of 41.500 persons will have to enter the profession to meet the demand. As a consequence, a total of about 75.700 persons will be required in the area of domestic and institutional senior care until 2030 and it remains to be seen how this serious matter is going to be addressed in policy.

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<sup>33</sup> Federal Chancellery (2023): Stalking. URL: [<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/agenda/frauen-und-gleichstellung/gewalt-gegen-frauen/gewaltformen/stalking.html>]; (04.23).

<sup>34</sup> BMASGK & Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (2019): Pflegepersonal-Bedarfsprognose für Österreich.

## **9. ROLE AND POSITION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN GENDER EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION**

- 9.1. Role of women’s CSOs in the political system / addressing the gaps, family, education, equal pay, managerial positions, political positions (local – regional-central level) – CSOs dedicated to women’s situation (national, women-immigrants)**

### **Civil society organizations**

Civil society organisation in Austria working on gender equality and inclusion can be described as heterogeneous actors that differ significantly in terms of their respective context of origin, their location within women’s, feminist, intersectional, and other political movements and discourses. They also vary considerably regarding their institutional and organisational forms, ranging from temporary or loose associations and networking initiatives with a high level of voluntary commitment, to a considerable number of professional associations and NGOs that receive state funding. The latter often consist of multi-professional teams that offer counselling, support or training for different target groups and engage with political and public awareness-raising and lobbying work. Numerous organisations have been around for decades, experiencing shifting political and social framework conditions, and actively shaping public debates and conveying their expertise to political actors.

The objectives and methods pursued by institutions working in the field are just as broad: Numerous organizations tackle violence against women, family and partnership problems, works towards a gender-equitable health system including reproductive rights, and/or the inclusion of women in the labour market, to name just a few pressing issues. They provide professional support to women affected by multiple forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, structural violence, educational and economic disadvantage or disabilities. CSOs differ considerably regarding their size and reach (local, regional and/or national); some associations operate with a few (part-time or voluntary) staff, whereas others consist of relatively large teams. While some organisations focus on a specific objective or issue, others provide broad and interconnected services such as counselling, accompaniment to visits to authorities, interpreting, education and in some cases housing to a specific target group.

Given the large number of institutions in Austria working from diverging standpoints, positionalities and background of experiences towards the empowerment of different target groups, it is challenging to give a representative overview of CSOs. Nevertheless, chapter 9.3 lists important policy areas and thematic complexes addressed by CSOs in Austria and portrays organisations working in the respective fields.



## Party-affiliated organizations

While most CSOs are politically and denominationally independent, there are also party-affiliated women's organisations in Austria. For example, the Austria's Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) is linked to a women's organization. The "**SPÖ Frauen**" (Women of SPÖ) works towards minimizing the gender pay gap as well as preventing domestic violence or helping victims of it. Further topics of relevance to them include women poverty, pension, work, health care, women and Covid as well as gender empowerment on the international level.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the Green Party of Austria (die Grünen) have an informal organization called "**Die Grünen Frauen**" (The Green Women) working towards empowerment in regard to work, sexual harassment, reproductive rights, sexuality in general, health, gender-fair language, the empowerment of migrant women in particular, an equal pension and pay, violence protection and prevention, as well as many more.<sup>36</sup> The "**KPÖ Frauen**" (KPÖ Women) is the women's organisation of the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ). The organisation demands equal pay for women and men, the inclusion of unpaid care work in health and pension insurance, the expansion of childcare facilities and increased funding for violence protection facilities.

As a sub-organisation of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), the "**ÖVP Frauen**" (Women of ÖVP) are organised to focus on closing the income gap, returning women to full-time work and increasing the proportion of women in politics and leadership positions.<sup>37</sup> The FPÖ, which is located in the far-right political spectrum, is also associated with a women's organisation. The "**Initiative Freiheitliche Frauen**" is organised as an independent association, which has regional groups in the nine Austrian federal provinces. The organisation is an example for an initiative that holds a conservative standpoint regarding women empowerment.<sup>38</sup> The "Freedom Women" initiative for the federal state of upper Austria, for example, does demand that women should be treated equally to men, by including child raising periods in salary classification calculations and providing girls a better access to higher education, however simultaneously stating that the increasing migration of especially Islamic communities is a threat to this very equality. Further, they are against abortion, as well as gender mainstreaming and gender fair language.<sup>39</sup>

More on the role of CSOs in lobbying and participating in the policy making process will be added after further research.

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<sup>35</sup> Frauen SPÖ (2023): <https://frauen.spoee.at/aktuelle-kampagnen/>

<sup>36</sup> Die Grünen Frauen (2023): <https://frauen.wien.gruene.at/themen/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://frauen.oevp.at/Downloads/Leitantrag.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> FBI Politikschule (2023): <https://www.fbi-politikschule.at/blauesoesterreich/organisationen/vorfeld-und-befreundete-organisationen/initiative-freiheitliche-frauen/>

<sup>39</sup> Initiative Freiheitliche Frauen Oberösterreich (o. J.): <http://www.iff-ooe.at/ueber-uns/>

## 9.2. Financial situation: change (improving-worsening) over time (2010-2022)

State subsidisation of CSOs working in various gender and intersectional policy areas takes place at different levels: The organisations concerned have the possibility to apply for funding from the federal government, the federal province, and the European Union among others; at the local level, municipalities also award smaller subsidies. Most associations, NGOs and organisations, however, receive subsidies from various state agencies for different fields of their work. While at the federal level the chancellor's office (Sektion III Frauen und Gleichstellung) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs provide basic funding opportunities, the Women's Department of the City of Vienna, Magistratsabteilung 57 (MA57), should be mentioned as an important funding agency in Austria's capital.

It has to be stressed that CSOs also receive financial subsidies from numerous other agencies on a national, regional or local level: The Ministry of Education (BMBWF) for example finances educational projects carried out by women's organisations (partly in co-financing with European funds), the Ministry of the Interior awards grants for various violence protection projects, and various other ministries, such as the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provide grants for multiple projects and institutions. At the regional level, several authorities of the federal provinces support organisations in their area; in the case of Vienna, for example, the Fonds Soziales Wien (Vienna Social Fund) finances assisted living facilities run by women's organisations and the Wiener Gesundheitsfonds (Vienna Health Fund) supports health projects for women.

In the past years (since 2020) Austrian CSOs dealing with women empowerment were able to receive higher funding. Among others, the chancellor's office allocated a larger share in the general budget in comparison to previous years. The budget is spent on political activities on the one hand, but supports CSOs (violence protection facilities, family and counselling centres, ÖFR) and projects (e.g. for women with migration history) financially, on the other.<sup>40</sup> In total the budget increased over 81 percent since 2018 and is to be further increased in 2023.<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, CSOs were able to apply for a national support fund, installed in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Several CSOs that work towards the empowerment of women and/or persons with migration history applied, thus receiving minor grants in order to overcome the pandemic.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Parlament (2021): [https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr\\_2021/pk1249](https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr_2021/pk1249)

<sup>41</sup> Parlament (2023): [https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr\\_2023/pk0293](https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr_2023/pk0293)

<sup>42</sup> NPO-Fonds Gesetz (2023): <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20011196>

However, while the volume of financial support has increased in recent years, partly as a result of CSOs' and public lobbying (highlighting for example the increasing numbers of femicides in recent years), the funding volume is by no means the only indicator for assessing the working conditions and frameworks in which CSOs are currently operating. In order to gain a more comprehensive impression, it is important to look at the specific forms of state fundings.

Many CSOs working on feminist and intersectional issues are strongly critical of the increasing project-based funding, which sometimes imposes excessive bureaucratic hurdles on NGOs. Criticism can be made of the fact that basic areas of work are more and more dependent on short-term projects, which makes sustainable work very difficult. Institutions have to write very extensive funding applications at their own risk, introduce "innovative" approaches and, in the case of funding, are under pressure to partly open up new target groups and reach indicators. Positive exceptions worth mentioning are the basic funding of Magistratsabteilung 57 of the City of Vienna (Frauenservice Wien: women's department of the city of Vienna), which allows associations to autonomously set priorities in their daily work according to their expertise and needs analysis.

### **9.3. Short description of selected organizations (selected because of their activities, successes)**

This chapter provides a brief overview of focal points in the field of gender equality and inclusion set by NGOs, organisations and associations active in Austria. Due to the fact that field research will take place in Austria's capital Vienna, a regional emphasis was placed in this region. Against the background that an intersectional perspective is at the centre of the project alignment, this section starts with institutions that in their objectives explicitly refer to the interconnectedness of different experiences of discrimination relevant for their target group. In Vienna, several organisations have emerged from (self-organised) political endeavours embedded in diverse antiracist and feminist and/or women's movements. Their focus lies on the self-empowerment of women with migration history in Austria.

One of the oldest self-organised associations by and for women with migration history is **Miteinander Lernen – Birlikte Ögrenelim** (Learning Together – Birlikte Ögrenelim), founded about 40 years ago. The institution offers social counselling and psychotherapy predominantly for Turkish-speaking women, who represent a large community in Austria. The organisation is an officially recognised women's service and family counselling centre and also offers educational, health and parenting counselling. Miteinander Lernen is networked with three other migrant women's organisations in Vienna:

Another association that looks back to four decades of feminist and antiracist engagement is **Peregrina – Bildungs, Beratungs- und Therapiezentrum für Immigrantinnen** (Peregrina – Education, Counselling and Therapy Centre for Immigrant Women). The organisation pursues the overriding goal of

improving the living situation of women with migration history in Austria, offering legal and social counselling, psychological counselling and psychotherapy, educational counselling and adult education with a focus on basic education for women with migration history.<sup>43</sup>

**Orient Express – Beratungs-, Bildungs- und Kulturinitiative für Frauen** (Orient Express – Counselling, Education and Cultural Initiative for Women) was also founded in the 1980s and is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year. **Orient Express** is a non-profit, politically and denominationally independent association based in Vienna (Austria) that operates a women's counselling centre (for women speaking Arabic or Turkish as first language), two anonymous shelters for girls and young women affected by forced marriage and kin-based violence, a nationwide coordination centre against abduction and forced marriage, and a learning centre.

The association **LEFÖ – Beratung, Bildung und Begleitung für Migrantinnen** (LEFÖ – Counselling, Education and Support for Migrant Women) was founded more than 30 years ago as an initiative of Latin American women in Austria and represents an important position in the empowerment of women in the migration process and the improvement of living and working conditions in Austria. LEFÖ is very active in raising awareness and lobbying for the political and social destigmatisation of women with migration history. The association has additionally realised important groundwork in addressing the issue of trafficking in women.<sup>44</sup>

While the associations just mentioned focus on accompanying women in the migration process (often through first language counselling), there are many more organisations that deal with the interconnectedness of various experiences of discrimination (such as racism and sexism) in Austria. One example is the **Schwarze Frauen Community** (Black Women's Community) that supports and mobilises Black women in Austria (also belonging to the 2nd and 3rd generation). Apart from individual counselling and opening emancipatory spaces by and for women, it raises awareness of the marginalisation of Black people in Austria. Schwarze Frauen Community also actively works with children and young people.<sup>45</sup>

In 2015, the first association of Roma women in Austria **Vivaro – Viva Romnja Verein Roma-Frauen** (Vivaro – Viva Romnja Association of Roma Women) was founded. In addition to counselling and support, the association offers low-threshold and multilingual workshops and discussions (mainly in the languages Romani, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and German) on racism, education and health, forced marriage and

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.peregrina.at/ueber-peregrina/leitbild/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://lefoe.at/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.schwarzefrauencommunity.at/unsere-ziele>

women's rights. The association aims at mutual exchange, and the development of collective solution strategies to fight patriarchal and antizigan structures.<sup>46</sup>

Another topic that is taken up within feminist movements and organisations is sex work (as a field of work in which predominantly migrant women are active). **TAMPEP** as part of the association LEFÖ described above is an important point of contact that pioneered this field of work and not only provides multilingual counselling but also political lobbying for the rights of migrant sex workers.<sup>47</sup> Another important institution in this regard is **Sophie – Beratungszentrum für Sexarbeiterinnen** (Sophie Counselling Centre for Sex Workers) (part of a larger organisation, Volkshilfe Wien) that also offers counselling on issues such as taxes, insurance, problems with authorities, residence issues and much more.<sup>48</sup> Both institutions place the destigmatisation of sex workers and their (labour) rights at the centre of their mission statement.

Groups active in the field of development policy can also be mentioned when talking about intersectional working areas: **Wide – Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk für Frauenrechte und femintische Perspektiven** (Wide – Development Policy Network for Women's Rights and Feminist Perspectives) has describes itself as a network, which supports human rights and feminist perspectives within the area of development politics composed by 21 member organisations. The network aims to connect women working in the field of development, provide gender-sensitive development education work, address economic, political, social and cultural power relations from a feminist perspective, mobilise for women's rights worldwide and campaigns for global justice. WIDE refers to Austrian, EU and international law, action plans for the realisation of universal women's rights as well as national, European and international guidelines on gender equality, development cooperation and humanitarian aid. WIDE Austria sees itself as part of the international women's movement(s) and is a member of the European network WIDE+.<sup>49</sup> One of its members is **Frauen\*solidarität – feministisch-entwicklungspolitische informations- und bildungsarbeit** (Women's solidarity – feminist-development information and education) that aims to "make the positions of global international women's movements audible and readable".<sup>50</sup> Founded in 1982, the feminist-development organisation carries out educational work on global gender relations and is in exchange with feminist and LGBTIQ movements from the global South. Frauen\*solidarität runs a library and publishes a magazine with the same name.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://vivar.at/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://lefoe.at/tampep/>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.sophie.or.at/>

<sup>49</sup> WIDE (2023): <https://wide-netzwerk.at/mission-statement/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.frauensolidaritaet.org/uber-uns/>

Numerous queer organisations in Austria, such as **Partner\*innen-, Familien- und Sexualberatungsstelle COURAGE** (Partner, Family and Sexual counselling centre COURAGE) work significantly on gender justice and the dismantling of gender-specific role clichés, stereotypes and discrimination from the perspective of intersectional localisations and positionalities. The institution located in several provinces, deals with sensitisation and counselling on topics such as same-sex relationships, trans identities, intersexuality and rainbow families. The centre opens up safe spaces for exchange and discussion, for example the group SAPPHO – Accompanied Self-Help Group for Lesbian, Bi- or Pansexual Women - located in Vienna.<sup>51</sup> Pioneering work in linking LGBTIQ rights with the support of refugees in Austria is being done by **Queer Base**, which advises lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans and inter persons (LGBTIQ) who have fled to Austria, among other things, on legal issues related to asylum.<sup>52</sup>

Intersectional approaches and theories have been significantly expanded in recent years and decades to include further positionalities and struggles. **Ninlil – Empowerment und Beratung für Frauen mit Behinderung** (Ninlil – Empowerment and Counselling for Women with Disabilities) deals with another form of overlapping experiences of discrimination. The association offers counselling, and networking against sexual violence against women with learning difficulties and aims to provide counselling for women with different disabilities in the areas of living, housing, body/sexuality and personal assistance.<sup>53</sup>

Many of the organisations already listed take up educational aspects in their self-image and their activity profile. Feminist educational engagement in Austria encompasses a broad spectrum of actors, such as the collective **Frauenhetz – feministische Bildung, Kultur und Politik** (Frauenhetz – feminist education, culture and politics), that facilitates open discussion on various political topics since the 1990s. Another example is the association **Efeu** that among other things, raises awareness of sexism, racism and homophobia in various educational fields (for example, by providing materials for teaching in schools and adult education), to institutions that offer target group-specific courses and gender-sensitive educational counselling.

A well-known institution that offers education and counselling for girls\* and young women\*, trans\*, inter\* and non-binary young people is **sprungbrett Beratungsstelle für Mädchen und junge Frauen** (sprungbrett Counselling for Girls and Young Women) that aims at encouraging this particular target group in their career goals and opening up educational opportunities.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.courage-beratung.at/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://queerbase.at/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.ninlil.at/>

Many organisations offer educational programmes for educationally disadvantaged women with migration history, including basic education and courses in German as a second language. While basic education forms part of the wider target-group specific offer in the above-mentioned associations LEFÖ, Peregrina, Orient Express and Miteinander Lernen, there are other women's organisations like **Piramidops – Frauentreff**<sup>54</sup> and **Station Wien**<sup>55</sup> in Vienna that have a specific focus on emancipation through education. Other important social institutions, such as **Verein Projekt Integrationshaus**<sup>56</sup>, which are not women's organisations in the strict sense, nevertheless offer important educational programmes especially for the target group of women with a migration history, who find an inclusive and safe space for learning there. In addition, NGOs have increasingly implemented projects to promote girls' and women's access to STEM subjects and digital skills in recent years.

This leads on to the topic of labour market inclusion, another cornerstone of feminist engagement, which is pursued for example through individual counselling, making women and girls aware of educational and career opportunities independent of gender conformist clichés, or clarifying legal aspects of labour market access for women who are third-country nationals. **ABZ\*AUSTRIA**, to name one prominent actor in this field, is a social-profit company that has made it its mission to promote equality between women and men in the labour market, in education and in business.<sup>57</sup>

Another crucial struggle within the movements and organisations fighting for gender equality, is certainly the issue of (domestic) violence. While many of the above-mentioned organisations work in this field with a specific focus, one of the most well-known institutions working with diverse target groups, is the **Wiener Interventionsstelle gegen Gewalt in der Familie** (IST) (Vienna Intervention Centre against Violence in the Family), a state-recognised victim protection institution that started operating in 1998. The institution works in close cooperation with the authorities and as soon as the police impose a restraining order on a perpetrator of domestic violence, Interventionsstelle is informed and advises victims about their (legal) options.<sup>58</sup>

With regard to protection against violence, Austria counts on a relatively progressive legislation. According to the law, a perpetrator of domestic violence has to leave the shared flat for two weeks - regardless of which partner is the apartment's owner or main tenant. With support of the

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<sup>54</sup> [https://piramidops.com/?page\\_id=52](https://piramidops.com/?page_id=52)

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.stationwien.org/>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.integrationshaus.at/de/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.abzaustria.at/de>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.interventionsstelle-wien.at/>

Interventionsstelle, within these two weeks, a temporary restraining order can be claimed, expanding this period. Nevertheless, many women affected by violence do not feel safe enough to stay in their flat and prefer anonymous accommodation in one of the Austrian women's shelters, which are networked in two different umbrella organisations: The Association of Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters (**Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser – AÖF**) is the umbrella organisation of 13 autonomous women's shelters in Austria. The organisation was founded in 1988 as an association of the staff of the autonomous women's shelters in Austria and still functions an information hub, support, service, and representation for its members.<sup>59</sup> One of their most prestigious projects, which aims to prevent (domestic) violence against women and children, partner violence and femicides, is StoP. It requires a strong involvement of neighbours, who are encouraged to show civil courage, when noticing any form of violence against the before-mentioned groups. StoP provides information and helps to recognise and interrupt domestic violence at an early stage.<sup>60</sup> In addition to the AÖF, there is another association of women's shelters in the different provinces in Austria, namely the **Zusammenschluss Österreichischer Frauenhäuser (ZÖF)**, which was founded in 2013. This organisation also pursues the goal of advancing women affected by violence and their children throughout Austria.

Some other organisations presented here also operate smaller shelters for specific target groups: For example, **Orient Express** runs two shelters for girls and women at risk of forced marriage and kinship violence, while **LEFÖ-IBF Interventionsstelle für Betroffene von Frauen\*handel** (LEFÖ-IBF Intervention Centre for Trafficked Women) is a recognised victim protection institution that offers counselling and housing for persons affected by trafficking in women.<sup>61</sup>

Several services have specialized in sexual/sexualised violence, such as **Frauen\*beratung Notruf bei sexueller Gewalt** (Women's Counselling – Emergency Call for Sexual Violence), which provides counselling for victims of sexual violence, process support and legal information.<sup>62</sup> Other well-known institution in this field are for example **Tamar Beratungsstelle für misshandelte und sexuell misbrauchte Frauen, Mädchen und Kinder** (Counselling Centre for Abused and Sexually Abused women, girls and children)<sup>63</sup> or **Selbstlaut – Fachstelle gegen sexuelleisierte Gewalt an Kindern und Jugendlichen** (Selbstlaut – Centre Against Sexualised Violence Against Children and Young People).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser (2023): <https://www.aeof.at/index.php/home1/ueber-uns-aoef>

<sup>60</sup> More information about this project can be found by following the link: <https://stop-partnergewalt.at/>

<sup>61</sup> <https://lefoe.at/en/ibf-intervention-center/>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.frauenberatung.at/index.php>

<sup>63</sup> <https://tamar.at/>

<sup>64</sup> <https://selbstlaut.org/>



Last but not least, focal points have been set on the topic of health in recent years. Numerous NGOs in Austria are dedicated to the physical and mental health of women and girls. A well-known institution in this field of work is the **Frauengesundheitszentrum FEM Süd** (Women's Health Centre FEM South) offering gender-specific counselling for women with migration history, which ranges from information and education regarding health concerns to assistance in social issues to clinical-psychological and psychotherapeutic counselling as well as support. The counselling service is aimed at women with migration experience. Furthermore, it provides counselling and information in German, English, Turkish, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Arabic, Farsi, and Somali. The implementation of further training for multipliers (such as doctors, nursing staff, teachers, social workers, midwives...) provides information and raises awareness in the context of migration, cultural diversity, and health. One of FEM South's areas of work is Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C).<sup>65</sup> In the field of mental health, **Frauen\* beraten Frauen\*** (Women Counselling Women) can be highlighted as a pioneering institution founded 40 years ago. The institution offers psychosocial counselling, health counselling and psychotherapy, among other services. In addition, Frauen\* beraten Frauen\* organises further training and publishes on the topic.<sup>66</sup> In addition, various associations that support women with migration history (such as Peregrina and Miteinander Lernen) offer psychotherapy for clients in their first languages.

In order to achieve greater political momentum, numerous initiatives, associations and NGOs working at local, regional and/or national level have joined together to form various umbrella organisations, two of which should be mentioned here: Various of the organisations listed on the last pages are also organised in the **Netzwerk Frauen- und Mädchenberatungsstellen (FMBS)** (Network of Women's and Girl's Counselling Centres), an important umbrella organisation which sees itself as a political association, as a representation of interests, as an information hub and as a contact point for women's issues and which currently consists of 63 women's and girl's counselling centres from all nine federal provinces.<sup>67</sup>

The before mentioned **Österreichische Frauenring (ÖFR)**<sup>68</sup> is the widest known umbrella organisation in Austrian. Its members include women's and feminist organisations, political parties, trade unions and professional associations, as well as progressive religious women's groups such as Evangelische Frauenarbeit (Protestant Women's Work Austria)<sup>69</sup>, Katholische Frauenbewegung Österreich (Catholic

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<sup>65</sup> FEM Süd (2023): <https://femsued.at/arbeitsbereiche/gesundheitsberatung-fuer-frauen-mit-migrationserfahrung/>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.frauenberatenfrauen.at/>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.netzwerk-frauenberatung.at/>

<sup>68</sup> Österreichischer Frauenring (2023): <https://www.frauenring.at/>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.frauen-evang.at/>

Women's Movement Austria)<sup>70</sup> or Junge Musliminnen Österreich (Young Muslim Women Austria).<sup>71</sup> Its central concerns are the protection of the rights of all women and gender equality.

Also see organizations mentioned in 1.3: the Austrian Women's Shelter Network, the Platform 20000 Women and the Women's Advisory Council.

#### **9.4. Number of members (2010-2022) and their social structure (gender, age, education, race, ethnicity, length of stay in the country)**

The prior chapter provides a brief overview of several organizations or associations of organizations working towards women empowerment in Austria. However, detailed information on the number of members or employees and their demographic composition, is missing. This data will be collected in the course the empirical research.

#### **9.5. Events offered to members**

The exact events that the CSOs offer to their members will be identified after the first research phase.

#### **9.6. CSOs as both positive and negative actors of gender empowerment (e.g., right wing organizations)**

Empowerment and gender justice are contested terms that are interpreted and connoted differently within diverging feminist, intersectional and other political movements. In this respect, conflicts between various actors are expressed in debates around sex work/prostitution, the inclusion of trans and inter persons in feminist spaces and movements, or the connections to religious and cultural rights, to give just a few examples.

While many organizations hold progressive values concerning women's empowerment, endorsing values and rights of women such as pro-choice, equal pay and achieving gender equality in all aspects of life (private, social, political), and establishing links to other political demands such as antiracist or anticlassist struggles, there exist several groups with more conservative stances. Although these groups state to strive towards gender empowerment and support demands such as equal pay, they may infringe on certain rights (such as pro-choice). However, as women's and feminist movements are embedded in

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.kfb.at/>

<sup>71</sup> <https://jmoe.at/>

other political movements and positionalities, what seems progressive from one standpoint may be seen as conservative from another social or political position.

A current example is the reaction of women's and feminist organisations to a highly problematic political discourse that has been reproduced in recent years, according to which patriarchal structures can be found (more strongly or even only) in "other" countries; from this perspective, migrants and refugees are responsible for a backlash in Austria. Although this representation is rejected by many organisations as othering, there are actors at the political and civil society level who affirm this discourse, each with different implications (e.g. white saviourism towards Muslim women who "have to be protected" from "their violent men").

At the end of this chapter, clearly right-wing women's organisations in Austria have to be mentioned: Although small in number, some German national sororities have emerged since the 1980s, which, in addition to biologicistic gender images, also take up völkisch-nationalist values that are clearly excluding minorities.<sup>72</sup> Further women organizations that can be assigned to the right-wing and/or conservative political spectrum possibly exist. As no other organizations were found via desk research, we offer following explanations: they have no impact / are not important; they have fewer members.

## 10. SUMMARY

Recent activities and future trends in national gender empowerment and inclusion policies

Overview of core information in chapters above

- Gender empowerment in Austria is driven by international and EU policy frameworks, with a focus on gender equality, protection of women's rights, and the involvement of various stakeholders, although challenges and disparities persist.
- Despite the existence of equal treatment legislation and ongoing initiatives, which have been mentioned throughout the report, challenges remain regarding the gender pay gap, the representation of women in managerial positions, part-time work, and work-life balance.
- The Austrian federal government has implemented gender mainstreaming strategies in various policy areas, including education, with the aim of promoting gender equality, reducing gender segregation, and challenging gender stereotypes through measures such as integrating the gender perspective in teaching, combining subjects to counteract early gender-stereotyped

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<sup>72</sup> <https://anschlaege.at/maedelsache-deutschnationalismus/>

selection processes and tackling educational poverty and early school leaving among girls with a migrant background.

- Austria has enacted laws and implemented various measures to protect and promote women's health, including prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, providing maternity protection, regulating reproductive medicine, providing free medical check-ups and cancer screenings, establishing women's health centres, and addressing reproductive health issues such as contraception and abortion rights and access, although the country still faces challenges in terms of limited language accessibility, access to abortion services, and addressing obstetric violence during childbirth.
- Austria has well-established **family policies** that aim to support families with childcare and housing costs, such as subsidies, tax relief, and home ownership programmes. However, there are also difficulties that families face in Austria, such as the high cost and limited availability of childcare and housing, especially in rural areas, and the gendered division of labour within families, with women taking on most childcare responsibilities and working part-time. A gender disbalance in relation to childcare contributes to lower salaries and lower pensions of women.
- A particularly pertinent issue in Austria is the problem with violence against women and domestic violence, which is criminalised by the Austrian Criminal Code but still has low conviction rates due to procedural deficiencies and lack of awareness among prosecutors and judges. Recommendations for improving the situations include as issuing clear guidelines for dealing with cases of violence against women, expanding preventive action with men and boys, and increasing awareness and training on gender issues.
- In regard to **the gender representation in social, political and economic elites**, Austria has adopted various legal measures to promote gender equality and representation, such as quotas, anti-discrimination laws, and gender mainstreaming policies. Despite some progress, women still face significant barriers and underrepresentation in leadership positions and decision-making bodies. The discourse on gender representation, especially regarding the use of quotas remains controversial and masks the intersectionality of gender with other forms of oppression.
- In regard to **migration and minority policy**, in 2020 integration agendas were transferred to the Federal Chancellery and are currently managed by the Federal Minister for Women, Family, Youth and Integration. This linked institutionally the two agendas of women's issues and migration. The understanding of successful integration focuses mainly on the narrative of "integration through achievement", for example in the acquisition of language skills, education and productive function, In this context, migrant women are seen as 'drivers of integration' and as a target group in various national action plans and strategies. The practical implementation of these measures is left to the

social partners and local institutions. Recommendations include unconditional access to women's shelters and public social services for migrant women and the promotion of preventive measures to protect migrant women and girls from violence or coercion based on family, social, ideological, cultural or religious factors, including introducing the topic into school curriculum.

- The situation of women in **rural areas and agriculture** has not significantly improved in the past period. Women are strongly underrepresented in leadership positions in agricultural policy and administration, historically a conservative and male dominated sector.
- The educational level of women with **disability** is significantly lower compared to the level of women without disability. The proportion of disabled women in the labour force is significantly lower than that of other disability groups. Disabled women also face a higher risk of poverty than the average population. Women with disabilities live alone far more often than men with disabilities. While there have been projects to improve the situation of women with disabilities in recent years, they are not enough, and additional initiatives need to be taken to reduce disability-related disadvantages and achieve health equity.
- **Forced marriages** continue to be a problem in Austria. While this has been recognized as a criminal offence since 2016, further advancements need to be made, e.g. opening nationwide contact points and counselling centres for girls and young women threatened and affected by forced marriage; more resources for data collection, raising awareness, and training relevant professional groups of how to prevent and support victims of forced marriages.
- **Civil society organizations** in Austria receive funding by the state and address issues where the state is not active enough or does not want to be involved. They are particularly active in providing support to migrant women through counselling and cultural and language courses; providing information on forced marriage, violence, health care; providing support with abortion and contraception; providing support and assistance with access to education, especially to migrant girls; providing support to care workers, especially live-in care works, who are mostly from migrant background. Some of the parties have women's organizations, that belong to them informally. Minimizing the gender pay gap as well as preventing domestic violence or helping victims of it. Further topics of relevance to them include women poverty, pension, work, health care, women and Covid as well as gender empowerment on the international level.



## Acronyms & Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

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